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Committee Socialization in the U.S. House of Representatives

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INTRODUCTION

Students of Congress have long been aware of informal norms or rules of behavior which are thought to be important for the successful functioning of the legislative system and are regularly inculcated in new members of Congress. Donald R. Matthews, Ralph K. Huitt, Charles L. Clapp, and others have identified apprenticeship, specialization, reciprocity, hard work and legislative courtesy as key legislative norms.¹ More recently scholars have focused on "committee-specific" norms: values related to the functioning of particular Congressional committees. Richard Fenno's pioneering work on the House Appropriations Committee identified norms especially stressed within that panel: apprenticeship, hard work, unity, minimal partisanship. More recently, Fenno, John F. Manley, and other scholars have found a variety of norms, values, and "decision-rules" existing in several committees.²

Despite the attention paid these committee-specific norms, there has been little assessment of the impact these subsystem norms may have on the Congress as a whole. As Matthews and Stimson have noted, "service on at least the better integrated House committees tends to socialize the specialist into an overall committee point of view which may diverge from the views of Congress as a whole."³ If this does

¹ Donald R. Matthews, *U. S. Senators and Their World* (New York: Random House, 1960); Ralph K. Huitt and Robert L. Peabody, *Congress: Two Decades of Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Charles L. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1963); and, Herbert B. Asher, "The Learning of Legislative Norms," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (June 1973), pp. 499-513.

² Richard F. Fenno, Jr., "The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System; The Problem of Integration," *American Political Science Review*, 56 (June, 1962), pp. 310-24; John F. Manley, "The House Committee on Ways and Means: Conflict Management in a Congressional Committee," *American Political Science Review*, 59 (December, 1965), pp. 927-39; and, James T. Murphy, "Political Parties and the Porkbarrel: Party Conflict and Cooperation in House Public Works Decision-Making," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (March, 1974), pp. 169-85.

³ Donald R. Matthews and James A. Stimson, "The Decision-Making Approach to the Study of Legislative Behavior," a paper delivered at the 65th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1969. Cited in Arthur G. Stephens, Jr., "Mobilization of Liberal Strength in the House, 1955-70: The Democratic Study Group," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (June 1974), p. 668.

occur, the legislative output of major committees may not reflect the distribution of opinion in the House. In addition, these committee-specific norms may be transferable to others contexts, i.e. the norms learned in committee may affect the Congressman's entire legislative outlook, not simply work within his area of specialization.⁴

This paper is a preliminary investigation of the "carry-over" of committee norms into general voting behavior. The House Appropriations and the Ways and Means Committees are compared on two somewhat contrasting norms held by their members. Changes in floor voting behavior of new members over a series of Congressional sessions are examined for evidence of socializing influence. Specifically, the paper will focus on the question of whether differing internal committee norms concerning partisanship and ideology affect Democratic members' voting behavior on the House floor. The choice of these two committees for study reflects several considerations: the centrality of both committees in Congress, the rather stable membership of both, the demonstrable persistence of a well-developed system of norms within each, and the existence of a wealth of information on both panels. Since new members are typically added to both committees only after considerable House service, a baseline of voting behavior can be established, facilitating examination of changes resulting from protracted committee membership and repeated exposure to committee norms and values.

The Problem

According to Fenno and Manley, both Committees have been highly integrated bodies with fairly consistent sets of norms, inculcated in new members through elaborate socialization process. Various sanctions are used by committee leaders to encourage proper learning and discourage deviance from committee values and modes of operation. Although both possess effective mechanisms for socialization of new members, many of the specific norms taught are different. For example, in Appropriations the norm of specialization and reciprocity among specialists is greatly emphasized; the Ways and Means Committee until very recently rewarded generalized expertise. This contrast in norms undoubtedly resulted in rather different internal decision-making modes.⁵

There are also variations in two committee "folkways" which seem likely to have more generalized effects on members. The first involves

⁴ Asher hints at the problem of whether norms learned in one context may be transferable to another. "The Learning of Legislative Norms," p. 513.

