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ARE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES COMPOSED OF PREFERENCE OUTLIERS?

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A diverse set of congressional studies portrays members of standing committees as more or less homogeneous "high demanders" or "preference outliers" relative to members of the larger legislature. Using interest group ratings of members of the Ninety-sixth to Ninety-ninth Congresses, I conduct conventional statistical hypothesis tests to discern whether standing committees are more extreme and more homogeneous than the legislature as a whole. With only a few exceptions, the tests do not allow confident rejection of null hypotheses of identical committee and chamber preferences. The absence of convincing evidence of preference outliers is broadly consistent with emerging incomplete information game-theoretic legislative research and difficult to reconcile with many previous formal theories of legislative politics.

A congressional claim so common that it approaches conventional wisdom is that standing committees are powerful in obtaining disproportionate policy benefits within their jurisdictions. This thesis emerged from empirical studies of the nineteenth century (McConachie 1898; Wilson 1885), persisted through the postwar behavioral revolution (e.g., Fenno 1966, 1973; Manley 1970; Price 1978), and has survived into the 1980s (Shepsle and Weingast 1987). An integral part of many claims regarding committee power is that committee members' preferences differ systematically from those of the larger legislature. In particular, the belief is that committee members more or less homogeneously demand high levels of benefits from policies that fall into their committees' jurisdictions. Indeed, in recent formal models, divergence in committee-chamber preferences is one of several necessary conditions for committee power (e.g., Denzau and Mackay 1983; Shepsle and

Weingast 1987; Weingast and Marshall 1987).

The dominant view among empirical and theoretical scholars is summarized in two quotations. Davidson offers a generalization based on his observation of congressional activity: "Under pressure from members and factions desiring representation, party leaders not only have allowed assignments to proliferate but have tended to accede to members' preferences for assignments. Inevitably, this means that legislators gravitate to those committees with which they, or their constituents, have the greatest affinity. Thus, many congressional workgroups are not microcosms of the parent houses, but are biased in one way or another" (1981, 111). Others use empirical generalizations such as Davidson's to defend a theoretical assumption that committees have policy biases. This approach, now common in the public choice literature, was first taken by Niskanen, who wrote that "[in this model the] committees for each serv-

ice are dominated by representatives of the group with the *highest relative demand* for the service. (One might think it equally plausible that the committees would consist of those representatives who have the highest and lowest demands for a specific service. A characteristic of legislatures, however, is that *advocacy is concentrated and opposition is diluted.*)" (1971, 139, emphasis added). (See also Benson 1981, 1983; Mackay and Weaver 1979, 1983; Weingast and Marshall 1987; Weingast and Moran 1983). In spite of the plausibility of such observations and corresponding assumptions, the evidence for what have been called "preference outliers," "high-demand committees," "self-selection tendencies," and ultimately "committee power" is inconclusive. For instance, while Ray (1980) interprets his results as supportive of the claim that the Armed Services Committee has high demanders, the findings of Stephens (1971) and Goss (1972) are quite different. Arnold (1979) therefore analyzes the committee's representativeness over a twelve-Congress period and finds substantial variation over time as well as across measures. Similarly, Weingast and Marshall (1987) present results indicating that some committees are outliers; however, the authors do not attempt to reconcile observed differences in the direction of outliers, such as the preponderance of defense advocates on Armed Services but defense opponents on Foreign Affairs.

Unanswered questions also accompany findings such as Cowart's (1981) and Shepsle's (1978). Cowart claims support for the outlier hypothesis when interpreting constituency characteristics as policy-specific measures of demand. In a similar vein, Shepsle estimates several probit models in which freshmen's requests are predicted by constituency characteristics. Interpreting these as "demand equations," the observed relationship is the first part of a multistage causal argument. Because constituency characteristics are associated

with requests, and requests in turn tend to be granted, the assignment process as a whole is governed by self-selection, yielding an "Interest-Advocacy-Accommodation Syndrome" (1987, 231). Munger (1988) expresses reservations about one stage of Shepsle's argument, pointing out that it is impossible to know how frequently legislators actually request their (or their constituents') most-preferred committees. Another stage is implicitly challenged by Jewell and Chi-hung's (1974) findings that freshmen typically do *not* receive their first choices and rarely receive prestigious assignments. Self-selection tendencies, therefore, may be overstated.

Others have questioned the generality of characterizations of congressional committees as homogeneous high demanders. Fiorina (1981), for example, points out that committee members may be extreme on both sides of their committee's policy spectrum. Davidson (1981), too, notes several exceptions to his generalization. Finally, the empirical results of Cook (1983), Fowler, Douglass, and Clark (1980) and Rivers and I (Krehbiel and Rivers 1988) raise deeper questions about whether assignment patterns are as important for legislators' electoral success and for committee power as much of the literature seems to presume. At the very least, a new empirical assessment seems worthwhile.

