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## *Joseph G. Cannon: Majoritarian from Illinois*

Congressional scholars regularly identify Speaker Joseph G. Cannon as the personification of centralized authority and partisan strength in the United States Congress. This paper assesses the conventional wisdom on Cannonism by employing the Groseclose-Stewart (1998) method for estimating values of committee seats to study variation in member-specific committee portfolio values. The data are useful both for reassessing the historical thesis of Cannon as tyrant and for testing more recent political science hypotheses about the underpinnings of a strong majority party. The findings fail to corroborate the notions of majority party power and Cannon as tyrant, and, if anything, support a new portrait of Cannon as a majoritarian.

*Results cannot be had except by a majority, and in the House of Representatives a majority, being responsible, should have full power and exercise that power.*

—Joseph G. Cannon, March 19, 1910<sup>1</sup>

Throughout congressional history, few individuals have personified tight-fisted party control as convincingly as the thirty-ninth Speaker of the House, Joseph Gurney Cannon. First elected to the Speakership in the 58th Congress, an office he then held through the 61st Congress, the “Tyrant from Illinois”<sup>2</sup> is often portrayed as the icon of Republican Party power at its apex. For example, in his seminal study of House leadership, Charles Jones presents a colorful and compelling portrait of the Speaker as a staunch partisan who adroitly wielded parliamentary authority to dominate the House. Thanks to the Republicans’ solid “procedural majority” in Congress—reinforced by “Cannon’s interpretation and use of his powers”—the Speaker “could appoint committees—including the chairmen, determine the schedule of business, recognize members on the floor, appoint members to conference committees, [and] dispense favors of various kinds” (Jones

1968, 619). With this parliamentary arsenal, Cannon allegedly organized the Congress effectively to impose his policy preferences on the House (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Hasbrouck 1927; Jones 1968; Norris 1945). Often cited are instances of punishment of disloyal members, such as stripping them of desired committee positions, refusing to schedule their favored legislation, and declining to recognize them for the offering of amendments or private bills. Indeed, according to most accounts, it was precisely this pattern of stern and vindictive behavior that led to Cannon's overthrow in 1910.

While the view of Cannon as tyrant is plausible and widely accepted, the supporting evidence consists predominantly of anecdotes, newspaper editorials, and personal interviews.<sup>3</sup> Such sources are obviously important in journalistic and historical research. Nevertheless, the absence of large-sample empirical analysis creates obstacles to the identification of regularities. It is possible, for instance, that many conclusions about Cannon's Speakership in particular, and this period in legislative history in general, are generalizations based on atypical cases. Nearly any congressional scholar can provide evidence of Cannon's fixation with party control by citing the case in which a progressive Republican, Irvine Lenroot of Wisconsin, was exiled to the House Committee on Ventilation and Acoustics. It does not follow, however, that isolated incidents of so-called tyranny justify sweeping generalizations about the height of partisanship in Congress.

This study focuses on the 58th–61st Congresses not only because these are the Congresses during which Cannon served as Speaker but also because the period is widely believed to have been among the most intensely partisan periods in U.S. history. It therefore provides a best-case opportunity to obtain systematic support for contemporary theories of strong parties<sup>4</sup> as well as older studies of Cannon's Speakership. In spite of this setup, systematic evidence tends to support an unconventional thesis: Speaker Cannon was less of a tyrant than a majoritarian.

Part I summarizes components of Cannonism, contrasting conventional with majoritarian perspectives. Part II introduces the focal dependent variable of this study: the value of committee seats. Part III analyzes variations in member-specific committee portfolio values. Part IV presents findings about the degree to which Cannon used his committee assignment rights to punish defectors from his governing coalition. Part V determines whether or not the party system functioned in predictably different ways after the institutional reforms of the historic revolt. Part VI is a discussion that relates additional qualitative information to the quantitative support for the majoritarian interpretation.

## I. Components of Cannonism

A December 13, 1908, *New York Times* editorial argued that the House of Representatives “is not in that big hall where the high-priced guide leads you . . . it is in a comfortable red-upholstered room just back thereof . . . it is the throne room of Uncle Joe.”<sup>5</sup> In another editorial discussing “Cannonism,” the *Times* wrote that “[Cannon] is an arch intriguer as well as a determined and merciless politician . . . [who] deals without scruple with those who stand in his way or in the way of the powerful interests with which he is allied.”<sup>6</sup> The conventional perspective on Cannonism was also compactly summarized in an editorial titled “The Threat of Congress” that appeared in the *Northwestern Christian Advocate* in December, 1909.<sup>7</sup> Blatantly attacking Cannon, the editorial claimed that the Speaker had, and abused, the absolute power to appoint the committees of the House. The article went on to criticize Cannon for his domination of the Rules Committee, claiming that no legislation could be passed through the House without the committee’s approval. More recently and dispassionately, David Rohde summarized the Cannon era as follows:

Joseph Cannon . . . built on the practices followed by Reed, serving as chairman of Rules and ensuring that his closest supporters headed the other major committees. He used his power to appoint all Republican committee members as a vehicle for rewarding allies and punishing dissidents. Control of the Rules Committee permitted him to determine which bills got to the floor, and his powers as presiding officer enabled him generally to dictate their fate once there. All of these institutional powers were buttressed by Cannon’s position as leader of his party and by the strong party discipline among House Republicans (1991, 4).

These are not portrayals of a majoritarian whose governing principle is to serve the interests of the median member of the legislature. To form a more balanced backdrop for the analysis, therefore, we will briefly consider four related components of Cannonism: the likely motives of actors in politics and the media, committee appointment procedures, the Rules Committee, and the nature of partisanship during Cannon’s congresses.

### *Motives*

Though the arguments against Cannon are compelling, many of the journalistic accounts upon which the conventional wisdom is based may have been motivated less by civic sensitivities and Cannon-caused injustices than by cold, hard self-interest. Turn-of-the-century media

organizations were anything but neutral and objective, and Republican insurgents hostile to Cannonism had significant ties with the press. Victor Murdock (R-KS), for example, was not only a leading Republican insurgent but also a former newspaper editor with tight connections with other newspapers (Hechler 1940, 37). It therefore seems possible, if not likely, that disinterested and dispassionate reporting was compromised.

As a case in point, Cannon's policy agenda gave publishers a powerful incentive to frame Cannon as a threat to the Republic (Bolles 1951, 113–18). An \$8.00 per ton duty on newsprint was among the legislation that Cannon promoted during the 60th Congress, and, to put it mildly, the policy would impose a hardship on publishers. Cannon was therefore approached in 1907 by Herman Ridder, President of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, who offered the publishers' support in Cannon's upcoming bid for the presidency, but only if Cannon would support a bill lowering the newsprint tax. Offended and outraged by the attempted extortion, Cannon threw Ridder out of his office. Ridder promptly threatened Cannon, saying that publishers would "destroy" him, that he would never be Speaker again, and that they would "destroy the Republican Party" unless the duty was lowered (Bolles 1951, 116).<sup>8</sup> Consistent with this story is Bolles' observation that, after 1907, the national media took on a substantially harsher tone towards Cannon.

Hence, despite professing to be objective, many newspapers had, and openly acted upon, a vested interest in portraying Cannon as the tyrant from Illinois. In fact, as a matter of historical record, many of the offenses of which Cannon was accused were grounded in precedents established under the Speakership of Thomas Brackett Reed or even earlier.

### *Committee Appointments*

The parliamentary infractions of which Cannon was accused were also probably less sensational than national media alleged. Consider Cannon's appointment behavior, for example. When evaluated by the letter of the law, the committee appointment process during Cannon's Speakership emerges not as an instance of arrogated power or "procedural deck-stacking" but as an explicit parliamentary right granted by House Rule X, which had been in existence for over one hundred years (Alexander 1916, 66). Closer inspection of Rule X reveals another rarely noted fact: the Speaker could appoint committees "unless otherwise specially directed by the House." In other words, majoritarianism

was implicit in the rule insofar as a majority of the House could always object to the Speaker's right to appoint or to the specific appointments he made.