⁵ Richard F. Fenno, *The Power of the Purse: Appropriations Politics in Congress* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.), pp. 161-163, and, John F. Manley, *The Politics of Finance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), pp. 94-95

political or ideology. Fenno discovered a complex of Appropriations Committee norms which emphasize fiscal and economic conservatism: the necessity of cutting the Federal budget, protecting the Treasury, and guarding the power of the purse. Despite the persistent efforts of Democratic leaders to "pack" Appropriations with liberal Democrats, the Committee atmosphere usually triggered a conservative reaction by these new members. On the basis of interviews, Fenno argued that "within one or two terms, Democratic liberals are differentiating between themselves and the 'wild-eyed spenders' or the 'free spenders' in the House." Republicans, appointed to the Committee because of their "fiscally responsible" attitudes, find their conservatism reinforced.⁶ The Ways and Means Committee exhibits a different set of values. As on Appropriations, new Democratic members are usually added on the basis of their liberal credentials. Unlike Appropriations, however, the dominant internal ethos of Ways and Means does not emphasize stringent conservatism, but rather "responsible," "moderate," and "pragmatic" liberalism among Democrats and similarly restrained Republican conservatism. Although many observers have felt that the resultant mix produced a "standpat" bias, Ways and Means has been less emphatically conservative than Appropriations. The socialization process within the Committee may impart a conservative bias, but if so, it should be less obvious than that of Appropriations.⁷

A second important normative difference between the two Committees involves partisanship. A vital feature of the Appropriations Committee, according to Fenno, is the norm of "minimal partisanship." Although members with high degrees of party loyalty are appointed on both sides, the Committee's mode of operation emphasizes subordinating party considerations to the central values of budget-cutting and economy, a rule of behavior which obviously creates the greatest strain for Northern Democrats. Ways and Means is considerably different; Manley observed that its central norm has been "restricted partisanship," party regularity moderated by good interparty personal relationships and overall businesslike conduct of the Committee's work. Given these rather different limits on the degree of permissible partisanship, one might hypothesize that Appropriations newcomers will become less

⁶ Fenno, *Power of the Purse*, pp. 213-214. Fenno made no effort to determine whether or not this change showed up in member voting behavior outside the committee.

⁷ Manley, *The Politics of Finance*, Chapter 3. Some observers, most notably Al Ullman, the present chairman of the Committee, have attributed the growing conservatism of some Democratic members to their experience on Ways and Means. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 32 (December 7, 1974), pp. 3248-49.

party conscious as they assimilate Committee norms, whereas those added to Ways and Means should show less change.⁸

Although both Fenno and Manley imply at points that both these norms are relevant primarily to internal decision-making, it seems unlikely that new members could entirely compartmentalize the impact of learning norms with such over-arching ideological implications.⁹ For example, it seems improbable that liberal Democrats joining Appropriations could become conservative in handling the Federal budget in committee and remain consistently liberal in floor votes. Similarly, habits of nonpartisanship engendered within committee might well result in generalized declines in party loyalty. This paper attempts to provide some evidence supporting the existence of such "carry-over" effect.

Procedure

To explore the possibility that committee socialization may have differential impacts on legislators' overall voting record, at least in these committees, this paper focuses on new members added to Appropriations and Ways and Means from the mid-1950's through 1968. The *Congressional Quarterly's* Conservative Coalition (CC) and Party Unity (PU) scores constitute the major source of data on voting behavior used here. Although CQ's Federal Role score formerly calculated would also be useful, it is not available for the entire period and was frequently based on a rather narrow range of votes. Thus, the Conservative Coalition score is used as a preferable indicator of conservatism-liberalism.¹⁰

Inasmuch as the CQ studies are not based on a fixed underlying continuum, with a true zero point, it was deemed inadvisable to use the raw scores on Conservative Coalition and Party Unity voting. The major problem involves the intuitive meaning of a numerical score. For example, a Democratic member's twenty per cent support for the Conservative Coalition one year might be a relatively conservative position vis-a-vis the House Democratic average, whereas it might actually be more

⁸ Fenno, *Power of the Purse*, pp. 164-65; Manley, *Politics of Finance*, pp. 64-65.

⁹ For Fenno's implication that the learning process affects primarily attitudes toward "money matters," see *Power of the Purse*, 213. Cf. Manley, *Politics of Finance*, pp. 68-70.

