

ATTAINABILITY, PARTISAN DYSFUNCTION, AND THE CHANGING  
NATURE OF SENATE LEADERSHIP

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## **ABSTRACT**

JACOB F. H. SMITH: Attainability, Partisan Dysfunction, and the Changing Nature of Senate Leadership  
(Under the direction of Jason M. Roberts.)

Partisan dysfunction and an increasingly attainable majority in the United States Senate have changed the nature of party leadership in the upper chamber. This paper examines why, in contrast to the overall trend of a decreasing number of close Senate elections, party leaders are increasingly burdened by difficult, closely-contested reelection campaigns. I argue that party leaders' unique position in the battle for majority control has contributed to new electoral challenges. I contend that the polarization of the cloture process has furthered this trend. As leaders are expected by their co-partisans to take full advantage of Senate rules to advance their party's priorities, they have come to typify dysfunction in the Senate and now represent attractive targets for defeat by the other party. As a whole, the emergence of competitive elections has contributed to the overall dysfunction of the body as electoral goals outpace policymaking as the primary focus of leaders.

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## Introduction

The success of democratic political institutions depends on those institutions being able to carry out the essential functions of government. Numerous countries in regions ranging from the Middle East to South America have experienced the failure of democratic government due (at least in part) to the inability of the government to perform its basic responsibilities (Kurlantzick 2011). In late 1700s America, as detailed by Alexander Hamilton in several *Federalist Papers*, super-majority requirements for the passage of legislation and an inability to enforce laws or punish law-breakers rendered the Articles of Confederation unable to “preserve the union, “ leaving America at “the last stage of national humiliation” (Madison, Jay & Hamilton 2003, p.134-138). Having also experienced a government that was so strong that it trampled on individual rights when under British rule, the framers of the American Constitution sought to form a government that would strike a balance between these two extremes. Under the new Constitution, the United States has flourished under what can generally be described as a healthy democratic political system.

Freely contested (and at times competitive) elections are a vital part of any healthy democratic political system (Dahl 1972). In urging the adoption of the new Constitution, James Madison declared that it was “essential to liberty” that a common interest be shared by the government and the people; the only way to achieve this link, argued Madison, was through “frequent elections” (Madison, Jay & Hamilton 2003, p.



Fed 52). Thus the new American Constitution ensured the occurrence of elections at regular intervals.

More than two hundred years after Madison wrote those words, the competitiveness of American elections is still a central focus of those studying American democracy. In the context of the Senate (originally appointed but selected through popular vote since the adoption of the 17th Amendment), majority control has become increasingly competitive in the years since the 1980 election, when Republicans ended 26 consecutive years of Democratic control (Smith 2014). (Although it might become apparent by the end of the election cycle that a particular party has a strong advantage, one could typically create a reasonably plausible counter-factual scenario where the other party could have won the majority in that election.) Indeed, the House majority, which has widely been viewed as attainable in recent literature (see Heberlig & Larson (2005), Heberlig & Larson (2007), Heberlig & Larson (2012)), has swung between the parties slightly less frequently than the Senate in recent years.) Yet, as detailed by Abramowitz (2012), several macro-level counter-trends have structured competition in Senate elections since 1980. On one hand, as voters increasingly support candidates from the same party for every office, the percentage of Senate elections decided by single digits has decreased from around forty percent in the 1960s and 70s to around thirty percent in the 1980s and 90s to the low twenties after the start of the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the average size of the Senate majority has decreased in recent years, thus requiring a smaller seat swing to win the majority. Indeed, since 2000, the the average seat swing has also increased, increas-

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 1 for breakdown by decade.

ing the likelihood of frequent shifts in majority control. The overall result of these counter-trends has been a highly competitive battle for the Senate concentrated in a narrowing number of seats.

In contrast with the overall trend, elections featuring party leaders have become increasingly competitive in recent years. Following the defeat of Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) in 2004, every subsequent Senate race featuring a party leader has been highly contested by both parties. While Daschle's loss in isolation could be singularly explained by the overall Republican lean of South Dakota, Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have faced competitive races even though their party's nominee for president won at least 55 percent of the vote in their states in the previous election. Furthermore, both Reid and McConnell won reelection with more than 60 percent of the vote in their reelection campaign before becoming party leader. For his part, Daschle won more than 60 percent of the vote when reelected in 1998.