What Are Preference Outliers?

There are three types of preference outliers. First, a *classical homogeneous high-demand outlier*, as characterized in Niskanen's seminal book (1971), is a committee whose members have a common desire for uniquely high levels of benefits from policies within their committee's jurisdiction. Advocates of this view, such as Weingast and Moran (1983), assert that

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Congress can be characterized as follows:

Each legislator gives up some influence over many areas of policy in return for much greater influence over the one that, for him [sic], counts the most. Thus, we find that representatives from farming districts dominate agriculture committees and oversee the provision of benefits to their farm constituents. Members from urban districts dominate banking, urban, and welfare committees overseeing an array of programs that provide benefits to a host of urban constituents. And members from western states dominate interior and public lands committees that provide benefits to their constituents (pp. 771-72).

Conditions for convincing empirical support for this form of preference outliers are straightforward. Given estimates of the policy positions taken by legislators, committee members' positions should be systematically different from those of the entire legislature in two ways: central tendencies (means, medians) and dispersion of policy positions (variances). In other words, the classical view has both an *outlier component* and a *homogeneity component*.

Second, a *bipolar outlier* is a committee that has significant factions of members on both sides of its policy spectrum. For example, a judiciary committee may be composed exclusively of high demanders—ostensibly a la Niskanen (1971)—but with one faction of extreme demanders of civil rights and another faction of extreme demanders of so-called law-and-order measures. The probable policy consequences of this form of outlying committee are much different from those of the classical homogeneous high-demand type. So, too, are its directly observable manifestations. For bipolar outliers, we would expect not to see systematic differences in committee-chamber means or medians. But we would observe significant differences in committee-chamber variances, since committee members' positions are substantially more dispersed than those of the parent body.¹

Third, an *intense interest* or *high-*

salience outlier is a committee whose members share a uniquely high level of intrinsic interest in the committee, perhaps because its policy domain is highly salient to members' constituents. While this type of committee may be regarded as a preference outlier, it is for reasons quite apart from the policies espoused or level of services demanded by its members. Rather, self-selection in this context simply means following one's (constituents') innate policy interests to committees with compatible jurisdictions. This type captures the notion of intense preferences and obviously cannot be detected from means, medians, or variances. However, a relationship between this and other conceptions of preference outliers must be noted. If preference outliers of the first or second forms do not exist—that is, if the distribution of policy preferences within committees is essentially the same as that within the legislature—the existence of intense interest or high-salience outliers would be inconsequential for the ultimate distribution of policy benefits. Perhaps good public policy a la Fenno (1973) is more likely to emerge when committees are composed of members who have uniquely strong interests in their committee's work. However, if such members share the policy preferences of the larger legislature, the alleged committee power emerging from the division-of-labor arrangement cannot be a form of power based on disproportionate distributive benefits.

Table 1 summarizes the types of preference outliers and their observational attributes. The empirical analysis that follows focuses on the classical homogeneous high-demand type and its corresponding outlier and homogeneity components. Bipolar outliers can also be detected with available data and will be noted if and when observed, although this is a lesser interest. Finally, since high-salience or intense interest cannot be measured with the data and techniques em-

Table 1. Types and Observability of Preference Outliers

Type of Outlier ^a	Observation	
	Difference in Mean	Difference in Variance
Classical (homogeneous, high demanders)	yes ($\bar{x}_c > \bar{x}_h$)	yes ($s_h^2 > s_c^2$)
Bipolar (heterogeneous, extreme demanders)	no ($\bar{x}_c = \bar{x}_h$)	yes ($s_c^2 > s_h^2$)

^aIntense-interest or high-salience outliers cannot be observed.

ployed, no inferences about this type will be made.

Data and Hypotheses

To assess the evidence for homogeneous high demanders in the contemporary Congress, I rely on the assessments of some of the closest observers of congressional activity: public and private interest groups.² These groups are:

- American Conservative Union (ACU)
- Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
- American Security Council (ASC)
- Business-Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC)
- Chamber of Commerce of United States (CCUS)
- Committee on Political Education (AFL-CIO) (COPE)
- International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
- League of Conservation Voters (LCV)
- Machinists Nonpartisan Political League (MNPL)
- National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC)
- National Educators Association (NEA)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- Public Citizens Congress Watch (PCCW)
- Railway Labor Executives Association (RLEA)

While not immune from criticism (Fowler 1982), interest group ratings have several unique advantages for studying the composition of committees.

