

Building Effective Committee Systems: Pressure Build-Up and Changes in Legislative Rules of Procedure

**By
Nancy Martorano**

**University of Dayton
Department of Political Science
300 College Park
Dayton, Ohio 45469-1425**

Nancy.Martorano@notes.udayton.edu

ABSTRACT: Studies of legislative politics have once again turned their attention to understanding the causes and consequences of change in the basic institutions that inform the legislative process. Specifically, this research has attempted to understand the forces underlying the adoption and amending of the formal procedures that dictate the day-to-day workings of legislatures. The research in this paper seeks to answer the question of what causes the members of legislative institutions to alter the procedures that they use to guide the legislative process. In particular, this research will focus its efforts on those changes that impact the effectiveness of the committee system in the legislative process. These questions will be addressed by exploring procedural change in 24 state legislative lower houses over the course of 21 legislative sessions (1955-1995).

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Introduction

Studies of legislative politics have once again turned their attention to understanding the causes and consequences of change in the basic institutions that inform the legislative process. Specifically, this research has attempted to understand the forces underlying the adoption and amending of the formal procedures that dictate the day-to-day workings of legislatures. Interest in this topic has been at both the congressional and state legislative levels. At the congressional level, this work has focused on the expansion and contraction of minority party procedural rights (e.g.: Binder 1997; Dion 1997; Fink 2000) as well as on legislative institutions and procedures more generally (e.g.: Swift 1997; Schickler 2001; Baumgartner, Jones and MacLeod 2000). At the state legislative level the focus has been on the development of institutions and procedures that deal directly with the functioning of committee systems in the legislative process (e.g.: Hamm, Martorano and Hedlund 2001; Martorano 2001, 2002).

Specifically, the research in this paper seeks to answer the question of what causes the members of legislative institutions to alter the procedures that impact the effectiveness of the committee system in the legislative process. Questions of interest are:

- What forces will cause legislators to adopt procedures that enhance the effectiveness or the power of committees in the legislative process?
- Under what conditions will committee system effectiveness/power be diminished?

In order to address this question, this research will draw combine ideas from studies of legislative politics at both the state and congressional levels. First, it will draw on the work of earlier research that addressed committee system effectiveness at the state legislative level (Rosenthal 1973). Second, it will draw inspiration from those who studied congressional procedural reform and change (Davidson and Oleszek 1976; Baumgartner, Jones, Macleod 2000).

Theoretical Foundations

Committee systems have long been of interest to legislative students (see Mezey 1993; Hamm and Squire 2001; Gamm and Huber 2003, for extensive reviews of research on legislative institutions). Most scholars agree that committee systems emerged in response to a need to divide increasing workload among smaller sub-units (Wilson 1885, McConachie 1898) in order to make the legislative process manageable.

Over time, the committee stage of the legislative process has become known as one of the most active and most important stages in the legislative process. Strong committee systems can assist members and legislative chambers in attaining their goals. No matter whether the goal is attaining district benefits (Sheplse 1979; Sheplse and Weingast 1981) or chamber efficiency (Krehbiel 1991) or political party dominance (Cox and McCubbins 1993), one aspect is common – in order for committees to be able to accomplish these goals, they must possess the tools to be effective participants in the legislative process.

Defining an Effective Committee System

What does it mean for a committee system to be an effective participant in the legislative process? Alan Rosenthal (1973) in his article “Legislative Committee Systems: An Exploratory Analysis,” provides a very clear and concise description of the dimensions that make up an effective system. These dimensions are:

- 1) Extent to which committees receive legislation;
- 2) Extent to which committees control the screening of legislation;
- 3) Extent to which committees shape the nature of legislation;
- 4) Extent to which committees affect the passage of legislation; and
- 5) Extent to which committees study problems and formulate legislation during interim periods.

In his article, Rosenthal assesses the effectiveness of the committee systems in the 50 state legislatures by surveying samples of legislators in each state. Based upon the above dimensions, he inquired of these legislators how effective committees were in each of their respective chambers. He found that the committee systems in 14 states could be considered more effective, committee systems in 16 states were considered somewhat effective, and committee systems in 20 states were considered less effective. Rosenthal then proceeded to consider what accounted for the differences in effectiveness between the states’ committee systems. He concluded that two concepts could be used to account for committee system effectiveness – *institutional capacity* and *institutional power*.