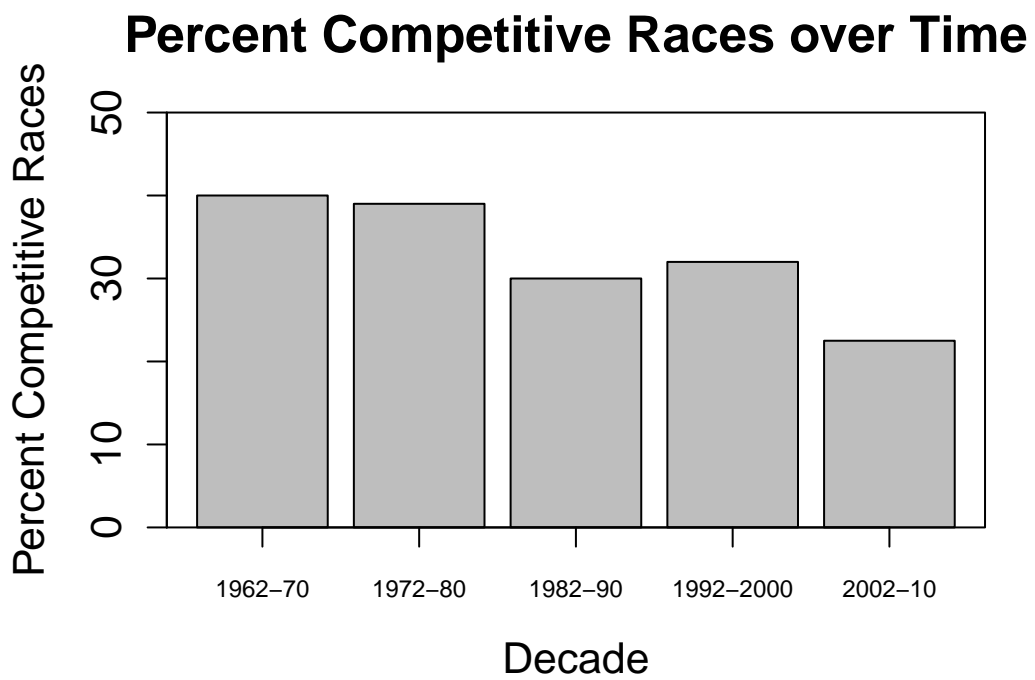


Figure 1: Percent of Senate Races Decided by Single Digits by Decade  
*Note: Data from Abramowitz (2012); 2010 results computed by author.*

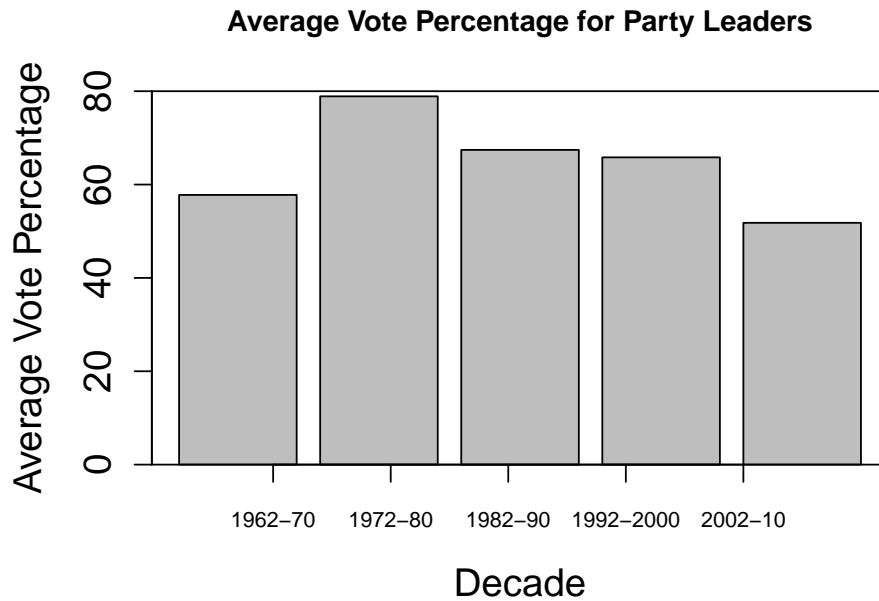


Figure 2: Average Reelection Vote Percentage for Party Leaders by Decade  
*Note: Calculated by Author. Note: There are only two leader elections in the 1972-80 period; Democratic Leader Robert Byrd (D-WV) was unopposed for reelection in 1976.*

This paper offers an account for why party leaders have come to experience more competitive reelection races even as the overall percentage of closely-decided races has declined. First, I discuss previous research that serves as a foundation for constructing a theory to explain increased competition in races featuring party leaders. Second, I theorize that party leaders' unique position in the battle for majority control in an era of polarized cloture voting makes them especially vulnerable to strong electoral challenges from the other party. Third, I present empirical evidence to substantiate the claims made in the previous section. Finally, I discuss further implications of the changes facing party leaders. Overall, I argue the increased burdens faced by party leaders in the Senate have made effective governance more difficult by feeding back

into the increasing dysfunction that has come to characterize the chamber in recent years.

### **Dysfunction and Institutional Change in the Senate**

Although this central puzzle of this paper speaks directly to electoral politics, electoral politics and political institutions are not isolated from one another. As the institutional politics of the Senate has changed in recent years, an account of the transformation of the Senate is a necessary prerequisite to pursuing an answer to this paper's central question. Focusing on the rise of the obstruction in the cloture process, past literature documents the rise of dysfunction in the United States Senate.

Created in a less polarized era, Senate rules that now serve to further dysfunction existed for centuries without causing this effect. (While dysfunction is almost always preferable to some actions, it is not more preferable to all potential actions. Furthermore, there are certain actions the government must take; legislative dysfunction makes it more difficult to provide quick and decisive policy action to the most pressing issues.) The first set of Senate rules were written in 1789 when twenty rules were adopted to structure the way the upper chamber was to be run (Swift 1996). New rules were added in 1806; it was then that the motion for the previous question was deleted from the Senate rules, which provided a new opportunity for the minority party to obstruct (Swift 1996, Binder & Smith 1997). Even though the previous order question was altered in the early 1800s, filibusters and other attempts to obstruct the majority agenda were few and far between (Binder & Smith 1997).

