

Congressmen in Exile: The Politics and Consequences of Involuntary Committee Removal*

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Abstract

When parties lose a majority in Congress, they also lose seats on committees. We examine one consequence of this seat loss—the involuntary removal of minority committee members that occurs when losses are unevenly distributed across committees. We show that committee *exile* has far reaching consequences for legislative behavior. We first characterize who is exiled—demonstrating that committee rank is used as a deterministic rule to select legislator for removal. The result of this deterministic assignment rule is that exiled legislators are strikingly similar to those who remain on committees. With this similarity as motivation, we use exile to estimate the effect of committee assignments on the outcome of Congressional elections and legislative behavior in the institution. We show that exile has only limited and conditional electoral consequences: only those legislators exiled from electorally beneficial committees suffer a decrease in support. But the limited electoral effects are due, in part, to legislators shifting their focus from Washington to the district. Exiled legislators raise and spend more money for reelection, author fewer pieces of legislation, and are absent from Congress for more days of voting. And exile causes legislators to vote with their party less often, with the largest decrease in party loyalty occurring among the most marginal members. Our results have broad implications for our understandings of the place of committees in Congress and our research design provides a new approach for answering enduring questions on the effects of committees.

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A large literature identifies the far reaching consequences of committee assignments for Congressional elections, political representation, and public policy. Members of Congress clamor for prestigious committee assignments to bolster their policy influence and to advance their careers. Other members of Congress seek out committees that will help them deliver money to the district and cultivate a personal vote. And still others pursue committee assignments particularly beneficial to their district to bolster support among their constituency. In almost all facets of Congressional life, the effects of committees are perceived to be far reaching and substantial.

Members of Congress believe that committee assignments are important. Yet, political scientists have struggled to credibly estimate the effect of committees on legislative behavior. We believe, as others have suggested, that systematic selection in who becomes a committee member is to blame. The most talented or politically well connected members of Congress are also the most likely to acquire their preferred committee assignments. Legislators also deliberately request committee assignments that they anticipate will be beneficial to the district. Both underlying legislator talent and district specific incentives to select into onto committees are difficult to measure. The result is that cross-sectional estimates of committee effects are deeply confounded.

We offer new estimates on the effect of committee assignments, exploiting a regularly exercised—though rarely studied—Congressional institution: committee exile. When new majorities arrive in Washington, they reapportion seats on a committee to favor the new party. Because committee sizes are often fixed and losses are unevenly distributed across committees this often forces the minority to remove legislators from the committees. We exploit committee exile to create a robust research design to measure the effects of congressional committees, that minimizes both measured and unmeasured confounding found in cross-sectional designs.

To explain why committee exile is a useful tool for estimating committee effects, we first study the incidence and characteristics of committee exile. We show that committee exile is a consequence of fixed partisan majority biases and uneven losses across Congressional committees—and not due to strategic targeting by the new majority. Both congressional parties use a seniority rule to determine who to exile from the committee. We show that the lowest ranked legislators are the most likely to be removed from the committee. The result is that exiled legislators have served less time in Congress than those who remain on the committees, but the exiles are otherwise strikingly

similar to the remaining legislators on other characteristics—such as previous vote share, ideological location, and district partisanship. After exile, representatives are sometimes deposited on lower prestige committees, but more often are given no compensatory committee assignment at all. And the removal endures: only about 10% of removed legislators return to the committee from which they were exiled.

Building a robust research design around exile, we show that committee exile has limited and conditional electoral consequences. If a legislator is exiled from an electorally beneficial committee, her party receives less support in the district. But this is primarily due to the fact that legislators exiled from electorally beneficial committees are more likely to retire, thus sacrificing the party’s incumbency advantage. For legislators who do not retire, committee exile fails to reduce electoral support.

We show that the lack of electoral consequences is due, in part, to legislators shifting their priorities away from legislative work in Congress and towards electoral considerations in the district. Exiled legislators have greater campaign expenditures for their reelection efforts and, in turn, raise much more money to support those reelection efforts. Perhaps due to their increased fundraising activities, exiled representatives subsequently participate less in Congress. The exiled legislators author fewer pieces of legislation and miss more days when Congress is in session. Exiled legislators also prioritize district priorities when casting roll call votes. Exile causes legislators from marginal districts vote with their party substantially less often.

Our results clarify how committees affect what legislators do in Washington. Rather than a tool to solidify electoral support, committees empower legislators to pursue policy focused careers in Washington, rather than electorally focused careers in the district. With prestige or preferential committee assignments, legislators are able to focus more of their attention on politics in Washington—both in their participation in the institution and the support for the party. But in the absence of those committee assignments, legislators return their focus to the district and cultivate electoral support at home.

To infer this effect of committee assignments, we introduce a new approach to studying the effects of committees—an approach that we show provides unusually good leverage on the value of committee assignments. This comparison removes concerns about confounding from both observed

and unobserved variables. Our approach removes concerns that limit inferences that can be made from cross-sectional studies of committee effects—in particular matching estimators. And the usefulness of exile as an identification strategy will only increase in the coming years. With large scale swings in House membership over the most recent Congressional elections, committee exile is an increasingly used electoral institution. To that end we provide guidance on how to use exile data, the trade-offs that are made in using this identification strategy, and useful specification strategies. Together, this methodological contribution provides a strategy to begin addressing long standing questions on how committee memberships affect representation in Congress.

1 Institutional Design: The Committee Assignment Process

After a resounding defeat in a congressional election, such as that experienced by the House Democratic Caucus in the 2010 congressional elections, the outgoing majority party is forced to relinquish power in a variety of ways. One of the most frustrating for returning incumbents is the loss of a valued committee assignment, which can occur when electoral losses are spread unevenly across committees. In addition to losing its majority status, a party loses at least a proportional number of seats on every committee and the committee ratios are further adjusted to reflect the new majority’s seat advantage. This causes some legislators to lose their committee seats—or to be exiled—because electoral losses are unevenly distributed across committees.

To better understand how legislators are exiled from committees, we first review how seats on committees are determined.¹ The committee assignment process for any new congress begins with the committee assignments and party ratios of the previous congress. Following the election, both new and returning members submit committee (and transfer) requests. Before any assignments can be made, however, the majority and minority party leaders must negotiate the committee sizes² and party ratios for each committee.³ Once the committee sizes and ratios are set, the assignment

¹The committee assignment process itself has been the subject of considerable academic study. While for the purposes of this paper, we can only give it the briefest treatment, we encourage readers interested in the assignment process to see: Masters (1961); Clapp (1963); Bullock (1970, 1971, 1972); Ripley (1974); Shepsle (1978); Bullock (1985); Munger (1988); Young and Heitschusen (2003); Yoshinaka (2005); Frisch and Kelly (2006)

²For research on expanding the sizes of congressional committees, we refer readers to: Cummings and Peabody (1963); Peabody (1963); Westfield (1974); Shepsle (1978); Whiteman (1983); Eulau (1984); Ray and Smith (1984); Munger (1988).

³The House Committee on Standard of Official Conduct is the lone exception that is exempt from negotiation and unaffected by election results as House Rules guarantee both parties an equal number of seats.

process by each party's Steering Committees takes place, and finally the slates are approved by the party caucus, and eventually the full House (Figure 1 below summarizes the assignment process⁴).

Figure 1: The Committee Assignment Process

1. The committee configuration in the previous congress.
2. A congressional election.
3. New and returning members submit committee assignment (and transfer) requests.
4. The majority and minority party leaders meet and set the party ratios for each committee using the party ratio bonuses from the previous congress as a starting point for negotiations. At the same time, they set the size (number of members who will serve) of the committee.
5. Each party's Steering Committee makes its respective committee assignments.
 - (a) First, they assign returning members to their former committees—respecting the existing committee property rights, and automatically assigning members to the committees on which they served during the last Congress.
 - (b) If with the new party ratio there are not enough seats for all members to return to their previous committee, the least senior committee members lose their seats.
 - (c) The Steering Committees then make all other assignments (both of new members and transfer requests).
6. Each party caucus (conference) then votes internally to ratify the party's entire slate.
7. The House then votes on a simple resolution to officially make the assignments.

