THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY HOUSE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE

By

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To Shelly, my love, who got me past the finish line and beyond
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY HOUSE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE

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Major: Political Science

This dissertation considers the contemporary U.S. House of Representatives from a historical institutionalist methodological perspective that allows for the identification and examination of patterns of political development within the institution overtime. From these patterns, our composite analysis of House majority party dynamics in the post-revolution era provides purchase in understanding movements of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse in the current political arena. Focusing on the preference homogeneity “condition” of the conditional party government thesis, we evaluate this chosen operational model of House majority parties in terms of its long-term sustainability. In doing so, we chart the developmental dynamics of the Republican party from 1994 to 2006 (and later the Democratic majority from 2007 to 2010), illustrating the fluctuating degree to which party members were uniform in their political
preferences overtime. In outlining competing tensions within the party caucus, we demonstrate how members reacted to major shifts or crises that occurred in their operational environment during their tenure as House majority. From this evidence, we challenge the sustainability of conditional party governance, contributing to the ongoing debate presented by its theoretical detractors.

Our analysis of recent House majorities shows that while conditional party governance is attempted in certain contexts, this initial decision becomes increasingly restrictive for members seeking to pursue their preferences in an evolving political climate. Employing an originally constructed database to trace ideological homogeneity of House majorities in the post-revolution era, we show that shifting environmental context and leadership failure contribute to the unsustainable nature of party governance in a Madisonian system. From a path dependency perspective, we illustrate that shifts in the very conditions that make party governance possible show themselves to be the seeds of future crisis. In the ever-changing operational environment of our political system, we demonstrate that those choosing to take on a party governance operational model have found these initial choices increasingly constraining on future actions that must occur in a newly emerging context.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY HOUSE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE

A New Majority in the House

The autumn of 1994 presented for the Democratic party more than a falling of leaves from the trees of Washington D.C., but a falling from political control of the Congress for the first time in nearly half a century. To their surprise, under the leadership and tutelage of Newt Gingrich, the Republican party seized majority status in the House of Representatives after having remained in the minority for so many decades. Unforeseen by most political elites and academics alike, the shock of political revolution took Washington and the halls of higher learning by complete surprise. For generations, Democrats had dominated the electoral and legislative landscape within the House of Representatives by employing a decentralized, constituency service model of governing built upon committee service and social welfare policy. Yet, with their ideologically-unifying document *The Contract with America* in hand, the Republicans accomplished in November of 1994 a goal that had eluded the party for nearly 50 years: becoming the majority party within Congress.

As the election fallout began to settle, both political scientists and media pundits sought to understand how this once “permanent minority” could so suddenly become the governing party within the legislative branch. When taken together, such evidence as the Republican’s *Contract*, their incorporation of southern conservative values, a newly minted (and greatly strengthened) party leadership under Newt Gingrich, and a series of centralizing organizational reforms used to enforce their *Revolution* led many to begin arguing that the Republicans’ success in 1994 was achieved through a strong sense of ideological unity – a characteristic that has since been commonly employed by
both congressional scholars and media observers to define the majority party (Mayer,
1996; Bruck, 1995). In particular, this rise of an ideologically homogenous Republican
caucus to power (in conjunction with other factors such as reforms to strengthen party
leadership, and increasingly deep interparty division) led certain academic camps to
argue that the institution of Congress had entered into a new era of legislative
operations under a model of conditional party government (Aldrich and Rhode, 2000;

Since the early 1990s, legislative scholars have been debating about how
Congress and the members within it have changed in the wake of this “Revolution;” and
in the years that followed, how the contemporary period of legislative politics helps the
field to understand the development of this institution as it operates overtime. In
participating in this dialogue, this dissertation presents a political development-narrative
account of the Republican tenure as the majority party in the House of Representatives
from 1995 to 2006 (as well as an account of the Democratic majority from 2007 to
2010). With an eye for how long term legislative processes have evolved following the
post-reform era, we seek to understand the political development of the contemporary
House as the institution has operated in an environment of change.

**Research Purpose and Dissertation Thesis**

The purpose of this developmental-narrative is to consider academic tensions
between the leading explanatory arguments of the post-reform era Congress; namely,
the conditional party governance thesis provided by David Rhode and John Aldrich,
versus its criticisms and alternative model of constructive partisanship presented by
Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer. An investigation of these tensions forms the
foundation our primary research contribution to the broader political development
literature: understanding the developmental dynamics of the Republican\(^1\) caucus during its tenure as the majority in the House of Representatives, and addressing the lessons learned from this experience as it pertains to today’s era of legislative party governance in an operational environment of change and crisis.

Our thesis states that the conditional party government model has failed to see that the “conditions” on which the model is supported – most specifically the persistence of intraparty ideological homogeneity – are highly dependent upon (1) continued effectiveness of newly empowered party leadership, and (2) long term environmental stability conducive to a highly partisan organization and its agenda. In creating our contemporary political development account, we employ a path dependency theoretical perspective backed by a series of descriptive statistics\(^2\) that allows this dissertation to chart the dynamics of the Republican House as it evolved over time. This developmental analysis provides the foundational support of our thesis: The conditional party governance argument presents an illusion of party strength, failing to fully account for

---

\(^1\) While the bulk of this dissertation focuses on the Republican House from 1994-2006, we also consider the development of later Democratic (2007-2010) and current Republican majorities.

\(^2\) This dissertation’s descriptive statistics are based upon an originally constructed database in which a member’s National Journal vote rating, electoral region, leadership position, committee service, and seniority status are collected and compiled. This database represents the gathered “liberal percentage” score of each individual Republican House member from 1994-2008 (and the “conservative percentage” score for Democrats from 2006-2010). Placed on a scale from zero – 100, our descriptive statistics are calculated using the positions that an individual member took in voting on “Key Votes” (these votes illustrate a legislator’s stance on important votes on national issues, as selected by the National Journal staff and consultants) as compared to every other member of the House in the given year. The lower the score, the less liberal that individual is on that particular set of policy issues in that particular year; or, one could say, the lower the member’s score, the more conservative that member is compared to other members in the House in any given session (when ranking Democrats, the lower the member’s conservative score, the more liberal the member). We rank Republican members into ideological subgroups from most to least conservative: Ultra-Conservative, Strong-Conservative, Conservative, Weak Conservative, Patrician (when ranking Democrats, the ideological subgroups range from most to least liberal). For a more complete explanation of our empirical analysis, see the attached appendix.
two fundamental realities that limit the sustainability of this framework as an operational model for Congress – first, the “shortcomings” of party leaders who often fail to achieve their stated political agenda despite increased political authority; second (and more significantly), inevitable yet unpredictable fluctuations in the operational environment of the House that repeatedly leave a structurally and ideologically rigid majority party in crisis.

This work is purposefully qualitative in nature: The conditional party governance model (which argues that strong party leadership and ideological homogeneity are the dominant factors in explaining legislative behavior in Congress) is highly context specific; as such, we argue that it has failed to see that the “conditions” on which party governance is supported are greatly dependent upon what James Madison might call “enlightened statesman” (i.e. effective party leadership), and what Machiavelli might refer to as “Fortuna’s Smile” (i.e. an external environment conducive to an organization and its agenda). While the predictive analysis employed to support party governance is compelling, its occurrence is not founded in a permanence of preference homogeneity within the Congress. Rather, in paying close attention to the “stickiness” of past choices (that is, the affect of previous decisions on newly emerging contexts and issues), we find that party governance – and its variable degree of strength – within the Republican majority fluctuates as a response to shifts in the operational environment in which the House has operated over the last decades.

In tracing the developmental dynamics of contemporary House majorities, we demonstrate that preference homogeneity – again, a fundamental “condition” for party governance – is not a permanent feature of House majorities, but a contextually
supported factor that exists for short moments in time (often in the wake of crises). While parties who benefit from short-term environmental advantages may choose to exploit these moments as an opportunity to empower leaders and adopt ideological unity (hence, the illusion of strengthened parties), the preference homogeneity necessary to sustain support for leaders and their party agenda cannot be assumed in an environment of change. Taken together, this study concludes that as the majority party moves forward in time – increasingly bombarded by the pressures of governance over a heterogeneous society – the preference homogeneity made possible by long-exhausted short-term advantages will fade.

Our developmental-narrative allows us to consider the nuance missed in the conditional party governance argument: whereas the party governance camp argues that the model’s "conditions" have been stable overtime (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 289; 2009, pp. 233), we show that these conditions have fluctuated in response both to leadership outcomes within the party, and to external changes in the House’s operational environment. In certain circumstances, these outcomes and changes are supportive of party governance (for example, the 1994 Revolution and post 9/11 sessions); in others, each is quite restrictive (for example, 1995-96 government shutdowns and the souring war in Iraq). In all, we argue that in initially embracing a party governance model, House Republicans placed themselves in a highly precarious

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3 In reference to the stability of these conditions, Aldrich and Rhode have repeatedly argued: “Will the patterns that our theory describes – internally homogeneous and polarized parties with empowered leadership – continue to prevail…. The answer to these questions is probably yes…. We have no reason to expect that these patterns will change in the future” (2001: 289); again when they later posit, “CPG theory has a number of key features we have to account for to demonstrate continued applicability…. Evidence indicates that the underlying ‘condition’ for CPG is still well satisfied” (2009: 233); and finally when they state boldly, “All indications are that the theoretical account offered by CPG is as applicable in 2008 as it was in 1995” (2009: 237).
position – while their initial operational surroundings may have been conducive to this action, leadership failure and/or eventual shifts in their environment lead to crisis as their established political brand and operational model became incompatible with their new institutional context. This finding leads to our primary criticism of party governance: because one cannot always depend on upon effective leadership and an advantageous operational environment, the sustainability of this operational model is put into question. Through our qualitative analysis, we present a cycle of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse that we argue must be considered when seeking to understand this contemporary period of legislative political development.

The conditional party governance model has not been without other detractors: most clearly articulated by the constructive partisanship model (which argues that sustainable legislative production occurs in periods of moderated partisanship), party governance in the House is always “tentative and fragile” due to the ever present threat for cross-cutting issues to arise between members within a majority party (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997b; 2001b). Our argument represents an expansion of this criticism and an original contribution to the academic debate: In additionally examining the effect of leadership enhancement and contextual change on the sustainability of intraparty ideological homogeneity as considered overtime, we cast further doubt on the utility of legislative operations that adopt party governance. In illustrating repeated patterns of development, we show that parties who incorporate this model inevitably find themselves in a progressively insecure position as their operational context shifts in a manner not conducive to their chosen organizational path. As such, the findings of this dissertation represent an original contribution to the broader academic criticism that
party governance is neither a fully complete theoretical explanation of congressional politics; nor is it a pragmatic model for sustainable legislative operations. Conditional party government – while it has been attempted in the post-reform era – is not a permanent, sustainable fixture of Congress; rather, we present the argument that its occurrence is a context-specific facet within the broader development of legislative politics.

**The “Thread” of this Dissertation**

In assessing the effects of leadership failure and shifting environmental contexts, our argument is developed over a series of six chapters that detail the political development of the House Republicans (and later Democrats) as the majority party moved through time.

**Theoretical Perspectives and a History of House Development, 1910 to 1994**

To better comprehend the context of the recent Republican majority, we begin in Chapter 1 with an explanation of our conceptualization of legislative politics when considered overtime. Opening the chapter with a justification of our methodological outlook and its utility in grappling with the contemporary political development of the U.S. House of Representatives, we focus on path dependency theory’s concept of institutional and policy “stickiness.” Quite useful in understanding how initial choices by political actors in one contextual setting become restrictive on these individuals when operating in future settings, this perspective helps us to understand how embracing party governance becomes problematic in an operational environment of change. Following this argument, we look back through history to understand how Congress as an institution has developed overtime since the events of an earlier legislative revolution – that being the downfall of strong parties under Speaker Cannon and the rise of
committee government. In tracing the historical development of the legislative branch during the 20th century, we address the causes and consequences of the reform era in Congress and introduce the model of conditional party government as a defining framework for the post-reform era – in particular, we discuss the necessary “condition” of intraparty preference homogeneity.

After providing this historical account of congressional development, we consider two divergent strains of thought when it comes to conceptualizing the contemporary Congress: the conditional party government thesis, versus the constructive partisanship model – again, a criticism of strong party governance.4 Through our descriptive examination of the Republican majority as it operated over the past decades, we seek in this dissertation to shed more light on this academic divide; both in terms of each model's explanatory power and operational sustainability overtime.

The 104th House: Choices and Consequences, 1994 to 1995

Once legislative history is considered and these theoretical concepts are vetted, we chart in Chapters 2 and 3 our analysis of the actions taken by the young Republican majority following their early electoral and legislative successes with the Contract. To do so, we begin in Chapter 3 by detailing the underlying movements within the Republican experience in the House since the late 1980s, examining the methods by which Republicans orchestrated their takeover of the House. Specifically, we consider two factors within this period that not only made the Revolution possible; but more

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4 Though we introduce these competing conceptualizations of the House in Chapter 2, we consider these arguments and criticisms throughout this dissertation. In doing so, we seek to trace how this academic dialogue has responded to developments in the Congress throughout this contemporary period, and to contribute our own comments in the on-going debate. Specifically, in questioning the sustainability of conditional party governance, we also offer a “friendly amendment” to the constructive partisanship model in terms of its need to consider the potential for national crisis moments to extend the limits of party government as an operational model.
importantly, were central to the new majority’s operational structure and to the dramatic institutional reforms demanded by the conservatives’ legislative platform – first, the leadership of Newt Gingrich; second, the political environment surrounding the 1994 election. As to the first, we provide a thorough discussion of Gingrich’s leadership activity in the years building up to 1994: his work with the Conservative Opportunity Society, his use of GOPAC and status as minority whip in recruiting deeply conservative candidates, and the influence of his chief supporters in the House (fellow southerners Richard Armey and Tom DeLay of Texas). Importantly, we provide in this chapter an analysis of the Contract in terms of its employment both in the mid-term election, and its later function in the first session of the 104th Congress. Secondly, we illustrate the favorable environmental context in which the Republicans and their House leaders were operating: the politics of “character assassination” following the downfall of Speaker Wright, unified government under an inexperienced Democratic Administration, the popular rejection of the Clinton healthcare reform legislation, and the political opportunities of a thawing “Solid South.”

Having traced the developments leading to the 1994 Revolution, we next outline the initial choices made by Gingrich and his “Young Turks” in the wake of this momentous event. In presenting evidence that the new majority sought to take the House down a new institutional path, we discuss the centralizing nature of the party’s reforms in their first “Revolutionary” session. These reforms sought a direct break with long-held legislative rules and norms – the creation of term limits on the Speaker and committee chairs, the circumventing of committees in the legislative process (for example; the creation of the Speaker’s Advisory Group, elimination of three committees,
and importance of party loyalty over member seniority in committee assignment), and the establishment of enhanced authority for party leadership (for example; the enlargement of the Speaker’s vote in the Committee on Committees, and the creation of “Party Taskforces” in-place of traditional committee work). Of particular importance, the Contract also demanded drastic policy reform, especially concerning targeted federal spending programs aimed at substantial budgetary reductions.

We introduce in these chapters a series of descriptive statistics that analyze member actions and associations, addressing the new majority’s early ideological structure, partisan outlook, and adopted operational framework. Most importantly, we offer empirical evidence⁵ that this new path chosen by the young Republican majority was not only indicative of conditional party governance; moreover, this moment of high intraparty ideological homogeneity was the primary tool used by party leadership in their efforts to fulfill the mandates of the Contract. In providing this analysis of the electoral and legislative actions taken by the young majority in their first year of revolution-style governance during the 104th Congress, we lay the groundwork for our primary research contribution.

In multiple ways, the Republican Revolution and the reforms that followed represent a “critical juncture” in the progress of the House upon which the young Republican majority attempted to push the institution down a new developmental path – whether the action was the dramatically enhanced powers of the party leadership, the undercutting of traditional committee activity, or the demands for radical policy change;

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⁵ See most specifically Figure 3-6 (pg. 75) in which we find a strong negative relationship between the number of members in an ideological subgroup and the degree of ideological liberalism of that subgroup; a finding indicative of the strong intraparty ideological homogeneity necessary for party governance.
the new majority sought to remove and reconfigure the chamber in such a way as to remake the structure of the House. Of central importance to contemporary congressional development, these seemingly beneficial choices made by the majority in one context would not necessarily retain their advantage overtime: Despite short-term successes for the “Revolutionary” Republicans, we show in Chapter 4 that this new developmental path would remain “sticky,” thus planting the seeds for future crisis as their newly empowered leaders stumbled and their favorable political climate evaporated.

We illustrate in Chapter 4 the negative consequences of these initial decisions for the Republican House as it entered into a series of budget shutdowns against inter-institutional rivals – a moderate Senate and Democratic President Bill Clinton. Finding that the new majority did attempt to act in accord with party governance as their chosen operational model in the 104th Congress, we present a discussion of our primary criticism of the conditional party governance model and the sustainability of its requisite “conditions.” Simply stated, the process of development from the 1994 election through the 105th Congress represents the beginning of a defining pattern for the Republican tenure as the House majority. We show that in multiple instances, the Republicans (and later the Democrats) were advantaged by short-term circumstances within the political arena. Based upon these favorable conditions and initially successful leadership, the majority adopted an operational model indicative of party governance. Unfortunately for the majority, we illustrate how these conditions were fleeting – exposing the tenuous authority of party leadership and fluctuating levels of preference homogeneity overtime.
In Chapter 5, we build on our primary criticisms surrounding the conditional party government thesis, again employing our series of descriptive statistics to present the Republican’s struggles as they continued to lead the House from 1995 to 2000. Here, we introduce data to assess the validity of popular notions concerning persistent high levels of unity within the Republican House, and present original evidence\(^6\) that outlines a pattern of change that occurred within the conservative majority.

Through an examination of the ideological homogeneity shifts experienced by the Republican House between the 104\(^{th}\) to 106\(^{th}\) congresses, the failed workings of leadership and organizational structure, and the changing regional associations held by various members; we expand our analysis to see how these constraints evolved overtime from 1995 to 2000. In terms of the post-revolution period, this chapter examines growing disunity within the House GOP, particularly following the 1995 budget debacle with the Clinton Whitehouse, later impeachment trials, and electoral stalemate in 1998 and 2000. From a path dependency perspective, we portray how such defining moments took the Republicans down a course that at first reinforced unity under a clear and authoritative party leadership, but that with time placed pressure on individual members to pursue incongruent policy preferences.

These events and outcomes present a pattern of development in attempting party governance: The first step in the pattern; in riding a wave of unity built upon short-term favorable operational conditions and successful leadership action, House

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\(^6\) See most specifically Figure 5-6 (pg. 142) in which we show the growth and decline of political subgroups within the Republican House in response to choices made and events experienced in the first half of their majority tenure.
members make an initial decision to empower and follow their party leadership. Following this step; newly empowered leadership, in pursuing a promised ideologically-driven (and as such, a politically controversial) policy agenda, make a subsequent choice to employ party governance in an attempt to exploit these short-term advantages. These two steps are consistent with the conditional party governance model. Despite new organizational reforms to institute party authority, we find that these two choices place leaders and their members in a position in which continued party success depends on the outcome of issues and conditions beyond the party’s control. In the third phase of the pattern; following inappropriate leadership activity and/or unfavorable shifts in the operational conditions surrounding the issue, the party faces political failure on the promised agenda (this failure is often to the benefit of inter-institutional or inter-party rivals). Finally; as a result of failed action, the party experiences a loss of intraparty ideological unity as members scramble to pursue individual preferences rather than those of their defeated party platform. Taken together, it is a pattern of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse in which initial decisions become future obstacles within a dynamic operational environment.

In concluding this section of our developmental account, we employ our research to illustrate the ideological-unity patterns that have arisen within the contemporary Republican party as a result of leadership failure and shifting operational environments following the first days of their majority – patterns which show fluctuation and normalization in ideological unity one would not expect if assuming conditional party
governance⁷. In terms of the contemporary Congress, we demonstrate that the initial choice to adopt party governance became increasingly constraining in future contexts. Whether the constraint was failure to achieve the promised political agenda because of a bumbling party leadership, or an unfavorable shift in the political environment surrounding the House; the conditions necessary to sustain an ideologically and structurally ridged majority party faded overtime.

A Pattern Repeated: Unity in the Face of Tragedy, 2000 to 2006

In the same theme, Chapter 6 presents a continued account of the Republicans as the majority party in Congress by considering their experience in a post-9/11 era of unified government: As in Chapters 3 and 4, we examine patterns highlighting the development of divisions within the Republicans as they pertain to leadership activities, regionalism, and the ideology of rank-and-file House members.

In response to the 9/11 crisis, we show that the Republican House once again adopted ideological preference patterns⁸ and organizational behavior predicted by the conditional party governance model. Unforeseen by the critics of conditional party governance⁹, we find that a combination of contextual shift and institutional “stickiness” help to explain the return of intraparty ideological homogeneity – regardless, this

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⁷ See most specifically Figure 5-9 (pg. 149). As compared to the strength of ideological homogeneity in 1995, the Republican party experienced moderation and normalization of member preference as it developed overtime and in response to leadership failure and inhospitable environmental shift.

⁸ See most specifically Figure 6-1 (pg. 157), in which the party – following the 9/11 crisis – returned to an ideological homogeneity pattern similar to that displayed in 1995.

⁹ Dodd and Oppenheimer argue in 1997 and early 2001 that the conditions necessary for party governance had reached their operational limits. Yet, we find that the constructive partisanship model – though we endorse its broader criticisms – needs to consider the potential impact of national crisis. Given the ability of such critical moments to change the developmental course of political dynamics, the limits of party government can be extended when dramatic shifts occur in the operational environment. The 9/11 crisis and Republican response to the event represent such a shift. As such, we argue that the constructive partisanship model be amended to consider the impact of shifting operational environments and leadership response to these unique moments in time.
increased party strength was again unsustainable. The reforms that enhanced party leadership and weakened committee autonomy remained present throughout each Congress since the 104th. When contexts were favorable, parties attempted to utilize the reforms in employing party governance so as to take advantage of these conditions. Given the context of the political arena after 9/11, we find that the early 2000s presented such a moment in time. Several events highlight this re-adoption of party governance: the removal of term-limits for the Speaker’s office, DeLay’s advancement to Majority Leader in reward for party loyalty, and the forcing of controversial legislation by party leadership. This context was exacerbated by a return to united government under a newly strengthened President Bush. In passing the Iraq War resolution, tax cut legislation in 2001 and 2003, and other contentious bills (Medicare Part D, No Child Left Behind, attempted Social Security reform, etc.); we find that the House GOP, their leaders, and the President’s future were all linked under the same unified conservative brand. Yet, the advantage gained in the aftermath of crisis was only present in the short-term.

In each case for the Republican House, we show this initial choice was again unwise: despite enhanced authority, the move towards party governance would – overtime – result in political turmoil as leaders failed to behave appropriately and/or the operational context shifted to become inhospitable. In terms of shifting operational environments, the Republicans were repeatedly battered by an Iraqi quagmire internationally, and Hurricane Katrina domestically. Not only had the Republican leadership “Hitched their Wagon” to a souring Bush Administration brand, political scandal surrounding Majority Leader DeLay cemented in the minds of many voters the
failure of Republican leadership. Just as in the first half of their tenure, the conditions that encouraged party governance began to turn against the majority who had become entrenched in their adopted operational model. As a result, ideological heterogeneity once again defined the conservative majority.

The period from 2000 to 2006 represents a repeated pattern of development in attempting conditional party governance as was presented in Chapter 5: First, strong partisanship based on early external success (i.e., the Republican response to 9/11 tragedies). Second, a decision to push for a deeply conservative and contentious political agenda supported by strong partisanship (i.e., the War in Iraq). Third, a major defeat or struggle on a newly emerging event caused by a shift in operational context for which the ideologically polarized party and their leadership was unable to adapt (i.e. Iraq quagmire, Hurricane Katrina, Tom Delay). Finally, the growth of ideological division and defection away from party unity. In all, Chapter 6 once again presents the instability associated with the choice to employ conditional party governance – Despite short-term advantages provided by the 9/11 crisis, we see again a pattern of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse in which initial decisions become future obstacles within a dynamic operational environment.

**Different Majority but Similar Story, 2006 to 2010**

In Chapter 7 – to provide a more thorough account of the contemporary Congress – we continue our study by conducting a review of the Democratic majority in the House following the fall of the Republicans in 2006. Here we illustrate the developmental

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10 See most specifically Figure 6-8 (pg.192). Here we see almost identical patterns of ideological division and preference disunity within the Republican majority in two separate periods following the decision to adopt party governance.
dynamics of the liberal majority from 2006 to 2010 as compared to earlier periods of congressional politics, and consider possible causes of loss during the 2010 midterm elections. Though not a perfect reflection of their conservative counterparts, the short tenure of the Democrats in the post-Revolution House mirrors that of the first and second halves of the Republican experience.

In their first two years, though they had adopted party governance based upon the electoral success of party leaders and a certain degree of ideological unity, the Democrats chose this operational model in the face of divided government. Like the Republicans in the 1990s, the new majority faced a separation of powers issue that impeded their political efforts. As had conservatives in 1995-1996, the Democrats pursued a controversial and ideologically driven agenda – that being immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq – a volatile policy choice that put the majority into direct conflict with an adversarial White House. Just as President Clinton before him, President Bush was able to block the Speaker and broader House leadership from attaining their electoral promises. Despite their unity (though not to the same degree as present in the 104th Congress), Democrats experienced the same difficulties as had Republicans in their first period as the majority. The second half of their tenure was also comparable to that of the GOP. Similar to the gains made by Republicans in the aftermath of 9/11, Democrats were advantaged in 2008 by an economic crisis that shifted the operational environment into their favor. Further, this return to unified government cemented a relationship between the House and the Obama “brand.” Yet – like we found in the mid-

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11 See most specifically Figure 7-4 (pg. 203), and our discussion of the efforts by Pelosi and other party leaders. In comparison to Republicans in 1995 and 2002, levels of ideological unity were strong for Democrats as they re-entered majority status, though not as strong as earlier conservatives.
2000s – as this brand began to tarnish in the controversy over healthcare reform and a stagnant economy, members responded by disassociation and localization away from party leaders. Resembling their 2006 election counterpart, the 2010 mid-terms were much a referendum on the politics of the Obama Administration and Democratic party leadership.

In all, while their experiences are not exactly the same, we see enough similarities to again question the sustainability of party governance as a model for House operations. In both periods of the Democratic majority, the results were much like those of the Republicans before: policy failure (i.e. no troop removal), disunity (following soured healthcare reform), and eventual electoral failure. We can also say that the ideological trend of the Democrats was similar to that of the Republicans: At the end of their tenure as majority, the ideological spectrum of the Democrats was much more normalized than that of the party in 2007\textsuperscript{12}, a pattern not expected if assuming conditional party governance.

**Criticism of Conditional Party Governance**

Finally, we conclude with our overall assessment of the developmental dynamics of the Republican (and later Democratic) majority in the House. In particular, we consider the theoretical and practical implications of our findings as they relate to party governance in the contemporary Congress, seeking to understand the lessons of 1994-2010 as the nation enters into a new period of Republican control of the House.

Our analysis shows that operational context and institutional “stickiness” help to explain the illusion of sustained party authority – that is, the reforms enacted in 1995

\textsuperscript{12} See most specifically Figure 7-6 (pg. 218)
that enhanced party leadership and weakened committee autonomy remained present throughout each Congress since the 104th. When contexts were favorable, parties attempted to utilize the reforms in employing party governance so as to exploit these conditions. Yet, the advantage gained was only possible in the short-term. In each case for the Republican House (and to a certain degree in the Democratic), we show this initial choice was unwise: despite enhanced authority, the move towards party governance would – overtime – result in political turmoil as leaders failed to behave appropriately and/or the operational context (that had once benefited the ideologically rigid parties) shifted to become inhospitable.

The Rhode-Aldrich camp is correct: there has been increased ideological homogeneity, there has been increased leadership authority, and these factors have coalesced since the early 1990s; but, we show that each of these conditions are dependent upon unique political moments in time. Moreover, each condition is highly unstable; fluctuating in a pattern we show to be repeatedly unfavorable for the majority that seeks to employ the operational model of party governance. As such, our thesis – from a historical institutionalism, political development perspective – represents a criticism of the sustainability of conditional party governance in the U.S. House of Representatives. This criticism is an endorsement of the Dodd-Oppenheimer camp; yet, because the limits of party governance can be extended in the wake of crisis, we argue that the constructive partisanship model be amended to consider the impact of shifting operational environments and leadership response to these unique moments in time. In all, this dissertation presents an original contribution to the debate surrounding the development of contemporary congressional politics. We argue that a party desiring to
retain its majority status ought not embrace party governance, but rather a moderated operational structure of balance, stability, and productivity that is aware of the dynamic environment in which the House operates.
CHAPTER 2
CONCEPTUALIZING THE HOUSE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE

Since habits involve the support of environing conditions, a society, or some specific group of fellow-men – Conduct is always shared

—John Dewey, 1922

Theoretical Perspectives and a History of Congressional Development

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical "lenses" and historical context this dissertation utilizes to investigate and frame the development of the contemporary House of Representatives. We begin with a discussion of our methodological framework, focusing on path dependency theory and its value in grappling with the political development of the House overtime. We conclude this section with a brief discussion of our empirical analysis and related descriptive statistics\(^1\). Next, we trace the history of the House since the downfall of Speaker Cannon in 1910, describing the ebb and flow of the institution as it has moved through the committee, reform, and post-reform eras. After providing this historical account of congressional development, we consider two divergent strains of thought when it comes to conceptualizing the contemporary Congress: the conditional party government thesis, versus the constructive partisanship model. We conclude this chapter by introducing our primary argument that the conditional party governance model is unsustainable: Intraparty ideological homogeneity is a context-specific facet within the broader development of legislative politics that is highly dependent on two decidedly variable conditions – successful leadership and favorable operational environments.

\(^1\) For a complete description of the methodology behind our statistical analysis, see the attached appendix.
Theoretical Lenses: Historical Institutionalism, American Political Development, and the Path of the Republican House

Within the discipline of legislative politics, there has been a long-standing academic feud between scholars over the type of methodology “most appropriate” to the study of political institutions (Skocpol, 1995). We maintain the methodological value for both qualitative and quantitative scholarship; regardless, we have chosen to approach our theoretical quandary via a developmental-narrative supported by a series of descriptive statistics. While complex statistical analyses are quite adept at explaining particular political phenomena, this methodology can suffer from a limitation in context; that is, these studies often present a “snapshot” of political behavior as that behavior occurs in one moment of political time. As a result, this focus tends to incorporate a micro-view of politics (Rockman, 1994, pp. 144). Our research objective is to understand the development of the contemporary Congress as this institution – and those within it – changed over time; thus, we argue that a historical institutionalist perspective grounded in a “moving picture” view is the most appropriate methodology to achieve our academic goal. Further, this methodology allows us to participate in broader academic discussions within the American Political Development sub-field of political science.

The basic argument underlying the perspective of historical institutionalism is that institutional context matters. Actors within organizations are constrained and shaped by their surroundings; as such, “preferences and meanings develop in politics… through a combination of education, indoctrination, and experience. They are neither stable nor exogenous” (March and Olsen, 1984, pp. 739). Political scholars must be attuned to the history and development of the institutional context under study, otherwise they risk
missing the nuance – or what political development scholars refer to as the “ebb and flow” of politics – present within political phenomena:

Because mainstream behavioralist theories focused on the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the individuals and groups themselves to explain political outcomes, they often missed crucial elements of the playing field and thus did not provide answers to the prior questions of why these political behaviors, attitudes, and the distribution of resources among contending groups themselves differed from one [institutional context] to another…. To explain these differences required more explicit attention to the institutional landscape (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, pp. 5)

In grappling with political quandaries, historical institutionalism tends to take a macro-perspective, defining institutions in terms of the, “formal or informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, pp. 938). As such, historical institutionalists tend analyze politics with an eye for long-term processes and critical junctures. Rather than examining issues as distinct slices of time, historical institutionalists attempt to, “make visible and understandable the overarching contexts and interacting processes that shape and reshape states, politics, and policy making” (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, pp. 693). Three key features define this perspective:

- Seeking broad agendas, historical institutionalists address big, substantive questions.
- In developing their explanatory arguments, historical institutionalists take time seriously, specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality.
- Rather than examining just one institution or political process at a time, historical institutionalists analyze macro contexts, hypothesizing about the combined effects of institutions and process (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, pp. 695-6).

In sum, we have chosen a qualitative, developmental-narrative methodology supported by a series of descriptive statistics for this work because politics is a messy business; thus, an appreciation for the slow-moving, deeply complex processes that
define institutions and their progress overtime is necessary in explaining political
development – especially in terms of the contemporary development of the U.S. House.

Due to the scope and purpose of this dissertation, this work finds it academic
home in contemporary American Political Development. Although it has only been in
existence for a relatively short period of time, American Political Development (APD)
represents a distinct sub-field in political science, and has been credited as a leading
force in the “rediscovery” of institutions, especially in terms of previously neglected
issues such as the temporal dimension of politics (Gerring, 2003, pp. 82). From a
macro, state-centered perspective; APD seeks to explain how governance changes
overtime through an analysis of how political innovations are negotiated with past policy
in the generation of new political relationships. Of particular interest to APD is the
manner in which the choices made in past governance influences, shapes, and
constrains the practices of emerging and future political processes (Orren and
Skowronek, 2002, pp. 722). Because our work pays close attention to how initial
decisions made by majority parties both restrict and enhance future governmental
prospects in the House, this dissertation is well grounded in the APD sub-field.

Many of the building blocks within the APD literature were formed out of the
historical institutionalist methodological framework. Specifically, the attention paid to
institutions and temporality lead scholars to begin focusing on the causes, nature, and
consequences of key transformative periods in American political history (Kersh, 2005,
pp. 335). For the APD scholar, historical institutionalism’s “moving picture view” of
institutions as dynamic, path-oriented constructions is quite attractive and helpful in
understanding political change (Pierson, 2004). For APD, what is needed is a complex
perspective that views the past not simply as the accumulation of policies within institutions, but also one attuned to the idea that, “the normal condition of the polity will be that of multiple, incongruous authorities operating simultaneously” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004, pp. 107-8). For the APD scholar, past political decisions constrain future political action. Therefore, to fully appreciate political phenomena within an institution, one must consider its development overtime.

Termed “intercurrence” by Orren and Skowronek (2004), deconstructing multiple orderings of authority (i.e., new vs. old organizational rules, leadership structures, regional associations, etc.) as they fluctuate overtime directs researchers to investigate the historical construction of politics in the simultaneous operation of older and newer instruments of governance. Importantly, these multiple orderings of authority cannot be assumed to be coordinated with one another: “The devices that order politics at any given moment are going to be a mixed bag of instruments and are likely to weave political contention into their asymmetries and mutual impingements” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004, pp. 113; 2002, pp. 747). For ADP (and particularly our work’s analysis of House development), this “mixed bag” of political policies and actors is of crucial importance to understanding institutional development: Change proceeds through the push and pull of differently constituted elements simultaneously engaged within institutions overtime (Orren and Skowronek, 2002, pp. 736). In sum, the “development” of American politics has been characterized by this multiple order induced conflict; thus, from the APD perspective, politics is “shaped by the shifting nature of group conflict and no single cleavage dominates across historical eras” (Dodd and Jillson, 1994, pp. 3).
In looking to understand the recent era of Republican majority in Congress, the choices made by the GOP in that era, and especially the consequences of those choices; a path-dependency theoretical perspective born out of the APD / historical institutionalist methodology allows for a deeper investigation of these matters. As best articulated by Paul Pierson (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2004) this methodological perspective refers to the dynamics of self-reinforcing or positive feedback processes in political systems. Essentially, though the path of institutions and organizations can be easily influenced in their early stages of development; increasing returns theory states that once a particular path becomes established, self-reinforcing mechanisms make reversal increasingly difficult. This theory highlights a primary area of concern for those seeking to understand institutional or organizational development: sequencing and timing. Primary to this perspective is that political phenomena do not occur as single isolated moments in time; rather, the political arena is highly sensitive to external operational context and more akin to a cinematic series that evolves and responds overtime (Pierson, 2004). Though a great number of options may be available to organizations when they first become active, large consequences often result from relatively small initial choices. Once a choice is made or direction taken – even a seemingly favorable one – it can be very difficult (if not impossible) to change course once introduced, even in light of future difficulties (Pierson, 2000a). In essence, because the order of choices and events they produce make a fundamental difference in determining political outcomes, institutional development is a key factor in both orchestrating and constraining political outcomes over time: “Once actors have ventured far down a particular path, they may find it very difficult to reverse course. Political alternatives that
were once quite plausible may become irretrievably lost” (Pierson, 2004, pp. 10-11). In the end, because earlier event-based choices remain prominent even in later context, organizational history is critical.

Path dependency argues that the institutional arrangements made in the initial stages of development are not only difficult to change, but for a variety of reasons makes organizational reversal unattractive. Once political actors have accepted the new “rules of the game,” Pierson (2000b, pp. 491-2) argues that they begin making extensive commitments to their organization based on the expectations that these rules will continue; that is, they become increasingly invested in their association. Overtime, this investment leads to adaptation, dramatically increasing the cost of reversal or exit from existing social relationships. From this perspective, initial structural decisions – even those that show themselves with practice to be suboptimal decisions – become self-reinforcing overtime. For those scholars investigating the dynamics of organizational evolution2, these concepts are beneficial in explaining the “stickiness” (i.e., the tendency for early choices to define and constrain future options) that often characterizes many aspects of political development (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002).

This “stickiness” occurs in four basic ways: First, with any new organization there are large set-up costs – these can include purchases like computers, or in the case of political parties the costs associated with campaigning. In all, these set-up costs are large and often fixed, therefore providing association members with a “strong incentive to identify and stick with a single option.” Second, once settled, there are substantial learning effects associated with set-up costs to be overcome. As the level of

2 Particularly historical institutionalism and political development scholarship.
organizational complexity increases, the process of learning how the institution operates provides a significant source of increasing returns. Third, as more and more members adopt the chosen institutional operations, individuals will feel the pressure of coordination effects – that is, they will receive increased benefits when they adopt the same option as those chosen by their peers. Finally, once initially chosen options are learned and accepted by the majority of an organization, the group may experience adaptive expectations in which individual activity becomes self-fulfilling. Overtime, Pierson concludes, as social actors make commitments based on existing institutions, these initial institutional choices will become increasingly “sticky,” leading to path-dependency (2000b, pp. 492-3).

The path dependency model is especially relevant for understanding political institutions. Specifically, certain factors such as the collective nature of political organizations, the role of formalized rules in governing institutions, the desire for authority to dictate decisions, and the day to day ambiguity of the political arena make the domain of politics especially prone to the increasing returns process (Pierson, 2000a). In particular, this ambiguity leaves the door wide-open for political actors to make mistakes. Whereas certain methodological perspectives presuppose political actors to behave under focused rational principles, path-dependency allows for a somewhat more “boundedly rational” actor. Unintended consequences are at the heart of the perspective: even where actors may be greatly concerned about the future of their efforts when designing institutions, they often make mistakes because of the tremendous complexity of their environment. These issues culminate into what is perhaps the primary characteristic of the political process that lends itself to a path-
dependency argument: small events can have major consequences – that is, political phenomena never occur in a context of isolation (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, pp. 709). To put it more simply, time advances and shifts inevitably occur. As such, those whose earlier choices no longer “fit” with their current environment may find themselves in a very precarious position.

While the issue will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, an example of these concepts were hurdles faced by Gingrich during his time as Speaker in relation to his own recruits. As we illustrate in Chapters 2 and 3, Gingrich traveled the country giving speeches and issuing video tapes that sought to train his “farm-team” in the methods of political campaigning. In sending out a series of taped-messages, Gingrich amassed an army (some might even say “drone” army) of political neophytes who walked, talked, and thought in a manner that mirrored the words crafted by Gingrich to inspire action. Once in the majority, Gingrich used his army to catapult himself to the Speakership and to hammer through a series of institutional reforms to enhance his authority. Yet – as we will see – Gingrich lost control of the monster: the new Speaker did such a good job crafting his “Young-Turks” that he eventually painted himself into a corner when going head to head with President Clinton over the budget in 1996. Though Gingrich wanted to pull back on the reins once he saw his budget showdown plans were failing, he was prevented from doing so because of the rabid demands he had instilled within his “revolutionary guard.” The result was crisis in the House. As we demonstrate, the Republican (and later Democrat) majority tenure is littered with multiple analogous experiences.
Once established in a political organization, patterns of policy mobilization, the institutional rules of the game, and even the member’s basic ways of thinking about their group’s context and goals will often generate self-reinforcing dynamics – even in the face of organizational jeopardy:

Relative timing, or sequence, matters because self-reinforcing processes, playing out over time in political and social life, transform the consequences of later developments…. Increasing returns processes occurring during particular periods generate irreversibilities, essentially removing certain options from the subsequent menu of political possibilities (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, pp. 700-01 – emphasis ours)

Despite the stickiness of organizations, path dependency does allow for institutional change at times of “critical juncture.” Though rare, all political institutions will at some point experience a dramatic systematic or contextual shift – what Pierson and others term a “punctuated equilibrium” – in which opportunities for major institutional reforms appear that establish a new path of organizational development. These junctures are often attributed to significant shocks to the institution’s environment, and they are “critical” because, “they place institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter” (Pierson, 2004, pp. 135). Once the shock subsides, the organizations are stable until the next critical juncture arrives. As such, institutional change is a reality – but a process of which is incremental and occurs overtime. A primary example of this phenomenon can be captured by an event central to the House GOP experience: September 11th, 2001. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, 9/11 represents a moment of extreme shock to the nation, which pushed the political system down a new trajectory. One upshot of this critical juncture was a hardening of the GOP’s control over the House – despite the fact that the party had been losing electoral ground
in each previous election. The effect of this and other critical junctures will be a primary focus of this study.

From the above examples and others to be addressed, this dissertation recognizes that identifying and examining the triggering events – even the small ones – which set development along a particular path are a fruitful source for understanding political outcomes. Argued throughout this dissertation, the institutional “stickiness” of these triggering events helps to support our thesis that the conditional party governance model presents an illusion of sustained party authority. We demonstrate that the conditions and reforms cited as indicative of party governance – though they remained present in the House following the 104th Congress – fluctuated in their stability overtime. We present evidence that shows when operational contexts are favorable, majorities attempted to utilize these reforms in employing party governance so as to take advantage of these conditions. Yet, the advantage to be gained was only possible in the short-term. In analyzing the contemporary political development of the House, we show the initial choice to embrace party governance was unwise: despite enhanced authority, the move towards party governance would – overtime – result in political turmoil as leaders failed to behave appropriately and/or the operational context (that had once benefited the ideologically rigid parties) shifted to become inhospitable.

While qualitative in nature, our argument is grounded in empirical evidence. Specifically, we outline a series of descriptive statistics to trace the ideological dynamics of contemporary House majorities. This dissertation’s descriptive statistics are based upon an originally constructed database in which National Journal scores, electoral region, leadership position, committee service, and seniority status are collected and
compiled. The most important aspect of this data represents the gathered “liberal percentage” score of each individual Republican House member from 1994-2008 (for Democratic House members from 2006-2010, we use the opposite “conservative percentage” score to determine placement on a liberal spectrum). Placed on a scale from zero – 100, this score is calculated using the manner that an individual member voted on “Key Votes” (these votes illustrate a legislator’s stance on important votes on national issues, as selected by the National Journal staff and consultants) as compared to every other member of the House in the given year. The lower the score, the less liberal that individual is on that particular set of policy issues in that particular year; or, one could say, the lower the member’s score, the more conservative that member is compared to other members in the House in any given session. We categorize our ideological subgroups under the following labels and scores: Ultra-Conservative Republican (0-9), Strong-Conservative Republican (10-19), Conservative Republican (20-29), Weak-Conservative Republican (30-39), Patrician Republican (40 and higher)\(^3\).

In tracing fluctuations within these ideological subgroups, we illustrate shifting patterns of development within House majorities following their choice to adopt party governance as an operational model.

