

Minority-Party Influence in the U.S. Congress: Floor Proposals and Minority Leverage in the House and Senate

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The literature on congressional decision-making largely ignores the influence of the minority party in the legislative process, particularly in the House of Representatives. This omission follows from the widely held belief that the majority party dominates the agenda setting process, and thus is primarily responsible for guiding legislative outcomes. Though we agree that the minority party rarely achieves major policy success in Congress, we argue that the minority has significantly more influence over the legislative agenda than is appreciated in the literature – and begin establishing a foundation for a broader theory of minority-party influence. We posit that, under some conditions, the minority has enough bargaining leverage to get floor votes on their proposals, in the form of both amendments and bills. To investigate this claim, we look at patterns of votes on minority-sponsored bills and amendments, as well as minority-party disappointments and majority-party rolls, across several decades of the post-World War II era.

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“The best system is to have one party govern and the other party watch.”
Rep. Thomas B. Reed (R-ME), 1880

Introduction

Over the last quarter century, scholars of the U.S. Congress have increasingly turned to political parties as analytic units worth studying. Prior to that time, much of the American Politics literature had come to the conclusion that parties had waned in importance, at both the mass and elite levels, to the point that prominent scholars claimed “no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far” (Mayhew 1974, p. 27). This view of party decline began to change in the late-1980s, as congressional scholars first noticed that standard metrics of partisan behavior in Congress (party voting scores, measures of party cohesion, etc.) were indicating that a partisan resurgence was underway. Thanks to a variety of contextual factors – perhaps most notably the enfranchisement of African American voters in the South following the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – Democrats and Republicans, by the late-1970s, had become more homogenous in their roll-call behavior and more different (polarized) from one another – and this trend escalated through the 1980s. As a result, by the early-1990s, congressional scholars began studying parties with renewed interest.

The burgeoning literature on party resurgence in Congress has been built around two theoretical perspectives: party cartel theory (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005) and conditional party government (CPG) theory (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 2001). While there are some differences between the two approaches – cartel theory is predicated on blocking bad policy outcomes from occurring (or negative agenda power) while CPG theory focuses on the production of new policy outcomes (or positive agenda power) – they are also similar in many respects. One similarity is the emphasis they place on party influence being the sole

domain of the *majority party*. More specifically, both theories are built on the notion that the majority party is the unique source of party power in Congress; the minority party, by comparison, is left out of governing completely. As a result, scholars' conception of party power in Congress is in keeping with the quote by Thomas Reed at the top of this paper – the majority party rules, while the minority party (if it is even mentioned) is left to sit and watch (and perhaps complain). Indeed, party scholars often compare Congress today to the era when Reed controlled the House speakership (in the 1890s) and adopted a series of internal changes (the Reed Rules) that effectively shut the minority party out of the policymaking process.¹

While we largely agree with the tenets of contemporary theories of party power in Congress – that is, that the majority party dominates the agenda process – we also believe that completely ignoring the minority party goes too far. In this paper, we attempt to correct this imbalance by conceiving of ways that the minority party might be able to wield some influence in Congress, and consider what they might seek to achieve as a result. We take some initial steps toward building a theory of minority-party influence in Congress by assuming that plenary time is scarce and that the majority has a variety of policies that they wish to pursue. Minority-party power, then, is based on the minority's ability, through the use of dilatory tactics and other procedural devices, to slow down the majority and waste (expend) valuable plenary time – the minority can potentially leverage this temporary blocking power into either policy gains (by

¹ The 1880 quote by Reed came when he was a member of the minority party in the House. The Republicans would regain the majority following the 1888 elections, and Reed would be elected Speaker in 1889 (51st Congress). He would institute his Reed Rules in 1890. The Democrats would return to power in 1891 and attempt to rescind the Reed Rules – but Reed himself forced them to rethink their strategy by gumming up their agenda using a variety of dilatory tactics. By 1893, the Democrats had effectively come to terms with Reed's argument – that in order to get anything done in the House, the majority had to rule effectively and thus minority rights had to be infringed. Reed would be elected Speaker again in 1895 (54th Congress) and 1897 (55th Congress), and his institutional legacy of iron-fisted control from the Speaker's chair would allow the Republicans to dictate policymaking in the House through 1910 – when Speaker Joe Cannon (R-IL) was stripped of various powers by a cross-partisan alliance of Democrats and progressive Republicans.

forcing final-passage votes on policies that they care about) or electoral gains (by forcing amendment votes, and thus subjecting the majority to difficult votes in front of constituents).