### *The Rules Committee*

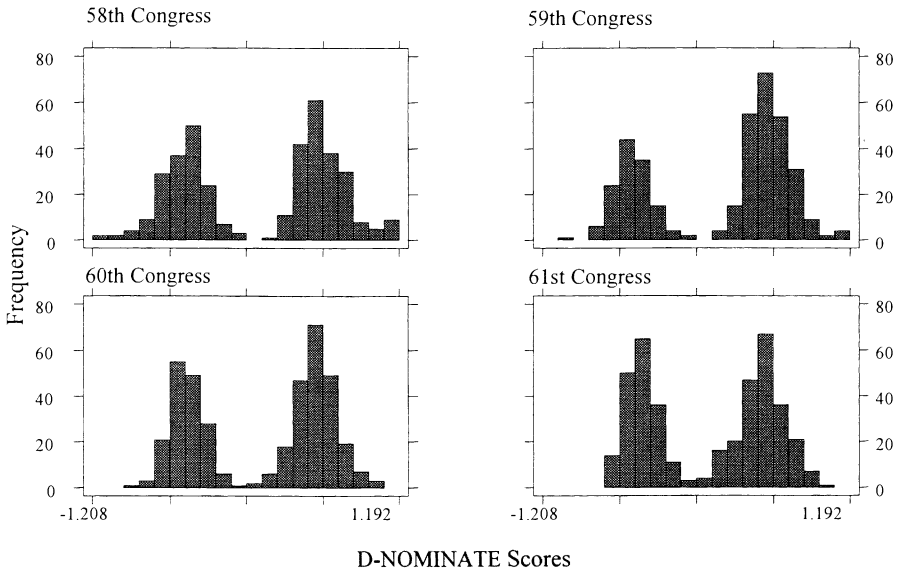
Although it is rarely portrayed as such, the House Rules Committee was another instrument of possible majoritarianism. The conventional wisdom is that Cannon's domination of the Rules Committee made it impossible for legislation to pass through the House without the Speaker's stamp of approval. Some researchers suggest that it was Cannon's position or personality that gave rise to the Rules Committee's stature, but this claim is questionable. First, in the 60th Congress, the two other Republicans on the committee were not hand-picked by Cannon but rather were "recommended to the Speaker by the Republican Caucus" (Busbey, n.d.). Hence, the composition of the Committee was, by its very nature, subject to the approval of at least some overseers.<sup>9</sup> Second, it is clear from the record that the Rules Committee was not a gatekeeper whose approval was necessary for passage of legislation. The legislative calendar system existed at the time and was used far more extensively than is customary today. For example, the 60th Congress enacted "305 Public Laws, 7,041 Private Laws, . . . while only 2 bills to make laws were aided by the Committee on Rules, and none hindered by that Committee" (Busbey, n.d.). Finally, then as now, all rules reported by the Rules Committee were subject to majority approval in the House.

### *Partisanship*

Contemporaries of Cannon, as well as historians and political scientists, argue forcefully that the era was one of intense partisanship. As evidence, data such as that presented in Figure 1 are often cited: distributions of Poole-Rosenthal D-NOMINATE scores of House members, broken down by parties. In each of the four Congresses during which Cannon was Speaker, the distribution of measures is strikingly bimodal. Invariably, the rightmost Democrat lies to the left of the leftmost Republican.

Two party-relevant interpretations can be given to evidence based on roll-call votes, and each one is problematic. First, the scores can be interpreted as primitive preferences that, in the aggregate, define an *exogenous condition* under which partisan behavior is predicted (e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 1998). This perspective is plausible, but it also has

FIGURE 1  
Distribution of Preferences in Cannon's Congresses



the major disadvantage that, when taken to its logical extreme, its predictions are substantively trivial. For example, backbenchers will delegate to leadership when leadership is not needed, but not when it is needed; majority party median outcomes will occur when the majority party median and chamber median are identical, but not when they are significantly distant from one another; and so on.

Second, the scores can be interpreted as *endogenous*, or conditioned by forces within the legislative settings. In this case, a seemingly innocuous supposition is that true, unobserved preferences are much more heterogeneous than those shown in Figure 1; the scores in Figure 1, then, represent the homogenizing influences within both parties. Although this interpretation seems sensible, in the context of the strong-party hypothesis, what remains to be tested? The finding of strong parties is already at hand, yet obtaining it did not require that the theory be exposed to data with a chance of refutation. Instead, the finding is a direct result of an unconfirmed assumption—that true, unobservable preferences were such that the observed measures reflect party influence.

Given these problems with vote-based scores, we adopt a different and unique approach to study party influence.

## II. The Value of Committee Seats

The data analysis employs Groseclose and Stewart's (1998) method for estimating the average value of a seat for a given set of standing committees. Based on committee transfer data and described in detail in the article, the method has several conceptual advantages over predecessors. With committee transfer data suitably organized, a probit analysis results in a coefficient for each standing committee that represents the average of legislators' individual values associated with that committee.<sup>10</sup> In our application, the committee-level estimates are used to calculate individual members' *committee portfolio values*, defined as the sum of coefficients of all, and only those, committees of which a given legislator is a member. These measures are then used to determine if the majority party as a whole reaped disproportionate benefits from the committee system, and, finally, whether or not specific individuals were punished in predictable ways via changes in assignments across Congresses.

Table 1 summarizes Groseclose-Stewart estimates of committee values based on all committee transfers in the House of Representatives between the 50th and 62d Congresses (roughly 1877–1911). Committees are sorted from most to least valuable. For the most part, the rankings comport with a priori intuitions based on contemporary as well as historical literature. The column labeled “value” is the probit coefficient. Among the 62 committees used by the House during the twenty-four-year period, most of the top finishers are well-known and highly prized today. For example, “power committees” (Fenno 1973), such as Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules, are all in the turn-of-the-century top ten. So are several “constituency committees” (Smith and Deering 1984) or their historical forerunners: Rivers and Harbors, Agriculture, and Post Office and Post Roads.

The face validity of the measure can also be assessed with reference to Charles Jones's (1968) study in which he singles out seven “*spectacular appointments* and adjustments prior to 1909” [emphasis added] that Cannon allegedly endorsed in order to punish past aberrant behavior and to send a signal to Republican moderates about the importance of toeing the party line in the future. On the assumption that Jones correctly identified and interpreted these anecdotes qualitatively—an assumption, which, to the best of our knowledge, is uncontested—the Groseclose-Stewart measure, if valid, should provide independent quantitative corroboration. This assertion can be formalized as a simple hypothesis test. If the null hypothesis is that committee portfolio values are random noise, then members on the Jones list should be indistinguishable from other members, in terms of

TABLE 1  
Estimates of Value of Committee Seats

Committee	Value	Standard Error	<i>p</i> -value
Appropriations	2.630	0.299	0.000
Interstate and Foreign Commerce	1.705	0.297	0.000
Ways and Means	1.685	0.225	0.000
Rivers and Harbors	1.557	0.313	0.000
Agriculture	1.401	0.299	0.000
Foreign Affairs	1.400	0.281	0.000
Disposition of Executive Papers	1.283	1.220	0.293
Judiciary	1.270	0.247	0.000
Rules	1.027	0.263	0.000
Public Buildings and Grounds	0.970	0.300	0.001
Naval Affairs	0.960	0.293	0.001
Post Office and Post Roads	0.916	0.230	0.000
Accounts	0.830	0.287	0.004
Banking and Currency	0.776	0.203	0.000
Library	0.769	0.332	0.020
Commerce	0.726	0.488	0.137
District of Columbia	0.715	0.218	0.001
Expenditures Commerce and Labor	0.644	0.463	0.164
Insular Affairs	0.600	0.254	0.018
Immigration and Naturalization	0.547	0.265	0.039
Coinage Weights and Measures	0.473	0.200	0.018
Expenditures Justice	0.470	0.223	0.035
Military Affairs	0.463	0.216	0.032
Irrigation of Arid Lands	0.433	0.235	0.065
Printing	0.424	0.378	0.263
Merchant Marine and Fisheries	0.415	0.205	0.043
Public Lands	0.387	0.228	0.090
Territories	0.385	0.221	0.081
Indian Affairs	0.378	0.227	0.096
Industrial Arts and Expositions	0.365	0.281	0.194
Alcoholic Liquor Traffic	0.317	0.260	0.223
Expenditures Navy	0.244	0.241	0.311