Following the realignment of the South that began in the 1960s, the Senate be-

came an increasingly polarized (and dysfunctional) institution. As noted by numerous scholars (for example, see McCarty, Poole & Rosenthal (2006)), the gap between the two parties in both houses of Congress has grown over time. Just because an institution is polarized does not necessarily mean that it cannot function. After all, despite complaints from the minority about unfair treatment, the House of Representatives has generally operated efficiently in recent decades (Rohde 1991, Cox & McCubbins 1993, Cox & McCubbins 2005). The Senate, however, relies on cooperation and consensus in order to function. Absent a unanimous consent agreement, a super-majority of senators is needed to cut off debate and ultimately vote on legislation. As partisanship in the Senate has increased, it has become more difficult to invoke cloture and the legislative process has broken down (Binder & Smith 1997, Smith 2014).<sup>2</sup>

The results of the breakdown of the legislative process have not been lost on senators. In 1982, Senator Dale Bumpers (D-AR) proclaimed that unless senators came to understand the need to change procedures the chamber would “never be an effective legislative body again,” while eleven years later Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) stated that although he felt he had been more than fair in letting the minority party offer amendments the ability to accomplish anything had become “extremely difficult” and that changes needed to be made (Binder & Smith 1997, p.18-19). Yet, by comparison, the late 20th century Senate looks fully functional when compared with the Senate of the early 21st century. As detailed by Smith (2014), the pattern of the minority obstructing the majority and the majority

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<sup>2</sup>As one can observe in Figure 3, the number of cloture votes has increased over time.

restricting the ability of the minority to participate in debates has changed senators' assumptions about the behavior of their colleagues, which has reshaped the ethos of the Senate as a chamber.

At the same time, changing Senate rules—even those rules that are broadly viewed as harmful to the institution's mission—is difficult. Typically, it takes the vote of two-thirds of the Senate to change Senate rules; while a relatively large number of senators at a given time might find the filibuster to be deleterious to the body's ability to govern, members of the minority party are unlikely to vote to weaken their ability to block the majority. In November 2013, however, Majority Leader Harry Reid (with the support of 52 of 55 Democratic senators) decided to trigger the so-called “nuclear option,” a procedure that allowed the majority to change the rules with a simple majority. Democrats changed the rules on cloture for non-Supreme Court judicial nominees and executive branch nominees so that cloture only required a simple majority rather than a three-fifths majority (Smith 2014). The nuclear option had first been discussed in 2005 in relation to some of President Bush's judicial nominees who were being blocked by Senate Democrats, although a group of senators called the “gang of fourteen” struck a deal that allowed most (but not all) of the judicial nominees to go through in exchange for the continuation of the sixty vote threshold for judicial nominees, thus rendering mute the threat of the nuclear option by then-Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN). Reid had also considered using the nuclear option earlier in 2013, but ultimately backed off after striking a deal with Republicans that allowed several nominees to move forward (Smith 2014). In total, these two episodes demonstrate the struggles facing the majority leader to control the agenda and the

ends leaders must go to in order to assert a modicum of control over the agenda.



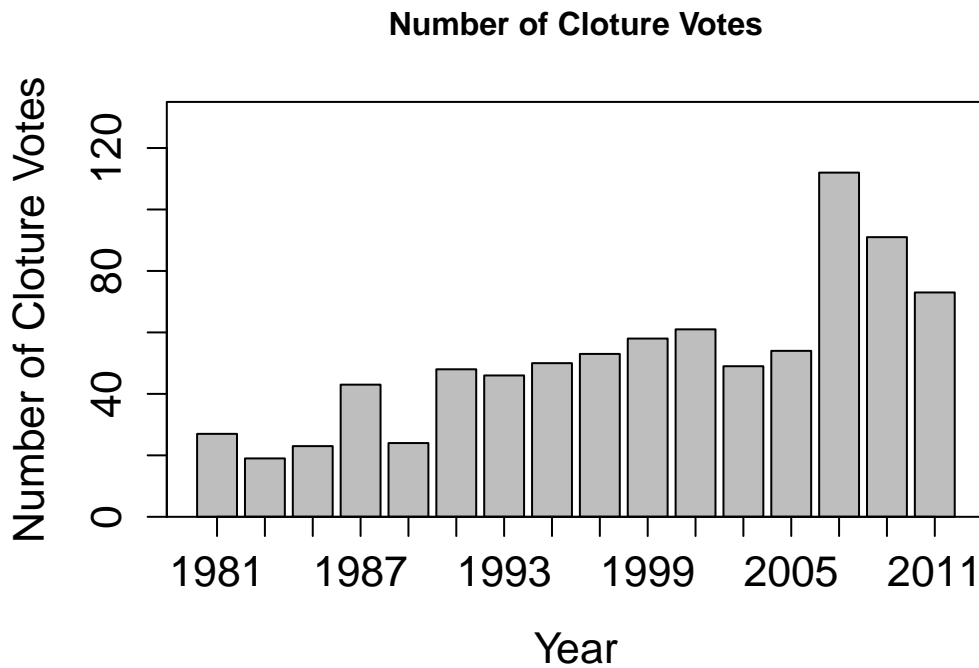


Figure 3: Number of Cloture Votes by Congress  
*Note: Data from [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)*

The new pattern of dysfunction in the Senate presented in this section serves as a foundation for considering why party leaders have come to face competitive reelection campaigns in recent years. It is clear that the day to day behavior of party leaders is fundamentally different than it was even a few decades ago. The next step of this paper is to examine the potential implications of this institutional transformation to this paper’s central puzzle.

### **Explaining Newfound Competitiveness in Party Leader Races**

In contrast to the overall trend, Senate leaders have come to experience additional electoral burdens in recent years. This section advances a theory to explain this

puzzling departure from the decreasing competitiveness that has come to characterize Senate elections as a whole. I posit that party leaders' newfound electoral difficulties stem from voters associating party leaders with the the increased dysfunction facing the institution and taking out their frustrations by voting against these senators in their reelection campaigns. Adding to leaders difficulties, each party views the other leader's seat as a potential expansion of the battle for party control and now actively targets them for defeat.