¹⁰ CQ's Party Unity score is based on the percentage of times a party member votes with a majority of his party on roll calls in which a majority of Democrats opposes a majority of Republicans. The Party Opposition score is the percentage of times a party member votes in disagreement with the majority of his party. Failure to vote lowers both Party Unity and Party Opposition scores. Both scores are used here as a means of checking the possible implications of non-voting for apparent changes in party regularity. The Conservative Coalition support and opposition scores are based on roll calls in which the majority of voting Republicans and the majority of Southern Democrats oppose the majority of Northern Democrats.

liberal in the following year. As a result, trends indicated by raw scores are not particularly reliable.

To acquire usable data, the author has adopted a different strategy. Trends in voting behavior have been measured by the deviation of individual scores from overall party and group means. Assume, for instance, the following hypothetical series of CC scores for a Northern Democrat:

	1965	1966	1967	1968
CC	20%	13%	18%	10%
Mean for Northern Democrats ..	20%	15%	22%	26%
Individual Deviation from Northern Democratic Mean	0	-2	-4	-16

This is a clear illustration of a congressman becoming steadily more liberal in comparison with the average Northern Democrat. In this fashion, annual scores for new members of both Committees were calculated for their years in Congress. Then, the mean score (deviation) for new members *before* and *after* joining each committee was calculated for Conservative Coalition Support, Conservative Coalition Opposition, Party Unity, and Opposition to Party. In this fashion, members were identified as becoming more or less conservative and more or less party-conscious after accession to Committee membership. In addition, the mean changes in ideological and party orientation were also calculated as a check on the magnitude of the directional shifts.

Findings: The Democrats

The expected differences between Democratic addressees to Appropriations and Ways and Means do appear in changes in Conservative Coalition voting. Table I. provides a brief summary of these changes.

The Conservative Coalition support scores indicate that Appropriations members shift decisively toward a more conservative overall orientation after committee service. Not only do most members become more conservative, but the average movement is rather substantial. The CC support tabulation, on the other hand, reveals very little change in Ways and Means Democrats, who retain most of their pre-appointment liberal proclivities. The CC opposition scores provide added evidence that Appropriations Democrats grow more conservative, but they indicate that Ways and Means Democrats also adopt more conservative habits. That the Ways and Means group does not provide additional

TABLE I

*Conservative Coalition Voting Among Committee Democrats**Coalition Support*

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	16	(9.1)	8	(7.5)
More Liberal	5	(5.0)	7	(6.7)
Net:	11	(5.8)	1	(0.9)
	<i>More Conservative</i>		<i>More Conservative</i>	

Coalition Opposition

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	14	(12.6)	9	(11.9)
More Liberal	7	(5.8)	6	(4.4)
Net:	7	(6.5)	3	(5.4)
	<i>More Conservative</i>		<i>More Conservative</i>	

positive support for the Coalition suggests that the net decline of opposition to the Conservative Coalition largely reflects roll calls missed by busy Ways and Means members. In any case, the relative changes in conservative voting among members of each committee do conform to earlier expectations.

Which Democratic members contribute most to the conservative movement? As Table II reveals, the most dramatic rise in conservatism occurs among Northern liberal Democrats, primarily those on Appropriations.

Northern Democrats become much more conservative on Appropriations and slightly more conservative on Ways and Means, taking both the direction and magnitude of changes into account. Among Southern Democrats no substantial ideological shifts appear, with the possible exception of a decline in opposition to the Conservative Coalition among Ways and Means Democrats. As noted earlier, it seems unlikely that this drop

TABLE II

*Conservatism and Regional Scores Committee Democrats**Northern Democrats**Coalition Support*

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	14	(9.6)	5	(6.0)
More Liberal	2	(3.4)	3	(6.8)
Net Change:	12	(7.9)	2	(1.2)
	<i>More Conservative</i>		<i>More Conservative</i>	

Coalition Opposition

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	12	(13.6)	4	(16.6)
More Liberal	4	(7.5)	4	(4.8)
Net Change:	8	(8.3)	0	(5.9)
	<i>More Conservative</i>		<i>More Conservative</i>	

*Southern Democrats**Coalition Support*

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	2	(5.8)	3	(9.9)
More Liberal	3	(6.2)	4	(6.6)
Net Change:	1	(1.4)	1	(.5)
	<i>More Liberal</i>		<i>Liberal Conservative</i>	

Coalition Opposition

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Conservative ...	2	(6.6)	5	(8.1)
More Liberal	3	(3.6)	2	(3.6)
Net Change:	1	(.5)	3	(4.8)
	<i>Liberal Conservative</i>		<i>More Conservative</i>	

reflects real changes in perspective, in the absence of corresponding increases in active Coalition support. Nevertheless, among liberal Northerners large voting shifts are apparent on Appropriations and, to a lesser extent, on Ways and Means.