In employing an APD framework to employ a qualitative historical-institutionalist methodology, this dissertation takes-on a path dependency perspective in its examination of the Republican majority’s tenure in the House (and after, Democratic control from 2007-2010). Further, the historical process by which this narrative unfolds is used to outline the theoretical implications of this study’s empirical findings as we

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\(^3\) Democrats are labeled under similar headings with analogous “conservative” percentage categories. Please see our appendix for a more complete explanation of our descriptive statistics.
seek to assess congressional politics in the era of a second Republican majority. As stated by Pierson, political science ought turn to history because important aspects of political reality can be better comprehended as a temporal process: “It is not the past per se but the unfolding of processes overtime that is theoretically central” (2000a, pp. 264). In all, this dissertation employs a combination of historical events and original descriptive data to provide a deeper understanding of the causes, activities, and ultimate consequences of House majority parties from 1994-2010.

Clearly, context is key; as such, to properly understand contemporary House majorities, we must first consider the historical development of the Congress as a whole as it has evolved over time. To do so, let us conduct a brief review of the “Textbook” to post-reform era in the American legislature.

**From Textbook to Post-Reform**

Altering its legislative processes within the ebb and flow of the nation it serves, Congress as an institution has been by no means static in its operations. Deriving its name from the way in which many scholarly textbooks traditionally describe the legislative process of the nation’s legislature, the “Textbook” Congress is characterized by its systematic, straightforward methods of policy enactment. The old textbook process was predictable and linear, with one stage following another in an inevitable sequence (Sinclair, 2000, pp. 9). Two fundamental shifts were responsible for the ushering in of the textbook system: the realigning elections of 1894 and 1896, and the rise of the Progressive fissure within the Republican party (Stewart, 2001, pp. 109). After decades of intense electoral competition, the elections of 1894 and 1896 transformed Congress from an institution characterized by close partisan margins to one in which the Republican party was clearly dominate nationally – though the
Democrat’s grip on the South remained firm. Of importance to these changes were election reforms that sought to prevent voting fraud and regulate party competition. Effectively, reforms such as the Australian ballot (which made it easier for voters to pick and choose among candidates) and the open primary process (which loosened the tie between politicians and parties) broke the hold local party bosses had upon candidate selection. As a result of eased electoral tensions and ballot reforms, turnover in House membership dropped significantly at the onset of the twentieth century. In all, careerism in congressional politics became the norm (Stewart, 2001, pp. 110-12; Polsby, 1968).

Beyond careerism, electoral safety allowed individual members of the Republican party greater latitude in their political opinions. Regardless, members of Congress attracted to long term careers found that the power in the House was in the hands of the Speaker: “The centralized conduct of congressional operations denied rank-and-file members the personal congressional power that growing numbers of them sought” (Dodd, 1977, pp. 502). With the power to preside over the Rules Committee (thus keeping off the floor any legislation that he personally disapproved), the tenure of Speaker Joe Cannon proved to be a source of immense tension within House. With little respect for Progressive Republicans, Cannon employed the powers of his speakership to silence his political opponents and maintain party discipline. The ‘era of czar rule’ came to an end when divisions within the House Republicans led to a revolt against Speaker Cannon in 1910 (Smith and Gamm, 2005). Joining with Democrats, Progressive Republicans stripped Cannon – and the office of Speaker as a whole – of his control of the Rules Committee, and amended the House rules to provide for election of all standing committees. Overall, between 1910 and 1915, congressional
reformers were successful in their attack on party government in the House, overthrowing the Speakership and dispersing congressional power to the standing committees (Dodd, 1977). Stewart summarizes:

The House had re-established a new institutional equilibrium to replace the one in place before the revolt against Cannon. The party mechanisms that had coordinated the policy-making process, periodically using coercion against reluctant rank-and-file members, no longer existed. Leadership in the House was dispersed, shared between formal party leaders and the chairmen of the committees (2001, pp. 116)

With a set of formalized rules and procedures following this organizational shift absent, the two parties adopted the seniority system in organizing the new committee structure. This system had two primary components: (1) Although a member could not simply choose committee assignments, once on a committee, he or she could not be taken off involuntarily, and (2) the member with the longest continuous service on a committee had the right to chair whenever the chairmanship came open (Stewart, 2001, pp. 116). As noted by Dodd, “the system of committee government that emerged was held together by the institutional norms and rules that had been growing up over the preceding decades as congressional turnover had decreased, particularly the norm of seniority” (1977, pp. 502). Within these elements – congressional careerism and the seniority system – we see the core elements of the “Textbook” Congress (Stewart, 2001).

Following 1910, party influence was increasingly low: “The party leadership had lost control over committee assignments and the Rules Committee, and their ability to reward or punish individual members also declined” (Rhode, 1991, pp. 5). Further, the size of the House had expanded dramatically: membership increased from 243 in 1860
to 435 in 1913. As government became more complex, political expertise and policy experience became desired:

Congress needed some system of specialized advice in the numerous policy areas facing it – access to experts who knew the legislative history of a policy, had studied intensely the policy options, and could make seasoned, reliable recommendations to the whole body…. Committee government and the seniority system offered solutions to both problems (Dodd and Schott, 1979, pp. 72).

In this environment, the era of committee government took hold and flourished. In its early stages (1919-1946), Deering and Smith (1997) depict a House in which committee leaders gained increased independence as the number of committees and committee influence grew in the wake New Deal programs and World War II. Electorally, Democrats solidified their power, with senior southerners taking hold of chairmanships under the seniority system. Politically, central party leaders could not mount a threat to committee autonomy; thus, congressional leadership and accountability remained weak. Policy wise, a structure of subsystem politics and “iron triangles” emerged between legislators, agency personnel, and interest groups (Dodd, 1977).

Overtime, problems emerged as jurisdictional lines were blurred, executive oversight fell, and member staffing needs were not met. To resolve these problems, the 1946 Legislative Reorganization Act sought: (1) to streamline the structure of committee government by reducing the total number of standing committees to 19 in the House and 15 in the Senate, (2) direct standing committees to exercise “continuous watchfulness” over administrative agencies and create a Joint Committee on the Budget, and (3) provide individual members with greater staff assistance. Despite these changes, “the Reorganization Act refurbished the old order and removed some of its
most glaring shortcomings, but in the end it left committee government intact and strengthened" (Dodd and Schott, 1979, pp. 86-9).

In sum, the “Textbook” Congress, born out the desire for an electoral and institutional diffusion of power; it was characterized by routines and norms. Giving rise to committee government, Congress became defined by the institutionalization of the seniority system, policy apprenticeship / specialization, and careerism. Power was in the hands of committees and committee chairs, and party influence was at an all time low.

Lasting for over fifty years, committee government defined Congress in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the norms and routines that established and dominated the era were also the foundations of its own undoing. Under the seniority system, conservative southern Democrats (whom were continually re-elected by the “Solid South”) had taken control of committee chair positions. As liberal progressive trends began percolating within the junior-wing of the Democratic party, a political split began to emerge within the halls of Congress. These divisions became increasingly sectional overtime, with northern Democrats disagreeing more often than not with their senior, southern colleagues (Rhode, 1991). In essence, this ‘Conservative Coalition’ – the voting alignment of a majority of Republicans and a majority of southern Democrats against a majority of northern Democrats – appeared, “more frequently on the House floor, and became an important element in the conflict over policy…. Thus, by the 1960s the House was characterized by a system of committee government, dominated by a working coalition of southern Democrats and Republicans” (Rhode, 1991, pp. 5).
Despite this trend, change was on the horizon. Following the election of 1958, a large influx of northern liberal Democrats stormed the Congress. In an effort to break the norms of the seniority system, “democratize” power within the institution, and end the conservative roadblock that prevented the implementation of their progressive policies, these young liberals began sounding the call for reform: “The frustration of liberals in the 1950s set in motion a series of events that led in the 1960s and 1970s to a fundamental restructuring of congressional organization and procedure and to a new congressional policy process” (Dodd and Schott, 1979, pp. 107). In the House, where size dictates that more formal and hierarchical rules be placed on individual member action, the reforms of the 1970s produced fundamental change in the institution. As noted, though liberal Democrats made up the majority of the House Democratic Caucus, they lacked seniority and were thus denied leadership positions. In response, liberal Democrats established the Democratic Study Group (DSG), an organization devoted to planning and enacting decentralizing reform. In essence, the DSG came to realize that the power of committee chairs was both formal (the committee structure) and traditional (the norm of seniority and the weakness of the party caucus) in nature: “Liberal efforts to weaken the hold of conservative chairpeople and disperse power more widely were thus directed both at the formal rules of the House and at reform of the party caucus” (Dodd and Schott, 1979, pp. 113).

The liberal Democrats first success came with the 1970 Legislative Reform Act, which required committees to make public all recorded votes, limited the use of proxy votes, allowed a majority of members to call meetings, and encouraged committees to hold open meetings and hearings (Deering and Smith, 1997, pp. 35). Despite these
changes, the primary years of reform occurred in 1973 through 1974 under a series of actions known as the Hansen reforms. As noted by Stewart (2001, pp. 122), two of these reforms in the House were most important:

- The right to make committee assignments was taken away from the Democratic members of the Ways and Means Committee and given to a party committee dominated by the Speaker and other Democratic party leaders.
- The seniority system was altered to provide for an automatic ballot each Congress to ratify nominees for committee chairs.

Informally, members became increasingly willing to allow party leaders the authority to enforce party discipline and set the legislative agenda more aggressively (Stewart, 2001). For example, the reforms increased the power of party caucuses by allowing them more time to conduct organizational business, thus increasing the utility of the caucus to party reformers and activists: “In the process, the reform spread power more widely among members of Congress” (Dodd and Schott, 1979, pp. 116-7). As proof of this transference of power away from committee chairs, three sitting chairman were defeated following attacks on their re-nomination in 1975.

**The Post-Reform Era**

The effects of the reform era had far reaching ramifications, both direct and indirect. For example, though reforms made the chairs and members of committees more representative of the party, by reducing the power and autonomy of committees the reforms made legislating more difficult. As the use of floor amendments rose, political opponents made passage of bills increasingly complicated: “Compromises carefully crafted in committee were being picked apart on the floor, and floor sessions were stretching on interminably” (Sinclair, 2000, pp. 85). In response, Democrats began looking to the only central leadership left in the chamber – their party leaders – to
counter these problems: “The leadership became more involved with legislation before it reached the floor, and this involvement increasingly took to form of negotiating substantive changes in the legislation, often at the postcommittee stage, in order to produce a bill that could pass the chamber” (Sinclair, 2000, pp. 86).

Further, in replacement of committee government, subcommittee government became the norm. Seeking to accommodate members’ demands for desirable committee positions, party leaders expanded the committee system; thus, “subcommittees supplanted the full committee as the primary locus of decision making” (Deering and Smith, 1997, pp. 42). As a result, the policy process became more elaborate than it had ever been. Terming the process “unorthodox lawmaking,” Sinclair (2000) argues that the 1970s House reforms which permitted multiple referrals have created a policy process that is characterized by variability rather than uniformity. Consequentially, “multiple referral has drawn the majority party leaders into the substantive side of the legislative process” (2000, pp. 18). Further, Binder (2003) argues that the larger the political center and the less polarized the Congress, the greater the prospects for policy compromise and change. Yet, as party’s have become more cohesive in the post-reform era, ideological polarization has stretched thin the political center: “Far from ensuring that voters will be given meaningful choices between competing party programs, the polarization of parties seems to encourage deadlock” (2003, pp. 80-1).

In terms of electoral politics, the method of coordinated campaigning between individual candidates and their parties has become increasingly necessary: “In order to win a congressional election or even be remotely competitive, candidates must compete
in two campaigns: one for votes and one for resources” (Herrnson; 2004, pp. 2). In the age of increasingly expensive campaigns, this competition for resources requires candidates to seek party funds, without which most congressional candidates would lose their bids for election. Beyond funding, parties have become directly involved with elections through broad-based efforts in agenda setting, issue advocacy, and partisan mobilization (Herrnson, 2008).

Together, these developments produced what congressional scholars identify as the post-reform Congress: Party leaders have been imbued with increased formal powers and informal duties; thus, as ideology has become more cohesive, parties have increased in their partisanship. Members reap the electoral benefits of decentralized power through sub-committee participation and floor amendments; consequently, legislation has taken on an “omnibus” character. Multiple bill referral has proliferated and sub-committee jurisdictions are ill-defined; as such, party leadership is more necessary in negotiating legislation to and on the floor. Stalemate is a fact of life. In all, the current period of the post-reform Congress is quite different from the “Textbook:”

The two parties are now more ideologically cohesive than they were in the past generation. Committees still dominate policy making and the seniority still operates. However, members who want to rise to the top of committee leadership (particularly in the House) must not stray too far from the party’s mainstream, lest they be passed over for a more loyal committee member when the opportunity arrives (Stewart, 2001, pp. 122)

The Contemporary Congress: an Era of Party Governance?

In response to these changes, the concept of conditional party government has become a (some would argue the) leading academic explanation of legislative politics in recent years. As first posited by David Rhode (1991) and later joined by John H. Aldrich (1995) and others (Cox and McCubbins, 1993; to a certain extent Sinclair, 1998 and
2006), the argument has been made that the post-reform era has provided individual members with increased access to the political process, while leadership resources have been concurrently expanded. Evolving since the days of the reform era, this argument holds that electoral forces have aligned at the national level, resulting in coalitions of representatives that are more similar within parties and more different between them. For the party governance camp, increased homogeneity within the electorate – as translated through parties – provides the basis for a more aggressive use of 1970s reform-granted powers by party leadership. Essentially, the conditional party government thesis posits that as diversity shrinks within the ranks of the party but concurrently grows between it and its opposition, rank-and-file members will be less worried about their leaders choosing positions contrary to their own. Thus, the theory goes, these members will be more willing to delegate power to their party leaders (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 275). For Rohde, Aldrich, and other adherents to the conditional party government thesis, preference homogeneity is a central condition on which the viability of party governance is determined within a legislative body. Because we focus on investigating patterns of ideological development within intraparty groups on the dynamics of House majorities from 1994-2010, it is to this particular “condition” of conditional party government that this dissertation will grapple with heavily.

Seeking to challenge David Mayhew’s seminal argument in the *Electoral Connection* (1974) – in which members of Congress are famously said to be “single-minded seekers of reelection” – the party governance camp have argued that a new, more refined view of Congress is necessary. As reelection seekers operating in committee government, Mayhew’s argument states that party governance within
Congress is unlikely (due to an organizational system in which individual representatives have little or no personal incentive to support their party programs because they are often insulated by the committee system from the party structure). In opposition, Rhode and Aldrich argue that Mayhew, “painted a picture of the House in the early 1970s and presented a theoretical account for what it revealed” (2001, pp. 270-1). If members are restricted to being independent entrepreneurs concerned about being reelected under the Mayhew model – as is argued by the party governance camp – then these members will be reluctant to delegate significant power to party leaders for fear that supporting or being identified with certain policies not in accord with their electorate’s liking will make them vulnerable in their individual districts.

A key factor must not be missed here: Whereas the conditional party government thesis agrees that a Mayhewian model holds true when a party is ideologically diverse, this diversity is not set in stone: “Substantial preference diversity within the majority is not a certainty” (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 275). Adherents to the conditional party government thesis believe that Mayhew’s explanation of Congress is a product of its particular context in time – specifically, the context of the “Conservative Coalition” and strengthened committee authority. Thus, this camp argues that Mayhew’s entrepreneurial model of weak parties falls short in the post-reform era: due to the substantial reforms that ended the era of committee government (in combination with the demise of southern Democrats), the conditional party government thesis seeks to address the current congressional context by considering the impact of ideological preference homogeneity versus preference conflict within parties themselves. In essence, this camp argues that members no longer operate as singular automatons
distinct from their party structure; rather, that partisanship and enhanced party strength are the hallmarks of congressional politics.

Although the conditional party government argument is centrally grounded on the “condition” that parties in the post-reform era have been increasingly similar within, and different between each other; this is not to say that it completely ignores members’ electoral motivations. Rather, if members (especially those members among the majority party) are concerned about being reelected, then it may be to their electoral advantage given certain conditions to fall in-line behind the party leaders. This model claims that if a party’s primary electorates and activists are similar across the country, the policy preferences of the candidates selected within the party will be relatively similar; thus, variations in these electoral forces will increase or decrease members’ incentives to support strong parties (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 276). With electoral diversity in check, once in the Congress, this camp theorizes that members will be less worried about leaders choosing policy positions contrary to theirs and will be more willing to delegate significant power to these leaders (2001, pp. 275).

Further, this homogeneity is reinforced within the party as the amount of disagreement between it and its opposition grows. In previous eras – particularly during the heyday of the “Conservative Coalition” between northern Republican and southern Democratic committee chairman – the distribution of opinion between the parties was a less significant factor. In such a situation, the conditional party government model states that the policy chosen by the minority party would not be very far from that preferred by

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4 It should be noted that among other “conditions” within the conditional party government argument, preference homogeneity within a party’s primary electoral constituencies and activists must also be realized. Due to the theoretical scope of this dissertation, however, we will be focusing on the “condition” concerned with member preference once already in the House.
majority; therefore, a minority party victory on a bill will not hurt the majority greatly:

“But, when the respective distributions of opinion are very different, the minority’s policy
is likely to make the majority very unhappy” (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 275). When
party preferences are highly divisive, members of the majority have a greater degree of
incentive to empower their leaders to prevent a legislative victory for the minority.

Aldrich and Rhode sum nicely:

> These two considerations – preference homogeneity and preference conflict – together form the “condition” in the theory of conditional party government. As they increase, the theory predicts that party members will be progressively more willing to create strong powers for leaders and to support the exercise of those powers in specific instances. But when diversity grows within parties, the differences between parties are reduced, members will be reluctant to grant greater powers to leaders. This is the central prediction of CPG (2001, pp. 275-6)

Taken together, the model’s argument is highly concerned with the degree of
preference homogeneity within and between the two congressional parties.

Looking at the politics of the contemporary Congress, the conditional party
governance camp views the Republican ascension to power and resulting House
operational reforms as the evidence for their stance. Following the 1994 Revolution, the
camp claims that Gingrich operated under this model by taking major strides to
personally design a new assignment committee to secure passage of the Contract.
Discussed more systematically in Chapter 3, this new assignment committee directly
reflected the wishes of the party leadership to such a degree that within a week of the
election, it dramatically altered seniority arrangements in key committees. Before most
of the newly elected members could even get to Washington, Gingrich simply asserted
the right to choose the chairs of major committees – without any formal alteration of the
party or House rules – that he preferred and who he believed would be responsive to
the demands of party leadership. Regardless of this bold move, “the GOP members accepted this assertion of authority” (Aldrich and Rhode, 2001, pp. 286). In fact, Gingrich forced members of the Appropriations Committee to sign a “letter of fidelity” to cut the budget as much as Gingrich requested. For many in the party governance camp, it seemed that the Republicans entered their tenure operating not under a Mayhewian model, but rather a “Legislative Leviathan” as depicted by Cox and McCubbins (1993).

Though powerful, the conditional party governance model is not without its detractors. A leading criticism of the conditional party governance thesis is presented by Dodd and Oppenheimer and their alternative model of constructive partisanship. Rather than conceptualizing the House in terms of stable partisanship, constructive partisanship postulates a model that allows for variability of preference homogeneity held by members as they operate overtime. Writing their initial criticism in 1997, Dodd and Oppenheimer state that while the majority party in the House initially sought to operate in accord with party governance, Republicans and their leadership, “vastly overreached in [their] effort to dominate national policy making… then suffered the collapse of its governing momentum” (1997a, pp. 29). The criticism posited by this camp is straightforward: due to the institutional limitations of the House and the ever present threat of cross-cutting issues, party governance is an unsustainable model. For the constructive partisanship model, party governance is possible – but it is difficult (and potentially damaging) for a majority party to maintain.

Sustained levels of high preference homogeneity within parties and heterogeneity between them have not been the historical norm within the House (again, the downfall of Speaker Cannon and the rise of the “Conservative Coalition” era). Had things
changed in the post-reform House? For a short time, the constructive partisanship camp answers ‘yes’: A series of reforms in the first 100 days of the 104th Congress left, “little doubt that in the short run they fueled the move toward united party government in the House” (1997a, pp. 41). Regardless, these moves came crashing down – as outlined in detail throughout this dissertation, this initial adoption of party governance became increasingly restrictive on House members as majority party leaders bumbled their way through a series of government shutdowns, and as the electoral arena shifted in conjunction with the failed Clinton impeachment trials. Dodd and Oppenheimer argue that while party governance *is possible*, it is, “always fragile and tentative because it can occur only as long as no serious intraparty divisions develop on pressing policy questions” (1997b, pp. 402). In tracking their tenure overtime, we demonstrate the realities of this prediction for contemporary House majorities.

Dodd and Oppenheimer stake their criticism of party governance on several issues not fully addressed by the leading model. First, party governance is continually threatened by the emergence of, “salient policy issues that are critical to the party’s governing success and on which party members seriously disagree” (1997b, pp. 402). Though strengthened by new institutional rules, if party leaders force unity on divisive issues, these leaders potentially face a Cannon-like revolt. Second, the electoral realities of the House require that, “its members will have to build a governing record that confronts social, economic, and moral issues on a continuing basis;” a difficult prospect for an ideologically rigid party that is tasked with governing a deeply heterogeneous society (1997b, pp. 403). Third, “to achieve policy success and maintain governing of a chamber, an American legislative party must cooperate with the other
house of Congress and other branch of government” (1997b, pp. 407). Simply put, no matter how strengthened party leaders may be, it is impossible to govern the nation from the Speaker’s office alone. Taken together, Dodd and Oppenheimer suggest that parties ought realize the inherent limitations of party governance, and move to embrace constructive partisanship (1997b, pp. 406). Such a system utilizes a more moderate form of partisanship – one that favors a majority party’s ideological predilections, but not to such a degree that it prevents a productive legislative record or cooperation across partisan and inter-institutional lines. Akin to Aristotle’s Golden Mean, adherents argue that the constructive partisanship model represents the appropriate middle ground for parties (whose members fluctuate overtime between Rhode’s view of collective partisanship, Mayhew’s view of individual entrepreneurialism, and back again) that operate in an institutional environment of change.

Our Criticism of Conditional Party Government

Given that Rhode and Aldrich continue to maintain that their model has remained an apt description of the House for nearly two decades, is “tentative and fragile” an accurate label for the theory of conditional party government? As stated by the party governance camp in 2009:

CPG theory has a number of key features that we have to account for to demonstrate continued applicability: (1) Have intraparty homogeneity and interparty divergence remained high? (2) If so, has the majority party in particular continued to delegate strong powers to its leadership? (3) Has the majority leadership continued to exercise its powers to facilitate achievement of the party’s legislative and electoral goals?.... All indications are that the theoretical account offered by CPG is as applicable in 2008 as it was in 1995 (Aldrich and Rhode, 2009, pp. 233-37)

The problem that this dissertation finds with the above assertion is that for each of these key features, though they may be applicable for 1995 and 2008, are not necessarily
applicable to the years in between. On each of these three points, we demonstrate in this dissertation that adherence to party governance has fluctuated with time and in response to constricting issues within the very features the model is structured upon.

Building on the constructive partisanship model’s 1997 criticisms (cross cutting policy issues, a sustained governing record, and inter-institutional relations), we show that the Republicans in fact did struggle greatly between 1995 and 2000: employing our developmental-narrative and descriptive statistics, we illustrate the resulting ideological disunity within the House majority in response to leadership failure and shifting operational contexts. As such, we argue that within the first half of the Republican majority tenure, Dodd and Oppenheimer were quite right to predict that the conditions necessary for party governance had reached their operational limits. Yet, the constructive partisanship model is not without limits of its own. Specifically, this alternative model does not fully consider the impact of potential national crisis. Given the ability of such critical moments to change the developmental course of political dynamics, the limits of party government can be extended given dramatic shifts in the operational environment. The 9/11 crisis and Republican response to the event represent such a shift.

While our empirical findings endorse its broader criticisms of party governance, we argue that the constructive partisanship model be expanded to consider the impact of shifting operational environments and leadership response to these unique moments in time. The 9/11 tragedies allowed the weakened majority to return to a party governance model; thus sustaining the Aldrich-Rhode thesis despite its apparent weaknesses in the late 1990s. Though the conditions necessary for party governance had returned and the
Republicans once again adopted it in 2001, we show that the model is not a sustainable fixture of Congress. Critically, we find that the same pattern that defined the Republican House in the first half of their majority tenure returned in the second – that is, following a newly favorable political environment in the wake of the 9/11 tragedies, we outline a second pattern of partisan growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse (To a different degree, we continue to show a similar pattern within the Democratic majority as it existed in the House from 2007 to 2010). In illustrating a repeated pattern of ideological heterogeneity overtime, we present the argument that the occurrence of conditional party governance is a context-specific facet within the broader development of legislative politics.

Taken together, this dissertation demonstrates that the party governance model highlights an illusion of sustained party authority: Intraparty ideological homogeneity is a temporary phenomenon that is highly dependent on two unreliable conditions not fully addressed by the Rhode-Aldrich camp – successful leadership and favorable operational environments. In certain circumstances, we show that these conditions do favor the majority; as such, the majority reacts by adopting a party governance operational model. Yet, because leaders often fail to achieve their promised potential, and because the environmental stability upon which the House operates is often in flux; these initial decisions prove restrictive overtime. In all, our argument represents an amendment to- and expansion of the criticism first outlined by the constructive partisanship camp in 1997. While we confirm that party governance is continually threatened by policy issues that divide the party as stated by Dodd and Oppenheimer, we further demonstrate ideological homogeneity’s fragility by considering its reliance on effective leadership and a stable institutional context. As stated by Aldrich and Rhode
themselves, preference diversity within the majority is not a certainty – we argue that the same can be said of preference homogeneity, leadership success, and environmental stability.

Summary: Conceptualizing House Majorities in an Environment of Change

In their conclusion concerning the development of congressional politics, Smith and Gamm (2009, pp. 162) posit a “hunch” that the conditional party governance thesis – and those that desire to employ it as an operational model – must consider the limitations posed by institutional context. This dissertation lends credence to this gesture: Like others in the discipline, we believe that a deep focus on the processes, relations, and structures of organizations as they exist overtime will enable scholars to formulate better theories of politics (Jackson-Nexon, 1999; Dodd, 1977). Group formation and adaptation to the institutions of their making is central to the literature surrounding historical institutionalism broadly, and to contemporary congressional political development specifically. In recent decades, Congress has started down a new developmental path in terms of its processes, power centers, and policy outcomes. To understand these changes and the impact party governance has had upon both the institution and the actors within the legislative body, we seek in the following chapters to critically access the rise and attempted employment of this operational model on the House since the early 1990s.

Due to the relational nature between parties and their members, we take a developmental-narrative approach to understanding competing theories of partisanship in the House. Parties provide for members – especially inexperienced members – resources that advantage these individuals in pursuing their political goals. Whether these resources are policy knowledge, bureaucratic connections, campaign finance,
electoral platform, etc.; parties play an essential role in the lives of members. In light of congressional norms and institutional reforms arising since the late 1980s, one branch of the congressional literature has argued that parties are the most important force in the contemporary Congress, claiming that preference homogeneity and leadership empowerment have become a stable and dominate factor in modern legislative politics (Rhode, 1991). In showing that these very factors have fluctuated in response to shifting conditions of the political arena, we respond with the counter argument that ideologically and structurally rigid majority parties will struggle mightily when unfavorable objects arise overtime within their operational framework or institutional environment.

Whether in Congress or otherwise, groups are useful to individuals because they enable efficient learning and action: instead of expending the time and energy necessary in conceiving the optimal course of every action encountered, people will resort to simplified rules provided by their group to guide them (Gigerenzer-Selten, 2001, pp. 7-9; Todd, 2001, pp. 56-7). These processes work well because groups organize to exploit structural regularities within their environment (Mellers, et al.; 2001, pp. 263). When their environment is stable, these rules and guidelines have a high degree of operational utility. Unfortunately for human groups, environments are fickle things.

Operational environments can dramatically shift overtime, thus causing groups to experience crisis situations. As articulated by a second, competing branch in the congressional literature; groups will hold to a strategy of action until, “informational stimuli pass a critical threshold of change” (Dodd, 1994, pp. 332). Essentially, assuming that internal equilibrium is balanced, political parties will continue to operate at the
status quo until contextual pressures change to such a degree that the party is forced into a period of crisis. Once this crisis stage is entered into, this camp postulates that group participants will, “engage in an experimental search for a new strategy of action.” (Dodd, 1994, pp. 332).

Presenting an alternative to the conditional party governance thesis, the constructive partisanship model argues that party governance is an unsustainable model due to the ever present threat for cross-cutting issues to arise within the majority political party. This dissertation builds upon (and amends) this criticism by further examining the effect of leadership enhancement and contextual change on the sustainability of intraparty ideological homogeneity overtime: Majority parties who organize upon- and dogmatically habituate themselves to a particular operational environment will inevitably find themselves in an increasingly precarious position as their external context shifts in a manner not conducive to their chosen organizational path. Simply put, the initial action to embrace ideological and structural rigidity holds within its creation the seeds of its own destruction. Conditional party government – while it has been attempted in the post-reform era – is not a permanent, sustainable fixture of Congress; rather, we present the argument that its occurrence is a context-specific facet within the broader development of legislative politics.

Throughout this dissertation, we seek to understand the developmental dynamics of majority parties in the contemporary Congress; that is, how they formed their organizational structure, how they operated overtime, and the ways these parties responded to the shifting environment they faced. In doing so, we evaluate their chosen operational model in terms of its sustainability overtime. Focusing on the preference
homogeneity “condition” of the conditional party government thesis as we chart the developmental dynamics of the Republican party from 1994 to 2006 (an later the Democratic majority from 2007 to 2010), we illustrate the fluctuating degree to which party members were uniform in terms of their political preferences overtime. Further, we examine the influence of party leadership, depicting the effect of the success and failure of these newly empowered positions on rank-and-file members. In outlining competing tensions within the conservative caucus, we further show how the majority party reacted to major shifts or crises that occurred in their operational environment during their tenure as House majority. From this evidence, we challenge the sustainability of conditional party governance, contributing to the ongoing debate presented by its theoretical detractors.
CHAPTER 3
TAKEOVER

We are at a special place in history and cannot fail.

—Newt Gingrich, *following passage of the 1995 appropriations bill*

In this chapter, we focus on the process by which Republicans came to power in 1994, and the early decisions made by the new majority as they sought to take the House down a new developmental path. We begin by detailing the underlying movements within the Republican experience in the House since the late 1980s, examining the methods by which Republicans orchestrated their takeover of the House. Specifically, we provide a thorough discussion of Gingrich’s leadership activity in the years building up to 1994, an analysis of the *Contract’s* role in the mid-term election and its later function in the first session of the 104th Congress, and the favorable environmental context in which the Republicans were operating. Having traced the developments leading to the 1994 *Revolution*, we next outline the initial choices made by the Republican membership in the wake of this momentous event. Here, we discuss the centralizing nature of the party’s reforms in their first “Revolutionary” session, arguing that these reforms sought a direct break with long-held legislative rules and norms – the creation of term limits on the Speaker and committee chairs, the circumventing of committees in the legislative process, and the establishment of enhanced authority for party leadership. Of particular importance, the *Contract* also demanded drastic policy reform, especially concerning targeted federal spending programs aimed at substantial budgetary reductions.

Finally, we introduce in this chapter a series of descriptive statistics that analyze member actions and associations, addressing the new majority’s early ideological
structure, partisan outlook, and adopted operational framework. We present empirical evidence that this new path chosen by the young Republican majority was not only indicative of conditional party governance; moreover, this moment of high intraparty ideological homogeneity was the primary tool used by party leadership in their efforts to fulfill the mandates of the *Contract*.

**Background: Gingrich and the Path to the 1994 Election**

Though nearly two decades ago, the 1994 election is still referred to by many as the *Republican Revolution*; an apt title considering that the party had been continuously in the House minority since 1954. In the eyes of many, the “Republicans seemed fated to remain the permanent minority party” (Dodd and Oppenheimer; 1997, pp. 29). To fully appreciate the development of House Republicans in their tenure as the majority party, we begin by considering the historical and political processes that lead to this defining political moment for contemporary legislative politics.

Beginning with the Republican reform agenda, surveys from the late 1980s through the early 1990s showed that the American electorate had become skeptical of their congressional representatives. In particular, one study found that 60% of Americans felt “angry” or “disgusted” with Congress. In comparison to other federal institutions, this same survey indicated that these feelings were directed disproportionately at Congress: only 7% were angry or disgusted about Supreme Court justices, while one-third indicated that they felt the same about the president. Before the 1994 mid-term election, these surveys found that 78% of Americans believed that Congress was too far removed from ordinary people, while 86% believed that Congress was heavily influenced by interest groups when making decisions. Of particular importance, the decline in support for more spending from 1991-1995 was one of the
steepest on record over the past 50 years (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Samples, pp. 2005, 23-4). Though these trends were reflected in other early polls conducted during the 1994 election year – for example, a December 1993 NBC/Wall Street Journal poll showed that 56% of voters disapproved of Congress, while only 30% approved – the institution took few “ convinc ing steps to rebuild its credibility” in the early 1990s (Cohen, 1994, pp. 33). In all, “ The Democrats, the party of more government and more spending, had controlled the House of Representatives for 40 years…. The public was rapidly moving in a direction that Congress could not accommodate for ideological and partisan reasons” (Samples, pp. 2005, 24).

The Republican response to this context had been years in the making. Though the climax of the story took place in 1994, the Republican Revolution had begun not in electoral victory but in electoral losses. After a disappointing 1982 midterm election in which House Republicans lost twenty-six seats, former president Richard Nixon advised a young Newt Gingrich and other then junior Republicans, “You can’t change the House yourself. You have to go back and form a group” (Edwards, 1999, pp. 280). Emphatically agreeing, Gingrich created in the 98th Congress (1983-1985) a House caucus of young conservative activists named the Conservative Opportunity Society (COS), who sought to erode political confidence in the Democrats while concurrently developing a new set of Republican ideas and programs that would appeal to a majority of voters (Peters, 1997; Edwards, 1999). From the beginning, Gingrich lead with strategy focused on political organizing that in many ways ignored traditional lines of authority:

The roots of Gingrich’s elevation to Speaker were planted in his 1989 [election to minority whip]. Then, as now, he recited a four part mantra for
political organizing: Define a vision, set the strategy to implement it, prepare tactics designed for success, develop projects to achieve goals…. The notion that a Speaker would have a ‘team’ of activist followers is a vivid example of how much the House has changed (Cohen and Browning, 1995, pp. 66)

The COS was a dual-vision organization that was just as negative as it was positive: on the one hand it sought to tear down Democratic leadership in the House for abuse of power, on the other the group eagerly trained young state and local conservatives to establish a grassroots Republican organization (Maraniss and Weisskopf, 1996).

Specifically, the COS began to confront the Democratic majority on procedural and policy issues such as a balanced budget amendment, reform of House rules concerning committee structure and leadership tenure, and the line-item veto – many of the political matters later stated in the Contract with America (Dodd and Oppenheimer; 1997). One of the most notable (and politically original) moves of COS was the employment of C-SPAN's coverage of the House:

With his political organization in hand, Gingrich next considered how to best communicate his revolutionary message…. In May 1984, COS members took command of an almost empty House floor and condemned the Democrats…. COS members began using the period set aside for special orders of each day’s regular session to talk about conservative issues. Few House members were present, but C-SPAN’s cameras were, and they daily piped COS’s presentations to the 17 million Americans with access to C-SPAN. In short order, Gingrich and his fellow Young Turks became television celebrities, and other news media began paying increasing attention to them (Edwards, 1999, pp. 281).

Despite there being few other legislators to hear this rhetoric in the empty chamber, Gingrich and his fellow COS members were able use this and other tactics to enrage then Speaker O’Neill into stating that the Republican’s actions were “the lowest thing I have ever seen,” a public outburst from the Floor that went against House etiquette and had to be struck from the congressional record (Peters, 1997).
Though the Democratic leaders were furious – if fact, they forced C-SPAN cameras to at times pan across to show an empty floor – COS had made its mark: leading conservatives encouraged COS to keep pushing, and even President Reagan noted in his 1984 State of the Union Address the importance of COS using the phrase, “an opportunity society for us all.” Proving his worth under COS, Gingrich was handed control of GOPAC in 1986, transforming it from a fund-raising committee for state and local candidates into a hard-hitting, national political organization. In doing so, GOPAC served as the body through which new conservative ideas were conceived, refined, and disseminated to the conservative group as a whole:

In short order, GOPAC was sending training tapes to thousands of GOP candidates running for federal as well as state and local office. Among other things, the tapes suggested ‘contrast words’ to use against opponents, including ‘decay, failure, shallow, traitors, pathetic, corrupt, incompetent, sick.’ With GOPAC funds, Gingrich traveled across the country to recruit, train, and campaign for candidates (Edwards, 1999, pp. 282-3)

Gingrich used GOPAC as a recruitment network, traveling across the country to give speeches, lead training sessions, distribute talking-points videos, and the like to young conservative ideologues who were committed to transforming the “Gingrich vision” into a political reality. What began as an inspirational organization aimed at schooling junior politicians in the ways of campaign techniques through a network of videos and speeches, soon turned into a powerhouse of political innovation (Wilcox, 1995). In the name of the “party cause,” Gingrich constructed what he called his “farm team”: a group of organized, focused, and single-minded conservatives who could run for office under a unified GOP banner in the upcoming 1990s elections (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997; Peters, 1997). Referring to GOPAC as the “Bell Labs of GOP politics,” Gingrich and his caucus spent an estimated $8-million between 1991 and 1994. But, the money was well
spent: through a series of activities aimed at understanding and targeting public opinion, GOPAC established a political network of persistent and consistent conservative politicians, whom spread the new Republican message across the country (Edwards, 1999). Like its result, Gingrich and GOPAC’s methods of political maneuvering were aimed at being revolutionary. As reported by one media observer:

Gingrich was acting as an entrepreneur, but one who was bent on a political control – creating a Republican majority. And the ideology was developed like any commercial product, through market research to determine what customers wanted. GOPAC, therefore commissioned research testing, issues polling, and focus groups. Once ideas were produced, Gingrich was their principle salesman. He gave thousands of speeches, of course, but GOPAC also produced and distributed videotapes (played at GOPAC sessions for the training of candidates) and – most important, as it turned out – audiotapes of Gingrich (Bruck, 1995, pp. 61)

Republicans began to take notice of Gingrich and GOPAC’s achievements. Most specifically, Gingrich – whose district was in Georgia – was highly successful in mobilizing southern and southwestern conservative activists. Beyond taking charge of organizing his own party, Gingrich took the lead in combating the House Democrats. Under the Gingrich model of “guerrilla warfare,” congressional Republicans’ primary objective was to present the Democratic majority as corrupt and label the Congress as the “Broken Branch of Federal Government.” Most notably, Gingrich – who viewed ethics charges as a legitimate political weapon (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 3) – himself lodged a formal complaint with the House Ethics committee against O’Neill’s successor Speaker Wright in 1988, claiming, “The House has never before had to deal with allegations of unethical conduct at the Speaker’s level” (Zelizer, 2004, pp. 241-2). After a formal investigation, the Committee declared that it had “reason to believe” that Wright had committed sixty-nine violations of the House Rules – most of which concerned money Wright collected for his book Reflections of a Public Man. Though claiming that
the charges were unsubstantiated, Speaker Wright chose to resign so as to spare himself and the Democratic party the pain of further investigations. In his resignation speech, Wright appealed to the House to end "partisan blood-letting" and to turn away from the poisonous environment that had encompassed the House (Peters, 1997; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997). Some House scholars mark the Wright investigation as a turning point for the House in which the seeds of polarized partisanship and character assassination politics were planted into the institution:

Wright was in part correct in portraying himself as the victim of a political vendetta. There can be no doubt that the partisan acrimony in the House was greater in 1988 and 1989 than at any other time since the reign of Uncle Joe Cannon. Even in the fierce partisan conflict during the Cannon speakership, however, members did not commonly employ attacks upon the personal ethics of other members as a political strategy (Peters, 1997, pp. 278).

In the end, Gingrich was rewarded for his combative attacks on the Democratic leadership, and elected by House Republicans in 1989 as their Minority Whip. As Gingrich amassed more control over his minority party, it was clear that an attitude of charged partisanship would continue to grow within the Republican ranks and within the Congress as a whole.

Unlike previous Whips, Gingrich spent more time building his party than coordinating floor votes. Though the 1992 elections were a return to unified government under the Clinton Administration, there were several factors that Gingrich took advantage of in preparing his party. First, a wave of Democratic retirements in 1992 left a large number of vulnerable first-term Democrats open to Republican attack – many of them in the GOPAC-targeted south. Second, Gingrich tapped into the voter’s dissatisfaction with federal government, and in particular Congress. Following the popular anti-government campaign of third-party Ross Perot in 1992, the Republicans
framed the 1994 elections as a referendum on the Democratic party; that is, the mid-term election became an ideological contest between the Republicans – who termed themselves as ‘the party of smaller government and lower taxes’ – and the Democrats – who the Republicans chastised as ‘the party of larger government and higher taxes.’ This framework was intensified by a third factor, the Clinton Administration’s push for national healthcare reform. Led by his wife, then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, the call for a federally funded healthcare system was widely opposed by the electorate, and even some senior members of the Democratic Congress. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Gingrich was able to unite his opposition Republicans under a single conservative banner: *The Contract with America* (Peters, 1997).

Though most did not foresee the 1994 mid-term as a landslide victory for the Republicans, many legislative observers did note that high levels of partisanship dominated Congress in the years building up to the election: “Although Congress focused in 1993 on setting new priorities for the national economy, its vigorous partisan divisions ran across the range of issues. On social and foreign policy issues, as well as on economic ones, few Members of either party were inclined toward bipartisan accommodation” (Cohen and Schneider, 1994, pp. 170). This attitude is reflected in Figure 3-1:
Calculated using a composite ideological voting score based upon actual votes cast in 1994, we see here that nearly 60% of Republican members of the House can be categorized as either an “Ultra” or “Strong” conservative during the year building up to the mid-term election. Across three ideological voting dimensions (economic, social, and foreign policy), our originally constructed data shows that House Republicans in the early 1990s were increasingly ideologically homogeneous, dominated by political activity that leaned deeply conservative in its point of view. There remained smaller, though significant groups of more moderated conservatives – regardless, weaker conservative groups were considerably diminished in comparison to their more ideological counterparts in the run-up to the Revolution.

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1 See the attached appendix for an explanation of the calculations involved.
Perhaps the reason that the *Revolution* was such a surprise was because it took place in a period of unified government. Importantly, these factors were exacerbated by this political context: for the first time since 1980, both Congress and the White House were controlled by Democrats; thus, the Republicans could more effectively hold the Democrats accountable for the nation’s problems (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2001). As mentioned, Clinton’s healthcare initiative illustrates how the Republican’s exploited this context to their advantage. The legislative process in the post-reform House has been labeled by some as “unorthodox;” that is, bills in the contemporary Congress increasingly no longer follow a predictive linear process, but are referred to multiple committees before heading to the floor (Sinclair, 2000).

In the case of the healthcare bill, Clinton faced a situation in which five House committees and two Senate committees controlled its fate. With the proposal moving through so many committees, Republican (and even some Democratic) opponents had multiple opportunities to attack the legislation. Placing great trust in their leadership, a united Republican front emerged in an effort to put more partisan pressure on the Clinton proposal. One such example was made by House Minority Leader Richard Armey who published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that illustrated a damaging critique of the President’s plan. The op-ed, and its flow chart that displayed the complexities of the proposed legislation, was repeated over and over on television news programs and in other newspapers. Congressional observers reported that the Administration and Democratic leaders were exasperated by attacks:

“What does it tell you when 75 percent of Americans support the proposals included in the President’s plan… and yet the President’s plan is in trouble” Sen. Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., said. “We’ve got to be very careful about the
continued effort to distort and undermine the legitimate efforts to address this issue through the Congress” (Kosterlitz, 1994, pp. 1119)

In the end, Clinton was handed a major defeat by the Republicans despite their being unified government, and no version of a healthcare bill was ever voted upon in the Congress (Zelizer, 2004, pp. 253-4).