At first glance, it is somewhat surprising that Senate leaders have come to consistently experience competitive reelection campaigns as a smaller percentage of their colleagues face tight races for reelection. Numerous studies (for example, see Box-Steffensmeier (1996)) have demonstrated that having a large campaign war chest is generally an effective strategy for deterring quality challengers. As party leaders typically rank at or near the top of all senators in terms of fundraising prowess, one would expect their large campaign war chests to forestall challenges from credible challengers. In addition, as a result of their leadership positions, Senate party leaders are also in a position to bring back federal spending to their states. As Fiorina (1977) noted, increased federal spending and a larger and more complicated bureaucracy have played a role in reducing the number of close congressional races over time. If anything, one would expect party leaders to be *less* likely to face competitive election challenges as a result of their superior ability to steer federal money to their districts. Furthermore, party leaders' clout places them in a strong position to help constituents who may run into problems in dealing with federal agencies. Broadly, based on these patterns, one would not expect Senate leaders to suddenly face increasing competitive

reelection campaigns.

Nevertheless, recent election returns clearly demonstrate that party leaders have come to experience more competitive reelection campaigns in recent years. Indeed, since Senator Daschle's defeat in 2004 every party leader has faced a competitive reelection campaign. In 2008 Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) faced a strong challenge from Democrat Bruce Lunsford, in 2010 Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) was nearly unseated by Republican challenger Sharron Angle, and McConnell once again faced a competitive reelection challenge from Kentucky Democratic Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes. Before moving forward, however, it is necessary that the increased competitiveness of elections featuring party leaders is not the byproduct of some other factor that is not unique to party leaders that has only recently begun to manifest itself in these elections.

Table 3 presents two OLS regression models that provide quantitative evidence that the competitiveness of elections featuring party leaders cannot be wholly attributed to factors that also affect non-leaders. (For models with data clustered by year I used bootstrap cluster standard errors (BCSE) in keeping with the recommendations of Harden (2012)) To determine whether some sort of multi-level model was necessary, I also ran ANOVA tests on the residuals by year; in all models presented in this paper, the result of the ANOVA test was not statistically significant.) The era of an attainable Senate majority is divided into two sub-time periods in these models; the first model includes election cycles occurring before the South Dakota election for the Senate in 2004 (elections from 1980-2002), while the second model includes elections since 2004, when then-Minority Leader Daschle lost reelection (elections from

2004-2012). In both models, the focal dependent variable measures the margin between the winning and losing candidates as a percent. For this analysis, I calculate this margin based upon the two-party vote. I count independents who are associated with one of the parties as de facto members of that party.

The inclusion of several variables relating to other possible explanations for increased competitiveness allows for an examination of whether this pattern is the function of other factors that apply broadly to Senate elections manifesting themselves in Senate races featuring party leaders. First, this model includes a measure of a state's competitiveness in presidential elections which is calculated by comparing the presidential results for a state to those of the country as a whole for the previous two election cycles. (To calculate this measure, which is based upon the Cook PVI (Wasserman 2014), I first took the difference between the average presidential vote in a state and the average presidential vote in the country over the previous two elections. Then, I took the absolute value of this result. Thus, for example, a state where the Democrat received an average of 54 percent in two elections compared to a national average of 50 percent would receive a value of 4.) All else equal, one would expect that states that are relatively balanced, on average, to be more likely to have competitive Senate elections than states where a strong ideological lean in favor of either party is present. The coefficient for this measure is statistically significant in both time periods. Nevertheless, party leaders in states ranging from relatively competitive (Harry Reid in 2010) to favorable to their party in national elections (Mitch McConnell in 2008 and 2014) to unfavorable to their party (Tom Daschle in 2004) have faced competitive races in recent years.

Another factor that affects the outcome of elections, including Senate races, is the phenomenon of midterm decline. Documented prominently by Campbell (1960) (as well as other authors), members of Congress in the president's party typically do poorly in midterm elections and the other party does well at the polls. To control for this phenomenon, the midterm decline variable is coded as "-1" for elections featuring senators of the president's party in a midterm, "1" for elections featuring senators not of the president's party in a midterm, and "0" for all other scenarios. Although this variable, as with the presidential margin variable, is significant in both time periods, the party leader variable still remains significant in the latter time period. Thus, the explanation that some other factor that applies broadly to Senate elections is manifesting itself in leaders' races seems less likely to be true, still leaving the puzzle of this newfound competitiveness unsolved.<sup>3</sup> Having established that the newfound competitiveness facing party leaders does not appear to stem from another confounding factor, the next step is to provide some alternative explanation for this phenomenon.

Increased legislative dysfunction has changed voters' perception of the Senate. As demonstrated by public opinion data, voters' perceptions of Congress have fallen to all-time lows. Congressional approval ratings in the Gallup Poll have been below forty percent (and in recent years, under twenty percent) for the past decade (Gallup 2014). As Senator John McCain (R-AZ) frequently jokes, congressional approval is down to "paid staff and blood relatives" (Temp 2012). Although having somewhat different viewpoints as to what is causing these problems and how to solve them, there is

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<sup>3</sup>A control variable for whether an election features an open seat is also significant.

bipartisan agreement that government isn't working the way it should and that elected officials are part of the problem (Newport 2014). Although polls increasingly show that voters claim they would like to vote out their own member of Congress, incumbent reelection rates remain high (Craighill & Clement 2014). Thus, even though voters are frustrated with the way Congress works today, the reelection of the typical senator does not appear to be a consistent target of voters' frustrations.

Senate leaders, to a greater degree than their colleagues, are likely to be blamed for ongoing legislative dysfunction as a result of how they must respond to a polarized cloture process. Both parties' leaders are expected to do everything in their power to gain an advantage for their party in the cloture process (Smith 2014). For the majority leader, this includes "filling the amendment tree," casting "wrong way" votes in order to bring up cloture petitions for future votes, and potentially holding numerous cloture votes in succession with the hope of breaking the logjam. (Note: "Filling the amendment tree" refers to procedures allowing the majority leader to prevent the minority from offering amendments to a bill.) In the case of the minority leader, the expectation is that this individual will lead a united front in opposing nearly all proposals brought forth by the majority party, as well as forcing extended debates in order to "run out the clock" (Benen 2014).