Sources: Rohde and Shepsle (1973); Stewart (2001); Schneider (2008*a,b*); Tong (2010).

While technically the party assignment slates are subject to votes as both the caucus and chamber level, they are almost always upheld, and it is therefore, the decisions party leaders face in the committee assignment process of Step 5 that are of the greatest interest to us here.

⁴A few additional rules are worthy of note. No Member can serve on more than two standing committees (House Rule X). Each party has designated exclusive committees, which prohibit members from serving on other desirable committees (exceptions are made for additional service on Budget or House Administration Committee). The Democratic Exclusive Committees are: Appropriations, Rules, Ways & Means, Energy & Commerce, and Financial Services. The Republican Exclusive Committees are: Appropriations, Rules, Ways & Means and Energy & Commerce. Additional Limitations are placed on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, Budget, and Intelligence, all other exceptions must be approved by the House upon recommendation of the respective party caucus or conference.

Both congressional parties employ a “property rights” or seniority system approach to committee assignments, which means that once a member has received an assignment on a given congressional committee, it is assumed that he or she will continue to receive that assignment in subsequent congresses.⁵ There is, however, an important and greatly understudied exception to that rule which involves the question of how to treat these “property rights” when there are an insufficient number of committee slots available.⁶ This process—the removal of a committee assignment due to electoral losses—is in fact so understudied in the literature that it has no name. For clarity of exposition, therefore, we define committee exile to be the violation of committee “property rights” due to electoral losses.

1.1 The Exile Rule

Once electoral losses have occurred and the need for exile arises, the party must select who to cast out from the committees. In deciding whom to exile, both parties have traditionally used, and continue to use today, a seniority system, exiling those with the lowest levels of seniority on the committee (defined by the fewest terms of service on the committee in question). Contrary to many congressional norms in which seniority rights have been eroded or violated over time, this is one area in which a strict seniority system continues to be the norm today.⁷ While this aberration in the trend toward a weakened seniority system is worthy of study in its own right, and certainly deserves greater attention than it has received to date, we can take advantage of this application of a seniority rule in the process of committee exile to gain causal leverage on a variety of theoretical questions posed in the literature on congressional committees.

Our strategy for leveraging the committee switch relies heavily on this seniority rule. Given our reliance upon it, is natural to ask if the seniority rule reflects some other process that might undermine the usefulness of committee exile—such as compensation with other committee assign-

⁵It should be noted that this is a strong party norm, but not a rule formalized in the Republican Party Conference Rules in the 112th Congress (Conference, 2010).

⁶As Stewart (2001, 299-300) explains, “Thus, over the past century, a type of property right in committee assignments has emerged in both chambers—members are allowed to hold onto their committee seats from one Congress to the next and may not be removed *unless* the party ratios change so dramatically between Congresses that junior members of the minority party find their seats abolished altogether.”

⁷It is worth noting that in our data the seniority exile rules are never violated for what have traditionally been viewed as the two most powerful and desirable congressional committees: Appropriations, and Ways and Means. This finding is consistent with earlier work by Masters (1961, pg. 348), who noted, “What turnover [on Ways and Means] there is results from death, resignation, or loss of party control, rather than from transfers or election defeat.”

ments, consideration of pet legislation, or particularistic goods to a district. But a more benign logic explains the persistence of the seniority rule (at least for our purposes). Legislators who are already feeling the sting of losses in the institution are particularly averse to any further losses with their committee assignments. As Carney (1994) explains, the partisan logic in one of the largest exile waves that took place following the 1994 Republican Revolution, “Whatever they decide, incoming Democratic leaders will be hard-pressed not to alienate fellow Democrats fighting over the shrinking committee pie. Some are bitter over what they’re calling a divide-and-conquer strategy by the GOP. Any attempt to consider factors other than seniority on Appropriations could prove particularly explosive. ‘It would be very,very ugly,’ a Democratic House aid said. ‘It would be a real bloodbath to start throwing people off the committee who are more senior in favor of people who are more junior,’ ” (Carney, 1994). Thus for the minority, the persistence of the seniority rule may largely be about preserving comity within the party during a particularly challenging period for party leaders.

1.2 Examples of Exile

So what does committee exile look like in practice? We return to our example the committee assignment politics facing Democratic and Republican leaders at the start of the 112th Congress following the wave elections of 2010 in which the Republican party retook the majority and the Democratic party suffered tremendous losses. Those Democratic losses (and corresponding Republican gains) were unevenly distributed across congressional committees. There were some committees, such as Armed Services and Agriculture, in which the proportion of Democratic losses roughly corresponded to the overall loss rate in the chamber, so on these committees, the usual committee property rights were adhered to, and traditional committee assignment politics were at play. There were other committees, however, in which the losses were minimized, and too many Democrats survived reelection relative to the chamber as a whole, which created a sizable exile cohort as all the committee ratios had to be adjusted to reflect the new majority.⁸

In addition to the uneven distribution of electoral losses in the 112th Congress, Democratic exile cohorts were increased because Republicans shrank the overall size of committees. For example,

⁸This adjustments are further complicated by the variable committee-party ratios employed in different congresses. See Tong (2010) for variation in recent congresses.

consider Ways and Means—one of the traditional “power” committees. Six incumbent Democrats were exiled from this committee: John Yarmuth(D-KY), Brian Higgins(D-NY), Linda Sanchez(D-CA), Danny Davis(D-IL), Allyson Schwartz(D-PA), and Chris Van Hollen(D-MD).⁹ This large cohort of exiled legislators had two origins—the decrease in the overall size of Ways and Means and the high reelection rate among Ways and Means Democrat incumbents.

Exile targets more than powerful legislators who reside on power committees. After the 1994 Republican landslide, a disproportionate number of minority representatives were exiled from committees. This exile has its origins in the 1992 redistricting plans. The 1992 redistricting, based on the 1990 U.S. Census, was the first to deliberately create majority-minority districts. These newly created majority minority districts meant that a sizable component of the freshman class of the 103rd Congress either were minorities themselves or represented majority-minority districts. These minority freshmen were somewhat unusual among members of the freshman class in that they were freshmen in extremely safe Democratic districts, and therefore fared uncommonly well during the Republican wave of 1994. This meant that when the Republicans decided to shrink committee sizes and Democrats employed a strict seniority rule in exile, these minority sophomores bore the brunt of the exile burden (see Guinier, 2000; Swain, 1995).¹⁰

Exile, therefore, affects many types of legislators across a wide range of committees. To better characterize the aggregate patterns of exile, in the next section we examine more systematically when and how exile occurs in Congressional committees.

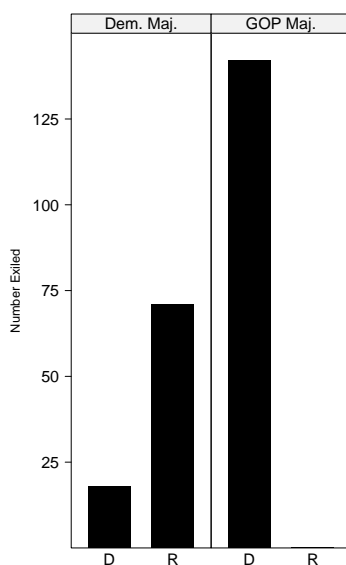
⁹After losing their seats on Ways & Means, the members received the following assignments in the 112th Congress: Congressman Yarmuth continued to serve on the House Budget Committee, and was newly assigned to both the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct; Congressman Higgins was newly assigned to both the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Homeland Security Committee.; Congresswoman Sanchez continues to serve on the House Judiciary Committee and was newly assigned to the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs as well as the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct; Congressman Davis continued to serve on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and was newly appointed to the Homeland Security Committee.; Congresswoman Schwartz continued to serve on the House Committee on the Budget, and was newly appointed to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.; and Congressman Van Hollen also gave up his seat on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and was newly appointed to the House Budget Committee.

¹⁰As Guinier (2000) describes, “The Republican decision to reduce the size of all standing committees meant that under seniority rules, the most junior Democrats lost their assignments on the more prestigious committees. Blacks and Hispanics who had been in Congress for less than two terms were disproportionately affected. Carrie Meeks of Florida, with the lowest seniority, lost her place on the Appropriations Committee. Mel Reynolds and Cleo Fields lost their seats on Ways and Means. Bobby Rush of Illinois lost his seats on Banking and Financial Services and on the Science Committee,” (pg 176).