The respective Appropriations and Ways and Means Committee norms relating to ideology do seem to influence the general voting behavior of members. Does a similar "carry-over" of the contrasting partisan norms also take place? The figures in Table III indicate that it does.

TABLE III
Democrats and Party Unity

		<i>Party Unity</i>			
		<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
		<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	.....	6	(2.5)	7	(10.7)
Less Unity	.....	17	(8.9)	19	(6.9)
		11	(5.9)	12	(2.2)
		<i>Less Party Unity</i>		<i>Less Party Unity</i>	
		<i>Party Opposition</i>			
		<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
		<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	.....	8	(3.6)	12	(4.1)
Less Unity	.....	14	(8.4)	8	(6.0)
		6	(3.9)	4	(.1)
		<i>Less Party Unity</i>		<i>Less More</i>	

The table reveals a rather substantial decline in partisan support among Appropriations Democrats, together with a smaller decline in party voting among Ways and Means Democrats. This latter decline among Ways and Means Democrats disappears in the party opposition scores, indicating once more that the trend may be an artifact, at least in part, of non-voting.

Which segments of the Democratic party are affected by these trends? Table IV demonstrates that, unlike the case of Conservative Coalition voting, the greatest impact of committee membership on party regularity occurs among Southern—not Northern—Democrats.

TABLE IV

*Party Unity and Regional Scores: The Democrats**Northern Democrats**Party Voting*

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	5	(2.7)	6	(8)
Less Unity	13	(7.5)	9	(7.5)
Net:	8	(5.0)	3	(1.3)
	<i>Less PU</i>		<i>Less PU</i>	

Party Opposition

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	8	(3.6)	7	(5.1)
	*			
Less Unity	9	(8.1)	5	(4.6)
Net:	1	(2.5)	2	(1.0)
	<i>Less PU</i>		<i>More PU</i>	
	(* 1 no change)			

*Southern Democrats**Party Voting*

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	1	(1)	1	(27.5)
Less Unity	4	(13.4)	10	(6.4)
Net:	3	(10.5)	9	(3.3)

Party Opposition

	<i>Appropriations</i>		<i>Ways and Means</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean Change</i>
More Unity	0	(0)	5	(2.8)
Less Unity	5	(8.9)	3	(8.3)
Net:	5	(8.9)	2	(1.4)
	<i>Less PU</i>		<i>More Less PU</i>	

Both groups of Appropriations Democrats, responding to the milieu of "minimal partisanship," exhibit declining support for their party and find themselves in increasingly frequent opposition to party majorities, but the Southern Democrats move farthest. The trends on Ways and Means indicate a slight lessening of party bonds, but the indicators are mixed among both Northern and Southern members. Thus, on both crucial sets of committee norms, the data support, or at least do not rule out, the hypothesis that "committee-specific" norms may become generalized and affect overall member voting. Differing post-assignment behaviors of Appropriations and Ways and Means Democrats can plausibly be explained as the result of socialization into differing "rules of the game" within each committee.¹¹

Discussion and Conclusion

John F. Manley has observed that the internal decision-making norms of Congressional committees may pre-ordain the political coalitions appearing in Congress on issues within their jurisdiction.¹² For example, the Appropriation Committee's norms of unity and nonpartisanship have traditionally been reflected in the lack of major controversy over money bills on the House floor. If similar effects appear in other policy areas, committee norms and modes of operation have obvious implications for the structure of Congressional conflict.