Based on the observation that party leaders are expected to do whatever possible to advance their parties agenda, the number of cloture votes should be indicative of an array of other legislative behaviors that set party leaders apart from their colleagues. An example of such a legislative behavior resulting from the cloture process that sets the majority leader apart from his or her colleagues is wrong way voting, a behavior

resulting from Senate Rule XIII. Senate Rule XIII allows for a cloture petition to be reconsidered if a reconsideration motion is made by a senator on the prevailing side. In practice, this means that the majority leader's vote is changed from "yes" to "no." I classify a vote as a "wrong way" vote if a party leader votes "no" on a failing roll call when at least 80 percent of the other senators in their party voted the opposite way. To establish this link, I hypothesize that:

*H1: As the number of cloture votes in a Senate session increases, the number of "wrong way votes" cast by a party leader will also increase.*

While beneficial for advancing their party's agenda in the Senate, the actions taken by party leaders during the polarized cloture process have the potential to be problematic for leaders in their home states. First, by virtue of their leadership post, party leaders are likely to be associated with the daily functioning (or, in modern times dysfunction) of the Senate. Polling data demonstrates that voters in party leaders' home states often associate these individuals with the dysfunction of the body. For example, despite the fact that their party's presidential candidates easily carried their states in recent presidential elections, both Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have had negative approval and personal favorability ratings in numerous polls in their home states (Sink 2012, Gardner 2010). Additionally, a September 2014 Ipsos/Reuters Poll from Kentucky indicated that the second and third most frequent words that Kentucky voters associated with McConnell were "Washington insider" and "arrogant." In contrast, only eleven percent of Kentucky voters described McConnell as a "real Kentuckian" (Ipsos 2014). Over time, the heightening of the cloture process has had deleterious effects on party leaders as voters in party lead-

ers' home states have come to associate party leaders with the dysfunction of the legislative body.

Second, the arcane nature of the cloture process opens up Senate leaders to the distortion of their actions in the Senate as a result of how the cloture process changes their behavior on the floor of the Senate. For example, as Smith (2014) notes, the media does an especially poor job of explaining the Senate procedure associated with cloture votes. This lack of clarity in reporting applies especially to Senate Rule XIII.<sup>4</sup> A glaring case of the imprecise explanation of a leader's record comes from the website of a Nevada news station which declares (WVVU-TV 2013) in its title that "Sen. Reid speaks for background bill but votes against it." It takes until halfway through the article to explain why Reid voted no and even then states that gun control supporters claimed that Reid voted no for procedural reasons, rather than noting that Senate rules require that a senator on the losing side vote with the prevailing side should he want to potentially bring the bill up for another vote in the future. A voter reading this article is likely to both be frustrated about ongoing gridlock, as well as confused about what Reid's true position is on this issue. Finally, (although this has not happened yet since Democrats were in the majority from 2007-2015) in the future, the distorted voting records that result from wrong way voting associated with Rule XIII could open up a Republican leader to challenges from a Tea Party opponent that they are too moderate.

Thus, based on the connection I posit exists between the expansion of the cloture process and the negative reaction to this of voters in party leaders' home states, I

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<sup>4</sup>Political science ideology measures also can be distorted by wrong way voting (Roberts 2007).



derive the following hypothesis:

*H2.1: The percentage of vote received by a party leader decreases as the number of cloture votes in the preceding Congress increases as compared to previous Congresses.*

Mirroring the above hypothesis, as a non-party leader senator is less likely to be blamed for the dysfunction of the Senate than party leaders and their floor behavior will be less changed by increased cloture voting than that of party leaders, it follows that:

*H2.2: The percentage of vote received by a non-party leader is unrelated to the number of cloture votes in the preceding Congress increases.*

While the cloture process by itself and voters' negative reactions are important in explaining the decline in party leaders' electoral fortunes, this phenomena by itself does not fully explain why leaders have come to consistently face competitive races for reelection. Additionally, I posit that the opposing party, seeing the additional burdens that the cloture process places on party leaders, actively target party leaders for defeat in an effort to expand the increasingly constrained array of seats that are competitive in the battle for control of the Senate. Party leaders have come to understand that by virtue of being a Senate leader, they are likely to be actively targeted for reelection. Indeed, Senator McConnell recently admitted that "When you accept the responsibility to be the leader of your party you get targeted by the other side and it just sort of goes with the turf" (Cowan 2014).

All else equal, as demonstrated in Table 3, the broad political leanings of a state are likely to rank high in the decision process for parties when selecting which seats to target. Party leaders, however, face additional electoral vulnerabilities imposed by the

cloture process. Thus, the polarized cloture process creates an additional dimension that makes seats held by party leaders more likely to be competitive in recent years. Fully understanding the liabilities of the cloture process, the other party understands that races featuring party leaders represent a unique opportunity to win a Senate seat that may not otherwise have been competitive. Having the potential to put even one more Senate seat in play in a time period when the percentage of competitive Senate seats has waned is important for a political party. As a result, one should expect to observe active efforts aimed at targeting party leaders (such as spending money) for defeat from the other party, as well as similar efforts from leaders themselves aimed at maintaining their Senate seat.