2 Patterns of Exile

We identified all instances of involuntary committee reassignment from the 80th Congress to the present, which resulted in 231 cases.¹¹ If we take a closer look at our cases of exile (Figure 2 below), we see that occurrences of committee exile occur under both Democratic and Republican controlled congresses. We find, as we would expect given the electoral circumstances that lead to exile, that members of the minority party make up the vast majority of cases. While Democrats controlled the chamber most cases of exile were Republicans, and while Republicans controlled the chamber every single member exiled was a Democrat.

Figure 2: Committee Exile is Concentrated Among the Minority

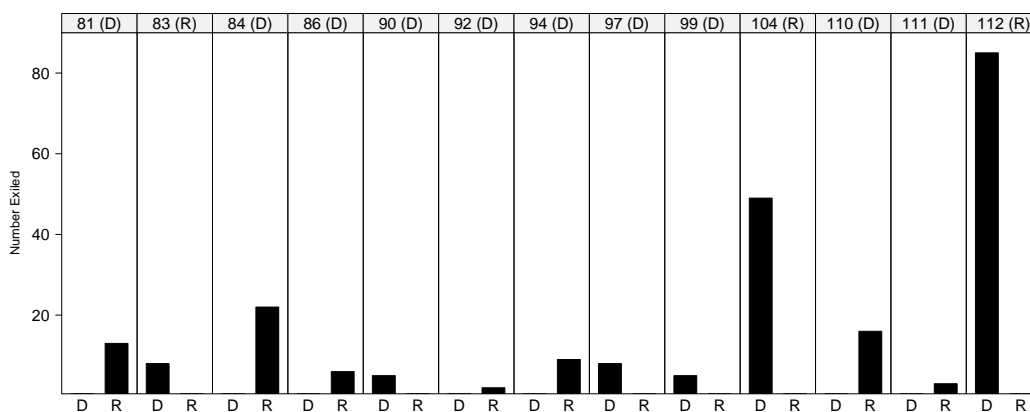


The over time patterns in committee exile reveals further demonstrates that majority parties rarely exile their own members. Figure 3 below shows the partisan exile breakdown over time beginning with the 81st Congress at the far left, and moving forward toward the 112th Congress at

¹¹We identified cases of exile by beginning with Nelson (2011) and Stewart and Woon (2011)'s databases of congressional committee assignments. We first identified every case in which a member left a previously held committee assignment. We then examined each of these cases individually to determine whether the member left due to a shortage of party seats created by electoral losses. Inevitably, this process required making some assumptions, which probably are most strongly supported for exclusive and prestige committees that qualitative accounts suggests members never voluntarily leave.

the far right.¹² The bulk of exile cases occur after a major wave election that changed control of the chamber—such as the 104th, 110th and 112th Congresses. The few cases of majority parties exiling their own members occurs during the long period of Democrat dominance in the House: during the 90th, 97th and 99th congresses¹³ The exile of majority party legislators from committees has ceased: the most recent of these majority exile cases occurred in the 99th congress immediately following the 1984 congressional elections. Over the last 30 years, majority party leaders appear to avoid majority party exile.

Figure 3: Committee Exile From Wave Elections



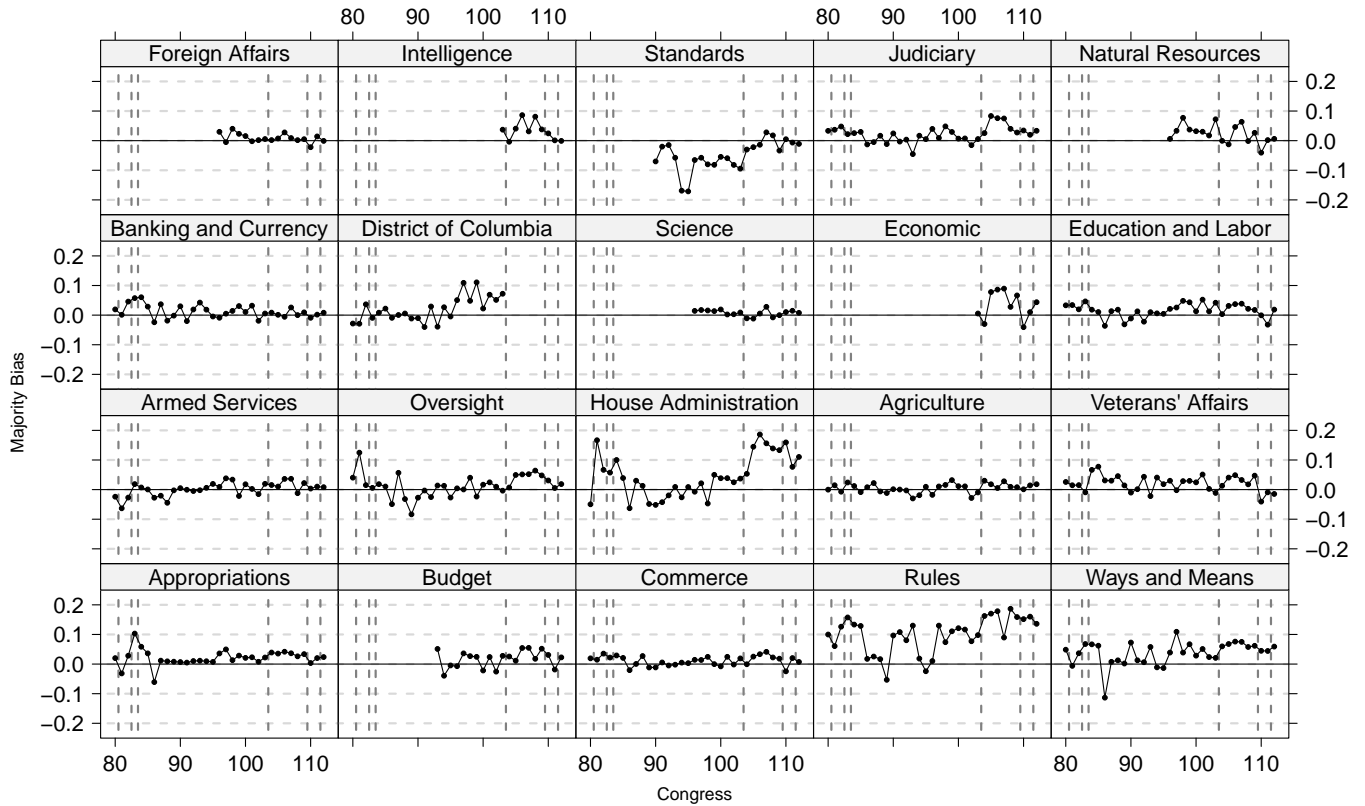
Committee exiles, therefore, are primarily concentrated among the new minority and create variation in who belongs to committees. But to use exile as a strategy to identify the effect of committees, we need to demonstrate that leaders of the new majority are not strategically targeting committees to remove minority members. The possibility for manipulation arises if the new majority manipulates the party ratios or committee size to force minority members to be removed (See Figure 1). Evidence against this strategic manipulation would be party ratios that remain relatively fixed from Congress to Congress. But if there is strategic manipulation, then we would expect large biases in favor of the new majority.

Figure ?? presents the majority party bias on each committee from the 80th to the 112th

¹²In interpreting the figure, we caution readers to note that to save space the figure only includes congresses in which there were cases of exile, such that the 82nd, 87th-89th, 91st, 93rd, 95th-96th, 98th, 100th-103rd, and the 105th-109th congresses are omitted from the figure.

¹³These elections involved majority party (Democratic) losses of 48, 33, and 15 seats respectively.

Figure 4: But Exile is Not the Result of Strategic Committee Manipulation



Congress. A majority bias of zero (along the solid horizontal line) indicates that the partisan balance of the committee exactly reflected the partisan balance of the chamber, while a positive majority bias indicates a majority party cushion above the chamber balance, and a negative bias indicates a rare minority party cushion. The dashed vertical lines indicate a party take over year, in which there was a change in control of the chamber. The bottom row of graphs represent the prestige committees, which are those that have been traditionally considered by scholars to be the most desirable committee assignments.

