Chapter 8

Committees in Congress

version 1.0

In form, the Committees only digest the various matter introduced by individual members, and prepare it, with care, and after thorough investigation, for the final consideration and action of the House; but, in reality, they dictate the course to be taken, prescribing the decisions of the House not only, but measuring out, according to their own wills, its opportunities for debate and deliberation as well. The House sits, not for serious discussion, but to sanction the conclusions of its Committees as rapidly as possible. It legislates in its committee-rooms; not by the determinations of majorities, but by the resolutions of specially-commissioned minorities; so that it is not far from the truth to say that Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work.¹

With these words — “Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work” — American political science was born. While this assertion of mine is a bit hyperbolic, to a large degree it is true. Political Science as a discipline only arose toward the end of the nineteenth century, on the heels of a total transformation of American higher education and the professions. That transformation involved, in part, the creation of research universities in the model of those found in Germany. Among the first to adopt this model was Johns Hopkins University, and among its first PhDs in political science was a young southerner named Woodrow Wilson.

Wilson’s dissertation, which was later published as the book Congressional Government, would have been memorable even if he had not gone on to be the President of the United States. Wilson’s analysis represented a bold move in the intellectual analysis of American national institutions. He brushed aside the hagiography that had attended most learned discourse on the

¹Woodrow W. Wilson, Congressional government, p. 69.
institutions handed down in the Constitution. (Notice that Wilson was writing on the eve of the centennial of the U.S. Constitution, and thus Constitution-worship was in the air.) In *Congressional Government*, he held up Congress to judgement against what Wilson regarded as the highest good that a national legislature could stand for. Because the Constitution had placed Congress at the heart of the national governing system, he imagined that the keystone of all national institution should have certain characteristics — it should be deliberate, draw the attentive citizenry into its deliberations, respect the implied political equality of its members, and operate in a manner that allowed voters to judge directly whether policy had been beneficial to the nation, so that voters could reward or punish those who were responsible.

As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Wilson found Congress lacking. Rather than being dominated by the deliberations on the floors of the two chambers, congressional business was dominated by the secret, idiosyncratic machinations of its committees. Rather than integrating national power, Congress dispersed and *dis*integrated national power. By relying on committees and stealth, Congress was irresponsible, not responsible.

In the century since Wilson wrote, political scientists have written volumes about the behavior of congressional committees. Even though Wilson’s words were controversial at the time and his analysis has come under tough scrutiny, his identification of congressional committees as the working centers of Congress was absolutely correct. Corresponding with their critical positions in the legislative process, congressional committees are the most-studied part of Congress.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to congressional committees — both to the contours of committee behavior and to the theoretical perspectives their study. Now, you
may be thinking: “Woodrow Wilson first identified congressional committees as the keystone of congressional activity. I understand why I need to know something about what congressional committees do and how they do it. But, why do I need to know something about the theoretical perspectives surrounding the study of committee behavior?”

By examining theoretical perspectives on committee behavior, we gain a better understanding of why congressional committees behave as they do and end up being in a better position to judge whether committees contribute to or detract from the democratic/representative character of Congress. Although scholars of Congress all agree with Wilson about the importance of committees, many regard his normative views about congressional committees as theoretically confused. It can be argued that Wilson underappreciated how a division-of-labor system (which is what congressional committees are formally) actually operates in a complex organization. All complex organizations operate through delegation, and so the right question in judging the quality of committee deliberations is not whether their legislative products were rubber-stamped on the floor, but whether the resulting legislative product was “better” than what would have emerged absent the use of committees. It is impossible to judge the contribution of congressional committees to legislating without specifying theoretically what we could expect committees to accomplish in a relatively pure, theoretical environment.

The plan of this chapter is as follows: In Section I, I explore the most important empirical features of the committee system, reviewing its basic shape, its historical development, and theoretical perspectives on the empirical rigor of Wilson’s scholarship.
important patterns associated with committee memberships and leadership. In Section II I shift my attention to focus briefly on differences between the House and Senate committee systems, highlighting along the way committees in both chambers that deserve particular attention. In the final section I take a step back from the empirical aspects of committees to explore the important ways in which theorists of legislative behavior have approached the committee system over the past century.

I. Committees 101

I begin my discussion of committees empirically. Congress relies on many different types of committees, so I will start by discussing what the different types of congressional committees do. I then turn to the historical development of the committee system, to give you a sense about how political developments over time have left their mark on congressional committees. Following that, I attend to important topics of committee membership, including committee appointments, the selection of committee chairs, and the transfer of members between committees. I complete this section by examining two important features of the committee system, subcommittees and committee staff.

Committee morphology

Tab. VIII-1 Committees in the United States Congress are organized according to some basic features, which are summarized in Table VIII-1. Most committees are organized within a single chamber, though some—joint committees and conference committees—have memberships that span the two chambers. Committees also vary according to their persistence. Some, most notably the standing committees, can be considered permanent. The House Ways and Means Committee, for
instance, has been in continual existence since the 1790s. Others are short-term, being created to study a particular issue (like most select and special committees) or finalize a particular piece of legislation (conference committees). Finally, while most congressional committees are created primarily to consider legislation, a few are not legislative, being either investigatory or administrative.

Standing committees are the best-known of the congressional committees, being responsible for almost all legislation. They are written into the rules of both chambers, and thus have a sense of permanence about them. Not only do the identity and jurisdictions of standing committees typically remain unchanged from Congress to Congress, but most members continue from one Congress to the next, as do the staff.

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Under long-standing parliamentary practice, the House of Representatives is considered to be a brand-new body every two years when it first convenes, because all of its members are subject to biennial election. Thus, the rules of one House do not formally carry over to the next. However, it has long been a practice of the House to adopt the previous House’s rules as its own, upon reconvening at the start of a Congress. Thus, while nothing in the House rules is formally permanent, except what is specified in the Constitution, it is not a big stretch to treat the House committees as permanent from one Congress to the next.

Because only one-third of the Senate is up for election every two years, the Senate has adopted the convention of considering itself a permanent body. Thus, in a formal sense it is even less of a stretch to consider the Senate committees permanent. Even so, well into the end of the 1800s the Senate still adheres to the practice of appointing committees anew each session.
Until 1946, neither chamber was very precise in specifying the jurisdictions of its committees. Instead, they relied on decades of informal practice to guide the reference of bills to committees. That changed with the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, which rationalized the committee system considerably. The rules of both chambers now delineate in fine detail which matters belong to which committees. Table VIII-2 shows the jurisdictions of the two “taxation” committees in the House (Ways and Means) and Senate (Finance), as defined in the rules of the 106th Congress. Note that even these committees, which have relatively simple jurisdictions, can lay claim to matters far removed from its obvious jurisdiction (which in this case is taxing and finance), such as Social Security. Even though the jurisdictions are clearly defined in the House and Senate rules, there are vigorous “border wars” fought among the committees for the right to consider legislation in cases where jurisdictions are unclear or overlapping (King 1994, 1997).

Select and Special Committees⁴ have many of the features of standing committees, but lack their formal permanence and usually lack the ability to report legislation. From the mid-1800s to the present, both chambers have tended to rely on Select Committees to investigate matters that emerge unexpectedly on the political agenda and that are expected to recede away from the agenda in short order.

Some of the most notable committees in various historical eras have been Special Committees. For instance, in the early 1970s, elements of the Watergate scandal were exposed through the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, which was chaired by

⁴These two terms seem to be used interchangeably in congressional practice, with any distinction between the two being lost to the mists of time. The preferred term these days is special committee, which is the term I will mostly use in this chapter.
Sen. Sam Ervin (Dem-N.C.). More recently, in the 106th Congress (1999–2000), the Senate appointed the “Special Committee on the Year 2000 Technology Problem” to investigate and report back on the nation’s readiness to deal with the so-called “Y2K Bug.”

Select committees provide members with political advantages that standing committees lack. Because they are focused on a single issue, it is easier for the press to cover the proceedings of select committees and communicate them to the general public. Thus, membership on select committees can be highly sought-after among members who desire a public platform. The publicity that select committees generate often redounds to the benefit of committee members, especially their chairs. The Senate Watergate committee was popularly known as the “Ervin Committee.” The Senate special committee that investigated organized crime in the 1950s was popularly known as the “Kefauver Committee,” after its chairman, Estes Kefauver (Dem.-Tenn.).

A perusal of Senate select committees over the past half century reveals that many were chaired by senators with presidential ambitions, who used the committee chairs to claim national attention. Among these were Kefauver, Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn, Disarmament), Lyndon Johnson (D-Tex., Space and Aeronautics), Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn., Unemployment), George McGovern (D-S.D., Nutrition), Walter Mondale (D-Minn., Equal Education Opportunity), Frank Church (D-Id., Intelligence), Birch Bayh (D-Ind., Foreign Lobbying), and Robert Dole (R-Kan., European Security).

Select committees are popular among members of Congress because they allow them to pursue politically interesting issues without having to forego membership on other committees. The rules and party practices of both chambers restrict the number of standing committees that members can serve on. Thus, if a representative wants to switch over into another area of
specialty, s/he typically has to quit one committee to acquire membership on another. Members of select committees escape these sorts of rules, so that if a senator wants to spend time on an issue that takes him away from his standing committee assignments, he can do so without jeopardizing his longer-term legislative interests. For this reason, there are great pressures on the party leaders in both chambers to expand the number of select committees and even, at times, designate certain committees that should be standing as select. One example of this latter phenomenon is the designation of the Senate Indian Affairs committee as a select committee in 1977, and then its designation as a “permanent select committee” in 1985.5

Table 3 lists the standing and select committees that existed in the House in the 106th Congress (1999–2000). Table 4 lists the Senate committees. The remainder of this and the next section reviews important features of these committees. For the moment, simply note the following two things. First, the committees in both chambers vary considerably in their size, jurisdiction, staff and financial resources, subcommittee complexity, and degree to which the majority party dominates the membership. Second, in both chambers the majority party (the Republicans in the 106th Congress) hold a majority of seats on almost all committees,6 and a member of the majority chairs all committees.

5 Further adding to the confusion about the status of the Senate Indian Affairs committee is that the select committee’s name was changed to the “Committee on Indian Affairs” in 1993, but the rules were never changed to make it a standing committee.

6 The only exception to the majority-domination practice was both chambers’ ethics committees, which contained an equal number of Democrats and Republicans.
In addition to the well-known standing and (lesser-known) special committees, both chambers of Congress use other committees to transact specialized business. The joint rules of the two chambers, for instance, currently make provision for three joint committees: the Joint Economic Committee, the Joint Committee on Taxation, and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress. Joint Committees are composed of members from both chambers, with the chairmanship (typically) rotating between the two. Only one Joint Committee has ever been given jurisdiction over legislation, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, which existed from 1947 until 1979.

Over the past century, the number of joint committees has been reduced and their jurisdictions have been farmed out to the separate standing committees of the two chambers. A small skirmish broke out in the 104th Congress over this trend, when the House leadership wanted to eliminate the Joint Committee on Printing (which oversees the Government Printing Office), and the Senate leadership wanted to keep it. The skirmish was part of a larger effort, supported by a vocal group within the Republican Caucus, to streamline the operations of the House and to eliminate vestiges of what they considered to be past Democratic wastefulness.

While joint committees such as Printing and Library generally labor under obscurity, two joint committees, on Taxation and Economics, do their work closer to the limelight. The Joint Economics Committee (JEC), which was created by the 1946 Employment Act, was intended to be the depository of macroeconomic expertise on Capitol Hill. For many years the JEC’s hearings have been the location of the best continuing macroeconomic seminar in Washington. Many closely-followed economic indicators are released to coincide with JEC hearings on how the economy is evolving. In recent years the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board has used his
regular appearance before the committee to issue statements about how the Fed perceives the direction of the economy, which is information investors are always dying to hear.

The Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) does not get the same regular press attention as the Joint Economic Committee, but it gets much greater attention among lobbyists and others concerned about the details of the tax code. The joint tax committee, which for years was known as the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation (JCIRT), is composed of the senior members from the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees. While both chambers’ taxation committees have guarded their legislative prerogatives fiercely over the years, the staff of the JCT has served both committees by providing expert tax advice to the writers of revenue legislation. It is, in effect, Congress’s own Treasury Department, and is one of the reasons why members of Congress have held their own against successive administrations when tax bills have been written.

Conference committees also are composed of members from both chambers, but that is where the similarity with joint committees ends. A conference committee is an ad hoc committee, appointed by the presiding officer of each chamber, which reconciles differences between the House and Senate versions of the same legislation. For that reason, we can consider them legislative committees. Unlike legislative committees, conference committees have no staff or permanent membership. The membership of conference committees is typically dominated by members of the standing committees in the two chambers that originally considered the legislation in the House and Senate, and most often by members of the subcommittees that originally considered the bill.
In the case of simple legislation, this means that the number of conferees is relatively small. More complex legislation might have larger conference committees. Examining the 94th (1975–76), 96th (1979–80), and 97th (1981–82) Congresses, Longley and Oleszek (1989) found that the total size of conference committees ranged from 13, in the case of transportation and environmental conferences in the 97th Congress, to 24, in the case of agriculture issues in the same Congress. House delegations in that time period ranged from a low of seven to a high of 24; Senate delegations ranged from five to sixteen. House delegations typically exceeded Senate delegations in size, with the typical number of House members ranging between nine and fifteen and the number of senators ranging between six and thirteen.\footnote{In the case of the simplest pieces of legislation, there may not be a conference committee at all. Conferences can be avoided if (a) both chambers simply pass the identical bill the first time around or (b) if, through a procedure that sends the bill back and forth between the two chambers, one chamber’s amendments to the bill are accepted by the other chamber. Most legislation passes Congress without a conference committee, although most “important” legislation goes through the conference procedure.}

Occasionally, a bill will involve a number of issues and committees, resulting in a mammoth conference committee appointed among members of many standing committees and viewpoints. A good example of this was the conference committee appointed in 1981 to finalize budget cuts under the reconciliation act, which involved more than 250 members of Congress, divided further into 58 separate conference sub-groups.