(continued on next page)



TABLE 1 (continued)

Committee	Value	Standard Error	<i>p</i> -value
Elections 1	0.208	0.364	0.567
Pacific Railroads	0.189	0.213	0.374
Expenditures War	0.187	0.299	0.531
Election of the President and Vice President	0.156	0.220	0.478
Expenditures State	0.152	0.279	0.586
Patents	0.126	0.259	0.628
Census	0.110	0.221	0.618
Education	0.102	0.212	0.631
Reform in the Civil Service	0.090	0.205	0.660
War Claims	0.087	0.220	0.691
Labor	0.076	0.224	0.735
Expenditures Agriculture	0.066	0.288	0.817
Elections 3	0.041	0.319	0.897
Invalid Pensions	0.037	0.250	0.881
Ventilation and Acoustics	0.002	0.286	0.996
Expenditures Interior	-0.007	0.260	0.977
Levees and Improvements of Mississippi River	-0.055	0.209	0.792
Expenditures Public Buildings	-0.120	0.273	0.658
Manufacturers	-0.127	0.225	0.574
Expenditures Treasury	-0.143	0.254	0.574
Expenditures Post Office	-0.150	0.270	0.579
Mileage	-0.163	0.389	0.676
Private Land Claims	-0.181	0.223	0.419
Militia	-0.182	0.210	0.387
Pensions	-0.204	0.278	0.463
Claims	-0.205	0.216	0.342
Mines and Mining	-0.257	0.251	0.306
Elections	-0.270	0.366	0.461
Revisal of the Laws	-0.385	0.231	0.096
Enrolled Bills	-0.409	0.333	0.219
Elections 2	-0.462	0.310	0.136
Railways and Canals	-0.687	0.240	0.004

*Note:* Based on data from the 50th–62d Congresses using the Groseclose and Stewart method.

changes in portfolio values, between the 60th and 61st Congresses. The actual difference in means is  $-.588$ , significant ( $p = .003$ ), and in the expected direction. So, the measure and the anecdotes are consistent with one another.<sup>11</sup>

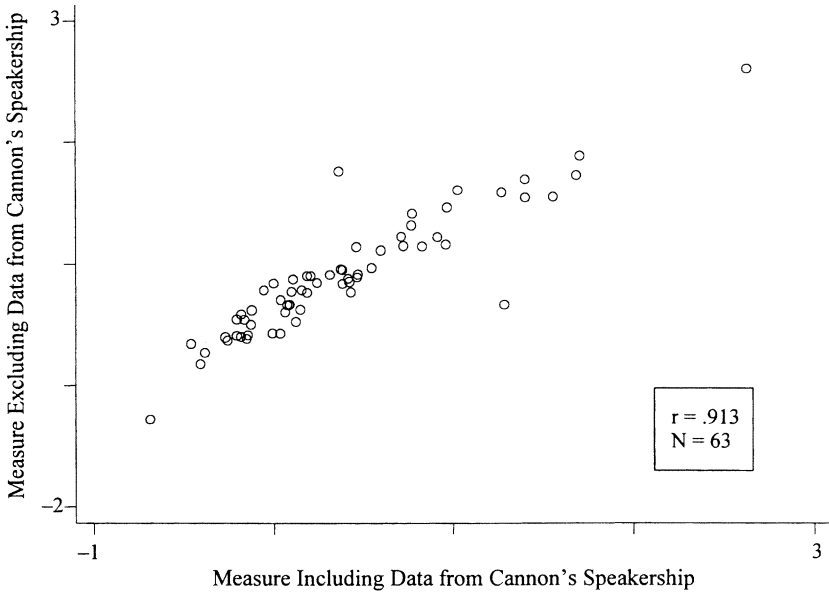
Although such validity checks are encouraging, the measures are not immune from additional reservations and criticisms. We address these concerns briefly before turning to a more systematic analysis.

### *Bias*

One worry is that the measure of the value of committees will be biased if it is based on large numbers of transfers that were not revealed preferences of members but rather were revealed punishments by the Speaker-tyrant. In the limit, this objection implies that the measure would actually be tapping the *undesirability* of committees. For instance, the infamous Ventilation and Acoustics—if used regularly as a holding tank for the disloyal—would take on a *high* value and thereby contradict its reputation as a veritable Siberia. From the exercise above, it is clear that this limiting case does not hold. On average, the members on the Jones-documented Cannon hit list indeed took a hit by these measures. To put it precisely, we find that these members incurred a net loss of 72% on their average portfolio value—from a 60th Congress average of 0.582 on committees to which they did not return, to a new, 61st Congress average of .160 on their new assignments. Moving beyond portfolio values, it should further be noted that over half of the members identified by Jones were also victims of seniority violations, either being passed over for committee leadership posts or transferred to new committees with a coincident loss of committee seniority.

The potential bias in the measures can also be assessed by computing lower and upper bounds on measure-biasing transfers. This assessment entails finding, respectively, the smallest and largest number of Republican transfers between our focal Congresses that could have been punitive and then dividing these numbers by the total number of transfers that serve as inputs for the calculation of the measure. The lower bound is based on Jones's list, which comprises 22 transfers, many of which, indeed, seem to have been involuntary. Relative to the 3,820 transfers between the 50th and 62d Congresses, however, the implied bias factor of .0057 is quite small. The upper bound, in contrast, uses as its numerator *all* Republican transfers in the controversial 61st Congress, even though most of these were almost surely perceived as promotions rather than demotions.<sup>12</sup> The implied bias factor then is  $224/3820$ , or .058, which is still not particularly large and is surely overstated.<sup>13</sup>

FIGURE 2  
Comparison of Two Committee Value Measures



### *Period-Specificity*

A second possible criticism of the Groseclose-Stewart measure is that committee values change over time. If both the first and second criticisms were severe, then there would be no point in proceeding. To compute the estimates somewhat reliably, we require many Congresses. Using only the four Cannon Congresses for estimation is inappropriate, and such a treatment, in any event, would heighten concerns about bias as noted above. Using only Congresses prior to Cannon's Speakership, in contrast, is possible. Were we to do this, however, the present criticism that committee values change significantly across eras becomes sharper. Fortunately, here, too, it is possible to bring at least indirect evidence to bear on the severity of the criticism. The simple scatterplot in Figure 2 compares committee values with and without Cannon Congresses. Essentially, there are only two outlying committees whose values change substantially, and neither of these is in the top 10 committees or plays an otherwise significant role in the analysis. Furthermore, because the correlation coefficient is large

( $r = .913$ ), we are generally willing to use the more data-intensive measure, which has more efficient estimates. Nonetheless, to continue to address concerns such as this, we will also summarize tests based only on the pre-Cannon Congress data.

### *Regime Changes and Involuntary Turnover*

Third, there may be concerns that changes in party control may render some transfers involuntary because new committee ratios negotiated by party leaders squeeze out erstwhile majority committee members. Although it is perhaps plausible in the context of today's high reelection rates, this objection loses significance when one considers that turnover was very extensive throughout this period. In the 58th–61st Congresses, the average turnover was almost 29%—much higher than the levels observed in the latter part of the twentieth century. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that inter-Congress adjustments in party ratios on a committee were ever a binding constraint for the somewhat moderate (by today's standards) percentage of returning incumbents. Moreover, even if such constraints were present, they could be lifted in the pre-Congress process of negotiating ratios. In other words, party ratios—like committee assignments—are endogenous.

### *Inactive or Low-Value Committees*

Finally, concerns may arise that so many committees were without value, did not meet during Cannon's Speakership, or reported little meaningful legislation. While these concerns have empirical merit, their implications for the measure are not pernicious. To the extent that committees are idle or undesirable, exodus from such committees supplies the requisite data for the measure to pick this up and yield near- or below-zero estimates (see Table 1).

In conclusion, though the measure is not perfect, most or all of the a priori objections can be rebutted, often with supporting data.