First, although the ratings are based on small samples of roll call votes and although voting is only one of several significant stages of the legislative process, the votes are nevertheless carefully selected by organizations that have strong incentives to know the implications of such processes for the legislative product. Consequently, the revealed preferences in these votes are likely to differentiate legislators according to genuine policy differences rather than inconsequential or symbolic behavior.

A second advantage of using interest group ratings pertains to agenda processes. Many roll call studies are indiscriminately based on very large samples of votes that are inherently determined by endogenous agenda formation processes. Neither these processes nor the systematic biases they induce in votes are well understood. In contrast, when selecting significant votes for the computation of published ratings, interest groups incorporate information about specific and sometimes arcane strategic settings. For example, inspection of the sets of votes used in this study reveals a nontrivial fraction of what a naive observer would regard as procedural questions, such as votes on special orders or on motions to instruct conferees. For some applications, inclusion of a large number of so-called procedural votes would make inferences hopelessly ambiguous. However, I not only acknowledge but also exploit the selection bias of informed congressional observers.

Third, the proliferation of interest group ratings in recent years provides an

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opportunity to assess committee-chamber differences with more precision than was previously possible via general party support scores, for example, since many contemporary interest group ratings are policy-specific and thus jurisdiction-specific. Accordingly, in addition to assessing the evidence for preference outliers from the standpoint of general ideology measures, this study looks closely at differences in committee-chamber preferences on issues that fall predominantly in the jurisdiction of the specific committees.

As discussed above, the classical preference outlier perspective has two components: an *outlier component*, which pertains to central tendencies of committee members as compared with non-committee members, and a *homogeneity component*, which pertains to the degree to which committee members are in better agreement with themselves than are members of the larger legislature. Two types of tests will be conducted for each component.

To assess whether or which committees are composed of outliers, I compute and compare median and mean ratings of committees with those of the entire legislature. The focus on medians is justified by formal models that typically yield variations of median voter results. Support for the preference outlier claim requires that these medians be significantly different. One method of assessing significance is simply the percentage of legislators whose ratings lie between the committee and chamber medians. A second method is a standard difference-in-means test. The null hypothesis is $H_1^0: \mu_h = \mu_c$, where μ_h is the average policy position of the house (excluding committee members) and μ_c is the comparable average for the committee. The alternative hypothesis is $H_1^A: \mu_h < \mu_c$. Rejection of the null hypothesis is necessary for support of the claim that committees are composed of outliers. A one-tailed t -test is used where,

for example, rejection of the null hypothesis at the .05 significance level requires a t -statistic of 1.65 or greater.³

Analogously, to assess whether committees are significantly more homogeneous than the House, a median-based approximation is obtained by ascertaining whether, for any given committee, its Democratic and Republican median members are both on the same side of the House median. When this condition holds, the committee is said to be homogeneous, since majorities of committee members of *both* parties have ratings that exceed those of a majority of the House. Homogeneity of this sort facilitates reaching a bipartisan consensus on the committee. When this condition does not hold, the committee is said to be heterogeneous since committee members' preferences are sufficiently different from one another that a committee majority of only *one* party has ratings that exceed those of a majority of the House. Heterogeneity in this sense makes reaching a bipartisan consensus within committee difficult. A similar but more rigorous test of homogeneity focuses on the relative variance of the committee and the House. The null hypothesis is $H_2^0: \sigma_h^2 = \sigma_c^2$, where σ_h^2 is the variance for the House (excluding committee members) and σ_c^2 is the variance for the committee. The alternative hypothesis is $H_2^A: s_h^2 > s_c^2$. Rejection of the null hypothesis is necessary for support for the homogeneity component of the classical view of committee composition. The ratio of the variances, σ_h^2/σ_c^2 , has an F -distribution. Under the appropriate one-tailed test we reject the null only if the test statistic, s_h^2/s_c^2 , is above the critical value given by F_{N_h, N_c} , where N_c is the number of members on the committee minus 1, and N_h is the number of members in the House minus N_c .⁴

The analysis is conducted in two stages. A first approximation permits inspection of all standing committees and focuses on general ideology ratings. More refined