In gearing up for the 1994 campaign against a wounded Administration, Gingrich and GOPAC were adamant about the Republican message and its presentation in terms of its capacity to both encompass the political demands of the voting public, and to communicate the Republican’s ability to meet those demands over that of the Democrats. Seeing 1994 as the moment to present the Republican’s signature platform, the content and language of the *Contract* were refined with extensive polling as conducted by Frank Luntz (a chief Republican spin-doctor), and the advice of sympathetic public policy groups like the Heritage Foundation (Bruck, 1995; Peters, 1999; Edwards, 1999, pp. 297). By June of 1994, many in the GOP were becoming convinced of their possible success: “‘We are like a football team with momentum,’ Rep. Bill McCollum, R-Fla., said… ‘It’s infectious’” (Cohen, 1994, pp. 1618). Following their healthcare victory, a confident Republican party leadership conducted a Maryland retreat to craft their own legislative agenda and policy goals that could be presented to the public “forcefully, persistently, and intelligently.” This retreat produced the GOP’s 10-point platform that called for institutional reform and conservative legislation to be passed within the first 100 days of a Republican majority in Congress (Zelizer, 2004, pp. 254). In multiple ways, this platform represented a direct break with past legislative politics, seeking to remove and reconstruct the institutional foundations of the House.
In a document revealing reminiscent of a landmark presidential signature, the legislative vehicle for achieving the Republican agenda – coined *The Contract with America* – was signed by more than 300 Republican legislators and candidates in a public gathering on the Capitol steps six weeks before the mid-term election. Republican leadership claimed the event (which was covered by all major news outlets) was conducted in such a manner as the signing was a, “symbolic promise to voters that they would fulfill their campaign pledges – unlike Democrats, who (it was claimed) were nothing more than career politicians playing to vested interest groups” (Zelizer, 2004, pp. 254). In a coordinated effort woven together through a single message, GOP candidates continued to nationalize the *Contract* by appearing on daytime television talk shows, the evening news, and on growing non-traditional sources such as talk-radio. Regardless of these actions, not all members of the GOP were convinced by Gingrich, his tactics, or his *Contract*. While conservative Republicans were comfortable with a confrontational approach to lawmaking, many House moderates expressed their reservations:

> Most House moderates are willing to adopt a more aggressive stance, but they don’t necessarily agree with the positions that party leaders are staking out. “My view is they are trying to cast this in an absolute sense,” said Rep. Michael N. Castle of Delaware, a GOP centrist…. Castle endorsed the contract… but, [Castle’s] backing shouldn’t be read as a “signal that I support everything that is in there. I might even fight some of it” (Barnes, 1994, pp. 2211)

Further, many saw the *Contract* as a contradiction in legislative terms: on the one hand it called for tax cuts and tax credits at the same time that it called for a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget. To compound the issue, the *Contract* left little room for raising revenue through taxation as any new taxes would require a three-fifths vote in the House (Shear, 1994, pp. 2451).
Despite some levels of internal division, the conservative legislative agenda generally was a success: The first item – applying all laws of the nation to Congress itself – was supported by 90% of the voters; the balanced budget amendment, the line-item veto, welfare reform, term limits, the $500 tax credit for children, and an enforceable death penalty all had approximately 80% support; and even the less favorable items of regulatory, litigation, and social security reform had 60% of the public backing (Edwards, 1999). A little over a month later, Gingrich and GOPAC found themselves to be wildly successful at the ballot box as well: on November 8th, 1994 Republicans gained fifty-two seats (the largest partisan swing since 1948) and assumed a majority in the House for the first time since the Eisenhower administration. Thirty-four incumbent Democrats were defeated, including then Speaker Foley and two senior committee chairmen – no Republican incumbent suffered defeat. The Republicans were particularly successful in the south: according to some calculations, the GOP turned a 54-83 deficit in the formerly “Solid South” into a 73-64 majority. Taken together, the Revolution produced a 230-204 Republican majority in the House (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2001, pp. 25).

Gingrich’s role in the Revolution cannot be understated:

He was actively involved in recruiting candidates for office, he provided training for them through GOPAC workshops, he articulated their campaign themes on audiotapes that most of them drew upon, he planned campaign strategy for the party, he raised vast sums of money for candidates, he organized the incumbent GOP members to contribute to the campaigns of nonincumbent GOP candidates, he planned the 1994 “Contract with America” strategy – in short there was no aspect of the Republican effort to elect a House majority that he was not responsible for initiating and leading (Peters, 1999, pp. 50)

As such, when the Republicans took hold in the 104th Congress, the obvious choice for Speaker was none other than Newt Gingrich. In all, Gingrich encompassed a new era in
congressional politics: he was different from all previous Speakers because he had created his own majority (Peters, 1999, pp. 50). With this background, the Republicans entered a new era of governance ideologically united under a singularly powerful leadership structure.

The 104th Congress: Republican Party Governance in the House

Through the *Contract with America*, Gingrich had led Republicans to victory by uniting his party under the banner of congressional reform through a deeply conservative policy platform that sought to attract new conservative voters. In the new Congress, this victory (and the process by which it was achieved) led to two very important changes within the institution – first, the establishment of a new electoral base in the south\(^2\); and second, the structuring of the Republican House as an increasingly ideologically cohesive unit under the direction of a greatly empowered leadership structure\(^3\). For the Republicans, these two initial factors would largely define their future path as the new majority party in Congress.

\(^2\) See Figures 3-2 and 3-3.

\(^3\) See Figures 3-4, 3-6; and Table 3-1.
Figure 3-2. Republican regional distribution: 1994 to 1995

Looking at Figure 3-2, we see that before the 1994 election, the regional distribution of House GOP seats came from the Mid-West, South, and Mid-Atlantic states. Our data above mirrors the conventional wisdom that the GOP made huge inroads into the South during the Revolution; yet, Figure 3-2 also suggests that the distributional balance remained somewhat similar following 1994, with the Mid-West and Mid-Atlantic states remaining important areas for conservative electoral support. What is interesting about the 1994 election is that while the biggest wins were in the South, the party made gains not only in this region, but across all geographic regions. In

For more information on our regional division methodology, see the attached appendix.

The number of Freshmen gains were substantial in this election with 73 new Republican members in the 104th Congress. Comparatively, the 101st had 16, the 102nd had 18, and the 103rd had 47 new Republican members (Congressional Research Service, 2008).
particular, the party nearly doubled its presence in Rocky Mountains and Border states, and saw large gains as well in the Pacific region. The only area in which the Republicans did not make significant representational advancement was in the New England region. Below, Figure 3-3 provides a dramatic illustration of the GOP’s gains in 1994.

![Bar chart showing regional distribution of Republican House freshmen: 1995.]

Figure 3-3. Regional distribution, Republican House freshmen: 1995

Measuring the percentage of victorious Freshmen by region, Figure 3-3 illustrates the significant gains the party made in the South. Clearly, Gingrich – whose electoral district was in north Georgia – was highly successful in recruiting, training, and funding his fellow southerners in his march towards Capitol Hill.
As stated, the Republicans owed much of the 1994 election to inroads the party made in the South over the decades prior to the Revolution\textsuperscript{6}. For the first time since the Civil War, the “Party of Lincoln” was viable in the heart of Dixie. As rigorously articulated by Black and Black (2002) in their seminal work “The Rise of Southern Republicans,” the South had become an electoral target for conservatives following the collapse of the Conservative Coalition between Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans. Though the GOP began chipping away at the Democratic “Solid South” with the Goldwater campaign, the Reagan Administration ushered in the possibility of a new electoral South in which suburban, upper-middle class, evangelical whites could be mobilized under a conservative party banner. Combined with racially motivated reapportionment in redistricting during the 1980s and early 1990s, many Southern electoral districts became distinctly homogenous in terms of race. Prior to the 1994 election, Black and Black find that these factors combined to create a favorable environment for the GOP: in 1992, despite H.W. Bush’s poor overall reelection efforts, the number of presidentially Republican and very low-African American congressional seats increased from twenty eight in 1990 to forty-one. In all, Black and Black find that the Republicans congressional surge was based on, “durable changes in white partisanship and much more aggressive party leadership in recruiting and financing GOP candidates” (2002, pp. 337).

As if to cement this new electoral base into the party, Republicans in the House chose to empower three southerners with party leadership positions: Newt Gingrich from Georgia, Speaker; Dick Armey from Texas, Majority Party Leader; and Tom Delay

\textsuperscript{6} The impact of regionalism on future political development is examined in Chapters 4 and 5.
from Texas, Majority Whip. Like many of their newly won supporters in cities like
Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston; each of these leaders was a white, suburban, middle-
aged man (Critchlow, 2004). In fact, this leadership structure (especially in terms of
Gingrich’s story) was somewhat of a case study for the southern conservative
experience: the new party leaders were energetic and combative, and had originally
succeed the hard way, running as Republicans in states that had been exceedingly
hostile to the GOP for over 100 years (Black and Black, 2002). Beyond Gingrich, other
leaders like Armey were characterized in the media as “True Believers” who had
themselves spent years working towards a conservative movement in the House:
“Armey is eager to do his part to purge Washington of what conservatives view as a
rickety tax-and-spend Big government that hasn’t worked for decades but has been kept
afloat by an alliance of zealous liberals, labor unions, the Democratic party, and a liberal
news media establishment” (Starobin, 1995, pp. 8). Uniting under this narrative, these
newly empowered party leaders were ideologically linked and organized in such a way
as to limit the possibility of internal struggles over power and to reinforce the move
toward a centralized authority in the new GOP majority (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997,
pp. 43).

As is evident in Figure 3-4, the leadership chosen by the newly minted Republican
majority was highly conservative. By our calculations, 75% of House leaders (defined
here as members holding party leadership positions including: Majority Leader, Majority
Whip, Chief Deputy Majority Whip, Republican Conference Chairman, Republican Vice
Conference Chairman, Republican Conference Secretary, Republican Policy Committee
Chairman, Leadership Chairman, and NRCC Chairman⁷) are considered to be an “Ultra-Conservative” in the first session of the 104th Congress.

Figure 3-4. House leadership ideology: 1995

Further, as seen in Figure 3-5, members in positions of broader House management (defined here as both elected party leaders and committee chairmen) between 1994 and 1995 shifted away from an organizational structure dominated by members from traditional Republican strongholds in the Mid-Atlantic, to one that took a significantly increased Southern and Mid-Western turn in leadership following the Revolution:

⁷ The Speaker is usually a non-voting member of the House; as such, this office is not incorporated in our calculations of leadership ideology.
Together, the Gingrich leadership team was relatively solid, and operated from a simple principle that they had developed during their years with the COS – “What is the smallest group that can effect things” (Maraniss and Weisskopf, 1996). Employing this theory to manage the young “Revolutionaries,” the new Speaker and his lieutenants set out to govern the House in manner strongly indicative of party governance.

Even before the 104th Congress convened in January 1995, the Gingrich team set the stage for Contract-based reform within the House. Most specifically, in terms of how the House constructed legislation, Republican leadership called for the elimination of three House committees and a number of subcommittees. In an effort to further erode committee autonomy and influence in the House, all committee and subcommittee meetings were to be opened to the public, and party leadership sought to end “proxy voting” in which committee chairs controlled the votes of absent members. Further, the leadership proposed a series of “taskforces” to help ensure the smooth passage of the
Contract (Critchlow, 2004). In all, many newly elected GOP members from 1992 and 1994 believed that they owed – in some degree – their election to Newt Gingrich and his efforts during the previous decade. Following the lessons of GOPAC, these “Young Turks” not only supported Gingrich’s policy goals and leadership style, but also now represented a relatively homogenous majority within the Republican conference (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 42). Journalists covering the election wrote of the infatuation with Gingrich and his plans following the election:

Most Republicans, especially in the afterglow of victory, appear infatuated with Gingrich. In late September, about 350 House GOP candidates came to Washington to sign the Gingrich-inspired contract on the Capitol steps. When the candidates and their entourages joined Gingrich for a lavish private dinner that night, participants said, the crowd was in the palm of his hand. “With the Republican faithful, to a much broader extent than I thought possible three months ago, Newt has assumed the mantle of moral leadership” said Jeffrey A. Eisenach…. The staggering dimensions of the GOP rout may benefit Gingrich and his team in unexpected ways (Cohen, 1994, pp. 2649)

As noted by a number of scholars writing in this time period, with all of this action taking place before the 104th Congress even began, it was unsurprising that Speaker-elect Gingrich and his team sought to impose a more centralized leadership structure in the new era of Republican governance (Peters, 1997; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997; Koopman, 1996; Aldrich and Rhode, 2000; Zelizer, 2004).

The desire to exploit their electoral success in such a way as to change the developmental path of the House cannot be understated: In multiple ways, the Republican Revolution and the reforms that followed represent a “critical juncture” in the progress of the House upon which the young Republican majority attempted to push the institution down a new developmental path – whether the action was the dramatically enhanced powers of the party leadership, the undercutting of traditional committee
activity, or the demands for radical policy change; the new majority sought to remove and reconfigure the chamber in such a way as to remake the structure of the House.

In his exhausting review of the American Speakership, Ronald Peters (1997) argues that – historically – Republicans have often leaned toward more centralized party leadership than Democrats have typically been able to sustain (for example the speakerships of Reed and Cannon). Following the Gingrich model formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s and culminating in the *Contract with America*, the House GOP’s goal for the 104th Congress was to transform its culture thoroughly:

Under Gingrich’s leadership the Republicans sought to dismantle entirely the power structure the Democrats had put in place during their forty years of uninterrupted control and to replace it with new mechanisms that reflected the culture and values of the Republican party…. From the committee system to the House’s administrative apparatus to the seniority rule to the informal caucuses to the culture of the Republican conference, Gingrich sought to root out every vestige of the Democratic regime and to replace it with a new Republican regime that would be as lasting as the Democrats’ had been (Peters, 1997, pp. 293 – emphasis ours)

Heeding their earlier calls for a focused party leadership structure, once officially endowed as Speaker, Gingrich formed a new leadership team entitled the *Speaker’s Advisory Group* (SAG) consisting of Newt’s closest party allies: Majority Leader Dick Armey, Whip Tom Delay, Conference Chair John Boehner, Campaign Committee Chair Bill Paxon, and the SAG Chair Robert Walker. The purpose of this new leadership steering committee was two-fold: first it provided a centralized point within the House to ensure the passage of the *Contract*; second, it enabled the new Speaker to thwart hurdles within the committee system that had defined the legislative process in previous Congresses. As to the first, SAG formed the basis for a coordinated staff structure within the leadership and between specific committees, helping to mitigate any factionalism with the GOP caucus. Further, the steering committee allowed for a more
efficient public-relations effort led by the Speaker’s press secretary—thus helping the fledging majority speak with a unified voice (Peters, 1997, pp. 294). In terms of the second purpose, reminiscent of the reform era of the 1970s, the GOP party leadership took a number of steps in an effort to diminish the legislative authority of the House committee system.

The Republican majority held true to their efforts to reform the committee system, eliminating the Merchant Marine and Fisheries, District of Colombia, and Post Office and Civil Service committees (several others were renamed to reflect the GOP’s view of the House; for example: Armed Services became National Security, and Education and Labor became Education and Educational Opportunities). The elimination of these three committees was not random, in that each had strong relationships with traditionally Democratic interest groups (most centrally federal workers unions tied to Civil Service committees and subcommittees). Beyond elimination, remaining committees had their staff slashed by one-third, and leadership often came to determine the placement of key committee staff members. As argued throughout the literature, deep reductions in committee staff have a fundamental impact on committee power, as committee activity is often determined by the limits of its resources (Peters, 1997, pp. 295; Deering and Smith, 1997; Dodd and Schott, 1979). In conjunction with total elimination of three committees, staff reductions and leadership placement afforded Gingrich’s SAG increased control of the House’s internal workings (Peters, 1997, pp. 294-5).

Perhaps most important in terms of committee reforms, Peters (1997) notes that team Gingrich was able to use his political capitol garnered in the 1994 election to reduce the influence of committees in the name of party governance in four key ways.
First, the decentralized Committee on Committees was replaced with a new committee assignment system in which Speaker Gingrich himself controlled (at least indirectly) one-fourth of the assignment votes. Second, with the new power to nominate (or remove) committee chairs, Gingrich was able to employ his assignment influence in circumventing three times seniority placement in favor of junior, party-loyal members of the Revolution. Third, as discussed, committee chair influence was reduced with the elimination of proxy voting. Fourth, and potentially most important to Gingrich’s view of party governance in the House, the 104th Congress forced a three-term limit upon all committee chairs. In effect, this term limit in combination with other reforms would prevent committee chairs from amassing power in a manner similar to committee chairs during the “Textbook” era of Congress (Peters, 1997, pp. 295). Interestingly, while the new term limits focused on committee chairs, a second limit of eight years – this time aimed at the Speaker – was also proposed and passed with support of GOP Freshmen.

Congressional media observers at the time predicted that these reforms would have a profound impact on the institution:

> Proposed reforms would fundamentally change the way the House does its business. By weakening committee fiefdoms and consolidating power in the hands of Speaker Gingrich, R-Ga., the GOP has ended an era dominated by powerful committee barons, or “old bulls.” The House Republicans’ Contract With America also breaks new ground by setting a national agenda that goes beyond Members’ local, constituent-driven concerns…. The result will be a series of administrative and procedural changes more comprehensive than any since the 1946 Legislative Reform Act (Carney, 1995, pp. 156-7)

As the new majority came into power, these reforms shifted the internal workings of the Congress in three substantial ways: (1) a departure away from the seniority system and
towards party loyalty in the selection of committee chairs\textsuperscript{8}; (2) the elimination of certain committees and the placing of limitation on the number of subcommittees; and (3) an increase in appointment authority of the Speaker on the Committee on Committees (interestingly, despite the elimination of certain committees and the streamlining of subcommittees, these reforms did not adopt a wholesale realignment of committee jurisdictions as had earlier reforms such as the 1946 Legislative Reorganization Act) (Aldrich and Rohde, 2009). In all, these reforms significantly enhanced the administrative and procedural authority of the Speaker of the House (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a).

In replacement of committee and committee chair influence in the 104\textsuperscript{th} Congress, Gingrich and SAG erected a number of “party taskforces” to develop and ensure the passage of the \textit{Contract}. Relying on his brand of managerial style, Gingrich argued that whereas committees may have been traditionally thought of as the workhorses of Congress in which members develop area-specific policy expertise (Deering and Smith, 1997), these taskforces would be flexible and adaptable units to more efficiently and effectively produce legislation. Regardless of this argument, many observers felt that the real agenda was to circumvent Democratic opponents from participating in the legislative process so as to maintain party and ideological unity (Peters, 1997; Maraniss and Weisskopf, 1996). While these taskforces consisted of several members from relevant standing committees, each also included several general caucus members and outside interest group advisors loyal to the leadership. In conjunction with the multiple committee government reforms, these taskforces effectively supplanted committees in

\textsuperscript{8}See Figure 5-4
the writing and passage of *Contract*-based legislation: “Speaker Gingrich was determined to ensure that no committee or sub-committee chair could impede the party agenda…. The committee reforms, the staff reductions, and the undermining of seniority all aimed at transforming the committee structure; the use of task forces aimed at circumventing the committee process altogether” (Peters, 1997, pp. 294-5). Together, these developments eroded operational models employed by the federal legislature in previous congresses as leaders increasingly influenced bill creation in committees, bypassed committee and post-committee bill adjustments, and controlled rules and floor action during debate (Aldrich and Rhode, 2009).

A number of other changes were made in the halls of Congress that shed light on the nature of the new Republican regime. Compared to previous eras of Congress in which Democrats controlled the day-to-day operations and services of the House, Republicans took a view not of preservation, but elimination:

The post office, Folding Room, the barber and beauty shops, and the shoeshine stands were privatized. Ice delivery to members’ offices was eliminated. The House Printer office was abolished…. The Office of Doorkeeper was eliminated…. Twelve layers of House administration were reduced to two. The new Office of Chief Administrator was created, reporting directly to the speaker…. The operation of the House was reconceptualized on a business model, with each office treated as a small business and given a “representational allowance” (Peters, 1997, pp. 297-8)

In all, the House began to look, function, and sound like its Speaker’s two operational virtues: first, Gingrich’s management motto of “Listen, Learn, Help, Lead;” and second, Gingrich’s militaristic leadership theory of “Vision, Strategies, Projects, Tactics.” With his aggressive personality, the strong backing of fellow southern-conservative party leaders Armey and Delay, and nearly lock-in-step support of Freshmen “Revolutionaries,” Speaker Newt Gingrich employed his two visions to lead his troops onto the House
floor. In all, the Republican party leadership opened the 104th Congress stressing not just command, but group cohesion and collective action (Peters, 1997; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a).

In considering the level of ideological cohesion within the party at the start of the 104th Congress, Table 3-1 below compares the ideological make-up of the party before and after the 1994 election. As is discussed in greater detail our appendix, these five categories separate Republican members of the House in terms of their general ideological outlook over a given period of time. Inspired by the methodology employed by Douglas Koopman in his 1996 work Hostile Takeover, these categories represent a member’s mean ideological score across three voting issue dimensions (economic issue votes, social issue votes, and foreign policy issue votes) as determined by the National Journal’s annual congressional vote ratings. When taken together, these voting dimensions provide us with some interesting insights about the Republican party and their first year as the House majority. First, in the sessions immediately before and after the Revolution, the party as a whole leaned towards strong levels of conservatism across all three voting dimensions. Second, as expected, the leadership structure remained consistently conservative during the election year and in the following congressional session. Third, the incoming Freshmen – of whom nearly 50% can be categorized as either an “Ultra-” or “Strong Conservative” – represent a large conservative voting bloc within the young Republican majority.

9 Leadership Structure is defined here as elected party leadership and committee chairmen in 1995. To provide for comparative consistency, calculations for 1994 are derived from member National Journal Vote Ratings whom would assume those leadership roles in 1995.
Table 3-1. Percentage of membership by ideological category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1994 Party</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>1995 Party</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ultra Conservatives</td>
<td>30.90%</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
<td>27.35%</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>25.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Conservatives</td>
<td>26.97%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>20.09%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>24.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Conservatives</td>
<td>21.35%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>21.37%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>16.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Conservatives</td>
<td>15.73%</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>25.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrician Conservatives</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>14.53%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our findings for these two years are supportive of the conditional party governance model, which as an organizational strategy requires significant levels of internal ideological homogeneity. As Table 3-1 and Figure 3-6 (below) demonstrate, the early actions taken by the newly formed Republican caucus fulfill largely the party governance model’s fundamental requirement of ideological cohesion within a party.\(^\text{10}\)

**Takeover Successful, But an Unclear Future Ahead**

Taken together, the institutional reforms employed in the first days of the 104\(^{th}\) Congress were clearly aimed at strengthening the power and prerogatives of the Speaker (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 39). Congressional observers and practitioners saw that Gingrich was the clear authority in the first session of the 104\(^{th}\) Congress; as such, this highly centralized leadership structure placed responsibility for policy success directly on his shoulders. Some even referred to Gingrich as the

\(^{10}\) Figure 3-6 and Table 3-1 also indicate the presence of ideological groups within the emerging Republican majority that are more moderate in their voting behavior – a significant factor that will emerge as the Republican move forward in time. In terms of the party as a whole, though the single largest bloc are the “Ultra Conservatives” in both 1994 and 1995, more than half the caucus can be categorized as a “Moderate-,” “Weak-,” or “Patrician Conservative” in their first year as the majority. This categorical breakdown can be interpreted to say that these members consistently voted less conservatively than their counterparts. As to Freshmen, though many of the new faces were deeply southern and deeply conservative (thus, some might say the most visible), half of these labeled “Young Turks” did not fit their given political title – at least not when it came to their votes on substantive issues. Even for those in positions of organizational control, despite a large reduction in the number of “Patrician Conservatives” between 1994 and 1995, ideological moderates and weaker made up 37% of the Republican’s party leadership in 1995.
“Legislative Leviathan” predicted by Cox and McCubbins (1993), who could force his majority in any direction he demanded (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 43).

Figure 3-6. Republican House ideological trend: 1995

Illustrated above, the overall ideology in the first session of the 104th Congress leaned strongly towards a conservative framework. As seen in Figure 3-6 — in which a lower liberal ideological score (x-axis) indicates a higher degree of conservatism by an individual member – the centralization of power in the House was characterized by a high degree of ideological unity among the overall GOP, leading to a series of early

11 Figure 3-6 was calculated using a member’s mean ideological score following the methodology discussed in the attached appendix. After placing the member in their appropriate ideological range – Ultra, Strong, Moderate, Weak, and Patrician Conservative – these subgroups were again divided in two by their median score. Of those members falling within a particular range, a mean ideological score was calculated. The “dots” above represent a simple frequency count of the number of members who fall into a particular sub-range, and the average ideological score of those members in that sub-range.
legislative success for the new majority (in fact, our data here show a very strong negative relationship between the number of members in an ideological range, and the level of liberalism in that range; that is, as conservatism decreased, so too did the number of members decrease). It is important to note that these findings are consistent with the conditional party governance model; that is, given the condition of a high degree of intraparty ideological unity, the majority chose to adopt an organizational structure defined by strengthened party leadership and increased partisanship. With the majority of their members supportive of a conservative legislative agenda, it seemed that the takeover of the House was complete. Indeed, from January through April of 1995 – deemed by some as the high point of the Revolution (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a) – the Republicans successfully acted on a series of major promises made in the Contract with America.

In terms of the preliminary actions taken by the Republicans to fulfill the Contract, the initial decision to employ party unity lead generally to legislative success – at least in the House. Of the institutional reforms discussed (empowering the Speaker, placing regulatory workforce rules on the House, committee chair term limits, etc.), all but member term-limits were passed with high levels of Republican voting cohesion. Without doubt, the first 100 days of the 104th Congress were a breathtaking display of party governance at work. With committees out of the way and party leadership using “Taskforces” to craft terms of debate that minimized the opportunity for dissent within the party or obstruction by the Democrats; complex legislation including bills on crime, welfare reform, the federal budget, Social Security, defense, illegal drugs, the environment, and taxation all passed the House as products of party leadership
negotiations rather than committee deliberations (Critchlow, 2004, pp. 720; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 44). In total, with the exception of congressional term limits and missile defense, Speaker Gingrich and his army of followers in the GOP House caucus succeed in passing the entirety of the *Contract with America*. The first 100 days seemed to be the first of a new Republican era in Congress and possibly beyond:

Backed by a united party and trusted assistants, Gingrich presented the House Republicans as an aggressive, cohesive, and irresistible force that could not fail to create a new Republican era in Congress, which would go on to transform the nation. The size of the 1994 victory seemed to provide the justification for this Republican confidence, and the Contract with America provided the policy agenda that Republicans claimed the public had mandated in the election (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 44).

More importantly for the institution of Congress and fate of the Republican majority, Speaker Gingrich and his followers had clearly sought a direct break with past legislative governance, setting the party on a new developmental path in the post-*Revolution* House – a path that depended greatly on the ideological preference unity of the party he was endowed to lead. The question remains: With all of the pressures of governance now on Gingrich’s shoulders, and the all too real potential for a shift in the operational context of the 104th and later congresses, how did this initial strategy of party governance shape or constrain the future direction of the Republican House majority? Answering this question and considering its theoretical implications for congressional politics remains the primary focus of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 4
EXTENDING THEIR REPUBLIC?

Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests…

—Publius, Federalist 10

As the previous chapter illustrated, the new Republican majority met with a great deal of success in the days leading up to the 104th Congress – much of which is attributed to Newt Gingrich, his leadership team, and their party governance approach to legislating in the House. The Revolution of 1994 was a milestone for both the development of Congress as an institution and for those elected members under its dome. Representing a critical juncture in the history of the House, the post-Revolution period took the body and those within it down a new developmental path – one that we find placed the young majority in an increasingly precarious position. In this chapter, we present an emerging pattern of behavior under this new operational system that would continue to shape the Republican House majority as it moved through time.

The Revolution and the first days of the 104th Congress represented an attempt by Republicans to radically reform the House (and more broadly the nature of the American political arena itself). In seeking to enforce the promises of the Contract, the once “permanent minority” sought a direct break with long-held legislative rules and norms. These breaks included the creation of term limits on the Speaker and committee chairs (and an attempted term limit on all members), the circumventing and elimination of committees in the legislative process, and the establishment of enhanced authority for party leadership. Of particular importance, the Contract also demanded drastic policy change in the form of cuts to the federal budget. In seeking to exploit this critical juncture and take the House down a new legislative path, the Republicans sought to
remove and reconfigure the chamber in such a way as to remake the structure of the institution. Of central importance to contemporary congressional development, these initial choices made by the majority in one context would not retain their luster overtime: Despite short-term successes for the “Revolutionary” Republicans, we show in the following chapter that this new developmental path would remain “sticky,” thus planting the seeds for future crisis as their newly empowered leaders stumbled and their favorable political climate evaporated.

Make Way for the Republicans!... or, the Revolution that Wasn’t?

Despite the electoral success of 1994, legislatively speaking, the Republicans faced a wholly different opponent in their efforts to pass the *Contract with America*: themselves. As discussed, via the *Contract*, Republican members of Congress and their leadership promised to reform Congress in an effort bring the institution into accord with what these young conservatives considered to be America’s core political values – a smaller government (especially in terms of the budget) and a more responsive Congress. For the “Revolutionaries,” the initial order of business was to reshape the procedural environment in which the institution operated (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 3). To do so, Republicans promised to bring member term limits to a vote, impose term limits on party leaders, ban gifts to members of Congress, apply civil rights and employment law to Congress, reform legislative processes in committees, and – most importantly – to reduce spending and balance the federal budget (Samples, 2005, pp. 26; Rae and Campbell, 1999). In each of these areas, the “Revolutionaries” would quickly come to understand the limitations placed upon them by their chosen operational model and broader institutional context.
Gingrich and his party were on a mission to fulfill the promises of the *Contract*. On the agenda for first day of the 104th Congress: term limits were imposed on party leadership (though the House passed the constitutional amendment prescribing term limits on *all* members, it failed to get the required two-thirds majority), House staff was drastically reduced, budgeting rules were altered, committee hearings were opened to the public, members enacted a requirement of a three-fifths vote to increase taxes, and applied to Congress as a body anti-discrimination and workplace safety rules. While the Republicans seemed to have an impressive start out of the gate, they soon began stumbling – and potential fault lines within the young majority began to emerge.

Looking first at term limits for party leaders, committee chairman, and general members of Congress; the *Contract* promised to bring the issue to a vote within the 104th Congress’ first 100 days. Despite high electoral support for the reform and the backing of junior members who strongly supported term limits, the Republican leadership was wary of pushing too hard for universal member term limits as many senior members of the GOP opposed them. Three separate versions of term limits legislation was proposed by the party, each with a different number of terms allowed by a House legislator. In an effort to compromise with senior GOP members, party leadership ultimately supported a bill that limited members of the House to six terms, and provided the recommendation that senators be limited to two terms. Viewed as too generous a limit by junior members, the leader-supported bill split the House Republicans from the grass-roots groups that had put term limits on the national agenda: In the end, the term-limits constitutional amendment fell 63 votes short of

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1 Particularly, as seen in Figures 4-1 and 4-2, between newly empowered southern social conservatives and more traditional fiscal conservatives from other regions.
passage in the House. This is not to say that term-limits reform met with no success. House rules were altered so that committee and sub-committee chairs did have term limits imposed upon them; as such, these reforms led to the retirement of four committee chairman in the House in 2002. Though somewhat successful in this endeavor, many of these term-limit reforms have since been overturned, as particularly seen in 2003 when the House removed these limits on Dennis Hastert’s role as speaker (Samples, 2005, pp. 28-9).

Beyond term-limits, perhaps the biggest failure for congressional Republicans came in the form of budgetary reform: balancing the budget was a key promise of the incoming Republicans, and was viewed as a fundamental change in the direction of national governance after 25 consecutive years of budget deficits (Moore, 2005). Without doubt, limiting the size of government via a reduced and balanced budget was a central feature in the Revolution’s platform. From eliminating single programs to entire departments, the 104th Congress promised to reduce taxes, government regulation, and overall federal spending. Specifically, the original Contract with America budget for fiscal year 1996 slated more than 200 programs for termination:

Some programs were little more than political slush funds for special interest constituencies, such as the Legal Services Corporation, bilingual education funding, and President Clinton’s program for an army of AmeriCorps “volunteers.” That budget also tried to defund programs Ronald Reagan had tried to kill, such as the Economic Development Administration, Amtrak subsidies, federal transit grants, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and maritime subsidies. Most impressive of all, the FY96 House budget called for the elimination of three cabinet departments: Commerce, Education, and Energy (Moore, 2005, pp. 60)

How successful was the young Republican majority in this endeavor? For a short time, the Republicans did lead the way on budget reform; yet, these reforms were hardly ground-breaking. Cuts were made in defense spending (made possible largely by the
end of the Cold War), and domestic discretionary spending was brought under some control through changes in federal welfare policy. Despite limited government and spending reductions being key policies in the overall platform of the *Contract*, these reforms were not to last: The 1994 *Revolution* now behind them, congressional Republicans were showing themselves to be short lived in their revolutionary ways when it came to fiscal policy issues. Just one electoral cycle after the 1994 upheaval, both defense and domestic discretionary spending began to rise rapidly. Though the Republicans had won control of Congress for the first time in nearly 50 years on the promise to eliminate hundreds of government programs, the majority of those slated in this category remained in effect – even today, with higher levels of funding than in 1994.

Specifically, by the midpoint of the Bush Administration, unreformed programs include:

- *Amtrak*: Scheduled to be self sufficient FY2002, Received $1.2 billion FY04
- *Medicare*: Cuts attempted in 1994, Program expanded in 2003 under the Bush and party leadership backed “Medicare Part D” legislation - $534 billion (estimate) over 10 years for drug benefits
- *Department of Education*: Targeted for termination by the *Contract*, increased from $31 billion in FY95 to $63 billion in 2004 with the creation of Bush and party leadership backed “No Child Left Behind” Program (Moore, 2005)
What might explain this dramatic change in policy direction? The content of the *Contract* and the regional gains in 1994 are interesting places to begin investigating this and other questions about House Republican change overtime. As discussed, the *Contract* largely side-stepped many of the moral issues and social policy reforms pressed for by conservatives new to the party since the 1970s and Reagan era. Focusing on economic policy, the *Contract* placed the focus of House members squarely on budgetary issues. This focus is reflected in Figure 4-1, in which we use our originally constructed database to place members within two conservative camps: “Budget-Cons” and “Theo-Cons.” As seen in 1994, the majority of GOP House members can be classified as “Budget-Cons” — meaning that their degree of conservatism on fiscal issues was higher than that on moral issues. With the large influx of “Revolutionary” Freshmen (who were often deeply morally conservative), the gap between these two broad groups was nearly closed, remaining relatively close in number across the 1990s. Beginning in 1999, “Theo-Cons” — or those whose
conservatism was deeper in terms of moral issues than that of fiscal issues – took a dramatic increase, dominating the party’s policy perspective from then until the end of the Republican majority tenure.

This move overtime from a traditional fiscal focus, to a focus upon moral issues may be somewhat explained by the growth of non-traditional regional groups within the party. Looking to Figure 4-2, we see that across the entire period of Republican control of the House, a greater percentage of members from the south in each congressional session supported moral issues to a higher degree than fiscal issues (to put it another way, members from the south were comparatively more conservative on moral issues, and more liberal on fiscal issues during the entire Republican majority). If there was a broad change in the party in terms of conservatism typology, what developmental dynamics might explain this change following the success of the 104th Congress’ first session; that is, what sort of change in the political arena might have caused Republicans to behave in this manner? The puzzle presented here is at the heart of our research objective.

Figure 4-2. Budget-Cons versus Theo-Cons, The South: 1994-2006
**104th to 105th: What a Difference a Congress Makes**

To assess these developments, let us take a deeper look at the interplay of the Republican experience between the 104th and 105th Congress. As noted, Gingrich met with some success in passing the reforms in the *Contract*, much in part due to his new “farm team” of GOPAC indoctrinated junior members. In his first 100 days, Speaker Gingrich relied heavily on support from conservative congressional Freshmen: over seventy in number, this sub-group was directly trained by team-Gingrich, and received an unprecedented number of key committee positions once in office. In fact, the new Speaker often spoke of them as the “guardians” of the *Revolution*. In all, these junior members constituted a significant voting bloc within of the House Republican conference, and were a core powerbase for Gingrich and other party leaders. Despite the party leadership’s move to empower these faithful juniors, Gingrich’s decisions alienated some members of the House GOP from others. Preliminary investigations here and in the literature note that there was growing divide between the junior, southern “Revolutionaries” and their more senior, traditional Republican colleagues (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 4). Beyond these issues, there were institutional hurtles to consider as well.

Assuming for the moment that Gingrich and his leaders were able to operate the House from the perspective of party governance, successful passage of controversial reforms in their chamber did not guarantee legislative success once bills left the House and were taken up by adjoining political institutions. While Gingrich was able to force some of the *Contract’s* more contentious legislation on the shoulders of his junior “Revolutionaries” within the House, the first major institutional hurdle that slowed the speed of the proposed *Contract’s* implementation was found in the Senate. As Gingrich
began pressing his colleagues in the upper chamber to pass the *Contract’s* economic reform plan, congressional media observers began to take note of the uphill battle he faced when it came to dealing with the more moderate Senate: “But what about the Senate, which will determine the fate of all the fine print in the contract? There, the dynamics shift from rah-rah to chin pulling. ‘We’re going to let the coffee cool,’ Majority Leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., said. Then, with a sly chuckle, he added, ‘In fact, we’re going to let it get cold’” (Shear, 1995, pp. 344). Passage in the Senate was stalled for two reasons: First, due to such factors as the body’s size, its norms, and its mores; the Senate tends to be a more restrained and deliberative chamber than does the House. Though they controlled the majority in the Senate, with only 54 seats Republicans were not able to overcome filibuster rules necessary to control floor debate. Secondly, the Republicans were not able to secure the numbers necessary to pass constitutional amendments. Regardless of their attempts at party governance in the House, particularly when it came to fulfilling the *Contract’s* central plank of a balanced budget amendment, the nation’s Madisonian separation-of-powers system proved to be a significant barrier for the party’s attempted *Revolution*: “The first indication that the Republican agenda would stall came when the balanced budget amendment to the Constitution – an integral part of the Contract – failed by one vote to secure the necessary two-thirds majority (67 votes) for passage” (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 4).

The second institutional barrier facing Republicans – and one with far greater impact on their then and future majority – was the White House. Even if they could steer the *Contract* through the Senate, implementation of the controversial legislation required presidential approval. Though Gingrich and other party leaders believed President
Clinton had been severely weakened in the 1994 mid-term election, their estimation of the executive who had mastered “going public” was sorely off-mark (Kernell, 2007). A budget showdown was underway. This dissertation hypothesizes that in a fundamental way, the reaction of the Republican Party to the 1995-1996 budget showdown lead to a breakdown in party leadership and unity, followed by an increase of ideologically temperate sub-groups within the conservative camp. In particular, this dynamic displayed growing incongruence during the first half of the Republican majority tenure between leaders whom remained predominately in the “Ultra-Conservative” camp, and those rank-and-file conservatives that adopted a more moderated tone in reaction to multiple crisis episodes. To see why, a brief look at the events leading up to the budget debate is helpful.

As argued by Sinclair (2000), lawmaking in Congress has become increasingly unorthodox in the post-reform era. Different from the textbook view of Congress, which modeled the legislative process as predictable and linear, the unorthodox lawmaking thesis argues that the contemporary policy process is characterized by variability rather than uniformity. A primary example of unorthodox lawmaking comes in the form of omnibus bills often employed by Democrats during their tenure in the post-reform era. As described by Krutz (2001), omnibus legislating is the practice of combining numerous measures from disparate policy areas into one massive bill. Omnibus bills have become increasingly useful institutional tools to pass contentious legislation that might otherwise fail in the legislative process if left to stand on its own. Though in use

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2 We conduct a more complete empirical analysis of this event and its aftermath in Chapter 5 as it relates to shifting operational contexts and related changes in ideological patterns within the House Republican majority.
since the 1950s, omnibus legislating has become increasingly common as complexity has grown both within Congress and between the institution’s relationship with the White House (Sinclair, 2000). To summarize the process, while riders are often attempted by members to kill legislative initiatives, omnibus bills are pursued as an institutional “blanket” to hide particular controversial legislation within an overall bill that is easier for members of Congress and the President to swallow:

The bigger bill has its own locus (or multiple loci) of attention and is more likely to have the broad support needed for passage. Omnibus bills are powerful for focusing attention away from controversial items to other main items that enjoy widespread support and/or are seen as necessary – like the budget (Krutz, 2001, pp. 5)

Overall, omnibus bills provide a method to both manage increasing legislative uncertainty in the post-reform Congress, and to enact policies whose outcome is doubtful in the American system of checks and balances (Krutz, 2001).

Despite calls against omnibus legislating in the 1994 campaign – referring to them as “dictatorial” and “illegitimate” – and attempts to reform the budgeting process so as to make it more open to scrutiny, Republican leaders found themselves unable to pass the Contract’s most contentious fiscal policies despite their majority in the House and Senate (Sinclair, 1999). To combat this situation, Republican leaders employed the very tactics they had criticized just one year before: “As the rest of the Contract faced inevitable obstruction in the Senate, the Republican House leadership and Senate Majority leader Robert Dole were compelled to resort to the same tactics of ‘unorthodox’ lawmakers as their Democratic counterparts in the 103rd Congress” (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 4). Regardless of prior rejection in the campaign, Republican leadership in the House and Senate chose to utilize omnibus legislating for the same purposes as their Democratic colleagues: due to institutional limitations in Congress, Republicans
packaged the most contentious items of the *Contract* together in a fashion calculated to thwart possible Senate roadblocks and requirements for supermajorities. The legislation presented to the Senate floor for the fiscal year 1996 budget was broad indeed: a “tax cut for working families,” significant reduction in the size of federal government (in the form of spending reductions towards a 2002 balanced budget), reform of the welfare system, a roll-back in environmental legislation (by cutting appropriations to enforcement agencies), and a redirect of federal government activity to the state and local levels. Overall, because the legislation was more attractive to a broader range of senators than was the original *Contract*, this omnibus budget was successful in terms of circumventing institutional minefields in the Senate; yet, Republicans still faced the challenge of a presidential veto at the hands of Bill Clinton (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 5).

One of the most attractive attributes of omnibus legislation is that it nearly always passes: because both contentious policy and district-specific pork can easily be added with little or no notice to what is otherwise viewed as “necessary” legislation, both members of Congress and the president have an interest in their passage. In this way, congressional leaders have historically believed that the packaging of this legislation can be used to structure the president’s choices in a way more favorable to the congressional majority – particularly in times of divided government (Krutz, 2001). As the budget showdown came to a head, the newly minted Republican majority gave into the pressure, backing away from their vitriolic campaign criticisms and turning to a previously opposed institutional tool to move forward on their agenda: “The Republican leadership believed that packaging the mass of major policy changes in one huge
reconciliation bill made it harder for the president to veto…. The new majority used rules to structure choices, as had their Democratic predecessors” (Sinclair, 1999, pp. 29-30).

Gingrich and his fellow Republican leaders went into the 1996 Budget battle believing their forces possessed the upper hand. Perhaps more importantly, after years of training and planning, Gingrich had built himself an army of “Revolutionaries” whose near-rabid demands for federal spending reform could not be quelled – even by Gingrich himself. As reported by media observers, for the Freshmen Revolutionaries, “The three most important issues for the freshman class are the contract, the contract, and the contract…. You don’t want to go out there and, as your first act as a freshman, break your signed pledge” (Browning, 1995, pp. 480). Moderation was not a virtue for the early Republican majority (Moore, 1995). With the president seemingly weakened by the 1994 electoral outcome, conservative congressional leadership calculated that the voting public would blame the White House and not Capitol Hill in the event of budget shutdowns. Unfortunately for Gingrich and his caucus, this was not the case. As a master of “going public,” Clinton and his Democratic colleagues in Congress lost no opportunity to inform the public that Republicans intended to cut popular services such as Medicare, and that tax cuts for “working families” were actually “tax cuts for the wealthy.” Compounding the issue, overzealous Republican rhetoric was ill-received by the public, as was the harsh public image of Gingrich (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 5). In the end, as Clinton repeatedly vetoed Republican measures that resulted in government shutdowns in November 1995 and again over Christmas and New Years, it was the Republican Congress that was blamed and not the President (Kernell, 2007).
Republican leaders realized that they could not use their majorities to push through their “revolutionary” agenda. Reluctantly, Gingrich and Dole persuaded dejected Republicans to reopen the government via a series of “stop-gap” measures that funded federal agencies until after the upcoming 1996 election. Kings of the Hill just a year earlier, the Republican majority was now utterly deflated: “Without a balanced budget – the centerpiece of the Republican legislative agenda… House Republicans were left without a clear strategy for their reelection efforts. Conversely, Democrats were invigorated by the outcome of the budget battle” (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 5).