In looking for evidence of minority-party influence, we examine three indicators of how often the minority-party's proposals (specifically, amendments and bills) garner votes on the House and Senate floors: (1) sponsorship rates (how often the minority sponsors bills/amendments), (2) minority disappointment rates (how often a majority of the minority party supports a bill/amendment but it fails), and (3) majority roll rates (how often a majority of the minority party supports a bill/amendment and it passes over the objections of a majority of the majority party). A close look at these data suggests that the amendment stage is where most of the minority's leverage is converted to plenary time.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss the role that the majority party plays in the dominant legislative theories on the U.S. Congress, as well as in some related theoretical work. In the third section, we begin to construct a theoretical foundation for minority-party influence in Congress, built around the procedural leverage that the minority possesses and the goals that they pursue using this leverage. In the fourth section, we look for evidence of minority-party influence by tracking minority sponsorship rates, minority disappointment rates, and majority roll rates on both amendments and bills across the contemporary (post-World War II) congressional era. In the fifth section, we summarize our findings and conclude.

The Role of the Minority Party in the Existing Literature

As noted, the dominant party theories (cartel and CPG) on the U.S. Congress are structured entirely around the majority party. In cartel theory, the agenda process is dictated entirely by a small group of majority-party leaders who act on the behalf of the median House

member (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). Party power is about installing multiple veto points in the agenda process, so that the majority of the majority party is never “rolled” on the floor (i.e., a majority of the majority never opposes a bill that subsequently goes on to pass). In CPG theory, when the parties are internally homogenous and distinct (polarized) from one another, members of the majority party delegate power to their leaders to structure the agenda – such that policy initiatives that a majority of the majority support are pursued (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 2001). While cartel theory is about the majority largely seeking to avoid harm while CPG theory is about the majority aggressively seeking to pass new policy, both are majority-centric in their structure. Neither affords the minority a meaningful role in the agenda process. The minority is treated as little more than a bystander, an entity to be ignored at best and steamrolled at worst.

The other dominant theoretical literature on the U.S. Congress is distinctly non-partisan in nature, in that congressional behavior is driven entirely by majoritarian or supermajoritarian concerns. In these works, pivotal actors – the floor median in the House on matters of legislative organization (Krehbiel 1991), and the filibuster and veto overrides on matters of lawmaking generally (Krehbiel 1998) – make important decisions, and parties are treated largely as epiphenomenal. When parties are considered in more depth, their exclusion is justified based on the belief that the majority and minority parties cancel each other out. As Krehbiel (1998, p. 171) notes in his study of lawmaking: “The point is not that majority-party organizations and their deployment of resources are inconsequential. Rather it is to suggest that competing party organizations bidding for pivotal voters may roughly counterbalance one another, so final outcomes are not much different from what simpler but completely specified nonpartisan theory predicts.” Thus, in these nonpartisan theories, *neither* party organization – the majority nor the

minority – possesses agenda power. In effect, the minority is ignored just like in the party cartel and CPG theories (expect that the *majority* is ignored as well).²

Moving beyond these foundational theoretical works, however, scholars sometimes find a role for the minority party – but it is often secondary in nature. Jenkins and Monroe (2014), for example, examine how the cartel theory can be extended to include multiple veto coalitions – the standard majority party coalition as well as a cross-party coalition. They examine the Conservative Coalition (CC) – a coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans – in the mid-20th Century House, when the Democrats controlled the chamber, and find that the CC also effectively wielded negative agenda control. As such, the minority Republicans were an important factor in CC blocking power during this time. Schickler (2001) and Schickler and Pearson (2009) also examine whether the CC exercised *positive agenda control* in the House during this period – that is, whether the Rules Committee, controlled by Southern Democrats and Republicans sought to actively move policy in a conservative direction by opening the gates on legislation that would roll the Democratic majority (and the Northern Democrats, in particular). Their results – which are meant to question the extent of majority-party blocking during this period (and thus the unconditional nature of the party cartel theory) – also suggest a meaningful supplemental role for the minority.

Research on the Senate, where institutional features limit the extent to which the majority can control the agenda (relative to the House), also provides a role for the minority party.³ Procedural rights are more plentiful in the Senate, so the minority has more avenues to pursue a dilatory strategy – with holds and filibusters being the most well-known methods. Historically,

² For a critique of Krehbiel’s “counterbalancing” party argument, see Aldrich and Rohde (2000).

³ But, on this point, see Gailmard and Jenkins (2007), who present empirical evidence (“roll rates”) to suggest that the majority party’s exercise of negative agenda control isn’t substantially greater in the House relative to the Senate. Also see Gailmard and Jenkins (2008) for a similar analysis on the minority party.

filibusters were used to kill legislation, and many reforms efforts were aimed at circumventing these obstacles in order to pass languishing legislation (Binder 1997; Dion 1997; Koger 2010; Wawro and Schickler 2006). However, the days of Mr. Smith-style blockades have given way to a more complex bargaining environment, and in the modern Senate these tactics have become the foundation of the minority party's leverage. Sinclair (2006), for example, argues that Senate filibusters and holds are used more often to extract policy concessions on unrelated matters.⁴ Den Hartog and Monroe (2011) conceptualize these dilatory tactics as "costs" that the minority can impose on the majority in trying to set the Senate agenda, which affect the likelihood that majority proposals and minority counter-proposals will be considered on the Senate floor.