Table 2. Preference Outliers Based on ADA Ratings

Standing Committees	Difference in Medians (1)	Percentage in Gap (2)	<i>t</i> -statistic for H_1^0 (3)	<i>p</i> -value for H_2^0 (4)
Ways and Means	2.0	.9	.46	.47
Public Works and Transportation	3.0	1.4	.23	.42
Agriculture	-3.0	2.8	-.89	.13
Veterans' Affairs	-3.5	3.0	-.70	.14
Government Operations	4.0	1.8	.52	.73
Budget	5.5	2.1	.38	.73
Energy and Commerce	5.5	2.1	.04	.62
Appropriations	7.0	3.0	1.01	.40
Merchant Marine and Fisheries	-7.0	4.1	-.45	.22
Small Business	-8.5	5.5	-.59	.47
Science and Technology	-9.0	6.0	-.91	.19
Interior	9.5	3.4	.41	.91
Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	13.0	6.0	.46	.52
Foreign Affairs	13.0	6.0	1.80	.74
Standards of Official Conduct	-14.0	9.4	-.30	.63
Judiciary	18.5	10.6	1.19	.85
Education and Labor	21.5	12.2	2.05	.44
Rules	22.0	12.6	1.20	.70
House Administration	23.0	13.3	.69	.67
Armed Services	-27.5	17.9	-3.72	.04
Post Office and Civil Service	35.5	25.7	2.20	.67
District of Columbia	50.5	37.9	1.96	.84

Note: House median = 44.50; mean = 47.32; standard deviation = 34.39. All party medians are heterogeneous except for the Armed Services Committee, for which the median is homogeneous.

tests are then conducted by analyzing policy-specific ratings. Due to the more precise information available at this stage (albeit for only a subset of committees), the alternative hypotheses face a better chance of corroboration. For example, we would expect committee-chamber differences to be greater with policy-specific measures than with the general ideology measures and especially pronounced on committees where the goal of the high demanders is acquisition of concentrated benefits, that is, distributive policies. Such committees in the House, for example, include Public Works, Interior, and Agriculture. The analysis reported in detail focuses on the House of Representatives in the Ninety-ninth Congress, while a subsequent section summarizes comparable results for the Ninety-sixth to Ninety-eighth Congresses, including the Senate.

General Ideology Results

The purpose of the first set of results is very narrow: to see whether systematic and general biases in general ideology outliers exist or whether cross-committee variation exists. Although these findings are clearly not sufficient for drawing any precise conclusions about preference outliers, they provide a useful baseline for subsequent results and their interpretation.

Ratings of the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the American Conservative Union (ACU) were first analyzed for the House in the Ninety-ninth Congress. The results were virtually identical for the two sets of ratings, so only ADA ratings are presented. Column 1 of Table 2 summarizes the medians by listing the number of points of deviation of the committee median from the House

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median. A positive score designates a relatively liberal committee, a negative score a relatively conservative one. Committees that are somewhat more *conservative* than the House include Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs, Merchant Marine, Small Business, Science and Technology, and Standards of Official Conduct. The Armed Services Committee, however, is a more significant conservative outlier, with a median 27.5 points lower than the House's.

Several additional findings emerge from the remaining columns of Table 2. Most standing committees do not have general ideology medians or means significantly different from the House. Column 2 shows that for 15 of the 22 standing committees fewer than 10% of the House's members lie in the gap between the House and committee medians. The paucity of general ideology outliers is also reflected in column 3, which summarizes the hypothesis tests for differences in means. Generously overlooking differences in signs and thus allowing maximum opportunity to reject the null hypothesis, the t-statistics are significant at the .05 level for only five committees: Foreign Affairs, Education and Labor, Post Office and Civil Service, Armed Services, and District of Columbia. Of these, only Armed Services is currently among the five most desirable assignments as estimated by Munger (1988, tbl. 3), and here the putative self-selection runs contrary to the majority party's preferences. In contrast to the handful of outliers, committees that appear to be microcosms of the House include Ways and Means, Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, Public Works, and Energy and Commerce. Indeed, Davidson (1981) singles out the first three of these committees as exceptions to his generalization about outliers.

While committees exhibit substantial variation in terms of whether their means and medians are outliers and, if so,

whether they are in a conservative or liberal direction, their composition is heterogeneous almost without exception. This claim is supported by the fact that the committee's party medians lie on opposite sides of the chamber median for every committee except Armed Services. Similarly, the *F*-tests reported in column 4 permit confident rejection of the null hypothesis, H_2^0 , only in the case of Armed Services, though the Agriculture and Veterans' Affairs Committees are somewhat more homogeneous than the House.⁵

The general ideology results raise some preliminary doubts about prevailing views on preference outliers. Cross-committee variation in outlying tendencies is evident, but the classical homogeneous high-demand committee seems at first glance to be an endangered species. These results must be interpreted with extreme caution, however. The most apparent problem is that the exceptional diversity of votes on which ADA ratings are based may mask some significant jurisdiction-specific differences in committee-House preferences. This possibility is examined next.

