

Public Abstract

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In the study of legislatures, the effect of parties on legislative organization and behavior is generally considered under the broad precepts of two party-based theories: conditional party government theory (CPG) and party cartel theory. While complimentary in many ways, these two theories have disparate expectations for the ability of the majority party to keep measures off the floor (i.e., negative agenda control). Advocates of CPG suggest that negative agenda control varies with intra-party preference cohesion and inter-party preference distinction, while proponents of cartel theory contend that this type of agenda control is relatively constant over time. This latter expectation is primarily tested by looking at the ability of the majority party to resist rolling efforts on final passage votes. However, there are other ways to conceptualize negative agenda control, thus, prompting questions about the stability of different indicators of this type of power.

In this project, I propose that some manifestations of negative agenda control are not constant, and vary by the extent to which the conditions of CPG are met. To evaluate this claim, I examine the conditional nature of majority party control over participation in discharge efforts, a form of negative agenda control, in the U.S. House from 1931-2006. This project presents a more nuanced picture of how majority party power is restricted when the conditions of CPG are met to a lesser extent, and furthers our understanding of party power in the U.S. House.