For junior and senior House Republicans alike, their leadership had failed them in the most fundamental fashion.

Having been a “permanent minority” for so many years, some might look at the early difficulties faced by the Republican majority and conclude that the party’s few previous opportunities to define and lead an agenda were the underlying cause behind the failed transition to power in the 104th Congress – simply put, once the Republicans had power, they did not know what to do with it. We argue that this is not a complete explanation of these political developments. Our analysis finds that the difficulties faced were the consequences of the operational choices made by the party itself. Republican leadership had a clear agenda, and well-developed plan to enforce it. Inexperience in power may have played a role – as there is a steep learning curve in political leadership – yet, any potential mistakes made were significantly magnified by the particular conditions and assumptions upon which the new majority structured itself.

In her work on the problems with single-party predominance in emerging and established democracies, Anderson states that the composition of political parties and
party systems (that is, their structure and degree of competiveness) plays a direct role in the facilitation of democratic governance: “Single hegemonic parties help eradicate competition and enforce dictatorship…. Parties facilitate democracy best when they are competitive in a pluralist setting. But it has also been shown that nations may develop a strong single-party system which is utterly antithetical to democracy” (Anderson, 2009, pp. 767). Anderson presents a comparative analysis of this relationship between party/party system structure and democracy by contrasting the developments of the Argentinean party system to that of the American south before and after the Civil War. Divided between the Radicals and the Peronists, Anderson argues that despite electoral victory in Argentina, a loss of political conflict left the Radicals facing great difficulty in taking control of governance:

Party competition works best when stoked by conflict…. The arrival of elections and Peronism deprived Radicalism of its two main points of conflict: agitation for an electoral calendar and representation of the masses. Now both major parties agree that elections are desirable and that Peronism represents the masses. Radicalism’s key issues of conflict have disappeared (Anderson, 2009, pp. 774)

This situation is similar to the fall of the Whig party in 1850s America: Despite largely succeeding on their electoral platform in the early 1800s, the Whigs fell into a long period of political decline. This position was worsened as the party lost ground to the newly emerging anti-slavery Republicans: “As the Whigs disappeared, a new party, the Republicans, proved more successful in defining new policy positions…. They developed a popular following where the Whigs had failed because they found a new issue around which to frame conflict: slavery” (Anderson, 2009, pp.774). The lesson from this comparative approach for Anderson is that after having won their respective
political battles, both groups needed to find “new positions, new points of conflict, new
issues, and a popular base” in order to provide effective governance (2009, pp. 774).

Though the Republicans of the 1980s and 1990s had been playing opposition
politics for more than a generation, we argue that their rise to power and subsequent
mistakes were not fully the result of being the majority for the first time in 50 years;
rather, we argue that both the rise and subsequent stumbling are directly related to the
operational structure employed by the party. In their attempt to reform and reconfigure
legislative politics, the Republicans were saturated in new positions, conflict, and
issues. Further, leadership had spent years developing a platform and group of
candidates that could articulate this message to a popular base. As such, the most
specific difference between the Radicals/Whigs and the current Republicans, is that the
GOP was anything but free of political conflict. As illustrated throughout this and the
previous chapter, the Republican’s electoral success was founded on their goal of
achieving a direct break with past governance – not only in terms of radical policy and
institutional reform, but also in terms of their empowerment of party leadership. Their
issues and structural reforms were clearly articulated in the Contract, candidates swore
allegiance to these issues and to Gingrich, and once in office organized themselves in
such a way as to force radical change. Divisive political issues defined the Revolution,
whose public face was that of (the often petulant) Newt Gingrich.

The particular problems faced by the contemporary Republicans were the very
things that defined the new majority: radicalism built upon ideological unity and the
empowerment of party leadership. As stated, this break with past governance in an
effort to take the House down a new institutional path was built upon unsustainable
conditions. This is not to say that inexperience at governing did not play a role; rather, our argument is that the new party’s organizational structure and assumptions of a stable operational environment greatly exacerbated any missteps that would inevitably occur. A reliance on fleeting circumstances and a false assumption of operational stability were at the core of the Republicans’ difficult transition to governance. As we show, even with experience under their belt, the operational structure of future Republicans (and later Democrats) would continue to hamper their development in emerging political contexts.

If at First You don’t Succeed… Try Impeachment

As argued by Sinclair (1999), many Republican members responded to the dramatic shift in their operational environment by asking of themselves two central questions: First, whether or not the pursuit of the Contract’s overall agenda would help or hinder their individual reelection efforts in the upcoming campaign. Second, if the course of action most likely to retain a Republican majority would result in either severe reelection or in policy costs. Given the differences in their constituencies, individual members answered these questions quite differently; thus, the unity House Republicans had displayed under the Contract began to break down. Over the 1996 campaign, Republican defections for constituency reasons became more common – for example, Northeastern moderates forced a floor vote on a minimum wage increase that the leadership and majority opposed (1999, pp. 39). Outside the halls of Congress, the 1996 elections for the Republicans turned out to be an exercise in “dissociation” and “localization” – especially for the 104th Freshmen who desperately sought re-election:

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3 See, for example, member action as displayed in Figure 5-6 in Chapter 5.
Dissociation was evident in the reluctance of many Republicans to link their campaigns to the faltering presidential effort of Bob Dole. Localization was the deliberate effort by Republican incumbents, including firebrands of the 1994 freshman class, to use the resources of incumbency – programs, constituency service, fundraising, and media visibility. Many freshman incumbents, in fact, intentionally voted against their party in meaningless procedural votes in the House, simply to inflate their overall scores on opposition to the unpopular Speaker Gingrich (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 6).

The strategy paid off as the Republicans maintained their majority, but the Revolution was over. Not only was the margin of their majority significantly reduced, but also any sense of mandate resulting from 1994’s Revolution was gone. The fallout from the budget debacle left the Republican majority in a very different place just one congressional cycle into its tenure: There was little consensus within the party on a strategy for the 105th Congress, nor did members believe their own goals were necessarily congruent (Sinclair, 1999).

Following the 1995 government shutdowns and 1996 general election, Republican governance in the House went into somewhat of a tailspin. With weakened leadership, Gingrich was less able to control the behavior of individual members within the party. While this period does have some highpoints (banning gifts and applying laws to Congress), it was not revolutionary. As noted, the debate over term limits was a major factor in exposing the rift between senior and junior members of the party. With political legitimacy waning for Republican leaders, individual members turned to institutional mechanisms that helped to minimize their electoral vulnerability. As argued by Samples (2005), congressional Republicans were caught in a “paradox of electoral competition.” That is, before taking power in 1994, because their vision of a reformed Congress had great electoral appeal after nearly 50 years of rule by an entrenched party, conservatives had every reason to unite under a criticism of Democratic political
policies. Yet, after taking hold of the reins of power, Samples describes a different feeling amongst individual members:

After the Republicans came to power, however, the appeal of robust policies over electoral competition must have waned. Those who hold office have another name for competition: vulnerability and defeat. The party in power seeks to stay in office by winning elections.... Not surprisingly, the new majority is acting much like the old one (2005, pp. 33).

In the end, the Republican “Revolutionaries” simply ran out of steam. As another example in a story that has been repeated in several instances throughout the history of the American political arena, the Revolution of the Republicans was short-lived as dramatic shifts in the majority’s institutional and external environments overwhelmed the agents of change within the party: “The tragedy is that many of the Republicans who led the revolution have settled into power, become too comfortable with their perks and authority, and are now mirror images of what they have replaced” (Moore, 2005, pp. 69-70).

The 105th Congress looked very different from the 104th: a previously weakened Clinton Administration was elected to a second term, Gingrich’s public approval had evaporated, and internal party divisions were becoming increasingly evident. With all of these factors combined, many congressional scholars began to argue that the Republican Revolution had given way to a more traditional model of congressional politics. Specifically, due to weakened leadership and a mounting concern for reelection, individual House Republicans began to find that traditional congressional career-building practices paid high dividends: “Paying their dues by working through the committee system, earning their stripes by rising through the ranks of the formal party structure, and developing expertise with the support of a caucus of members with shared interests – was indeed useful in achieving some of their personal political goals”
(Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 7). Increasing individualism within the narrow majority invited in-fighting and the development of factions that party leaders had an increasingly difficult time controlling: “When Republicans captured Congress in the 1994 elections, analysts widely proclaimed the triumph of the conservative model of limited government – a model… seemingly embodied by Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America. But now, just over a year later… post-Contract conservatism threatens to splinter into sects” (Starobin, 1995, pp. 3022). Legislatively, intraparty divisions and defections lead to more defeats on the floor. In response, Gingrich attempted a new strategy in which he sought to cultivate relations with Republican moderates, avoided unnecessary confrontation with the Clinton Administration, and worked closely with committee chairs. The result of this new strategy was increased division: two dozen conservative sophomores challenged Gingrich’s Speakership by publically criticizing that their leader had become too willing to capitulate to President Clinton and the Democrats.

Though Gingrich survived this particular coup – in the end – it was Gingrich who was ultimately blamed by House Republicans for a lackluster campaign. In response to this image, Gingrich turned away from an internal House agenda to tackle external issues head-on – most specifically, the Clinton Administration and the growing Lewinski scandal. As detailed in the next chapters, this decision to attempt control of- and be dependent upon the outcomes of volatile events external to direct House influence would become a model for future action (i.e. the Clinton impeachment, 9/11, Iraq war, etc.), shaping the direction of House activities for the rest of the Republican tenure. In terms of this present issue, following the Kenneth Starr report in which it was alleged that President Clinton had lied under oath about an extra-marital affair, Republican
leaders attempt a desperate effort to defeat their nemesis in the White House. Though House leadership was successful in using their House voting bloc to impeach the President under charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, their plans again came to ultimate failure on the floor of the Senate: not only did the Senate fail to convict Clinton on the House’s impeachment charges, ten Republican Senators switched sides and voted along with their Democratic counterparts.

Clearly, the Gingrich agenda had failed and his reign as Speaker was coming to an end. As if following the same playbook as used in the Speak Wright case, growing issues surrounding the ethical conduct of Gingrich began to mount. Argued by Rosenson, increased partisanship during this era has, “spilled over from the realms of policy-making and vote-seeking to the realm of ethics investigations” (2011, pp. 1). A differentiating characteristic of this period’s ethics scandals is that they have not been in response to wrongdoing in terms of personal gain; rather, the investigations are the result of members’ attempts at political gain. Rosenson explains that the problematic element in these investigations has been the manner in which wrongdoers have exploited their positions to the (often undemocratic) benefit of their respective parties:

What was most damaging was not so much [Gingrich’s] actions prior to the investigation, but his less than full and enthusiastic display of respect for truth-telling during the investigation…. The bulk of the investigation was not about financial benefits. Rather, it centered primarily on Gingrich’s aggressive pursuit of partisan, political goals, using tax-exempt organizations not intended for that purpose (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 18)

Causing the intensity of his operational environment to grow dramatically, Gingrich sought a break with past legislative politics that included, “innovative ways of achieving political gain, both properly and improperly” (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 30). It was these very actions – whether they were political revenge for Speaker Wright in the past, or actions
taken against leaders (specifically, Majority Leader DeLay) in the future – that show the tenuous nature of party governance in the House⁴. Central to our argument concerning the unsustainably of party governance as a result of failed party leadership, these political maneuvers would hurt not only the Speaker himself, but the party he was endowed to lead. Under charges of ethics violations and with little support either within his party or with the voters, Gingrich ultimately resigned from Congress and was replaced by a more pragmatic and “institutionalist” Denny Hastert (Rae and Campbell, 1999, pp. 7-9). It is important to note that while the Gingrich era had come to an end, many of his lieutenants – Armey, DeLay, Boehner, etc. – remained in positions of party leadership.

**After the Revolution, the Dynamic Environment of the House**

The House Republicans clearly attempted to employ party governance as their operational model in the 104th Congress; just as clearly, this initial choice became increasingly problematic as their newly empowered leadership failed to achieve a promised political agenda, and as the political environment surrounding the House shifted in a direction unfavorable to the ideologically ridged majority party. Following these events, criticisms of the conditional party governance model began to mount in the literature. Most notably, Dodd and Oppenheimer (1997a, 1997b) rejected the notion of permanent partisanship, stating that multiple constraints presented a threat to the authority of party leadership even in the partisan period of the Republican Revolution: a

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⁴ Rosenson concludes her argument stating, “It seems likely that cases involving political gain will only continue to increase in number. Increasingly partisan elites and a highly competitive electoral landscape are conducive to individual politicians seeking innovative ways of achieving political gain, both properly and improperly” (2011: 30). Like Rosenson, we believe that these ethical scandals represent a “cautionary tale” for those embracing the hyper-partisanship associated with conditional party governance. We discuss the details and broader implications of the ethical scandals surrounding Speaker Gingrich and Majority Leader DeLay in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.
large majority could make it unlikely that a governing party can maintain internal cohesion overtime, times of close party division could be threatened by the loss of support by just a few members, competitive seats may cause members to hesitate in going along with the party in reaching out to centrist voters, and so on. From this perspective, the greatest threat in attempting to manage Congress via party government, “comes from the emergence of salient policy issues that are critical to the party’s governing success and on which party members seriously disagree” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997b, pp. 402).

In the case of the Republicans and their initial attempt at party governance, the critique presented by this camp states that Gingrich and the GOP in-effect gambled that their early successes with the Contract would create “such momentum for the Republican agenda that when they turned to fiscal matters they would prevail here as well” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 45). Essentially, House GOP leadership believed that it had compiled enough political capital to not only force compliance within their ranks, but more importantly to bully both the Senate and the White House into action. For Gingrich and his team, the budget crafted by the 104th Congress was central to the enduring legacy of the Revolution as the 1994 election had stressed significant budget reductions, the movement towards a balance national budget, and a large tax cut aimed at the average conservative voter. Based upon these contextual factors, Gingrich entered the budget making session with optimism for their long-term prospects:

Gingrich and the House leadership saw the 1996 budget as a political opportunity. It would force the president to either accept a conservative budget – and cripple his support within his own party and liberal constituencies – or to veto it and lose support with the majority of the nation’s citizens who backed a balanced budget. For Gingrich and other party leaders, the defeat of a sitting Democratic president in this manner
was the key to gaining control of policy making during the 104\textsuperscript{th} Congress, winning the White House in 1996, and consolidating a Republican era in American politics (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 46).

Despite this optimism, we have demonstrated that the initial decisions made by Republicans held within them the seeds of future crisis. Though they had the election and early successes with the \textit{Contract} behind them, with the fallout of the budget battle, a tarnished GOP leadership never regained their ability to dominate the policy agenda during the remainder of the Clinton Administration. As we illustrate in the next chapter, growing divergence within the party would continue to erode leadership authority and expose internal partisan fissures from 1995 to 2000. The result of these developmental dynamics was a changed majority party.

In looking at the early months of the Republican era, Newt Gingrich had a very clear idea of the purpose of the \textit{Contract}: it was to be used as a tool to bring conservatives together and to focus inexperienced Republican candidates in the 1994 election (Gingrich, 2005, pp. 1). Richard Armey, Gingrich’s right-hand, saw the potential of the \textit{Contract} in a similar light: “The Contract with America was the driving force behind the Republican rise to power because it connected Republican members with grass-roots activists” (Armey, 2005, pp. 6). Though this platform was certainly the primary mechanism that propelled congressional Republicans to power, the ultimate impact of the \textit{Revolution} fell far short of its intentions (Connelly and Pitney, 1997; Crane, 2005). Gingrich and other leaders within the House did propel the Republicans into power. Further, they led the charge in managing the House from a perspective of party governance; yet, it was these very actions that – with time – would prove themselves to be only illusions of strength.
In writing ten years after the 1994 election, former Majority Leader Dick Armey provides scholarship with some tantalizing insights into the inner-workings of the House during the 104th and 105th congresses. He claims that while Republicans did bring together a broad coalition that challenged the Democratic majority, *this coalition was particularly context specific*. In many ways, Armey argues, the new Republican coalition was possible only because Clinton and his Democratic majority in Congress overreached in their agenda goals (principally in terms of the Clinton healthcare plan). Because this agenda was viewed by the electorate as too radical, short-term opportunities emerged to challenge the status quo: “Had they not been so arrogant, we could not have written the Contract” (Armey, 2005, pp. 7). Regardless of these initial electoral opportunities and early successes, Armey states that, “As time passed reform got harder, as we learned that Congress was not a world of small-government conservatives…. The willingness to go along with the party began to erode overtime” (Armey, 2005, pp. 8-9). As such, Armey himself defines the Revolution and the Contract as “a unique political moment” rather than a sustaining political era.

Through the remainder of this dissertation, we layout the argument that the process of development from the 1994 election to the 105th Congress represents the beginning a defining pattern for the Republican House majority in the post-Revolution era. We show that in multiple instances, the Republicans (and later the Democrats) were advantaged by short-term issues within the political arena. Based upon these favorable conditions and initially successful leadership, the majority sought to exploit their context in adopting an operational model indicative of party governance. Unfortunately for the majority, we illustrate how these conditions were fleeting –
exposing the tenuous authority of party leadership and fluctuating levels of preference homogeneity overtime. In all, these developmental dynamics support our thesis and expand established criticisms of the Rhode-Aldrich model: due to leadership failure and shifting operational contexts, conditional party governance is unsustainable.

For Figures 4-1 and 4-2, we measure ideological differentiation between economic and social conservatives in the House by utilizing the three NJ issue-based scores (as discussed in our appendix), though in this instance it does so by separating economic and social conservatism. By comparing one of the voting score-types against the other, the issue voting dimension examines the possibility of specific levels of ideological focus in the Republican House. This statistic is an operationalized NJ rating that emphasizes the difference between a group’s relative conservatism on economic issues versus their relative conservatism on moral issues. Essentially, this comparison measures ideological focus within the conservative spectrum.

Following Koopman, the ideological issue voting statistic is operationalized via a straightforward calculation: a ratio in which a particular NJ issue score is used as the denominator under the average of the remaining NJ scores as the numerator. For example, to calculate a member’s Fiscal Conservatism Ratio the operation would be the ratio of the NJ social and foreign policy score averaged over the NJ economic score. The higher the ratio, the more liberal the member is on foreign or social policy as compared with economic policy. Specifically talking about the economic issue voting dimension, Koopman states that, “The purpose is to highlight a pattern of voting that identifies members as especially conservative on economic and budget issues, identifying those members who deviate from the New Deal paradigm that defined liberalism and conservatism in a particular way” (1996: 20).

Whereas Koopman limited his study to only the Fiscal Conservatism score, in light of the growth of southern evangelical influence in the House GOP, this dissertation believes that by expanding on the same methodology, two ratios can be compared in a manner that tests the relative importance of the social voting dimension against the economic for the broader chamber overtime. Thus, two ratios are employed:

\[
\text{Fiscal Conservatism ratio:} \quad \frac{\text{Social Score + Foreign Score}}{\text{Economic Score}}
\]

\[
\text{Moral Conservatism ratio:} \quad \frac{\text{Economic Score + Foreign Score}}{\text{Social Score}}
\]

By comparing these two ideological perspectives, we can measure a member’s relative ideological tendencies; that is, do members tend to lean toward fiscal conservatism or moral conservatism? Using these calculations, the members will be assigned to an ideological sub-faction (as determined by their highest ratio). By session, if a member’s highest ratio is Fiscal Conservatism, that member is assigned to the “Budget-Con” ideological sub-faction. If a member’s highest ratio is Moral Conservatism, that member is assigned to the “Theo-Con” ideological sub-faction. In combination with data presented in later chapters, these ratios will help to determine the existence of ideological development patterns within the Republican House majority as they occurred overtime and in response to shifting operational contexts.
CHAPTER 5
THE REPUBLICAN HOUSE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE 1995 TO 2000

We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can choose how we respond to them.

—Epictetus, *The Art of Living*

**After the Fall**

Arguing that the conditional party government thesis presents an unsustainable model for legislative politics in the House, this dissertation has presented in the previous chapter an emerging pattern of change in the ideological unity of the Republican party, especially as this change relates to moments of leadership failure and environmental shift within the political arena. From our analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, we can say with confidence that party governance was the operational model adopted by the Republican party as they entered into their majority. Regardless, having traced the effect of these early choices on future action, we presented our argument that this initial adoption constrained members as they pursued their political agendas following the opening days of the 104th Congress.

In this chapter, we expand our analysis to see how these constraints evolved overtime from 1995 to 2000. In terms of the post-Revolution period, this chapter examines growing disunity within the House GOP, particularly following the 1995 budget debacle with the Clinton Whitehouse, later impeachment trials, and electoral stalemate in 1998 and 2000. From a path dependency perspective, we portray how such “critical moments” took the Republicans down a course that at first reinforced unity under a clear and authoritative party leadership, but that with time placed pressure on individual members to pursue incongruent policy preferences. In combination with this developmental account, we present a series of descriptive statistics that illustrate
ideological-unity patterns that have arisen within the contemporary Republican party as a result of leadership failure and shifting operational environments. Once these patterns of change in ideological unity are presented, we conclude with a consideration of an alternative explanation for House legislative behavior — again, the constructive partisanship model — adding to its criticism of party governance in terms of its sustainability for majority parties in the post-reform House.

**Organizational Structure: Tracing House Leadership Activity, 1994-2000**

Successful political bodies must be rooted in well-defined, coherent institutional rules and procedures; otherwise, the product of that institution becomes, “a function of the force of each man’s personality rather than a function of the roles they filled within the institution” (Willson and Jillson, 1989, pp. 34). In the aftermath of the Revolution, Republican leadership took this argument to its extreme; a choice that we find had a negative impact on the Republican majority when considered overtime. In his exhaustive review of the institutional development and theoretical study of Congress, Charles Stewart (2001) opens his chapter on legislative parties and leaders noting that political parties are one of the two primary structural features of Congress. As evidenced by each new House’s bi-annual convening action to elect a new Speaker and other administrative offices, Stewart argues that a student of politics might, “witness this pomp and circumstance and conclude that the American Congress was much like the other parliaments of the world, wherein the majority party controls the organization of the chamber and, consequently, legislative outcomes” (2001, pp. 235). Yet, Stewart quickly turns to posit that such a view might be a mistake:

Even in the most strongly partisan eras in American history, national political parties have been weak…. Party leaders in Congress have *never been able to assume they could corral all their members* to walk lockstep on
important policy questions. Consequently, the weakness of political parties has always been a puzzle to be addressed by scholars, just as it has been a hurdle to be overcome by party leaders (2001, pp. 235-6 – emphasis ours)

While scholarship, has witnessed increased party leadership empowerment in the modern Congress, Stewart’s words “puzzle” and “hurdle” still ring true.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the leadership of the Republican Revolution was deeply conservative and deeply unified in its ideological perspective. From our calculations – in accord with the methodology outlined in our appendix – the vast majority of those holding official party position\(^1\) and many of those appointed to committee chairmanships during the first session of the 104\(^{th}\) Congress could be classified as either an “Ultra-Con” or a “Strong” Conservative. In opposition of this grouping, only 4.17% and 12.5% could be classified as either a “Weak” or “Patrician” Conservative, respectively\(^2\). As discussed, this ideological homogeneity was the product of Newt Gingrich, Dick Armey, Tom Delay, and other fathers of the COS, GOPAC, and 1994 election campaign – most of who were linked both ideologically and regionally\(^3\).

From a historical perspective, this early leadership structure – that is, its ideological and geographical homogeneity – was a new venture. The norm during other congressional eras, Democrats often maintained what was known as the “Boston-Austin connection” in which leadership in the House was shared by representatives from two distinct regions. Described by Stewart as “the tendency of the Democrats to cement

\(^1\) Defined as: Majority Leader, Majority Whip, Chief Deputy Whip, Conference Chairman, Conference Vice Chairman, Conference Secretary, Policy Committee Chairman, Committee on Rules Chairman, and NRCC Chairman; Speaker of the House is not included as the Speaker is usually a non-voting member of the House.

\(^2\) See Figure 3-4

\(^3\) See Table 3-1 and Figure 3-5
their northern and southern wings through the election of a northerner and a southerner to the two most prominent party leadership positions,” this leadership structure was employed from the New Deal era all the way until the late 1980s. The reason for the Boston-Austin connection was simple: it produced a balanced policy and communications network within the Democratic majority that prevented the leadership from pursuing either an extremely “northern” or “southern” political agenda. Following the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1970s reform era, this balance of power leadership structure shifted overtime from a geographically based- to an ideologically based pairing of a chamber liberal and moderate (Stewart, 2001, pp. 256). Regardless of the shift, the goal was the same: internal balance to prevent a slide from one excessive platform or to another.

In taking the mantel of power, the new Republican leadership chose to take their majority in a new direction. As has become clear in our analysis of this period, conditional party governance defined the early days of the Revolution. Yet, in taking on the Gingrich “brand,” the House majority party had placed itself in a very precarious position. While decentralized House organizational structures such as the committee system had practiced a “get-along, go-along” legislative style, Gingrich was a self-identified bomb thrower. Further, he used this leadership brand to provoke a group of young ideologues into believing that the Republican party had been too acquiescent as the minority party, and needed to pursue an overt strategy of discrediting Democratic stewardship of the House. Though it may have seemed advantageous at the outset of the Republican majority tenure, the early decision to adopt and enhance this
organizational structure would prove highly restrictive for both the party and particularly for its leadership. Schickler and Pearson sum nicely:

Although this system was credited with noteworthy successes… it soon came under challenge…. Most notably, Gingrich became the party’s chief negotiator in battles with President Clinton. This forced the Speaker into the untenable position of either making compromises that alienated his party’s conservative base, particularly the freshman members unconcerned about institutional maintenance, or standing firm in showdowns with the increasingly popular president…. The Speaker’s own penchant for highly charged public rhetoric made the Democrats task mush easier…. As a result many Republicans blamed Gingrich’s poor public image when the party lost seats in the 1996 and 1998 congressional elections… [leading] to his withdrawal as a candidate for reelection as Speaker and his resignation from the House (2005, pp. 208)

Returning for a moment to consider this summary more fully as it applies to the developmental dynamics 104th and 105th Congresses, whereas Gingrich and his followers might have believed that the early successes with the Contract with America to have been their defining moment, history has remembered the budget shutdowns and their aftermath long after the individual merits of the Contract have been forgotten. In his analysis of these critical days, Peters (1997) writes that Gingrich believed the momentum of the 1994 elections and the accomplishments made by the House in the first weeks of the 104th Congress would provide the Republicans the opportunity to establish a long-term GOP majority at the federal level. In doing so, the enactment of a seven-year balanced budget became the most important goal for “Revolutionaries” in the House. To achieve this goal, Speaker Gingrich relied upon a key assumption to overcome a primary hurdle of our separation of powers system: He believed that it was in the president’s interest to sign a balanced-budget agreement into law. Peter’s argues that Gingrich’s assumption that Clinton would eventually compromise with the Republican Congress was grounded in the view that Clinton’s most secure path to
reelection was to move to the center and to present himself as a leader who could work with an opposition Congress. Gingrich knew that conflict was coming, but in his core, he believed that he could force compromise (1997, pp. 307).

While Gingrich was correct that compromise would follow deep conflict, the player positions within this political game would switch before the showdown was over. Remember that despite the momentum of 1994, all but two of the new House’s political reforms had been stymied by moderates in the Senate and by President Clinton (the two being the relatively uncontroversial prohibition of unfunded mandates and the Congressional Accountability Act). Most specifically, having failed to push through Congress a constitutional amendment balancing the budget, Gingrich decided it was time for the troops in his chamber to unite, and to take aim at the budget itself: “This issue rallied both those Republicans who believed that a balanced budget was essential to fiscal responsibility and those who believed balancing the budget meant downsizing government” (Critchlow, 2004, pp. 721). Taken together, this choice forced the nation into a series of multi-week federal government shutdowns.

This operational path taken by Gingrich and his team would back the young GOP House into a political corner: not only was Clinton able to move towards the political center (as he was able to “Go Public,” successfully standing-up against Gingrich and blaming the highly unpopular shutdowns on over-zealous ideologues in the House – Kernell, 2007), but also Republican leadership began to face internal pressures from within their own ranks that increasingly constrained their legislative agility (for example: To get legislation through both the House and Senate, Gingrich found it necessary to maintain a unified front with GOP presidential frontrunner Bob Dole. Unfortunately for
Gingrich, many junior members found Dole too accommodating and ideologically unacceptable, thus complicating the Speaker’s situation). Though the Speaker was being forced by political reality to seek compromise with the President, his own authority within the House was being undermined by competing pressures bearing down upon him from the House, Senate, President, and especially from the American voter (Maraniss and Weisskopf, 1996, pp. 149). Fearing that he was quickly losing any public mandate garnered from the 1994 election, Gingrich attempted to shift towards the political center by cutting the House’s initial tax-cut in half and increasing Medicare spending to the poor. Though Gingrich may have been able to use this move to regain the political advantage, it was his own troops that prevented him from assuming a more moderate tone.

Having spent years being recruited, inculcated, and elected on the merits of Gingrich’s Contract with America, this imposingly large and vitriolic group of Freshmen “Revolutionaries” refused to back away from the ideological fervor that united them – even at the pleading of their leader. Having rallied them for years against President Clinton, Speaker Gingrich could not now convince his lambs to follow their shepherd in a different direction:

By defining the House GOP position on terms initially acceptable to the conference’s most zealous members, including 73 freshmen, Gingrich created a severe constraint on his ability to bargain. In setting his goal of a seven-year balanced budget in stone, he had established a benchmark against which GOP conservatives would measure any compromise (Peters, 1997, pp. 307-8).

Playing a game of political chicken, Speaker Gingrich was losing control of the party monster of his own creation. Observers reported that in one moment, the top House leader would attempt to rally his troops by mouthing off that he would put Clinton liberals
in their place; in another, Gingrich would seemingly capitulate in budget negotiations as a result of being seduced by the charismatic President and atmosphere of the Oval Office. In all, these observers wrote that, “Gingrich sounded like a whiner, a little boy who behaved irresponsibly when he didn’t get his way. That became his image. And he was lampooned in cartoons and columns and radio shows across the nation” (Maraniss and Weisskopf, 1996, pp. 152). After a rattled Congress returned to session following a backfired series of shutdowns, senior moderates (lead by Senator Dole) pushed a new budget resolution through the Senate. Following a bitter debate in the divided House Republican conference, the resolution was passed in the House: “By late April the battle over the 1996 budget was over, with Clinton emerging as a clear victor” (Critchlow, 2004, pp. 721).

In the end, despite his history with GOPAC, success in 1994, and czar-like authority during the first months of the 104th House; Gingrich failed to achieve the primary goal of the Revolution: a smaller government and a reduced budget. He and fellow House leadership had bumbled its way through the ‘shutdown-showdown,’ and it showed in media reports of the period:

Like a groggy fighter who has taken too many punches, the House Republicans are staggering in the congressional ring. As they seek to rally their forces and to prepare for still more political fisticuffs, they seem less unified and less formidable than the fighting team that took control of the House in January 1995 and won passage of virtually every one of its legislative objectives…. In their frustration, and in some cases out of anxiety about their reelection prospects, many Republicans have begun to point fingers (Cohen, 1996, pp. 638)

Though Gingrich attracted more attention than any previous speaker, he failed to control himself, his message, and his caucus when pressured by shifts in the political arena. In the end, “it was unsurprising when President Clinton won the spin war over the
government shutdown: the public blamed it on the congressional Republicans by a 2-1 majority” (Peters, 1997, pp. 310). The Revolution was collapsing – the mere reference to the word began to fall into disuse by the young majority – and many began to question the future of the Republican House and its Speaker. Abandoned by his troops and even his leadership (many of whom now saw him, despite his tough talk, as a “softie”), Gingrich’s revolution was coming to an end. Why? Despite the move towards an empowered leadership in an atmosphere in which initial conditions seemed favorable for such action, those empowered within this organizational structure were not prepared to operate in an environment in which political conditions can rapidly change.

Much of the literature covering this event places the primary blame of the budget shutdown debacle on the institutional limitations of the House and Speakership that were underestimated by Gingrich. This argument highlights the difficulties encountered by party governance as a form of institutional organization in our Madisonian system. Though the Speaker may control the House, its legislative agenda must pass muster in the Senate. Moreover, even in times of high intraparty unity, because the House leadership authority comes from a single congressional district and the sustained consent of their party caucus (and not from the American people writ large), the office of Speaker is a deeply constrained one in comparison to the Presidency. To put it another way, while the Speaker represents a few hundred-thousand voters, the President represents a few hundred-million. In overestimating himself and underestimating Clinton, Gingrich as Speaker misjudged the office of President: “Newt Gingrich could not, in the end, govern the country from the speakership because the Senate and President Clinton would not allow it” (Peters, 1997, pp. 309).
We whole heartedly agree with this argument, but we also see in this budget shutdown narrative a pattern of unity, constraint, and crisis that is played out repeatedly throughout the Republican majority tenure: Though the path of the *Contract* may have seemed advantageous in the early stages of the *Revolution*, it was these very choices that deeply constrained the majority party as it moved forward through time in an ever-shifting political environment. As we see above in Table 5-1 and throughout our narrative account, in hardening themselves around party unity and enhanced leadership authority, the Republicans placed themselves in a position that did not allow for the organizational flexibility necessary to adapt to their dynamic institutional landscape. Though he and his contract may have propelled the young majority to control of the House; by adopting the Speaker as their mouthpiece, Republicans (junior or senior, moderate or revolutionary) also adopted Gingrich’s vitriolic political brand. Further, by growing in such large numbers from non-historic geographic regions, Republicans began to be identified publically as increasingly southern and increasingly conservative. Once cast in this mold, the House majority and its leadership found themselves less and less able to sustain ideological purity when placed under the immense political pressure exerted in our turbulent, heterogeneous political system. As seen in Table 5-1, political-embarrassment over budget shutdowns and electoral-loss in 1996 were followed with a
The rejection of ideological rigidity by Republican party leadership, undermining Gingrich’s authority to dictate legislative outcomes. As stated by Critchlow:

The government shutdowns were a critical misstep by conservatives. Gingrich had underestimated the strength of a president armed with the veto and the weakness of a House Speaker presiding over a tiny Republican majority. He did not help matters by pushing his agenda in what was widely considered a harsh, argumentative style. The defining image of congressional Republicans appeared to many Americans as a southern-led party bent on telling them how they should live and willing to shut down the government to get their way (2004, pp. 721-2).

Whether it is mistakes made by leadership or the fervor of junior members, the sustainability of the path laid down by the Contract came into question when the Republicans attempted to force a deeply conservative agenda upon an unpredictable policy issue that was both external to their direct control and susceptible to shifting political winds.

The adoption of an ideologically driven party governance model placed the party on a path that ended with House conservatives painting themselves into a political corner against a President who proved quite adept at political maneuvering and ideological agility: “The first Republican Congress in 40 years slouched toward the elephant’s graveyard. Two headline grabbing government shutdowns had failed to frighten President Clinton into signing on to the GOP’s budget plan and resulted in public humiliation and heavy political damage to the party” (Shear, 1996, pp. 2219). In the end, Table 5-1 and our broader narrative show while they were able to use intraparty ideological homogeneity to propel themselves into power, this authority was a contextually supported illusion that faded with time. Because they misunderstood (or misused) the limits of their power, the Republican leadership was unable to sustain the legislative agility necessary to succeed on their most important issue – thus, the
“Revolutionaries” killed the Revolution. In the absence of continued environmental “good fortune” (that is, external events and crises that break in a party’s favor and provide incentive for both the electorate and representatives to adopt ideological homogeneity), and “enlightened statesmen at the helm” (that is, not only empowered leadership, but moreover wise leadership); the lesson of the Republican majority is that the shifting sands of political time make it extraordinarily difficult for House leaders to maintain a sustained a party governance model. Like the man of virtu who must realize that half his fate is dependent on Fortuna’s fickle smile, Gingrich learned that, “Opportunities for speakers to fundamentally alter the conditions of House governance are rare and depend on Machiavellian fortune as well as Machiavellian art” (Peters, 1997, pp. 318).

Despite this failed venture, Republican leadership continued down the path already set before them. Though reeling from their loss, a sexual-scandal in the White House began to show cracks in the Clinton armor, perhaps altering House operational conditions in a way that favored the Republican majority. In response to these potential winds of change, congressional leaders attempted to “double-down.” Seeking to regain political momentum, leadership once again pursued a deeply conservative agenda in which they – for a second time – entered into a head-to-head fight with the President on a volatile issue external to their control: the impeachment scandal of 1997 and 1998.

As seen in Table 5-1; in the aftermath of the budget shutdown crisis, the leadership of the party was devastated and Gingrich had become severely weakened (though he was able to thwart a Cannon-like coup against his speakership by a small group of junior caucus members). Having not retained majority of the House for more
than two consecutive sessions since 1930, Gingrich abandoned his firebrand public persona and adopted a quite tone – in comparison to the last campaign, it was as if Gingrich had fallen off of the political radar entirely. Like lambs wandering away from their shepherd\textsuperscript{4}, House Republicans abandoned the \textit{Contract} to adopt behaviors in preparation for the 1996 elections that mirrored the political desires of voters who were looking increasingly likely to re-elect President Clinton and his agenda:

\begin{quote}
In Washington, House Republicans moved quickly to the political center, passing an increase in federal minimum wage, health-insurance portability, and a compromise welfare reform bill…. One clear indication of the change in the political tide was the fact that congressional Republicans raised federal spending for a variety of discretionary programs by about $15 billion \textit{above 1995 levels}. The Republicans were out to save themselves (Peters, 1997, pp. 310-1 – emphasis ours)
\end{quote}

In the fall of 1996, with the economy racing and deficit falling (not to mention the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot), Bill Clinton was re-elected with slightly less than a majority vote. For Congress, though they were able to retain their majority, losses in 1996 made the Republican margin as slim as ever.

Importantly, House Republicans were not the only group dealing with struggles within their camp. Outside of Congress, a re-elected Clinton was himself finding problems in his second term. Though President Clinton had proved adept at convoluting House Republicans and garnering the popularity necessary for re-election, his second term was not without its challenges. Though hoping to push for a balanced federal budget on the back of a growing economy, scandal in 1997 placed the Clinton Administration in jeopardy as allegations surfaced surrounding a sexual harassment suit brought against the President for actions taken while still governor of Arkansas.

\textsuperscript{4}See Figure 5-3 in the section below.
Following a rejection by the Supreme Court to allow the sitting President to delay this lawsuit until after he left office, Clinton found himself in front of Kenneth Starr and on television in front of the American people. Under oath to tell the truth about matters surrounding the allegation, President Clinton stated that he never “had sexual relations with [Monica Lewinsky].” Though he continued to deny the allegations over the coming days, incontrovertible evidence surfaced in August of 1998 that proved Clinton was not forthright in his statements: “‘The President of the United States has committed a serious transgression,’ said Representative Dick Armey of Texas, the House majority leader…. ‘He took an oath to God to tell the truth… then failed to do so, not once, but several times… To ignore this is to undermine the rule of law’” (Mitchell, 1998). Caught in a lie, President Clinton gave a nationally televised address in which he admitted to the American people that – though neither illegal nor detrimental to his ability to fulfill his oath of office – he had engaged in an inappropriate extra-marital affair.

While his relationships may not have been illegal, what was in question was whether or not Clinton’s lie about the issue was an act of perjury; and if so, was it grounds for impeachment? The question caused a deep rift between both the Congress and the American people:

Those supporting the president’s removal argued that Clinton was guilty of the charges, that he had disgraced his office, and that a failure to punish him would be applying a different standard to the president than that applied to average citizens. Clinton’s defenders maintained that the crimes he was charged with were rarely prosecuted and that the alleged offenses did not meet the definition of impeachable crimes described in the Constitution (Critchlow, 2004, pp. 723)

With Republican leadership again bumbling throughout the process, the drama of the impeachment played out in a manner similar to that of the governmental shutdowns. Republican leaders charged with heading the House investigation – most notably Henry
Hyde – had themselves engaged in adulterous affairs. To make matters worse, Speaker Gingrich was himself charged during this period with committing ethical violations in regards to his alleged use of tax-exempt donations to fund college courses for political activities. Though he was later vindicated by the IRS, Gingrich was branded as a law-breaker after being fined $300,000 by the House Ethics Committee as a “cost assessment” in punishment for the Speaker’s inaccurate information provided during this investigation⁵. From throughout the media, howls of hypocrisy were making their way into the living rooms of the American voter:

Under pressure to speed up resolution of accusations that he used tax-exempt organizations to promote his political agenda, Gingrich has confessed that he acted improperly and mislead the Ethics Committee. On December 21, a four-member investigative panel of the committee issued a “Statement of Alleged Violation” that neither found Gingrich guilty nor exonerated him of blame…. From the start, Democrats have complained about the investigation’s slow pace, the panel’s irregular observance of its own rules and its 14-month delay before hiring special counsel. What makes the case extraordinary is that Gingrich virtually defined modern ethics warfare when he brought down Speaker Jim Wright, D-Texas, in 1989. Now Gingrich may die at the sword by which he once lived (Cohen and Carney, 1997, pp. 60-1 – emphasis ours)

Clinton, on the other hand, once again showed his mastery of the executive office – the longer the debate ragged, the more he was able to convince the American people that Republicans were once again proving themselves to be ideological obstructionists whom cared more about a right-wing agenda than the good of the nation.

These ethical scandals – in particular the Gingrich investigation – highlight the treacherous potential of party governance, and its conditions of ideological homogeneity and raised partisanship. As detailed by Rosenson (2011); in alleged violation of federal

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⁵ Also investigated was Gingrich’s potential conflict of interest surrounding a book deal with Rupert Murdoch, a media mogul who was concurrently seeking House legislation to deregulate the broadcast industry. Ironically, these charges were quite similar to those made by Gingrich in his political assassination of then Speaker Wright (Rosenson, 2011).
tax law, Gingrich’s troubles began when he used tax-deductible donations for non-profit activity to fund a college course that was political in its purposes. Though not found to have broken the law, the investigation concluded that Gingrich had given the House committee inaccurate information. For the first time in its history, the House voted 395-28 to discipline a Speaker for ethical wrongdoing. In the swirl of 1997, such charges were viewed by the American public as duplicitous and indicative of failed Republican leadership:

    Perhaps the more important [charge] for Gingrich’s reputation was providing false information…. As with Bill Clinton, what was most damaging was not so much his actions prior to the investigation, but his less than full and enthusiastic display of respect for truth-telling during the investigation. Gingrich’s public image suffered, and he received much of the blame for the GOP’s poor electoral showing in 1998 (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 18)

Again, the important issue here is the political risk taken when engaged in conditional party governance: As an individual member of Congress, Gingrich was embarrassed but eventually vindicated; as the leader and public face of a party founded on hyper-partisanship, these events were disastrous. What makes these events particularly important is that they were motivated not by personal gain, but by political – as earlier quoted, “The case was not, fundamentally, about the pursuit of personal financial gain…. Rather, it centered primarily on Gingrich’s aggressive pursuit of partisan, political goals” (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 18). In seeking to form a new model of governance, Gingrich set himself and his party down a perilous path – one that came crashing down as the endowed leader made a series of missteps in his attempts to secure the group’s political position. As we will detail in Chapter 6, such activities were not an isolated event: in the second half of the Republican’s tenure, a similar story
unfolds in the ethical scandal surrounding then Majority Leader Tom DeLay – and, it concludes with similar results.