Consistent with the committee literature, we can see that committees that are essential to the majority's control of the chamber, such as the Rules Committee, maintain a large positive majority party bias over time, while others, such as the Science, Space and Technology Committee are consistently more faithful to the partisan balance in the chamber. With the exception of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (commonly referred to as the Ethics Committee)

which maintains an even partisan split regardless of the partisan balance in the chamber by the House Rules, most committees have a positive majority party bias.

Most relevant for our understanding of committee exile, however, is the stability of the majority party bias during the wave election years (alternations in control of the chamber), which generate most of our exile cases. If we look at the majority party bias around the party take over years (dashed vertical lines) we see that the majority party bias is quite stable before and after takeover. This stability is reassuring for the purposes of research design: it does not appear that either the majority or minority parties are engaging in deliberate manipulations of committees to target individual members. Rather, the stability of the majority bias suggests that, contingent on the election results, committee exile is largely exogenously determined by past party shares on committees.

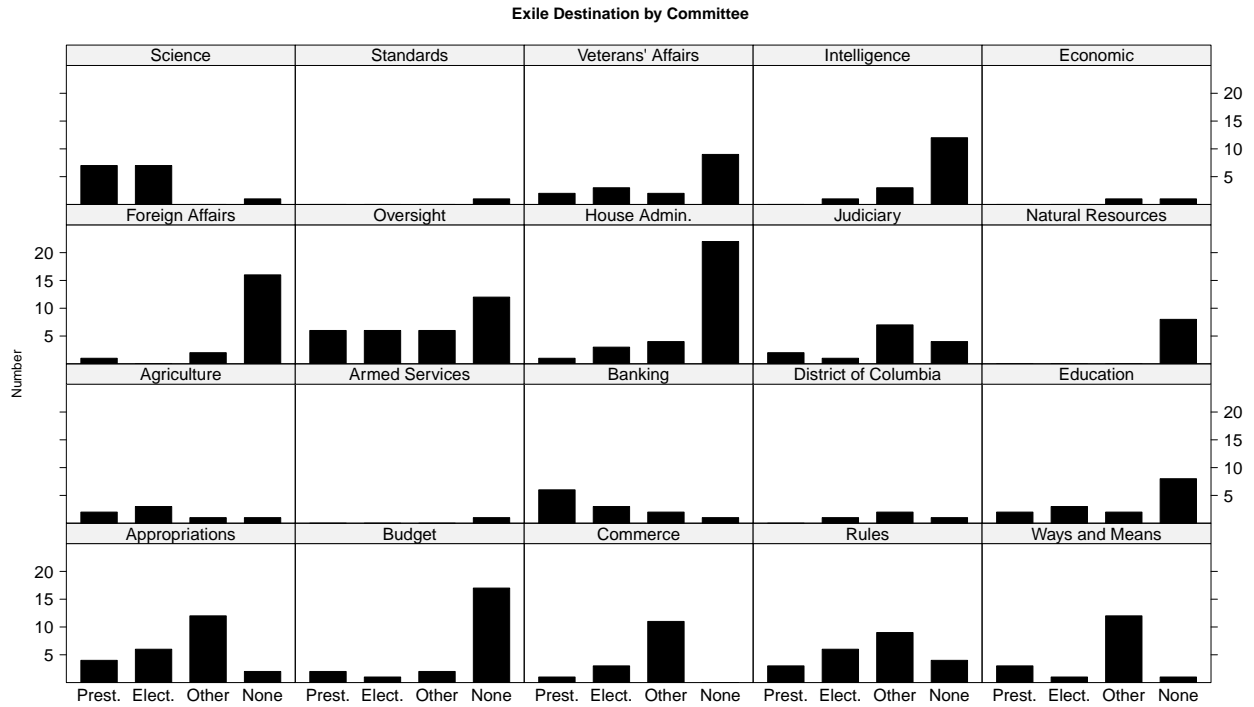
While minority party members do not appear to be strategically targeted for exile, another possibility that could limit the usefulness of committee exile to estimate committee effects is that exiled legislators could receive compensatory committee assignments from the minority. Figure 5 shows that this is not the case: most exiled legislators receive little compensation. To demonstrate this, we aggregated the new committee assignments into four categories of desirability: prestige committees, election committees, other committees, and no new committees.¹⁴ Each histogram in the figure shows the new assignments received by members who were exiled from a given committee (labeled at the top).

Consider first the most consequential exiles—those who are removed from prestige committees, which are represented by the bottom row of histograms are the prestige committees. Most legislators removed from prestige committees do not receive a prestige or electoral committee assignment as compensation for exile. Rather, many receive assignments on an “other” committee, and a not inconsiderable number of members receive no compensating assignment whatsoever. Similar compensation patterns in which members receive what might be received as a less desirable committee assignment can be seen on most of the remaining non-prestige committees.¹⁵

¹⁴The Prestige Committees are: Appropriations, Ways & Means, Commerce, Rules, and Budget. The Election Committees are: Appropriations, Ways & Means, Agriculture, and Armed Services. The Other Committees are: Foreign Affairs, Intelligence, Standards of Official Conduct (Commonly referred to as Ethics), Judiciary, Natural Resources, Banking & Currency, District of Columbia, Science, Economic, Education & Labor, Oversight, House Administration, and Veterans Affairs. We caution readers to note that there is overlap in the form of the Appropriations and the Ways & Means Committees between the Prestige and Election categories.

¹⁵A notable exception is on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in which members receive surprisingly desirable compensating committee assignments, though we hesitate to draw many conclusions from this due to the

Figure 5: Exiles Rarely Receive Compensation for Removal



Not only then do members receive relatively little to compensate them for their exile, but further, and perhaps surprising given our traditional understanding of committee “property rights” is that the exile endures. Only about 10% of members ever return serve on a committee from which they were exiled. And most of these returns happen during the 105th Congress with Democrats originally removed from the Appropriations committee.

3 Committees and Reelection

Committee exile is interesting on its own—causing substantial changes in who resides on the most sought after committees. But we will use committee assignments to gain leverage on enduring questions of how committees affect what legislators do in Washington. While many studies have argued that committee assignments will have wide ranging effects on legislators’ electoral prospects, we argue that committees empower legislators to pursue legislative careers in Washington. Rather

small sample size of exile from the Space, Science and Technology Committee.

than bolstering legislators electoral support, we argue that the primary effect of committees is to allow legislators to pursue their diverse career goals in Washington.

Instrumental legislators have diverse goals when deciding what to do when in Washington. Perhaps the main goal of legislators is reelection (Mayhew, 1974), but legislators are also interested in developing good policy, advancing their careers, and even developing a reputation of policy effectiveness (Fenno, 1973, 1978). Committees empower legislators to pursue these goals because much, if not most, of that legislative action happens in congressional committees. President Woodrow Wilson went so far as to describe in his treatise *Congressional Government* that, "... it is not far from the truth to say that Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work," (Wilson, 1900, pg. 79). Committees, then, are a natural venue where instrumental legislators will use their institutional positions to pursue their diverse goals.

Scholars of congressional politics have often looked to the ability of members to use their congressional committee assignments to their electoral advantage. Committee work provides this boost in electoral prospects by providing legislators the opportunity to deliver policy and particularistic goods to their district. When legislators work on committees, they develop expertise in the area (Clapp, 1963), which is a credible and valuable signal to constituents that their representative exerts influence on policy. (Padgett, 1990; Katz and Sala, 1996; Fowler, Douglass and Clark, 1980; Fenno, 1973; Bullock, 1976). Some committee assignments such as Agriculture, or Armed Services, allow members to signal expertise and take public positions on issues of great salience to their constituents. While other committee assignments provide representatives with the capacity to develop non-partisan bases of support through the delivery of particularistic goods to the district. For example, representatives on Ways and Means build coalitions in the district through the strategic request of tax waivers as earmarks in legislation. In both these cases, members believe these assignments may assist their reelection prospects.