Rosenthal defines *institutional capacity* as the existence of “a rational division of labor, an equitable distribution of work, proper procedures, and adequate resources (255).” Rosenthal is implying that a committee system can be effective only if the “institutional infrastructure” exists to foster effective committees – namely a system where members serve on a limited number of committees, each committee receives a relatively equal workload, ***formal procedures exist that facilitate committee effectiveness***, and the committee system is given sufficient resources in the form of facilities and more importantly staff. The concept of *institutional power* concerns the question of who controls the chamber. In chambers where chamber organization (i.e., committee assignment process, etc.) is centralized (e.g. control is placed in the Speaker or party caucuses, etc.), it is likely that committee systems will be less effective.

The research in this paper will assess committee effectiveness from an institutional point of view. One important way in which a chamber can foster the establishment of an effective committee system is by adopting structures and procedures that will give committees power (i.e., control) over the legislative process. These basic structures and procedures related to state legislative chamber committee systems are often found in formal chamber rules as well as in state constitutions and statutes. The forces that cause chambers to adopt procedures that enhance/diminish committee system effectiveness will be explored in this analysis.

The structures and procedures that foster effective committee systems can easily be related back to Rosenthal’s (1973) five dimensions of committee system effectiveness, and include (Table 1 lists and describes the structures and procedures used in this analysis):

- 1) Receive legislation dimension – requirement that all bills be referred to committees for consideration,
- 2) Screening of legislation dimension – requirement that not all referred bills be considered and reported back to the floor, lack of deadline for committee action
- 3) Shaping legislation dimension – ability to introduce committee bills, incorporation into bills of committee amendments before floor consideration; ability of committees to offer substitute legislation
- 4) Affect passage dimension – procedures that make it difficult for the floor to overturn adverse committee reports, automatic calendar procedure, and difficulty of floor amending, and
- 5) Interim meeting dimension – provisions for committees to meet in the periods between legislative sessions.

[Table 1 about here]

In addition to the structures and procedures that correspond to Rosenthal's five dimensions of committee system effectiveness, structures and procedures that Rosenthal asserts impact committee effectiveness will also be included – provisions for committee staff (institutional capacity), existence/lack of a seniority system (institutional power), extent to which the committee assignment process is centralized (institutional power). Several structures and procedures not mentioned in Rosenthal's article will also be included – requirements for open committee meetings, regularly scheduled committee meetings, advance notice of committee meeting agendas, the existence of subpoena powers for committees and committee power to conduct investigations, and the inability of the floor to easily withdraw legislation from committee consideration.

The above structures and procedures are coded in a manner in which negative scores indicate that the structure or procedure makes committees less effective actors in the legislative process, and positive scores indicate that the structure or procedure work to enhance committee system effectiveness¹. These procedures will be used to create an overall measure of committee effectiveness that adds the values of the twenty-two procedures listed above.² There are several reasons for taking this approach rather than studying each procedure independently. First and most simply, exploring each of these items standing alone does not allow us to determine the extent to which chambers have decided to formally provide committees with the necessary tools

¹ All of the procedures are on a scale of –1 to +1, where a negative score indicated that the procedure clear limits committee system effectiveness and a score of +1 enhances committee system effectiveness. A score of 0 indicates that the rule is neutral.

² In many instances, the values of the rules cancel one another out – meaning a chamber's score on one indicator may help committee effectiveness, but its score on another may diminish it. However, this is meaningful and important and using a summation index allows the creation of a measure that allows us to capture the full extent to which committee systems can exert influence over the legislative process in any given chamber. In effect, summing the procedures in this manner allows us to gauge the relative strength of the committee system's procedural toolbox.

to be forceful and active participants in the legislative process. It is only through the existence of a combinations of these procedures as a unit can it be determined how committed a chamber is to fostering an effective committee system. The second reason is related to research design. The goal of this research is to determine what forces cause the members of a legislative chamber to adopt rules that enhance committee effectiveness. Legislative structures and procedures do not change at a rapid rate.³ Using a summed score of committee system effectiveness allows the changes to be aggregated to a point where there are a substantial number of changes to explore.

Hypotheses and Independent Variable Measurement

Determining the forces that drive procedural change

Under what conditions will a legislative chamber alter the formal structures and procedures that influence the effectiveness of the committee system in the legislative process? Past research offers some clues as to what may induce legislators to alter their formal rules of procedure.