Figure 5-1. Leadership of the House, regional distribution: 1995-2000

Republican actions against the President once again backfired in the 1998 midterm: for the first time since the Great Depression, the president’s party gained seats in the House during an off-year congressional election. Embodying the rise, centralization, and fall that his party was experiencing, the Speaker’s failures to manage his majority had come to fruition: “It is a pattern – strong, centralized leadership, abrupt departures – that Gingrich accentuated…. Republicans in the House in the time of the Gingrich Speakership never learned how to manage their narrow majority in the bipartisan environment created by a Democratic president” (Polsby, 2004, pp. 144). For Newt Gingrich, the end had come, and he resigned both his speakership and seat in the
Congress: though his standing at the head of a unified party in a polarized House seemed to confirm the conditional party government thesis, Gingrich’s inappropriate behavior overtime and failure to adapt to a changing political context showed the limits of this operational model (Smith and Gamm, 2009, pp. 157; Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997b). To make matters worse, Gingrich’s successor – fellow southerner Robert Livingston – was forced to immediately step down after evidence of his adultery became public. As seen above in Figure 5-1, Republican leadership shifted in its regional stance post-Gingrich. Following the resignation of Gingrich and the Livingston debacle, punch-drunk Republicans turned to a quiet man from the mid-West to be their Speaker: Dennis Hastert from Illinois. Between the 105th and 106th Congresses, House leadership increasingly came from non-southern states. In combination with Table 5-1, Figure 5-1 indicates that in the first half of their majority tenure, House leadership was forced by failure on multiple external crises to step-back from its Revolution organizational structure. The question remains: would this move translate into a more muted form of partisanship as the majority entered into a new decade?

The Republican party, its leadership, and broader organizational structure were in tatters. In a last gasp during the lame-duck session, a shaken House approved two articles of impeachment – one for perjury and the second for obstruction of justice – and

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6 Perplexingly, Republican party leaders chose to again to return to an ideologically rigid stance during the second session of the 106th Congress – as seen in Table 5-1, approximately 60% of leaders can be categorized as either an "Ultra-" or "Strong-Conservative." A similar return to deep conservatism occurs in 2000 with junior members – see Figure 5-3. This shift towards ideological homogeneity within these two groups occurs before the broader chamber, which does not do so until 2002, after the 9/11 tragedies – see Figures 5-6 and 6-7. While our present analysis does not allow us to empirically comment on this early shift in terms of the specific groups “Leaders” and “Lost Lambs,” we hypothesize that such fluctuation might occur as a result of the 2000 election in which southerner George W. Bush was the party’s presidential nominee. Future study of these shifts would be helpful to a more complete understanding of these legislative dynamics.
sent the matter to the Senate. Now beyond the control of the House, Senators (many of whose first official action was to swear an oath in preparation for the impeachment trial) took up the matter. With the American people now clearly against the Republican majority, the Senate failed to convict on the charges after weeks of testimony and deliberation. Once again, the Republicans failed on an issue external to their direct control. A feeling of stalemate began to take hold of the Congress. No longer hoping to recapture the revolutionary spirit, House Republicans merely tried to hold on to their majority. With Clinton off the ballot, the hope for many members was that the 2000 presidential election might provide relief to their ailing majority. Would this new election alleviate tensions? The answer was a resounding ‘No’: “The 2000 congressional elections resulted in some of the closest in American political history. The GOP retained control over the House, but the Senate was tied, 50-50. Only Vice President Dick Cheney’s vote kept the Senate in Republican hands” (Critchlow, 2004, pp. 723-4).

Writing in this time of tumult, many congressional observers viewed this as evidence that Gingrich-style conditional party government was not a “long term” fact of life for the House, but merely a period of natural fluctuation between high and low levels of partisanship within Congress (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997b; 2001b). Did the fall of Gingrich spell the end of party governance in the House? Before looking to answer this question, let us consider the actions and reactions of rank-and-file members in these turbulent times.

**Lost Lambs of the Revolution: Tracing GOP Membership, 1995 to 2000**

Like lambs wandering from their shepherd; the governmental shutdowns and increasing electoral uncertainty caused many junior House Republicans to disassociate themselves from their party leadership in the 1996 elections.
Figure 5-2. “Lost Lambs” versus Party Leadership, ideological sub-groups: 1996

After all of the drama experienced by the Freshmen “Revolutionaries” during their first sessions, it is understandable that they would begin to take on different perspectives when it came to their political careers: “Although a large majority of [Republican sophomores in 1997] continue to back Gingrich’s leadership, many have often been more inclined to second-guess his decisions than to fall in line like obedient soldiers. Most of the Republicans who have begun their second term call themselves conservatives, but have various ideological shadings” (Cohen, 1997, pp. 165). Figure 5-2 above illustrates these media observations: though the party leadership remained relatively steadfast until multiple failures forced change during Clinton’s second term, vulnerable Freshmen seemed to react to sudden changes in their environment by ‘wandering away’ from the ideological rigidity of their party leadership. There are a number of powerful theories that help us to understand the actions of these junior conservatives as they moved beyond the first days of the 104th Congress.

In his classic example of the ebbs and flow of the House, Polsby (1968) argues that turnover in the House has dramatically decreased in the 20th century, as compared
to earlier eras for the institution: “In the 18th and 19th centuries, the turnover of Representatives at each election was enormous…. In the 20th century, the highest incidence of turnover (37.2 per-cent – almost double the twentieth century median) occurred during the Roosevelt landslide of 1932” (1968, pp. 146). For Polsby, this complex institutionalization of careerism and growth of length in House service is the byproduct of a number of developments experienced by the Congress since the czar period of Speaker Cannon. Specifically, the rise of committee governance, the specialization of chairmanships, and the seniority system showed that the behavior of members had changed dramatically over time. In fact, Polsby goes so far as to say that these developments – specifically the seniority system – lead to what he termed universalistic and automated decision making within the House:

The best evidence we have of a shift away from discretionary and toward automatic decision making is the growth of seniority as a criterion for determining committee rank and the growth of the practice of deciding contested elections to the House strictly on the merits…. The central finding of our present purposes is that the seniority system – an automatic, universally applied, nondiscretionary method of selection – is now always used (1968, pp. 160)

Polsby, in terms of the overbearing nature of the seniority system, was absolutely correct: as recounted repeatedly in the literature, a central tenet (if not the central tenet) of the committee era of government in Congress was the seniority system. Of course, with time and increasing constraints placed upon junior members by the seniority system, the reform era of 1972-74 brought a large change to the institution. Yet, Polsby was correct in another, broader sense: a member’s career has a strong relationship with the evolution of the House as an institution – with longer service goals in mind, members of the House have shifted in their behavior. Since providing his argument, political science has paid increasing attention to the institutionalization of political
careerism in the House, and its effect on the development of the chamber and those within it.

While we have discussed his later models, David Rohde’s earlier work has much to say about the career ambitions and motivations of members of Congress. Writing in 1979, Rhode attempts to provide a concrete theoretical basis for why certain members seek higher office, and to understand the role of ambition and risk in the House. Assuming members are rational, Rhode develops a calculus of decision making for members that considers the value of the higher office, the probability of winning the higher office, and the value of their current House seat (measured, as the article was written in the context of the textbook era, by a member’s committee placement). While these situational factors measure what he terms the “opportunity structure” of a member’s decision, Rhode argues that these factors alone do not tell the whole story: “We believe that it is the differences in intensity of preference, and thus willingness to take electoral risks in seeking offices, that distinguishes the ambitious politician from the nonambitious” (1979, pp. 12). As such, Rhode measures these situational factors against a fourth factor – risk acceptance and progressive ambition. Given these factors, Rhode finds that members are more likely to seek career advancement when the probability of winning is high rather than low, and that “risk takers” are the most likely members to consider a campaign beyond the House. Perhaps most interesting, when considering the value of a member’s present seat, Rhode states that future research ought to look at more than seniority in the House:

Party is one consideration; Republicans have less power in the House than Democrats, and their minority status is almost certain to continue; therefore they should be more likely to seek higher office than their majority counterparts. Other related matters are: whether the member is... a
committee or subcommittee chairman or ranking members; or whether he is a member of the party leadership (1979, pp. 23).

While these lines foreshadow Rhode’s future contributions in terms of the party governance thesis, what is most compelling about these overall findings is that individual members are quite attuned to their operational environment. Whether intended or not, Rhode here has indicated that members are responsive to the rules of the game in the House, making current choices about their behavior that they believe will enhance the prospects of their future agenda. If this is the case, it logical to consider that – overtime – members will be motivated to change their behavior if such patterns no longer assist them in fulfilling their political ambitions.

Also focused on this question of careerism, Lawrence Dodd (1986) attempts to explain changes in member activity and institutional development via a theory of congressional cycles. Being that a member must master two goals in their careers – first, mastery of organizational politics within Congress; second, mastery of electoral politics in their districts – Dodd argues that these cycles of change, “result from legislators’ desire to exercise policy making power – to have an autonomous and significant impact on the nation’s policy decisions” (1986, pp. 4). In terms of the organizational nature of their careers, Dodd posits that members will move through four stages as they develop a mastery of their legislative and electoral skill set. First, members must develop a distinctive and unique “personal style” that will allow the member to interact in an effective manner with their colleagues. In order to meet the demands of her constituency, a member must also seek to gain the resources and skills that enhance district level electoral security. Combined, these re-election skills assist the member in mastering the second stage: policy making. Because policy affects the
lives of constituents, and because the process involves the ability to bargain with fellow legislators, mastery of this stage is of key importance to the member. If a member excels in these stages, she may have the opportunity to pursue the third and fourth stage of development – chamber influence and control, respectively. In these last stages, a member moves from the ability to persuade and bargain with fellow legislators, to increasing control of the organization (i.e. control over the appointments, scheduling of bills, debate rules, etc. that allow the member to shape the policy agenda of the chamber). What is of high interest here is Dodd’s assertion that, “legislators gain mastery of these four areas of organizational life – reelection, policy making, influence, control – primarily through membership and service in political parties” (1986, pp. 6-7). If true, what then is the relationship between the career cycle and congressional parties?

Dodd answers by stating that while parties provide extensive assistance for members’ reelection and policy making expertise, the party is often in a difficult position: “Precisely because a party seeks to govern, it must ensure that party leaders can coordinate the party’s members and pursue the party’s general interest” (1986, pp. 7).

Herein lies the rub: while a new legislator – because she has few resources or skills at her disposal – will have few initial quarrels with the distribution of power as determined by the organizational structure; with time, these quarrels will increase to the point where junior and mid-career legislators will seek to reform the organizational structure in which they operate:

Overtime, the legislature will experience organizational fragmentation…. The period immediately following the creation or reorganization of the legislature will witness very little fragmentation. The new organizational arrangements and the career interests of legislators mesh fairly well. But with the aging of the new generation, the legislature will witness a steady rise in fragmentation…. The result is a breakdown in the mechanisms for
coordination and leadership of the Congress (Dodd, 1986, pp. 10-11 – emphasis ours)

While Dodd successfully tests this theory using it as an explanation for the movement from the committee government model into the reform and post-reform, we argue that this model can be expanded to help us better understand the developmental dynamics of the Republican majority’s former “Young Turks.”

Figure 5-3. Developmental dynamics, freshman revolutionaries: 1995 to 2000

In Figure 5-3, we see that the Freshmen class of 1994 shifted their ideological perspective through time as their environment changed around them. While the “Ultra” and “Strong” conservative perspectives dominated the group in the first session of the

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7 Despite the ideological fluctuations the Freshmen of 1995 have experienced in response to their dynamic environment, over the past two decades they have also experienced generally high rates of re-election. These rates are on par for all members of Congress in recent history, as average re-election rates regularly exceed 85% (Herrnson, 2008). The most interesting finding here is not the re-election rates themselves; rather, it is the moderation in ideology of these members in order to sustain their re-election chances (i.e. the “disassociation and localization” previously discussed). This willingness to deviate from the party reinforces the candidate centered nature of our congressional system.

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<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
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<th>106th</th>
<th>107th</th>
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<th>109th</th>
<th>110th</th>
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<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional Average Overtime</td>
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104th Congress, failed budget shutdowns moderated the tone of many of the most rabid “Revolutionaries” in 1996. Beginning in the 105th Congress, we see that parity between ideological subgroups began to emerge, with moderate conservatives having a slight majority with the now sophomore group. Interestingly, the number of those members continuing to follow an “Ultra” conservative perspective during the 1997 and 1998 sessions declined dramatically from 1995 highs. These trends reinforce our argument that as operational context shifted around these members, the “Revolutionaries” found their earlier decision to fall in line behind a deeply ideological leadership became increasingly constraining. Responding to this environmental dynamic, they acted more akin to “Lost Lambs” who wondered away from their shepherd in search of greener pastures. As seen in the graph displayed in Footnote 8 below, this “disassociation and localization” away from the party and the Contract towards more traditional district service was a smart decision in terms of maintaining their re-election chances.

These shifts by junior members reflect the careerism that has taken hold of the contemporary House; that is, members – junior and senior alike – will change their behavior overtime to meet the demands of their individual electoral environment when those demands are not in accord with their party’s agenda. As members enter the House, they are finding themselves under increased scrutiny from multiple fronts; whether those fronts are leaders, the media, their district, or future political challengers:

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8 As noted above (Footnote 7), while this pattern dominates the majority of the post-Revolution years, we are perplexed by our data in the final session of this period: as seen above, a majority of the 1994 Freshman class once again adopted an “Ultra” Conservative record in 2000. Why was this the case? Perhaps in the build-up to the 2000 general election, these members decided to embrace their presidential candidate, Texan George W. Bush. Seeing him as one of their own, it may be logical to conclude that these members felt more comfortable presenting themselves as “pure conservatives” so as to retain the favor of their Bush supporting district. While our present analysis cannot comment on this particular issue directly, we believe that future consideration of this phenomenon would be helpful to a more complete understanding of these legislative dynamics.
Those identified as latecomers to an issue or to a cause run the risk of losing support from both sides. Members are being watched much more carefully than they have ever been watched, even though constituents are not any more knowledgeable or informed than they used to be. Every contribution received, every vote missed, every roll call scale released, every piece of franked mail sent, every joke told, every staffer hired, every trip home not taken now all have the potential to be major issues in the next campaign, or the next, or the next. The fact that this attention is more latent than actual is of no practical consequence to the representative. Both encourage the same response (Hibbing, 1991, pp. 18)

In reaction, individual members have become more attuned to their surroundings as the pressure to maintain an electorally perfect legislative record has increased. As such, members have increasingly employed sophisticated district-level statistical analysis so as to have an accurate fix on the issue positions of the voters in their district; that is, members are investing in the tools that help them, “learn what sells and what does not sell among their constituents” (Hibbing, 1991, pp. 18). In certain contexts, these members find that towing the party-line sells; in other contexts, it does not. Election motivations, just as in Mayhew’s time, are forefront in the minds of legislators – young and experienced. In response, members are independently seeking positions to bolster their political viability, whatever the stage of their career:

New members now set up shop quickly in terms of their constituency oriented operations. Polls, political parties, seminars, management guides, focus groups, seasoned staffers, delegation colleagues, and common sense all help members to learn very early how to organize and initiate a smoothly running constituency operation. This operation has become routinized almost immediately, with standard trips home, standard response letters, and standard procedures for dealing with constituent requests (Hibbing, 1991, pp. 182)

One of the measurable outlets that members can utilize to enhance their political viability is to serve in a committee relevant to their individual needs. Though we recognize the diminished status of committees since the textbook era, Fenno’s (1973) argument that committee service is a vital tool for members in achieving their political
agenda remains true. Descriptive data related to types of committee service show that members – both experienced chairmen and junior members – moved overtime to better position themselves to achieve their political agendas.

![Graph showing ideological fluctuations of committee chairs](image)

**Figure 5-4. Ideology of committee chairman overtime: 1995-2000**

Looking above at Figure 5-4, we see the ideological fluctuations of committee chairs as they moved overtime. The vast majority of members appointed to be committee chairs in 1995-96 were ideologically cohesive and deeply conservative. Loyal to the party leadership and their platform via the *Contract*, these members were rewarded with positions of legislative authority – a finding in accord with party governance. Not in concurrence with that model, our data show that as time moved forward and the House majority experienced a series of crises, the ideology of these chairs moderated. Beginning in 1997 and especially during the 1998 election year, committee chairs deviated from their previously stiff ideological positions to adopt a stance that trended against earlier calls from party leadership. Following the Clinton impeachment debacle,
ideological cohesion of committee leaders had evaporated in 1999. Though a “Strong” conservative perspective returned in the build-up to the 2000 presidential election, more moderated voices were still present. In all, the experience of these committee chairmen reflects the responsive nature of congressional members to their ever shifting environment.

Junior members within these committees felt pressure to change as well: when considered by region, we see across the board that those elected in 1994 were largely placed in Constituency Committees. As stated by Deering and Smith (1997), junior members are often placed in these committees so as to assist in reelection efforts – looking to Table 5-2, our data from 1995 seems to support this argument as this type of committee is the most populated by Freshmen. As these members strengthened their reelection chances overtime, they also seemed to move in greater numbers towards more “advanced” committees: compared to rates in 1995, few of the 104th congressional Freshmen served in Constituency Committees. Though a portion of this drop is explained by simple attrition of members overtime, Deering and Smith’s (as well as Hibbing’s and others) argument that members pursue different types of committee service overtime remains sound⁹.

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⁹ Interesting is the committee service advancement of southern members: members from this region more than double their service levels in Prestige Committees and strengthened their presence in Policy Committees. One questions whether or not this phenomenon is the result of being regionally linked to party leadership and electoral base.
Table 5-2.  Lost Lamb committee service: 1995 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prestige Committee</td>
<td>Policy Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Pacific</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Plains &amp; Rocky Mountains</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Border States</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Mid-West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: The South</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: New England</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a whole, when looking at the ideological fluctuations and association behavior of both junior and senior “Revolutionaries” during the first half of the Republican majority, what we see is a great deal of change as members responded to dramatic shifts in their operational environment. Today’s members are more knowledgeable of the increased scrutiny they face, but also have more tools at their disposal to help them face these pressures. In terms of the early Republican majority, many junior members (and those senior members seeking committee chairmanships) formulated their careers on the basis that Gingrich and other party leaders would revolutionize Congress and establish a new era of GOP dominance. When their operational environment shifted, these preceding choices placed members into increasingly restrictive positions as time moved on: As the authority of partisan leadership evaporated in the wake of failure, members began to change their political activity.

In an excellent description of his experience as a House member, David Price (2004) writes that in this time of political turbulence, neither party clearly dominated the politically shifting landscape. As such, whether it was the Contract itself (in which team-Gingrich lead the “Congress Bashing” charge) or later when the political arena turned against the Revolution (in which these critics themselves were viewed as overreaching,
becoming the targets of public cynicism and distrust), many House members, “often found it politically profitable to run for Congress by denigrating and running against the institution” (2004, pp. 2). Moreover, as early as 1997, media reports found that despite Contract promises to end “pork barrel” politics, GOP rank-and-file were, “lining up at the public trough to try to steer money in a huge transportation bill towards their districts” (Wildavsky, 1997, pp. 754). Others later commented on the resurgence of ideological moderates in the Republican camp: “When Republicans took control of the House in 1995, their majority was large enough that losing a few Northeastern moderate members on key votes did not matter…. Now, given the House GOP’s four vote majority, moderates hold significant power” (Baumann, 1999, pp. 3060).

In multiple ways, the story of the “lost lambs” of the Revolution reflects the arguments made by Polsby, Rhode, and Dodd decades ago. “Revolutionary” members were quite responsive to their external environment – they marched in lock-step with Gingrich and other leadership under the Contract, they worked as a unit to pass the majority of the document’s proposals, and they employed their momentum to take on the White House. Yet, as the tide turned against them, these members quickly sought to distance themselves from the party brand they had embraced. Constrained by a path upon which they were walking, these members sought to break rank in an effort to secure their individual political future.

**A New Solid South: Regional Developments, 1952 to 2000**

Scholars in the field have long discussed intra-party division in terms of regionalism and sectionalism. Having seen that member behavior and goals are much reflections of their external environment, we show in this section that district geography continues to impact ideological unity within contemporary House majorities. Historically,
Bensel (1984) argues that sectionalism and sectional stress are at the heart of congressional institutional development:

The ebb and flow of political conflict across the American nation has almost always produced the same basic geographical pattern. That pattern, representing the alignments of competing sections, indicates – without explaining – the structural imperatives of the American political system. These imperatives are rooted in the economic geography of the nation and dictate the spatial form of the political conflict (1984, pp. 6).

Charting the regional partitions shaping congressional politics for over a century, the primary post-Industrial Revolution divide identified by Bensel occurred over economic competition between the metropolitan-industrial north and the rural-agricultural south. Between the New Deal and Civil Rights eras, a divided Democratic party was able to maintain power via an enduring bipolar coalition between the northern working class and the southern plantation elite. Though seemingly disparate, Bensel argues that relations between these groups coalesced over two factors emerging from the Great Depression: (1) a vast increase in Democratic party controlled executive and bureaucratic discretion in the wave of New Deal policy; and (2) the institutionalization of the legislative committee system, which created congressional decentralization that paralleled executive expansion. This context, “permitted the Democrats to divide political spoils between the separate factions without exposing or aggravating the policy contradictions within the party” (1984, pp. 370). This sectional coalition between northern workers and southern landowners remained stable until the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and the destabilization of the seniority system in the 1970s. Because these events eroded the control of southern committee chairman, the sectional stress caused by southern Democrats in the party caucus began to fade. From this vantage, Bensel predicted (correctly) that the level of sectional stress between these regional electoral
bases would rise again as the nation entered into the late 1980s, yet this time in a
different form: “All these recent trends suggest the final dissolution of the New Deal
coalition and a probable return to a regionally polarized party system” (1984, pp. 388).
The ramifications emerging in this new form of regional polarization would have a
profound impact on future congressional politics: while the south remained ideologically
conservative, it would also adopt a new party.

One of the more interesting arguments for the causes behind this sectional
developmental dynamic comes from Polsby’s (2004) recent work in which he argues
that congressional institutional evolution is the product of institutionalization, political
innovations, socio-political movements, and technology. Focusing on technology as an
explanation of the changes that took place in the south following the New Deal era,
Polsby argues that the invention of air conditioning went far to uproot long held political
norms. In effect, air conditioning made the southern climate tolerable for northern and
Midwesterners, thus leading to the immigration of Republican voters:

The effects of air conditioning began to kick in during the mid-1950s,
preceding the Voting Rights Act by nearly a decade…. From 1952 onward,
the National Election Studies asked respondents where they were born as
well as their party identifications, and so it was possible to track the
incidence of northern-born Republicans in their samples of southern voting
population. These numbers show that starting in the mid-1950s, a very
substantial share of the respondents identifying themselves as Republican
voters were born outside the 11 southern states… migrants from outside
the South made up as many as half of all Republican voters in 1964 and
throughout most of the 1970s (2004, pp. 86-7)

When combined with “Dixiecrats” (that is, ideologically conservative southern voters
who had more in common with the national Republican party than with the Democratic
coalition), northern migrant voters made substantial inroads for the Republican party in
the 20 years between the 1950s and 1970s in the “Solid Democratic South.” Taken
together, the technological innovation of air conditioning and the social migration of northerners demonstrate for Polsby a sectional augmentation of Republican strength in the electorate – enough to change the partisan landscape in the south.

Whether or not air conditioning had anything to do with matters, Republicans have put themselves into a situation similar to that of their Democratic counterparts of an earlier generation. That is, in taking on southern geography, the Republicans have created divergent regional coalitions within their ranks. Moving from the 1980's into the 1990s, Connelly and Pitney (1997) find that Republicans from the south and west came to outnumber – for the first time – Republicans from the northeast and Midwest. These numbers further cemented a non-traditional political culture into the GOP as southerners Gingrich, Armey, and Delay made their way through the ranks (in fact, in taking over during the 105th Congress, only one representative from the northeast held an elected leadership position). Connelly and Pitney argue that this dynamic caused, “many Northeasterners to feel alienated, and they grew nervous about embracing a leadership that looked remote and unattractive to their constituents” (1997, pp. 700).

The level of change that took place in terms of regional shift cannot be understated: in looking specifically at the ascendancy of Republicans in the south, McKee states, “To put it mildly, contemporary southern congressional elections look nothing like they did half a century ago, or as they did as late as the 1980s” (2010, pp. 1). Labeling the development as a sort of S-curve pattern of Republican advancement, McKee states that both long-term (realigning party identification) and short-term (redistricting and the emergence of viable Republican candidates) factors came together to create, “the perfect electoral storm” that opened the door for southern
Republicans. In sowing the seeds of ascendancy, party identifications in the south began shifting due to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights movements of the late 1950s and 1960s. Many southerners felt abandoned by President Johnson and his support of the Civil Rights Act. As such, they began listening to Goldwater and later Reagan:

The 1964 presidential election was a pivotal moment in the South. By voting against the 1964 Civil Rights Act and opposing federal intervention as a means to promote racial equality, the Goldwater campaign sent a clear signal to southern whites who opposed integration. On the Democratic side, President Johnson’s push for civil rights after the assassination of Kennedy revealed his 1964 presidential campaign strategy: win the election by abandoning the South in favor of a pro-civil rights agenda with broad appeal in the rest of the nation (McKee, 2010, pp. 35-6).

In the end, Johnson won every state but Arizona (Goldwater’s home state) and the southern states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. McKee claims that by altering the national parties on the civil rights issue, racial politics became the agent of change that widened the divide between Democrats and Republicans in the south: “Overtime, white southern resistance coupled with economic conservatism became the foundation upon which to build a competitive Republican Party below the Mason-Dixon Line” (2010, pp. 42).

With long-term partisan alignments in flux, McKee states that two short-term changes in the political context opened the door for the sudden (and largely unseen) ascendancy of Republicanism in the south. The first was the redistricting that occurred for the 1992 elections. In an effort to make Congress more diverse, majority-minority districts were established throughout southern states. The idea was that if districts were re-drawn so as to consist of large minority (in this case, African-American) populations, voters in those districts would elect candidates that better reflected their values and interests. While the goals of this plan were noble, they unintentionally created super-
white majorities in the remaining districts. McKee finds that after the redistricting, with white Democrats crowded out of their former districts, Democratic candidates could no longer assemble the bi-racial coalitions upon which they depended: “The flipside is that racial redistricting made it easier for Republicans to construct voting majorities by relying almost entirely on the support of southern whites” (2010, pp. 72).

Overall, the incumbency advantage of Democrats was seriously challenged by these institutional shifts. Instead of facing this challenge, many candidates for the House simply retired. Combining this context with the development of viable Republican candidates under the tutelage of Gingrich, Republicans capitalized on the vulnerabilities of Democrats by offering a unified message under the *Contract with America*. Gingrich and his tactics foreshadow the second short-term shift that brought southern Republicanism to the forefront: the emergence of viable candidates. Dividing the periods before and after the *Revolution* as normal opportunity elections and the 1992-1996 period as high opportunity elections, McKee finds that Republicans became the most competitive when formerly Democratic seats became open (due either to the retirement or defeat in primary of incumbent Democratic members). In this high opportunity environment, a number of amateur Republican candidates found success.

Interestingly, McKee’s examination of regional shifts explores patterns highlighted throughout this dissertation; that is, he concludes that by choosing to become increasingly southern, the Republicans put themselves into a position that would constrain their future actions:

Due to its distinctive but perhaps waning cultural milieu, the South’s Republican realignment made possible a national House majority, and yet the region is also a primary explanation for the party’s later demise.... The
persistence of southern exceptionalism makes the region a precarious foundation for building the base of a national party (2010, pp. 110).

Essentially, by moving beyond its historical platform of limited government and free enterprise to include heavily southern interests – prayer in schools, anti-abortion issues, gun rights, etc. – the Republicans set the stage for not only internal discord, but also electoral marginalization of the non-southern electorate. Yes, southern votes are important, but tying one’s political future to the values of one particular sub-culture in a broader political arena is a risky venture. Though it propelled them into power, this choice – like leadership empowerment and a drive towards ideological purity – became an increasingly unsustainable operational model.

The history of these divides plays a dramatic role in terms of the contemporary Republican majority. Theodore Lowi writes of this new geographical divide within the Republican camp, “on the one hand, the national Republican party was a liberal, eastern, Wall Street party. On the other hand, the most numerous elements of the conservative wing… were anti-elitist, anti-eastern, and anti-Wall Street” (1995: 160). Writing prior to the outcome of the Revolution, Lowi’s argument is reflected Figure 5-5 in which we see the geographical distribution of the party from 1994 to 2000:
Figure 5-5. GOP House regional distribution: 1994 to 2000

From a regional and leadership standpoint, the south had grown to become the new foundation for conservative politics. Yet, it is not the only region of the nation represented: While the south maintained the largest number of representatives on average per session, did its particular ideological perspective alienate members from other areas of the country? To this question, Table 5-3 shows how the south compared – on average – ideologically to its other regional counterparts from 1995 to 2000:

Table 5-3. Regional breakdown: 1995-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Ultra Conservative</th>
<th>Strong Conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Weak Conservative</th>
<th>Patrician Conservative</th>
<th>Average Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The South</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pacific</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains and Rocky</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Mountains</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border States</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of raw numbers, the South had more “Ultra” and “Strong” conservatives than any other region in the nation. As the region with the largest number of representatives, this finding is to be expected. What is more interesting is how the South’s ideological distribution compares to the other regions. Whereas the South, Plains / Rockies, and Boarder States regions lean towards higher levels of conservatism; the Mid-West, Mid-Atlantic, and New England regions lean towards lower levels of conservatism (with an average ideological score of 21.35, the Pacific region remains relatively moderate). Taken together, we see the outlines of a regional split within the House Republican party – particularly between the party’s two largest electoral regions in the ideologically conservative South and the ideologically moderate Mid-West. During the 1990s, southern conservative regions became more Republican (Barone, 1997); a fact highlighted by the electoral regional division when it came to how southern vs. non-southern voters reacted to the 1998 and 2000 elections: “What do conflicts between the two political parties and schisms within them have in common? Here’s a clue: Geography…. As a result of large political trends and some smaller tactical wins by the two major parties in recent elections, the US is separating into two regions, each dominated by one of the major parties” (Maggs, 1999, pp. 748).

Having considered multiple aspects of the first half of the Republican majority, what criticisms can be made of party governance in the post-Revolution House?
Republican House Governance, 1995-2000:
A Critique of CPG and the View Overtime

In looking at the context of Congress from their then 1997 perspective, Dodd and Oppenheimer ask a question fundamental to the congressional scholarship of the post-reform era:

At issue for the 105th Congress and thereafter is whether conditional party government will prove to be the dominant pattern in a new partisan order or a transitory phase that is followed by a return to a more muted partisanship (1997b, pp. 394)

In expanding upon their criticism of the Rhode-Aldrich thesis, this dissertation aims to strengthen their alternative argument that party governance is an unsustainable model for legislative politics.

In their initial 1997 critique – *Revolution in House: Testing the Limits of Party Government* – Dodd and Oppenheimer stress that while the early passage of the *Contract* seemingly supported the conditional party governance thesis, the latter half of the 104th Congress was anything but a highpoint for the Republican House leadership. Most specifically, the showdown over the 1996 budget between Clinton and Gingrich placed the House GOP in an unsteady position that would haunt the majority for years to come. Similar to the discussion of this event as outlined in the present chapter, Dodd and Oppenheimer argue that the “conditions” for party governance had been greatly eroded: the House itself was stymied when its legislative agenda was taken up in the Senate, the authority of Gingrich came under fire during a critical test of his Speakership, and the overwhelming demands by constituents for the government to reopen all lead to a huge political victory for the Clinton Administration. In the end, they conclude in 1997 that while the GOP sought to operate under a model of party
governance, that the institutional and electoral realities of the House placed strong
limitations on such a legislative strategy: “The power and momentum of the Gingrich
speakership and the Republican revolution was broken. In the process, Gingrich and
the Republicans demonstrated the limits of party government in the House, as well as
the constitutional vulnerabilities of the speakership that Joseph Cannon had discovered
eight decades earlier” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 1997a, pp. 47-8).

In a second 1997 argument – Congress and the Emerging Order – the scholars
argue that when looking at conditional party government from a historical perspective,
the model has not been the norm for American parties for much of the twentieth century;
rather, “the parties were characterized by internal divisions and preference
heterogeneity” (1997b, pp. 394). Yet, Dodd and Oppenheimer admit that party
governance was an apt description of Congress during the late 1980s and early 1990s;
given political shifts in the south emerging out of the Civil Rights movement and the
Reagan Administration, the hardening of conservative preferences within the
Republican ranks during the first two years of the Clinton Administration, and the
actions of Gingrich during the first session of the 104th Congress. Regardless, the
argument is made that party governance in the U.S. Congress is in all political contexts
a difficult prospect: because it can occur only when there are no serious intraparty
divisions on pressing policy questions, this method of behavior is both fragile and
tentative.

Given this criticism, Dodd and Oppenheimer propose an alternative model of
Congress. Labeling this model as a constructive partisanship; under this operational
structure the majority remains a cohesive bloc, but one that pursues a moderated policy
agenda that is more centrist than the party itself (1997b, pp. 394). To maintain a majority status, the scholars state that a legislative party must demonstrate the ability to address the cross-cutting policy conflicts present in any heterogeneous society and in our separation of powers system. Whereas party governance is both rare and decays rapidly: “A party that learns to engage in constructive partisanship can continue to contest for majority control of Congress even in the presence of internal divisions and… normal byproducts of political life” (1997b, pp. 410-1). In many ways, this model can be thought of an Aristotelian “Golden Mean”: Between the deficiency of Mayhew’s individual entrepreneurialism, and the extreme of Rhode-Aldrich’s czarist partisanship; the constructive partisanship model represents a balanced middle ground for the role of parties in the post-reform House. In appreciating the ebb and flow of the institution as the House moves through time, the constructive partisanship model is argued by this camp to be both accurate in terms of explanation and sustainable in terms of practical legislative application.

Following the stalemate elections of 1998 and 2000, Dodd and Oppenheimer return to their critique in early 2001. Here, they again conclude that while the early years of the Republican majority were witness to a number of dramatic events in American politics (i.e. internal House reforms, changes to the nation’s welfare policies, and the impeachment of President Clinton); the GOP leadership’s ability steer the House towards their most far-reaching proposals during the Revolution was hampered by their narrowed House majorities, a resurgent Democratic minority, a moderate Republican Senate, and the continued popularity of President Clinton (2001a, pp. 21). Important for their assessment of the party governance model, this period also saw the downfall of
Newt Gingrich himself. With a loss in both legislative preference and personal leadership support, the Gingrich era came to a disgraceful end: in the midst an impeachment attack on Clinton that ironically lead to increased voter support for the President, Gingrich – facing ethical scandals of his own – was forced to resign after the loss of a number of congressional seats in the 1998 elections. For Dodd and Oppenheimer, the belief that the Gingrich leadership model and party governance could lead to a return of czar rule in the House was greatly misplaced:

However tempting it may be to conjure up a vision of a modern House run in the smooth and effective manner associated with the strong Speakers of a century ago, in truth the House itself has changed in ways that make such an effort difficult if not impossible (2001a, pp. 29 – emphasis ours)

In response to the fallout of 1998, the scholars suggest that the newly placed House leadership\textsuperscript{10} under Speaker Hastert shifted away from a party governance model to an increasingly collective and moderated model of constructive partisanship – as predicted in 1997. Seeking to establish a legislative record rather than continue to fight for a failed revolution, Dodd and Oppenheimer argue that the House GOP desperately wanted to demonstrate their capacity to govern effectively. With an overriding goal of positioning the House Republicans to maintain their majority in the 2000 elections and avoid a “do-nothing image” reminiscent of the 1996 budget shutdowns, Hastert began to seek ways to work with the Clinton Administration and influential House Democrats. As such, GOP leadership gave up the fight for across-the-board tax cuts while concurrently adopting social programs supported by the Democrats (2001a, pp. 39). When taken

\textsuperscript{10} It should be noted that southerners Dick Armey as Majority Leader and Tom Delay as Majority Whip – both of whom were strong Gingrich allies – remained in leadership positions. Particularly in the case of DeLay, this leadership structure would once again place the Republican majority in a precarious position during the 2000s.
together, the evidence indicated that Republicans were moving away from party governance as they moved through time.

In looking to our own analysis, Figure 5-6 points to the “train wreck” that took place over the budget, and the fallout the Revolution experienced after the event. After having failed to achieve victory in two critical national events (i.e. the budget shutdowns and the build-up to the Impeachment trials), the Speaker’s revolutionaries had deserted him: 1998-1999 presented a low-point for the “Ultra” conservative camp in the House, while the same period witnessed the growth of moderate and “Weak” ideological groups.

![Graph showing developmental dynamics, overall Republican House: 1995-2000](image)

**Figure 5-6.** Developmental dynamics, overall Republican House: 1995-2000

While the caucus had been dominated in early 1995 by “Ultra-Conservatives” loyal to the *Contract*, this degree of unity in legislative conservatism was abandoned as the overall House moved forward following the governmental shutdowns. In its place, less
conservative groups began to grow in number – particularly moderate and “Patrician” legislators. Inaccurately believing that their operational environment had once more shifted in their favor following an admission by the President of adulterous behavior, House party leaders again pressed forward against their institutional rival during the Clinton impeachment process. As seen by the explosion of ideological moderates in the GOP caucus between 1997-1999, many legislators reacted by turning away from their leadership’s deeply conservative agenda following these failed attacks against the President. As discussed, these battles between the Republican leadership and the President culminated in repeated electoral losses and the retirement of Speaker Gingrich.

Perhaps the most important finding of Figure 5-6; by 2000, the three leading ideological camps were at near equal levels within the House GOP, evidencing the disarray the party was faced with internally: the Speakership had changed hands, the Contract was unfulfilled, derided legislative maneuvers in the form of omnibus budgeting and pork-barrel spending had become common place, and the party’s electoral image had been tarnished. In all, following a series of highly unsuccessful attempts to exploit volatile events for their political advantage against an institutional rival (again, the budget shutdowns and Clinton Impeachment), House Republicans had chosen to abandon the Revolution in favor of behavior that secured their individual preferences over that of the broader party. During this period, media observed that: “This fraternal clash, marked by mistrust and bitterness on both sides, is enormously complicating the task of GOP Hill leaders…. The very quality that propelled conservatives to their lofty perch – their self-image as anti-establishment rebels – may make it impossible for them
to stay there” (Starobin, 1997, pp. 1500). Going into the 2000 election, what had once been viewed as an irresistible force in Washington, the Republican majority in the House was now hanging by a thread.

For this dissertation, these events and outcomes present a defining pattern of development for the Republican majority in attempting party governance: The first step in the pattern; in riding a wave of unity built upon short-term favorable operational conditions and successful leadership action, House members make an initial decision to empower and follow their party leadership. Following this step; newly empowered leadership, in pursuing a promised ideologically-driven (and as such, a politically controversial) policy agenda, make a subsequent choice to employ party governance in an attempt to exploit these short-term advantages. These two steps are consistent with the conditional party governance model. Despite new organizational reforms to institute party authority, we find that these two choices place leaders and their members in a position in which continued party success depends on the outcome of issues and conditions beyond the party’s control. In the third phase of the pattern; following inappropriate leadership activity and/or unfavorable shifts in the operational conditions surrounding the issue, the party faces political failure on the promised agenda (this failure is often to the benefit of inter-institutional or inter-party rivals). Finally; as a result of failed action, the party experiences a loss of intraparty ideological unity as members scramble to pursue individual preferences rather than those of their defeated party platform. Taken together, it is a pattern of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse in which initial decisions become future obstacles within a dynamic operational environment.
This pattern provides evidence for this dissertation’s thesis: Preference homogeneity – again, a fundamental “condition” for party governance – is not a permanent feature of House majorities, but a contextually supported factor that exists for short moments in time (often in the wake of crises). These findings illustrate a particular development given a particular context: While parties who benefit from short-term environmental advantages may use these moments as opportunity to empower leaders and adopt ideological unity, the preference homogeneity necessary to sustain support for leaders and their party agenda cannot be assumed in an environment of change. In examining this evolving developmental pattern, we have shown that as the majority party moves forward in time – increasingly bombarded by the pressures of governance over a heterogeneous society – the preference homogeneity made possible by long-exhausted short term advantages will fade.

During the first half of their tenure, this pattern is most clearly evidenced in the budget shutdown debacle and later the failed impeachment trial. Though, constitutionally, the House takes the lead in forming an initial budget and in bringing charges of impeachment, it must consider the preferences of competing institutional powers in the Senate and – most importantly – the White House in order to avoid the multiple “veto-points” the legislation must overcome. In the case of the shutdowns, the House leadership pursued a deeply conservative and highly contentious budget agenda, believing that their internal unity could force the hand of external rivals. As demonstrated, such early decisions placed the Republicans on a highly precarious path. Following this failure, leadership redoubled their efforts against Clinton, attacking him on perjury charges. As we illustrated, this dependence on volatile issues external to their
control again blew-up in the Republicans’ faces. As a result, their unity scattered. In fact, had it not been for another external crisis – albeit one that broke in their favor – the Republican House majority may have ended far sooner than 2006.

![Mean House Republican ideology overtime: 1995-2000](image)

Figure 5-7. Mean House Republican ideology overtime: 1995-2000

When ideological subgroups are taken as an average overtime, Figure 5-7 shows us that while “Strong” and moderate conservatives made up the largest voting blocs in the first half of the Republican majority era, no one ideological perspective clearly commanded control of the House during this period. In fact, our data show that rather than operating in lock-step under the direction of a unified leadership – when considered overtime – the legislative conservatism of individual members was rather dispersed across multiple levels of ideological fervor. With movement away from revolutionary politics to politics as usual following the budget shutdowns (and later the
Clinton impeachment), these findings lead us to believe that ideological faction within the party – even during the early stages of their majority – was a reality.

Further, our findings lead us to argue that party governance – because it is centrally grounded in sustained ideological homogeneity – is an unsustainable model given the realities of governing in the turbulent operational environment of the House. This argument is both an endorsement and expansion of the alternative constructive partisanship model.

Figure 5-8. Republican ideological sub-groups, 106th Congress

In looking at Figure 5-8, we see that during the 106th Congress the Republicans had largely abandoned their once dominant preference for deeply conservative legislation in favor of preferences that were increasingly moderate in tone. With no particular ideological camp directing the party, the identity of the post-Revolution Republican House was ill-defined. In the view of Dodd and Oppenheimer, and in our
own, the initial choice to employ party governance portended dark days for the Republican House:

The House and its leadership thus approached the end of the 106th Congress... preoccupied by external events and internal divisions, uncertain about the future, hobbled by the past, awaiting developments largely beyond their control, and certain only of their ability to make matters worse through misstep and miscalculation (2001a, pp. 41)

In all, the 2000 election presented the nation with a partisan stalemate not seen since Kennedy / Nixon in 1960. While the Republicans had made a concerted effort to move away from party governance in comparison to earlier sessions, the ultimate impact of their initial decision to embrace this operational model had shown itself to be a poor choice during the first half of their majority tenure.

**Summary**

As seen in Chapter 4, the popularly held view of congressional Republicans as a lock-step unit throughout their tenure as majority party is not a complete picture of the House conservatives. While we found ideological homogeneity was present during certain periods from 1995 to 2000, this unity was both difficult to maintain, and was dependent on circumstances exigent to the influence and control of the party and its members. In multiple ways, this chapter showed that the story of House Republicans in the first half of their tenure is that while the relative strength of parties has increased in the modern congressional era (as seen in the post- Revolution session), this increase was not a sustainable model upon which to build legislative governance (as seen in the post-governmental shutdown and post-impeachment trial periods). As argued by the Rhode-Aldrich camp, party governance relies on the condition of intraparty ideological homogeneity; yet, because intraparty ideological homogeneity is influenced by context, it is logical to view this model of congressional politics as one heavily dependent on an
effective leadership and a favorable operational environment. From a path dependency perspective, shifts in an organization’s functional context play a major role in the developmental dynamics of that organization.