The number of House and Senate members on conference committees need not be the same. Equality in numbers between the two chambers is not critical, since a majority of each
chamber’s delegation must approve the conference committee’s report before the bill can go back
to the two chambers. Therefore, the most important thing in the composition of conference
committees is the degree to which each chamber’s conference committee delegation represents
that chamber.

Conference delegations do typically represent the winning coalition in the chamber on that
bill. However, the presiding officer’s prerogatives to appoint conferees can be used to his (or his
party’s) advantage. An example of this was the House conference delegation appointed by
Speaker Hastert on the 1999 bill establishing a “patients’ bill of rights” for participants in Health
Maintenance Organizations (HMOs). Hastert, an opponent of many provisions in the House-
passed bill, appointed a conference delegation that was composed of members who had opposed
the House bill. While this move generated an angry response from the original House bill
sponsors—who were Republicans—there was not much they could do about it.

Finally, the House frequently uses a fictional committee to transact most of its business.
Usually, when the House is considering legislation, it operates as a Committee of the Whole. As
the name implies, a Committee of the Whole consists of all members of the House. However,
because the committee is, formally, not the House itself, the Committee of the Whole device
allows the House to proceed with routine legislative business without having to compel all of its
members to be present for all the debate and parliamentary fisticuffs. Because it is a committee,
the rules of procedure are less formal than if the House were meeting in formal session, and it is
easier for floor majorities to work their will without getting tied into parliamentary knots.
As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the Reed Rules of 1888 changed the quorum of the House Committee of the Whole to 100, rather than a constitutional majority, which is now 218. Furthermore, there are expedited amendment and debating procedures in Committee of the Whole which allow the House to get a lot of business done very quickly.

Because the committee of the whole is not the House, per se, everything the committee does must be ratified by the House in formal session. Most importantly, all amendments passed in Committee of the Whole must face a second vote in the formal House session. Amendments that lose in Committee of the Whole are not voted on again by the House. Since most amendments to bills are attacking the legislative product of a standing committee, this voting procedure gives the legislative committees a second chance to beat back challenges to their work should they lose the first time.

*Historical development of the committee system*

When Congress convened in April 1789, it had inherited from the Confederation Congress the practice of referring different bills to *ad hoc* select committees. (See the discussion in Chapter 2.) Both chambers of the new Congress continued the practice into the new regime. Eventually both chambers migrated over into a new practice in which select committees were supplanted by permanent standing committees.

Figure VIII-1 graphs out the number of select and standing committees in both chambers of Congress from 1789 to the present. At first blush, the gross development of the two chambers’

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8In 1888, when the Reed Rules were instituted, the House had 325 members, making a constitutional majority 163.
committee system is similar: Early-on both relied heavily on select committees, but as time passed, reliance on select committees waxed and the prominence of standing committees waned. Examined in more detail, the paths from reliance on select to standing committees took different directions in the two chambers, reflecting the different styles of legislative that developed in the two bodies.

The House adopted its initial parliamentary practices primarily from the Confederation Congress. It would begin the deliberation of legislation in Committee of the Whole first. Once a majority view had emerged on a particular topic, a committee would then be appointed to consider the matter further, in greater detail. However, the committee could only write a bill if it had been given explicit authority to do so. More often, the committee would report back to the House with its recommendations, after which further debate might develop on the floor. Then another select committee—perhaps with the same membership as the original one, but not necessarily—would be appointed to draft up a bill and report it back to the House. Committee bills were considered on the House floor with no special parliamentary protections, and they were frequently amended.

The select committees that were appointed in the House in its earliest years were on a very short leash. The early legislative process in the House under the Constitution was not much different than under the Articles of Confederation, subjecting the House to the same problems that had emerged in the extinct Confederation Congress. One important difference, however, is that the earliest House was willing to act as if Alexander Hamilton, George Washington’s Treasury Secretary, was the Prime Minister for the first two Congresses. Hamilton was the key player in drafting the details of the young nation’s financial plans and then shepherding them through
The House had already created two standing housekeeping committees before this, the Committee on Elections (1789), to help judge disputed election cases, and the Committee on Claims (1794), to help judge the petitions of citizens who claimed that the federal government owed them money.

So long as a majority of the House was politically sympathetic with the president and his treasury secretary, this arrangement was better than a committee system for the development of complex legislation. It left House members free to focus on what they specialized in, the political consequences of government action, while allowing Treasury officials to focus on what they specialized in, which was public finance.

Relations between the administration and the House began to deteriorate as the political majority in the House shifted away from the party of Hamilton (eventually called the Federalists) and toward the party of Jefferson (eventually called the Republicans). This led, in the 4th Congress (1795), to the establishment of the first legislative standing committee, on Ways and Means, which was responsible for reviewing all financial legislation that came before the House—taxing, spending, and banking.\(^9\) Even with the establishment of the Ways and Means Committee, the House proved hesitant to devolve front-line responsibility for legislation to other standing committees. Nonetheless, over the next thirty years, it was regularly faced with crises in which the reliance on closely-watched *ad hoc* select committees was roundly criticized. The years of the 1810s were particularly challenging to the House, on both policy and political grounds. Hence, by 1820 almost all original oversight over legislation in the House had been given to

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standing committees, with select committees being reserved for special investigations or hot political topics, such as the issue of slavery in Missouri.

In the Senate, committees of all kinds were slower to develop. In fact, if you examine Figure VIII-1 closely, you will see that in the earliest years, while the number of select committees was declining in the House (reflecting a gradual shift of work from select to standing committees), it was growing in the Senate. This also reflects a shift in the general legislative style of this chamber, which developed somewhat independently of the House. In its earliest years, the Senate was content to leave to the House the job of taking a first crack at legislation. Thus, in its earliest years the Senate was much less busy than the House.10 Political realities slowly shifted around senators, as they began to feel many of the same political pressures from back home as were felt by House members. This led, in turn, to a gradual shift in attention to the origination of legislation and, in turn to an increase in the number of select committees appointed in the Senate.

The onset of standing committees was more sudden in the Senate than in the House, so much so that the source of this shift remains a bit of a mystery. In 1816 the Senate changed its rules so that it went, overnight, from having no standing committees to having twelve. From that time forward, the evolution of the committee system in the Senate paralleled that of the House.

10Keep in mind that in addition to sharing a legislative function with the House, the Senate shared executive functions with the president. The balance between the two functions can be gleaned from the relative heft of the Senate Journal, where legislative business was recorded, compared to the Senate Executive Journal, where executive business was recorded. About one-quarter of the Senate’s business in its earliest Congresses can be found in the Executive Journal.
Figure VIII-1 also reveals that the committee systems in both chambers have been pruned back occasionally, especially in the 1920s and 1940s, with smaller cut-backs in other years. Each of these retrenchments, large and small, are the obverse of the dynamic that leads to the gradual expansion of the standing committee system in normal times.

The existence of a standing committee dedicated to a specific topic leads, in turn, to the specialized organization of politics around that topic. For instance, when the House created a committee on Revolutionary Pensions in 1831 (half a century after the end of the Revolutionary War), it created expectations among a certain class of citizens that their requests for pensions for their military service in the Revolutionary War would be sympathetically considered. It also created expectations among a small set of House members that they could reap political benefits by responding to these requests through serving on the committee. And it created expectations among lawyers working on behalf of claimants that they could rely on a one-stop forum for their clients. Even as the number of Revolutionary War veterans (and their dependents) dwindled to trace element levels, the committee stayed in business. It was finally abolished in 1881, a century after the Battle of Yorktown.

The most significant reorganization of the congressional committee system occurred in 1946, taking effect with the 80th Congress in 1947. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 mandated the reduction in the number of committees in both chambers—from 33 to 15 in the Senate and 48 to 19 in the House—codified committee jurisdictions, and expanded the congressional support staff system, including that in the committees. Most of the abolished committees found their jurisdictions transferred wholesale to a new standing committee, where the former committee reemerged as a new subcommittee. Thus, one second-order consequence
of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 was the heightened importance of subcommittees within the overall committee system.

Since 1946, both chambers have periodically changed the committee system on the margin. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 made some formal changes to the overall committee system, including requiring House committees to have formal rules and opening up committee proceedings to the public. The “subcommittee bill of rights,” which will be discussed below, expanded even further the importance of subcommittees in the House in the early 1970s. Most recently the takeover of the House by the Republican party in the election of 1994, for the first time in almost half a century, led to the abolition of three standing committees, a reduction in committee membership and staff, a change in committee procedures, and tactical warfare with the Senate over the continued existence of joint committees.

Committee reforms in the 104th Congress

The committee system in Congress is fairly stable for long periods of time, owing to a variety of reasons. Among these are the fact that the political goals of the great bulk of members do not change all that rapidly, the committee system is adaptable enough for members to satisfy most of those goals without altering the system, and the system itself creates political resources that members are willing to defend.

It is this last factor that is most often overlooked by observers of Congress. Serving on committees is valuable to all members of Congress, for both policy and political reasons. The policy advantages are obvious. Committee service focuses the attention of members of Congress on a narrow range of topics, not only allowing them to acquire expertise, but also identifying a few domains in which each member can exert effort and plausibly claim to have made a difference
in policymaking. Less obvious are the political benefits, but they are substantial, too. Two types of political benefits draw out attention, external and internal. As I discussed in Chapter 6, committee service opens up avenues for soliciting campaign assistance from donors, particularly political action committees. In total, some committees are just better positions from which to raise funds (like Commerce) than others (like District of Columbia). Still, even serving on a low-ranking committee helps to align committee members with political action committees associated with issues in the committee’s domain. Serving on the House Science Committee facilitates contribution links with telecommunications firms and companies with large research and development components. Service on the Agriculture Committee facilitates contacts with farm organizations and agribusiness concerns. Etc.

Internally, the simple process of continued service on a committee allows committee members to accrue political benefits over time. The longer a member serves on a committee, the more favors he has been able to do for his colleagues who do not serve on the committee, but who care about the committee’s output nonetheless. Favors are an important currency in any legislature, and they be swapped across time. Continued service on a single committee makes it easier for rank-and-file committee members to acquire a valuable legislative resource. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that with a functioning seniority system, the longest-serving members of committees also ascend into positions of leadership, and from these positions of leadership they are able to acquire even greater policy influence and more political resources.

Hence, even though committee reform is a topic that is always on the lips of someone, it is rarely on the top of the agenda of a lot of members. A few times in congressional history—in the 1880s, the 1920s, the 1940s, and the 1970s—political events have conspired to overcome the
various sources of institutional inertia and prompt major reforms of the committee system. The period after the 1994 congressional election was another such period, and here I will discuss the source of those reforms and their consequences.

The Democratic party had controlled the House of Representatives, nonstop, from 1955 to 1995. In 1994, Republican candidates for the House (incumbents and challengers) ran on a platform called the “Contract with America.” Most of the planks in the contract pertained to policy differences between Democrats and Republicans, such as crime, welfare, and “personal responsibility.” But, some of the planks also addressed the organization of the House itself. The Contract promised that the Republicans would pass the following congressional reforms of on the first day of Congress:

- Require all laws that apply to the rest of the country also apply equally to the Congress;
- Select a major, independent auditing firm to conduct a comprehensive audit of Congress for waste, fraud or abuse;
- Cut the number of House committees, and cut committee staff by one-third;
- Limit the terms of all committee chairs;
- Ban the casting of proxy votes in committee;
- Require committee meetings to be open to the public;
- Require a three-fifths majority vote to pass a tax increase;
- Guarantee an honest accounting of our Federal Budget by implementing zero base-line budgeting.
Of these practices, closed meetings were a bit of a red herring, since the House had operated under “sunshine” provisions for committee meetings for twenty years. The reforms that were actually passed by the Republicans when they took control of the House corresponded very closely to the promises made in the Contract. Those reforms are summarized in Table VIII-5.

Three of these changes were particularly important: The reduction in the number of staff, the reduction in the number of committees, and the imposition of term limits for chairs. The reduction in the size of staff and the number of committees was justified as a way to reduce a bloated congressional bureaucracy and end pandering to special interests. The committees that were eliminated—District of Columbia, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, and Post Office and Civil Service—all had strong supporters among Democrats. Imposing term limits on committee chairs was justified two ways. First, it was consistent with the more general Republican promise to return Congress to control by “citizen legislators,” not “career politicians.” Second, it was consistent with a desire among the most dedicated congressional conservatives to rein-in the independence of the committees, so that they might do the bidding of the Republican caucus more expeditiously.

Indeed, one short-term consequence of these committee changes was to shift power from the committees to the Republican leadership. The reduction in staff and in the number of committees allowed the leadership to redistribute resources (committee assignments and staff resources) in ways consistent with the party’s legislative agenda. The imposition of term limits

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for committee chairmen also helped centralize power in the parties. Most obviously, the term limits reduced the flexibility of the chairmen and gave the party leadership new opportunities to change leadership if they so desired. Less obviously, this provided an avenue for party leaders to impose new political burdens on rank-and-file committee members who aspired to future chairmanships. This effect showed up in later elections, when the Republican leadership began demanding that all committee chairmen, and candidates for chair, transfer campaign funds to party coffers and to vulnerable Republicans running for Congress.

It is still not clear whether these changes represent an equilibrium in Congress. On the one hand, as mentioned in Chapter 7, the parties are becoming more cohesive, and thus members are more willing to abide reforms that shift power from the decentralized committee system to the more centralized leadership structure. On the other hand, the political and policy advantages to committee service have only been diminished, they haven’t disappeared. The Republican rank-and-file have resisted leadership efforts to minimize committee autonomy, and many of the actions of Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), who replaced Newt Gingrich in 1999, have been to shift power back to the committees. Before he decided to run for Speaker himself in 1998 (after Gingrich had announced his retirement), rumors were floating around that Bob Livingston (R-La.), who was chairman of the Appropriations Committee and about to be term-limited out of his job, would challenge the term limits in caucus.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\)After Gingrich announced his retirement, the Republican Caucus voted in December 1998 to nominate Livingston as their candidate for Speaker when the 106th Congress, convened in 1999. At the end of 1998, in the midst of the House impeachment proceedings against President Clinton, it became known that Livingston had engaged in extramarital affairs.
Should the reforms of the 104th Congress stay in place—especially those that reduce the power and effectiveness of committees—we should be attentive to how this might shift power and politics within the House. First, it is widely agreed that House members enjoy a certain policy advantage over the Senate due to its more capable committee system. The Contract committee reforms might establish greater parity between the House and the Senate, shifting power away from the House, with both policy and political consequences. Second, it is also widely agreed that the committee system has been a major component of the career system of members of Congress. A diminished committee system may reduce the attractiveness of congressional service as a career, leading to more rapid membership turnover through retirement, but also perhaps changing the quality of politicians who seek entry into the House in the first place.