Other committee assignments allow legislators to exercise substantial policy influence—even if it is difficult to use positions on the committees to bolster electoral support. While Appropriations, Agriculture and Armed Services might, for a variety of reasons, be helpful in a member's quest for re-election, other committees might be more useful for members seeking influence within the

chamber, or a lobbying career after they retire. For example, Fenno (1973, pg. 1) argues that, “[t]he opportunity to achieve the three goals [re-election, influence within the House, and good public policy] varies widely among committees. House members, therefore, match their individual patterns of aspiration to the diverse patterns of opportunity presented by House committees.” For this reason, we might expect that once members lose the opportunities provided by a given committee assignment, that members might alter their behavior in a variety of ways after exile.

When legislators sit on committees that are either prestigious or desired, it allows them to invest in their career in Washington. As Tom Delay (R-TX) observed, Congress is filled with two types of legislators: policy focused legislators—members of Congress who focus on their work in the institution—and district legislators—those legislators who focus on reelection and the concerns of the district (Draper, 2012). While legislators sit on prestigious committees, they are able to pursue careers as policy legislators. But when legislators lose their committee assignments, they lose the opportunity to pursue their career through their committee assignment. The result is that the legislators shift towards a district and reelection focus.

Part of this district focus will manifest in how legislators campaign. If more focused on reelection, we expect that legislators will raise and therefore spend more money on their reelection effort. The district focus will also limit their work in Washington. So, exiled legislators should author fewer pieces of legislation and miss more days when Congress is in session. A final implication is that committee exile will affect how legislators vote in Washington. If exiled legislators adopt a greater focus on the district, they should defer less to their party when casting roll call votes. This is particularly true when the district and party preferences clash. Therefore, exiled legislators from marginal districts should see substantial drops in their party unity scores after exile.

An implication of a greater district focus after exile is that involuntary committee removal will have a limited effect on legislators’ electoral support. When legislators adopt a greater focus on their district after exile, they compensate for losing their seat on the committee. The result is that exiled legislators will maintain levels of support to those legislators who remain on the prestigious committees. But it is worth emphasizing that we expect that this sustained electoral support comes at the cost of legislators shifting their career goals.¹⁶

¹⁶Our findings contribute to a large literature on the effects of committee assignments. In spite of the strong expectations that committee assignments will exert direct and substantial influence on legislators’ political careers,

We will test our expectations by building a research design around committee exile. In the next section, we explain how we use committee exile and a panel data design to minimize confounding in estimates of the effects of committees.

4 A Deterministic Identification Strategy

The fundamental problem when attempting to infer the effect of a committee assignment is that it is difficult to observe all the characteristics that determine whether legislators obtain a particular assignment. Some characteristics are easy to identify—legislators more senior, more loyal to the party, and those who deliver more fundraising dollars to Congressional committees are all more likely to obtain seats on committees of their choosing (Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Stratmann, 2000; Brady and Burchett, 2001; Currinder, 2008). But obtaining desired committee assignments also depends on political skill, the persuasion of party leaders, and the demonstration of legislative capacity in a particular area (Shepsle, 1978). These characteristics are difficult to measure and include in regressions or when attempting to match treatment and control groups. This is a particular problem for matching estimators—as the balance improves between the *treatment* group—legislators who obtain prestige committee assignments—and the *control* group—legislators who fail to obtain the prestige assignments—the unobservable characteristics are likely to remain and confound our estimates of the treatment effects.

Committee exile provides a deterministic assignment mechanism for understanding of who remains on particular committees. This deterministic assignment mechanism is useful, because it mitigates the unmeasured confounding. This mitigation occurs, in part, because all legislators—both those who are exiled and those that remain on committees—had sufficient political acumen to obtain a seat on the prestige committee. The hope is that legislators who remain on the committee

there is surprisingly mixed evidence. Scholars have used a variety of methods and designs to attempt to estimate this relationship ranging from the direct approach of Bullock (1976)'s survey of members asking why they want to be on a committee (re-election) to Katz and Sala (1996)'s innovative approach of exploiting exogenous changes in the adoption of the Australian ballot across states. The evidence is decidedly mixed on the issue with Bullock (1972); Fowler, Douglass and Clark (1980); Cook (1983); Krehbiel and Rivers (1988); Broockman and Butler (2011) on the negative side of re-election effects, and Bullock (1976); Shepsle (1978); Smith and Deering (1983); Crain and Sullivan (1997); Milyo (1997); Leighton and Lopez (2002); Heberlig (2003); Katz and Sala (1996) on the more positive end. A large and related body of literature examines committee transfer requests (Bullock and Sprague, 1969; Bullock, 1973; Rohde and Shepsle, 1973; Jewell and Chi-Hung, 1974; Hinckley, 1975; Shepsle, 1978; Smith and Deering, 1983; Bullock, 1985; Copeland, 1987; Stewart, 1992; Groseclose and Stewart, 1998; Stewart and Groseclose, 1999; Frisch and Kelly, 2004, 2006; Canon and Stewart, 2009; Stewart, 2012).

and those that are removed from the committee are similar on unmeasured characteristics, limiting their potential influence on the estimation of the effect of committee assignments on legislative behavior.¹⁷

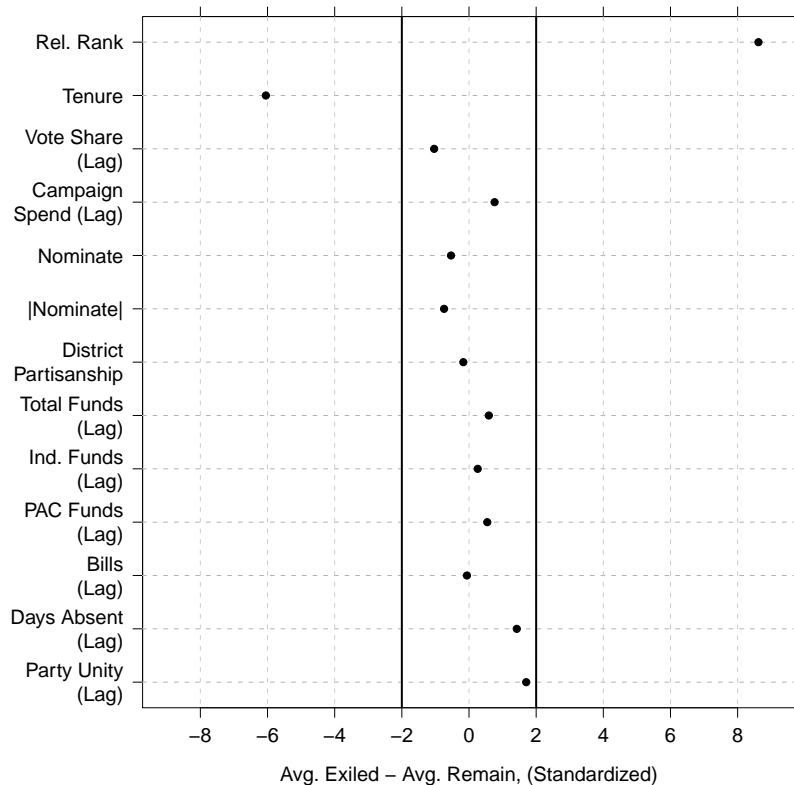
Demonstrating that any research design for observational data provides balance on unmeasured characteristics is, by definition, impossible. But an implication of balance on unmeasured variables is that exiled and remaining legislators are similar on measured characteristics. Figure 6 shows that this is the case. Figure 6 presents the standardized differences between exiled and non exiled legislators (on the horizontal axis) across several characteristics. For characteristics not explicitly used to select legislators for involuntary removal both exiled and non-exiled legislators are quite similar—this includes prior campaign spending, nominate scores, and support for the same party presidential candidate in the district. The similarity also extends to the lagged values of dependent variables that we will use in our analysis—exiled and non-exiled legislators had similar levels of prior vote share, days missed in Washington, number of bills sponsored, money raised, and party unity score.

But exiled and remaining legislators are quite different on characteristics that determine who is selected for exile. Consistent with the rules used to determine exile, Figure 6 shows that legislators who have a lower rank—which we scale from 0 (highest rank) to 1 (lowest rank)—are much more likely to be exiled. This closely co-varies with tenure in the institution, so not surprisingly exiled legislators have spent fewer years in Congress. This demonstrates the trade-offs that must be made when using exile to study the effects of committees. Because we are able to include both tenure and relative rank on committees in our analyses, we are able to mitigate the bias that this induces, while also controlling difficult to manage unobserved confounding.