Policy-specific Results

Table 3 presents results for nine standing committees and one select committee for which jurisdiction-specific ratings are available. Again, the best support for the classical outlier view is the Armed Services Committee. American Security Council (ASC) scores, which focus exclusively on issues of foreign policy and defense, depict a committee whose members tend to be substantially more conservative than a majority of the House. Indeed, over one-fifth of the House membership has ratings between the two medians. Republicans and Democrats alike are outliers in the committee's jurisdiction, and they form a statistically significant homogeneous group, as reflected

Table 3. Preference Outliers Based on Policy-specific Ratings

Committees	Rating	Difference in Medians	Percentage in Gap	t-statistic for H_1^0	p-value for H_2^0
Armed Services	ASC	50.0	21.4	4.93	.02
Appropriations	BIPAC	-13.5	8.3	-1.95	.26
	CCUS	-15.0	13.3	-2.68	.12
Budget	BIPAC	-3.0	1.4	-.21	.70
	CCUS	-2.0	.7	-.51	.65
Education and Labor	COPE	19.0	11.5	1.14	.61
	IBT	15.0	3.2	1.22	.37
	MNPL	10.5	6.7	.97	.61
	RLEA	8.0	1.8	.45	.48
	NEA	2.5	.5	.95	.24
Foreign Affairs	ASC	-30.0	8.0	-1.62	.54
Interior	CCUS	-10.5	7.1	-.11	.72
	LCV	-3.0	.0	-.13	.98
	PCCW	-5.0	2.1	-.38	.82
Public Works	CCUS	-4.5	2.5	-.57	.55
	LCV	-3.0	.0	-1.12	.16
	PCCW	-4.0	.9	-.13	.29
	RLEA	.0	.0	.55	.47
Small Business	BIPAC	-8.0	3.0	-.42	.47
Agriculture	NFU	6.0	4.6	1.62	.01
Aging (Select)	NCSC	3.5	.9	1.36	.19

Note: All party medians are heterogeneous except for Armed Services, for which the medians are homogeneous.

by the *p*-value of .02. These findings differ from at least one prior study of Armed Services, which characterized that committee as a relatively *low* demander, who battled, often successfully, with relatively high-demand Appropriations subcommittees (Stephens 1971). But it is consistent with more recent studies that claim support for high demanders on Armed Services (Ray 1980; Weingast and Marshall 1987). Two caveats should be issued, however. First, the ASC ratings are based on only 10 votes. Second, the votes for the Ninety-ninth Congress sharply divided House members. The *F*-test presumes normality of the parent distribution; and, for ASC ratings, this condition appears from the sample not to be met. Moreover, impressionistic evidence is sug-

gestive of heterogeneity on Armed Services, contrary to the *F*-test. One member is Representative Ronald Dellums, a Democrat from Berkeley, whose 1986 ASC and ACU ratings are 0 and ADA rating is a perfect 100. Three other members also had ASC ratings of 0: Nicholas Mavroules (D-MA), Dennis Hertel (D-MI) and Thomas Foglietta (D-PA), each of whom is very liberal on ADA and ACU ratings as well.

After Armed Services, evidence of homogeneous high-demand outliers is almost nonexistent. Possible candidates include Appropriations, Education and Labor, and Foreign Affairs. But on closer inspection none of this support is fully convincing.

The Appropriations Committee is a

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moderately liberal and statistically significant outlier according to the Chamber of Commerce (CCUS) and Business and Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) ratings. These findings are consistent with Schick's (1980) postreform characterization of Appropriations members as "claimants" and diverge from Fenno's (1966) prereform characterization of Appropriations members as "guardians." But the outlying tendency is less pronounced in terms of the percentages of members lying between the chamber and committee medians, and neither rating yields significant differences in variances. To the degree that the Appropriations Committee has been forced to share much of the spending spotlight in the 1980s, the results for the Budget Committee are also relevant here. From all indications (and also consistent with Schick), the Budget Committee is a microcosm of the House. Divergence in chamber-committee preferences is minimal in terms of both means and medians, and the committee is clearly heterogeneous.

The Education and Labor Committee appears to be somewhat of an outlier according to the AFL-CIO's COPE score, with 11.5% of members lying between the committee and House medians. But this difference is not significant according to the *t*-test. Nor are the committee's liberal leanings strong according to other labor ratings: the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the Machinists' Nonpartisan Political League (MNPL), and the Railway Labor Executive's Association (RLEA). On the education issues, the committee and chamber medians are virtually indistinguishable. In light of Fenno's (1973) study and the pattern of results thus far, it is not surprising that the Education and Labor Committee has party medians on the opposite sides of the House median. But variances for Education and Labor tend to be somewhat *less* than those for the House, which may be surprising given the high degree of par-

tisanship in the period Fenno studied. Thus, not only does the Education and Labor Committee fail to live up to the classical outlier claim, it is not a bipolar outlier either.