Membership

Membership on committees is formally at the discretion of the chambers that establish and maintain the committees. In practice, the actual locus of power in determining who will serve on what committees has shifted about in both chambers over time.

Originally, both the House and Senate appointed their committees by ballot. Constantly balloting for committees proved such a burden that the House changed its rules in the first Congress, allowing the Speaker to make committee appointments. This rule stayed in effect until 1910 when, as a part of the revolt against Speaker Cannon, the House formally took back authority to make committee assignments. In practice what this means is that the two House

Livingston, in turn, resigned from the House, opening up the door for the nomination of a new Speaker candidate, who was Dennis Hastert.
parties took it upon themselves to appoint their share of committee seats. Both parties established committees on committees that were responsible for making party committee assignments. The Republican party established a separate committee within its House organization to make its assignments. Originally, power in this committee was distributed in such a way that states with a large number of Republicans were allocated the best assignments. Over the past two decades the Republican party has dropped this practice, opting for a more egalitarian committee on committees. The Democrats, on the other hand, originally gave the authority to make committee assignments to the Democratic members of the Ways and Means Committee. (Democratic members of Ways and Means, in turn, were appointed via a ballot of the Democrat caucus.) Liberal reformers in the 1950s and 1960s charged that the Ways and Means Committee was too conservative in making Democratic assignments. Thus, in the 1970s the Democrats, too, adopted a separate committee on committees that was more representative of its party rank-and-file.

The Senate continued to appoint its committees by ballot into the 1840s. In December 1845 the party caucuses developed committee lists and the Senate adopted those lists, pre-arranged by party. Thus began the dominance of party organizations in the making of Senate committee assignments—a dominance that continues to this day.

When I state that party organizations are practically responsible for making committee assignments, I implicitly raise a question that preceded the making of assignments—who determines how many members of each party will serve on each committee? As parties have developed to take on greater responsibility for organizing Congress, the majority parties have, at a minimum, been able to allocate a majority of committee assignments to their members. Ever since
the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, the parties have been able to go one better, by allocating a disproportionate share of seat on the most powerful committees, such as Ways and Means and Finance.

Fig. VIII-2

This is illustrated in Figure VIII-2, which graphs the percentage of seats held by the majority party during the twentieth century on the two tax-writing committees, House Ways and Means and Senate Finance. Note that from the 80th Congress to the present, the majority party has almost always had considerably more seats on the House Ways and Means Committee than in the full House. This disproportionality has grown particularly large in the past two decades. In the Senate this disproportionality has not been so great, and has actually disappeared in recent years.

Ultimately, setting the party ratios is a job for the majority party since it, by definition, has the votes to impose its will. The minority is left with only two lines of recourse, public complaint and delay. In the House, the minority party has periodically engaged in delaying tactics to protest their treatment by the majority in the distribution of committee assignments. Because the avenues for delay are even greater in the Senate than in the House, the majority party has tended to treat the minority more “fairly,” even when it has allocated for itself a disproportionate share of the good committee assignments.

In Chapter 7 I discussed the effects of this partisan committee stacking in terms of the spatial model. In those committees that are responsible for issues that most clearly divide the parties, partisan committee-stacking has the effect of deflecting the location of the committees’ median members away from the chamber median, toward that of the majority party median.
The appointment of members and chairs

Although majorities of the two chambers formally control who serves on the committees, committee memberships are controlled, in practice, by the parties and leadership committees within each that actually make the assignments. In Chapter 7 I noted the identity of each party’s “committee on committees.” (See Table VII-7.)

While the committees on committees have significant latitude in moving members among committees, a few practices, both formal and informal, constrain how this is done. First, with only a few exceptions, once a member is on a committee, she can veto efforts to move her off of the committee. Thus, transfers between committees among veteran members of Congress are usually worked out between the rank-and-file and the leadership. The vesting of a property right in committee assignments arose in the early twentieth century, due to the demand among rank-and-file members for a more predictable career path within Congress. Keep in mind that this was a time when legislative careers were lengthening rapidly, leading rank-and-file members of Congress to use their congressional service to further their political goals.

Violations of committee assignment property rights are rare enough that they usually elicit considerable note in the press when they do occur. The best know case of a member being removed from a committee against his will occurred at the beginning of 1983, when Phil Gramm (Tex.) was removed as a Democratic member of the House Budget Committee, due to his collaboration with Republicans in 1981 and 1982 to promote Pres. Ronald Reagan’s economic plans. Even though Gramm’s actions were particularly egregious—he served as a spy for the Reagan administration during budget negotiations in 1981—it still took the Democratic caucus over a year of discussion and debate before it decided to remove Gramm from the committee. In
response to deposed from Budget, Gramm resigned from the House, changed parties, ran as a Republican to fill his own vacancy in the House, won, and then returned to the House to take his seat again on the Budget Committee, this time as a member of the GOP.

The property right system in committee assignments is an informal practice that restricts how party committees can make committee assignments. The formal rules of the chambers and parties also limit how assignments are made. On the House side, both parties have divided the committees into categories—exclusive versus non-exclusive or major versus minor—and then require members to spread their memberships around these committees. Exclusive committees have tended to be Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means (and Commerce, in the case of Republicans). Membership on any of exclusive committees precludes membership on any others. Those not blessed with a membership on an exclusive committees are generally limited to service on two committees, with the parties sometimes differing with respect to what combinations of committee assignments are allowed. These rules generally allow members to serve on one attractive non-exclusive committee and then require them to serve on an unattractive non-exclusive committee.

On the Senate side restrictions on committee membership are found primarily in the Senate Manual (rules). Senators are generally limited to membership on two major committees and one minor committee, but the rules are crammed full of exceptions. Augmenting these formal restrictions, both parties have honored the Johnson rule since at least the early 1950s in the assignment of senators to committees. The Johnson rule, named after Lyndon Johnson, who was Senate majority leader when the rule was last instituted, restricts a senator from serving on a second “good” committee (like Appropriations) until all senators from his or her party party have
at least one good committee assignment. This rule was instituted primarily to keep veteran
senators from hogging all the good committee assignments, and it allows the freshmen to
participate more fully in the legislative process.

Choice of chairs

Just as committee assignments themselves are formally under the control of chamber majorities,
the chairmen of the committees are formally appointed by majority vote in each chamber. But as
with committee assignments more generally, the actual designation of committee chairs is
determined outside the rules.

The most important statement about committee chairs is that the chair is usually allocated
through the operation of the seniority rule. Broadly stated, the seniority rule grants the
chairmanship of a committee to the member of the majority party who has served on the
committee the longest. The seniority rule came into full flower in the 1910s, as authority over
committee appointments slipped out of the hands of party leaders, especially in the House. Since
then, violations of the seniority rule have been rare.13

The operation of the seniority rule has come under fire within both political parties,
especially in the House, over the past fifty years. First, Democratic liberals complained in the
1950s that the operation of the seniority rule tended to favor southern Democrats, who were on
average more conservative than the mainstream of the Democratic party. After battling the

13On violations of seniority over the past century see Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist
seniority rule for two decades, reformers managed in 1974 to change House Democratic caucus rules to allow the Democratic caucus to confirm committee chairs via a secret ballot.\textsuperscript{14}

Only seven House Democrats have been deposed from their committee chairs in the past quarter century. The first three were deposed in 1975 due to ineffectiveness and incapacity. Les Aspin (Wisc.) led a successful revolt against Melvin Price (Ill.) in 1985, arguing that the 80-year-old Price was too infirm to discharge his duties effectively. Aspin himself was briefly deposed two years later, among dissatisfaction among liberals that he had forgotten those who had gotten him elected in the first place. After being deposed, Aspin was sufficiently chagrined and compliant that he was reelected to his post on the next ballot, having given assurances that he would be more responsive to liberals in the future. Finally, Democrats deposed two chairmen in 1990 for being weak and ineffectual.

The Republican party has gone the Democrats one better in their overhaul of the seniority system. In the 1970s, while the Democrats were changing how committee chairs were selected, the House Republicans adopted a rule that allowed for the caucus ratification of ranking minority members or chairmen. In the election of 1994, the \textit{Contract with America}, which formed the basis of the platform on which the Republicans ran in their effort to retake a majority of the House, promised that the Republicans would institute term limits on committee chairs should they gain control of the House. They kept to their promise, changing the House Rules by setting six-year term limits for committee and subcommittee chairs.

\textsuperscript{14}Chairmen of Appropriations Committee subcommittees are also subject to election by the caucus.
As of this writing the term limits have not fully kicked in, since they will only become effective for those who have served three terms as a committee chair before the 107th Congress (2001–2002). Storm clouds have begun to brew in response to the limits. As rank-and-file Republicans began circling committee leadership positions like vultures in the 106th Congress, Speaker Dennis Hastert ruled that the term limit only applied to particular positions. That is, if a Republican had to relinquish the chairmanship of Committee A due to the three-term rule, he could still become the chair of Committee B. Young conservatives in the party were angered by this ruling, saying it violated the spirit of the term limit rule. (A skeptic could counter that the young turks were angry because Hastert’s ruling made it difficult for rank-and-file Republicans to rise quickly through the committee system.) In addition, Republican leaders let it be known that they would take into account campaign fundraising prowess when choosing the new committee chairs. This set off a scramble among potential chairmen to raise money on behalf of party candidates, while at the same time producing complaints among marginal Republicans that the leadership was now expecting them to abandon fund-raising for their own races in favor of raising funds for other Republicans.

Whatever the effects of committee chair term limits will be, the initial reaction to them among Republicans suggests that this seemingly minor rules change will have far-reaching repercussions beyond the committee system itself, influencing decisions about whether to retire from the House or run again, changing the relative strength of the party leadership, and altering the role of committee chairmen from being leaders of committees to being instruments of the party.
Senators have put less effort into regulating the election of committee chairs, in part because almost half of majority party senators get to chair a committee. Indeed, committee chairmanships are so easily acquired in the Senate that it is common for a freshman to chair a Senate committee whose House counterpart had to wait decades before he could ascend to the top. Perhaps more important in the Senate is the operation of the rule that restricts senators to chairing only one committee at a time and the further practice within both parties that allow senators not only to claim the chair of a committee by virtue of seniority, but also to depose a sitting chair based on claims of seniority.

The case of Jesse Helms and the Agriculture Committee in 1985 illustrates this point nicely. Helms (R-N.C.) was in a tough reelection fight against former-governor James B. Hunt in 1984. Agriculture is an important industry in North Carolina and, in particular, tobacco is a major crop. Helms was the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and, quite naturally, was regarded as the most powerful friend of tobacco in Congress. However, Helms was also a senior (long-serving) member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and could, under the right circumstances, relinquish the chairmanship of Agriculture and claim the chair of Foreign Relations.

Toward the end of 1984 Helms was actively considering moving over to chair Foreign Relations. The Hunt campaign caught wind of this possibility, making it a campaign issue. Hunt argued that if Helms relinquished the chair of Agriculture in favoring of becoming the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, North Carolina’s agricultural interests would be severely harmed. The very fact that Helms would even consider moving over to Foreign Relations was evidence that Helms was an unreliable friend of North Carolina’s farmers. In response, Helms
made a promise to the voters of North Carolina that he would remain chairman of Agriculture should he be reelected. He was reelected narrowly and kept his promise.¹⁵

Table VIII-6 summarizes the details of this particular case. In each of the four panels, the Republicans on the two committees in question are listed in order of their committee seniority. At the beginning of the 99th Congress (1985), the most senior Republican on Agriculture was Bob Dole (Kans.). But Dole was the chairman of the more powerful Finance Committee, which allowed Helms to claim the chairmanship of Agriculture (as he had in the 98th Congress). Helms was the most senior member of Foreign Relations, but he was chairing Agriculture already. The next most-senior Republican was Lugar, who would have chaired Foreign Relations if Helms stayed as the chair of Agriculture.

In addition to being next in line to chair Agriculture, Lugar was also running to replace Howard Baker (Tenn.) as the Majority Leader—as was Bob Dole. If Lugar had been elected

¹⁵When the Republicans lost control of the Senate following the 1986 election, Helms decided to claim the top Republican position on Foreign Relations, dropping the ranking minority position on Agriculture. Helms claimed that he did not betray his promise to the voters of North Carolina, since he was not relinquishing the chairmanship of Agriculture. Helms’s move did not go without a challenge, but he did win the battle in the Republican caucus to move from the top Republican position on Agriculture to Foreign Relations. In doing so, he won the support of a small band of liberal Republican senators who felt it more important to support the seniority principle in choosing committee leaders than in subjecting committee leaders to ideological tests—tests they knew they would lose if ideology were the criterion that determined who would sit at the top of the Republican committee lists.
majority leader and if Helms had remained at the top of Agriculture, Charles Mathias (Md.) would have been next in line to chair Foreign Relations. Mathias was even worse than Lugar, in Helms’s eyes, being even more liberal than Lugar. Thus, Helms might have claimed the chairmanship of Foreign Relations, in order to block Mathias from the position (Scenario Ia). This move was, of course, precluded by Helms’s promise to the voters of North Carolina. However, had he broken the promise, then the fourth-ranking Republican on Agriculture, Thad Cochran (Miss.) probably would have chaired it, since the first three senators already enjoyed leadership positions that were more valuable. In fact, Dole beat Lugar for the Majority Leader position, which led to the situation summarized in Scenario II. Helms kept his promise to his voters, allowing Lugar to chair Foreign Relations.