Therefore, following the logic of the above paragraph, I hypothesize that:

*H3: Overall spending is likely to be greater in races featuring party leaders than in races featuring regular senators.*

Extending and building further upon this logic, party leaders may face additional electoral targeting than even other senators facing competitive races for reelection. For example, John Thune (R-SD), who unseated Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) has sometimes been referred to as a “giant killer” by other conservatives (Rowland 2009). The reverence with which one like Thune (and, presumably, any future senators who make it to the upper chamber by defeating a party leader) stems from the—as Frances Lee puts it— “teamsmanship” that has come to define American politics (including the traditionally less ideological Senate) in recent years (Lee 2009). If politics is like a team sport, then defeating the other party’s leader is (to use an analogy) akin to sacking the other team’s quarterback. In addition to providing an important extra

seat for one's party it also serves as a morale booster for one's own party. At the same time, the other party is both demoralized and disorganized as it must choose a new leader.

Based on the increased role of teamsmanship in legislative politics, I derive the below (related) hypotheses:

*H4.1: Competitive races featuring party leaders will feature a higher level of overall spending than competitive races featuring regular senators.*

*H4.2: Competitive races featuring party leaders will feature a higher level of overall spending from challengers than competitive races featuring regular senators.*

As a whole, this section offers a potential answer to the central puzzle of this paper. Increased use of the cloture process has caused party leaders to increasingly be blamed by voters in their home states for the dysfunction of the Senate. Seeing these vulnerabilities, the other party seeks to target party leaders for defeat.

## **Methodology and Results**

Empirical evidence provides support for the hypotheses presented in the previous section. First, I establish that an increased number of cloture votes relates to other changes in floor behavior for party leaders. Second, I demonstrate that increased cloture voting relates to decreased percentages for party leaders in reelection campaigns. Finally, I show that party leaders have been targeted for defeat by the other party in terms of campaign spending. Overall, these results lend support to the theory presented in the previous section to explain the surprising increase in competitive elections facing party leaders.

To establish that increased cloture voting is indicative of a wider range of changed floor actions by party leaders, I examine the relationship between the number of wrong way votes cast by the majority leader in a Congress and the number of cloture votes cast in that Congress. As discussed previously, a wrong way vote is (in practice) a nay vote cast by a party leader so as to be able to make a motion for reconsideration under Rule XIII. The dependent variable for this model is the number of wrong way votes cast by the majority leader in each of the 97th to 112th Congresses. I determined which votes were wrong way votes by looking at legislative roll calls in these Congresses; a vote was counted as a wrong way vote if a leader voted “no” on a failing roll call when at least 80 percent of the other senators in their party voted the opposite way.[Note: While it is theoretically possible that a party leader might actually hold that position, in every roll call, the vast majority of other same-party senators voting with the party leader were more conservative (in the case of Democrats) or liberal (in the case of Republicans) than the typical senator from the party.] The focal independent variable in this model is the number of cloture votes in a Congress. I also include controls for the total number of votes in a session of Congress, the number of senators in the majority party, whether or not the House and presidency are controlled by the same party as the Senate (measured from 0 to 2), and a dummy variable for whether or not Democrats are the majority party in the Senate. Due to evidence of over dispersion, I use a negative binomial model instead of a poisson model.

The results presented in Table 5 provide evidence for the claim that increased cloture voting is emblematic of an expansion of other changed behaviors of party leaders.

The focal independent variable, the number of cloture votes in a Congress, is statistically significant while the other independent variables do not attain significance. This result suggests that, at least in the case of wrong way voting, increased cloture voting is representative of an increase in other changed behaviors by party leaders. As cloture voting has increased in Congress, an array of other actions by party leaders, such as wrong way voting, have also risen in prominence.

The small number of the cases used for testing this hypothesis necessitates caution when interpreting this model as a larger sample size should generally be used in MLE models (Long 1997). A strategy that could be used to confirm these results includes using a logistic regression model at the vote-level to test the related hypothesis that cloture votes are more likely to produce wrong-way voting than non-cloture votes. The increase in the number of cloture votes per Congress over time could then be used to confirm that a rise in cloture voting relates positively to the number of wrong-way votes. Finally, Carsey & Harden (2014) suggest permutation and randomization testing a way to test whether the effect of some treatment (in this case, cloture voting) makes an outcome (in this case, wrong way voting) more likely.

Second, I test the hypothesis that increased levels of cloture voting in Congress relate to a decreased vote share for party leaders running for reelection. The dependent variable in this OLS model is a leader's two party vote share; the data includes all races featuring party leaders from 1980 to 2010. The focal independent variable for this model is the number of cloture votes that were held in the previous Congress. Control variables include a measure of electoral competitiveness in the state, and a midterm decline variable.[Note: This measure of electoral competitiveness is calcu-

lated by averaging the Democratic presidential vote in the previous two presidential elections and (assuming uniform swing) converting that to the expected percentage in a tied election.]To establish that an increase in cloture voting has not translated to closer races for other senators, I also include a model for elections featuring non-party leaders. This model includes the same independent variables as the leader model, with two exceptions. The non-leader model includes a control variable for whether or not an election features an open seat (a factor that does not apply to the party leader model) and a control variable for whether the race occurred in or after 2004. I include this variable to both delineate between the two time periods in the models presented in the theory section and as a result of the fact that non-leader races have become less likely to have close margins over time.

The results presented in Table 9 provide support for hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2. An increased number of cloture votes has a negative, statistically significant relationship with the vote share received by party leaders. Substantively, a increase of 28 cloture votes (or approximately one standard deviation) translates to a decrease of just under six percentage points in expected vote share for a party leader. As one can observe in Figure 3, there has been a steady increase in the number of cloture votes per Congress over time. The implication of the steady increase in cloture votes based on the results of the model is that one would expect a rather sharp drop in the vote share received by party leaders (exactly what has taken place). In contrast, the relationship between vote share and cloture votes for non-party leaders is slightly positive and not significant. The non-party leader model provides further evidence for the theory presented in the previous section by demonstrating that the effects of cloture voting

on senators' vote shares is not widespread and is instead isolated to a specific type of senator.