The Foreign Affairs Committee has persisted in its liberal leanings in foreign policy (Fenno 1973); but here, too, the difference in means falls short of the .05 level of significance. Moreover, when compared with Armed Services, this result raises questions that conventional preference outlier claims do not answer. If the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees have similar jurisdictions in a manner that the ASC ratings tap, why are their members outliers on *opposite* sides of the spectrum—consistent with the majority party's preferences in one case but contrary to them in the other? And why is one committee, but not the other, significantly more homogeneous than the House? In short, it is increasingly apparent that the committee assignment mechanism operates neither automatically nor uniformly.

The remaining committees in Table 3 deal most explicitly in constituency-specific benefits and thus provide what should be the best opportunity to marshal support for the classical view. As such, the absence of strong and uniform support is striking. Regardless of the policy-specific rating employed, the quintessential pork barrel committees—Interior and Public Works—are not homogeneous high demanders at all.⁶ Nor is there evidence of self-selection of high demanders on the Small Business Committee. On Agriculture, ratings of the National Farmers' Union provide the most jurisdiction-specific information of all ratings; yet even here the results are inconclusive. The *t*-statistic approaches significance at the .05 level, but only 4.6% of House members have ratings between the committee and chamber medians. And although they *F*-test uncovers significant homogeneity, the committee is nevertheless heterogene-

ous according to the party median criterion. At best, then, the Agriculture Committee is a somewhat homogeneous medium-high demander.

Finally, if self-selection is apparent anywhere, it should be on a committee designed to represent voters who turn out at high rates and on which, as a select committee without legislative powers, work load is low and position-taking opportunities are high. Yet the Select Committee on Aging is only slightly more predisposed to policy favorable to senior citizens than is the House overall.

Additional Evidence

Are the findings reported above for the House in the Ninety-ninth Congress atypical? Do Senate committees conform to preference outlier claims better than House committees do? Comparable data from the Ninety-sixth through Ninety-eighth Congresses (and Ninety-ninth for the Senate) clearly say *no*.

According to general ideology measures, the Ninety-ninth Congress is much like the Ninety-sixth to Ninety-eighth Congresses. Armed Services is consistently more conservative than the House. Veterans' Affairs and Public Works join the conservative list for late 1970s Congresses but become moderate thereafter. In contrast, the Education and Labor, Foreign Affairs, and District of Columbia committees are sometimes significantly more liberal than the House.

Jurisdiction-specific special interest ratings exhibit only a few minor deviations from the pattern discovered in the Ninety-ninth Congress. While Armed Services was always high on the ASC scale, it was clearly *not* homogeneous in the Ninety-sixth and Ninety-seventh Congresses. Agriculture was a barely significant outlier in the Ninety-sixth Congress according to the NFU ratings, but this finding has since dissipated. Similarly, Education and Labor exhibited some outlying ten-

dencies on labor ratings in the Ninety-sixth Congress but was less prolabor during the Ninety-seventh and not significantly different from the House in the Ninety-eighth and Ninety-ninth Congresses. Moreover, it was clearly heterogeneous throughout the period. Public Works was significantly antienvironment according to the LCV ratings in the Ninety-sixth Congress; but in each succeeding Congress, the results from the Ninety-ninth are typical of this *nonoutlying* pork barrel committee. Finally, the Select Committee on Aging was (barely) significantly predisposed to senior citizens in the Ninety-seventh and Ninety-eighth Congresses; but here, too, heterogeneity of preferences was characteristic of the committee in each Congress. Thus, for the eight-year period beginning in 1979, there are almost no instances of homogeneity of committee preferences in the House and only occasional instances of significant outliers.

For the Senate, the data reveal more of the same. In the Ninety-ninth Congress, for example, not a single standing committee in the Senate was a general ideology outlier. Special interest ratings also reveal a robust pattern of moderation in Senate committee preferences. Even the somewhat conservative Senate Armed Services Committee fell short of the .05 significance level on the ASC scale. Instead, the closest thing to an outlier in the Senate seems to be the Environment and Public Works Committee, which is somewhat more proenvironment than the Senate according to LCV ratings (see Table 3). Finally, the Senate Agriculture Committee is somewhat (but not significantly) more *antiagriculture* than the Senate according to NFU scores.

Discussion

The composite picture of committees that has emerged from congressional literature has, in some circles, attained the

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status of a "stylized fact": self-selection in the committee assignment process results in committees that are composed of homogeneous preference outliers who secure disproportionate policy benefits. At minimum, the results of this study force us to entertain the possibility that the standard preference outlier story is a stylized fiction. Few contemporary committees are composed predominantly of high-demand preference outliers; and homogeneity of preferences within committees is the exception, not the rule.