## **III. Committee Portfolio Values**

A legislator's *committee portfolio value*, as noted above, is defined as the sum of the Table 1 coefficients of all committees on which the legislator is a member. For example, Cannon's committee portfolio value was simply 1.027, the value for the Rules Committee, which was his only committee. In contrast, Charles Korbly's (D-IN) committee portfolio value was  $-1.149$  because his two committees—

Elections 2 and Railways and Canals—both yielded net costs, according to their respective values of  $-.462$  and  $-.687$ . Another specific observation bears on the face validity of the estimates: Cannon's vindictiveness towards Representative Lenroot of Wisconsin (e.g., Bolles 1951, 195). Lenroot defeated a crony of Cannon's in the Republican primary and signed the Rosewater Pledge against Cannonism.<sup>14</sup> Holding true to his pledge, he defected from the Republican Party's position on the key vote on House Rules at the beginning of the 61st Congress. The apparent consequences of this conspicuous act of disloyalty were assignments to the Committees on Patents and on Ventilation and Acoustics. Freshman Republicans averaged  $.639$  in their committee portfolio values, but Lenroot's assignments summed only to  $.127$ , thanks to the drafty and barely audible value of  $0.002$  for Ventilation and Acoustics.

What might account for variation in committee portfolio values? Two straightforward conjectures come immediately to mind.

- *Seniority*. Despite the fact that it was not institutionalized at the turn of the century, the seniority system existed to a nontrivial degree as a norm of the House (Polsby 1968; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969). Its existence as an implicit norm does not guarantee that seniority will be positively associated with committee portfolio values, but it does support the expectation that serving on a committee for an extended period is likely to culminate in a chairmanship. The steady state of such a system is likely to be one in which portfolio values increase with seniority, although probably at a diminishing rate.
- *Majority party status*. Clearly, in a partisan era under so-called Czar Rule, being a member in the party of the czar who appoints committees should translate into a net benefit in committee portfolio value. If this were not the case, the salience of committees and asymmetric influence of the majority party would have to be questioned.

Table 2 reports on tests of these conjectures. We first regressed committee portfolio value on *seniority* (terms of consecutive house service), *seniority*<sup>2</sup>, and a *majority party* (Republican) dummy variable. The seniority coefficients are significant and have the expected signs. A term of service is worth approximately  $.33$  units of portfolio value at the beginning of a career, and the rate of accumulation of these benefits declines over the course of a career. The party coefficient is also positive and significant, as expected. Other things being equal,

TABLE 2  
 Factors Affecting Committee Portfolios,  
 58th–61st Congresses  
 (OLS estimates and *t*-statistics)

	1	2	3
Constant	0.003 0.056	0.491 1.365	0.066 0.717
Seniority	0.328 17.832	0.154 10.707	0.151 10.357
Seniority <sup>2</sup>	-0.016 10.202	-0.008 6.840	-0.008 6.623
Majority party	0.184 5.034	0.113 3.276	0.116 1.507
Top committee		1.119 24.664	1.131 24.547
Majority party × Top committee		-0.024 -0.438	-0.043 0.760
Distance from Cannon			-0.019 -0.200
<i>N</i>	1590	1590	1532
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.2723	0.6081	0.6063

*Note:* The dependent variable is committee portfolio value.

Republican status adds .18 units of committee portfolio value. (The standard deviation in the dependent variable is .830.) Relative to the portfolio benefits associated with seniority, the benefits of majority party status seem small. For example, according to the coefficients in Equation (1), a sophomore minority party member can expect a portfolio greater than a freshman majority party member.

It is possible, however, that Cannon manipulated committee assignments as conventional wisdom suggests but that his machinations are masked by the simple party-dummy-variable specification.

This masking would occur, for instance, if the Speaker's primary interests were confined to a small set of key standing committees. This conjecture is easy to test by coding and including two additional variables: a dummy variable, *top committee*, that equals 1 only if the member served on one of the top ten committees (see Table 1) and an interaction variable, *majority party* × *top committee*, which isolates majority party advantages, if any, where they would seem to matter the most. The coefficient for the simple top-committee variable will be positive by construction, but the question is whether or not majority party members had a unique advantage within the set of top committees. Equation (2) fails to provide support for this plausible partisan conjecture. The key coefficient is negative and insignificant; moreover, the estimate of the general majority party advantage decreases by about one-third from its value in Equation (1).<sup>15</sup>

Equation (3) tests for evidence of a strong majority party in yet another way. Perhaps the committee seats are doled out disproportionately, not simply on the basis of seniority and majority party status, but, more important, on the basis of preference proximity to the ostensible dictator of such assignments: Speaker Cannon. Defining *preference extremity from Cannon* as the absolute difference between Cannon's NOMINATE rating and any legislator's, we find no evidence of preference effects either.

In total, the results in Tables 1 and 2 provide some additional validity for the measure of committee portfolio values and preliminary support for the conventional claim that majority party status was a valuable commodity in the Cannon era.<sup>16</sup> The support is tentative, however, because the conjectures are not as closely affiliated with theoretical claims as they could be. To understand more deeply and illustrate more convincingly the role that the Speaker played in the partisan era, we must devote more specific attention to the *mechanisms* by which the Speaker exercised his parliamentary authority. In Cannon's case, a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggests that committee appointments were the chief mechanisms employed to elicit compliant behavior and punish errant behavior. When discussing Cannon's strategy, Chiu writes: "Speaker Cannon was . . . very pointedly censured for the 'outrageous' changes which he made [. . . in which] members of the House who incurred the displeasure of the Speaker were either removed or demoted" (1928, 66–67). With the benefit of measures of committee portfolio value, claims about rewards and punishments are not only plausible but also testable.

#### IV. Defections and Punishment

Although it is not apparent in Figure 1, the Progressive Movement was in full swing in the 60th and 61st Congresses. The overthrow of Cannonism through changes in House rules was a top objective of the foes of Uncle Joe. Immediately after the 1908 election, leaders of the insurgent faction floated several proposals for reforming the Rules Committee. Some proposals would have confined Cannon's appointments to only part of the committee; others would have rescinded his appointment rights entirely and removed him from the committee (Hechler 1940, 44–46). In the 60th Congress, Cannon's Republican majority had shrunk from 58 to 47. The tariff question had been a focal point of the previous election, causing Cannon to come under fire both across the nation and within his own district (Peters 1990, 78–80). In this context, the 60th and early 61st Congresses posed numerous opportunities for defections from the majority party fold. The purpose of this section is to assess the degree to which such defections were punished. The test takes seriously these theories of majority party strength that, in varying degrees of explicitness, maintain that leaders hold unspoken but ever-present threats over followers. According to theory, these threats are sufficiently credible that, in equilibrium, they have important behavioral consequences apart from their actual exercise. Yet, as an empirical matter and for reasons not well understood (e.g., mistakes, uncertainty, emotions), defections do occur.

Many interpretations can be given to such behavior, but strong-party theorists would likely regard defection behavior as lying off the equilibrium path. We, too, will adopt this view, in which case, two possible responses must be considered. One response is to reject theories of strong majority parties on the basis of out-of-equilibrium defections. This standard seems too harsh. Another response is to give the theories the benefit of the doubt by tolerating arguably isolated imperfections, but also by inquiring further whether or not the Speaker, as a procedurally empowered leader, punishes defections in a manner consistent with the party theories. The idea is that, when confronted with defections, calculating, power-loving leaders cannot simply look the other way if they are to maintain positions of authority. They must instead resort to tools at their disposal to inflict harm on some defectors in order to deter future instances of defection. Committee assignments are one set of mechanisms believed to have been crucial to Cannon's arrogation of power. Consequently, we assess the degree to which defections on key votes resulted in relative demotions in committee assignments. The dependent variable is a legislator's *change in*



*committee portfolio value* between the 60th and 61st Congresses.

An operational obstacle arises with independent variables: how should the defections that constitute triggers to punishment be defined and coded? Three perspectives are defensible, each with different implications for structuring the empirical analysis.

1. *Strong Majority Party*. Upon close inspection, we note that most theories in recent party-in-legislature literature focus almost exclusively on *majority* party activity and argue that rewards and punishment *within* the majority party are the keys to party strength. This perspective implies that analysis during the Cannon Congresses should be confined to Republicans.

2. *Strong Parties*. If rewards and punishments work within the majority party, and if the legislative system is one of strong *parties* (plural), then approximately the same kind of behavior ought to occur within the minority party as within the majority party. The difference lies with coding: here, defection is defined differently across parties with reference to their respective leaders' wishes (presumably different). This perspective suggests that analysis should include Democrats as well as Republicans, but that predictions must be party-specific.