Turning to the third hypothesis, I examine total levels of campaign spending in Senate races from 2004 to 2012.<sup>5</sup> The dependent variable for this OLS model is the amount of spending in millions of 2012 dollars. The focal independent variable measures whether or not a senator is a party leader. Control variables for this model include a measure of the competitiveness of the state (measured the same way as in the model presented in the previous section), a variable for midterm decline, and a measure of state population (due to the fact that spending may be greater in states with a large population.)

The results presented in Table 8 provide support for the third hypothesis. Overall, when controlling for the competitiveness of a state, races featuring a party leader see an expected increase in total spending of just under 30 million dollars in total spending. Considering the fact that the mean level of total spending for a Senate seat during the 2004-2012 time period is 15 million dollars, the higher levels of spending in races featuring party leaders are both substantively and statistically significant. (Note: I also ran models for the earlier time period of 1980-2002 and did not find the party leader variable to be significant.) This is not to say that other factors do not matter in determining the level of spending in a race; indeed, all three of the other independent variables in this model are also statistically significant. Rather, this result (in keeping with the theory presented in the previous section) suggests that the party leadership status now represents an additional dimension that is taken into account by a party

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<sup>5</sup>Summary statistics for this model can be found in Table 2.

when deciding whether or not to target a race.

To test hypotheses 4.1 and 4.2, I use data measuring levels of campaign spending in the closest Senate races, defined as those decided by a single digit margin. The models used to test these hypotheses feature the same independent variables as the model used to test hypothesis 3. The main difference for these models is that the data is limited to only those races that were decided by a single digit margin in the previous election. In addition, the dependent variable used to test hypothesis 4.2 measures the level of spending by the challenger-party candidate, rather than the overall level of spending in the election. (The dependent variable for the model used to test hypothesis 4.1 remains a measure of overall spending, now for the most competitive races.)

The results in these models demonstrate that contests featuring party leaders have become a central part of the battle for control of the Senate. In both models, the Senate leader variable is statistically significant; interestingly, neither the competitiveness nor midterm decline variable attain significance in either model. (The state population variable attains significance in the first model, but not the second.) In total, an additional 23.7 million dollars in expected money is spent as compared to the typical close Senate race, and an additional 10.8 million dollars in expected money is spent by challengers as compared to the typical close Senate race. These results provide support for the claim that party leaders are being targeted by the other party for defeat and also demonstrate that party leaders face an electoral challenge that even their colleagues in tough races do not experience. This finding demonstrates that the growing importance of “teammanship” in Congress has prompted parties to target party leaders even more forcefully senators of the other party who are vulnerable by



virtue of other factors.

Overall, the results presented in this section provide support for the explanation to the central puzzle presented in the previous section. Cloture votes, which represent the rise of a range of new or previously uncommon floor behaviors by party leaders, strongly relate to the decline in vote share by party leaders in recent elections. Evidence also points to party leaders being actively targeted for defeat by the other party: more money is spent in races featuring party leaders when controlling for party identification. Indeed, races featuring party leaders feature more overall spending and spending by the challenging party even when limiting the sample to the most closely contested races. In total, party leaders have suddenly found themselves thrust into more competitive (and expensive) reelection campaigns than most of their colleagues as a result of changes within Congress that are in many ways outside of their control.

### **Broader Implications and and Conclusion**

As Senate leaders are forced to focus more time on electoral politics, less time is available for legislating. As stated by Cox & McCubbins (2005), legislators hold four goals: winning reelection, having influence in Congress, shaping what they view to be good public policy, and helping their party gain or maintain majority party status in the institution. As demonstrated in this paper, two of those goals (winning reelection and holding majority party status) have become more difficult for party leaders. As time is a scarce resource, the additional time and effort party leaders must spend on electoral politics comes at the expense of engaging in constructive policymaking efforts. Party leaders shouldn't necessarily be faulted for turning their attention more

to electoral goals as a result of these additional burdens. Indeed, as some scholars such as Mayhew (1974) note, winning reelection is the proximate goal for legislators as one must first win reelection before pursuing other goals. In pursuit of this goal leaders spend more time on electoral politics so as to preserve their place in Congress, thereby spending less time on policymaking in an already-dysfunctional upper chamber.

Dysfunction in the Senate compounds upon itself as existing dysfunction provides a further disincentive for cooperation among party leaders. Even when Senate leaders want to pursue constructive policymaking opportunities at the expense of other goals, the dysfunction that already exists in the body serves as a barrier to additional action. Party leaders are then faced with the choice of investing time in policymaking opportunities that are likely to prove to be fruitless or spending their time and efforts on electoral politics. Thus the choice to focus on winning reelection and helping one's party maintain or attain the majority (or a filibuster-proof majority) is made even more appealing by existing dysfunction in the body. As a result, dysfunction continues to grow in the Senate and it becomes even less likely that the body will engage in constructive policy efforts.

An additional implication of this research relates to the type of senator who may want to serve as a party leader in future years. Seeing the electoral challenges faced by Tom Daschle, Harry Reid, and Mitch McConnell, a senator who has even a hint of electoral problems may forgo running for a leadership position. As the polarization of the cloture process makes it difficult to get anything done, the increased electoral burdens now facing party leaders may make being a party leader simply not worth it to numerous senators. Ultimately, it is the country that suffers the most from this,

as electoral security, rather than policy credentials or the ability to pass legislation determines which senators are most likely to become party leaders. In a time period where political institutions have been unable to provide solutions to an array of problems, dysfunction may continue to compound upon itself, rendering the Senate even less able to carry out its necessary functions. As a result, American democracy suffers as democratic political institutions such as the Senate are increasingly seen as being unable to provide adequate policy responses to the important policy issues of the day or indeed even carry out the basic tasks of governing.