Compared with much of the literature on the composition of congressional committees, these findings are surprising in and of themselves. They also have two more far-reaching implications. First, because it now appears that a necessary condition for committee power is rarely met, empiricists are encouraged to reconsider and, if necessary, rewrite the conventional wisdom on the composition of congressional committees and the nature of committee power. Second, theorists are encouraged to exercise additional caution when employing the now-conventional formal depiction of committees as unitary (homogeneous) actors with extreme (outlying) ideal points.

These findings and interpretations are not immune from objections, of course. To put the study in perspective and to guide future research, I conclude by examining three common criticisms: (1) that the data are suspect; (2) that, while perhaps accurate, the findings are unique features of the contemporary Congress; and (3) that in any case, old theories should not be abandoned until new and better ones come along.

Dubious Data?

Arguments that interest group ratings are problematical span a broad spectrum. Most of the strongest criticisms pertain to the fact that such ratings tend to be based on intermediate stages of the legislative

process and therefore are subject to selection bias.⁷ On this empirical foundation, various theoretical arguments are constructed. For example, a perfect information model may have the feature that in equilibrium, contentious issues are not subjected to roll call votes on the floor because of committees' gate-keeping powers or restrictive procedures (Denzau and Mackay 1983; Shepsle and Weingast 1987). So, the argument goes, only in committee can one hope to observe behavior that correctly discriminates between legislators in terms of their preferences.

While equilibrium arguments may seem like compelling reasons to doubt the usefulness of interest group ratings, two points are noteworthy. First, a strict interpretation of at least one model that lends itself to such an argument—namely, Shepsle and Weingast's (1987) "ex post veto" model—has the property that "floor events do not constrain the committee in conference and hence are, in effect, irrelevant" (Weingast 1989, 799). Clearly, the theoretically derived irrelevance of amendment activity is difficult to reconcile with the empirically documented quantity and contentiousness of amendment activity (Smith 1989). Second, even if this discrepancy is ignored, the equilibrium argument is faced with another problem that comes closer to the focus and findings of the present study. If, as is claimed, the uniquely meaningful legislative disputes occur in committees, is this not a tacit admission that committee members' preferences are *not* homogeneous? That is, a logical implication of the equilibrium argument is consistent with one of the main empirical findings of this study, committee heterogeneity. Ironically, however, it is inconsistent with a key assumption of the model on which the argument is based, committee *homogeneity*. In summary, it seems unreasonable to discard potentially useful data because of arguments resting on theories

that, when subjected to data, seem not to fare well.

Logical exercises aside, the main issue is not whether interest group ratings are without limitations. It is whether the use of such data is reasonable, given the specific purposes of this study. Conceding selection bias and setting aside equilibrium arguments, I would argue that if interest group ratings are based on votes with jurisdiction-specific content, if interest groups regard such votes as important, and if congressmen regard the votes as meaningful, the ratings are, at minimum, not meaningless. More constructively, they provide a unique and reasonable opportunity to reject null hypotheses in favor of alternative hypotheses that are widely believed to be true.

Contemporary Artifacts?

This study has focused explicitly and exclusively on the Ninety-sixth to Ninety-ninth Congresses. Although it seems doubtful whether committees' composition was somehow atypical during this eight-year period, this is a natural topic for future research. Those who pursue it may continue to entertain beliefs that classical preference outliers once thrived and theorize about historical change.

What might this research look like? Suppose that similar data were collected for the 1950s and 1960s and that convincing evidence of preference outliers was found. What might account for the change in the 1970s? Formal theorists are fond of explanations that are potentially amenable to refutation by testing comparative statics predictions derived from the equilibrium of a given model. Scientific and sound as this can be, a word of caution is in order. Properly conducted empirical research of this sort requires that exogenous variables of the model be explicitly identified and be shown to have changed in value during the historical period. Otherwise, these essential theory-

testing efforts run the risk of causing more confusion than clarity.⁸

Abandon Old Theories?

The paucity of homogeneous high-demand committees in the Ninety-sixth through Ninety-ninth Congresses is an empirical finding, first and foremost. Its theoretical implications, while significant, fall well short of abandoning all existing models in which a legislative committee is represented as a unitary actor. Rather, the practical and constructive modeling concerns are whether more realistic assumptions are tractable and—if and when they are not—whether the unitary actor assumption yields predictions that survive empirical tests.