Despite this work done on the minority party outside the foundational theoretical treatments, however, a full-fledged theory of minority-party influence is lacking. We argue that such a theory should be built on first principles. In the next section, we begin to do this, by first considering what leverage the minority party possesses, and where it comes from, and then discussing what motivates the minority party (as a way to understand how they might use/apply this leverage).

Explaining Minority Influence in Congress: Theoretical Foundations

In beginning to construct a theory of minority party influence in the U.S. Congress, we need to first consider the source of the minority party's leverage, and then consider the goals that they will seek to achieve with that leverage. Below, we take these topics in turn.

The Source of Minority-Party Leverage

⁴ Evans and Lipinski (2005) contend that the hold was the invention of the *majority* party as an early warning system. Ultimately, however, holds became the starting point for negotiations with (for the most part) minority party senators who sought to leverage their ability to block unanimous consent agreements in order to get other amendments and votes considered on the floor.

The minority party's leverage in the modern House and Senate emanates from the scarcity of plenary time. Plenary time – that is, the time available to process legislation through the chamber – is limited in both the House and Senate, and is perhaps the majority party's most valuable resource (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Den Hartog and Monroe 2011). Without sufficient plenary time, the majority party cannot change policy, take positions, advertise, distribute pork, or demonstrate its ability to steward government in the eyes of the public. It is truly proximate to all of their collective party goals.

This combination of scarcity and import leaves the majority open to some degree of exploitation. Where the minority can chew up plenary time through its use of a variety of procedural motions and dilatory tactics, they can generate leverage to bargain with the majority over the use of plenary time.⁵ Moreover, the dynamics of this delay-produced leverage are ripe for the minority to push for plenary time of their own. If faced with the choice between losing $x + 1$ units of plenary time to the minority party's dilatory tactics or giving the minority party x units of plenary time to have their own proposals considered, the majority (we argue) prefers the latter, all else equal.

And while there may be other negative externalities associated with allowing minority proposals onto the floor, the majority can simply figure these into the “price” of floor time for the minority. In other words, the minority may have to promise to reduce its dilatory consumption by $x + 5$ units of plenary time in order to get x units of time for their proposals. But the basic bargaining environment exists such that if the minority can credibly threaten to delay, they will have leverage to demand some plenary time of their own.

⁵ This dynamic mirrors some of the processes and incentives that surround “veto bargaining” (Cameron 2000). In future work on this topic, we plan to build more specifically on that theory to inform our own.

So can the minority credibly threaten to delay? The answer to that varies over time and across chambers. In the 1950s Senate, for example, the combination of a regionally-split Democratic Party and a difficult-to-overcome filibuster provided the foundation for enormous delay (Koger 2010). To a lesser extent, minority-party Republicans in the 1950s House derived leverage from the “dual veto” (Jenkins and Monroe 2014) created by Conservative Coalition-controlled committee chairs. Over time, the ability to delay has eroded in both chambers, more quickly and to a greater degree in the House than in the Senate. Still, opportunities for delay exist in both chambers. In the Senate, non-germane amendments, holds, and filibusters continue to offer the minority party opportunities to slow the process. In the contemporary House, dilatory tactics are less often displayed but still provide context for deliberation: the minority party has the opportunity to move to recommit bills prior to final passage; all non-closed rules are subject to minority-party amendment proposals; and enterprising minority-party members can expend time challenging chairs’ interpretations of House procedure (in some circumstances).

In short, though we have become accustomed to equilibria in both chambers that avoid the demonstration of minority delay, its potential certainly informs the negotiated distribution of plenary time.

The Goals of the Minority Party

We argue that the minority party uses its leverage in pursuit of two core (interrelated) goals. The minority party’s first goal is to change policy. Shared policy beliefs and the pursuit of common policy goals are essential forces that draw co-partisans together in most legislatures, and the U.S. Congress is no different. For members of Congress, the benefits of achieving those policy goals are both a means of fulfilling their representational contract with their constituents (including the special interests that help to fund their campaigns for election and reelection) and

an end in and of themselves, inasmuch as legislators have personal policy-driven motives for seeking office in the first place.