Davidson and Oleszek (1976) use organization theory to formulate a theory to account for structural and procedural reform in the U.S. Congress. They assert that legislative bodies must adapt to stresses and strains in their external and internal environments if they wish to remain effective. They assert that *adaptation* occurs when a chamber reforms itself in response to external forces and *consolidation* occurs when the chamber reacts to internal stresses. Of course, the two conditions tend to intermingle, and the ensuing reforms may be small or large in scope.

Davidson and Oleszek's work is quite informative in this current study as one asks what types of factors (in the form of either external forces and/or internal stresses) may cause legislators to enhance or even decrease the formal avenues available to committees for achieving effectiveness. With respect to external forces, workload may be a factor. As the public begins to place more demands on a legislative chamber for more public policy, there will be an increase in the amount and complexity of bills that the chamber must process within the confines of a legislative session. The committee system has long been recognized as institutional structure that allows for the easy division of labor, and increasing its effectiveness will help the legislature deal with this added pressure.

A variable called Policy Complexity that takes into account the number of bills, the average length of bills and the number of days available to consider bills in the previous legislative session accounts for the amount and complexity of legislation.⁴ In the analysis, this

³ When examining the individual procedures over a 21 legislative session period, it was discovered that the rate of formal procedural change is actually quite low – often less than 10% and in several cases even less than 1%. Despite a great deal of cross-sectional variation between legislative chambers across the U.S. states, temporal variation within states is actually quite low.

⁴ The measure is the number of bills introduced during the previous legislative session multiplied by the average length per bill in the previous session divided by the legislative days spent in session during the previous regular session. In this analysis, the average length per bill was measured by counting the number of pages in the session laws of the previous session, multiplying by the number of lines per page and dividing by the total number of

measure will be the cumulative sum of the change in policy complexity until a procedural change (Table 2 contains the descriptions and operationalization of all independent and control variables.). The cumulative sum of the change is used in this analysis in order to be able to assess whether or not procedural changes occur in reaction to the “building up” of pressures for more public policy. Baumgartner, Jones and MacLeod (2000) make a similar assertion about issue diversity and its effect on committee jurisdictional change in Congress. The operationalization of this measure leads us to hypothesis #1.

Hypothesis #1: A cumulative increase in the amount and complexity of bills introduced will lead to the adoption of rules that foster committee effectiveness.

[Table 2 about here]

What about internal stresses? The most prevalent internal stresses in a legislative chamber are the consistency of chamber membership as well as the goals of the members serving. The following variables can account for internal stress in the form of changes in chamber membership as well as goals of the members – reapportionment, reform movement, professionalization, new speaker, and the tenure of previous speaker.

The mandatory reapportionment that took place following the Baker v. Carr (1962) decision had a tremendous impact on the composition of legislative chambers in the U.S. states. This reapportionment is different from later reapportionments or redistrictings (i.e., 1970s, 1980s or 1990s) because it is the first to take place after the one-man, one-vote decision, and many states had not reapportioned for years prior to this ruling. Thus, some state legislatures changed their chamber size and many had a large influx of new members that may have led to a need to strengthen the role of existing legislative structures. In addition, in many chambers there was a shift in power (conceptualized as percentage of members holding seats) from legislators who represented rural districts to those that represented urban districts, potentially affecting the member and legislative goals. Therefore, a dummy variable will be included that will account for the first legislative session after reapportionment (*Reapportionment*) as well as a dummy that accounts for the size of each legislative chamber (*Chamber Size*).

Hypothesis #2: Reapportionment will result in the adoption of procedures that foster committee system effectiveness.

Hypothesis #3: Chamber size will be positively related to the adoption of rules fostering committee system effectiveness.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a widespread movement to reform state legislatures that culminated in the publication of The Sometimes Governments (CCSL, 1971), a report that evaluated the performance of each state legislature and made specific suggestions for improvement. Specifically, this analysis of government in the fifty states asserted that virtually every state legislative chamber needed to formal adopted structures and procedures that better

enactments. The value of this variable is often quite large, so it is divided by 100 in order to make interpretation easier.

defined and strengthened their committee system. Thus, it is important that the potential effects of this report be included in this analysis through a dichotomous variable (Sometimes) that is coded one in the years after 1973.⁵

Hypothesis #4: The post Sometimes Government period will be positively related to the adoption of rules that foster committee system effectiveness.