In the case of the Republican House, though their earlier decisions to support party governance dominated by empowered leadership may have seemed prudent following major shifts in their political context (again, the Revolution and Contract), these initial decisions proved to be increasingly constraining upon members as their environment evolved with time. As such, our evidence in Chapter 4 has presented a defining pattern that took place during the first half of the Republican majority era: strong partisanship in conjunction with short-term favorable operational conditions; the empowerment of leaders associated with this initial environment and early agenda success; a decision by leadership to push for a deeply conservative and contentious political agenda supported by strong partisanship; despite this ideological cohesion, a major defeat on an event arising in a newly emerging, inhospitable context for which leadership is not prepared; and – finally – the growth of ideological defection away from party unity.
Figure 5-9 above supports our argument: If we remember from Chapter 3, in a finding indicative of party governance, there was a very strong negative relationship in 1995 between the number of members in an ideological sub-group, and increased levels of liberalism on the conservative spectrum. When taken across time, this relationship is more normalized; that is, while the House majority leaned towards conservatism during certain moments in this period, ideological rigidity and cohesion lessened as the party responded to a series of dramatic shifts in its operational environment. This ideological pattern is unexpected – if one assumes conditional party governance.

In many ways, the broad story of the Republican House from 1995 to 2000 is that good fortune is an essential condition necessary for party governance. Unfortunately, as

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Figure 5-9 was constructed using the same methodology as detailed in Chapter 3 – see footnote 3.11 for further clarification.
Machiavelli has taught political scientists for generations, those in power cannot depend upon fortune’s good graces. Overtime, the shifting sands of the political arena is of special importance: the environmental context of the House is at times advantageous and at times disadvantageous for political actors within the institution. As such, rational political actors – evenly boundedly rational actors – impacted by the limitations of their operational environment ought to organize themselves in such a way as to be responsive to this reality; that is, one must not mistake an illusion of power for sustained authority.
CHAPTER 6

But I can hear you! And, the people that did this… their going to hear from all of us very soon!

—President George W. Bush, September 14th, 2001

While Chapter 5 provided an analysis of the Republican experience during the 1990s era of divided government, this chapter seeks to examine patterns of activity and organizational structure within the House majority as it entered into a new era of unified governance following the 2000 presidential election. This chapter considers the choices (and consequences of those choices) made by the majority party in the aftermath of the September 11th tragedies, the build-up to the war in Iraq, and the events surrounding the 2006 mid-term elections. Continuing to employ the methodologies utilized in previous chapters, our goal here is to illustrate a more complete picture of the developmental dynamics experienced by the Republican party from 1995-2006, and to understand how these dynamics shaped the House in an environment of continual change.

Finding that the Republican House majority did re-adopt ideological homogeneity in the aftermath of September 11th, in this chapter we offer a “friendly amendment” that we believe enhances the constructive partisanship model. Simply put, our data show that certain events – in this case leadership response to a national tragedy – can extend the limits of conditional party governance beyond that predicted by Dodd and Oppenheimer in their 1997 to 2001 publications. Taking these possibilities into consideration, we argue, strengthens the explanatory power of the broader constructive partisanship thesis. Despite this return to party governance, we again find that failures by empowered leaders and fleeting environmental conditions represent increasing
constraints on individual members who had previously adopted the party brand. From this analysis, we identify a continued pattern of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse that we employ to further question the sustainability of the conditional party governance model.

**A Return to Party Governance in the House**

The Republicans entered into the new millennium a very different majority from the Revolution. In adopting a centralized, leadership-driven organizational structure, the party had made a series of critical missteps on a number of volatile issues. These failures were compounded by a changing political context: gone were the short-term advantages that had propelled the party into power – they had been replaced by an ever more popular Democratic president who was viewed by many in the electorate as leading the nation into a new era of economic prosperity. Though they had won back the White House in 2000, the outcome of the race was extremely controversial (if, in the eyes of some, even legitimate). In all, their political majority was more vulnerable than at any previous time – clearly, this was not a political context conducive to party governance.

With stalemate in the air following the 2000 general election, Dodd and Oppenheimer revisit their earlier arguments made in 1997’s *Congress and the Emerging Order*, again predicting the emergence of a new partisan era for Congress. In their 2001 work *Assessing the 2000 Elections*, they state that while the early 1990s did present an extraordinary period of aggressive partisanship, political developments during the Republicans brief majority had lead them to, “believe that several factors may alter and constrain conditional party government over the next decade or two” (2001b, pp. 367). Because the political context at the start of the new millennia indicated that
party governance in the House would be difficult to sustain, they continued to argue that, “competing forms of rational behavior may arise and result in more muted, complicated forms of partisanship… we suggest that a party intent on keeping control of Congress may have to move beyond strict conditional party government and embrace a constructive partisanship that demonstrates its capacity to govern” (2001b, pp. 367-8 – emphasis ours). With just a five-seat majority in the House after 1998 and fears of being labeled a “Do-Nothing” Congress, this idea of constructive partisanship showed signs of becoming a reality. As reported by media observers during the run-up to the 2000 elections:

   Republicans are pleased that they… have come up with an appealing legislative agenda this year, and they have rallied around it. The list includes items that cater to their conservative base – such as curbs on abortion and measured tax cuts – even if they'll be dead on arrival at the White House. The agenda also included items traditionally associated with Democrats, such as providing prescription drug benefits to senior citizens and increasing the minimum wage. President Clinton may not ultimately sign these GOP-flavored initiatives into law, but at least the Republicans can say they are moving popular legislation (Baumann, 2000, pp. 1414)

   Continuing to hammer conditional party government as – at best – a fragile and tentative possibility, Dodd and Oppenheimer state that as seat distribution in the House became more closely divided following the 1998 and 2000 elections, the necessary condition of membership coordination and vote cohesion would become an increasingly difficult proposition (this argument was quite prophetic, as Jim Jeffords would soon after publication of their work jump from the Republican party and give control of the Senate back to the Democrats). In this context, the arising of cross-cutting “wedge issues” could critically hinder the leadership’s ability to operate under a party governance model.

Returning to earlier arguments addressed by Lowi, Dodd and Oppenheimer point out that in 2000 the most critical test facing the Republicans would be their ability to sustain
a coalition between social conservatives in the south, and the more traditional fiscal conservatives from the north and west. Though they admit in 2001 that many of the reservations they expressed in 1997 concerning centralized party government have persisted, Dodd and Oppenheimer continued to insist that conditional party government is a highly difficult method of legislative politics to maintain. In a heterogeneous nation as the United States, policy conflicts seldom remain polarized in ways that reinforce distinctive preference homogeneity:

The longer the Republicans are in power in Congress, the harder it may be to suppress their internal party differences and the more likely it is that a wedge issue will arise to divide them and tear conditional party government apart…. Any such policy divisions within the Republican Party could create difficult governing tasks for its party leaders and complicate the continuation of conditional party government (2001b, pp. 382)

As seen earlier¹, the House was ripe with ideological division, and any such wedge issue could have been incredibly detrimental to the sustained cohesion of the majority party. At the then mid-point of their tenure as the majority party in the House, Dodd and Oppenheimer suggest that while conditional party government may have been an apt description of the Republican majority in the early 1990s; given their present context, following this behavioral model would neither present an easy road for the House Republicans, nor is it necessarily a prudent model for any majority party in the House to follow overtime.

Even with a Republican Administration, they assert the potential that the conditions necessary for party governance could evaporate. Though there was unified government with the election of George W. Bush and the placement of Dick Cheney in the Senate as a tie-breaking vote, the margin of majority in 2000 was razor thin.

¹ See Figure 5-6
Regardless, Dodd and Oppenheimer note that Bush expected the Congress to act as though he had won a landslide victory. While this agenda presented some new programs that were avoided in the *Contract with America* (most notably the socially conservative policy of “faith-based initiatives” to make it easier for church related programs to receive federal money), the focus of the Bush Administration was on fulfilling a central plank sought for throughout the 1990s: tax cuts. Evidencing the tensions in the House, even this issue was quite divisive within the party: While conservative House Republicans wanted even larger tax cuts, moderates in the party favored smaller ones so as to leave revenues available for the funding other programs such as education (2005b, pp. 30-1). As reported by congressional journalists, “No muss, no fuss; now that Bill Clinton’s out of the picture…. But so far, things aren’t looking so neat and tidy. House and Senate Republicans are already disagreeing among themselves – and in some case, with their Republican President – about how much money to spend” (Baumann, 2001, pp. 879). These divisions became more complex as the Senate came under the control of the Democrats, the economy and tax revenues continued to deteriorate despite the Republican’s tax policies, and President Bush’s approval ratings began to decline:

> As members returned from the recess in the first week of September, gloom was descending on House Republicans, as they contemplated the economic figures… Adding to the Republican’s concern were the president’s falling poll numbers and declining public confidence in the job he was doing…. *All such concerns pointed to an early end to Republican control* (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2005b, pp. 31 – emphasis ours)

In all, Dodd and Oppenheimer note that worry, division, and the fear of failure defined the Republican majority during the first session of the 107\textsuperscript{th} Congress. It seemed that their 1997 predictions were proving correct – conditional party governance in the House
was just a transitory phase that was quickly yielding to more muted forms of partisanship.

As with all works of scholarship, Dodd and Oppenheimer – writing in early 2001 – could not have predicted the future events of that year: Despite the fallout of 1998 and the stalemate of 2000, the operational conditions of the House Republicans would take a dramatic shift in the fall of 2001. Due to this shift and the response of Republican leaders (most specifically President Bush), we offer a “friendly amendment” to the constructive partisanship model. Dodd and Oppenheimer argue in 1997 and early 2001 that the conditions necessary for party governance had reached their operational limits. Yet, we find that the constructive partisanship model – though we endorse its broader criticisms – did not fully consider the potential impact of national crisis. Given the ability of such critical moments to change the developmental course of political dynamics, our data show that the limits of party government can be extended when dramatic shifts occur in the operational environment.

The 9/11 crisis and Republican response to the event represent such a shift. As such, we argue that the constructive partisanship model be extended to consider the impact of shifting operational environments and leadership response to these unique moments in time. Because the environmental context in which the House operates is itself dynamic, we have shown (critically of the conditional party governance model) that ideological homogeneity cannot be assumed to remain static. Our empirical analysis in this chapter finds that the same is true of ideological heterogeneity: At times, the House dynamic enhances the attractiveness of party unity and strengthened leadership. The terror attacks of 9/11 represented such a context, causing members to unite under the
vision of a powerful and ideologically driven leadership – a leadership, who, could now again exercise the reforms instituted during the Gingrich era. With just a slight majority, Republicans were able to exploit the crisis to divert attention away from budget issues, and to focus upon terrorism, homeland security, and America’s new role in a dangerous world – a focus which proved to be electorally viable for Congress in 2002 (Critchlow, 2004).

Figure 6-1. Republican House ideological trend: 2002

Did 9/11 reopen the return of party governance? The short answer is ‘yes’: the House did return to ideological homogeneity within the majority party under the direction of party leadership. As seen in Figure 6-1; in the session following the 9/11 tragedies, Republicans returned to intra-party ideological homogeneity. Whereas the ideological
trend of 2000 was more normalized\(^2\) (a finding not in accord with the conditional party governance model), a strong negative relationship between the number of Republican members in an ideological range and the level of liberalism in that range became the norm in the second session of the 107\(^{th}\) Congress. In many ways, the ideological make-up the 2002 House was quite similar to that of the 1995 House\(^3\). Yet, the story is more complicated: the primary difference between this second phase of the Republican tenure and the first was that the post-9/11 era occurred in a period of unified government. Now that the Congress had a friend and not a rival in the White House – in combination with political upheaval following terrorist attacks – the difficulties and divisions of the 1998 and 2000 elections were quickly forgotten. In short, partisanship reigned in this new operational context. Though there were differences from the Gingrich era, in that the leadership of the party was now on a Speaker \textit{and} a President, patterns analogous to those found in the first years of the House Republican majority occurred once again during the second half of the majority’s tenure. With short-term advantages now in their favor, House Republicans and their leadership began to once more embrace an operational model predicted by the conditional party government thesis.

Under the Madisonian system of checks and balances, each institution is (theoretically, at least) supposed to compete with other institutions as legislation is created and enforced. With divided government the rule more than exception, this quasi-filtering system has been the historical norm – for example, the deep partisan

\(^2\) See Figure 5-9

\(^3\) See Figure 3-6
rancor that poisoned the legislative-executive relationship of the 1990s. Yet, following the 9/11 tragedy, unified party government gave way to a House whose leadership deeply embraced President Bush’s agenda – foreign and domestic: “Strong House leadership has coincided with close working relations with the White House to attain common legislative goals…. The Bush administration worked with GOP leaders to develop legislation that could pass with wide Republican support, such as the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003… the resolution authorizing war with Iraq” (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 221). In many ways, this legislative strategy mirrored the Contract – most specifics of agenda were attractive to a broad number of members (regionally and career-wise), and were supported by a large percentage of the electorate still reeling from terrorist attacks and a struggling economy. In “hitching their wagon” to the Bush administration, the Republican members of the House once again branded themselves under a centralized mark, empowering their leaders to make broad policy decisions of which they initially embraced. As we argue in this chapter, this repeated unification under- and dependence- upon empowered leadership was a mistake similar to the one made in 1995; that is, an excess of ideological rigidity once again placed Republicans in a very tenuous position.

The operational context of a unified government and an external crisis was advantageous (though, only in the short-term) to their preference agenda, fostering a cooperative development that returned the Republican majority to party governance. In branding themselves under the Bush Administration, this dynamic tied the future success of House members directly to the leadership successes (and as we shall see, the failures) of the President and party leadership. Similar to the early days of the
Revolution and easy passage of the Contract, this operational environment proved successful for the Republicans: the President’s impromptu “I Hear You” speech on the rubble of the Twin Towers and his resolute leadership in the weeks following rallied the spirits of a shaken American people. Further, the Administration’s move towards “compassionate conservatism” defused traditional Democratic attacks on education issues, and a series of tax cuts hardened support of the conservative electoral base. Together, these factors combined to advance Republican gains in the 2002 congressional election; leading Speaker Hastert to announce that congressional Republicans would run as a united party with a common record in the 2004 presidential contest (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 222).

Following the successful 2002 elections, House GOP members made moves to strengthen the prerogative of party leaders: First, not only was Hastert allowed to remain as Speaker; moreover, the caucus chose to remove that office’s four-Congress term limit. Second, with the retirement of Dick Armey, the majority caucus entrusted former Gingrich-ally Tom DeLay with the post of Majority Leader (Roy Blunt, DeLay’s firm supporter, was elected Majority Whip). Though this relationship between the House and the White House was not without strain⁴, a second period of party governance had taken hold in the House – this time by party leaders increasingly following the conservative will of President Bush:

Most major legislative initiatives emerge from the White House, not Capitol Hill…. Therefore, as long as Republicans are unified in their belief that President Bush’ success is essential for their continued majority party control, centralization on Capitol Hill is unlikely to coincide with a

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⁴ As evidenced by such contentious issues as the Medicare prescription drug benefit bill vote in which party leaders employed various tools –for example, holding the vote open for an extraordinary length of time – to pressure rank-and-file members into forcing the divisive bill through the House.
reassertion of congressional prerogatives vis a vis the White House (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 223-4) 

In sum, the House GOP, their leaders, and the President’s future were all linked under the same unified conservative brand. Having organized themselves again via an empowered command structure under the direction of party leaders (in this case, due to unified government, a structure in which party leaders controlled the agenda of the House as guided by the President), would the Republican House majority experience a fate similar to that as experienced during the 1990s? Simply put, yes.

**Organizational Structure: Tracing House Leadership Activity, 2000-2006**

Having witnessed a dramatic change in the role of the Speaker with the ascension of Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich, scholarship covering the 1990s gestured that the House may have entered into a new Cannon-like era of czar rule (Aldrich and Rhode, 2000; Cox and McCubbins, 1993). After Gingrich’s struggles and ultimate fall, competing research began to posit arguments that such behavior had peaked under the Republican Speaker, and that his successor would most probably return the House to a structure more similar to that of previous era's (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2001a; Connelly and Pitney, 1997). The shutting down of government, the impeachment of a president, and the fall of Gingrich put the 106th Congress – and especially House Republicans – in a state of near-shock. As such, many predicted that the next Speaker would behave in a manner much different than that of recent House leaders: “By the time of Gingrich’s departure, any lingering thoughts of a czar-like Speakership had been abandoned…. Hastert was expected to proceed in more collegial manner, helping the House Republicans regroup, find their legislative bearings, and compete for reelection
in a more effective manner in 2000” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 28-9). Did reality meet expectation?

Figure 6-2. Average regional distribution, Republican House leadership: 2001-2006

Though his speakership came to an abrupt and embarrassing end following the 1998 elections, many of Gingrich’s centralizing reforms continued in the House after the election of a new Speaker: Dennis Hastert. At face value, Hastert was anything but Gingrich – he was not from the south, he had never before served the party in an elected leadership position, and he was known for a quiet demeanor and a tolerance for compromise. In fact, as we see above in Figure 6-2, this new leadership team was largely “non-southern,” dominated by faces and voices from the new Speaker’s mid-western region. Beyond region, other differences abounded: Whereas Gingrich was a fire-brand, Hastert had a media reputation as a behind-the-scenes consensus builder (Carney, Foerstel, and Taylor, 1998). Others in the literature backed this early
observation stating that, "Gingrich’s successor, Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., initially seemed to be a very different leader. Not only did he follow through on his promises to allow committee chairs more independence and to act with the advice of a much wider range of Republicans, but he proved to be nearly invisible in the media” (Smith and Gamm, 2009, pp. 158). As he entered the Speakership, many media observers commented that the Gingrich model of leadership-driven partisanship would not remain the operational norm in the post-Revolution House: “In the House this week, Newt Gingrich became a faded memory. J. Dennis Hastert, his lower-than-low-key successor, took great pains to portray his speakership as a return to what congressional insiders call the ‘regular order’” (Cohen and Serafini, 1999, pp. 48).

Despite these differences in personality, Hastert’s speakership did not translate into a more muted form of partisanship; that is, given the new operational context presented in the post-9/11 period, Hastert did not deviate radically from Gingrich, returning to a more “textbook” model of the House.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>22.22%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11.11%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Conservatives</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patricians</td>
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Looking to Table 6-1, following the 9/11 bombings, House leadership once again chose to embrace a deeply rigid, deeply conservative ideological perspective: in 2002, two-thirds of leadership could be categorized as either “Ultra-” or “Strong-Conservative;” and by 2003, not a single member of the leadership could be counted as a “Weak-” or “Patrician-Conservative.” This trend peaked in the build-up to the 2004 presidential
elections: in that session, 62% of House leaders behaved as “Ultra-Conservatives,” more than at any other time in the party’s majority tenure.

With the operational environment of the House now in their favor, and the powers formed by previous Speakers still in hand (not to mention the continuance of “Team Gingrich,” with Tom DeLay advancing to Majority Leader and Roy Blunt as Majority Whip), Hastert and fellow leaders chose to continue down the organizational and operational path established in the first days of 1995. Institutional rules from the Revolution remained “sticky,” reinforcing the party governance model: committee chair term limits remained in place (compounded by the fact that the term limit on the Speaker was itself repealed), and party loyalty – not seniority – remained an essential factor for career advancement (for example, senior members in the Government Reform and the Resources committee were passed-over in favor of more junior, ideologically pure members). Further, Hastert also pressured members into ideological conformity, though often in closed-door meetings: “When House Republicans gathered behind closed doors… Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., pleaded for unity and legislative progress. ‘I need you to stand together,’ Hastert read… ‘to not just cry out for leadership, but be willing to follow it’” (Cohen, 1999, pp. 1592).

In multiple ways, recent literature has argued that those in Republican leadership positions gained and maintained their status through loyalty to the party and to its political agenda – whether that loyalty took the form floor voting record, legislative or committee activity, or financial support to the electoral efforts of rank-and-file members (Aldrich and Rhode, 2009). For example, the new Speaker went so far as to establish what became considered as the “Hastert rule,” in which party leadership made it clear
that they were not interested in passing legislation that required Democrats’ support, or bills that did not already have a majority of Republicans approve the measure (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 210; 2009, pp. 171). Overall, this return to party governance was enhanced in 2000 by the election of a Republican president, and the 9/11 crisis that catapulted a friendly executive's power:

Once a new Republican president was elected in 2000, the House leadership reverted to the form predicted by the [conditional party government] thesis. Hastert and his second in command, majority leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, coordinated agenda’s with the White House, set strategy on measures important to the new administration, insisted on timely committee action, and proved quite willing to twist arms (Smith and Gamm, 2009, pp. 158).

Beyond Table 6-1, our data reinforces this argument in other ways; for example, in terms of the expectations placed upon committee chairman. As we saw before⁵, ideological loyalty was a marker for those advancing to committee chairmanships in 1995 (though, as discussed, the ideological fervor of committee chairs lessened as the operational context shifted in the 1990s). Looking to Figure 6-3, during the second half of the Republican’s majority tenure, we see the same pattern emerging: following the 9/11 crisis, the majority of committee chairman were either “Ultra-” or “Strong-Conservatives.” Though this rigidity would wane with time (just as we saw during the 1990s), high levels of ideological homogeneity leaning towards “Strong-Conservatism” indicates that committee chairman were less independent, and expected to tow-the-party line.

⁵ See Figure 5-4
Figure 6-3. Ideology of committee chairmen overtime: 2001-2006

Party governance had once again been adopted by the Republican party in this succeeding period of their House majority; yet, the patterns that defined the first half of their experience would also come to define their second. In terms of their initial foray with party governance, the Republican Revolution – based upon its goals of radical change within the Congress – sought to operate not from a balanced geographic or ideological position, but from a unit position singularly guided by the dictates of the Contract. Whereas the party had historically experienced an internal division between “Wall Street” and “Main Street” conservatives, the Gingrich / GOPAC army seemingly erased internal strife – at least for a time. In considering this development, scholars have continued to debate both the existence and effect of increased party strength: various academic camps have arisen since the early 1990s, defining themselves by their views on party unity, activity, and effectiveness. While some scholars – again, Dodd and Oppenheimer’s 1997 Testing the Limits of Party Governance – deeply questioned the effectiveness of party governance, others have outright rejected the
notion. Perhaps most vocal in opposition to the effect of party leadership upon legislative development is found in Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics* (1998), in which the scholar argues that high levels of party unity do not necessarily mean that congressional parties are in fact strong. That is, unity is not the product of the party intending to act towards an objective as a unit, but simply because members will naturally sort themselves according to their preset ideological perspective. As such, Krehbiel argues that for leadership driven partisanship to take place, party leaders must take active steps to achieve a level of unity beyond that which normally occurs in the chamber. In opposition to Krehbiel’s criticism, we find that such leadership activity did in fact take place during this period of the Republican majority – most specifically when it came to the passage of Medicare Part D.

Following the 9/11 tragedies, the vast majority of rank-and-file House Republicans were supportive of the party’s legislative agenda; yet, as noted by Schickler and Pearson (2005), certain major legislative issues – for both ideological and electoral motivations – gave many GOP members pause before readily supporting their party leaders. Following months of legislative maneuvering, the Bush Administration and chamber leaders made a final push to place legislation providing prescription benefits to seniors onto the president’s desk before year’s end. The political stakes were high: as reported by congressional observers in the media, President Bush was pressuring congressional leaders to, “do whatever it takes to make sure their party delivers on promises [to extend benefits], and thus score a win on what historically had been considered a Democratic issue…. Republicans will have a hard time explaining if a Republican House, Senate, and White House doesn’t pass a bill” (Serafini, 2003, pp.
As a new multi-billion dollar entitlement program, the problem for many members with the Medicare bill was that it went against traditional Republican principles of fiscal conservatism.

Faced with a near unified Democratic opposition and a very slim majority, the leadership knew that it had few votes to spare. Moreover, many House Republicans openly balked not only at the proposed Part D plan, but also at similar funding in the build-up to the bill’s final vote (for example, leaders were forced in the summer of 2003 to extend time on a measure, allowing them to scramble for the votes needed thwart-off Democratic amendments to the 2004 Health and Human services appropriations bills). To make matters worse, a preliminary vote on the Medicare bill revealed a 215-219 defeat against new funding. To overcome this situation, House leaders employed an unprecedented legislative maneuver to force passage of the bill: “Beginning at 3 a.m., Republican leaders held open the vote on the Medicare prescription drug bill for nearly three hours until the votes totals shifted from a 215-219 defeat to a 220-215 passage. Republican leaders refused to bring down the gavel… until they had persuaded enough Republicans to switch their votes” (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 210-11). Similar to the experience of the 1990s, this effort on behalf of the leadership backfired against the majority: though Speaker Hastert convinced divided conservative members that support for Medicare expansion would defuse a core support basis for the Democrats, “almost immediately, however, the law was criticized as being too confusing for its beneficiaries to understand and too oriented toward the interest of pharmaceutical and insurance companies” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 33).
Though the most public, the Medicare Part D was not the only instance in which party leadership took aggressive measures to ensure unity on votes during this congressional period. We have already seen that following the election of 1994, Speaker Gingrich took drastic steps in seeking to force the Contract.\(^6\) Beyond these reforms; Hastert, DeLay, and others used not only career advancement as a method to pressure member obedience; but also money for campaigns and reelection (Stewart, 2001). It is well documented that campaigns for the House of Representatives have become dramatically more expensive in the modern era – often costing candidates multiple millions of dollars to remain competitive (Herrnson, 2008; Goidel, Gross, and Shields, 1999). In the search for funds, members often turn to their party for financial support. As reported by Herrnson, in the 2006 House congressional elections, the Democrats distributed approximately $606,000 in contributions and $8.8 million in coordinated expenditures; whereas the Republicans distributed $975,000 in contributions and approximately $4.7 million in coordinated expenditures. Herrnson argues that such large coordinated expenditures are of great importance: “Their higher limits… the possibility for creating agency agreements; and the control they afford party committees in candidates’ campaigns make coordinated expenditures an attractive avenue for party involvement” (2008, pp. 101). One example of this form party involvement occurred during the Clinton impeachment trial: Reports surfaced that messages were being sent throughout the House and to party activists that a moderate Republican defector considering voting against the charges of impeachment could

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\(^6\) As discussed, he demanded that members of the Republican caucus sign a letter of fealty to the Contract; he both established new rules limiting the number of terms for chairman, and bypassed the norms of the committee system entirely by nominating three junior members to three key chair positions; and in place of committees he created a series of party “task forces” that were run from his and Armey’s office.
expect future campaign contributions to evaporate and be transferred to challengers during the next primary race. Though denied by then Majority Whip Tom DeLay, moderate Republicans voted overwhelmingly to impeach President Clinton. As argued by Stewart, this episode suggests that ideological divergence may have been kept in check in the Republican House by threats of undercutting vital campaign funding (2001, pp. 260).

During the post-9/11 Republican majority, scholars hint at other events in which party leadership is accused of employing pressure via campaign funding – in this case, the issue was a promise to fund rather than a threat to remove. Related to the controversial vote on Medicare Part D, moderate Republicans had charged that – in exchange for their vote – money would be offered to their campaign coffers. In particular, Representative Nick Smith (R-Michigan) stated that “unnamed members had offered $100,000 in donations to his son’s congressional campaign if he would change his vote.” Though Smith voted against the new program and later issued a statement that he had been “technically incorrect” about the bribery charges, this example shows for some observers the continued pressure placed on members by their party leadership during the Republican majority era – other examples of pressure from this vote include two junior Republicans who switched their votes at 6 a.m. after receiving heated phone calls directly from President Bush (Schickler and Pearson, 2005, pp. 210; Cohen, et al., 2004, pp. 82; Serafini, et al., 2003). Whatever the level of force in these particular instances, parties have grown to become important sources for much needed campaign funds and support.
In all, during certain periods, supporting the party agenda and leadership driven efforts was to the benefit of individual members (and perhaps, in some instances like the Medicare Part D vote, harmful to them if they did not). Yet, these periods are fleeting, with time leaving those who supported an ideological agenda in a precarious position.

**A Lesson “Misremembered”**

Depicting the ideological breakdown of House leadership vs. the broader majority caucus in 2002, we seen in Figure 6-4 below that leadership was initially successful in returning members to a level of homogeneity that largely reflected their own. While there were moderate sub-groups present, a near-majority of rank-and-file members could be classified as either an “Ultra-” or “Strong Conservative” in the early stages of the post-9/11 House (in fact, there is a perfect rank-order from most conservative to least conservative in terms of membership level). As seen in Figure 6-4 (and throughout the data previously presented), the House and its leadership have experienced – in particular periods – high levels of ideological homogeneity (i.e., following the Revolution and 9/11). Further, Hastert, DeLay, and other Republican leaders became increasingly involved the introduction, development, and passage of legislative policy. These findings are consistent with the conditional party government thesis – yet, these findings are linked to one particular context in time. While party governance may be an accurate description of the House in certain periods, it is an illusion of party authority; that is, the model is unsustainable overtime.
Because political parties have the ability to provide collective goods that individuals could not provide on their own (i.e. a coherent and highly recognizable political platform, legislative development experience, resource connections with special interest groups, campaign finance, etc.), individual legislators may – in certain circumstances – be heavily benefited by association with and loyalty to the political party most relevant to their and their district’s political preferences. One benefit in particular could be thought of as analogous to a franchise system in the private business sector: branding. In his broad review of congressional politics, Stewart provides a robust analogy that helps in understanding the practical role of parties for individual members of the national legislature:

The role of parties in this view is much like that of a national office of a hamburger franchise. The McDonald’s corporation has made a fortune by franchising thousands of stores that offer a uniformly high-quality product anywhere in the United States. Achieving this uniform high quality is no easy task. Each store owner, at least in theory, has an incentive to free ride on the McDonald’s reputation: cutting corners, lowering costs, luring in unsuspecting customers, and making even more money. The contract between McDonald’s and its franchisees not only prohibits such free riding but contains mechanisms to enforce the contract (like inspectors and auditors) and punish non-compliance (2001, pp. 266)
In a context where conditions are ripe for party governance, as seen in 1994 and again in late 2001, rank-and-file members are more willing to give leaders increased authority to try and create, as Stewart puts it, “a relatively uniform, positive image of the party that is of benefit to all party members” (2001, pp. 266). In doing so, these members also give leadership the power to pressure reluctant members to maintain a uniform public front. In all, these actions present the party as a “brand” to the voting public. When the brand is popular, for example the presentation of the *Contract with America* or during crisis post-9/11, it behooves many individual members to solidify their “contract” with leaders to gain the benefits of the party’s public image. Yet, in our dynamic society, political conditions shift and leaders fail; thus, there is the very real possibility that the external context in which the party operates will no longer be conducive for the brand enshrined in the past.

Using Stewart’s analogy, questions about the effects of this contextual change can raised: While Stewart discusses problems with individual franchisees free riding and cutting corners, what happens when the tables are turned? That is, what happens when the problem with the franchise brand is not with the individual operator, but with the national corporation? If the direction a company’s leadership is moving the corporation is an incorrect one given the current market or broad economic context, what measures ought the individual owner/operators take? Sell the franchise and get out of business all together? Change the franchise to become a former competitor? Issue a vote of “no confidence” to remove the corporation’s board of trustees?

Continuing the logic of this analogy from a different angle helps us to understand the broader impact and primary pitfalls of conditional party governance – especially from
a historical institutionalist, path-dependency perspective: While the initial operational context of the institution may present to members conditions favorable for enhancing leadership power so as to gain the advantages of the party “brand;” as the institution moves forward across time, context is bound to change. If this is the case, and leadership does not respond (or, as we have seen, responds incorrectly) to changes in the operational environment, the initial decision by those who have chosen to align themselves with the brand will find that their choice proves to be increasingly restrictive – if not outright harmful – to the pursuit of their political agenda. When an organization’s operational environment shifts and previous decisions no longer fit current institutional operational context, crisis will ensue. To survive this critical moment, the organization will – theoretically, at least – experience shifts in its developmental dynamics away from its previous structure. For the Republican leadership and rank-and-file members, this theory became reality for the House majority on a number of occasions; most specifically during showdows with President Clinton over budget shutdowns and impeachment trials, and later with President Bush and the increasingly negative view of post-9/11 actions taken at home and in Iraq. As party governance becomes increasingly institutionalized, when shifts occur – and they will – members begin to question the utility of their party.

**Hitching their Wagons: Tracing GOP Membership, 2000-2006**

As Stewart eloquently puts it, “It does appear that when the collective image of a party is negative, party candidates lose out on election day more than if the party image is positive” (2001, pp. 267). Having witnessed the experience of the “Lost Lamb Revolutionaries” from 1995 to 2000; let us take a look at the broader party and its activities from 2001 to 2006. By considering the story of members during second half of
the Republican tenure, this period will help us to better understand the effects that the initial decision to adopt party governance had upon the rank-and-file – especially as they and their political agendas matured with time. In this section, we take a focused look at the responses of members in the House majority towards the defining events of the post-9/11 era so as to examine the lessons from this experience as the party moved through time.

Following the 9/11 tragedies, the Republican party returned to a state of ideological unity under the leadership of President Bush. In cementing this relationship with the President, Congress chose to grant him broad authority to conduct a “War on Terrorism” – so broad in fact that some observers labeled it a ‘blank check’ (Cohen, 2001). Bush took this authority to its limit – perhaps beyond: “After September 11th, Bush unblinkingly described his mission as ‘saving the world.’ Congress alone has the power to legislate, but the President in the past year has flexed all the muscles the Constitution gave him and, some would say, a few it didn’t” (Simendinger, 2002, pp. 230). Though the party experienced initial success, it once again found itself embroiled in an external crisis growing more difficult and unpopular as time progressed: the war in Iraq. Beginning with his first address to the joint session of Congress after taking the oath of office in 2001, Bush began promoting the idea of exporting freedom throughout the world – particularly in the Middle East. In the wake of 9/11, the President altered this call to action to include not only spreading peace, but more importantly protecting the American people from terrorism (most specifically from those seeking to use chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons against American citizens).
Less than two years after the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, the administration began to shift its attention away from al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden, focusing instead upon Iraq and Saddam Hussein. In his speeches, weekly radio addresses, and meetings with congressional leadership; President Bush repeatedly stressed the impending danger posed by Saddam Hussein’s potential possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), his brutal treatment of the Iraqi people, and his unwillingness to cooperate with United Nations resolutions. On March 19, 2003, the Bush administration announced that U.S. military forces were, “in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger.” Although this action was not authorized by the United Nations, Bush’s initial argument resonated with the American people with broad (though certainly divisive) support. However, this preliminary public support for the war quickly eroded as Bush’s warnings that Iraq actively possessed WMD were found to be inaccurate. In response, political challengers and the public began to question the relationship between Iraq, al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups associated with 9/11. To compound these issues, what looked like post-war victory degenerated into an insurgent lead civil-war, despite the fact that Bush had publicly announced “Mission Accomplished.” As American casualties began to mount, public support continued to decline. Regardless of its unpopularity, the Bush administration insisted that the war was the right thing to do, given the realities of a post-9/11 world.

Clearly, the war in Iraq placed increasing pressure on Republicans as they entered into the 2004 election season. To combat this situation, congressional leaders took a stance similar to that taken in the years after the budget shutdown and
impeachment debacles 1998. During the second session of the 108th Congress, leaders sought a “do no harm” strategy in which they focused the House agenda on less controversial issues such as extending tax cuts to the middle class and married couples. In terms of foreign policy, House leaders remained at the President’s side, arguing that “staying the course” in Iraq would keep the fight against terrorism outside of the nation’s borders. To further bolster their image on the terrorism issue, congressional leaders also considered various recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission – though this action occurred only after heavy pressure from political commentators and Democratic rivals (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 34). Despite growing struggles and popular discontent about the war in Iraq, George W. Bush was victorious over John Kerry as the voters viewed the latter as too weak on terrorism and the former more closely aligned to traditional domestic values. Journalists following the election commented that much of the support for Bush and conservative candidates stemmed from congressional redistricting7 and from multiple state popular referendums that put conservative leaning issues such as gay marriage amendments on the general election ballot (Cohen and Baumann, 2004). In any case, the Republicans had won – they maintained unified control of the federal government and even picked up a three seat gain in the House.

Having maintained a successful record in two election cycles, many conservatives believed that they had an electoral mandate. In fact, during his victory speech, Bush stated that he had earned political capitol, and he intended to use it. Based upon these outcomes, House Republicans pursued a three pronged strategy that they believed

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7 Occurring in Texas, this redistricting was later found to be illegal, leading to the downfall and arrest of then Majority Leader Tom DeLay.
would propel them into long-term control of the House: (1) continued support of Bush and the war on terrorism, (2) endorsement of Tom DeLay as heir apparent of the Speakership, and (3) reform of domestic social welfare programs – most specifically Social Security (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009). Unfortunately for the majority, the operational environment of the House was about to take a dramatic shift for which the ideologically rigid caucus was not prepared. Before the next election cycle, the Republicans would fail in each of these cases, and their time as House majority would come to an end.

The Republicans of the 109th Congress stumbled out of the gate as they sought to reform the nation’s social welfare domestic-spending programs. Similar to their earlier attempts with Medicare Part D in which the party sought to co-opt a historically Democratic electoral stronghold, Republican leaders argued that individual American citizens ought be allowed to privatize their Social Security taxes – at least partially. Democrats were quick to counter that such a move would jeopardize the program’s guarantee of a “safety net” for current and future senior citizens; further, liberals argued that the proposed move was not motivated by reform, but by greedy corporations seeking to profit from privatized governmental monies. In the end, Republicans – having been cast as cronies for Wall Street special interests – were forced to retreat on the issue. Failure to reform Social Security caused the 109th Congress to sputter on other ideologically driven issues as well: “Efforts to reform Social Security had gone by the wayside early and were followed over the next eighteen months by many other failures, including reform of lobbying and ethics rules, reform of immigration policies, reducing
estate taxes, and a range of measures popular with social conservatives” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 34).

Another factor leading to trouble for the 109th Congress was its hierarchical dependence on party leadership to pass legislation – a system which came crashing down with fall of its Majority Leader. Having helped to engineer their victory in 2004, the first session of the 109th House was eager to embrace its party leadership, especially the deeply ideological Tom DeLay of Texas. Employing controversial techniques to increase the viability of conservative candidates in his home state, DeLay’s actions were not only essential to the success enjoyed by House Republicans in 2004, but also lead to an increase in the number of southern conservative caucus members. Though this pseudo-gerrymandering produced the largest number unified districts since the 1950s, DeLay’s method of “re-redistricting” Texas angered many Democratic counterparts (who sought in late 2004 to bring the issue to the attention of the House Ethics Committee). Assisted by Texas Democrats who successfully charged DeLay in state court with felony money laundering8, Republicans began to fear a repeat of the Gingrich ethics scandals of the late 1990s. Embarrassingly, DeLay was booked by Texas police and pictures of his mug-shot were carried in all major media outlets. Following an indictment on campaign finance-related charges of misconduct in Texas, conservatives knew that they could no longer protect their party leader – though the process played out for more than a year, Tom DeLay resigned his position and seat just months before the 2006 elections. Reliance on DeLay proved to be devastating for the

8 A second charge of criminal conspiracy to violate state law was dismissed by a Texas state judge. Though the charges had not yet gone to trial, in accord with House rules regulating member felony indictments, DeLay stepped down from his leadership post (Rosenson, 2011).
Republicans. No longer able to depend on strong leadership, conservative members conducted a desperate search to maintain legislative balance as they approached the mid-term elections. Preferring stability to a total restructuring of the leadership, House Republicans chose to maintain Hastert’s Speakership and to allow DeLay confidant Roy Blunt to remain as Majority Whip. Further, they elected former Gingrich protégé John Boehner of Ohio to the position of Majority leader. In all, this continued support of leadership in league with Tom DeLay was seen by many as a lost opportunity for the Republican House to change their course as they headed down the path towards the midterm elections (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 34-7).

In terms of leadership fallout and platform turmoil, the 109th Congress began looking eerily similar to those of the late 1990s. As argued, those sessions exposed the risks associated with organizing the House via party governance; that is, from a path-dependency perspective, adoption of a unified agenda under an empowered leadership that is initially viewed as an optimal choice becomes increasingly restrictive as time progresses and operational environments shift. As in the first half of their House majority, Republicans in 2005 were again finding themselves in an increasingly difficult position. Importantly, the DeLay scandal and its consequences mirrored that of Gingrich: Like the former Speaker, improper political gain (as opposed to personal) was at the heart of DeLay’s ethical violations (Rosenson, 2011). This second example of failed leadership in terms of political scandal reemphasizes the treacherous path taken when attempting party governance:

Cases involving political gain have become increasingly numerous in the American Congressional context, relative to other types of cases. Their impact on the fortunes of the involved politicians, and on the fortunes of their parties, should not be underestimated. Arguably, Gingrich and DeLay’s
congressional careers ended due to their boundary-pushing pursuit of political gain. These cases not only affected the individuals who were the target of the investigations, but they also affected the GOP’s overall success (Rosenson, 2011, pp. 29 – emphasis ours)

Pressured by the need to reinforce party dominance and ideological homogeneity, the Majority Leader took aggressive steps in an effort to acquire unethical campaign contributions. Just as with Speaker Gingrich, this event spilled beyond the Majority’s Leader; soiling both DeLay’s reputation and the party that he was empowered to lead.

Compounding the issue for the 109th majority was the fact that Republicans had not only embraced strong leadership via the tarnished Tom DeLay; more importantly, they had come to depend once again on the success of a volatile issue external to their control: the sustained popularity of the President and the war in Iraq. Despite the fact that the President had declared “Mission Accomplished” via a very public publicity stunt on a returning U.S. aircraft carrier, the war became more unpopular as casualties mounted, the fighting escalated, and WMD were not found. Similar to the budget shutdowns of 1996 and the impeachment trial of 19989, the Iraq conflict and broader war on terror finally caught up with President Bush and his party – whether the debate concerned criticism of pre-emptive strike, the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons, or failure to plan for post-regime change fighting; the President and congressional majority were being hammered upon on all political fronts. Even though the public came to believe that the President and his conservative supporters were leading the nation headlong into a quagmire, congressional Republicans refused to cut funding for the war or demand changes in leadership or

9 Though, of course, opposite as this new external issue played out in a period of unified government; thus requiring presidential success and not failure as in the 1990s period of divided government.
strategy: “Bush’s unwillingness to change course in Iraq, or change his major advisers, such as secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld, made him appear intransigent and even out of touch with the nation” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 35).

As if the GOP’s circumstances could not get any worse, another blow to the Republican’s dominance came in the form of a crisis that no political observer could have predicted: Hurricane Katrina in the fall of 2005. As the nation watched the city of New Orleans descend into Hobbesian disarray, the President failed to act with the decisiveness displayed in the early days of the 9/11 tragedy. A prime example of how leaders can falter, and how an operational environment can dramatically shift in a way the impedes the success of an organization built upon the foundations of a previous context; Hurricane Katrina cemented the perception of many voters that the Bush Administration and his supporters in Congress were incompetent to lead the nation either internationally or domestically:

Just as Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast, it also tore the nation’s political and social fabric. At a time of crisis, after the nation looked to its president for leadership and confidence, George W. Bush’s standing is in tatters. Old racial wounds have also been re-exposed by Katrina, and anxiety over the direction of the country has risen to heights not hit in nearly a decade. And the American leadership class seems more intent on pursuing partisan goals than on pulling together (Barnes, 2005, pp. 2806).

Followed in real-time by the DeLay resignation and Mark Foley scandal\textsuperscript{10}, the Democratic opposition saw its opportunity to strike in the 2006 mid-term elections.

Employing these back-to-back debacles to orchestrate the election as a referendum on Republican dominance since the Clinton era, Democrats effectively

\textsuperscript{10} This scandal involved Florida House Republican Foley whom resigned from Congress after allegations surfaced that he had—with some awareness by party leaders—engaged in unscrupulous relationships with young male House pages.
argued to the American voter that the party which claimed traditional American values was in reality “a climate of corruption.” Clearly, the majority had embraced a deeply conservative agenda built upon an ideological cohesion that seemed beneficial to party and individual member alike. Unfortunately for the party, Republicans for a second time now found themselves in a highly precarious and politically vulnerable position as their operational environment shifted under their feet. Swamped by the path chosen years before, Republicans were unable to adapt to this new context; yet, the Democrats were poised to pounce. Whether the advertisement stated that Bush lied about the rational for the Iraq war, that DeLay was a criminal, that Katrina showed that Republican’s did not care about poor people, or that Foley and those in oversight were demeaning the House; the message was clear: the Republican majority must be removed. Voicing similar rhetoric as that broadcast by Newt Gingrich in 1994, Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic House leaders (in particular, future Obama Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel) piloted the Democratic minority back into control of Congress in the 2006 mid-term elections. Combined with selective recruitment of moderate-Democratic candidates on a district-by-district basis, public dissatisfaction with the Iraq war and overall Republican governance lead to a return of congressional power into the hands of the Democratic party.