The minority party's second goal is to become the majority party. In this sense, we might think of this goal as purely electoral, and in one sense this is true: in order to recapture the majority, the minority party must persuade enough voters in enough critical districts to replace majority-party members with its members. But, in fact, recapturing the majority simply for the sake of doing so is not a particularly useful way to think about this goal. Instead, we argue that it is more useful to envision the minority party's desire to recapture the majority as a desire to obtain a less expensive avenue for making policy change.⁶

Following up on this latter point, we believe that these goals should not be considered in isolation. Rather, we need to think about what the minority's pursuit of these goals will imply about their use of the leverage they possess. Not only is this leverage zero sum, in the sense that using it for the pursuit of one goal comes at the expense of pursuing the other, but they are almost certainly asymmetric. That is, the "cost" of changing policy as the minority party is likely to be quite expensive on a per item basis, relative to changing policy as the majority party. Thus, for the minority, the choice to invest in recapturing majority status is also an investment, of sorts, in cheaper policy change.

This calculation becomes clearer if considered in dynamic terms. Envision a minority party, at the beginning of a given Congress, whose policy aspirations span a number of Congresses in the future. The minority's decision to invest resources in effectuating immediate policy change (during the current Congress) versus investing those resources in trying to increase

⁶ A number of other benefits also follow from majority status. Most notably, members have an easier time raising campaign dollars (Cann 2008; Cox and Magar 1999) and get a larger share of the particularistic projects allocated by Congress (Crespin and Finocchiaro 2008). However, we argue that the major policy benefit of majority status outweighs and overshadows these secondary benefits.

their probability of achieving majority status in a future Congress hinges on (1) the relative cost differential in changing policy as the minority vs. the majority and (2) how much they can increase their probability of recapturing majority status.

To see how these factors interact, imagine a hypothetical world that is three Congresses long. In this world, the minority party can pursue two different strategies. The minority can spend the first two congresses forcing numerous votes on things that will never change policy in their preferred direction, but will set them apart from the majority electorally – effectively attacking/exposing vulnerabilities in the majority’s electoral prospects – with the hope of becoming the *new* majority party in the third Congress. Alternatively, the minority can work towards changing a few policies in each of the three congresses but never achieving enough to significantly increase their probability of recapturing the majority.⁷ How do these two strategies compare?

For simplicity, assume that the latter strategy yielded precisely three major policy changes for the minority per Congress, for a total of nine minority policy goals achieved over our hypothetical three-Congress period. The essential question then becomes how many policy changes the party can achieve in *one Congress as the majority*, if they successfully pursue the former strategy and regain majority control in the third Congress. In our example, where the minority can change three policies per Congress, if the majority party can achieve more than nine policy changes in one Congress then the former strategy is preferable. Put in slightly more general terms, if

⁷ Of course, there are exogenous trends and shocks that will affect this probability, but from the perspective of the minority strategy, these exogenous factors cannot be accounted for and thus we omit them from our discussion here.

(# of Congresses spent in the minority before capturing the majority + 1) x (# of major policy goals achievable as the minority in a Congress) < (# of major policy changes achievable as the majority in a Congress)

then the minority should invest their resources and leverage towards recapturing majority status, even if policy change is the primary goal. Our observation of congressional policymaking leads us to assume that the discrepancy between the number of policy goals that can be achieved as the minority and the number of policy goals that can be achieved as the majority is very large. Therefore, if the recapture strategy has even a modest impact on the likelihood of achieving majority status, then the minority party is highly likely to invest in this strategy.

If this is the case, then we should observe the minority forcing many votes on floor proposals – in the form of amendments or bills – but with relatively little success at changing policy. In the next section, we look at patterns of votes on minority proposals, and consider how those patterns change over time, and compare across the House and Senate.

Minority-Favored Amendment and Final-Passage Votes in the House and Senate

The ability to propose bills and amendments is one weapon the minority party can use to aid in their efforts to achieve majority status. The minority's goal is to get majority-party members to take positions on issues and (hopefully) build an unfavorable record with the public – which will hurt their reelection chances. Similarly, proposal power provides minority-party members with opportunities to take popular positions on issues that help separate them from majority-party members.

To assess whether the minority is able to parlay their procedural leverage into proposal power – and get floor votes in the House and Senate on bills/amendments that minority-party

members care about – we examine three indicators. The most basic indicator is to determine whether a minority-party member sponsored the amendment or bill. This has the potential to be a noisy measure, however, since the views of one minority-party member may regularly deviate from those of his co-partisans. A second indicator is to track minority-party “disappointments” – when a majority of the minority party supports an amendment or bill (on final passage), but it ultimately fails on floor. Minority-party disappointments are, by definition, proposals that are opposed by a majority of the majority party; thus, they effectively separate the party positions in many cases. Given that disappointments (1) have the support of half or more of the party but (2) fail to pass, and thus cannot lead to new law, they are perhaps a better indicator of proposals that are broadly intended for position-taking (electoral) benefits but not policy change. A third indicator is to track majority-party “rolls” – when a majority of the minority party supports an amendment or bill (on final passage) and it passes, despite opposition from a majority of the majority party. Majority-party rolls also effectively separate the party positions, but represent potential policy change rather than position-taking, since they pass and *do* raise the possibility of new law. Thus, comparison between minority disappointments and majority rolls will be instructive vis-à-vis minority-party strategy – and majority-party response – over time and across chambers.