Jockeying for committee chairmanships in the Senate is usually not as complicated as this, but this example does illustrate how the small size of the chamber interacts with the seniority system to produce a moderately complicated senatorial dance whenever committee leadership positions are shuffled. For the student looking at this as an indicator of how power is distributed in the Senate and how policymaking proceeds, the lesson should be obvious: On the whole, committee power in the Senate is distributed according to longevity of service and only indirectly according to the policy preferences or political abilities of majority party senators.

Moving to and fro—evidence of committee value

The committee system is more than a mechanism for helping MCs deal with the crush of legislative business. Committee service also focuses the legislative attention of MCs. In some cases this focus corresponds with the policy interests of legislators. At other times this focus
primarily serves their *electoral interests*. For whatever reason, MCs care deeply about the committee assignments they receive and jockey mightily to receive better ones.

Members of Congress have long cared about how committee assignments are made. Nowadays, in both parties and in both chambers, committee assignments are made by party committees. These assignments are made for a variety of reasons, but two factors stand out. First, the party committees weigh the electoral vulnerability of their members in making assignments. This has two major implications. First, the most electorally marginal members of the two chambers are unlikely to be assigned to committees that handle matters that are central to the parties or in which they are expected to resist lobbying pressures. In this way, the parties protect their most vulnerable members from political embarrassment. Second, the party committees also try to match their members to the interest of their constituents in making committee assignments. A member with a large army base in his district, for instance, will have a better chance of getting on the Armed Services Committee than a member without a large military presence.

The second major factor in making committee assignments is party regularity. At the most extreme, the parties can threaten their most heterodox members with the loss of committee assignments if they don’t shape up. We have already seen an example of this, concerning Phil Gramm in the early 1980s. Rewarding party regularity and punishing irregularity is rarely as dramatic as this, but it still plays an important role in determining who gets on the most important and powerful committees, such as Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules.

When an MC serves on a committee, he is able to focus his attention on a fairly narrow set of legislative matters and, as a consequence, become a legislative expert on those matters. Not
only does he become a legislative expert, but he also becomes an expert in navigating that policy
domain to the benefit of his constituents. For that reason, MCs have come to jealously guard
their committee assignments—the assignments themselves are valuable, and they grow in value
over time. Thus, over the past century a type of property right in committee assignments has
emerged in both chambers—members are allowed to hold onto their committee seats from one
Congress to the next, and may not be removed *unless* the party ratios change so dramatically
between Congresses that junior members of the minority party find their seat abolished altogether.

At the same time, someone who has learned the ropes on Committee A may still believe
that service on Committee B is more valuable. For instance, all but the most senior members of
the House Interior Committee would fall over themselves at the prospect of becoming the most
junior member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Tab. VIII-7 The fact that MCs usually find value in the committees they serve on, that they often (but not
always) would like to serve on even more powerful or valuable committees, and that they can
veto transfers between committees has an interesting empirical implication for studying Congress.
If these conditions hold, then the net traffic of MCs through the committee system tells us
something about the relative value of the different committees in Congress. A number of scholars
have developed techniques to use transfer patterns between committees to ascertain the relative
attractiveness of committees at any point in time. These techniques range from simple ratio
The simple ratio method is this: Count up the number of members who transfer onto a committee between Congresses and the number of members who transfer off. The ratio of transfers on to transfers off is a good simple measure of that committee’s attractiveness relative to other committees. See Groseclose and Stewart (1997) for a discussion of several different measures, including the econometric method that produced Table VIII-7.

Note a few things about these rankings. First, even though members of the Senate and House are drawn from different electoral environments, the rankings of the two sets of the committees are largely consistent. The committees that handle the purse strings are the most attractive in both chambers. The Rules Committee fills a special role in the House, which explains its third ranking there, but note that even without a special institutional position in the Senate, the Committee on Rules and Administration is also especially attractive. The Senate’s special constitutional authority in foreign policy and in approving judicial nominations explains why the Senate Judiciary and Foreign Relations committees are (slightly) more attractive than their House counterparts. Ranked at the bottom of both lists are mostly constituency-oriented committees like Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, and Post Office and Civil Service.

In general, then, both senators and representatives have similar career patterns through the two respective committee systems. They start out with committees that are suited to their particular policy, constituency, and electoral interests. Over time these interests tend to broaden, measures to more complex econometric methods. The results from a more sophisticated econometric method are reported in Table VIII-7.

\[\text{measure} = \frac{\text{members transferring on}}{\text{members transferring off}}\]

\[\text{measure} \geq 1\]

16 The simple ratio method is this: Count up the number of members who transfer onto a committee between Congresses and the number of members who transfer off. The ratio of transfers on to transfers off is a good simple measure of that committee’s attractiveness relative to other committees. See Groseclose and Stewart (1997) for a discussion of several different measures, including the econometric method that produced Table VIII-7.

17 Senate Rules and Administration has jurisdiction over campaign finance reform, which is of special interest to both parties, and over budgetary allocations to the other Senate committees.
leading to a migration up the committee system to places where broader interests can be accommodated.

*Subcommittees*

Up to this point, I have been focusing on the committee system at its most basic unit of analysis—the committee itself. Committees, however, have evolved a further division of labor that has become politically significant in recent years—subcommittees. It is tempting to consider subcommittees as yet a type of fractal expression of the committee system. That is, subcommittees are, in a sense, just a replication of the committee system, one level lower. They grew up within the committees out of the same impulse that gave rise to the committees themselves, out of a desire to take advantage of the division of labor.

There is no comprehensive history or accounting of the rise of subcommittees in either chamber of Congress, and thus any general statement about their early history is largely speculative. Within the original records of the committees themselves, there are occasional references to permanent subcommittees as far back as the 1870s. Even before then, the committees that considered a large number of constituent claims—such as the House Committee on Claims or the committee on Invalid Pensions—essentially did their work via one-man subcommittees, who were assigned the task of investigating claims and then shepherding the bill that disposed of the matter through the committee and the full chamber.

Subcommittees first became major features of the House committee system in the mid-1880s, when the major committees (i.e., Agriculture, Military Affairs, Naval Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Indian Affairs, and Commerce) acquired the right to report appropriations bills within
their jurisdictions, thus upstaging the House Appropriations Committees. These committees each established subcommittees (usually chaired by the parent committee’s chairman) that considered the appropriations bill and acted, for all intents and purposes, like a mini-appropriations committee. (The Senate followed suit in the 1890s, with the same effects on subcommittees.)

When the two chambers re-established their Appropriations Committees in 1919, they both coincidently expanded their Appropriations Committees and began the practice of granting great autonomy to the Appropriation subcommittees.

Subcommittees became a practical reality throughout the entire congressional committee system following the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, which consolidated the standing committee system. In many cases, where a committee was combined with another, a subcommittee arose in the new committee with the same jurisdiction as the old committee.

Throughout all this early development of subcommittees in Congress, one basic rule governed their development: the subcommittees were creatures of the committees, just as the committees were the creatures of the parent chambers. Thus, the rules of the two chambers did not even mention subcommittees, and the practical use of subcommittees varied committee-by-committee. Most subcommittees were created and operated at the sufferance of the committee chairman, who determined the jurisdiction, composition, and workload of all the committees. Some committees had subcommittees with set jurisdictions. Others had subcommittees that were assigned numbers, but no jurisdictions.

The consolidation of the committee system in 1946, combined with the expansion of the role of the federal government at that time, led to a more expanded role for subcommittees within the legislative life of Congress, especially the House. This led to increasing tensions between
House leaders and the rank-and-file in the 1950s and 1960s. Part of the tension was ideological: Congress in these years was controlled by the Democratic party and the Democratic party, in turn, was wracked by divisions between its southern and northern wings. Southerners disproportionately chaired committees and northerners disproportionately filled out the Democratic back benches. In a few notable cases, conservative southern committee chairs used the subcommittee system to their political advantage—mostly hampering the legislative agenda on civil rights and social welfare legislation.

But the tension wasn’t entirely ideological. As power flowed from the committees to the subcommittees, all members of Congress desired to have a hand in the exercise of power—for both policy and electoral reasons. That the organization and operation of the subcommittees was beyond the short-term control of the rank-and-file was inconsistent with the majoritarian impulses of the institution.

Therefore, in the 1970s, both chambers of Congress adopted reforms that spread the control over the subcommittees more evenly among the rank-and-file. The House Democrats adopted a series of reforms in the early 1970s which, taken together, have been referred to as the *subcommittee bill of rights*. Some of these reforms included restricting the number of subcommittees a Democrat could chair, guaranteeing subcommittees control of their own staff, allowing the Democratic caucus of each committee to select subcommittee chairs, requiring bills to be referred to subcommittees based on set, written rules, and requiring almost all committees to have subcommittees.

The subcommittee bill of rights ushered in an era that congressional observers termed a period of *subcommittee government*. This term is more accurately applied to House politics.
from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s than to the Senate. During this period of subcommittee
government, formal and informal power was pushed to the subcommittee level. Because
subcommittee jurisdictions are very narrowly drawn, it is easy for interest groups and government
agencies to develop cozy relationships with subcommittees. (See Table VIII-8 for a list of
subcommittees in the 106th Congress.) Thus, it was eventually charged that subcommittee
government facilitated special interest legislation and made it more difficult for rank-and-file
members of Congress to influence the details of legislation. Republicans went one step further
and charged that this cozy relationship between interest groups and subcommittees encouraged
government bloat. Finally, the proliferation of subcommittees led to the proliferation of
subcommittee *meetings*, which further created a sense that legislative life was out of control.

In the mid-1990s, with the ascendance of the Republican party in the House, this era of
subcommittee government ended—or at least changed significantly. Upon taking control the
House following the 1994 elections, the House Republicans undertook a number of changes to
undercut what they had regarded as abuse of the subcommittee system. The number of House
subcommittees was reduced, from a total of 115 to 84. The names and jurisdictions of many
subcommittees was altered, expressly to undercut the power of sub-governments that the
subcommittees may have given rise to. For instance, the subcommittees of the House Agriculture
Committee had traditionally been organized along agricultural commodity lines. In the 100th
Congress (1987–89), the House Agriculture Committee had the following subcommittees:

- Conservation, Credit, and Rural Development
- Cotton, Rice and Sugar
- Department Operations
In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), the subcommittees had been changed to the following:

- Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry
- General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation, and Credit
- Livestock and Horticulture
- Risk Management, Research, and Specialty Crops

**Staff and resources**

Given the time demands on members of Congress, it should not come as a surprise that they delegate most of their committee work to others. Each of the committees has a staff and a budget for its operations. Even the smallest committee, the House Committee on Standard of Official Conduct (Ethics) had a budget of $2.6 million in the 106th Congress and a staff of 11. At the other extreme, the House Appropriations Committee's budget was $21.3 millions, supporting a staff of 156.

Tables VIII-3 and VIII-4 list the budgets and staff sizes of the House and Senate committees. This table contains evidence of an important difference between the two chambers in their use of committees—the Senate relies on committees less than the House, which results in smaller budgets for comparable Senate committees and smaller staffs. Thus, for instance, the
House Appropriations's budget in the 105th Congress was $21.3 million, compared to the Senate committee’s budget of $10 million. Even committees that guard the Senate’s special legislative prerogatives—Judiciary and Foreign Affairs—tend to have smaller staffs and budgets than their House counterparts.

What do the committee staffs do? Always wary that they not overstep the bounds that separate them from their bosses, the committee staffs are responsible for actually carrying out the three major tasks of each committee—organizing hearings, drafting legislation, and keeping in touch with the myriad collection of outsiders (lobbyists, constituents, and executive agencies) that want to influence committee behavior. Some have viewed the central role of committee staffs as usurping congressional power (see Malbin 1980). However, the professional success of committee staff members depends on the continuing political success of their bosses. Therefore it is more accurate to say that committee staff members operate as agents of their political bosses, rather than as loose canons who “usurp” legislative power.

But, having asserted that committee staff are keenly attuned to the desires of the committee members, I have only pushed the question back one step—what do staffs do and whom do they work for? Even if committee staff are faithful servants of their bosses, staff resources aren’t distributed evenly, with predictable consequences for the distribution of power within and between committees.

Control over committee staff has been a contentious issue throughout congressional history. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, individual members did not have personal staffs of their own. The only hope for clerical (and political) assistance at taxpayers’ expense come by virtue chairing a committee—committee chairs were (usually) entitled one clerk. When
Congress changed the law and allowed for individual members to have their own staff support, the dynamics concerning committee staff changed somewhat. Committee staff are no longer solely the political henchmen of the committee chairs. Still, tensions continue to emerge in fights over who controls committee staffs.

These fights have generally divided over three lines of cleavage—(1) between the chairmen and the rest of the committee, (2) between majority and minority party members, and (3) between the full committee and the individual subcommittees. Ever since the 1960s, each of these cleavages has erupted behind the scenes of Congress. Originally, all the committee staffs of both chambers were controlled by the chairmen. Now, there are rules in both chambers that allow the sharing of staff between the chairman of the full committee and the chairs of the subcommittees, and between the majority and the minority. These sharing rules are so fluid that there is no need to talk about the details of them here. Just note that the allocation of committee staff if another thing that has no equilibrium of tastes and therefore members of Congress fight about it—and change it—all the time.

II. House-Senate Comparisons

As the previous discussion indicates, the committee systems in the two chambers have evolved separately, as befits the fact that the two chambers have been delegated slightly different tasks by the Constitution and that members of the two chambers face slightly different sets of political imperatives. On the whole, the House is more reliant on its committees than the Senate. House members devote relatively more of their time to committee business than do senators and the
House as a whole devotes more of its resources to committees than does the Senate. (Conversely, senators are more likely to rely on their personal staffs, making the Senate as a whole more oriented around the personal offices of its members.)

Constitutional differences between the chambers also affect the relative importance of different committees in the two chambers. For instance, the constitutional provision requiring all revenue bills to originate in the House has given the House’s revenue committee, Ways and Means, considerable clout within the chamber. What is more, the preeminence of Ways and Means extends to relations with the comparable committee in the Senate—Finance—such that the Ways and Means Committee is considered the more expert and politically powerful committee of the two.