A great deal of state legislative research has shown that U.S. state legislatures exhibit varying degrees of professionalization relative to Congress (see King 2000). Further, these differences in professionalization have been shown to have some impact on the structures and procedures adopted by state legislative bodies (Freeman and Hedlund 1993; Squire 1993, 1997; and Thompson 1986). Specifically, this research has found that more professionalized legislatures were more autonomous relative to other state government officials (i.e., governors), and in turn were able to exert a great amount of influence over public policy. Therefore, it is anticipated that more professionalized legislative chambers may adopt procedures that will allow the legislature to have maximum input over public policy – namely structures and procedures that foster committee system effectiveness. In this analysis, King’s raw measure of legislative *professionalization* is used.⁶

Hypothesis #5: Legislative professionalization will be positively related to the adoption of rules that foster committee system effectiveness.

It is quite possible that major changes in state legislative structures and procedures may occur when a new speaker takes office especially if the previous speaker had been in charge for quite a long time. For example, in many states, a speaker may be in power for several continuous sessions and may oppose particular changes in structures and procedures even though they may be necessary for the efficient operation of the legislative process. The election of a new speaker may then proceed to initiate a wave of change in the chamber regardless of other forces. It may be the case that proper leadership was necessary to finally push through much needed procedural changes (Swift 1997). A variable will be included in the analysis that accounts for the election of a new house Speaker (*New Speaker*), as well as a variable that accounts for the number of terms served by the previous speaker of the house (*Tenure of Previous Speaker*), as change may be more likely after a speaker who enjoyed a particularly long reign.

⁵ The year 1973 was chosen as the start of the post-reform period because it allows states approximately two sessions to incorporate any of the recommendations included in *The Sometimes Governments*.

⁶ Professionalization was measured using King’s (2000) measure of professionalization that was calculated for 1963/73/83/93. The scores were applied to the data as follows: The years 1955-1967 received the 1963 score, 1969-1977 received the 1973 score, 1979-1987 received the 1983 score and 1989-1995 received the 1993 score. Unfortunately scores for each year were unavailable, and collecting the components used to create King’s scores for each year would be both time consuming and possibly problematic (i.e., consistent data may not be available for all years in all states). It is my contention that applying the scores as I did is appropriate as legislative professionalization tends to change incrementally rather than dramatically over time and a yearly measure may not actually provide any additional analytical leverage.

Hypothesis #6: The election of a new house Speaker will be positively related to the adoption of rules that foster committee system effectiveness.

Hypothesis #7: The length of tenure of the previous speaker will be positively related to the adoption of rules that foster committee system effectiveness.

Other forces may also effect the adoption of structures and procedures that are related to the creation of an effective committee system in a legislative chamber. In particular, partisan forces may impact the extent to which a chamber desires and effective committee system. A chamber that possesses a strong and effective committee system is also a chamber in which decision-making is decentralized. That is, the bulk of decisions made about public policy are done so in small groups (e.g., committees) rather than by the chamber as a whole. However, it is also more difficult for party leadership to control dispersed decision-making. Therefore, when partisan politics are heightened in a chamber (i.e., when there is little difference in strength between the political parties), the majority party in power may wish to centralize decision-making within the party leadership by limiting the effectiveness of the committee system. A variable will be included in the analysis that accounts for the strength of the majority political party. This variable (*Majority Party Strength*) is simply the percentage of seats controlled by the majority political party in the chamber.

Hypothesis #8: As the majority political party loses strength in the chamber, rules will be adopted that limit committee system effectiveness.

Two control variables need to be included in the analysis. *Turnover* at the state legislative level is traditionally higher than at the congressional level (Shin and Jackson 1979, Niemi and Winsky 1988). A higher degree of membership turnover impact the adoption of structures and procedures as inexperienced legislators may be unsure what structures and procedures are best for their legislative chamber or it may be the case the younger legislators possess different goals that require a different set of legislative procedures. It is unclear at this time whether or not a chamber may be more or less likely to enhance committee system effectiveness in chambers with higher degrees of turnover.

The second control variable deals directly with the formal structure of legislative procedures. This variable accounts for state legislatures that employ joint rules of procedure (*Joint Rules*). This variable is coded one if the legislative chamber in question uses joint rules as the primary source of procedure rather than individual chamber rules. For example, both Connecticut and Montana rely heavily on joint rules of procedure rather than chamber rules of procedure. As such, changes in the rules require the approval of both the house and senate rather than just a single chamber. Therefore, changes in the independent variables of interest may not have the same impact on the dependent variable as in the other states, and this needs to be accounted for in the model.