We employ two sources of data to examine minority-proposal floor votes. First, we constructed an original data set of minority-party-sponsored bills and amendments that received roll-call votes in the House or Senate from the 102nd (1991-92) through the 111th (2009-10) Congresses. We coded the party affiliation of the amendment (bill) sponsor, tallied the number of minority-party-sponsored amendment (final-passage) votes, and divided that figure by the

total number of amendment (final-passage) votes for each Congress in each chamber – this generated *minority-party sponsorship rates* for the House and Senate in each Congress.⁸

Second, we generated majority-roll and minority-disappointment data using the Political Institutions and Public Choice (PIPC) House Roll-Call Database, which spans the 83rd (1953-54) through the 111th (2009-10) Congresses for the House and the 91st (1969-71) to the 111th Congresses for the Senate (Rohde 2010). As with the sponsorship data, we tallied the number of minority-party disappointments and majority-party rolls on amendment (final-passage) votes, and then divided that number by the total number of roll-call votes on amendment (final-passage) votes for each Congress in each chamber – this produced *minority-party disappointment rates* and *majority-party roll rates* for the House and Senate in each Congress.

We present these data in four line-graph figures.⁹ Each includes the minority-party sponsorship rate, the minority-party disappointment rate, and the majority-party roll rate. For both the House and Senate, we have separate figures for amendment and final-passage votes. Note that the sponsorship line begins later in the series in each figure, and the Senate data span fewer Congresses than the House data.

We turn first to the floor amendment vote data in the House (Figure 1) and Senate (Figure 2). Consider the basic trends of each measure. Minority amendment sponsorship rates, which begin in the 102nd Congress in both figures, fluctuate between 40% and 70% for most of the series, and are above 50% in more than half of the Congresses. Thus, a first look suggests that the minority is getting significant plenary time during the floor amendment process. The

⁸ We constructed our party-sponsor data using the list of roll calls provided on house.gov and senate.gov (which include bill and amendment sponsors), and merging them with legislator party labels contained in Keith Poole's voteview.com data on legislator ideal point estimates.

⁹ We omit the Senate in the 107th Congress from both our sponsor data and the Political Institutions and Public Choice (PIPC) Data because of the majority-party switch (thanks to the partisan switch of Jim Jeffords). We will include these observations in later versions of this paper.

minority amendment disappointment rates in the House (which begins in the 83rd Congress) and the Senate (which begins in the 91st Congress) steadily increase over time from about 10% to peaks of 45% (in the House) and 60% (in the Senate).

[Figure 1 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

This upward trend stands in stark contrast to the majority amendment roll rate in each chamber. In the House, the majority amendment roll rate fluctuates greatly and remains mostly above 20% through the 91st Congress. This may have been the result of the Conservative Coalition, which was present and active during this time period. Schickler (2001) and Schickler and Pearson (2009), for example, have suggested that the Conservative Coalition sometimes pushed their agenda through the House over the objections of a majority of the majority-party Democrats. After the 91st Congress, however, which roughly matches the “post-reform” era of party resurgence described by Rohde (1991), majority amendment roll rates stabilize – in both chambers they settle in around 10% and fluctuate mildly Congress-to-Congress through the 111th.

By the end of the data series, the minority amendment disappointment rates and majority amendment roll rates in both chambers diverge dramatically; this is a pattern consistent with our explanation of minority-party influence. The low majority roll rate suggests that either the minority is largely uninterested in using its plenary time for policy change on amendments or the majority is unwilling to allow the minority to use plenary time in that way, or both. The high disappointment rate, however, demonstrates an overwhelming use of plenary time by the minority with no expectation of policy change. In the 111th Congress, for example, about half of

all floor votes on amendments in the House and Senate failed with the support of a majority of the minority party.

Figures 3 and 4, which mimic the previous two figures but include final-passage votes instead of amendment votes, tell a very different story. In both the House (Figure 3) and Senate (Figure 4), though the minority final-passage sponsorship rate sometimes spikes above 10%, the majority final-passage roll rate and minority final-passage disappointment rate remain at or very near zero for the entire time series. (Indeed, the modal outcome for the minority final-passage disappointment rate is zero in both chambers.) Moreover, unlike the amendment trend, the minority final-passage disappointment rate is less than or equal to the majority final-passage roll rates in every Congress, with only one exception in each chamber.