The present findings support further research into committee norms, as committee socialization appears to affect members' overall voting behavior. In this sense, the House may be the product as well as the creator of its committees. Studies of additional House committees give us some further tantalizing hints: the conflict-laden and partisan-oriented style of the House Education and Labor Committee may dictate not only how its bills are processed on the House floor, but encourage ideological stridency and partisan zeal among individual committee members, who may already be policy and ideology-oriented when assigned to the committee.¹³ In some cases, however, norms might indeed remain "committee-specific": a recent study of the House Public Works Committee revealed that a "party unity" norm applies within the committee and on

¹¹ The same operations were performed for Republicans on both committees, but as Fenno and Manley might predict, there was little evidence of major change in either the degree of party regularity or conservatism exhibited by these members. Minor post-appointment changes in GOP voting behavior were essentially random in direction.

¹² John F. Manley, "The Presidency, Congress, and National Policy-Making," in Cornelius P. Cotter, ed. *Political Science Annual*, Volume 5 (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1964), p. 263.

¹³ Richard F. Fenno, Jr. *Congressmen in Committees* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), pp. 74-79.

committee legislation sent to the House floor,¹⁴ but a brief survey of party unity scores of several Public Works Democrats by the present author failed to disclose any tendency toward greater party voting. If a systematic survey of these voting patterns bears out this impression, it might indicate that "party unity" can remain primarily an internal decision-making rule, a norm of behavior confined to the context of committee business.

Whatever the findings of further committee studies a tantalizing point remains: Which individuals are most subject to the socialization process and which are most resistant? Previous students of socialization in Congressional norms and folkways have discussed several limitations on its effectiveness: previous political experience with differing norms, higher political ambitions, constituency pressures, and strongly-held political ideologies.¹⁵ The experience of Appropriations Democrats provides some evidence on these points. A cursory survey of Democrats shifting most on party unity and conservatism scores reveals a number of shared characteristics: most come from relatively rural districts, often from sections of the Midwest or West settled by Southern migrants; few face powerful constituency pressures in the form of large labor unions or other liberal lobbies; most are not affiliated with intra-House liberal blocs such as the Democratic Study Group, which might provide peer group reinforcement of their original liberal orientations and party regularity; finally, most appear to be House and Committee careerists, accommodating themselves to committee norms and values, waiting to rise to a position of leadership within the existing structure.¹⁶

The deviant cases among Democrats illustrate the factors which prompt a member to resist socialization. Most who move against the stream of Committee conservatism and lessened partisanship are clearly influenced by strongly liberal (often highly urban) constituencies, hopes for higher partisan political office, and in a few cases, by considerable previous political experience. Although information on intra-House affiliations is lacking, at least some are also active in non-committee networks which compete with and reduce the effectiveness of committee socialization mechanisms.

A final caution is in order. Recent changes in Congressional operations may require major shifts in the focus of socialization research. The

¹⁴ Murphy, "Political Parties and the Porkbarrel," p. 177.

¹⁵ Matthews, *U. S. Senators and Their World*, pp. 102-117; Murphy, "Political Parties and the Porkbarrel," p. 178.

¹⁶ See, for example, the biographies of George E. Shipley, John J. McFall, John Slack, Julia B. Hansen, W. R. Hull, and Neal Smith in Michael Barone, Grant Ujufusa, and Douglas Matthews, *The Almanac of American Politics, 1974* (Boston: Gambit, 1973).

increasing turnover of membership in the House, the declining prerogatives and sanctions of committee leaders, and the growing role of subcommittees and their chairman obviously alters the context for committee socialization. For example, the Appropriations Committee has seemingly become more liberal as large numbers of new Northern Democrats are added, apparently beyond the capacity of the Committee's integration mechanism to process, and as the conservative Committee leadership is stripped of its power by the Democratic caucus. Similarly, the increased size of the Ways and Means Committee, the creation of several subcommittees, and the replacement of Wilbur Mills by Al Ullman have all had substantial impact on the way that panel operates. Thus, the results reported here may be primarily of historical interest, as committee socialization takes new forms in a rapidly changing Congressional environment.¹⁷

¹⁷ For the changes in the House Appropriations Committee norms, see Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of the Budgetary Process*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), pp. 213-216; for the Ways and Means Committee, see "Ways and Means in 1975: No Longer Pre-eminent," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 33 January 10, 1976, pp. 40-44.