Data Sources

When discussing legislative structures and procedures at the state level, several sources should be considered. These sources may include (1) state constitutions, (2) statutes, (3) formal rules and regulations of the legislative chamber, (4) resolutions, (5) precedents, and (6) usages (Shambaugh, 1918). This comprehensive approach to identifying formal constraints is necessary because particular rules of procedure have been imposed on state legislative chambers via different sources, both inside and outside of the legislature. This is in stark contrast to the national level (i.e., the U.S. House and U.S. Senate) where legislative structures and procedures are determined solely within the legislature by its members.

The data for this research comes from the formal rules of procedure of lower house chambers as well as state constitutions and state statutes in 24 states for the time period 1955 through 1995.⁷ The 24 state legislative lower houses chosen are a fairly good representation of the 50 lower house chambers in the United States.

A decision was made not to explore rules of procedure found in resolutions, precedents and usages (i.e., informal norms). Exploring rules of procedure embedded in resolutions, precedent and usages would be a monstrous task at the state legislative level, since it would require reading legislative journal page by page and locating historical records that discuss informal processes in each state. Additionally, since little research has focused on formal state legislative procedures, it is important that the formal aspects of the legislative process are well understood before concentrating on the informal aspects. This research intends on partially addressing this shortcoming.

Further, after much consideration, it was decided to limit the analysis in this research to only the lower chambers because the differences between the upper and lower chambers at the state legislative level are not as pronounced as the differences between the U.S. Senate and U.S. House (see Hamm, Hedlund and Martorano 2000). Thus, it does not appear that any significant leverage would be gained by including upper chambers, and they are excluded from the analysis in the interest of time and manageability.

Finally, this analysis is only concerned with the formal structures and procedures adopted at the beginning of each two-year session cycle. Therefore, this analysis is not concerned with minor changes made during the session(s). The most important decisions about the organization of a legislative chamber (i.e., number and names of committees, committee assignments, election of speaker, the adoption of rules, etc.) take place at the onset of the legislative session. Further, the members of the chamber are well aware of the partisan composition of the chamber at the outset of a legislative session, and therefore all pertinent changes regarding minority procedural

⁷ For some states not all years in the time series were available for coding. The following states and year ranges were coded: DE (1955-1985); CA, MT (1955-1991); KS (1955-1993); AZ, CT, FL, IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, NC, OH, PA, RI, SC, SD, VT, WA, WV, WY (1955-1995); KY, VA (1956-1994). Regular legislative sessions are held in even years in KY and VA, while regular sessions are held in odd years in the remaining states. Two-thirds of the data for this research was collected by the author. The remaining one-third of the data was provided for use in this research by Keith Hamm (Rice University) and Ronald Hedlund (Northeastern University). All of the rules data in this analysis was coded by the author.

rights should be made at the session's outset as well. The subsequent analysis is based upon the rules for 492 legislative sessions.⁸

Analysis

The analysis in this research will proceed as follows. First, committee system effectiveness will be assessed generally. We will explore the evolution of committee system effectiveness over time as well as the factors related to committee system effectiveness cross-sectionally. Second, change in committee system effectiveness will be assessed. Specifically, the factors that lead to the adoption of procedures that decrease and increase the effectiveness of committee systems in the legislative process will be explored.

In general, committee system effectiveness has increased over time in state legislative lower houses in the United States.⁹ In the 1950s, the average score of committee system effectiveness was 1.82. In the 1960s, it increased to 2.40, and in the 1970s, it leapt to 4.24. Levels of committee system effectiveness, in the 1980s and 1990s, were a bit more modest, 5.04 and 5.45 respectively. The increases in committee system effectiveness between the 1960s and 1970s as well as the 1970s and 1980s were statistically significant.

What factors account generally for committee system effectiveness? Table 3 presents the results of a model using a pooled, cross-sectional dataset and estimated with Prais-Winsten regression with panel corrected standard errors.¹⁰ In addition to the independent and control variables discussed earlier, two other variables are included in this and all remaining models – the passage of time and policy complexity. There is a moderate correlation between time and an increase in policy complexity, and these variables are included in the model to deal with the effects of this correlation.¹¹

Three factors other than the previous level of committee system effectiveness are associated with relatively higher levels of committee system effectiveness – policy complexity, professionalization and the passage of time. All three of these indicators are statistically significant and positive. This indicates that in chambers facing legislation that is both more numerous and complex and in chambers that are more professionalized, it is likely that the chamber will possess more procedures that foster committee system effectiveness. It is also the case that as time simply progresses; it is likely that chambers will adopt procedures that foster committee system effectiveness.