[Figure 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

One way to read this contrast to the amendment data is: the majority places a *much* higher price tag on plenary time associated with bill proposals than amendment proposals. This makes a lot of sense, considering that a bill takes up considerably more plenary time for debate, amendments, votes, and other procedural management. Moreover, rolls on bills almost certainly hurt the majority party's brand name more than rolls on amendments (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

Perhaps more to the point, from the perspective of a minority party bent on taking positions across a broad range of issues, trading many amendments' worth of plenary time for one bill's worth of plenary time would be a poor use of leverage. We suspect that, in terms of advertising the differences between the parties and forcing majority-party members to take tough votes, a roll call vote on an amendment is every bit as good as a roll call vote on final passage.

Thus, both the logic and the data point to the amendment stage as the arena in which most of the minority's leverage is cashed in for plenary time.

Conclusion

In this paper, we begin to construct a theoretical framework for thinking about minority-party influence in Congress. In short, we argue that the minority derives leverage by delaying (or threatening to delay) legislative action, which consumes very scarce, very valuable plenary time. To avoid this loss of plenary time, the majority is willing to offer the minority opportunities to have their own proposals considered on the House and Senate floors, respectively. We argue that, with the goal of recapturing majority status in mind, the minority uses these proposal opportunities to schedule roll calls that help separate them from the majority and force majority-party members into casting difficult votes.

Our data – which include minority-party sponsorship rates, minority-party disappointment rates, and majority-party roll rates for both the House and Senate – show trends that are consistent with this explanation. Specifically, the minority party seems to use its leverage to get floor votes on many amendment proposals that fail, but with the support of the minority party and the opposition of the majority party. This pattern shows up in both chambers, and stands in contrast to voting on the final passage of bills, which shows very little evidence of any kind of minority proposal.

While illuminating, these data are only a first step in a long overdue enterprise. The role of the minority party in Congress has been largely ignored, and has certainly been under theorized in the modern literature on congressional decision-making and organization. In part, this is almost certainly due to scholars focus on policy outcomes. And this is understandable. The “so what” question often dictates the orientation of scholarly literature, and outcome-driven

research comfortably passes that test. But the signals sent to voters along the way are intermediate steps in the policy process that certainly help to shape outcomes. And, in the end, they help determine who holds the reins of power. For that reason, among others, we hope to better understand the contours of minority-party influence in Congress.

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Figure 1: Minority Amendment Sponsorship Rates, Minority Amendment Disappointment Rates, and Majority Roll Rates in the U.S. House of Representatives, 83rd through the 111th Congresses