The converse of the revenue situation is executive business, which has been given to the Senate by the Constitution. Most obviously, the job of ratifying treaties has led the Senate to a preeminent position in foreign policy. By extension, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has always been among the most sought-after committees in the Senate. Compared to its House counterpart, Senate Foreign Relations has long been considered a power center in setting foreign policy. Less obviously, the appointment power that the Senate shares with the president has given Senate committees considerable clout in making policy and Senate committee members important positions in distributing patronage. For instance, before civil service protections were extended to the Post Office, the Senate Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads had an important role in determining who would be the local postmaster in virtually every community in America. Their role was so significant in fact that senators were the real appointees of most postmasters—the presidential nomination was a mere formality. In the twentieth century, with the explosion of the
federal court system, the Senate Judiciary Committee has come to play an important role in appointing, or blocking the appointment, of federal judges.

House committees of note

Within each chamber, some committees are more important than others, as is evident both from their jurisdictions and from the transfer patterns that are summarized in Table VIII-7. I complete my discussion of House-Senate committee differences by highlighting some committees in both chambers of note—either because they find themselves frequently in the new or because they have special influence on the legislative process behind the scenes. Most of these committees deal with the nation’s finances, but a couple deal with the business of the chambers. I begin with the House committees.

Rules Committee. The House Rules Committee was established in 1880 as a standing committee, even though it had existed as a select committee in most Congresses until that time. Before 1880, however, the select Rules Committee that was established at the beginning of most Congresses was charged with reviewing the rules of the House, recommending any changes that might be considered wise. Beginning in the early 1880s, though, the Rules Committee began taking on a different role in the House. Beginning then, the Rules Committee became the originator of resolutions which were technically called special orders, but which are now referred to as rules. In this context, a rule is a resolution which sets the parameters under which a bill is considered on a House floor. Although the full House gets to vote on these rules, the Rules Committee’s role in bringing these resolutions to the floor makes it especially powerful. First, if a rule is not brought
to the floor, it is very unlikely that a bill will even be considered. Second, on important legislation
the rule will often contain language that restricts how amendments may be considered—if they
may be considered at all. Again, while the House can in principle overturn the rule recommended
by the Rules Committee, the complexity of the rule’s language and the importance of the Rules
Committee’s power to the majority party make it unlikely that the Rules Committee’s
recommendation will be overturned.

The Rules Committee has not always been a tool of leadership. In the 1950s and 1960s,
the Rules Committee was a famous conservative bottleneck as the liberal Democratic majority
tried to move social legislation out of committee onto the House floor. Beginning in the early
1960s, the two party caucuses started to control the membership of the Rules Committee more
directly. Now, members of the Rules Committee are appointed directly by the top leaders of both
parties. Because the majority party members of the Rules Committee are appointed by the
Speaker, it has become a *de facto* arm of the majority party leadership—quite a different role for
the committee than earlier in the century.

*Appropriations Committee.* The House Appropriations Committee was created in 1865 to
consider all the annual appropriations bills. Prior to then, the appropriations bills were considered
by the Ways and Means Committee, but the fiscal strains of the Civil War were too much for one
committee to have jurisdiction over taxes, spending, and banking, and so Ways and Means found
its jurisdiction spread among three committees.

The power of the House Appropriations Committee is immense., as a consequence of its
jurisdiction. But not only does the jurisdiction of House Appropriations give it significant clout in
Congress, the practice of allowing the House to consider appropriations bills before the Senate gives this committee a “first mover” advantage that is enjoyed by no other congressional committee. This committee gives the annual bills the closest scrutiny of any congressional entity, which strikes fear in the hearts of agency bureaucrats who must justify their appropriations requests each year before it. House Appropriations also tends to cut the president’s budget requests for most items, which, practically speaking, sets a floor under the amount of money that will eventually be appropriated for federal agencies.

House Appropriations—along with Ways and Means and Rules—has long been considered one of the “exclusive” committees of the House, meaning that members of these committees may serve on one, and only one, committee. In Table VIII-7 we saw that it is the second most-attractive committee in the House, after Ways and Means. The power of the committee extends to its subcommittees, which are organized to correspond with the annual appropriations bills. The chairs of those subcommittees are so powerful that they are often referred to as the “College of Cardinals.” Recognizing their power, the two parties treat the chairs of the Appropriations subcommittees just like they were the chairs of a full committee, in that the chairs of the Appropriations subcommittees must also be formally ratified by the majority party caucus.

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18 A common mistake is to attribute the House’s first move on appropriations to the Constitution. However, it is only tax bills that the House must consider first—it is only by tradition that the House considers appropriations bills first. In some years the Senate has, in fact, passed appropriations bills before the House.
As powerful as Appropriations is, its influence in the House has waxed and waned over the years. Twenty years after it was created, the committee was stripped of its jurisdiction over most appropriations bills, with the bills being given to the legislating committees. (For instance, the Army appropriations bill was taken from Appropriations and given to the Military Affairs Committee.) Appropriations regained its full jurisdiction over all appropriations bills in 1919. However, in the 1930s, with the passage of the Social Security Act, large parts of federal spending began to migrate to committees other than Appropriations. Social Security itself, for instance, is overseen by the Ways and Means Committee. Other entitlement spending is often in the jurisdiction of legislative committees, not appropriations. In 1999, for instance, the federal government spent about $1.4 trillion. The sum total of all money contained in the 13 regular annual appropriations bills was “only” $841 billion.

In 1974, Congress passed the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (CBICA), which complicated the life of the Appropriations Committee significantly. The CBICA, first of all, established a Budget Committee in each chamber, with the responsibility to oversee the broad parameters of taxing and spending each year. Second, the CBICA created a mechanism called a budget resolution, which allowed Congress to establish spending and taxing targets each year. These two mechanisms affect all committees in the House, but the Appropriations Committee is the most affected, since it oversees the largest pots of money. Tensions between members of the Budget and Appropriations Committee have caused them to regularly play a game of “chicken” over levels of federal spending. As Table VIII-9 suggests, House members still would rather be appropriators than budgeteers, but it is also clear that most members of the Appropriations Committee would be happy if the Budget Committee did not exist.
Ways and Means. The House Committee on Ways and Means was the first major standing legislative committee to be created in either chamber. Thus, it is the oldest standing committee still in existence, having been created in 1795. When first created, Ways and Means overall all financial legislation in the House, but its jurisdiction over auditing the executive branch was taken away during the War of 1812 and its jurisdiction over spending and banking was removed at the end of the Civil War. What is left of its jurisdiction is still substantial: all tax legislation, plus important social programs with their own tax mechanisms, like Social Security and Medicare. With the constitutional provision requiring the House to move first on tax legislation, this gives Ways and Means an important position in the most important of legislative activities.

From its creation until the 1970s, Ways and Means was as much an exclusive club as a legislative committee. It was often among the smallest of House committees. It had no subcommittees, making its chair particularly influential. Indeed, for much of its history until the 1920s, the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee was often considered to be the floor leader of the majority party in the House, second only to the Speaker. And, from the 1920s until the 1970s, it also served as the “committee on committees” for the Democrats.

In the 1970s, many of the special prerogatives given Ways and Means were removed. The right to make Democratic committee assignments was given to a separate party committee, Ways and Means was required to create subcommittees, and the size of the committee was expanded significantly. In addition, prior to the 1970s, only “responsible” (i.e., low-taxing, moderately-partisan members capable of compromise) and electorally safe members were appointed to the
committees. In the late 1970s, as the committee’s size was expanded, the two parties also began appointing more ideologically vocal and electorally vulnerable members to the committee.

The changes to Ways and Means in the 1970s did not alter the overall attractiveness and power of the committee, but it did change the tenor of committee deliberations, and ultimately, the nature of tax politics. Particularly in the early 1980s, the tax cuts that were part of the Reagan economic plan were made much easier because committee members were less wedded to a philosophy of protecting the Treasury at all costs, and because many Democratic members of the committee were electorally vulnerable. Since the early 1980s, both parties have acted to appoint new members who are more like the old members of the 1960s and before—electorally safe and “responsible.” Still, Ways and Means is now much less like an exclusive club and more like the other (important) legislative committees in Congress.

_Budget._ The third in the triad of important financial committees in the House is the Budget Committee. As mentioned previously, it was created (along with its Senate counterpart) by the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act. Its primary function is to oversee the budgetary process in the House, particularly the budget resolutions and the _reconciliation process._ Unlike all other House committees, membership on Budget is temporary, with members generally only being allowed to serve six-year terms. It is also unusual in having a membership that is dominated by members appointed from other committees—Ways and Means and Appropriations—plus the leadership. Its responsibility for the entire federal budget makes membership on it attractive. The fact that one can’t make a career on the committee limits its attractiveness, however.
The Budget Committee, as with the entire budgetary process, got off to a rocky start in the mid-1970s. The perils of the Committee, and of the budgetary process generally, would fill up several books and many articles. What is important to note at this point is that the Budget Committee has withstood all the assaults on its jurisdiction fairly well. The details of the budgetary process it oversees shift from year to year, and thus are not particularly important for our purposes. The existence of any process to guide budgeting overall each year is important. To the degree that the Budget Committee is always in the middle of the annual budgetary process, it is an important player in setting fiscal policy.

*Senate committees*

In general, Senate committees demand less time and attention from their member than House committees, and thus Senate committees tend to dominate legislating in that chamber to a smaller degree than the corresponding House committees. Budgets for Senate committees tend to be smaller, as are the staffs. Still, the Senate committees play non-trivial roles in the legislative processes. For their chairmen particularly, the Senate committees give visibility to senators who are active in policy debates. Being smaller and more visible than the House, this is a feature of the Senate committee system that should not be overlooked.

*Senate Rules and Administration.* The Senate Committee on Rules and Administration is the closest Senate analogue to the House Rules Committee, since it has primary jurisdiction over the standing rules of the chamber. Beyond that, however, the analogy is weak, in two ways. First, the Senate committee is weakened by the nature of the Senate’s floor rules, which make it more difficult to cutoff debate and restrict amendments. The House Rules Committee gains its power
largely by overseeing the writing of “rules,” which determine these things for important legislation. As we will see in the next chapter, in the Senate the parameters of bill consideration for important legislation are determined by unanimous consent agreements, which are usually hammered out by party leaders, not by committees. Second, the Senate committee has jurisdiction over campaign finance legislation, which is of considerable interest to all senators. It is this aspect of the committee’s business, not the Senate rules themselves, that draws senators toward this committee.

*Senate Finance.* The Senate Finance Committee is the direct analogue to the House Ways and Means Committee. Historically, it has been more “liberal” than Ways and Means—or at least “liberal” in the classical sense. That is, while Ways and Means has historically been cast in the role of “guardian of the Treasury,” the Senate Finance Committee has historically been cast in the role of loosening up the purse strings a bit. This is no doubt due to the fact that the Senate must move second in writing tax legislation. Groups that win tax breaks in the House, of course, do not complain about it in front of the Senate committee. Furthermore, the revenue that is lost from tax breaks granted by the House is so diffusely spread among the rest of the taxpaying public, that no one usually appears in front of the Senate committee to complain about others’ special treatment.¹⁹ All that is left, therefore, is for the losers in the House to appeal to the Senate. Some of the House losers will become Senate winners, giving the appearance that the Finance Committee is more liberal.

¹⁹This is a long-standing phenomenon, classically examined in the context of tariff legislation by E. E. Schattschneider (1935).
Senate Appropriations. What I just wrote about the differences between Finance and Ways and Means can be applied to the differences between the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. By tradition, the Senate goes second in the appropriations process, leaving winners in the House relatively inactive when bills go to the upper chamber, and concentrating Senate activity on attempts to overcome House cuts.

Senate Budget. The Senate Budget Committee was created by the 1974 Budget Act, like its House counterpart. By-and-large the Senate committee performs the same roles, in much the same way, as the House. Having already discussed the taxing and spending committees of both chambers, it is important to note that the standard pattern of House-Senate differences often break down when we get to the Budget Committees. First, although most budget resolutions and reconciliation agreements formally originate in the House, the Senate Budget Committee usually plays as prominent a role in budgetary politics as its House counterpart. Second, unlike the House rules, the Senate rules do not restrict the number of years a member may serve on its Budget Committee. Therefore, senators on the Budget Committee are in a better position to develop substantive and political expertise on budgetary matters than are members of the House.

Senate Judiciary and Foreign Relations Committees. In discussing notable House committees, I omitted discussing the Judiciary and International Relations (formerly Foreign Affairs) committees. That is because in the House, these legislative committees are not especially distinct from the other mid-range policy committees. In the Senate, however, the Judiciary and Foreign Relations Committees have jurisdiction over major constitutional duties that are unique to that
There is also a tremendous number of military appointments to be confirmed each year—all officers of the armed forces must be confirmed by the Senate. In 1995 this amounted to nearly 40,000 nominations. The bulk of the Armed Services Committee’s time on nominations is not spent with these relatively routine matters, but rather with political appointments, such as NATO commanders and high positions in the Defense Department.

The constitutional duties these committees oversee are, of course, confirming judges and ambassadors and ratifying treaties. The Senate in general has the power to confirm all federal appointments, and thus almost every Senate committee shares in this special constitutional function. However, there is an especially large number of federal judges to be confirmed each year. Therefore, the Judiciary Committee has assumed a more prominent position within the politics of the Senate than its counterpart in the House. This is clearly evidenced in Table VIII-7, in which Senate Judiciary appear near the top of attractive Senate committees, while House Judiciary is barely in the upper half of House committees.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, likewise, has gained in attractiveness and stature by virtue of overseeing a unique power of the Senate. Only service on Appropriations and Finance are more sought-after in the Senate. The attractiveness of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is a bit paradoxical, considering the well-known political heat that its chairmen have received over the years. Within a short period of time, three Senate Foreign Relations chairs were defeated for reelection—J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) in 1974, Frank Church (D-Ida.) in 1980, and Charles Percy (R-Ill.) in 1984. In each case, their opponents succeeded by charging that

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20 There is also a tremendous number of military appointments to be confirmed each year—all officers of the armed forces must be confirmed by the Senate. In 1995 this amounted to nearly 40,000 nominations. The bulk of the Armed Services Committee’s time on nominations is not spent with these relatively routine matters, but rather with political appointments, such as NATO commanders and high positions in the Defense Department.
these senators were more attentive to the matters of foreign countries than to the folks back home. And, recall that in 1984, the prospect that Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) might claim the chairmanship of Foreign Relations became a campaign issue, and he was compelled to promise to remain as chairman of Agriculture. Even with these political perils, senators still gravitate to the committee that oversees foreign policy.