⁸ The final number of observations in the multivariate analysis is 380 because of some missing information with regards to the explanatory variables.

⁹ In theory, the value of this variable can range from -22 to +22, since all 22 indicators are measured on scales that range from -1 to +1. In reality, the range of the variable is -5 to 10 with a mean of 3.789 and a standard deviation of 2.99.

¹⁰ The author would like to thank Gina Branton and Randy Stevenson at Rice University for their assistance in learning this estimation technique.

¹¹ This model is slightly different from those that follow in that the measure accounting for public policy demand (policy complexity) is simply the value of policy complexity for the previous legislative session and not a cumulative sum of the change in policy complexity.

[Table 3 about here]

While it is useful to account for cross-sectional variation in committee system effectiveness, it is even more interesting to explore the factors that literally cause a chamber to adopt or change procedures that impact committee system effectiveness. Procedural change is a fairly rare event. In the 24 chambers in this analysis there were 106 changes (thus, change occurred in just 30 percent of the sessions in questions) in committee system effectiveness over the course of the twenty legislative sessions studied (there were 492 state/session years explored in total). Twenty-six (25 percent) resulted in a decrease in committee system effectiveness and 80 (75 percent) resulted in an increase in committee system effectiveness.

Table 4 displays the results of a repeated event history analysis estimated using multinomial logit¹². In this model the occurrence of two events – 1) alteration in the rules that result in a decrease committee system effectiveness, 2) alteration in the rules result in an increase committee system effectiveness – are assessed in comparison to another event – the maintaining of the status quo (i.e., no alteration is made in the rules of procedures relating to committee systems).

[Table 4 about here]

Recall earlier eight hypotheses regarding changes in committee system effectiveness were posited. The results of the model support just two of those eight, and provide negative support for one. The variable accounting for *The Sometimes Government (Sometimes)*, is positive and significantly related to a change in procedures that diminish committee system effectiveness. This results means that the publication of the report actually increases the hazard rate of the event occurring – in this case it is the risk of a chamber changing procedures in ways that diminish committee system effectiveness increases by 963.34 percent (See Table 5). This is contrary to the hypothesized relationship of the report actually leading to an increase.

[Table 5 about here]

The two hypotheses receiving support are those associated with professionalization and the election of a new Speaker in the chamber. Both are statistically significant and positive indicating that increases in professionalization as well as the election of a new Speaker both increase the hazard rate associated with changes in procedures that act to increase committee system effectiveness. Specifically, the hazard rate associated with increasing committee system effectiveness increases by 29.12 percent with every one standard deviation increase in professionalization.¹³ When a new Speaker is elected in the chamber, the hazard rate increases 94.84 percent.

¹² At the heart of this research is the question of what factors account for the timing of procedural change and the durations of those changes. It has been asserted by other researchers that event history analysis is the most appropriate research design to answer these types of questions (see Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997). However, one very strong and limiting assumption needs to be made in this analysis – that each of these legislative chambers were “born” in 1955. That is, the analysis does not take into account the effects of any factors occurring prior to 1955.

¹³ The professionalization variable ranges from .05 to .9. It has a mean of .235 and a standard deviation of .143.

The only other variables reaching statistical significance are the 1955 level of committee system effectiveness and the passage of time. Both are associated with the event of a decrease in committee system effectiveness. Substantively, an increase in the hazard rate for this condition is experienced when the 1955 base level is large, and a decrease is experienced with the passage of time. It is unclear how to interpret the finding concerning 1955 base committee system effectiveness, but the finding concerning the passage of time is not very surprising. Substantively, this finding indicates that the hazard rate of adopting procedures that reduce committee system effectiveness decrease 17.2 percent with every legislative session that passes. Thus, as time passes legislators are more reluctant to alter existing legislative procedures in ways that diminish committee power.

The general lack of findings in the model was surprising. The model in Table 4 indicates that the adoption of procedures relating to committee system effectiveness is not related to increase demands for public policy, shifts in partisan politics, or major reforms (*Reapportionment* and *Sometimes*). Figure 1 displays the distribution of procedural changes over the time period of study. The bars represent the number of chambers in each year that experienced some change (either an increase or a decrease) in committee system effectiveness.