3. *Strong Speaker*. If the key to Cannonism was Cannon himself, or, more precisely, the parliamentary rights that he had been delegated, then he ostensibly had the capacity to punish Democrats and Republicans alike to induce them to behave as he wished. This perspective suggests that analysis should include Democrats as well as Republicans but that predictions must not be party-specific. A defection, therefore, would be defined for Republicans as in Equations (1) and (2). For Democrats, however, a defection would be defined as a vote against Speaker Cannon.

The nature of analysis in Cox and McCubbins (1993) seems consistent with the strong-majority-party perspective. Nevertheless, well-received arguments and issues such as the "remarkable resurgence of *parties*" (Rohde 1991) and "Do *parties* matter?" (Sinclair 1999) imply that the logic ought to apply to minority party leaders as well.<sup>17</sup> Finally, a stronger version of the strong-Speaker argument implies a different sort of generalization: one in which the best-endowed leader—the Speaker—attempts to enforce discipline across the board and independent of backbenchers' party affiliations.

Fortunately, a test can be implemented that circumvents the need to choose any one of these perspectives. We estimate equations of the form

$$\Delta PV = \alpha + \beta \text{ Republican} \times \text{Vote} + \gamma \text{ Democrat} \times \text{Vote} + \varepsilon,$$

where  $\Delta PV$  is change in committee portfolio value; Vote is a vote against Cannon; Republican and Democrat are dummy variables with the obvious codings;  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ , and  $\gamma$  are parameters to be estimated; and  $\varepsilon$  is an error term conforming with the normal ordinary least squares assumptions.

Readers are thereby free to take any of the three perspectives and make inferences accordingly. From all perspectives, the main hypothesis is that  $\beta < 0$ . The expectations for  $\gamma$ , on the other hand, differ as follows: the strong-majority-party view makes no prediction about  $\gamma$ ; the strong-parties view predicts  $\gamma > 0$  (because Democratic leaders will define defection in the opposite way as the Republican Speaker), and the strong-Speaker view predicts  $\gamma < 0$  for the same reason that it predicts  $\beta < 0$ —defection elicits punishment by the Speaker, independent of party.

Table 3 summarizes 11 roll-call votes on which there were opportunities for, and instances of, defection. The substance of the votes varies greatly, but all votes have a common theme: Cannon had a clear position and considered the votes important. The first cluster of votes (1–6) occurred in the 60th Congress and were singled out by Cannon biographer Bolles (1951) as being historically noteworthy.<sup>18</sup> The second cluster (7–11) occurred in the 61st Congress, but *prior* to Cannon's making committee assignments. It includes some votes identified by Bolles, as well as some identified by Jones (1968).

In three stages, Table 4 explores the proposition that is implicit in conventional historical accounts of Cannonism and explicit in contemporary accounts of majority party leadership: deviant behavior of backbenchers is punished by leaders.

The first equation focuses exclusively on whether or not either of two key, anti-Cannon votes in the 60th Congress are associated with changes in committee portfolio values for the 61st Congress. Three of the four party-specific coefficients are negative, but none is significant. Nor are the two negative Republican coefficients jointly significant.<sup>19</sup> The case of the banking bill is especially noteworthy in light of recent strong-majority-party research that is based on a model of gatekeeping by majority party leaders (Cox and McCubbins 1999). The 1908 case seems, a priori, to be tailor-made for confirmation of this argument. Cannon adamantly and publicly opposed the bill, he put pressure on his cronies on the Banking Committee to block the bill, and the modern discharge procedure did not exist, so gatekeeping would appear to be sufficient to kill the bill. In the face of this impressive alignment of House procedures, committee preferences, and Speaker strength, however, a House majority supported, discharged,

TABLE 3  
Instances Ripe for Defection or Discipline,  
60th and 61st Congresses

Var.	Date, V	Description	Republican Defectors
1	12/2/07, 11	Ostensible <i>pro forma</i> motion for the previous question on adopting the rules of the 59th House as rules for the 60th House. Passed 199–164.*	1
2	12/2/07, 12	Vote on the rules (see above). Passed 198–160.*	1
3	12/2/07, 13	To elect the Speaker of the House. Cannon is reelected, defeating Democrat Williams in a near-perfect party-line vote of 212–162.*	1
4	4/20/08, 84	To table resolution, relating to question of privilege, that the action of the Speaker in adjourning the House on Saturday, April 18, 1908, was a breach of the privileges of the House affecting its safety, dignity, and the integrity of its proceedings. Tabled 148–119.*	3
5	5/14/08, 172	Motion to suspend the rules and pass a Vreeland resolution discharging the Committee on Banking and Currency to consider Cannon-opposed banking reform legislation, which ultimately passed. Passed 176–146.**	16
6	12/15/08, 286	To table an appeal of a ruling of the chair (Speaker) that a privileged matter may not be amended by matter not germane or not itself privileged. Tabled 149–136.	28
7	3/15/09, 11	To elect the Speaker of the House. Cannon is reelected, defeating Democrat Clark, 204–166. Twelve Republicans voted for candidates other than Cannon and Clark.	12
8	3/15/09, 12	Motion for the previous question on adopting the rules of the 59th House as rules for the 60th House. Passed 193–189.	31
9	3/15/09, 14	Motion for the previous question on considering Clark's proposed rules changes including, <i>inter alia</i> , expansion of the Rules Committee from 5 to 15, elected by the House. Motion fails 180–203 so rules changes not considered.	29
10	3/16/09, 15	Appeal decision of the chair (Speaker) on the Fitzgerald Resolution, which would reform Calendar Wednesday and expand minority rights.	28
11	4/9/09, 44	Vote on the conference report of the tariff bill.	20

\*Insufficient number of defectors for statistical analysis.

\*\*Suspension of the rules required only a simple majority.

TABLE 4  
 Consequences of Defections on Committee Portfolio Values  
 (OLS regressions and *t*-statistics)

	Constant $\alpha$	Republicans $\beta$	Democrats $\gamma$	R <sup>2</sup> <i>N</i>
<b>(1) 60th Congress</b>	0.232 3.690			-0.006 199
Banking discharge		-0.238 0.854	-0.232 0.371	
Overrule Cannon		-0.048 0.262	0.109 0.174	
<b>(2) 61st Congress</b>	0.18889 4.939			0.066 369
Election of Cannon		0.085 0.419	0.449 1.245	
Previous question on rules		-0.189 0.524	0.530 1.933	
Previous question on Rules Committee reform		-0.942 -1.474	0.335 1.224	
Appeal decision of chair		0.851 1.595	-0.851 4.020	
Conference report on tariff bill		0.006 0.041	-0.608 1.467	
<b>(3) Nonvoting events</b>	0.162 4.058			0.0249 221
Rosewater Pledge		-0.222 0.835		
Insurgent leaders		-0.028 0.081		
Jones's "spectacular appointments"		-0.539 2.301		

*Note:* The dependent variable is change in portfolio value between the 60th and 61st Congresses. See Table 3 for details on votes.

and passed the bill.<sup>20</sup> Then, having seen the majority form and work its will, Cannon appears to have respected it. The estimate of Cannon's punishment against defectors—the 16 Republicans who voted yes—is small, insignificant, and, in effect, zero.

The second equation considers more proximate potential triggers of punishment, i.e., votes in the 61st Congress that occurred during the period in which Cannon held up committee assignments, presumably to bolster the credibility of his threat on the proposed tariff measure. The results are mixed or null, depending upon whether or not one is willing to relax the criterion for statistical significance substantially.

For instance, defection on the election of Cannon as Speaker has no adverse consequences for Republicans and a marginally positive effect for Democrats (one-tailed  $p = .107$ ; recall that the coding is an *anti*-Cannon vote). This result suggests that Democratic leaders were involved in the assignment process and rewarded anti-Cannon behavior more than Republican leaders punished it. On the other hand, the estimates for the next two votes pertaining to reform of House rules include some evidence for the strong-Speaker view. A Republican vote against the previous question on passing the House rules (failure of which would effectively allow reform proposals) does not appear to have elicited punishment, but a vote in favor of Clark's specific rule change led to defectors' portfolio values being 0.942 lower than loyalists', other things being equal (one-tailed  $p = .10$ ). Even more intriguing, Republicans who voted to appeal the decision of the chair to reform Calendar Wednesday seem, if anything, to have profited from their defections. Defections on the critical vote on the tariff bill, however, were inconsequential in spite of Cannon's intense interest.