As in the first years of their majority tenure, House Republicans came to understand the realities of Congress: leadership failure combined with dramatic shifts in the external environment can force striking change in the developmental dynamics of the legislative institution. The pattern here is similar to that experienced from 1994 to 2000 – first, an event or crisis that favored the party and allowed leaders to utilize
institutional powers to enhance their authority (i.e., the 9/11 tragedies); second, the adoption of ideological homogeneity within the party and heterogeneity between that forces a deeply divisive policy external to their direct control (i.e., the Iraq war); third, leadership missteps and/or a shift in the external environment that proves unfavorable the adopted policy (i.e., the failure to find WMD, deepening conflict and casualties in the overall war on terror, and Hurricane Katrina fallout); and finally, from a path dependency perspective, the inability of the party to shift in the face of change due to the rigid structure of the organization. Compounding this pattern, the party had isolated itself regionally: following 2006, the GOP held the smallest share of non-southern seats in Congress since the apex of FDR’s popularity during the early days of the New Deal (Brownstein, 2010). As seen below in Figure 6-5, the Republican party was very much the party of the south.

![Average regional distribution, House GOP: 2001-2006](image)

Figure 6-5. Average regional distribution, House GOP: 2001-2006
This regional isolation is linked to increased conservatism for the broader party. Looking to Table 6-2, we see a pattern similar to that of the 1990s in which the south was not only the largest region, but also one of its most conservative.

Table 6-2. Regional breakdown: 2001-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Ultra Conservative</th>
<th>Strong Conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Weak Conservative</th>
<th>Patrician Conservative</th>
<th>Average Mean Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The South</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pacific</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains and Rocky Mountains</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border States</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken together, we and others in the literature see a pattern of collapse owed to a perception by the American public of policy failure at the hands of Republicans (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 421). The House GOP had again taken on a conservative brand; a choice that served them well in wake of travesty, but also a choice that proved increasingly restrictive overtime. While conditional party governance is a reality of the contemporary Congress, it is only a reality in certain contexts. As we have shown, these contexts are fleeting, making party governance an unsustainable model. Mann and Ornstein (2009) illustrate the limits of this model for parties seeking long-term control of the Congress:

That argument was put to the test by American voters on November 7, 2006. By deposing Republican majorities in both the House and Senate, in as decisive a midterm vote for change (a national vote swing of 5.3 percentage points, producing Democratic gains of thirty seats in the House and six in the Senate) as one can imagine in our uncompetitive electoral terrain, an angry electorate created a necessary condition for revitalizing the first branch of government and restoring some semblance of balance among the central political institutions of American democracy (2009, pp. 54).
Overtime, the conditions that encouraged party governance began to turn against the majority who had become entrenched in their adopted operational model. External shifts have defined the Republican tenure in Congress: just as Gingrich and Armey before them, Speaker Hastert and majority leader DeLay used their external environment to construct and institutionalize a highly homogeneous and deeply conservative voting caucus; yet, their downfall came with a failure to adapt to changes in the environment that once supported them:

As had been the case with Gingrich, electoral failure – in this case, failure readily attributed to an unpopular president – meant that the House Republicans would be looking for a new direction. Explaining the 1998 and 2006 changes in the House Republican leadership requires moving beyond policy – and party polarization – to electoral concerns. In both cases, public displeasure with the performance of the Republicans as expressed in election outcomes generated disagreements among Republicans about how to respond (Smith and Gamm, 2009, pp. 158-9)

From our path dependency perspective, the lesson of the Republican tenure as House majority is that early decisions – with time – can become the seeds of future problems. Having now investigated two periods of control, we have twice illustrated a pattern within the Republican experiment with conditional party government that allows us to question both the explanatory power and sustainability of this model for a party with long-term political ambitions.

**Republican House Governance, 2001-2006:**

**A Critique of CPG and the View Overtime**

As stated earlier, with all works of scholarship, Dodd and Oppenheimer – writing in early 2001 – could not have predicted the future events of that year. Though it seemed that continuing to employ a policy of party governance would inevitably catch-up to the Republicans, the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 bombings changed
the face of politics in America. Rallying around their president, the American people supported Republican George W. Bush with a 90% approval rate – which translated into support for his party during the 2002 and 2004 elections: “After the [2002] election, the Republican Party held half the governorships in the country, expanded its margin in the House, and, most significant, recaptured the Senate. Democrats and Republicans alike gave George W. Bush most of the credit” (Cannon and Baumann, 2002, pp. 3268). In this new political reality, Republican leadership no longer had to depend on party moderates to get legislation onto a friendly President’s desk.

Looking at Figure 6-6, our data show the dramatic shifts the party experienced following 9/11. Taken overtime, the ideologically dispersed party sharpened in comparison to the 1990s, pooling themselves along “Strong” conservative lines11. As argued above, following this critical political juncture, this data indicates a return to conditional party governance in the House. The newly energized Republicans choose to take a similar path to that as they had following the Revolution of 1994.

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11 As an average number of members per session, we believe that the “sharpened” nature of ideology seen in Figure 6-6 (in comparison to similar measures taken in the 1990s) is due to the extended period of time that the House successfully operated under party governance between late 2001 and early 2005. In the previous decade, the party successfully employed this model only in 1995. We believe that party governance operated for a longer period in the 2000s due to terrorism fears and unified government between the House and Bush Administration. Further research in this area would help to confirm this variance.
In light of the return to party governance in the House, the party governance camp seemed justified in its academic standing. Moreover, the primary critics of this model in the constructive partisanship camp felt the pressure – moderates now becoming an endangered species, the camp felt forced to reconsider their assertions made in 1997 and 2001 concerning conditional party government: “The 2004 elections resulted in an increase in intraparty homogeneity and interparty polarization in both the House and Senate. It is likely that those changes will affect the internal workings of the House and Senate and the legislative policies they produce” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2005a, pp. xxvi). With an increase in size and the emergence of an increasingly polarized majority, the Republican House leadership had far fewer obstacles in its path. Moreover, the leadership found new ways to force unity in the caucus via ‘pseudo-gerrymandering’:

![Figure 6-6. Mean House Republican ideology overtime: 2001-2006](image)
DeLay’s actions – though highly controversial (and later found to be illegal) – were fundamental to Republican electoral success:

Mr. DeLay and two associates channeled $190,000 in corporate donations in 2002 to several Republican candidates for the [State of Texas] Legislature, using the Republican National Committee as a conduit.... The Donations were seen as critical in the Republican takeover of the Legislature that year. Once they had control, state Republican leaders pushed through a controversial Congressional redistricting plan – engineered by Mr. DeLay, that sent more Republicans to Congress in 2004 (McKinley, 2011)

In response to these developments, Dodd and Oppenheimer took a strikingly different view of the Republican Party in 2004, arguing that the polarized House majority was likely to “push forward in unrelenting fashion on a conservative agenda” (2005a, pp. xxix).

It seemed as though the fate of the Republican majority had changed with the fate of broader America following September 11th, 2001. With an astronomically high approval rating by the American electorate, and broad support for war against Afghanistan and al Qaeda in the name of anti-terrorism; the Dodd-Oppenheimer camp state that 9/11 affected the U.S. Congress more fundamentally than most federal institutions. Not only did both houses of Congress and both parties come together to rally behind President Bush by granting him tremendous authority to pursue a “War on Terror.” More importantly, this period of crisis allowed Republicans an electorally justified explanation for sustained fiscal and economic woes, and for certain domestic policies that previously would have been deemed imprudent or untenable – for example, an “economic stimulus plan” formed around an additional series of tax cuts (2005b, pp. 31-2). In all, Dodd and Oppenheimer argue that the fallout of 9/11 utterly changed the political playfield in a way that highly advantaged the Republican majority in Congress:
As Congress acted in response to 9/11, it returned to its domestic agenda but did so with a transformed political landscape…. Gone were the August doubts about [Bush’s] stewardship of the nation and the dark clouds hanging over the congressional Republicans…. Less than three weeks following 9/11, it already seemed clear… that the political fallout of the terrorist attack would aid the Republicans in Congress (2005b, pp. 32)

With a new political context in place, the conditions had returned to allow for party governance in the House. Moreover, the Republicans choose to once again embrace this model.

Both chambers in Congress and the White House now in southern, strongly conservative Republican hands, Dodd and Oppenheimer seem to turn away from their criticisms of 1997; presenting themselves as tentatively supporting the notion that conditional party government accurately described the Republican House majority. What had changed for this camp? The scholars outline four methods by which Republican leadership attempted to operate under conditional party government: first, career advancement (particularly committee chairmanship) was directly related to party loyalty; second, omnibus legislation had been employed to limit roll call votes on divisive issues; and third, defection was prevented by limiting Democratic participation in policy development (tangentially leading to increased distrust and incivility between parties). While not directly the product of leadership maneuvering, a fourth issue – the threat of member defection – was also minimized because the Republican moderates had rarely been united against legislative efforts. In all, these factors combined to make the Republican leadership more successful in dealing with Republican moderates than the authors had originally anticipated: “the House Republicans have been *amazingly successful* over the past decade in achieving their policy goals, especially given the

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12 As indicated in Figures 5-4 and 6-3
narrowness of their majority” (2005b, pp. 49-50 – emphasis ours). Faced with such changes in political context, Dodd and Oppenheimer – for the first time in their scholarship series – state that the conditional party government thesis, “accurately describes how Republicans have operated much of the time over the past decade” (2005b, pp. 47-8 – emphasis ours).

Figure 6-7. Developmental dynamics, overall Republican House: 2000 – 2006

We can understand why the constructive partisanship camp felt pressure to back down from their initial criticisms of party governance in the House: with issues such as the war with Iraq broiling, party polarization in the House was at an all time high. With the re-election of Bush and member gains in the House, it seemed as though the predictions of the conditional party government model had come to fruition. Regardless,
we find that Republican developmental dynamics during this period continue to reinforce our argument that party governance – due to leadership failure and a fleeting operational environment – remains an unsustainable model when considered overtime. Looking at Figure 6-7, we see that “Ultra” and “Strong” conservatives once again came to rule the House following 9/11 (in fact, the data show a perfect order from most to least conservative in terms of size in the 2002 session). As argued above, these newly empowered conservatives once again took the House down a path that sought deeply conservative and highly contentious issues. Yet, as in earlier periods of their majority, the success of these volatile issues depended on circumstances external to their direct influence; that is, the outcome of these choices depended – again – on wise leadership and friendly operational contexts. The result of these early decisions was similar to that of the 1990s – as the war in Iraq soured between 2004 and 2005, so too did House Republican unity. Seen in Figure 6-7, as moderate conservatives became the largest bloc within the House following the rise of the Iraqi insurgency, the “Ultra Conservative” camp never recovered. Further, with a failure to find WMD, “Weak” and “Patrician” camps made their voice heard. In all, the developmental dynamics of the Republican House leading up to the 109th Congress were quite divisive: though “Strong Conservatives” made a show of force in 2006 as “Ultra Conservatives” migrated to their camp, the unity of this one group was consistently challenged by moderate, “Weak,” and “Patrician” Republicans in the House over the second half of the party’s majority tenure.

Interestingly, it is at this moment that we see a fracture within the Dodd-Oppenheimer camp itself. Writing alone, Dodd (2005) provided a warning to the
Republican party still riding high from the 2004 election: the critical tasks of all modern congresses has been to establish an organizational structure and legislative development process that concurrently provides individual members with satisfying and meaningful input into policy decisions while also maintaining the independence and integrity of the institution as a whole. In the case of the House Republicans in 2004, following the re-election of President Bush, Dodd argues that the Republicans put themselves in a very uncertain position. By accepting heavy involvement by party leaders following the Revolution of 1994 and a Republican president following 9/11 in the policymaking process, the Republican party has found success in the short-run in terms of majority status. Yet, with the maturation of individual members and their individual demands in combination with the ever present threat of change in the political winds, Dodd states that, “the Republicans now must confront the tensions between individual autonomy and collective governance that comes as the rewards and responsibilities of majority party status become increasingly evident” (2005, pp. 438-9).

Dodd’s 2005 warning would prove to be prophetic. As they had done in the 1990s, the House leadership had once again placed the party in a position in which success depended on the outcome of issues and conditions external to their control. As time moved forward and Bush’s agenda soured, so too did the relationship between and within the GOP House. Reported by media observers during the darkest days of the Iraq War, “The tension between Republican lawmakers and Bush was palpable in recent interviews. ‘It’s not our function to salute whenever the president gives an order,’ said second-term Rep. Tom Cole, R-Oklahoma…” There has quietly arisen an issue of
whether the leadership feels committed to pressing the president’s agenda or the House Republican’s agenda” (Cohen, 2005, pp. 970).

Based on the evidence, we argue the Republican House has consistently chosen to exploit short-term advantages, external issues, and crises to make possible the passage of their legislative agenda. In multiple cases – the government shutdowns of 1995-1996, the Clinton impeachment, September 11th 2001, the success of a wartime president, and so on – the Republican House has time and again defined its internal dynamics by political events external to itself. As argued in Chapter 4, the negative consequences of these decisions are not simply the result of inexperience. This is not to say that inexperience at governing did not play a role; rather, our argument is that the party’s organizational structure and assumptions of a stable operational environment greatly exacerbated any missteps that would inevitably occur. Moreover, having now led the nation under two Administrations and multiple congresses, the Republican House could no longer plead governing ignorance.

The particular problems faced by the contemporary Republicans were the very choices that defined the new majority: ideological unity and the empowerment of party leadership built upon favorable operational environments. When issues or crises broke in the Republicans’ favor, most evident after the Contract and the 9/11 bombings, the party appears to unite ideologically, trust its party leadership, and begin pursuing a highly homogeneous and deeply conservative agenda. And yet, these initial decisions then bind the party as it moves towards the future. In the budget battles, it was the near-rabid goal of political revolution that drove the party to ignore its institutional limitations and attack a president on his home turf – and to continue the attacks long after failure
was eminent. Regardless, the party leadership again attempted to bring down their institutional rival through an impeachment trial that nearly cost the Republicans their chamber majority (it did in fact, cost the GOP their Speaker). In the following Congress, the party fragmented as individual members began to seek legislative successes for their own benefit and not for the overall party.

These losses produced a pattern that has come to define the Republican House: strong partisanship based on early external success, a decision to push for a deeply conservative and contentious political agenda supported by strong partisanship, a major defeat on a newly emerging external event (caused by a shift in operational context for which the ideologically polarized party and their leadership was unable to adapt), and – finally – the growth of ideological division and defection away from party unity. As seen in Figures 5-6 and 6-7, what saved the Republican majority following the first half of their tenure was the aftermath of 9/11: before these tragedies, the House GOP seemed destined to lose their majority in 2002. Afterwards, the Republicans returned to an aggressive organizational operating structure. Further, they turned once more towards a deeply conservative and contentious political agenda dependent on successful leadership and the nature of conditions external to their own control.

Yet, the pattern experienced by the Republicans in the 1990s again repeated itself. This dependency on external conditions finally began catching up to the majority party in early 2005. As quoted above, the President’s controversially passed Medicare prescription drug program flared-up tensions within House: though Bush convinced House leadership that the policy would establish a legislative record that reached out to senior citizens, the program was instantly criticized as being too confusing for
beneficiaries and too intertwined with business interests in the private sector. To make matters worse, party leadership fumbled any chances at Social Security reform. Most important, the Iraq War began crumbling around the President, eroding voter support for the Republican’s plan to battle terrorism. Voter distrust of the newly reelected president was further enhanced in August of 2005, as Hurricane Katrina was interpreted by the nation as showing that the unified Republican federal government was incapable of leading and protecting the nation. Internally, the House suffered a severe blow as majority leader Tom DeLay was arrested and indicted on allegations of illegal campaign finance activity. With the fall of DeLay, dependency upon party leadership within the House majority began to unravel – not to mention loss in support from the electorate who was growing increasingly distrustful of leading Republican politicians in general. Democrats pounced on the floundering party, and the voters were paying attention: “Democratic House candidates link Republican incumbents to Bush proposals on issues ranging from Social Security ‘privatization,’ to the administration’s ‘failure’ to protect U.S. troops in Iraq, to last year’s passage of energy legislation that, they argue, resulted in billions of dollars in subsidies to Big oil” (Victor, 2006, pp. 24)

Overall, as seen in Figure 6-8, the ideological breakdown of the 109th Congress looks eerily similar to that of the 106th Congress – as individual members sought out individual preferences over that of the party agenda. With the conditions for party governance now against them, the Republicans braced for a painful 2006 midterm election. In all, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives ended barely a decade after it its “Revolutionary” birth.
Summary

In tracing leadership activities, rank-and-file responses, and regional growth; we have witnessed a developmental pattern repeated in two periods of Republican majority in the House. In light of this tumultuous 12 year status of the Republicans following their Revolution, what are we to make of their tenure as the majority party in Congress as they stumbled from external crisis to external crisis?

Constructed in a manner analogous to Figure 3-6 in Chapter 3, Figure 6-9 below illustrates the overall ideological trend within the Republican House from 1995 to 2006. If we remember from Chapter 3, the trend in the first year of their majority showed the Republicans to be concurrently highly unified and highly conservative – in fact, that year showed a near perfect negative relationship between the number of members in an ideological range, and the level of liberalism in that range (i.e. as conservatism decreased, so too did the number of members decrease). A similar pattern was depicted above in Figure 6-1 as the party again adopted party governance following the wake of the 9/11 tragedies. When isolated, these two years do reinforce the behavioral
predictions of the conditional party government model. When placed in a broader context, our empirical analysis shows a different story.

Figure 6-9. Republican House ideological trend: 1995-2006

Taken overtime, we see in Figure 6-9 that while the ideology is skewed towards stronger levels of conservatism, the behavior of the overall House GOP is much more normalized than during the first year of the Revolution or the post-9/11 session. In tracing the development of the Republican House across its tenure, we have shown repeated patterns in which a significant number of individual members deviated from conservative ideological puritanism. This finding leads us to conclude that party governance in the House – because of its necessary condition of sustained intraparty ideological homogeneity – is unsustainable as a permanent legislative model.
Institutional “stickiness” helps to explain the illusion of increased party authority. The reforms that enhanced party leadership and weakened committee autonomy remained present throughout each Congress since the 104th. When contexts were favorable, parties attempted to utilize the reforms in employing party governance so as to take advantage of these conditions. Yet, the advantage gained was only possible in the short-term. In each case for the Republican House, we show this initial choice was unwise: despite enhanced authority, the move towards party governance would – overtime – result in political turmoil as leaders failed to behave appropriately and/or the operational context (that had once benefited the ideologically rigid party) shifted to become inhospitable.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, we have found that ideological divisions did exist in the Republican House. What is most interesting about these findings is the pattern that it reveals about the party as it behaved overtime. From a path-dependency framework, we have shown that early decisions by Republican leadership and rank-and-file members have proven detrimental to the overall success of the party. This finding represents an endorsement of the Dodd-Oppenheimer criticism that party governance is a fragile, tentative, and transitory phase in legislative politics. Our findings also represent an amendment and expansion of this criticism: As articulated by the constructive partisanship model, parties must remain mindful of potential cross cutting issues and institutional limitations; further, as we have shown, they must be attuned to the dangers involved in the empowerment of leadership and reliance upon short-term political advantages. We have depicted repeatedly that such behavior, though it may be beneficial at one moment, cannot be assumed to remain conducive in future contexts.
On the assumption of sustained ideological unity, the party governance model represents an illusion of party authority. In pursuit of a highly controversial and deeply conservative agenda that is dependent on the success of issues and events beyond their control, the Republican party has repeatedly failed to consider not only the fundamental threat of cross-cutting issues within our heterogeneous society and the institutional limits of our Madisonian system, but also the fact that the House operates in an environment of constant – sometimes dramatic – change. Even if one can assume that no cross cutting issues are present, a unified party in one institution of government must consider its actions in light of the preferences and veto-point powers of its fellow federal bodies. Moreover – as this chapter repeatedly illustrates – even when fellow institutions are friendly, the operational environment may not be. Following our historical institutionalist model in tracing the political development of the House GOP from 1994 to 2006, we have shown that failure of party leadership to prepare for these multiple constraints resulted in substantial damage to sustained Republican party achievement in the Congress. The lesson of the Republican experience is that sustained success is not the product full-bore brute partisanship, but of an organizational structure that seeks pragmatic debate and compromise, and that is ever aware of the dynamic political arena in which it operates.

The question remains: As the Democrats took control of the House in 2006, would they heed the lesson?
CHAPTER 7
A NEW MAJORITY, A NEW HOUSE? THE DEMOCRATIC HOUSE: 2006 TO 2010

Do not walk away from reform. Not now. Not when we are so close. Let’s find a way to come together and finish the job for the American people.

— President Obama, 2010 State of the Union Address

Having traced the development of the Republican majority as it operated overtime, we seek in this chapter to provide a more complete account of the contemporary Congress. To do so, we follow our earlier analysis by conducting a review of the Democratic majority in the House following their electoral victory over the Republicans in 2006. Here we discuss the developmental dynamics of the liberal majority from 2006 to 2010 as compared to earlier periods of congressional politics, and consider possible causes of loss during the 2010 midterm elections. Though not a perfect reflection of their conservative counterparts, the short tenure of the Democrats in the post-Revolution House mirrors that of the first and second halves of the Republican experience.

Democrat Takeover

With the Republicans having lost their majority status just 12 years after the Revolution, we seek to understand in what ways the Congress changed (or did not change) as the Democratic party returned to power. Because of its recent occurrence, we are limited in the scope of our analysis by both the clarity of the data, and – simply – the lack of time between a number of historic events¹ and our present study necessary to develop a fuller perspective and appreciation of the current political environment. Regardless, we attempt to posit an analysis of the Democratic majority (and return of

¹ Including international economic collapse, the election of the first African-American president Barack Obama, and now the abrupt return of House Republicans to power in 2011.
the current Republican majority in the 2010 election) as it pertains to the lessons learned by the Republican experience from 1994 to 2006.

The first question to be examined is straightforward: “How did the Democrats win?” The second – to what consequence did this victory have on their later governance of the House – is a bit more complex. Like the Republicans of 1994, the Democrats were advantaged by a combination of short-term forces and electoral astuteness by party leadership. As discussed in Chapter 6, leadership folly and unfavorable external events – primarily the war in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, scandal surrounding Majority Leader DeLay, etc. – lead to tremendous public dissatisfaction with Republican unified government. Employing a strategy similar the GOPAC operatives of 1994 (though certainly not to the same extent as the Gingrich-machine), Democratic leaders took advantage of this context by campaigning on party-wide platform that concurrently sought to label Republicans as the party of corruption and the Democrats as the party of constructive reform. A pseudo-Contract with America, Nancy Pelosi orchestrated the election on the promise that within the first one hundred hours of a Democratic party controlled Congress, that she would ensure the passage of six popular reforms – which the party labeled “Six for ’06.” While not the manifesto that was the Contract (in which candidates staged a public pledge and signature of fidelity to the list of conservative planks), this evolving campaign platform was nonetheless a product of party leaders, and was employed as a tool to organize candidates and motivate voters. Some in the literature have argued that Pelosi was different than other party leaders before her. First, if successful, she would become the first woman Speaker of the House. Further, having been raised on the east-coast but successfully representing San Francisco,
many believed that she possessed a wider perspective than some of her colleagues. Unlike Gingrich (who sought to build an ideological army), Pelosi also showed herself to be open towards compromise as the campaign for 2006 played-out (Peters and Rosenthal, 2010). Though employing similar electoral tactics as their Republican counterparts, the then minority leader promised that if victorious, the polarization that had plagued the 2000s would be replaced by an attitude of bi-partisanship. As if to bolster this promise, Pelosi sought to recruit candidates that did not necessarily fit with popularly assumed ideological norms of the Democratic party: many were ideological moderates, and some – especially from the south – were quite conservative (Pearson and Schickler, 2009).

![Figure 7-1. 2006 Democratic party versus 2007 Democratic freshmen, ideology](image)

As seen in Figure 7-1, the newly elected Democrats were remarkably moderate as compared to the broader House Democratic caucus: Whereas the Democrats in 2006 were on average moderate to strong liberals, more than 53% of Democratic Freshmen could be classified as either “Traditionalist” or “Weak-Liberals.” This influx of moderate liberals into the party is related to the regional advances made in the 2006 election. Looking to Figure 7-2, we see that not only did Democrats make gains across all
geographic areas (including strongholds in the mid-Atlantic and New England regions); but also significant gains in more conservative regions such as the south and mid-west.

Figure 7-2. Democratic regional distribution: 2006 to 2007

In all, Pelosi and her followers were able to capitalize on the tremendous dissatisfaction that the voters had with President Bush and congressional Republicans from across the nation; in doing so, party leadership chose to concurrently pursue a national reform agenda, and to support a number of moderate candidates voicing a bipartisan tone. Taken together, the Democrats seemed poised to take on a hybrid organizational model that included some elements of the historical “textbook” and more recent “unorthodox” eras of legislative development:

Indeed, in addition to challenging the president's Iraq policy, the Democrats took a page from Newt Gingrich’s 1994 playbook of a “Contract with America” promising “Six in ’06” – six policy initiatives… likely to attract

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The term “hybrid” refers to promises by Democratic party leadership to employ “Textbook” norms to the House such as committee service, seniority, regional diversity, etc.; while concurrently continuing “Unorthodox” practices in terms of leadership authority in election and legislative planning.
significant support from the other side of the partisan aisle. They also pledged to do business differently inside Congress by bolstering ethics standards and enforcement, restoring pay-as-you-go budget discipline, reviving congressional oversight of the executive, improving civility between the parties, and returning to regular order in the legislative process (Mann and Ornstein, 2009, pp. 54-5)

As seen in Figure 7-3, this hybrid operational / cross-regional campaign was quite successful: after more than a decade as the minority party in Congress, Democrats gained thirty seats in the House and six in the Senate – enough to bring them control of both legislative chambers. Like Republicans in 1994, no Democratic incumbent lost re-election. Given these conditions and ambitions, would the Democratic party operate according to a hybrid organizational model now that they had returned to power?

![Figure 7-3. Regional distribution, Democratic House freshmen: 2007](image)

In many ways, the newly empowered Democrats in the first days of the 110th Congress acted not in accord with a hybrid model, but in a manner similar to their Republican counterparts in the 104th. Having largely constructed their party’s victory, House Democrats elected Nancy Pelosi to the Speaker’s office with unanimous support. Like Gingrich’s promises in the Contract, Pelosi acted on her election pledges
immediately once in power as Speaker: “Dubbed ‘Six for ‘06’ and passed in rapid-fire manner, the bills increased the minimum wage, implemented recommendations of the 9/11 Commission that President Bush had ignored, promoted stem cell research and drug price negotiations by the Medicare program, and cut tax benefits for energy corporations” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 44). Even with this momentum, the party was not without its divisions: Pelosi’s initial choice for Majority Leader, Pennsylvania’s John Murtha, was defeated in an internally divisive battle by the more moderate Steny Hoyer (perhaps as a result of having recruited ideologically moderate Freshmen). Pelosi chose to put the setback behind her, and sought to cultivate a course of teamwork between herself and fellow leaders (Pearson and Schickler, 2009). The new team was as follows: Majority Leader Hoyer – MD, a moderate who could communicate across the caucus; Majority Whip James Clyburn – SC, the highest ranking African American in the party; Democratic Caucus Chair Rahm Emanuel – IL, a rising star with tremendous fundraising abilities and experience as a strategist for the Clinton Administration; and Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Christopher Van Hollen – MD, whom proved his value in moving several Democratic challengers successfully into GOP incumbent seats. Perhaps not the General-Lieutenant lineup of the Gingrich era, Pelosi’s leadership unit was nonetheless cohesive:

Each of these Democratic leaders voted with the party more often than the average Democratic member did…. Party leaders actively campaign for their colleagues, frequently attending their fund-raisers and raising money to distribute…. All of the Democrat’s top leaders formed leadership political action committees (PAC’s) and contributed generously to federal candidates (Pearson and Schickler, 2009, pp. 175)
Considering these early successes and difficulties together, Dodd and Oppenheimer (2009) argue that Pelosi showed herself to be a pragmatist Speaker, able to take early control of the House’s leadership and legislative process, and to act as an activist for her party’s interests.

Regardless, the operational context in which the new House found itself remained polarized, subject to incongruent authority structures still in place from years past: President Bush and his veto pen remained in White House, Senator John McCain’s “surge” strategy seemed to be working in Iraq, and Democrats were beginning to confront the same lessons learned by earlier House majorities who found their legislation stymied by a filibustered Senate. Beyond their first 100 hours “Six for ’06” agenda, the new majority faced difficulty – even outright failure – in achieving a major legislative victory (for example, on such issues as a time-table for troop withdrawal in Iraq, State Children’s Health Insurance Program extensions, energy efficiency, stem cell research, etc.). Sensing the tension, Republicans employed a tactic from the Democratic play-book by attempting to define the 110th as a “do-nothing Congress.” With the short-term electoral advantages of 2006 now behind them, a razor thin Democratic majority feared that political tumult might return the Republicans to power (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 43-6). As a result, Pelosi and rank-and-file members abandoned earlier calls for civility, and began pushing for an aggressive party-line stance that sought to use polarization as an electoral tool. As seen in Figure 7-4; while perhaps not as ideologically cohesive as the “Revolutionaries,” our data show in the young Democratic majority a negative relationship between the number of members in an ideological range, and the level of conservatism in that range; that is, as
liberalism decreased, so too did the number of members decrease. In comparison to 1994\(^3\), the 2007 Democrats’ negative relationship between ideology and membership strength is weaker than that of Republicans (that is, different ideological sub-groups have greater parity in terms of numbers); nonetheless, the new majority was certainly more liberal than it was conservative.

![Figure 7-4. Democratic House ideological trend: 2007](image)

In all, the chances for significant change from politics-as-usual quickly diminished in the first session of the 110\(^{th}\) Congress\(^4\):

Even though a clear and powerful rejection of the status quo in Washington was a necessary condition for mending the broken branch, it was far from obvious that it would be sufficient…. Slim majorities in both the Senate and House ensured no letup in the permanent campaign. Both parties had ample incentive to use the legislative process to improve their political position for the 2008 elections (Mann and Ornstein, 2009, pp. 55)

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\(^3\) See Figure 3-6

\(^4\) One bright spot of these developments was a return to normalized oversight relations between Capitol Hill and the White House. With divided government again in place, the legislature had the political incentive necessary to challenge executive action (Mann and Orenstein, 2009)
The result of these developments, despite their campaign assurances, was a return to party governance in the Democratic House.

In multiple ways, the new Democratic majority continued to employ the same operational model as had the Republicans in earlier years. Democratic leaders quickly learned that promises of bi-partisanship and civility were a non-starter in the House. In their limited success with the first 100 days agenda, Democrats opted to side-line minority members – even those who might not have been ideologically opposed to the overall direction of Democratic legislation. Utilizing the “sticky” reforms passed 1995, the Speaker remained highly involved in agenda setting, committee activity, and the overall legislative development process – like Hastert and Gingrich before her, Pelosi directly negotiated the details of major legislation within the House caucus, with the Senate, and even with the Bush White House. Further, Speaker Pelosi chose to continue undercutting the authority of the committee system by keeping in place Republican initiated term limits on committee chairs\(^5\) (Smith and Gamm, 2009). Further, with the south still much in Republican hands, the historical regional division within the Democratic party diminished in the 110\(^{th}\) Congress. Overall (though not to as high a degree as with the Republican majority), young House Democrats and Speaker Pelosi did not deviate greatly from the conditional party governance model employed by their Republican predecessors:

As the session progressed and agenda became more controversial, opposition tactics in the House and frustrations with the Senate led the House Democratic majority to embrace many of the same unorthodox means (circumventing standing committees, writing closed rules, using the

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\(^5\) Though, it must be added that this continuance of diminished committee authority was somewhat tempered by Pelosi’s greater respect for the seniority system, as the senior-most Democrat chaired all standing committees (Smith and Gamm, 2009).
suspension calendar, waiving layover requirements, avoiding the conference process) that Republicans had employed to advance their agenda. The number and percentage of restrictive rules that Democratic leaders used to control debate and amending activity on the House floor rivaled the degree of control and departure from regular order that their Republican predecessors exercised (Mann and Ornstein, 2009, pp. 60-1 – emphasis ours)

While the characters were different, the narrative remained the same: Speaker Pelosi enjoyed a relatively cohesive and appreciative caucus, she was willing to stunt committee and minority involvement, and she focused the House strategy on achieving ideologically grounded reform. In total, the new Democratic party was leader and ideology driven in both agenda and process (Pearson and Schickler, 2009, pp. 167).

The narrative remained the same in another way: Democrats, having continued to utilize party governance to initiate their organizational structure, found themselves in a great deal of difficulty in the 110th Congress. On nearly every major issue – especially withdrawal from Iraq – the Democratic majority failed to accomplish its agenda. In fact, just as with the Republican majority in the face of divided government, Democrats were time and again forced to resort to omnibus bills in order to move any legislation forward. Iraq provides a good example of how this dynamic developed: Though ending the war and removing troops was a centerpiece of the 2006 elections, the new Democratic majority was never successful in forcing a timeline of action. Given the realities of the nation’s Madisonian system, party leaders’ legislative choices were limited. As the “People’s House,” leaders chose to use the House’s budgeting authority to follow a course of action that focused upon defunding the President’s supplemental war spending. Though Pelosi was able to cut deals with multiple members of her party in return for legislative support, the Democratic funding bill was ultimately vetoed because of its included troop withdrawal timeline. So as not be viewed by the electorate as
withholding money necessary for the safety of the troops, Democratic leaders bowed to presidential authority and decided to remove any binding benchmarks for the war. In response to the outrage voiced by many antiwar members and voters, Pelosi made several different attempts to separate funding and timeline resolutions, each of which were later altered by a filibustering Senate (Pearson and Schickler, 2009, pp. 168-170). As the Republicans of the 104th Congress discovered, it is very difficult to manage the nation from the Speaker’s office, let alone from the overall House, no matter the unity of the majority.

In these developments, we see trends within the 110th Congress similar to that of the pattern and resulting difficulties experienced between the 1995 to 2000 period of divided government and party governance under Republican leadership. Taken together, the early days of the new Democratic majority looked much like those faced by their conservative counterparts.

Despite the acrid political climate, the Democratic majority found its salvation in a number of external events that enhanced their political chances in the 2008 general election: first, the continued unpopularity of the Bush Administration; second, the infectious charisma of the Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama; third, an economic collapse blamed by many upon Republican deregulation policies. Though House Democrats were unable to force President Bush to change direction in Iraq, troop withdrawal remained a top priority with many liberal and independent voters. In reaction, leading candidates for the 2008 Democratic nomination took stands against the war – though to differing degrees. Most notably, the debate fell to frontrunners Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama: having originally voted to authorize the war in Iraq,
Senator Clinton was hampered throughout primaries on this fundamental issue. On the other hand, Senator Obama, having entered the Senate years after the Iraq war began, stated that he had always disagreed with the President on the issue, and would pull the troops out of the region if elected president. In the end, primary voters chose to support Obama’s charismatic vision and his calls for dramatic change in Washington.

This hard-line policy touted by Obama in the primaries became somewhat of an object to overcome in the general campaign. With the Republican nomination of John McCain – a decorated Vietnam veteran and POW – Americans began taking note of the success the Arizona Senator’s once vilified “surge” policy was having against Iraqi insurgent forces. Like 2004, the 2008 presidential election was shaping up to be a referendum on Iraq and the broader war on terrorism. Sensing the tension over international policy, congressional Republicans sought to bolster their election efforts by focusing on domestic issues, specifically the growing U.S. economy. Claiming that their policies of tax cuts, deficit spending on the war, and deregulation of industrial and corporate interests had stimulated a new era of U.S. economic expansion (particularly in the face of terrorist threats), Republicans hoped that a strong housing, job, and stock market at the end of the Bush presidency would translate into support for their domestic agenda. Though most political candidates and observers going into the late summer of 2008 believed that Iraq and economic growth would become the focal points of the elections, none had predicted the crisis that would engulf the nation and broader world.

Nearly overnight, the engines of the world’s economy flat-lined. For decades, deregulation policies in the United States had allowed for the use of so-called “sub-prime” mortgage lending in an effort to boost home ownership rates in the nation.
Financial institutions at home and around the world saw the profitability of these risky transactions, and began flooding the home market with adjustable rate mortgages, one-hundred percent financing products, and other dicey schemes that placed millions of individuals in homes that they could not afford. Coupled with the practice of mortgage backed securities, this expansion was extremely dangerous; yet, regulators allowed the practice that was seemingly generating a new era of economic prosperity. In the end, the bubble was unsustainable and drove the U.S. and other industrialized nations into near depression. A combination of skyrocketing gas prices and rising unemployment in the summer of 2008 acted as catalysts – suddenly, more and more people were unable to afford payments on their homes, especially those with adjustable rates. Home prices plummeted causing easy credit, the lubricant of the economy, to vanish without warning:

Mortgage defaults were occurring so widely, and housing prices in the United States were falling so fast, that many of the most reputable financial firms in the nation and the world faced imminent collapse when mortgages they held in the United States lost much of their value. Such a collapse, in crippling the solvency of banks, insurance companies, and the mortgage industry, threatened a financial meltdown that could almost overnight throw the world into prolonged depression (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 422)

With this shift in the operational environment of Congress and the White House came a shift in the election of 2008 – one that would seal the fate of both political parties.

Having branded themselves as the party of the very deregulation, tax cuts, and deficit spending policies that many believed were the cause of the financial crisis, earlier Republican arguments that showcased the Bush-era economy became electoral wounds for GOP candidates across the nation. Further, perhaps not understanding the reality or severity of the collapse, House Republicans in September of 2008 attempted to block President Bush from working with Democrats to pass a crucially vital bi-partisan
economic rescue plan. Week by week the economic news worsened, and the American voter looked for a new hope to solve the nation’s political and economic ills. Barack Obama’s one word campaign message of “Change” became a rallying cry for liberal and independent (and even many conservative) voters disenchanted with the politics of the 2000s. Like the election of 1992, it was the economy: “Confronting millions of citizens with the imminent collapse of life opportunities, and reinforcing the sense of governing incompetence that had haunted the Republicans in the 2006 elections, the sadness and seriousness of the crisis brought Democrats their first united party government since 1993” (Dodd and Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 422). Like the Republicans before, Democrats benefited electorally from a national crisis. In all, the party increased in majority, gaining twenty-one seats in the House, and seven seats in the Senate. Further, the nation once again returned to unified government as Obama took the oath of office in January of 2009.

**A Return to Unified Government**

Despite overwhelming support for “Change” in this new political period, the Democratic party stumbled throughout the 111th Congress, and Republicans returned to power in 2010 in what many conservatives argue was a mid-term election against President Obama. While these events are quite recent and scholarship has not had the distance or data to consider them fully, we attempt a preliminary investigation of the 111th Congress, its developmental dynamics, and discuss how this experience informs our broader analysis of legislative development.

As the 111th Congress opened, congressional observers argued that the nation’s economic crisis was not yet fully understood by congressional members and President Obama. Compounding the issue, Democratic majorities remained comparatively slim.
These issues may have been somewhat ameliorated by growing regional homogeneity of House Democratic members: With the south in Republican hands (McCain won southern states by an average of seven percentage points), Democrats had become an Eastern and Western party (Obama in these regions won by twenty-one and fourteen percentage points, respectively) (Balz, 2009). As seen in Table 7-1; the mid-Atlantic, mid-west, and Pacific regions had become the main hubs for Democratic representation. With a more regionally cohesive party and an ideologically friendly White House in place, the Democrats entered the political unknown with multiple options at their disposal.

Table 7-1. Regional distribution, House Democrats: 2007-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Average Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains and Rocky Mountains</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border States</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The South</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gesturing towards these possibilities, Dodd and Oppenheimer (2009, pp. 431-2) state that the party could choose between two general strategies at the start of 2009. The first would be to move quickly on a substantial reform agenda that domestically included historic healthcare and environmental legislation, and internationally the ending of the Iraq war. This reform option was preferred by ideological members of the House, many of whom believed that these issues were at the root of the economic collapse. On the other hand, some advocated a slower, long-term approach that was more bi-partisan in nature. Such a strategy would encompass a series of stimulus packages that
provided funds to public-works projects and ailing industries, and broader financial support – unemployment benefits, foods stamps, etc. – for those citizens out of work. Once the economic crisis settled, more ambitious reform could be sought. Each option came with risk: moving quickly and unilaterally risked uniting Republicans in opposition of reform, moving slowly and with bi-partisanship risked missing momentum and opportunity for change.

By and large, Democrats began with the second approach, passing a second $787 billion bail-out to fund infrastructure revitalization and to save industries such as General Motors in the first months of the Obama Administration. As the party moved forward, Democrats began taking on more controversial issues – most specifically, healthcare reform – in an effort to sustain momentum for policy change. Yet, as the party pushed through historical reform, the unpredictability of crisis undercut their electoral future.

Nearly a year since taking office, Obama was still facing a sputtering economy despite the efforts of a second series of bailouts. Claiming that the primary causal factor of individual bankruptcy was uninsured medical care, Obama pressed forward on the broadest expansion of healthcare reform since the Clinton Administration in 1993. While passage of the reform bill was successful – in fact, the reform was not only the President’s largest achievement (aside from the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011), but also the most substantial overhaul of healthcare since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid – the victory came after, “a roller-coaster year of negotiations, political combat, hearings delving into the minutiae of health care, and a near-death political experience after [the President and party leaders] appeared to have reached the brink of success” (New York Times Editorial Board, 2011). The Obama White House chose to let
Congress have a substantial amount of influence in the creation and development of the bill. This action resulted in the development of three separate bills: (1) in the House, a public option plan that included a tax on higher income earners and penalties for businesses that did not insure their employees; (2) in the Senate’s Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee, a public insurance bill; and (3) from the Senate’s Finance Committee, what became known as the “Baucus Bill” that removed a public plan in favor of bipartisan support. The three bills were immediately viewed by liberal supporters as either too confusing or too limited, and by conservative detractors as a government takeover of medicine. Town-hall meetings began springing-up across the country, criticizing the President and Democratic members of Congress. Republican political actors and conservative commentators (as they had done in 1993-4) pounced on the President with a series of messages that demonized the proposed legislation – some going so far as to compare the President’s actions akin to those in Nazi Germany. The vitriol ran so high that when the President Obama gave a speech to a joint session of Congress in September, House Republican Joe Wilson interrupted the Chief Executive’s argument by screaming “You Lie!” In all, many of the President’s supporters began to fear that he had lost control of the reform effort, just as had President Clinton nearly twenty years before (New York Times Editorial Board, 2011).

Electorally, these actions against healthcare reform seemed to be working. Running in near unanimous opposition to the President’s deficit spending bills and healthcare reform efforts, the first cracks for the majority became apparent in 2009 during a series of special elections for the governor’s office in Virginia and New Jersey. In each case, the election broke for Republican candidates: Robert McDonnell and
Chris Christie, respectively (Balz, 2009). As a result, Democratic moderates in the House grew increasingly wary that support for the reform would harm their re-election efforts in 2010. Promising that she would allow these so-called “Blue-Dog” Democrats to reconsider the bill in conference committee with the Senate, Speaker Pelosi was able to persuade just enough members to pass a last minute reform bill on November 7\textsuperscript{th}, with a 220-215 divided vote. It was unclear when the Senate would take up the House resolution, and what changes it would make (CNN Politics, 2009). Before bringing the bill to a vote, Majority Leader Reid was forced to consider multiple legislative changes to acquire a 60-vote minimum necessary to prevent a Republican filibuster in the Senate. To maintain quorum, Reid dropped any expansion of Medicare to those under 65 (to appease Senator Lieberman) and removed language that would strip the insurance industry of its anti-trust exemption (to gain the support of Senator Nelson). The altered bill passed on a 60-39 party line vote following twenty-five days of debate and negotiation. Unfortunately for Democrats, matters were greatly complicated by the death of Senator Ted Kennedy. In a reproach against the reform legislation that critics were labeling as “Obamascare,” Massachusetts voters elected Republican Scott Brown to replace Kennedy. Such an action would allow Republicans to employ a filibuster when legislation returned from the House in conference.