[Figure 1 about here]

The most startling observation about the distribution of adopted changes in committee system effectiveness is that the distribution is close to normal. If the time span is broken down into three roughly equal categories – 1957-1967 (six sessions), 1969-1981 (seven sessions) and 1983-1985 (seven sessions), it is discovered that 52 percent of the changes occur in the middle time period (1969-1981) and approximately 25 percent occur in each surrounding time period (26 percent for 1957-1967 and 22 percent for 1983-1995). A simple difference of means test confirmed that these differences are statistically significant.

Apparently, there is something occurring during the middle period of the time span that is causing legislative chambers to alter committee system effectiveness at a higher rate. Is it the case that a number factors may be converging in this same time period? The analysis in Table 3 accounts for two historical events – reapportionment and the CCSL's report on state government reform. Both events occur in very close proximity to one another. The 24 states in the study undertook their initial reapportionments between 1965 and 1971. CCSL's *Sometimes Governments* was published in 1971. In addition, a number of other events may have occurred during this time period that may have spurred state legislative chambers to alter their structures and procedures. The Watergate scandal (1972-1973) fueled a movement to pass government Sunshine Laws that would provide openness to government practices including the committee stage of the legislative process. In addition, it is during this time period that the U.S. Congress passed sweeping reforms of their own committee system (Rhode 1991), and all levels of government were affected by a severe economic crisis. Could it be the case the state legislative lower houses were being affected by all of these events at once?

Table 5 estimates the same model in Table 4 except that it replaces the measures accounting for reapportionment and *The Sometimes Governments* with a measure that accounts

more generally for a *reform period* that may have occurred from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. This variable is measured one for the years 1965 (the year the first chamber in this study reapportioned) through 1979.

[Table 4 about here]

With respect to the occurrence of a decrease in committee system effectiveness, only one variable is statistically significant – the 1955 level of committee system effectiveness. A one unit increase in the 1955 level results in a 16.65 percent increase in the hazard rate associated with a decrease in committee system effectiveness.

The results are quite different with respect to increases in committee system effectiveness. The hypotheses concerning professionalization no longer holds (although it barely misses statistical significance at the $p < .10$ level), but the election of a new speaker is still significant and positive. The substantive impact of the election of a new Speaker is also greater. The election of a new Speaker leads to a 187.20 percent increase in the associated hazard rate. This result infers that new leadership may be a very strong factor in instigating and achieving procedural change in legislative chambers.

The variable accounting for the reform period (1965-1979) is also positive and significant. The hazard rate related to an increase in committee system effectiveness occurring increases 203.81 percent in legislative sessions that fall in this time period. It appears that a combination of historical events may have played an important role in causing legislative chambers to adopt procedures that increase committee system effectiveness.

However, one finding from Table 4 is disturbing. The cumulative change in policy complexity is negative and significant indicating that increases in pressure for public policy actually result in a significant decrease in the hazard rate of adopting procedures that increase committee system effectiveness. This relationship is contrary to the one hypothesized earlier. Past literature and theory all support the notion that increases workload and policy complexity should lead to the desire for a more effective committee system. This finding must be explored in future research. Is it the case that the relationship is true, or is it the case that the measure is not actually capturing the concept? Oddly, the interaction of the cumulative change in policy complexity and the passage of time is also statistically significant, but positive. This finding indicates that as time passes and the cumulative change in policy complexity increases, the hazard rate associated with increasing committee system effectiveness increases by 107.53 percent.

Summation and Conclusion

The findings of this analysis underscore the notion that accounting for legislative structures and procedures is an extremely complex puzzle. In this analysis of committee system effectiveness, very few of the hypothesized relationships were borne out. Of the eight hypotheses posited, only one – the impact of the election of a new Speaker – received consistent

support. The election of a new Speaker appears to be linked to a legislative chamber's changing procedures in ways that increase committee system effectiveness.

One of the most surprising findings was the lack of support for the hypothesized relationship between policy complexity and committee system effectiveness. It was hypothesized that increases in policy complexity would lead to the adoption of procedures that fostered committee systems effectiveness. The results of this analysis found either no relationship or a negative relationship between the two. The question that needs to be addressed in the future is whether or not these findings are accurate or are adjustments needed. Specifically, has the concept been operationalized and measured correctly? Are there any interactions with policy complexity that have not been accounted for? These questions will be the focus of future research.