Overall, given the low levels of significance, we suspect that some or many of these observations are probably more statistical artifacts than empirical findings. The prudent conclusion is that the evidence for a heavy-handed or punitive Speaker is very thin.

On the Democratic side of the aisle, in contrast, evidence of punishment exists on the last two votes. Unlike the vote for Cannon as Speaker, these votes have negative coefficients, suggesting that Cannon punishes Democrats—but not Republicans—for defecting from the Republican party line. Although this suggestion may have some plausibility, the consequence of imposing no constraints on coefficients across and within parties is that resulting coefficients with different signs invite inconsistency in interpretation. That is, any coefficient—negative, positive, or zero—can be rationalized from the minority perspective in isolation. Even more important, no *single* theoretical approach provides a consistent explanation for the *set* of findings in Equation (2).

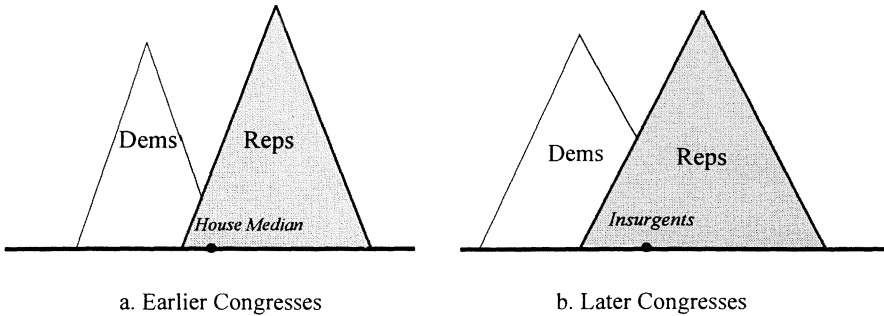
We conclude the punishment analysis with a different approach within the same framework. Inasmuch as votes constitute only one of several kinds of legislative behavior over which leaders attempt to exert influence, it is advisable to look at other forms of behavior and their possible punitive consequences, too. The literature on the Cannon era provides three suggestions in this vein. First, behavior in the electorate was clearly of interest to the Speaker. As noted above, during the campaign of 1908, several Republican candidates other than Lenroot signed the Rosewater Pledge to dismantlement Cannonism. A dummy variable is coded accordingly. Second, we also code a dummy variable for *insurgent leaders*.<sup>21</sup> Third, to better relate this analysis to prior claims, we use a dummy variable representing Jones's table of "some *spectacular appointments* and adjustments prior to 1909" that, presumably, were triggered by effrontery to the Speaker (Jones 1968).

Equation (3) reports on the consequences of nonvoting defections on portfolio values.<sup>22</sup> Although all three coefficients are negative, as the strong-Speaker theory predicts, the first two are insignificant, individually and jointly. This result leaves only one significant negative coefficient, which, upon reflection, is a hollow victory for the strong-Speaker hypothesis. These "spectacular appointments" are not really *triggers* for potential punishment; rather, they are *instances* of actual punishment identified after, and because, the trigger had been pulled. When compared with the insignificant or inconsistent findings elsewhere, this coefficient reinforces suspicions that the conventional wisdom about Cannon and Cannonism may be more of an outgrowth of selected anecdotes than systematic evidence in support of a theory.<sup>23</sup>

## V. After the Revolt

When one combines the historical observations with contemporary spatial theory, one realizes it is at least conceivable that a perfect-world, perfect-measures counterpart to Figure 1 would look somewhat like Figure 3. For illustrative purposes, let us suppose that the distribution of preferences within and between parties in the early part of the Cannon era was approximately what Poole-Rosenthal measures suggest, but with this added distinction: the distribution is free from any "artificial extremism" due to an abundance of roll-call votes with theoretical cutpoints in the middle of the spectrum.<sup>24</sup> In other words, there is some overlap between parties, but not much. Furthermore, suppose, as seems true, that Cannon was not far from the pivotal voter in the House.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, electoral forces took a toll on Republican standpatters. Not only were more Democrats elected, but also the number and prominence of insurgents in the center of the spectrum increased.

FIGURE 3  
Conjectured Preferences During Cannon's Congresses



A simple but instructive exercise is to inquire what a standard median voter theory would predict under these circumstances. At the most transparent level, it would predict median outcomes. Unfortunately, we cannot test this prediction directly, nor can we assert *ad hoc* that median outcomes (dots) occurred pre-revolt as in Figure 3a and post-revolt as in Figure 3b. We therefore take an indirect approach that sheds some light on the broader majoritarian thesis.

The received wisdom on Cannon as Speaker in particular, and strong parties in legislatures more generally, is that, however one characterizes House institutions and House leadership in the United States in the Cannon era, the system was severely shocked on March 19, 1910, and in its aftermath. Thirty-six Republicans flouted their Speaker by bolting their party to pass the Norris Resolution, 194–153. No longer would the Speaker of the House make committee assignments, (supposedly) rewarding loyalists and punishing defectors from his party.<sup>26</sup> No longer would he sit on—much less occupy the pivotal position on—the elite, five-member, all-powerful House Rules Committee. And no longer would he be permitted to exercise arbitrary and capricious recognition rights during well-conceived but poorly implemented procedures such as Calendar Wednesday. In brief, as some scholars put it, party government was institutionally dismantled as Congress paved the way for an era of committee power (see, for example, Cooper and Brady 1981, Cox and McCubbins 1993, and Rohde 1991).

Is the conventional wisdom reflected in the historical data in a specific and measurable way? We begin with the finding in this study that offers the clearest support for the strong-Speaker thesis: the significant, positive net effect of majority party status on committee

TABLE 5  
 Factors Affecting Committee Portfolios, Revisited  
 (OLS estimates and *t*-statistics)

	1	2	3
Constant	0.491 1.365	0.112 3.483	0.111 3.473
Seniority	0.154 10.707	0.132 10.623	0.132 10.658
Seniority <sup>2</sup>	-0.008 6.840	-0.006 6.143	-0.006 6.201
Majority party	0.113 3.276	0.101 3.153	0.088 2.684
Top committee	1.119 24.664	1.086 27.035	1.086 27.059
Top committee x majority party	-0.024 -0.438	-0.126 0.255	0.016 0.319
Majority party x 62d Congress		0.160 4.072	0.239 4.121
Top committee x majority x 62d Congress			-0.146 1.857
<i>N</i>	1590	1994	1994
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.6081	0.5955	0.596

*Note:* The dependent variable is committee portfolio value. Equation 1 replicates Equation 2 in Table 3 for the four Cannon Congresses. Equations 2 and 3 add the 62d, Democratic-controlled Congress operating under new rules.

portfolio values (recall Equations (1) and (2) in Table 2). It stands to reason that, after the putatively essential institutional devices of the Speaker were abruptly rescinded in the 61st Congress, this coefficient should have diminished appreciably in the 62d Congress.

Table 5 shows the results of a test of this hypothesis, which is central to the conventional wisdom not only on parties but also on institutionalism more broadly. Equation (1) is the baseline regression for the Cannon Congresses (58–61) as reported in Table 2. Equation (2) adds data from the 62d Congress, the potentially unique majority



party effects of which are singled out with the dummy variable *Majority party*  $\times$  *62d Congress*. The striking result is that, after the ostensible dismantling of the key institutions of centralized leadership, the degree to which majority party status confers disproportionate committee benefits to its members *increases* by a factor of about 2.5.<sup>27</sup> This result, too, is essentially the same when using the dependent variable based on pre-Cannon Congresses only.

As in the analysis in Table 2, we can determine whether or not this puzzling surge in party asymmetry in committee portfolios was a consequence of the new majority party leaders implementing a sort of focused power-grab within top committees. The results of Equation (3) suggest that it was not. The net Democratic, majority party advantage within top committees is negative, so the surge is more aptly described as an across-the-board advantage than a focused power-committee ploy. Indeed, within top committees, the *minority* party has a *ceteris paribus* advantage.