III. Theoretical perspectives on committees

I have now spent considerable space discussing the empirical basics of the committee system in Congress. Although this is the longest chapter in this book, in the previous pages I have only just touched on the important details of the committee system. Because the congressional committee system is so important, the amount of empirical knowledge we have about it has been matched by theoretical work that has attempted to understand it more fundamentally and provide interpretations to explain its significance.

*Traditional perspectives on committees*

The first significant scholarly analysis of congressional committees was made by Woodrow Wilson in the 1880s. In *Congressional Government*, Wilson set about to analyze the actual distribution of power in Congress, rather than a hypothetical distribution, which might be adduced from reading the Constitution. The Constitution, in Wilson’s mind, specified that all member of Congress were equal. And thus a reading of the first article of the Constitution, without a simultaneous glance at the actual Congress, would lead one to believe that all members of Congress—from rookies to crusty veterans—had an equal say in legislating.
Furthermore, Wilson had a normative vision of Congress in his mind to supplement the constitutional ideal, against which he judged Congress. This normative vision held Congress as the nation’s premier deliberative body and one that was responsible for its actions. By responsible Wilson meant that Congress should be a body in which it was easy to assign blame or credit for legislative actions on the legislature. In practice this means that the majority party should clearly articulate its program, use its majority to pass the program, and then face the consequences on election day, depending on whether the program failed or succeeded.

What Wilson actually described was anything but the legislature that he had proposed as ideal. From the constitutional perspective, there was a clear gradient of power in Congress. Senior members dominated the junior members and committee members dominated policy in their domains to the exclusion of non-members. From the perspective of responsibility, Congress was lacking, too. The majority party did not use the committees as instruments to achieve a well-articulated policy goals. Committees contained members from both the majority and minority party and deliberated mostly in secret, obscuring their effects on policy outputs.

Wilson believed that the British Parliament was a legislature that deliberated and legislated in a responsible manner, and found the American Congress wanting by comparison. Wilson noted that the real work of policymaking in Britain was done in the government ministries, which were controlled (nay, entirely dominated) at the top by members of the ruling party. The leaders of these ministries—cabinet members who were drawn from the ranks of the majority party in

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21 I use the term responsible advisedly, because it has taken on a popular meaning over the past century that is slightly different from what Wilson had in mind. However, it is the term Wilson used, and I will use it, too.
Parliament—formed a cohesive cabinet whose actions were clear and who, collectively, offered a single vision of policymaking to the electorate. The closest analogue to the ministries and the cabinet in the American case was the congressional committees, in Wilson’s view. And, in the mind of Wilson, these committees were “disintegrate ministries,” meaning that instead of integrating policy on behalf of the majority party, the American “ministries” yielded policy disintegration and, ultimately, irresponsibility.

The last sentence of the quote by Wilson that led off this chapter is probably the most frequently-cited sentence in all of political science. As political science quotes go, it is a fine rendition of an important empirical truth about the American Congress that has gone unchanged for a century in a half—Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work. When political scientists simply repeat the last sentence of that entire passage, without noting what precedes it, they are missing the larger theoretical context in which Wilson cast his thinking. The first part of the passage places Wilson’s thinking in its larger theoretical context, and bears re-reading again.

It is a great irony in the study of the American Congress that although Wilson identified congressional committees as the centerpiece of power in Congress and therefore, perhaps, of power in the American government, after Wilson wrote very few political scientists followed in his footsteps, analyzing congressional committees any further. This is no doubt because Wilson was a reformer and was appalled at what he saw. The next three or four generations of political scientists were mostly reformers, too, and therefore were also repelled by the centrality of committees in Congress. Consequently, theoretically-oriented study of congressional committees languished until the 1960s, when political scientists who had been trained in the methods and theories of sociology began to analyze them.
To sociologically-oriented students of American politics in the early 1960s, congressional committees were not so much power centers, but rather were politically important laboratories in which to test out a large collection of theories that had grown up to explain group behavior. The basic unit of analysis to the political sociologists who studied Congress was a group—which in this case was the congressional committee. The biggest questions these scholars sought to address were things like, “How do congressional committees integrate new members into the norms of the committee?” or “How do committees protect their power and prestige against attack from outside.” or “How do committees establish leaders so that the group can function optimally?”

Note that in all of these questions, it was taken as given that members of Congress would just naturally function within the group (which happened to be a congressional committee, but it could have been anything, like a bowling league), would hold the survival and success of the group to be an important goal, and would think about their life within Congress first through the perspective of group membership, rather than as individuals. Although much of the sociological approach to Congress at this time was interested in the behavior of individuals within groups, as far as scholarship is concerned, the individual behavior of group (committee) members was a problem to be solved by the group, not the source of the group’s collective behavior.

The best scholarship in this tradition analyzed the politics of the financial committees in Congress—Richard Fenno (1966) analyzed the two Appropriations Committees and John Manley (1970) analyzed the House Ways and Means Committee. I discuss Fenno’s research briefly here, to give you a flavor of how the best of this work was conducted.
Fenno began by analyzing the **role** of the House Appropriations Committee in the appropriations process. The role, Fenno discovered, was that of **guardian of the purse**. In that role, the committee subjected agency appropriations to great scrutiny, whacking them back mercilessly. New members were appointed to the committee every two years, and part of Fenno’s analysis was a description of how members of the committee **integrated** new members into the committee’s role. Another problem that Fenno analyzed was how the committee achieved its goal of serving as the guardian of the purse in a difficult environment—after all, cuts the committee made were subject to being overturned by amendment on the floor. And, keep in mind that the programs that were cut by the Appropriations Committee had already been approved by majorities in both chambers. In this parliamentary environment, how did the committee protect its power? It did so, Fenno discovered, by couching appropriations deliberations in nonpartisan business terms, and by avoiding discussing policy. By doing so, its members allowed the committee to achieve its goal of maintaining its power in the chamber.

Fenno did not lose sight of the fact that the House Appropriations Committee was a policy Goliath. However, in this work, what was important was not so much the substance of the Appropriations Committee’s deliberations, but how the committee maintained itself internally and maintained relations with the full chamber, in an environment in which its role was to cut appropriations requests.

*Modern theoretical perspectives on congressional committees*

The sociological approach to studying congressional committees provided students of Congress, in- and outside of colleges and universities, a tremendous number of empirical insights into the
functioning of these committees, all organized into intuitively-understood packages. Sociological theories of committees began to fall out of favor in the early 1970s, however, due to two critical shortcomings of these theories. First, they glossed over the tension between individual and collective goals of legislators, and tended to assume that group goals would be achieved because they “had to” be achieved. Second, they tended to highly personalize accounts of committee politics. There is no doubt true that politics—even (especially!!) in congressional committees—is highly personal. But, by focusing on the subtle nuances of group behavior, there was a tendency to overlook the impersonal strategic grasping for power and advantage which seems to be fundamental to politics in a legislature.

In the early 1970s, scholars took a turn toward economics in the study of Congress, and that turn had its greatest effects in the study of committees. Ironically enough, the turn was facilitated by an important book written by the greatest exponent of the sociological approach, Richard Fenno, as he analyzed a series of committees through the perspective of the individual goals of committee members, not through the perspective of the goals of the group. This book, Congressmen in Committees, allowed students of Congress to turn a corner in understanding how committees operated. Read alongside a contemporaneous essay on congressional politics more broadly considered by David Mayhew (1974), it was difficult to go back in our theoretical understanding of how committees operate.

The turning point came in the publication of Fenno’s 1974 book. Fenno posited that members of Congress pursued three goals—power, policy, and reelection—and that the behavior of the committees was best understood in light of those goals. First, committees differed in how they could help members pursue those goals, and there was a sorting of members to committees
based on this. For instance, the Interior Committee spent a lot of its time worrying about the allocation of public works projects, which made it perfect for House members who needed to shore up support with their constituents. The House Education and Labor Committee, on the other hand, was a hotbed of ideological contention, and was therefore the right place to be if one was interested in hashing out the details of social policy, but not such a great place to be if one was interested in providing public works projects to the folks back home.

Within this analysis, the motive force behind committee politics was the goals their members brought to the committees, but goals were only the starting point. Constraining the pursuit of these goals was an environment that might include the full chamber, the administration, or interest groups. The interaction of member goals with these environmental constraints produced a distinctive brand of decision rules for each of the committees, and thus a distinctive brand of policy outcomes.

David Mayhew’s approach to Congress was broader than Fenno’s, since he was interested in explaining behavior throughout the institution, not just in the committees. Still, Mayhew’s analysis of Congress has its greatest organizational implications for the operation of the committee system. Mayhew is known for studying Congress through the lens of election—he started by assuming that members of Congress were “single-minded seekers of reelection,” and went from there. Mayhew further argued that in pursuit of reelection, MCs engaged in three activities—position-taking, credit-claiming, and advertising. Position-taking is making public statements that are intended to locate the representative on the proper side of an issue. Credit-claiming occurs when representatives bring some particular benefit back to the constituency (like a public works project) and then associate their name with the particular project. Advertising is
the dissemination of one’s name around a district with the intention of leaving a favorable impression while avoiding issue content.

On the whole, committees are structured and do their work so as to enhance the ability of its members to engage in these activities, especially position-taking and credit claiming. Some committees make especially good platforms from which to expound on the issues of the day—select committees are especially good in this regard. Other committees are oriented toward the processing of constituency requests, and these therefore help fulfill credit-claiming goals.

The troubling part of Mayhew’s analysis is that it paints a portrait of an institution whose members care only about their own political fortunes and nothing about the collective well-being of the country—not to mention the well-being of Congress as an institution. All members of Congress desire that certain collective goals be achieved which might be overlooked if committees are organized simply around the narrow goals of members. Therefore, both chambers of Congress (especially the House) create control committees, such as Ways and Means, Appropriation, Budget, and Rules—to deal with the negative consequences of uncoordinated congressional behavior. To get members of these committees to do the job of providing the public goods required of them, the chambers pay those members in terms of power and prestige.

The glimpses at committee behavior provided by Fenno and Mayhew are very general and imprecise. They were written at a time when virtually all of political science was indistinguishable from history. In the intervening two decades, the theoretical and analytical tools of political scientists have become more sharply honed, and thus more precise theoretical statements about committee politics have been possible. The remainder of this chapter reviews the most important of those theoretical approaches.


The setter model and the study of committees. The modern theoretical understanding of congressional committees is grounded in the setter model, which was discussed in Chapter 2. In this simple spatial voting model, a committee votes on whether to accept a policy recommendation of an agenda setter on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Because the agenda setter is rational, she will offer the median voter of the committee a policy that makes the median only marginally better off compared to the status quo, but which makes the agenda setter significantly better off.

Fig. VIII-3

An example is illustrated in Figure VIII-3, with the status quo, the median, the agenda-setter’s spatial positions, plus the win set against the status quo, all as indicated. The agenda setter chooses her own ideal point as the policy proposal, which is accepted by the median voter, even though the median would have preferred even more a proposal closer to his own ideal point.

The application of the setter model to congressional committees is intuitive. A stylized fact of congressional life is that committees tend to be composed of preference outliers on the policies overseen by those committees. The rules and practices of the two chambers privilege the proposals made by the committees, and thus they are situated to make proposals of their own liking to the two chambers, with the assumption that those proposals will be passed, more often than not. In other words, committees tend to act as the agenda setter in the setter model.

This thinking about congressional committees corresponds with certain common-sense impressions about congressional politics. Indeed, it is entirely consistent with Wilson’s century-old complaint that the committees were “disintegrate ministries,” making policy in the interest of committee members, not in the interest of political parties or more “responsible” political actors.
More recently, the setter model has formed the core of the *structure-induced equilibrium* concept, put forward by Kenneth Shepsle and Barry Weingast, in the 1970s. Moving beyond the simple unidimensional policy world embodied in the basic setter model, Shepsle and Weingast suggested that policymaking equilibria exist in Congress because of congressional institutions, and that the most important of those institutions (though not the only ones) were committees.

In the realm of committees, the structure-induced equilibrium model works this way: Suppose the world is multidimensional. For simplicity we will concentrate on a world that has two separate policy areas that we’ll call Guns and Butter. Members of Congress have ideal points in this Guns-Butter space. Given the chaos theorem we discussed in Chapter 1, we know that Congress will have no *equilibrium of tastes* with respect to Guns and Butter. Without institutions that go beyond pure majority rule, Congress will vote on which mix of guns and butter to enact into law forever and never make a final decision.

However, the hypothetical Congress has created two committees, the Committee on Guns and the Committee on Butter, both of which are charged with overseeing policy in their own separate domains. All changes in policy must originate with them. If a committee reports a bill to change policy in its jurisdictional domain, amendments to the bill may only change policy along the single dimension of that policy.

Figure VIII-4 shows an example of how the structure-induced equilibrium with committees might work in such a world. I have shown the ideal points of nine members of a hypothetical legislature. I have grouped three of them (A, B, and C) into the “Butter Committee” and three (F, H, and I) into the “Guns Committee.” The status quo is indicated with the letter $q$. 
To simplify things somewhat, I have indicated on each axis where $q$ is located, along with the chamber and committee medians for that dimension.\footnote{On the Guns dimension, Member E is the chamber median and H is the committee median. On the Butter dimension, Member C is the chamber median and A is the committee median.}

The predictions we make in analyzing the figure depend on the chamber rules. Let’s take one set of rules for this example. (I will allow you to try out other rules in the problems at the end of the chapter.) Suppose that the committees only have gatekeeping power. That is, the committee can decide whether to bring a bill to the floor changing policy in its domain. However, once on the floor, there is a \textit{germaneness rule}, allowing the bill to be amended along that dimension. What would happen?