A Specification Strategy Committee exile is useful, therefore, because it provides an easy to understand mechanism to identify who is allowed to remain on committees: the lowest ranked legislators on a committee are the most likely to be removed from the committees. We build our modeling strategy around this clear assignment mechanism, utilizing restrictions on who we include in our analysis and panel data to more credibly estimate the causal effect of committee assignment.

¹⁷The logic here is similar to that used in an interrupted time series design (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2000).

Figure 6: Exiled Legislators are Similar to Legislators Who Remain on Committee



This figure shows the standardized difference in means across the covariates used in this study. For most covariates, the exiled legislators are strikingly similar to the legislators who remain on the committees. But this is not true demonstrates that for many of the variables used in this study the legislators who remain on commit

We restrict our sample to the exiled legislators’ co-partisans who remain on the committee in the new Congress. We use only co-partisans to avoid party specific swings in support that can occur after a new majority arrives in Congress. And we restrict our sample to those who remain on committees to ensure that we are comparing legislators with similar political skills and interests.

Committee exile provides a deterministic assignment mechanism, but Figure 6 shows that some differences remain across exiled and non-exiled legislators. To address this remaining imbalance, we use lagged values of our dependent variable of interest, covariates that are potential confounders, and fixed effects for committee and years. Specifically, for each legislator i , we model her response after exile $Y_{i,1}$ as,

$$Y_{i,1} = \beta_0 + \tau \text{Exile}_i + \gamma Y_{i,0} + \beta' \mathbf{X}_i + \sum_{j=1}^C \alpha_j \text{Comm}_{ij} + \sum_{t=1}^T \eta_t \text{Year}_{it} + \epsilon_i \quad (4.1)$$

where $Y_{i,0}$ is the lagged dependent variable, \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of covariates, Comm_{ij} is an indicator of whether legislator i serves (or was exiled from) committee j , Year_{it} is an indicator of the year the legislator was included, and ϵ_i is an error term. We include in \mathbf{X}_i a set of covariates that are potential confounders—such as the same-party presidential candidate’s vote share in the district and spending in the prior election. We also include variables directly related to the selection of exiled legislators—including a legislator’s relative rank on the committee and the number of years in the institution.

Using the specification in Equation 4.1, we will use our estimate of τ as the effect of exile on the behavior of legislators. In the next section, we detail the far reaching consequences of exile.¹⁸

5 Committee Exile and Increased District Focus

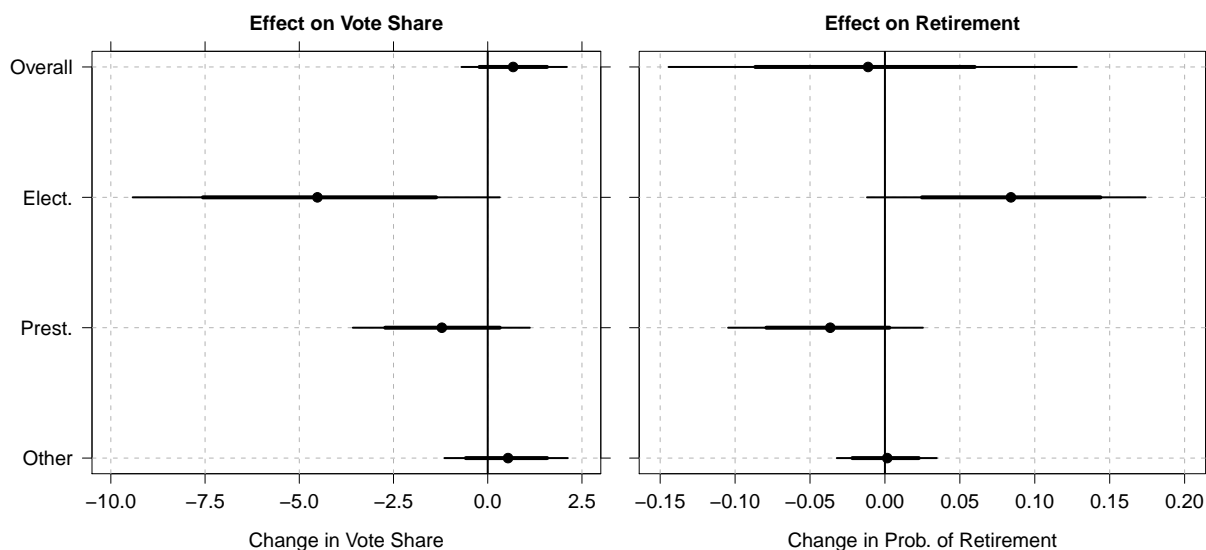
Using the research design described in the previous section, we examine the far reaching effects of committee exile on how members of Congress approach their job. First, we consider the electoral effects of committee exile for the minority party. The left-hand panel of Figure 7 demonstrates the average effect of involuntary removal on the exiled legislator’s party’s electoral support in the district. To measure this effect we use Equation 4.1 with the percentage point support for legislators in the election after switching to the minority as the dependent variable. The top-line shows the average effect of exile across all committees, while the remaining lines show the effect from electorally beneficial, prestigious, or other committees.¹⁹ In this plot and the subsequent plots, the points in each plot represent the average effect of committee exile, while the thick and

¹⁸A similar specification could be constructed with legislators who arrive on committees. But using legislators before they arrive on committees will likely induce severe biases in the effects of committee assignments—legislators who are striving to obtain a committee assignment are altering their behavior to obtain the assignment. Therefore, they do not provide a credible control condition. Because so few exiled legislators arrive back on the committee, this is not a problem for our study.

¹⁹We follow the literature when partitioning committees into electorally beneficial and prestigious committees and we allow for overlap in the definitions. Following the definition of prestige committees in Davidson, Oleszek and Lee (2011) we include Appropriations, Ways and Means, Commerce, Rules, and Budget. We follow the Congressional literature (for example, Fenno (1973)) and define electorally beneficial committees as Appropriations, Ways and Means, Agriculture, and Armed Services. Obviously, the definition of these committees are somewhat arbitrary and our primary points are perturbed if we modify the coding rules.

thin bars are 80- and 95-percent confidence intervals, respectively.

Figure 7: The Electoral Consequences of Committee Exile



This figure shows the effect of exile on the minority party’s vote share in the subsequent election (left-hand plot) and retirement (right-hand plot). Exile has only a conditional effect on a party’s vote share—only experiencing a substantively interesting decrease after a legislator is exiled from an electorally beneficial committee. And this is primarily due to the loss of the incumbency advantage, as legislators exiled from an electorally beneficial committees are much more likely to retire.

The top line in the left-hand plot of Figure 7 shows that committee exile has no real electoral effect. For districts with a representative exiled from a committee, the minority party experiences a small *increase* in vote share of about 0.5 percentage points, but a large portion of the confidence interval overlaps zero (95-percent confidence interval, [-0.70, 2.1]).²⁰ But, the effect of committee exile is more substantial in districts represented by a legislator exiled from committees that are beneficial electorally. For these legislators, committee exile causes a decrease in vote share of 4.5 percentage points—a decrease that is both substantively and statistically significant (95-percent confidence intervals, [-9.42, 0.32]). Similar to the overall effect, exile from prestige committee or other committees does not appear to substantially affect the minority party’s vote share in the subsequent election.²¹

²⁰Tables that summarize the models used to produce the figures in this section are found in Appendix A.

²¹The overlap in Election and Prestige categories implies that the small negative effect of Prestige committees is

The decreased support after exile from an electorally beneficial committee is due primarily to retirement—either running for other political office or ending a political career. The right-hand plot in Figure 7 shows the effect of committee exile on retirement rates overall and for legislators exiled from specific types of committees. To compute these effects, we use Equation 4.1 with an indicator of whether a legislator leaves the house as the dependent variable. We estimate the model with probit regression.

The second-line of the right hand plot in Figure 7 shows that legislators exiled from electorally beneficial committees are about 8.4 percentage points more likely to retire (95-percent confidence interval [-1.1,17.40]). This increased retirement causes the decreased vote share. In districts where a legislator is exiled and subsequently retires, the party experiences an *19.9* percentage point decrease in vote share (95-percent confidence interval, [-30.32,-9.56]), but when a legislator does not retire, the decrease is only 0.5 percentage points (95-percent confidence interval [-9.89,7.93]).