In summary, it appears that the revolt against the institutional instruments of Cannonism and, hence, of party government, had little constraining effect on the new party regime in the House. On the contrary, and more than a little ironically, the effect of stripping the Speaker of his so-called powers seems, if anything, to have been liberating with regard to the partisan compositional consequences of committee assignments.

## VI. Discussion

Two quite different types of findings have emerged in this study. Initially, we uncovered modest support for some broad assertions pertaining to the Cannon Congresses. Roll-call votes appeared to have been partisan. The committee system was thriving and valuable to members. A pecking order among committees had evolved. Members' committee portfolio values were closely related to their seniority. And, most relevant to our party-centered concerns, majority party status conferred a statistically significant (if substantively modest) net benefit to majority party members. Some political scientists may regard these findings as sufficient for corroborating extant theories of strong majority party leadership. Likewise, some historians may regard them as sufficient for quantifying what often has been written based on less systematic but more qualitative evidence.

Our analysis, however, attempted to look at more than this first-pass evidence. Therefore, we turned to some antecedent, and more specific, aspects of legislative behavior, such as how party leaders use

reward and punishment mechanisms to maintain a disciplined coalition that can enact policies at or near the majority party median.

Two caveats should be emphasized. First, in contrast to most studies of parties in legislatures, and for reasons discussed in Section I, we chose not to rely on roll-call voting scores as measures of preferences. Groseclose-Stewart committee value measures are not immune from a parallel problem: they too may embody some of the party influences we are interested in uncovering. We addressed this possibility in detail in Section II. The analysis following the discussion failed to reveal evidence that systematic bias is a problem, but measurement issues of this sort can be quite intricate and thus we cannot claim definitively that the measure is free from bias.

Second, it is possible that we have looked for evidence of rewards and punishments in the wrong place. Although there are ways that a strong speaker can induce compliant behavior aside from biannual committee assignments, committee assignments were notoriously controversial during the Cannon period (see also Lawrence, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck 1998). Therefore, the design of this study would seem, if anything, to favor the finding of evidence of a strong Speaker. Similarly, but at a more “micro” level, it can be argued that the punishment strategies that leaders play at the level of committee assignment are much more subtle than looking at a key vote and punishing everyone (or everyone within the leader’s party) who voted incorrectly. For example, it may matter what the defector’s electoral margin was, whether or not the defector was pivotal, or whether the defection was part of a pattern of behavior or it was anomalous. While substantively plausible, these responses are methodological moving targets. So, although the framework used here can be adapted to accommodate more refined predictions, it cannot exhaust the full range of predictions in a single study.<sup>28</sup>

With these caveats in mind, we can reconsider several more specific questions. Did majority party status confer net committee benefits to Republicans *because* of the parliamentary prerogatives of Joseph Cannon? Was it a characteristic of Cannon’s Speakership that disciplined behavior was systematically rewarded and errant behavior systematically punished? The findings related to these essential mechanics of sustaining a majority party coalition in the presence of intraparty heterogeneity were of a distinctly different type. Often, the critical coefficients were insignificant, and, when significant, they were not consistently in the direction that party-theoretic approaches would have predicted. As such, the findings support a conclusion that this high point of party government in the United States was probably not

so high after all. More specifically, we would suggest that perhaps the Speaker, who supposedly used his office “in such a fashion as to give its holder the greatest amount of power ever possessed by an American legislator,” (Hechler 1940, 30) was, in fact, less of a tyrant from Illinois than a majoritarian from Illinois.

To identify more clearly the logic and ingredients of this admittedly unorthodox thesis, consider three complementary, qualitative observations.

First, it is noteworthy that Joseph Cannon was not a preference outlier relative to the House median when he assumed the Speakership in 1903. If the measures on which this observation is based are approximately reliable, then one might question the premise of any nontrivial strong-majority-party argument as it pertains to Cannon Congresses: the Speaker did not want (significantly) noncentrist outcomes. So, if his rule was one of tyranny, it may have been a tyranny more of a de Tocqueville nature than a Russian Czar nature—that is, a tyranny *of* the majority rather than a tyranny *against* the majority.

Second, historical documents from the Cannon Library in Springfield, Illinois, reinforce this revised thesis by revealing Cannon’s professed and profound respect for principles of majoritarianism in the legislative process. In discussing the Rules of the House, Cannon wrote:

. . . it is not true that the Speaker, or the Committee on Rules, can bring the House to consider a bill which it does not wish to consider, or prevent it from considering any bill on its calendars which it may wish to consider; and when the words “the House” are used, *a majority* of the House, expressing itself by a *majority* vote, is meant and not a minority or small fraction, or an individual, who may conceive that the measures which they champion ought surely to be enacted, and that the failure of a majority to consider them is to be charged up to tyrannical rules. (Cannon, n.d., [emphasis added])

Likewise, when openly confronted with criticism of being a czar, Cannon responded:

Yes, I know I am a Czar in Democratic platforms and in some of the moral-  
uplift magazines, but only just so long as I have a majority behind me who like a Czar. There has been much said about Tom Reed and his rules, and he was the first Czar. Tom Reed led, but he would have stood naked before the minority if he hadn’t been clothed with a majority. That is what makes a Czar in this House, a majority, and it makes no difference whether it is on the Republican or Democratic side. (Chiu 1928, 302)

Skeptics of the majoritarian thesis undoubtedly will argue that such words are disingenuous and politically motivated, and perhaps they are. If actions speak louder than words, however, a thorough study of Cannon’s parliamentary rulings is likely to turn up the volume for

the majoritarian thesis. For instance, it is noteworthy that the first thing the Speaker did upon suspecting he had lost majority support in the 1910 revolt was invite a motion to declare the chair vacant, thereby inviting the ushering in of a new Speaker. The motion was defeated, Cannon's procedural majority was preserved, and he served out the remainder of his term.

Finally, concurrent systematic research of the early Cannon period—the 58th Congress—uncovers findings remarkably consistent with ours, in spite of the application of different methods to different data. Specifically, Lawrence, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck (1998) study Republicans' success in committee transfers, conditional on making on-paper requests to Cannon. They test a broad set of hypotheses bearing on the Speaker's influence. Many of their hypotheses are not borne out with statistical significance, but their positive findings replicate those in prior committee assignment literature. These findings include essentially nonpartisan determinants of transfer success. For example, the number of requests, the existence of intrastate competition for a seat, and the overall degree of committee competition are all negatively related to success, but having an internal or external endorsement letter is positively related to success.

In contrast with these expected nonpartisan correlates of transfer success, two unexpected partisan findings stand out. First, the 19 Republicans who were “backers” of Cannon for Speaker—meaning they committed to voting for him on paper and in advance—were significantly *less* likely than nonbackers to succeed in their transfer requests. Second, D-NOMINATE distance between Cannon and Republicans appears to be related *positively* to transfer success, which indicates that Cannon did *not* try to stack committees with members who shared his ideological perspective.<sup>29</sup> These are surprising and important findings that pose further challenges to the conventional wisdom.

Having sketched the argument that Cannon may have been a majoritarian, one difficult question remains: Why was there a revolt against the Speaker if the Speaker was a faithful agent of the median voter? Our necessarily brief answer has several components that make some concessions to party theory without significantly undermining the data and inferences drawn earlier. The electoral successes of Progressives throughout the first decade of the century probably did have the effect of shifting the House median and increasing Cannon's distance from it. If Cannon was anything, he was opinionated, so he continued to speak out on issues of importance to him and his ideologically like-minded followers. Outspokenness, in turn, underscored intraparty differences. To the extent that these differences

resulted in behavior regarding legislation that was or was not acted upon, Cannon's behavior in lawmaking can be summarized as overreaching. It is not clear whether Cannon overreached because he overestimated his powers, because he was principled in his policy stances, some of each, or something else entirely. Regardless of the explanation, it is clear that Progressives objected to the manner in which Cannon conducted House business and that the press was eager to cover the sentiments of outrage right up to "the revolt."