Recent game-theoretic research illustrates that formal characterizations of different types of committees are tractable (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987, 1989). The latter article analyzes an incomplete information model in which a heterogeneous committee consists of two actors whose ideal points are on opposite sides of the ideal point of the legislature's median voter. Compared with the earlier article's homogeneous committee (unitary actor), heterogeneous committees are preferred by the legislature because of their greater willingness to share their policy expertise. Furthermore, under either assumption about committee types (homogeneous or heterogeneous), the legislature has an incentive *not* to allow its committees to be composed of preference outliers (homogeneous outliers in the first case, bipolar outliers in the second). In light of the empirical results reported above, this form of theoretical analysis seems promising.

Although new, tractable, and perhaps more realistic assumptions exist, the unitary actor assumption does not need to be abandoned. Nor do those who continue to employ the assumption have to adhere to rigid, literal interpretations of it.

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Again, the issue is ultimately empirical. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of actual committee members, do they nevertheless somehow behave *as if* they make up a homogeneous entity? Excellent examples in which they might be provided in Fenno's (1966) account of the House Appropriations Committee (during some years) and Manley's (1970) account of the Ways and Means Committee under the chairmanship of Wilbur Mills. One caveat remains, however. If a committee fundamentally is not an outlier, it seems implausible that it would behave as if it were an outlier.⁹ Thus, the *as-if* defense, while effective in some contexts, ought not to be relied upon perfunctorily.

Conclusion

Because most of the findings of this study are consistent with *null* hypotheses, the final word on preference outliers almost surely has yet to be uttered. Indeed, new and diverse directions for legislative research on committees and their composition have emerged. Preference outlier stalwarts may continue to believe that congressional committees are composed of homogeneous high-demanders. However, a greater burden of proof now accompanies such beliefs. Converted or calcified preference outlier skeptics, on the other hand, have a distinctly different mission—to rethink the role of standing committees in the legislative process, to entertain theoretical foundations that are not biased by a presumption of committee power, and to develop alternative theories in which homogeneous high-demand committees arise endogenously if they arise at all.

Notes

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1. A third variation on this means variance theme is a *uniform shift outlier*—a committee whose members, while no more homogeneous than the parent chamber, are systematically higher demanders. In this case we should observe a difference in means or medians but not in variances. While theoretically possible, this pattern has received little attention and thus will not be considered.

2. Data were obtained from Legi-Slate, a subsidiary of the *Washington Post*. These ratings differ slightly from some of those obtained directly from interest groups because, unlike some interest groups, Legi-Slate does not count absences as "incorrect" votes during computation.

3. The test is based on the assumption that interest group ratings are independent draws from a hypothetical distribution of possible ratings. Thus, failure to reject the null hypothesis indicates that the observed differences could have occurred by chance when taking independent draws from the distribution.

4. To detect bipolar outliers, tests were also conducted with the same null hypothesis but with the alternative hypothesis $\sigma_c^2 > \sigma_h^2$. Here the test statistic is $s_c^2/s_h^2 \sim F_{N_c, N_h}$. These results will be reported in passing whenever statistically significant.

5. Since critical values of the *F*-statistic differ both across committees (because of different degrees of freedom) and across ratings (because of different parent samples), I report the *p*-value for each committee. This is the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true. Support for the homogeneity hypothesis at the .05 level therefore requires a $p \leq .05$. For each committee *F*-tests were also conducted for the bipolar outlier hypothesis (see n. 4), but statistically significant support was nonexistent.

6. Only in the case of Interior and LCV scores was a committee significantly *more* heterogeneous than the parent body, thus supporting the bipolarity outlier hypothesis. The difference between s_c^2 and s_h^2 was significant at the .02 level.

7. See VanDoren 1988 for a discussion of this point and empirical analysis in the context of the literature that seeks to differentiate between self-interested and ideological voting.

8. An example can be found in the controversy Krehbiel, Shepsle, and Weingast 1987, in which Shepsle and Weingast defended their *ex post* veto model as having "as its empirical referent the House committee system of the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 941) and advocate comparative statics as a way of testing it. A *necessary* condition for such analysis to establish that the *ex post* veto was the "institutional foun-

ation of committee power" in the fifties and sixties is that the exogenous variable for the comparative statics—namely, the existence or nonexistence of an ex post veto—indeed varied during the time series. As a point of fact, changes in conference procedures during the reform years were minimal and had no bearing on the existence or nonexistence of an ex post veto.

9. In contrast, the opposite is quite plausible. A genuinely outlying committee, because of expectations about floor behavior, may propose bills coincident with the floor median voter's ideal point, as if the committee were moderate. This seems to characterize the Senate's consideration of minimum wage legislation in 1977 (Krehbiel and Rivers 1988).

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