In general, we know that if a committee opens the gates in its policy domain, a majority on the floor will amend the bill to correspond with the chamber median on that dimension, assuming the committee bill does not propose the median to begin with. Thus, the committee median, in deciding whether to agree to report a bill to the floor, must decide whether he prefers the status quo over the floor median in that area. If he does, then he votes to report a bill to the floor, anticipating the chamber’s median will be enacted. Otherwise, he chooses to keep the legislative gates closed, \textit{even if he dislikes the status quo}.

Returning to Figure VIII-4, we see that if the Butter Committee reports a bill to the floor, the chamber will amend the bill to a position that is further away from the committee median’s idea point than is the status quo. Therefore, the committee will keep the gates closed. However, the Guns Committee would clearly prefer the chamber median on that dimension compared to the
status quo. Therefore, it will open the gates. The resulting policy in two dimensions is labeled
with point $p$ on the graph.

This example has not been generated randomly. First, note that I grouped members with
extreme preferences on the two dimensions into the committees: The Guns Committee contains
members whose preferences are extreme on that dimension, compared to the chamber. Likewise
for the Butter Committee. We call these outlier committees. With special institutional
prerogatives given to the committees, the effect of having outlier committees is to push policy
away from the center of the chamber. You can see this by examining closely the location of $p$, the
resulting policy after voting. Note that $p$ lies (barely) outside the Pareto set, which we discussed
in Chapter 1. If a policy is outside the Pareto set, we know that there exists other policies that the
chamber would support, compared to the status quo, unanimously. In this example, if the
chamber were allowed to vote on a policy just a bit to the southwest of $p$, it would support it
unanimously. However, the rules of the chamber preclude this vote. Moving to the “southwest”
from $p$ would violate the rule that we respect germaneness and move only “one dimension at a
time.” It would also violate committee prerogatives, which allow committees to take the lead in
proposing policy change.

This perspective on committees has gained currency within political science, economics,
and legal studies. It is a perspective grounded both in theory and in evidence. The theory has just
been discussed—that of the setter model. The empirical evidence is more indirect (and subject to
dispute—which we will explore shortly), but is based on a certain folk wisdom about Congress.
That is, the committee appointment process is one that is driven largely by self-selection.
Members of Congress seek committee assignments in areas of interest to their constituents,
making the committees particularly interested in constituency service, and thus preference outliers
with respect to the entire chamber. The committees, also, have rules that protect them, many of
which we will discuss in the next chapter.

Research in the Shepsle-Weingast tradition has emphasized the gains from trade that can
be extracted through the committee system. Much like nations and individuals can benefit in a
market—trading what they are good at producing in exchange for what they are bad at
producing—members of Congress can benefit electorally by dividing up policymaking into
discrete arenas, allowing “interested” members to populate those arenas and dominate
policymaking, and then allowing some sort of policy trading among the committees.

This is not always an attractive normative view of committees, since it suggests that
committees do nothing more than facilitate one huge policy log roll. In defense of the log roll
view, it should be pointed out that if MCs are electorally sensitive, then this massive, committee-
facilitated log roll may in fact be what a majority of Americans would want. Therefore, a criticism
of this view of committees that simply notes its logrolling potential is not all that compelling.

A more compelling criticism is this: If the “committee outlier” axiom is correct, resulting
in a large number of policies that are far removed from what large majorities of Americans want,
then MCs should feel pressures to overcome the jurisdictional niceties that protect extreme
policies. Consider again the world described in Figure VIII-4. Here, in a Congress dominated by
outlier committees with gatekeeping power, policy ends up outside the Pareto set. Recall, that if
policy is located outside the Pareto set, then everyone in Congress would vote to move policy
toward the Pareto set. The reason that can’t happen in Figure VIII-4 is that to move toward the
Some commentators have suggested that support for the 1974 Budget Act arose precisely because of problems with the appropriations process that are much like Figure VIII-4. Before the Budget Act, all appropriations bills, plus bills authorizing permanent appropriations like Social Security, were acted on one bill at a time. There was no mechanism that allowed Congress to adjust all the spending items simultaneously and comprehensively. One interpretation of the Budget Act, therefore, is that it created a new mechanism that allowed congressional majorities to protect themselves against the potential abuses of one-dimension-at-a-time voting rules.

The informational model of committees. It is this sort of insight that has motivated another robust strand of research into committees in recent years. This research, associated with Keith Krehbiel (1991) emphasizes the informational advantages that committees bring to policymaking. It is because committees can potentially improve the informational environment for all members of Congress that they are given special advantages in the policymaking process, including perhaps the latitude to shade policy in extreme ways.

To understand the informational approach, we need to backtrack to the simple one-dimensional spatial model and add a new wrinkle—uncertainty. Consider for a moment the utility

---

23Some commentators have suggested that support for the 1974 Budget Act arose precisely because of problems with the appropriations process that are much like Figure VIII-4.
function of a typical member of Congress, illustrated in Figure VIII-5. Most of this figure should be familiar to you. I have drawn an ideal point (labeled $x$) and a quadratic utility function for this member.

First, consider how this representative evaluates a policy, labeled $a$. The dashed lines in the figure indicate the level of utility the representative associates with policy $a$, which is labeled $U_x(a)$. In this example, the consequences of policy $a$ are known with certainty, and so the representative can simply evaluate how he feels about that policy, given his ideal point and utility curve.

Now, consider how he would evaluate a policy about which he was uncertain. This new policy, labeled $b$, has two possible outcomes, which are labeled $\underline{b}$ and $\bar{b}$. $^{24}$

Figure VIII-7 also illustrates how this member evaluates this uncertain policy, $b$. On the $y$-axis I have indicated how this representative would evaluate both these policy outcomes if they were known for certain, labeling them $U_x(\underline{b})$ and $U_x(\bar{b})$. Now, because either outcome could occur with equal likelihood, I have also indicated the average of these utility levels, and labeled it $U_x(\bar{b})$.

$^{24}$Policies $\underline{b}$ and $\bar{b}$ are located equidistant from $a$, so on average, they produce outcome $a$. (Policies $\underline{b}$ and $\bar{b}$ might be two possible outcomes under a proposed welfare reform. Let us say that we know the welfare reform will cut the welfare roles, but we don’t know by how much. The two possible amounts are cuts of 400,000 people ($\underline{b}$) and 600,000 people ($\bar{b}$). You might want to think of policy $a$, therefore, as one that cuts 500,000 people from the roles, for sure.)
\[
\frac{U_a(b) + U_a(b)}{2} \quad \text{Note that} \quad \frac{U_a(b) + U_a(b)}{2} < U_a(a). \quad \text{That is important, because the \textit{average} policy outcomes of policy} \ a \ \text{and of the lottery between policies} \ b \ \text{and} \ \bar{b} \ \text{are the same. What this figure illustrates, therefore, is that this representative would prefer a policy that set policy at} \ a \ \textit{for sure} \ \text{rather than a lottery that \textit{on average} would set policy in some range that was} \ a \pm \varepsilon. \\

This feature of voting on uncertain policies is a general finding when decisionmakers are \textit{risk averse}. Under risk aversion, if a person is given the choice between a policy that produces \( a \) for certain and a policy that produces \( a \) on average (sometimes better, sometimes worse), that person will choose the certain outcome.

What difference does this make for an understanding of committees? The answer is “quite a bit.” The oldest justification for committees is that they can help Congress develop expertise and apply it to a problem. Stated in terms of Figure VIII-5, the classic division-of-labor justification for committees looks like this: Policy proposals, when they first enter the public agenda, are like the lottery between \( b \) and \( ar{b} \). It becomes the task of a committee to study the policy and to see if it can learn more precisely what will happen if the policy is adopted. When the committee makes a report back to the legislature that reduces the range of possible outcomes of that policy, \textit{all} members of the legislature rate the policy more highly, even those who still believe the status quo should not be changed.

Therefore, if cost is not the issue (nor lying by the committee), then a legislature should create committees to help it reduce uncertainty about proposed policies. However, it is costly to
create committees. Also, committees may not always do the work they promise, nor do they always tell the truth. Therefore, the trick in designing a committee system is to reduce the costs of committee activity, induce committees to do the work they are assigned, and then to induce them to tell the truth about policies.

The costliness of creating committees has already been suggested earlier in this chapter. The House and Senate together spend about $100 million on its committees each year. If we include in this information-gathering apparatus the congressional support agencies (like the Library of Congress and the Congressional Budget Office), plus the personal congressional staff, the monetary cost of acquiring policy information is well over $2 billion each year. This is an amount sufficiently large to become a campaign issue at times, as the Republicans discovered to their advantage (and the Democrats to their dismay) in 1994.

There are costs in policy terms, as well. If committee members are rational and policy-motivated, there is nothing automatic about the transmission of information from the committee to the floor. Suppose, for instance, that the committee investigates a policy and that discovers that its most likely effects are (a) to please a majority of the committee but (b) displease a majority of the legislature. What is to force the committee to reveal what it actually knows about the likely outcomes of the proposed policy?

As this brief discussion suggests, there is nothing automatic about creating informed committees, even if financial cost is not an issue. There are agency costs associated, as well. An agency cost is the cost that’s incurred by a principal (in this case, the full chamber) when an agent (in this case, a committee) fails to do what the principal would have done in identical circumstances, with equivalent knowledge.
The informational approach to committees interprets many of the features of the committee system as mechanisms intended to foster and support an informative committee system. Some of these mechanisms include committee composition practices and the use of restrictive rules.

The information approach makes it clear that the entire legislature stands to gain from the appointment of committee members who share a mix of preferences. This approach first gives an informational justification for the common practice of appointing “interested” or “high demand” members to committees—farmers to Agriculture, lawyers to Judiciary, etc. Ask yourself this question: If you were to appoint a committee that was responsible for seeing that the food supply to a quarter of a billion people was uninterrupted, would you appoint a committee dominated by representatives from farm districts, from manufacturing districts, or randomly from all districts? In all likelihood, you would appoint the lion’s share of members from farm districts, and for one important reason: they are the most likely already to understand food production and to be best situated for learning more about it. Furthermore, they have electoral incentives to learn about the issue and to stay informed. Therefore, what looks like a huge logroll to proponents of the gains from trade school of committee politics looks like an informational story to the informational school.

Still, if you answered “manufacturing districts” or “randomly” to the question I just posed, it is likely because you would be uneasy about entrusting all of farm policy to a group of people who might corrupt policymaking to their own ends, not the ends of food consumers. Even though you might appoint an agriculture committee dominated by farmers, it would be unwise to appoint only farmers. While it would be impossible to appoint anyone entirely disinterested in the
nation’s food production and distribution, you could certainly find representatives who had no intrinsic interest in the plight of farmers, and you could certainly find others who had experience with other parts of the food production and distribution system—producers, bankers, consumers, etc.

This diversification of committee memberships is a longstanding practice in Congress. For instance, for years it was traditional to appoint someone from New York City to the agriculture subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. The job of this subcommittee member was to keep the farm state interests honest, and to make a stink if there were provisions of the bill that egregiously harmed the interests of food consumers to the benefit of food producers.

Another array of resources that Congress might employ to get the most information out of its committee system are restrictive rules meant to protect the legislative product of committees. The idea here may not be obvious, but it is still simple. If you want to induce committees to gather and report all the information relevant to any piece of legislation, you need to set up procedures to ensure that the time spent by committee members on information discovery isn’t wasted. What you want to guard against is what happened in the Congress of the Articles of Confederation (see Chapter 2), in which committees would work diligently on a bill, report it to the floor, and then see the bill ripped to shreds. It didn’t take members of the Confederation Congress long to realize that it was a massive waste of time to do committee work, and so they just stopped putting in a lot of effort in committees. Incompetent committees produced even worse legislative proposals, which were also shredded on the floor. Legislative proceedings were chaotic and so unproductive that members of Congress just stopped showing up altogether.
The Constitution gives Congress broad latitude to set its rules in such a way that committee effort is protected. In the next chapter I will discuss the rules of Congress and their effects on policymaking. For now, I will just note that the rules of both chambers, but particularly of the House, give subtle strategic advantage to all bills that come from committee onto the floor. In addition, a few important bills, from a few especially powerful committees, gain even more protection under the operation of the House rules. The net effect of these rules, from the information prospective, is to foster greater attentiveness by committees to policy.

The everyday parliamentary advantages to committees on the floor are many. They start with agenda-setting—deciding what gets to the floor and what gets into any particular bill. Although the House, in theory, has the right to amend any bill to the fullest, time limitations restrict what might practically be targeted when any bill is considered. Moving on to amendments, committees have two advantages. In the House, if an amendment is passed in Committee of the Whole, the amendment is voted on again in full House session. However, if an amendment fails in Committee of the Whole, it cannot be voted on again by the full House. Thus, committees get two shots at defeating amendments to its bills, whereas committee opponents don’t get a second chance if they lose in trying to amend a bill the first time. Second, committees are usually allowed to counter amendments with an amendment to the amendment, giving them some maneuvering room even when a majority is against them.

Finally, when bills are passed, two things advantage committees. First, most bills are passed under expedited procedures, such as suspension of the rules, in which no amendments (and practically no debate) are allowed. Therefore, for most bills, all the chambers get to consider is what the committee wrote—take it or leave it. Second, committee members dominate conference
proceedings, which allows them to set the contours of the final bill, subject again only to the constraint that a majority of each chamber favor it over the status quo.

The best-know (but least used) of the special committee protections is the closed rule in the House. This is a topic of Chapter 9, so I won’t discuss it much here. The closed rule is a legislative device that allows an entire bill to be brought to the floor for a single up-or-down vote. Short of such a Draconian measure, there are modified closed rules which allow some parts of the bill to be subject to amendment, but close off others from the amending process. The committee that has most often benefitted from the closed rule is Ways and Means. One justification for giving Ways and Means the closed rule so often is that it allows the committee to craft careful tax compromises among competing interests, while at the same time protecting the overall integrity of the tax code. In return for this hard economic and political work, the House (led by the leadership, which must work hard to get a closed rule passed) grants Ways and Means added protection over its tax legislation.