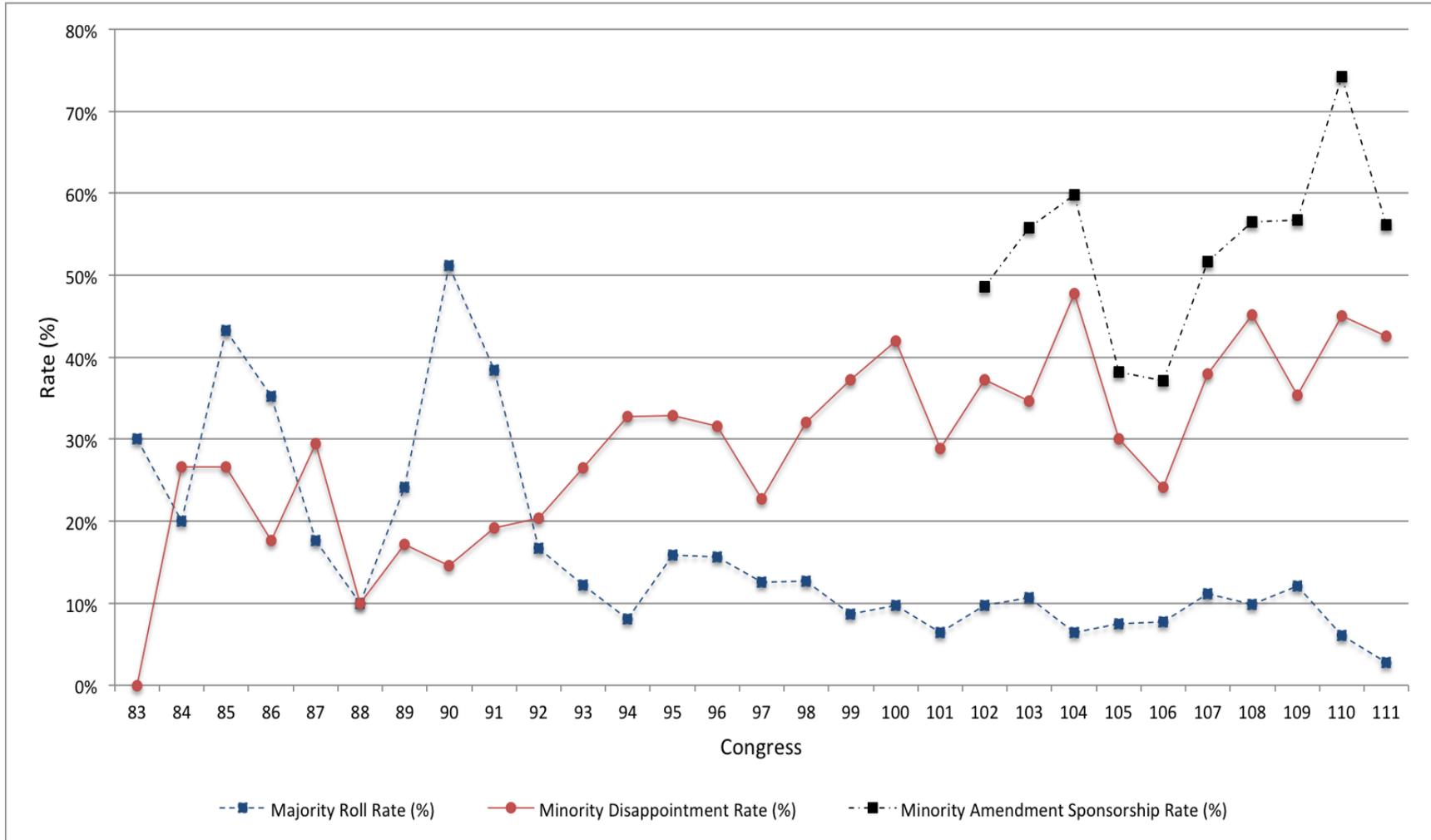


Figure 2: Minority Amendment Sponsorship Rates, Minority Amendment Disappointment Rates, and Majority Roll Rates in the U.S. Senate, 91st through the 111th Congresses