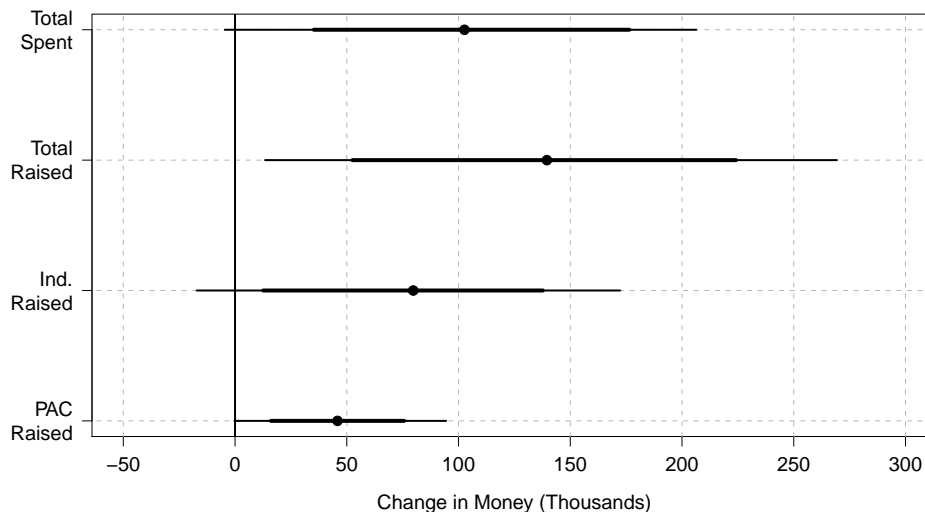
The limited effects of committees on electoral security is surprising. Even when we measure the effects of exile from committees widely identified as electorally beneficial, involuntary removal of legislators has few effects on the vote share of legislators who decide to remain in office. Of course, part of this could be explained as selection—the legislators who decide to remain in office are fundamentally different than those who select retirement (Jacobson and Kernell, 1981). And our design is ill-equipped to address this selection possibility (Imai et al., 2012). But there are only a few legislators who retire after exile, so strategic retirement can only offer a partial explanation for why legislators are able to maintain high levels of support in the district after losing valued committee assignments.

As we argue in Section 3, committee membership not only affects legislators support among voters, it also enables legislators to pursue legislative careers that may advance their non-electoral goals. The implication is that exile has limited electoral consequences because it changes how legislators invest their time in Washington. After exile legislators become more focused on the district, and less interested in work in Washington or loyalty to the party. One implication of legislators focusing more on the district and reelection is that they would should become more prolific fundraisers and, in turn, spend more on reelection. Figure 8 shows that this is the case.

due to the election oriented Prestige Committees—Appropriations, and Ways & Means.

The top-line in this figure shows the effect of exile on the amount non-retiring legislators spend on reelection. We use Equation 4.1 with the total dollar amount spent on the election as the dependent variable. On the horizontal axis is the effect of exile on the amount spent (measured in thousands of dollars).

Figure 8: The Campaign Financing Consequences of Committee Exile for Non-Retiring Legislators



This figure shows that after exile legislators spend much more money (top-line) and raise much more money to be spent in total (second-line)—from both individual and PAC donors.

The top-line of Figure 8 shows that exiled and non-retiring legislators spend about \$102,000 more on their reelection effort (95 percent confidence interval [-4590, 206359]). This is a meaningful increase in expenditures: the average candidate spent about \$945,000 on their campaign. After exile, legislators substantially increase the money spent to win their elections.

To support this increased campaign spending, legislators increase the amount of money they fundraise—drawing on both individuals and political action committees (PACs) to bolster their campaign funds. We measure the effect of exile on fundraising using Equation 4.1 with the dollar amount raised as the dependent variable, and estimate the model with least squares. The second line from the top of Figure 8 shows that exiled legislators substantially increase the amount of money they raise. Exile causes legislators to raise \$139,500 more for their reelection efforts (95

percent confidence interval [1342, 269319]). The next two lines in Figure 8 show that the increase in fundraising comes from donations from both individuals and political action committees (PACs).

Not only are legislators raising and spending more money, they are participating less in Washington politics (Hall, 1996). One manifestation of the decreased participation is that exiled legislators author fewer pieces of legislation. To assess the effect of exile on bill introduction, we use Equation 4.1, with the number of bills introduced in the Congress after exile as the dependent variable. To calculate the number of bills introduced, we use the collection of bill introductions from the Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson, 2012). We estimate Equation 4.1 with a poisson regression (See Table 3 in the Appendix).

The top-line in the left-hand plot of Figure 9 shows that exile reduces the number of bills that legislators produce. After exile, legislators author 2.3 fewer pieces of legislation (95 percent confidence interval, [-4.15, -1.05]). This reduction of two bills authored is large, relative to the authorship rates in our sample, where legislators average 9.7 bill introductions each session.

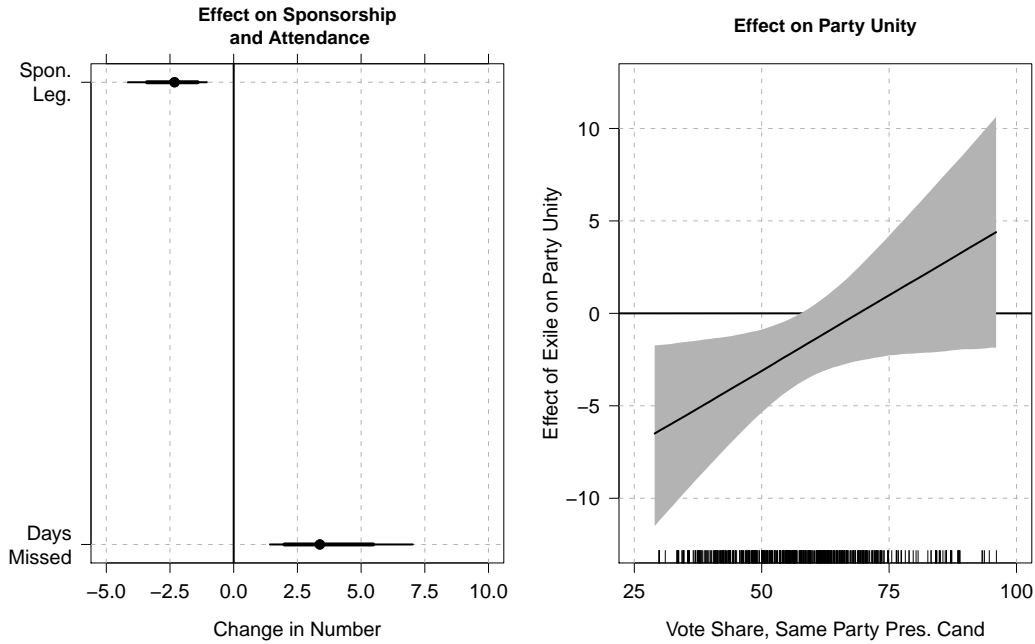
Exiled legislators are not only authoring fewer pieces of legislation, they are also absent from Congress during more days when it is in session. We use the roll call voting record to measure absence from Washington. Specifically, using the roll call voting data from www.voteview.com (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997), we calculate the number of days a legislator is absent. If a legislator misses all roll call votes on a day, we record her as absent.²² For each legislator we then calculated the total number of days that she missed. We estimate the effect of exile on the total number of days missed using Equation 4.1, which we estimate with a poisson regression.

The bottom line in the left-hand plot of Figure 9 shows that exiled legislators spend less time in Washington. After exile, legislators are absent an additional 3.3 days of voting (95-percent confidence interval, [1.42, 7.03]). As with the number of bills introduced this seemingly small difference is actually quite large when compared to baseline rates of absence. On average, legislators only miss about 10 days of Congress in a given session—so a 3 day shift constitutes a large increase in the amount of absences.

Exiled legislators also change their voting behavior to be more in line with the district. Parties often pressure legislators to vote with the party as a condition to maintain their committee

²²Legislators rarely miss roll call votes when they are in the institution, so this provides a credible way to measure legislative attendance in the institution.