It is easy to see how all these inducements for hard work are two-edged swords—they might get the information all members of Congress want, but they also can be manipulated by committee members contrary to the interests of the entire chamber.

Over the past decade a vigorous academic debate has emerged over proponents of the “gains from trade” and “information” approaches to committees. This debate has raged over the degree to which any of the empirical claims made by the two theories hold up to scrutiny. The gains from trade approach has been challenged to show that committees are composed of large numbers of self-selected outliers and that conference proceedings have been used to exert an inordinate influence on legislative outcomes. The information approach has been challenged to
demonstrate that the two chambers of Congress have been willing to use procedural resources to protect the legislative product of committees.

Some proponents of both approaches consider the two views to be mutually exclusive, which is certainly not true even in theory. The gains from trade approach makes more precise how we understand the mechanisms through which the timeworn practice of individuals and small groups use the government for their own private gain. The information approach makes more precise the mechanisms through which a collective body like Congress might pool its collective resources to produce a public good of informed policy. Rather than being competing approach, then, they both allow us to understand more clearly the fundamental tension in all legislatures—that of balancing the needs of individuals with the needs of all citizens.
Figure VIII-1
The Number of Committees in the House and Senate, 1789 – 1997

a. House

b. Senate
Figure VIII-2
Percentage of seats held by the majority party on House and Senate taxing committees

a. House

b. Senate
Figure VIII-3
Summary of the Setter Model

S.Q.  Median  Setter

Proposal

Win set(S.Q.)
Figure VIII-4
Structure-Induced Equilibrium Example with Committees
Table VIII-1
A morphology of congressional committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of committee</th>
<th>One chamber or two</th>
<th>Permanent or ad hoc</th>
<th>Legislative or not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee of the whole</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select &amp; Special</td>
<td>One (usually)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Usually not legislative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Usually not legislative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table VIII-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House Ways and Means Committee (Rule 10.1(a))</th>
<th>Senate Finance Committee (Rule 25(i))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customs, collection districts, and ports of entry and delivery.</td>
<td>Bonded debt of the United States, except as provided in the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal trade agreements.</td>
<td>Customs, collection districts, and ports of entry and delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue measures generally.</td>
<td>Deposit of public moneys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue measures relating to insular possessions.</td>
<td>General revenue sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonded debt of the United States, subject to the last sentence of clause 4(f).</td>
<td>Health programs under the Social Security Act and health programs financed by a specific tax or trust fund.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposit of public moneys.</td>
<td>National social security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation of dutiable goods.</td>
<td>Reciprocal trade agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax exempt foundations and charitable trusts.</td>
<td>Revenue measures generally, except as provided in the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revenue measures relating to the insular possessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tariffs and import quotas, and matters related thereto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation of dutiable goods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table VIII-3  
Committees in the 106th House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Reps</th>
<th>Dems</th>
<th>Party ratio&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Staff (1997)</th>
<th>Sub-committees</th>
<th>Budget (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Larry Combest, Tex.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.13:1</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>C.W. (Bill) Young, Fla.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.26:1</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Services</td>
<td>Floyd D. Spence, S.C.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.14:1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking and financial services</td>
<td>Jim Leach, Iowa</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.19:1&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>John R. Kasich, Ohio</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.26:1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Thomas J. Bliley, Jr., Va.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.21:1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and the Workforce</td>
<td>Bill Goodling, Pa.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.23:1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Reform</td>
<td>Dan Burton, Ind.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.26:1&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Administration</td>
<td>Bill Thomas, Calif.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.00:1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Benjamin A. Gilman, N.Y.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.13:1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Henry J. Hyde, Ill.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.31:1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Don Young, Alaska</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.14:1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>David Dreier, Calif.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.25:1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Wisc.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.14:1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>James M. Talent, Mo.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.12:1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of Official Conduct</td>
<td>Lamar S. Smith, Tex.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.00:1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Bud Shuster, Pa.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.21:1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Bob Stump, Ariz.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.21:1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways and Means</td>
<td>Bill Archer, Tex.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.44:1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Intelligence</td>
<td>Porter J. Goss, Fla.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.29:1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The party ratio in the chamber is 1.05:1  
<sup>b</sup>Bernard Sanders, Vt., is an independent and also a member of the committee. He is omitted from the party calculations.  
### Table VIII-4
Committees in the 106th Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Reps</th>
<th>Dems</th>
<th>Party ratio&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Staff (1997)</th>
<th>Sub-committees</th>
<th>Budget (105th Cong., millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, nutrition, and</td>
<td>Richard G. Lugar, Ind.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>Ted Stevens, Alaska</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.15:1</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed services</td>
<td>John Warner, Va.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking, house, and urban</td>
<td>Philip Gramm, Tex.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Pete V. Domenici, N.M.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.20:1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce, science, and</td>
<td>John McCain, Ariz.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and natural resources</td>
<td>Frank H. Murkowski, Alaska</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and public works</td>
<td>John H. Chafee, R.I.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>William V. Roth, Del.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign relations</td>
<td>Jesse Helms, N.C.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental affairs</td>
<td>Fred Thompson, Tenn.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.29:1</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian affairs</td>
<td>Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Colo.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.33:1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Orrin G. Hatch, Utah</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, Ed., Labor, and</td>
<td>James M. Jeffords, Vt.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and administration</td>
<td>Mitch McConnell, Ky.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.29:1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans’ affairs</td>
<td>Arlen Specter, Pa.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.40:1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Christopher S. Bond, Mo.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.25:1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Aging</td>
<td>Charles E. Grassley, Iowa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.22:1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Ethics</td>
<td>Robert C. Smith, N.H.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.00:1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Intelligence</td>
<td>Richard C. Shelby, Ala.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.11:1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2000 Technology</td>
<td>Bob Bennett, Utah</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.13:1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The Party Ratio in the Chamber Is 1.22:1
### Table VIII-5
Changes to the House Committee System in the 104th Congress (1995)

- **Committees eliminated**
  - District of Columbia (Jurisdiction transferred to Government Reform and Oversight)
  - Merchant Marine and Fisheries (Jurisdiction transferred to several committees)
  - Post Office and Civil Service (Jurisdiction transferred to Government Reform and Oversight)
  - Several committees renamed

- **Staff cut by one-third**

- **Subcommittee limits**
  - Committees generally restricted to three subcommittees
  - Exceptions: Appropriations (13), Government Reform and Oversight (7), Transportation and Infrastructure (6)

- **Subcommittee staff now controlled by committee chair (not subcommittee chairs)**

- **Assignment limits: members may serve on no more than two standing committees and four subcommittees**

- **Proxy voting banned**

- **Committees must publish roll call votes on all bills and amendments**

- **Rolling quorums banned**

- **Meetings may be closed to the public in only very limited cases**

- **Committees must allow broadcast coverage and still photography in all open sessions**

- **Multiple referrals eliminated; Speaker may still serially refer bills and refer parts of bills to different committees.**
Table VIII-6
Jesse Helms Contemplates His Move at the Beginning of the 99th Congress (1985)

Republican seniority on Senate Committees, 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</th>
<th>Foreign Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Dole, KS Ch. Finance</td>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Ch. (presumptive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Maj. leader</td>
<td>Charles Mathias, MD Ch. Rules &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad Cochran, MS Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Nancy Kassebaum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Hawkins, FL Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Larry Pressler, SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Andrews, ND Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Frank Murkowski,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Wilson, CA Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Paul Trible, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch McConnell,</td>
<td>Daniel Evans, WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenario I: Lugar becomes Majority Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</th>
<th>Foreign Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Dole, KS Ch. Finance</td>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Maj. leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Maj. leader</td>
<td>Charles Mathias, MD Ch. Foreign Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad Cochran, MS Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Nancy Kassebaum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Hawkins, FL</td>
<td>Larry Pressler, SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Andrews, ND</td>
<td>Frank Murkowski,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Wilson, CA</td>
<td>Paul Trible, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch McConnell,</td>
<td>Daniel Evans, WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenario Ia: Lugar becomes Majority Leader and Jesse Moves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</th>
<th>Foreign Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Dole, KS Ch. Finance</td>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Foreign Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Maj. leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Maj. leader</td>
<td>Charles Mathias, MD Ch. Rules &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad Cochran, MS Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Nancy Kassebaum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Hawkins, FL</td>
<td>Larry Pressler, SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Andrews, ND</td>
<td>Frank Murkowski,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Wilson, CA</td>
<td>Paul Trible, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch McConnell,</td>
<td>Daniel Evans, WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenario II: Dole becomes Majority Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</th>
<th>Foreign Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Dole, KS Maj. leader</td>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Helms, NC Ch. Agriculture</td>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Ch. Foreign Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Lugar, IN Ch. Foreign Relations</td>
<td>Charles Mathias, MD Ch. Rules &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad Cochran, MS Ch. Foreign Relations</td>
<td>Nancy Kassebaum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN</td>
<td>Rudy Boschwitz, MN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Hawkins, FL</td>
<td>Larry Pressler, SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Andrews, ND</td>
<td>Frank Murkowski,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Wilson, CA</td>
<td>Paul Trible, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch McConnell,</td>
<td>Daniel Evans, WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table VIII-7
Relative Attractiveness Ranking of House and Senate Committees, 81st–102nd Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>House Committee</th>
<th>Senate Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ways and Means</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>Appropriations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Foreign Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Energy and Commerce</td>
<td>Armed Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Armed Services</td>
<td>Judiciary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Rules and Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>House Administration</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Internal Security</td>
<td>Aeronautics (85th–95th Cong.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>Labor &amp; Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>Banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Post Office &amp; Civil Service (80th–95th Cong.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Merchant Marine</td>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Public Works</td>
<td>Small Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Governmental Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>Environment &amp; Public Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Education and Labor</td>
<td>D.C. (80th–95th Cong.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Standards of Official Conduct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Government Operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table VIII-8
Subcommittees of Standing Committees in the 106th Congress, 1999–2000

#### House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Subcommittees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation, and Crop; Livestock and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horticulture; Risk Management, Research, and Specialty Crops; Department Operations,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commerce, Justice, State, and Judiciary; Defense; District of Columbia; Energy and Water Development; Export Finance and Related Programs; Interior; Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education; Legislative; Military Construction; Transportation; Treasury; Postal Service, and General Government; VA, HUD and Independent Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Services</td>
<td>Military Procurement; Military Research and Development; Military Personnel; Military Installations and Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking and Financial Services</td>
<td>Housing and Community Opportunity; Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit; Domestic and International Monetary Policy; Capital Markets, Securities and Government Sponsored Enterprises; General Oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection; Finance and Hazardous Materials; Health and Environment; Energy and Power; Oversight and Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and the Workforce</td>
<td>Employer-Employee Relations; Workforce Protections; Early Childhood, Youth and Families; Oversight and Investigations; Postsecondary Education, Training and Lifelong Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Reform</td>
<td>National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations; Civil Service; Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources; Postal Service; Government Management, Information, and Technology; District of Columbia; National Economic Growth, Natural Resources, and Regulatory Affairs, Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Administration</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>International Economic Policy and Trade; Asia and the Pacific; International Operations and Human Rights; The Western Hemisphere; Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Courts and Intellectual Property; Crime; Immigration and Claims; The Constitution; Commercial and Administrative Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>National Parks and Public Lands; Fisheries; Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans; Energy and Mineral Resources; Water and Power; Forests and Forest Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Rules and Organization of the House; Legislative and Budget Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Basic Research; Energy and Environment; Space and Aeronautics; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td>Empowerment; Government Programs and Oversight; Regulatory Reform and Paperwork Reduction; Tax, Finance, and Exports; Rural Enterprises, Business Opportunities, and Special Small Business Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of Official Conduct</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Aviation; Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation; Economic Development; Public Buildings, Hazardous Materials, and Pipeline Transportation; Ground Transportation; Oversight, Investigations, and Emergency Management; Water Resources and Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Health; Benefits; Oversight and Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways and Means</td>
<td>Trade; Oversight; Health; Social Security; Human Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Subcommittees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry</td>
<td>Forestry, Conservation, and Rural Revitalization; Marketing, Inspection, and Product Promotion; Production and Price Competitiveness; Research, Nutrition, and General Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies; Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary; Defense; District of Columbia; Energy and Water Development; Foreign Operations; Interior; Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education; Legislative Branch; Military Construction; Transportation; Treasury and General Government; VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Services</td>
<td>Airland; Emerging Threats and Capabilities; Personnel; Readiness and Management Support; SeaPower; Strategic Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs</td>
<td>Economic Policy; Financial Institutions; Housing and Transportation; International Trade and Finance; Securities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce, Science, and Transportation</td>
<td>Aviation; Communications; Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce, and Tourism; Manufacturing and Competitiveness; Oceans and Fisheries; Science, Technology, and Space; Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Natural Resources</td>
<td>Energy Research, Development, Production and Regulation; Forests and Public Land Management; National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation; Water and Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Public Works</td>
<td>Clean Air, Wetlands, Private Property, and Nuclear Safety; Fisheries, Wildlife, and Drinking Water; Superfund, Waste Control, and Risk Assessment; Transportation and Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Health Care; International Trade; Long-term Growth and Debt Reduction; Social Security and Family Policy; Taxation and IRS Oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Relations</td>
<td>African Affairs; East Asian and Pacific Affairs; European Affairs; International Economic Policy, Export and Trade Promotion; International Operations; Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental Affairs</td>
<td>International Security, Proliferation and Federal Securities; Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring and the District of Columbia; Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions</td>
<td>Aging; Children and Families; Employment, Safety and Training; Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Administrative Oversight and the Courts; Antitrust, Business Rights, and Competition; Constitution, Federalism, and Property Rights; Criminal Justice Oversight; Immigration; Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information; Youth Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and Administration</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>No subcommittees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes
- For a full list of subcommittees, please refer to the official congressional records. This table provides a summary of the major areas of focus for each committee and subcommittee.