## APPENDIX: TABLES

Table 1: Summary Statistics, 1980-2002

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Absolute Margin	409	22.774	20.548	0.093	100
Open Seat	409	0.188	0.391	0	1
Average Presidential Margin	409	5.399	4.223	0	19
Midterm Decline	409	-0.042	0.708	1	1
Senate Leader	409	0.015	0.120	0	1

Table 2: Summary Statistics, 2004-2012

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Absolute Margin	172	24.980	19.085	0.013	100
Open Seat	172	0.244	0.431	0	1
Average Presidential Margin	172	7.744	5.364	0	22
Midterm Decline	172	0.000	0.640	1	1
Senate Leader	172	0.017	0.131	0	1
Total Spending	172	15.065	13.038	0.608	72.139

*Note: Spending in 2012 Millions*

Table 3: Determinants of Senate Election Margins

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Absolute Margin	
	(1980-2002)	(2004-2012)
Average Presidential Margin	0.927* (0.356)	1.174* (0.121)
Senate Leader	8.195* (3.051)	-20.836* (6.227)
Midterm Decline	3.683 (2.340)	4.905* (0.341)
Open Seat	-12.631* (2.170)	-8.151* (1.969)
Constant	20.181* (1.694)	18.241* (1.536)
Observations	409	172
R <sup>2</sup>	0.112	0.204
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.103	0.185
$\chi^2$ (df = 4)	48.575*	39.347*

*Note.\* p < 0.05*

Table 4: Summary Statistics, Wrong Way Voting Model

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Total Wrong Way Votes	16	5.250	5.972	0	21
Unified Government Measure	16	1.125	0.500	0	2
Size of Majority	16	54.188	2.257	51	59
Democratic Majority	16	0.500	0.516	0	1
Number of Cloture Votes	16	61.375	39.170	19	178

Table 5: Determinants of Wrong Way Voting, 97th to 112th Congresses

<i>Dependent var.: Num. of Wrong Way Votes</i>	
Total Wrong Way Votes	
Number of Cloture Votes	0.022* (0.007)
Total Votes	0.004 (0.002)
Size of Majority	-0.129 (0.101)
Unified Government Measure	-0.137 (0.482)
Democratic Majority	0.892 (0.511)
Constant	4.107 (5.705)
Observations	16
Log Likelihood	-38.929
$\theta$	2.517* (1.503)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	89.858

*Note.\**  $p < 0.05$

Table 6: Summary Statistics, Leader Model

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Leader Vote Percentage	9	61.689	7.845	49.400	70.100
Cloture Votes	9	55.667	28.749	23	112
Midterm Decline	9	0.000	0.500	1	1
Average Democratic Pres. Vote	9	53.000	7.106	39	60

Table 7: Summary Statistics, Non-Leader Model

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Cloture Votes	572	50.348	24.506	19	112
Win Percentage	572	61.709	10.106	50	100
Open Seat	572	0.208	0.406	0	1
Midterm Decline	572	-0.026	0.688	1	1
Average Democratic Percentage 2004 or later	572	52.1	7.418	30	72
	572	0.457	0.295	0	1

Table 8: Overall Spending in Senate Races, 2004-Present

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Overall Spending in Millions of 2012 Dollars
Senate Leader	29.651* (3.385)
Average Presidential Margin	-0.745* (0.119)
Midterm Decline	-1.891* (0.437)
Population in Millions	0.500* (0.085)
Constant	17.167* (2.134)
Observations	172
R <sup>2</sup>	0.295
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.278
$\chi^2$	60.213* (df = 4)

Note: \*p<0.05;  
Used BCSE.

Table 9: Cloture Votes and Vote Share for Senators

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Leader Two Party Percent	Winning Percent
	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Non-leader</i>
	(1)	(2)
Constant	38.088* (11.114)	56.507 (2.316)
Yearly Cloture Votes	-0.214* (0.063)	0.002 (0.035)
Avg. Presidential Margin	0.670* (0.216)	0.113* (0.049)
Midterm Decline	-0.854 (3.672)	1.967* (0.820)
Open Seat		-5.705* (0.755)
2004 or Later		1.539 (1.504)
Observations	9	572
R <sup>2</sup>	0.830	0.083
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.729	0.075
Residual Std. Error	4.085 (df = 5)	
F Statistic	8.165* (df = 3; 5)	
$\chi^2$		49.519* (df = 5)

*Note:* \*p<0.05;

Used BCSE for non-leader model.



Table 10: Summary Statistics for Fourth Hypothesis Models

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Avg. Pres. Margin	39	5.718	4.174	0	15
Midterm Decline	39	-0.256	0.498	1	1
Senate Leader	39	0.077	0.270	0	1
Pop. in Millions	39	5.701	4.031	0.655	17.397
Chall. Spending (Mill. of 2012 Dollars)	39	12.555	8.567	2.862	42.212
Overall Spending (Mill. of 2012 Dollars)	39	26.303	13.396	9.069	72.139

Table 11: Spending in Competitive Races

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Overall Spend. (Millions)	Chall. Spend. (Millions)
	(Overall Spending)	(Challenger Spending)
Senate Leader	23.716* (5.039)	10.871* (5.236)
Avg. Pres. Margin	-0.585 (0.551)	-0.301 (0.358)
Midterm Decline	-1.514 (2.480)	-0.764 (1.630)
Population (Millions)	1.310* (0.618)	0.789 (0.446)
Constant	19.964* (4.967)	8.746* (3.170)
Observations	39	39
R <sup>2</sup>	0.392	0.267
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.320	0.181
$\chi^2$ (df = 4)	19.406*	12.131*

*Note:* \*p<0.05;  
Used BCSE.

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