

Public Abstract

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At the heart of resurgent Congresses is resurgent partisanship in foreign policies. In order to confront this complex political context, the House majority leadership, both Democratic and Republican, has strategically manipulated the design of special rules to control the legislative agenda in foreign and defense legislation since the mid-1970s. In this research, I use the conditional party government (CPG) model to explain how the House majority leadership has changed its use of special rules in foreign policy bills. To consistently examine the chronicled changes of special rules in three decades (from 1975 to 2004), I forsake traditional typologies and construct a continuous "privilege index" of special rules based on factor analyses. The basic idea of this scale is that special rules provide privileges to bills by interrupting the regular order of business on the House floor. The major empirical result shows a strong support for the CPG thesis: as party polarization increases in the House, the majority leadership grants more privileged rules to foreign and defense bills in order to tighten agenda control for party benefits. A more nuanced exploration in defense spending bills finds that while the CPG theory provides the major explanatory framework, the political trend of defense budget explains the change of special rules in this area, conditioned by partisan control of the legislative and executive branches.