Congressional Democrats seemed to be in a no-win situation. Obama made a final push in his 2010 State of the Union Speech arguing to Congress, “Do not walk away from reform. Not now. Not when we are so close. Let’s find a way to come together and finish the job for the American people.” Seeking to take control of the debate, President Obama called for a “Healthcare Summit” between the leadership of the two parties.
Occurring on February 25th, the meeting was a non-starter: Republicans refused to support the reform effort and promised a filibuster, and Democrats threatened to utilize an unpopular budget reconciliation bill – an action that under Senate rules requires only a majority vote. In the end, Republicans called the Democrats bluff, and leaders chose to force the reform through the Senate via highly controversial reconciliation rules:

Republicans railed against the tactic, saying Democrats were using a procedural gimmick to “jam” the legislation through; Democrats replied by listing all the major bills the Republicans had passed via reconciliation when they were in the majority, including the Medicare drug plan and both Bush tax cuts (New York Times Editorial Board, 2011)

In the end, the bill passed the House 220-207 and the Senate 56-43. President Obama signed the controversial legislation March 23rd, 2010. Together, it was claimed by the President that the new law would expand healthcare coverage to thirty-two million uninsured Americans, would cost $940 billion over ten years (but would be paid for by only those Americans earning more than $250,000 per year), and would reduce the federal deficit by $1.2 trillion dollars over a twenty year period (Jackson and Nolen, 2010).

Regardless of the President’s claims, conservative voters and candidates were outraged. In particular, a grassroots movement of anti-government conservatives – who titled themselves the “Tea Party” as inspired by the Boston Tea Party of 1773 – began to coalesce against perceived growth in national debt, taxation, and governmental social welfare programs. A self described decentralized outcry against government, this group defines itself by, “the revolutionary principle of citizen participation, citizen activism, and the primacy of the individual over the government.” While not a formal party, this group does pursue a platform focused upon federal spending: It demands fiscal policies that limits government, restrains spending, and promotes market reforms for social
programs; it rallies against government support of healthcare, any form of tax hikes, and federal regulation of businesses via cap-and-trade policies and the like (Armey and Kibbe, 2010). The Tea Party does not classify itself as a Republican sub-group; in fact, by fielding its own group of candidates, the grassroots movement successfully challenged a number of Republican incumbents in 2010 primary races in states including New York, Delaware, Colorado, Nevada, Kentucky, and Alaska (Muskal, 2010). The victories of these deeply conservative candidates over long standing Republican politicians, especially those like Christine O'Donnell who ousted nine term Rep. Mike Castle of Delaware, raised questions not only about the vulnerability of Democrats at Obama’s midterm, but also about the unity of the GOP.

This is not to say that House Republicans were not seeking to take advantage of the Democrats’ troubles. Taking a page from Newt Gingrich and the 1994 midterms, House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio and other party leaders introduced in the weeks building up to the election a pseudo-Contract titled the “Pledge to America.” A rebuke against the methodology used to pass Obama’s health care legislation, the 2010 Pledge was similar to its 1994 counterpart in that Republicans proposed a variety of ideas that would reform congressional operations. Briefly, the Pledge sought to require Congress to cite the specific constitutional authority that undergirds each piece of legislation, to make sure that legislative measures are passed individually rather than collectively, to make open committee meetings, and to reduce spending on legislative operations. As to specific policies, the Pledge promised to hold votes that would overturn newly passed healthcare reforms, keep in place Bush-era tax cuts, freeze the hiring of federal employees, end increases to most domestic spending programs, and
prevent any future spending under the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). The *Pledge* was different from the *Contract* in certain respects: it was not introduced with the fan-fair Gingrich employed in 1994, candidates were not forced to publicly sign the document, it did not propose any new term limits, and focused more on security and anti-terrorism funding (Bacon, 2010).

Continued economic distress, a contentious and controversially passed healthcare reform law, and growing federal debt all weighed heavily on the public opinion of President Obama and the electoral viability of congressional Democrats as the 2010 midterm election loomed. Polls indicated that Democrats’ 2008 popularity had reversed: whereas Obama won the popular vote by a 53% to 46% margin and the House Democrats by an average of 54% to 43%; data in the weeks running up the November midterm showed Republicans leading on a generic ballot question (“Which party’s candidates will you support for the House of Representatives”) by an average of 49% to 42%. All together, it was projected that 90 Democratic-held House seats were at risk (Whitesides, 2010). Looking at these conditions in the days before the vote, congressional observers stated with growing confidence that, “Republicans seem very likely to win more – perhaps many more – than the 39 seats they need for a majority in the House and might, if they get lucky, win the 10 seats they need for a majority in the Senate” (Barone, 2010). On November 2\textsuperscript{rd}, 2010 these predictions came to fruition as the Republicans swept the Democrats and returned as the majority party in the House of Representatives (though they failed to take a majority in the Senate). In total, Republican incumbents lost in only two races (Charles Djou of Hawaii, and Joseph Cao of Louisiana) and the party gained 63 seats from districts across the nation. Perhaps
hardest hit were first and second term House Democrats, who Pelosi had hoped in 2006 and 2008 would represent the beginning of a new era for the party (Tumulty, 2010).

**Considering the Democratic House, 2007 to 2010**

In several ways, the short tenure of the Democrats in the post-*Revolution* House mirrors that of the first and second halves of the Republicans’. In their first two years, though they had adopted party governance based upon the electoral success of leadership and a certain degree of ideological unity\(^6\), the Democrats were operating in an environment of divided government. Like their conservative counterparts from 1995-2000, the new majority faced a separation of powers hurdle that consistently hampered their efforts. As had Republicans in 1995-1996, the Democrats pursued a controversial and ideologically driven agenda – that being immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq – a volatile policy choice that was external to their direct control. Like President Clinton before him, President Bush was able to employ the powers at his disposal to prevent the Speaker and broader House leadership from claiming their objective. Despite their unity (though not to the same degree as Republicans), Democrats experienced the same difficulties as had Republicans in their first period as the majority.

The second half of their tenure was also related to that of the GOP. Similar to the gains made by Republicans in the aftermath of 9/11, Democrats were advantaged in 2008 by an economic crisis that reshaped their operational environment. In this return to unified government, House members (whether they wanted it or not) were attached to the Obama “brand.” As this brand began to tarnish with the vitriolic controversy

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\(^6\) See Figure 7-4 and the discussion of the efforts by Pelosi and other party leaders. In comparison to Republicans in 1995 and 2002, levels of ideological unity were strong for Democrats as they re-entered majority status, though not as strong as earlier conservatives.
surrounding healthcare reform, members responded by disassociation and localization away from party leaders. Like their 2006 election counterpart, the 2010 mid-terms were much a referendum on the politics of the Obama Administration and Democratic party leadership.

Figure 7-5. Developmental dynamics, overall Democratic House: 2007 – 2010

As seen in Figure 7-5, though there was relative parity between ideological sub-groups throughout the 110th Congress, “Ultra-” and “Strong-Liberals” rallied behind their Speaker and later their popular presidential candidate in 2008. Believing that victory was within their grasp in the general election, new calls for removing the troops from Iraq and providing legislation for universal healthcare rang-out at numerous political rallies. Yet, as the young President would struggle in his first months in office, many Democratic House members abandoned a deeply liberal stance (as seen by the decrease in “Ultra-Liberals” in 2009-10), taking on a more moderate ideological
perspective (as seen by the increase in “Traditionalist-Liberals” in 2009-10) in fear that an unpopular president would harm their electoral chances in his first mid-term.

Figure 7-6. Democratic House ideological trend: 2010

In all, while their experiences are not exactly the same, we see enough similarities between the two majorities to again question the sustainability of party governance as a model for House operations. In both periods of the Democratic experience, the results were much like those of the Republicans before: policy failure (i.e. no troop removal), disunity (following soured healthcare reform), and eventual electoral failure. We can also say that the ideological trend of the Democrats was similar to that of the Republicans\(^7\): as seen in Figure 7-6, at the end of their tenure as majority, the ideological spectrum of the Democrats was much more normalized than that of the party in 2007\(^8\). We take caution in making hard-line inferences from this much too-recent

\(^7\) See Figures 5-9 and 6-9

\(^8\) See Figure 7-4
experience; regardless, our narrative and initial data allows us to posit gestures that help inform and support our broader analysis of governance in the post-Revolution House.

**Republicans’ Return to Power: A Return to Party Governance in the House?**

As the dust settled, Obama looked much like Clinton two decades before him: rebuked at the mid-point of his first term following a controversial (though this time successful) push for healthcare legislative reform, now facing an opposition majority in the House. Further, the new House majority seemingly swept into power with the same force of Gingrich *Revolution* in the early 1990s – in fact, the Republicans won more seats in 2010 than they had under Gingrich. The question for many congressional scholars and observers is whether or not 2010 will turn-out to be 1994 repeated. Though we are still in the midst of this momentous change, we can posit certain similarities and differences between the Republican’s two ascendancies to power. The most important comparison between the 1994 and 2010 elections is that despite the larger margin of victory, there is an absence of a political revolution on several levels: 2010 did not have a Gingrich-figure that united a disjointed party stuck decades in the minority, the campaign did not present a unifying national platform to the degree of the *Contract*, regional shifts in ideological and leadership perspective were not as pronounced, and the party itself faced internal division from a new group radical conservative ideologues in the “Tea Party.” True, Republicans returned to power, but the 2010 mid-term election does not seem at the outset to be the *Revolution* for the GOP that had occurred decades earlier.

Looking first at the way the party won, while Gingrich spent years building his majority from the ground-up through candidate recruitment, training, and policy
development; current leaders inherited much of their caucus and legislative agenda. Further, while Bill Clinton was certainly a target in 1994, the Revolution sought to move beyond a single president and towards a carte blanche reformation and restructuring of federal institutions and national governance. On the other hand, 2010 presented a more aggressive attack on one person in its focus on defeating Barack Obama and overturning his agenda. There was a thirst for change in the wake of economic worry and controversial legislation, but it was not so much a public commitment to wholesale reform as it was a rebuke of Obama’s policy. Beyond campaign focus, the leadership team itself is different. Compared to Gingrich and DeLay, leaders seem to be less in the spotlight, more willing to take a decreased vocal role. Also, whereas team-Gingrich was regionally homogeneous, the new party leadership – consisting of John Boehner-OH as Speaker, Eric Cantor-VA as Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy-CA as Majority Whip, Jeb Hensarling-TX as Conference Chairman, and Tom Price-GA as Policy Committee Chairman – is somewhat more regionally diverse in its representation. Further, there is ideological division within the party leadership structure: whereas Boehner has shown himself willing to work with the Obama Administration, Cantor has aligned himself with ideologically uncompromising Tea Partiers.

Regardless of these differences between 1994 and 2010, leaders did take advantage of the challenges facing the nation to unite their party members and voters. During the campaign, leadership funneled millions of dollars to various candidates in competitive districts: the National Republican Congressional Committee raised more than $107 million for its House candidates, spent $54 million on television advertising in 90 different districts across the nation, and funded the costs for 358 field staffers to
manage campaigns in each of the congressional districts targeted by the GOP (Parkinson, 2010). If placed back into power, leaders indicated that they would be willing fight the President to ensure passage of their supposed mandate. These threats included shutting-down the government and refusing to increase the national debt limit if the President would not agree to spending cuts and policy change.

Regionally, both party leadership and victorious challengers took on a somewhat more diverse perspective. Whereas gains were made predominately in the south in 1994, gains were made across the nation in 2010 – in fact, as seen in Figure 7-7, there were an equal number of seats picked-up in the mid-west as in the south, and substantial gains were made in the more moderate mid-Atlantic.

Figure 7-7. Regional distribution, Republican freshmen: 2011

Perhaps the most interesting development that differentiates 1994 from 2010 is the potential for internal disunity. As we saw at the end of their tenure in 2006,
ideological cohesion within the party began to degenerate as individual members scrambled to position themselves for re-election. These divides have since been compounded by the growth of the ultra-conservative “Tea-Party Patriots” who arose in response to growing national debt, economic bail-out packages, and Obama Administration reform policies (most specifically healthcare). Though many supporters of the movement may have affiliated with Republicans in the past, this groundswell was also created in reaction to perceived failure in the GOP during the Clinton and later Bush years. In fact, when it comes to competing against Republicans in primary races, the stated aim of the organization is, “not seeking a junior partnership with the Republican Party, but a hostile takeover of it” (Armey and Kibbe, 2010). Specifically targeting what they called ‘establishment conservatives’ from the Bush-era, Tea Party candidates successfully challenged Republican incumbents in a number of races across the nation: “The tea party rejected [Bush] Administration spending, overreach and immigration proposals, among other items, and has become only too willing to say so. In doing this, the tea party allowed the Republican establishment itself to get out from under Mr. Bush” (Noonan, 2010). The group, which is driven by a strong libertarian streak, is not only anti-government, but also largely secular in its focus. In rallying against the policies of Republican incumbents, the Tea Party did not show a great deal of public support for evangelical groups within the GOP:

The rise of a new conservative grass roots fueled by a secular revulsion at government spending is stirring fears among leaders of the old conservative grass roots, the evangelical Christian right. A reeling economy and the massive bank bailout and stimulus plan were the triggers for a resurgence in support for the Republican Party and the rise of the tea party movement. But they’ve also banished the social issues that are the focus of many evangelical Christians to the background…. The tea party movement has a politics that’s irreligious (Smith, 2010)
While some in the movement argued that a third-party should be formed, candidates instead chose to seek nomination in Republican primaries, running against both the policies of the Obama Administration and earlier GOP.

Tea Party candidates experienced a large degree of success in primary and general election victories, so large in fact that some pundits went as far as to claim that the Republican victory in the House was the product of Tea Party efforts:

Though Democrats barnstormed into Congress in huge numbers over the past two election cycles... frustration over the economy and far-reaching legislation passed under the current administration fueled a crop of candidates vowing to bring a renewed model of small-government conservatism to Washington. The most visible and vocal driver of that political breed has been the Tea Party, which aggravated several GOP primary contests by backing non-establishment candidates who, in many cases, won.... The energy from the Tea Partiers was an undeniable factor in getting Republicans out to the polls (FOX News editorial board, 2010)

Calculating exact numbers of Tea Party candidate victories is difficult – as affiliation was a declaration of ideas rather than with an official party other than Republican – but based upon Tea Party Conference endorsement, estimates account that Tea Party candidates where responsible for ten new seat victories in the House and five in the Senate (Shoichet and Travis, 2010). Though some high profile Tea Party candidate’s lost their campaigns (most specifically, Delaware’s Christine O’Donnell for the Senate, Nevada’s Sharron Angle for the Senate, and Carl Paladino for New York’s governor’s race), the grassroots movement claimed victory and a mandate in the legislature. Mark Meckler, co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots movement went as far as to state that success meant more than victory over Obama, but victory over establishment conservatism as well: “The Republicans need to know, we’ve done it in 2010. If they don’t do the right thing in the next couple of years, it’s not a problem. We’ll come back in
2012. We’ll do it over again. We’ll replace them with people that will uphold our principles” (Shoichet and Travis, 2010).

What does this victory mean for governance in the 112th Congress? While it is too early to make definitive arguments, the day after the election portended an interesting future for congressional Republicans. In his press conference after it became known that the House would return to Republican hands, future Speaker John Boehner stated: “Our new majority will be prepared to do things differently. It starts with cutting spending instead of increasing it, reducing the size of government instead of increasing it, and reforming the way Congress works.” While not an outright endorsement of the Tea Party movement, it was clear to House party leadership that this junior group would certainly be a force within the legislative process. How far the group would push the Republicans to the right in a period of divided government remains an evolving question. When asked if gridlock and stalemate would reign, Rand Paul – newly elected Senator of Kentucky and Tea Party hero – put it this way: “Government gridlock isn’t necessarily a bad thing… While people complain about gridlock, the most fiscally conservative government is always divided government” (Associated Press, 2010). Despite this statement, and two very close calls in the summer of 2011, gridlock has remained a threat rather than absolute certainty.

With difficult political issues and a struggling economy still on the horizon, what lessons would (and should) congressional Republicans take from the developmental dynamics of their history as they moved forward again as House majority? It is to this question and our normative response that we take-up in our conclusion.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED?

Because the House worked its will

—Speaker Boehner, in response to why the House and President Obama agreed to continuing resolutions during 2011 budget negotiations.

Republicans in a New Era: 1995 Repeated?

As Republicans have once more become the majority party in the House following a sweeping election, will they again seek to employ party governance as their operational model? The early evidence remains mixed.

Signs that the parties could work together came as early as the economic crash of 2008. Despite years as bitter rivals, Republicans and Democrats came together in a decisive manner in attempting to defuse the crisis, and did so in the face of apprehension among members of both parties. Republican leaders faced the toughest time with the issue – though minority leader Boehner was never able to corral a majority of Republicans, he was able to ensure bi-partisan support for President Bush’s economic rescue plan. As the Republicans returned to power in 2010, Obama appealed for “common ground” to become the basis for legislative and executive relations in a new period of divided government (Associated Press, 2010). Reiterating this message, newly elected Speaker Boehner stated that it was one of his top priorities to lower the partisan pressure in the House and to avoid a government shutdown over the budget: “Boehner has said he hopes to avoid a government shutdown. He was in the Republican leadership in 1995 when Gingrich forced the last one, and he remembers how it killed the GOP’s political momentum” (Grunwald and Newton-Small, 2010).

Further, President Obama in the weeks after the election invited Boehner and other congressional leaders from both parties to the White House to discuss the economy, tax
cuts, unemployment insurance, and the passage of a new nuclear-arms treaty with Russia (Grier, 2010). While there were heated debates in the lame-duck session, the Obama Administration and the House Republicans were able to achieve enough compromise so as to find consensus on divisive Bush era-tax cuts and the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy:

It’s been anything but a lame end of the congressional session for President Obama…. Obama has signed a tax cut extension deal that many analysts liken to a second stimulus bill that will juice the economy and reduce unemployment; this week, he ends the military’s ban on gays serving openly by signing a repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy…. This comes a month after Obama’s “shellacking” in the November elections (Jackson, 2010)

These compromises on the part of the House and President did not necessarily indicate a movement away from party governance. Despite these moves to the middle, the battle-lines had already been drawn: Just as in 1995, if the House and President could not come up with agreement or comprise for the federal budget, the national government would shutdown.

As the 112th Congress was being sworn in, members and the nation alike were looking to March 4th 2011, the day that – if a budget deal could not be made – the nation would again experience government shutdown at the hands of a Republican House and Democratic President. Referring to the debt as a “moral threat” to the United States, Speaker Boehner reiterated what many had already concluded: the House was prepared to go toe-to-toe with the President. Interestingly, the House leadership may not have been as hard-line as these words (and those quoted above) indicated. In the coming weeks, a series of continuing resolutions were agreed upon, effectively postponing shutdown. In each of the resolutions, cuts were a compromise between the legislative and executive rivals:
As approved Feb. 19, the House-passed package of spending cuts proposed to reduce nonemergency appropriations this year by $1.026 trillion, about $102 billion less than Obama’s initial budget requests for 2011…. In the weeks since, Congress has enacted two more CR’s to avert a shutdown, the second of which will expire next Friday. In each case, savings have been included that make up a $10 billion down payment toward what both sides hope will be a final deal soon (Rogers and Sherman, 2011)

Ideological zealots within the Republican House still argued that these cuts did not go far enough – and they were willing to shutdown the government to prove their point. It seemed that 2011 was going to be 1995 repeated. Yet, the context today is different than in years past: yes, there was a large election sweep, but there was also division within it. While many of the newly elected were “Tea Party” candidates, this group (though loud) is somewhat independent of the broader conservative House caucus – both in terms of their election status and their ideological rigidity. Unlike 1994 in which the “Revolutionaries” were recruited and trained in the Gingrich-leadership image, Speaker Boehner and the Tea Party Freshman do not have these ties – in fact, they may be in opposition of each other:

It’s not like Republicans need a reminder of the tensions within their own ranks on government spending cuts. But if they forget what’s at stake, all GOP lawmakers need to do Thursday is walk outside the Capitol, where perhaps hundreds of tea party protesters will be urging congressional leaders to hold their ground on major spending cuts…. Inside the Capitol, House Speaker Boehner will quietly try to figure out how to negotiate without looking like he’s making deals with Democrats and President Obama (Cogan and Sherman, 2011)

This division is further evidenced by the discord displayed between Boehner (who looks to be more moderate – willing to work with the President) and Majority Leader Cantor (who looks to be more conservative – wanting to play “hard ball” with the President):

“‘Time is up here,’ said [Cantor], telling reporters that a short-term continuing resolution, ‘without a long term commitment is unacceptable’ and that the leadership must push for
the full $61 billion in spending cuts… ‘That is the House position. That is what we are driving for,’ Cantor said” (Rogers and Sherman, 2011).

In the end, though the two sides took the debate to the very edge, the House and President were able to come to a last minute compromise that pulled the nation back from the brink of shutdown. Why? With the Tea Party demanding deep cutbacks across the board, why would Republicans compromise? We cannot say for certain, but perhaps the Republican leadership and broader majority learned the lessons of their history; that is, having experienced dramatic defeat on the same issue in a similar environmental context over a decade before, Republicans may have taken on a more moderate approach to legislating. As Dodd and Oppenheimer stated a decade ago, competing forms of rational behavior may arise and result in more muted, complicated forms of partisanship. The compromise over the budget shows that – maybe – the House is moving away from its Revolution past and towards a more moderate form of partisanship. From our analysis over the preceding chapters, we think this is a good thing.

Other evidence by members of the Tea Party themselves shows that even these modern-day “Revolutionaries” may have a taste for politics as usual. Published by the editors of Newsweek and The Daily Beast (October, 2011), many of the most visible Tea Partiers have shown their desire for constituency specific pork-projects: Majority Leader Cantor has sought out funding for high-speed rail for his district, Governor Rick Perry has accepted more than $2 billion in federal “Stimulus Package” funds for his state, Rep. Michele Bachmann has funneled a number of President Obama’s “shovel ready” transportation projects into her state, and even Speaker Boehner (though not a
Tea Partier himself) has requested federal loan guarantees for “green technology” companies in his home-state of Ohio. Other members of the Republican congressional caucus privately seeking federal monies for projects they publically deride include House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy; House Energy and Commerce Chairman Fred Upton; Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa; Representatives Alan West, Ron Paul, Mike Enzi, and Steve King; and Senator John McCain.

Yet, with deeply troubling issues such as the nation’s debt limit continuing to rage, the failure of the Congressional “Super Committee” to resolve budget issues, continued conflict in Afghanistan and Libya, and unrelenting economic distress; only time will tell if Republicans adopt a new operational model in the House.

**House Governance, 1994-2010: Our Criticism of CPG – A Madisonian View**

Over the previous six chapters, we have employed a historical institutionalist methodological framework to construct a developmental-narrative account of the Republican (and later Democratic) House to understand the way in which governance within this institution has changed overtime. From this contemporary American Political Development analysis, we have criticized the sustainability of conditional party governance as a model for legislative operations in the House: because it fails to consider the limitations of leadership and the shifting nature of the congressional operational environment, we argue that the model presents a contextually dependent illusion of party strength. This analysis represents an endorsement and contribution to the alternative model of constructive partisanship: Despite increased institutional authority, we have shown that parties must be aware *not only* of the threats presented by cross-cutting issues (as indicated by Dodd and Oppenheimer), *but also* the
combined threats of leadership failure and inevitable change in relation to shifting environmental-operational contexts.

Our analysis shows that institutional “stickiness” helps to explain the illusion of sustained party authority. In seeking to break from past legislative politics, the Republican reforms enacted in 1995 that enhanced party leadership and weakened committee autonomy remained present throughout each Congress since the 104th. When contexts were favorable, parties attempted to utilize the reforms in employing party governance so as to take advantage of these conditions. Yet, the advantage gained was only possible in the short-term. In each case for the Republican House (and to a certain degree in the Democratic), we show this initial choice was unwise: despite enhanced authority, the move towards party governance would – overtime – result in political turmoil as leaders failed to behave appropriately and/or the operational context (that had once benefited the ideologically rigid parties) shifted to become inhospitable. The Rhode-Aldrich camp is correct: there has been increased ideological homogeneity, there has been increased leadership authority, and these factors have coalesced since the early 1990s; but, we show that each of these conditions are dependent upon unique political moments in time. Moreover, each condition is highly unstable; fluctuating in a pattern we show to be repeatedly unfavorable for the majority that seeks to employ the operational model of party governance. As such, our thesis – from a historical institutionalism, political development perspective – represents a criticism of the sustainability of conditional party governance in the U.S. House of Representatives. We argue that a party desiring to retain its majority status ought not seek to embrace party
governance, but rather a moderated operational structure of balance, stability, and productivity.

Our thesis is squarely grounded in a Madisonian system of American federal institutions. In writing, “Complaints are everywhere heard… that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority,” Madison foreshadows in Federalist 10 the dangers that arise in a governing system dominated by one particular ideological objective (1999, pp. 45). Madison argues that faction in a free and heterogeneous society is a natural occurrence (unless, of course, liberty is removed or the citizenry is given the same opinions and interests – the first “remedy” of which is famously worse than the disease, and the second option both as impractical as it is unwise). Madison argues that centralization of interests is a real – and potentially dangerous – possibility, given certain conditions. Because the causes of faction are, “sown into the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought in to different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society;” those who both study and practice politics must be aware that social volatility increases as acrimony condenses (1999, pp. 47). Madison writes that centralized passions have, “divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common goal” (1999, pp. 47). The greater the centralization of passion and interest; then, the greater the volatility faced – given such conditions, even “frivolous and fanciful distinctions” will incite the most “violent conflicts” (1999, pp. 47). Madison’s point is that
conditional centralization of interest is a political possibility, but that this centralization is unsustainable as it makes social organizations proportionally more volatile.

Regardless, Madison argues that faction can be both controlled and used as a tool to promote liberty itself. Though his concern in Federalist Paper 10 was the advantage of a large republic in controlling the violent tendency of faction, in applying Madison’s arguments to an institutional context of associated though divergent individuals – in our case, the House of Representatives and its two major parties – interesting theories about organizational relationships begin to take shape; especially as those theories pertain to our findings concerning the developmental dynamics of the Republican majority in an era of party governance. Simply put, the characteristics associated with party centralization feed the “latent causes of faction,” making the organizational model adverse to sustainable governance.

Take for example the role of leadership. While conditional party government highlights a stronger role for party leadership, Madison encourages that one takes pause: “It is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm” (1999, pp. 48 – emphasis ours). If such is the case, Madison remarks that political leaders will often resort to actions that “kindle a flame within their particular states.” Our analysis has shown repeated examples of leadership failure and its negative effect on rank-and-file members: whether it is government shutdowns, impeachment, an unpopular war, ethical scandal, or bungled responses to natural disaster; those attached to the “brand” of failed leadership choices in a hierarchal-homogeneous organization are often harmed. The solution Madison
seeks for controlling these issues within organizations is startling: enhanced leadership
authority is not the answer to strife. Rather, it is the inclusion of more and more factions
into the organization:

   Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it
   less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the
   rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all
   who feel it to discover their own strength and act in unison with each other (1999, pp.

The point here advocated by Madison is that a strong reliance on leadership and high
levels of organizational centralization cannot be depended upon as a method of
institutional association – first, good leaders are hard to find; second, those in
leadership positions often work to foment agendas or interests particular to a narrow
cause – failure on which is detrimental to the broader organization. In conjunction with a
separation of powers system, centralized leadership and high levels of polarization
present – for Madison and us – an impracticable and uncertain organizational model.
From the lessons learned via our analysis of the Republican experience, we argue for a
Madisonian view of congressional operations; that is, we advocate an organizational
structure which encourages increased competition of ideas rather than rigid ideological
doctrine.

   The lesson for the post-Revolution House is straightforward: As the parties
entered into majority status (or as Madison might put it, extended their sphere of
influence), adopting an organizational structure that encouraged strong party
leadership, increased intraparty ideological homogeneity, and amplified interparty
polarization was not a wise choice. As a party takes on institutional control in becoming
the majority, that party must realize “the greater number of citizens and extent of
territory” they now represent; again, when you extend your sphere of influence, you take
in “a greater variety of parties and interests.” As such, seeking to maintain party governance, or what Madison might call a “common motive,” becomes increasingly difficult as one moves forward through time in an ever changing environment. Having failed to heed the warning of Federalist 10, recent House majorities have suffered this painful lesson. In founding their organizational structure upon strong party leadership and ideological rigidity, the parties placed themselves upon a very precarious, and – as we have demonstrated – unsustainable path.

The conditional party government model and our thesis present diverging viewpoints on partisan organization within political institutions. On the one hand, the Rhode-Aldrich camp argue that given proper conditions – most specifically increased ideological homogeneity within parties and increased ideological heterogeneity between them – rank and file members will be more willing to place trust in their party leadership. As such, the theory argues that parties will become more centralized both in terms of organization and policy preference. While we have shown that parties in the contemporary Congress did attempt to follow this model in certain contexts, its sustainability was fleeting. This dissertation has found – due to leadership failure and shifting operational conditions – that this initial choice becomes increasingly constraining overtime; as such, the model is unsustainable.

Employing our developmental-narrative and originally collected empirical data; this dissertation argues that our thesis can be applied as a critique against party governance: we have shown that long-term success will be threatened when a party’s platform and internal workings are dominated by one ideological perspective to such a degree that the party becomes inflexible in the face of an ever-changing political arena.
In the case of contemporary parties and the viability of party governance, the issue for congressional scholars during the post-Revolution era has been the “ideological fervor and tight cohesion” that some academic camps have argued define current House majorities. Other camps see this assumption of permanent partisanship as highly problematic. Conditional party governance may be an accurate explanation for the House in certain contexts; regardless, conditional party governance as a model for legislative behavior both sets the stage for governmental inaction, and places the party in power in a very tenuous political position – with themselves and with the nation’s voters:

Strong and polarized parties in Congress are seen as the culprit, not the solution to policy inaction. Watching the endless partisan squabbles and poor policy performance on Capitol Hill, the nation now yearns for an end to polarized politics – for greater ideological compatibility between the parties that will aid cross-party negotiations and for policy centrists in Congress who will push policy compromise (Dodd and Schraufnagel, 2009, pp. 395).

Such realities lead this alternative camp to attest that the normative attributes of moderated party governance provide a better model for legislative parties in power:

“Envisioned in this manner, Congresses operating amid moderate polarization and mixed government could well reach policy decisions in a more electorally responsive, broadly informed, deliberative, and yet party-based manner than is the case for either high or low polarization” (Dodd and Schraufnagel, 2009, pp. 414).

Our analysis over the proceeding chapters supports this very argument. By adopting a party governance model in 1994 and then reaffirming it again following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the early choices made by House Republicans help to explain the limited legislative accomplishments of the conservative Revolution and their relatively short tenure as the majority party in Congress. Our analysis takes Dodd’s alternative
model to its next step: we show that not only has intraparty ideological unity (a primary condition for party governance) fluctuated with time; moreover, we have shown that it does so in response to leadership folly and shifting external conditions for which the rigid operational model is not prepared. Dodd’s argument of limited policy success in combination with our analysis of party developmental dynamics – we believe – helps scholarship to further understand the limits of party governance in the House.

**Summary**

Aldrich, Rhode, and other adherents to their academic camp continue to argue that the contemporary Congress remains defined by the conditions necessary for party governance. Citing the continuation of partisan structures and preference homogeneity that have sought to centralize the House since the 1990s, this camp claims an accurate description of the post-*Revolution* House (Aldrich and Rhode, 2009). Yet, our analysis raises a number of critical issues concerning party governance (first) as an explanatory theory and (second) its sustainability as an operational model. As to the first, whereas intraparty ideological homogeneity is a primary “condition” for effective and continued party governance, we have shown repeated patterns of development in which intraparty homogeneity has fluctuated overtime in response to crisis (often of its own creation). At some junctures, ideological homogeneity increases; at others, it decreases. This fluctuation overtime has lead to our second issue: party governance has shown itself to be heavily dependent on sustained leadership acumen and favorable operational context. We have shown that when strengthened leaders fail or when the political context shifts, the choices made early-on by members becomes increasingly problematic with time.
As stated by Smith and Gamm (2009, pp. 162), the conditional party governance thesis ought be, “elaborated to recognize the institutional context and the forces that shape it.” Simply put, in a world in which institutional actors must operate in a shifting environment, context matters. In the case of the House, our path dependency perspective states that when groups habituate themselves to a chosen operational model, these decisions may later prove restrictive on future actions. Alluded to in the conclusion of Chapter 2, Smith and Gamm continue: “Our hunch is that centralization occurs when the parties are polarized, electoral conditions are favorable to the majority party, and the institutional context permits control of legislative outcomes by a centralized majority party” (2009, pp. 162 – emphasis ours). We argue that our analysis over the preceding pages provides a great deal of support to the “hunch” posited by these scholars and others cautious of party governance – in particular, we argue for a reconsideration of party governance via our criticisms and the alternatives provided the constructive partisanship model. As argued by this alternative camp, cross-cutting issues will always represent a threat to the sustainability of party governance. As argued by this dissertation, additional threats further aggravate the tentative and fragile nature of this model: We have found that the necessary “conditions” of party governance also include a favorable operational context and wise leadership. Along with intraparty homogeneity, these factors must remain present within the institution for party governance to remain an effective operational model – as such, we have demonstrated that contextual change and leadership failure leads to stress on those who continue to employ this operational model within the dynamic environment of the Congress.
This dissertation considers the contemporary congressional House from a historical institutionalist methodological perspective that allows us to identify and examine patterns of political development within the institution overtime. From these patterns, our composite analysis of the dynamics of House majority parties provides purchase in understanding movements of growth, rigidity, crisis, and collapse in the current political arena. Our analysis of the Republican House (and later Democratic House) shows that while conditional party governance is attempted in certain contexts, this initial decision becomes increasingly restrictive for members seeking to pursue their preferences overtime. As such, we show that because of shifting environmental context and leadership failure, conditional party governance is unsustainable in our Madisonian system of governance. From a path dependency perspective, shifts in the very conditions that make party governance possible have shown themselves to be the seeds of future crisis. In the ever-changing operational environment of our political system, we have demonstrated that those choosing to take on a party governance operational model have – overtime – found these initial choices increasingly constraining on future actions that must occur in a new context.

In the end, the patterns of development illustrated in this dissertation lead us to posit the conclusion that future majority parties ought not choose to operate in accord with an organizational model that demands and relies upon intraparty ideological homogeneity; rather, parties ought seek to be more agile, operating in accord with a view that recognizes the dangers of hyper-partisanship. If parties do not learn the lessons of the past, adopting a more moderated operational model, they will – with time – continue to be engulfed by crisis.
APPENDIX: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ASSESSING PATTERNS OF CHANGE WITHIN THE HOUSE

Mirroring data collection methods that have been employed by previous literature, this dissertation has developed descriptive measures to identify where individual representatives fit on a conservative spectrum; from this spectrum, we seek to better understand the influence fluctuating levels of ideological unity have had upon recent, current, and future congressional activity.

Much of the motivation for this dissertation comes from Douglas Koopman’s (1996) review of the House Republican experience between 1980 and 1995. In this study, Koopman attempts to identify patterns of ideological unity and faction within the Republican Party, to place individual Republican House members within their respective location on a conservative spectrum, and finally to understand the impact these groupings had on the governing experience for the then minority party. To identify these relationships and place members accordingly, the primary data source Koopman employed were voting statistics as compiled by the National Journal (NJ). This data source is of high utility as it provides a robust and parsimonious breakdown of the type of conservative an individual House Republican actually is – based upon individual legislative behavior as compared to all other members of Congress within the House. Of high importance for Koopman (and ourselves), this data source and its findings are easily understood and approached by a broad audience of readers, including those outside of political science and academia in general. As noted by the NJ and discussed by Koopman, on an annual basis since 1981, the NJ has compiled ratings for every member of Congress on three ranges of policy: social, economic, and foreign policy. The selection of votes to be rated is determined by journal staff in consultation with
special interest groups and other organizations that rank members of Congress. A member’s relative liberalism or conservatism in each policy area is compiled and compared against other members of Congress (Koopman, 1996, pp. 163-4).

The primary data source for this dissertation was gathered from the National Journal’s bi-annual Almanac of American Politics (1994 – 2010). Edited by Michael Barone and Richard E. Cohen, the Almanac contains a wealth of information well suited for this dataset. Emulating Koopman’s model, this dissertation’s descriptive statistics are based upon an originally constructed database in which NJ scores, electoral region, leadership position, committee service, and seniority status are collected and compiled. Inspired by Koopman’s (1996, pp. 20-1) methodology, this model divides the NJ statics into two parts: caucus ideological voting patterns and member association and behavior groupings. Both parts are formulated using individual member voting behavior on economic, social, and foreign policy issues as they develop by session overtime; the individual associations and behaviors data also includes electoral region data, party leadership vs. rank-and-file groups, and committee service associations. These statistics represent the “liberal percentage” scores as provided the NJ. As noted in the Almanac:

*National Journal’s* rating system is an objective method of analyzing congressional voting. A panel of the magazine’s editors and writers compiled a list of congressional roll call votes and classified them as either economic, social, or foreign policy based…. Members of Congress were then ranked according to the relative liberalism and conservatism…. The liberal percentage score means that the member voted more liberal than that percentage of his colleagues in that issue for the given year (2010, 14)

This dissertation’s database represents the gathered “liberal percentage” score of each individual Republican House member from 1994-2008 (for Democratic House members from 2006-2010, we use the opposite “conservative percentage” score to determine
placement on a liberal spectrum). Placed on a scale from zero – 100, this score is calculated using the manner that an individual member voted on “Key Votes” (these votes illustrate a legislator’s stance on important votes on national issues, as selected by the National Journal staff and consultants) as compared to every other member of the House in the given year relative to three policy issues – social, economic, and foreign policy. The lower the score, the less liberal that individual is on that particular set of policy issues in that particular year; or, one could say, the lower the member’s score, the more conservative that member is compared to other members in the House in any given session.

The caucus ideological voting patterns represent overall voting activities of the full Republican caucus in the House and are employed to form broad ideological comparisons of the GOP overtime. Following Koopman, the $NJ$ ratings are operationalized by creating a mean score from the three issue-based scores. Whereas Koopman formed his broad ideological divisions on a 15 point scale – where mean $NJ$ scores of zero up to 15 are put in the “conservative” pool, members with scores above 15 up to and including 30 are put in a “centrist” pool, members above 30 and up to and including 50 are put in a “moderates” pool, and those with mean ideological scores above 50 are put automatically in the “Patrician” pool – the findings of this study required that this scale be modified to accommodate for the proliferation of deeply conservative members who scored extremely low across all three issue dimensions. For the purposes of this dissertation, the caucus ideological patterns are broken down to
illustrate the divisions between five broad but distinct ideological groups within the Republican majority from 1995 – 2006:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A-1. Ideological groupings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultra Conservative Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Conservative Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Conservative Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrician Republican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The deviation from the Koopman model was not arbitrary. Though his model is very useful for this dissertation, Koopman’s analysis was one that examined the factional divides within the Republican party before they became the majority. While he correctly predicted the increase of conservative members under the Gingrich leadership model, he could not have known how far to the right the party would attempt to move beginning in 1995. Differentiating the exploding number of those members whom voted a mean ideological-score at or near “zero” is very informative in this study of broad ideological factions. For the purposes of this dissertation, this data and its fluctuations are presented in a series of descriptive figures that compare the relative strength of each ideological sub-group as they existed overtime. In combination with our qualitative developmental-narrative analysis of the dynamic “path” House Republicans followed as they developed overtime, this dissertation comes to a series of criticisms against the conditional party governance model.

This data is further considered via an analysis of member electoral regions and associations. To access these changes, this dataset includes the regional affiliation of

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1 To maintain comparative consistency, the same categories are employed in our discussion the Democratic majority from 2006 to 2010. As stated, for Democrats, we use the “conservative percentage” statistics. Thus, the difference between the two ideological groupings is not in degree, but in kind.
each Congress from 1994-2010. In accord with Koopman’s model, the regional breakdown is as follows:

Table A-2. Regional breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains and Rocky</td>
<td>Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountains</td>
<td>North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder States</td>
<td>Arizona, New Mexico, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The South</td>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The South</td>
<td>North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In looking further at member associations, Koopman conducts a brief investigation of committee activity by members as they progress throughout their representational tenure. To test whether or not certain “types or groups” of members are attracted to certain types of committees, Koopman tallies committee service of each member according to the categories described by Christopher Deering and Steven Smith in their seminal work *Committees in Congress* (1990\(^2\)): prestige, policy, and constituency. In their chapter on member goals and committee assignments, Deering and Smith persuasively argue that committee assignments are important to individual members, and in many ways (due to re-election factors, policy interests, and prestige motivations) committee assignments help to shape the character of a member’s career. Institutionally, because their composition greatly shapes policy outcomes (though to a

\(^2\) For the purposes of this dissertation, we use Deering and Smith’s most recent 3rd edition of Committees in Congress, published in 1997.
lesser degree since the decline of the mid-century era of committee government), the authors argue that committees remain important to leaders tasked with organizing the House and to the party groups that increasingly manage the chamber’s legislative activity. In short, Deering and Smith focus upon committee assignments because, “Put simply: they make a difference” (1997, pp. 59-60).

Briefly, Deering and Smith (and followed by Koopman) break their committee types into three categories, as seen in the Table A.3 below\(^3\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee Type</th>
<th>Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prestige Committee</td>
<td>Appropriations, Budget, Rules, Ways and Means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Committee</td>
<td>Banking, Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, Foreign Affairs, Judiciary, Government Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency Committee</td>
<td>Agricultural, Interior, Public Works, Science Space and Technology, Small Business, Veteran’s Affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prestige committees are those that remain distinctively influential in House members’ eyes (1997, pp. 63). Overall, prestige committees are the most coveted assignment for members, making them valuable for reasons beyond constituency service or individual policy interests. In opposition, policy committees are just that: committees defined by the prominence of members attracted to them by issued-based motivations (1997, pp. 72). While these members maintain their re-election interests by serving on a second committee specifically related to the characteristics of their district, these members are more experienced, multi-term representatives with well-established positions on major issues. Finally, constituency committees make-up the third category. Seen as

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\(^3\) While certain committee names changed overtime to reflect the policy stances of the Republicans during their majority, to maintain methodological consistency, current author calculations have maintained the original categories developed by Deering and Smith and later employed by Koopman by recording new committee titles under their former names.
extensions of their districts, members on these committees are highly motivated by constituency-service and re-election concerns. The jurisdiction of these committees tends to be more particularized than others (1997, pp. 74-5). As such, these committees are often viewed as the pork-barrel committees of the House.

Emulating Koopman, this dissertation takes a simple count of committee association, in which members are assigned a number equal to the number of committee memberships they have in each committee type. These counts are then used to determine if a certain type or group of Republican is more or less likely to serve on any particular type of committee, and how member service fluctuates overtime.

In combination with regional affiliation, seniority or leadership status, and broad ideological caucus data; this data helps to chart ideological development patterns within the Republican House majority as they occurred overtime and in response to shifting operational contexts.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hans E. Schmeisser, the son of two University of Florida alumni, was born in Winter Park, Florida. Moving to Georgia at a young age, Hans grew up in the Atlanta suburbs of Gwinnett County. After graduating from Collins Hill High School in 1998, Hans attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Graduating Magna cum Laude in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in political science, Hans was also a founding brother of Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity while at Mercer. Meeting his future wife, then Shelly Sumner, during those years; Hans chose to continue his education at the University of Florida. After earning a Master of Arts in political science in 2008, Hans began writing his dissertation. While a doctoral candidate, Hans accepted a tenure track position at Abraham Baldwin College in his wife’s hometown of Tifton, GA. Working at the small liberal arts college since 2009, Hans truly enjoys being in the classroom – especially when he gets to teach his students about the political philosophy behind today’s American governmental institutions. In August of 2011, Hans and his wife welcomed their first son, Luke. Having completed his doctorate in the spring of 2012, he looks forward to a successful academic career.