Figure 9: The Participation and Voting Consequences of Exile



This figure shows that legislators author fewer pieces of legislation, are absent for more days of voting, and vote less often with their party.

assignments. But once legislators are exiled from their committee assignments, party lose the opportunity to pressure legislators. Not all legislators have equal incentive to deviate from the party once pressure from their party leaders is removed. Those representatives from marginal districts—those composed of a large share of the other party’s partisans— should have much greater incentive to deviate than representatives from more aligned districts. To assess whether this is true we use measures of party unity posted on the www.voteview.com website. Because we expect that effect of exile on party unity scores will depend upon a legislator’s constituency, we modify Equation 4.1 to include a term that interacts exile with the partisan composition of a legislator’s district (See Table 3 in the Appendix).

The right-hand plot in Figure 9 demonstrates that exiled legislators from marginal districts deviate substantially away from the party. The horizontal axis in Figure 9 presents the vote share for the same party presidential candidate as the representative in the district (our measure of a district’s partisan composition following Levendusky, Pope and Jackman (2008)) and the small bars

along the x-axis is a rug plot that demonstrates where the observed district partisanship occurs. The vertical axis presents the effect of exile on a legislator's party unity score. The black line is the average effect of exile, conditional on the partisan composition of a legislator's district and the gray area is a 95 percent confidence envelope.

This plot demonstrates that the legislators who deviate from their party the most after exile are those legislators who reside in the most marginal districts. For example, exile causes legislators in relatively marginal districts (40 percent of the vote for the same party presidential candidate, 10th percentile of districts in our sample) to decrease their party unity scores -4.7 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [-8.15, -1.38]). But for legislators from well aligned districts, exile has little effect on their party unity score. For example, legislators who represent districts where 68 percent of voters voted for the same party presidential candidate (80th percentile of districts in our sample), decrease their party unity score only 0.3 percentage points—a decrease that is neither statistically nor substantively significant (95 percent confidence interval [-2.70, 1.94]).

6 Conclusion

Together, our results show the wide-reaching effects of congressional committees. Electorally, we find limited support for theories that expound the reelection benefits of congressional committees. Committee exile has only a conditional effect on a party's vote share, and only experiences a substantively interesting decrease after a member is exiled from an electorally beneficial committee. Furthermore, this effect appears to be primarily due to the loss of the incumbency advantage, as members exiled from electorally beneficial committees are much more likely to retire.

Legislatively, we find committee exile leads to substantial changes in members' behavior. Once exiled, legislators appear to shift their focus away from the policy-making process in Washington and toward their electoral goals in the district. After losing a committee assignment, exiled legislators spend more money on their reelection effort. To support this spending, they also raise substantially more money. There is also a clear shift away from work in Washington. Exiled legislators author fewer pieces of legislation and miss more days when Congress is in session. Exiled legislators also favor their district preferences over party pressures when casting roll call votes post-exile. Legislators from marginal districts deviate substantially away from the party, while legislators from

safe districts make only minimal changes to their voting behavior.

Our research contributes a new view of the effect of committees on legislative behavior and a new research design to identify these effects. Our findings show that committees likely have limited electoral effects—legislators able to secure prestigious or desirable committee assignments are able to maintain their support in the district. Rather, committee assignments empower legislators to pursue policy focused careers focused on Washington. Absent these assignments, legislators return their focus on electoral considerations in the district. Committee exile, therefore, can substantially alter who is contributing new policy proposals to Congress and who is evaluating those proposals.

Our research design is quite general: committee exile can be useful in tackling other substantively interesting congressional questions that are usually confounded by selection and identification problems. Perhaps chief among these are questions surrounding the influence of money in Congress. Exploiting our design, we hope to gain leverage on the mechanisms of influence by examining how contribution patterns from different industries change or remain constant before and after exile. On the one hand, changing patterns would suggest, consistent with Hall (1996), that contributors are seeking members to undertake legislative (committee) activity on their behalf. On the other hand, a constant pattern of giving would be consistent that contributors are seeking to keep friendly votes in the chamber.

Regardless of what we find, what is clear is that the involuntary loss of committee assignments has far reaching consequences—both for the policy creation process in Washington and the representational process in Congressional districts.

A Model Fit Tables

Table 1: The Electoral Consequences of Committee Exile

	Vote Share (OLS)				Retire (Probit)			
	Intercept	5.31 (3.67)	5.58 (5.66)	-2.23 (4.18)	1.39 (2.51)	1.22 (0.98)	1.36 (1.50)	2.05 (1.48)
Exile	0.68 (0.73)	-4.49 (2.40)	-1.21 (1.23)	0.47 (0.83)	-0.05 (0.22)	0.90 (0.58)	0.18 (0.38)	-0.12 (0.24)
Prev. Vote Share	0.73 (0.04)	0.82 (0.09)	0.67 (0.07)	0.80 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
District Part.	0.31 (0.04)	0.07 (0.06)	0.34 (0.06)	0.26 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
Years	-0.06 (0.05)	0.08 (0.12)	0.09 (0.07)	-0.19 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Rel. Rank	-0.47 (1.33)	6.12 (4.14)	4.98 (2.22)	-2.80 (1.56)	-0.40 (0.40)	-0.64 (1.01)	-1.26 (0.71)	0.32 (0.43)
Committee Fixed Effects	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Subset	All	Elect.	Prest.	Other	All	Elect.	Prest.	Other

Table 2: The Fundraising Consequences of Exile

	Campaign Exp. (OLS)	Total Cont. (OLS)	Ind. Cont. (OLS)	PAC Cont. (OLS)
Intercept	999.54 (246.75)	409.33 (218.01)	220.88 (164.78)	217.13 (78.56)
Exile	103.06 (55.31)	137.74 (64.20)	79.67 (48.60)	46.08 (23.18)
Prev. Camp Exp.	0.54 (0.04)	0.00 (0.00)	0.07 (0.06)	0.00 (0.03)
Prev. Total Cont.	- -	0.72 (0.14)	- -	- -
Prev. Ind Cont.	- -	- -	0.57 (0.12)	- -
Prev. PAC Cont.	- -	- -	- -	0.74 (0.07)
Prev. Vote Share	-0.58 (2.88)	2.09 (3.66)	1.33 (2.78)	-0.17 (1.32)
District Part.	-5.21 (2.56)	-7.75 (3.03)	-3.79 (2.30)	-2.84 (1.10)
Years	2.33 (3.79)	2.17 (4.37)	0.68 (3.30)	0.57 (1.58)
Rel. Rank	-118.82 (91.84)	-85.17 (110.56)	-67.77 (83.73)	-13.40 (39.94)
Retire	17.67 (65.24)	-598.59 (92.70)	-306.78 (70.59)	-296.57 (33.61)
Exile × Retire	131.47 (142.61)	-390.30 (179.68)	-227.03 (136.56)	-162.94 (65.36)
Committee Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3: The Institutional Consequences of Committee Exile

	Bills Sponsor (Poisson Reg.)	Days Absent (Poisson Reg.)	Party Unity (OLS)	
Intercept	1.31 (0.33)	2.84 (0.30)	8.30 (5.41)	9.24 (5.40)
Exile	-0.31 (0.09)	0.18 (0.05)	-1.82 (0.96)	-11.20 (4.79)
Prev. No. Sponsor	0.05 (0.002)	- -	- -	- -
Prev. No Days Absent	- -	0.04 (0.002)	- -	- -
Prev. Party Unity	- -	- -	0.86 (0.03)	0.87 (0.04)
Prev. Vote Share	0.02 (0.004)	-0.02 (0.0003)	-0.11 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.05)
District Part.	-0.01 (0.003)	0.02 (0.003)	0.28 (0.05)	0.26 (0.05)
Prev. Camp. Exp.	0.0003 (0.0001)	0.00002 (0.00004)	0.0002 (0.0007)	0.0003 (0.0007)
Years	0.03 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.03 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)
Rel. Rank	0.07 (0.13)	0.02 (0.09)	-1.63 (1.68)	-1.80 (1.67)
Exile × District. Part	- -	- -	- -	0.16 (0.08)
Committee Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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