Upon closer inspection, though, the so-called revolt was far short of revolutionary in substance if not form. Some rules were changed and, admittedly, the Speaker suffered public humiliation. Nonetheless, after taking it upon himself to declare the Chair vacant, Cannon was immediately reinstated. Furthermore, the House seemed not to function much differently after the so-called revolt than before.

In sum, then as now, many highly partisan actions undoubtedly took place. This is not the issue, however. The issue is whether or not theories of strong parties are supported by a systematic assessment of those actions. To the extent that such theories rely on punishment mechanisms as the key to rank-and-file discipline and to consolidation of majority party strength—and many do—these findings reveal a significant gap between existing theory and turn-of-the-century practice.

Of course, additional research is needed before Cannon the Majoritarian replaces Tyrant from Illinois as the received wisdom about U.S. parties and politics in the early twentieth century. Unusual findings in historical studies inevitably raise concerns that they may be era-specific. It bears repeating, however, that it is difficult to imagine a specific era of U.S. political history—and a specific Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives—for which the *ex ante* odds of corroborating theories of party and leadership strength could be greater than the one considered here. Therefore, this study should be taken as a further step towards uncovering the de facto role of parties in legislatures, as well as developing a new and plausible portrait of a much-maligned legislator, Joseph G. Cannon.

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## NOTES

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1. *Congressional Record*, 61: 1, 3436.

2. "Tyrant from Illinois" is the subtitle of Cannon's biography (Bolles 1951).

3. A significant exception is a recent study of Cannon's committee assignments in his first Congress (Lawrence, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck 1998). That characterization of the literature is almost identical to ours, but the authors' focus and data are different; they attempt to account for committee transfers conditional on a member requesting such a transfer in writing. In spite of differences in focal topics and data between Lawrence, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck's study and ours, the two sets of findings are remarkably complementary.

4. This voluminous literature includes, but is not restricted to, Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 1998; Binder, Lawrence, and Maltzman 1999; Brady 1973, 1988; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 1999; Rohde 1991; and Sinclair 1999.

5. "A Glimpse into Cannon's Famous Red Room," *New York Times*, 13 December 1908, Op-ed.

6. "Cannonism," *New York Times*, 12 October 1909, Op-ed.

7. As discussed in a letter from L. White Busbey, Secretary to the Speaker, to Charles N. Stuart, 8 December 1909. Document from the Cannon Library in Springfield, Illinois.

8. Hechler (1940, 42) also notes that newspapers turned against Cannon during the spring and summer of 1908 and attacked his treatment of pieces of legislation such as the Appalachian-White Mountain Forest Reserve Bill. This biased press view is also emphasized in a January 5, 1910, editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* by Samuel McCall, which notes in hindsight how the national press turned against Cannon in response to his tariff position.

9. Furthermore, as Jones notes (1968, 620n), the Democratic members of the committee were not solely appointed by Cannon, but rather were selected by the Democratic Party Caucus. We provide evidence on the composition of the Rules Committee as a result of this process.

10. For each pair of adjacent Congresses, an  $N$  (legislators)  $\times$   $M$  (committees) transfer matrix is constructed with entries of  $-1$  (transferred off of the committee),  $0$  (no change of status), or  $1$  (transferred onto the committee). For each row of the transfer matrix, cell entries are divided by  $1$  over the square root of  $z$ , where  $z$  is the number of nonzero entries (transfers) in the row. The resulting transfer matrix  $\mathbf{x}$  is then the basis for a probit equation,  $\text{Pr}(k=1) = \Phi(\mathbf{x}'\mathbf{b})$ , where  $k$  is a vector of constants and the equation is estimated *without* a constant term. (For some software packages, it is necessary to negate all variables in one observation for the likelihood function to converge to its maximum.) The mean and variance of the error term are fixed at  $0$  and  $1$  to identify the equation. See Groseclose and Stewart (1998) for the analytic justification for this somewhat counterintuitive implementation.

11. See Jones (1968, 620 and Table 1). We coded a variable for the list in Table 1. An oddity is that in Jones's text, his term "prior to 1909" does not mean "just prior to", i.e., violations between the 60th and 61st Congresses. Consequently, at least one important case that Jones mentions in his text is not picked up in our measure of change in portfolio value. Specifically, E. Stevens Henry of Connecticut is listed in Jones's text as a "spectacular" case but is not in the table and is not coded 1 in our dummy variable because he was denied his former seat on Agriculture prior to the 60th Congress. His corresponding change in portfolio value was therefore  $-859$ , which is less than the mean for the pre-61st violations and thus would increase the magnitude and significance of the difference were it to be included. In the comparable test for Republicans, the difference in means is slightly greater than in the all-members test.

12. To see this more concretely, realize that, when one legislator is punished by, say, losing a seat on Ways and Means, another legislator is likely to transfer onto the coveted committee. Therefore, the former observation would introduce a small negative bias into the estimated value of the committee, but the latter observation would neutralize this measured effect. Extending this logic to the big picture would suggest that alleged punishments may cause some attenuation in committees' values, but such punishments, when offset with rewards, do not permute the order of the committee lists. Since the metric is arbitrary, the problem seems not to be severe, but surely future research should explore these measurement issues in more detail than is possible here.

13. Seventy percent of Republicans with nonzero changes in portfolio values had positive changes.

14. Named after Victor Rosewater, publisher of the *Omaha Bee*, the Rosewater Pledge was taken by several moderate (insurgent) Republican candidates who committed themselves to voting against Cannon for Speaker if they were elected to the House in 1908 (Bolles 1951, 145–47).

15. The inclusion of the top-committee dummy variable also results in a lower seniority coefficient because, as a practical matter, seniority is a good predictor of top-committee membership. The two variables are collinear.

16. The specifications in Table 2 were also estimated with the pre-Cannon-based portfolio values, and the results are remarkably similar to those reported here.

17. Presumably, minority party influence will be weaker than majority party influence (see Jones 1970, 27).

18. The first four of these votes are noteworthy more because of the opportunity for defections than for the realization of defections among Republicans. Indeed, the incidence of defection is too low to analyze votes 1–4 statistically.

19. The  $N$  is small because of turnover, relatively high abstention rates, and nonoverlapping sets of abstainers.

20. Discharge occurred not by petition but rather by suspension of the rules, which then required only a simple majority vote.

21. In both instances, we identify these non-vote-based defectors based on Hechler (1940).

22. All but one of the nonzero dummy variables are Republicans, so Democrats are omitted from the analysis.

23. The analysis in Table 4 was likewise conducted with the pre-Cannon-based measure of change in portfolio value. Standard errors are almost always larger, as one would expect, but no significant differences occur.

24. The preponderance of roll calls in the 60th and 61st Congresses were close votes by conventional definitions. In most measurement models, this fact will cause measures to thin out in the middle of the spectrum (inflating differences between moderates) and bunch up on the extreme parts of the spectrum—i.e., to look more like Figure 1 than a representation of the true state of the world (see Snyder 1992).

25. This supposition is less critical for the ensuing argument than for the conventional strong-party/tyrant argument.

26. The Speaker was not actually denied the power of committee appointment until 1911, during the first session of the 62d Congress (Alexander 1916, 81).

27. The majority party effect during the Cannon Congresses is .101; in the post-revolt Congress, it is  $.160 + .101 = .261 > 2.5 * .101$ .

28. The deeper theoretical problem is that the theory underlying informal descriptions of leadership sanctions is an  $n$ -person-repeated prisoners' dilemma, which is well-known to have a multiplicity of equilibria, i.e., countless punishment strategies that are sufficient to keep defectors on the "all-cooperate" equilibrium path (not to mention equilibria in which defection occurs). For an empiricist, this theory is all but untestable because so many observations can be rationalized as consistent with one of many equilibria. We have, in effect, followed Cox and McCubbins in postulating (without a formal refinement) that a cooperative equilibrium obtains most of the time and have considered whether or not punishment strategies were played out in the most transparent way when occasional defection occurred. Given the current state of theory, we think this the most straightforward test.

29. The right-hand-side variable in Lawrence, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck is the D-NOMINATE score, which approximates the "distance from Cannon" measure we used in Table 3, Equation 3, because Cannon was on the low end of the NOMINATE spectrum.

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