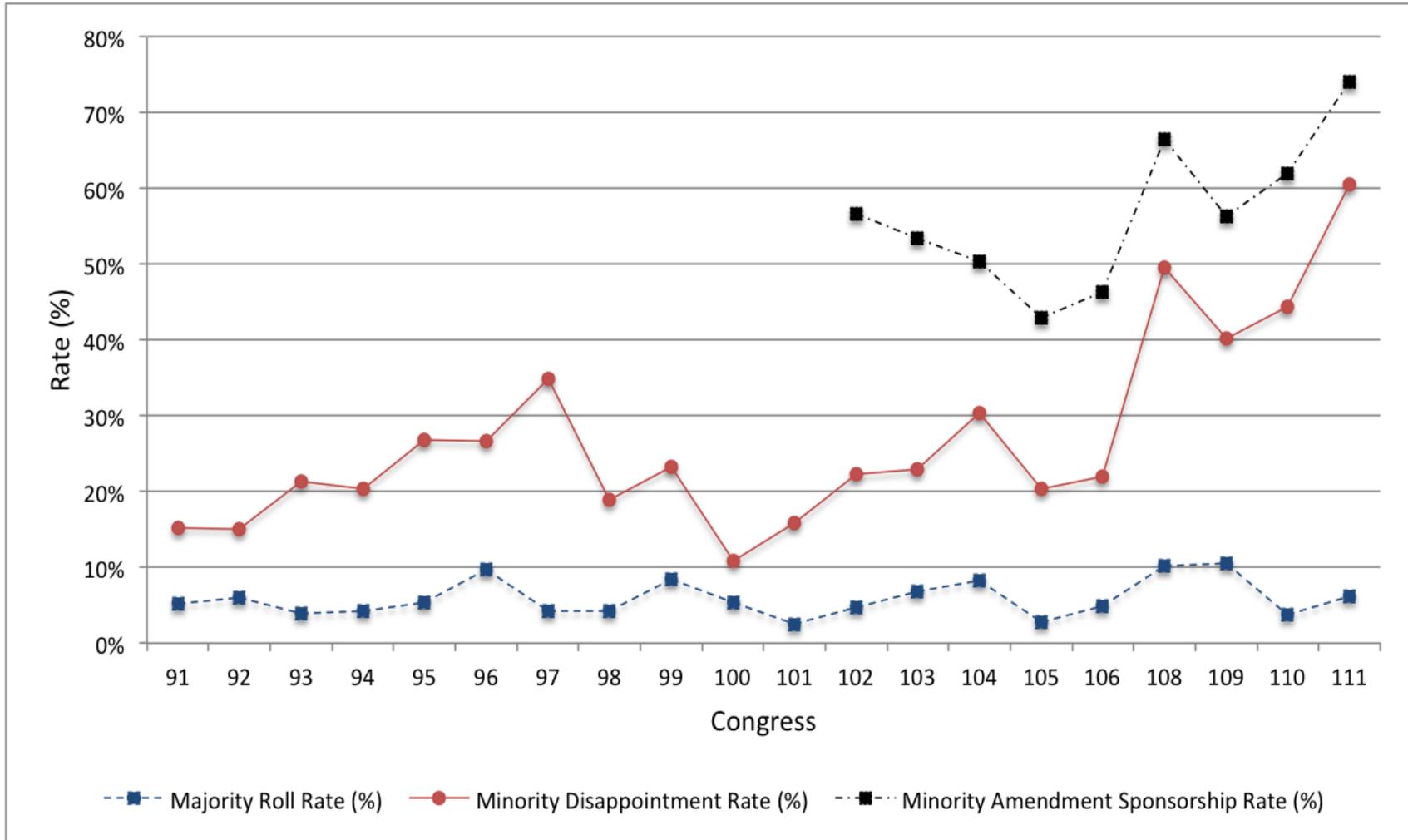


Figure 3: Minority Final-Passage Sponsorship Rates, Minority Final-Passage Disappointment Rates, and Majority Final-Passage Roll Rates in the U.S. House of Representatives, 83rd through the 111th Congresses

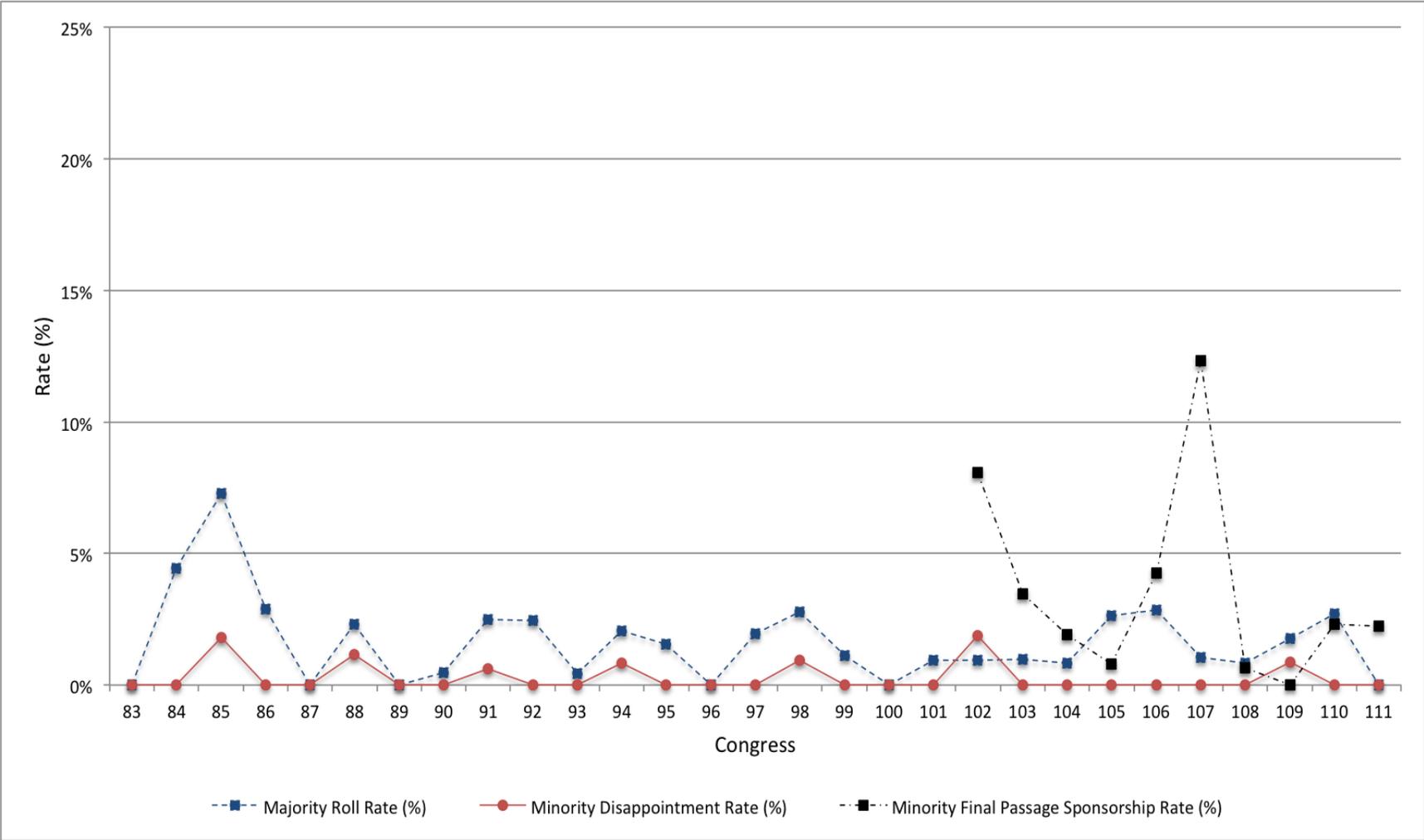


Figure 4: Minority Final-Passage Sponsorship Rates, Minority Final-Passage Disappointment Rates, and Majority Final-Passage Roll Rates in the U.S. Senate, 91st through the 111th Congresses