A closer exploration of the data showed that there was a significant increase in the rate that legislative chambers altered structures and procedures regarding committee system effectiveness in the legislative sessions between 1969 and 1981. What forces were driving this increased rate of change? A new variable was created that accounted for a general period of reform (1965-1979), and it was found that this period experiences a significant increase in the rate at which state legislative chambers are likely to adopt procedures that increase committee system effectiveness. This period in American political history was quite tumultuous. The following events all occurred during this period – the impact of the *Baker v. Carr* reapportionment decision, the Watergate scandal, CCSL movement to reform state government structures and procedures, severe economic problems such as high rates of inflation and unemployment, and sweeping structural and procedural reforms at the congressional level. Were state legislative lower houses so impacted by these events that they reacted by increasing the effectiveness of their committee systems? The results of the analysis indicate that this time period is indeed a significant factor. The next step is to sort out the effects on state legislative lower houses of the time period in question (1965-1979). Questions that need to be addressed are: 1) Did all of these events have an impact on decisions to increase committee system effectiveness; 2) Was some event(s) more important than others? Answering these questions will shed further light on the causes of institutional change in state legislative chambers.

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Table 1
Structures and Procedures Related to Committee System Effectiveness

Procedure	Description	Function
1) All bills to committee	Positive value indicates a requirement that all bills be referred to a committee for consideration	Receiving Legislation
2) Committee consideration of bills	Positive value indicates that committees do not have to consider all referred legislation	Screening Legislation
3) Committee reporting of bills	Positive value indicates that committee do not have to report all referred bills back to the chamber	Screening Legislation
4) Action deadline	Positive value indicates that committees do not have to consider and/or report bills back to the floor within a designated time period.	Screening Legislation
5) Committee sponsoring of bills	Positive value indicates that committees have the power to sponsor and introduce original legislation	Shaping Legislation
6) Incorporation of committee amendments	Positive value indicates that committee amendments are incorporated into bills before they are considered by the full chamber (i.e., the floor does not have the ability to reject committee amendments separately from the bill)	Shaping Legislation
7) Substitute bills	Positive value indicates that committees can offer substitute bills in lieu of those referred to them	Shaping Legislation
8) Handling of adverse committee reports	Positive value indicates that it is difficult for the floor to overturn an adverse or negative committee report	Affect Passage
9) Calendar order procedures	Positive value indicates that bills go on the calendar for floor consideration in the order reported out of committee consideration	Affect Passage

Table 1, cont'd

Procedure	Description	Function
10) Floor amending procedures	Positive value indicates restrictive procedures for amending bills on the floor	Affect Passage
11) Interim meetings	Positive value indicates that committees are permitted to meet between sessions	Interim Meeting
12) Committee staff	Positive value indicates that the formal rules contain provisions for committee staff	Institutional capacity
13) Seniority system	Positive value indicates that a seniority system does not exist	Institutional Power
14) Control over committee assignments	Positive value indicates that committee assignments are not controlled by the Speaker or party caucuses	Institutional Power
15) Open meetings (2 variables – one for meetings, one for deliberations)	Positive value indicates that committee meetings and deliberations must be open to the public	Ensures that committee stage is not compromised
16) Regular committee meetings	Positive value indicates that a regular schedule of committee meetings exists	Ensures that committees have time to meet and people know when
17) Committee agendas	Positive value indicates that committee meeting agendas must be announced in advance	Ensures that legislators/public know when legislation is being considered
18) Subpoena powers	Positive value indicates that committees possess the power to subpoena people and documents (separate variables for each aspect)	Ensures that committees can gather necessary information
19) Investigations	Positive value indicates that committees can conduct investigations	Ensures that committees can gather necessary information
20) Withdrawal of legislation	Positive value indicates that bills cannot be easily withdrawn from committee consideration	Ensures that the floor cannot easily bypass committee decision-making

Table 2
Independent and Control Variables

Variable	Description	Measure
Policy Complexity	Accounts for the building up of external pressures for more public policy in the legislature	Cumulative sum until a procedural change of: (#Bills introduced*Average length per bill)/Legislative days in the session The whole measure is divided by 100 to make interpretation easier, since the values are often large.
Reapportionment	Accounts for the impact of the one-man, one-vote decision	Coded one for the first legislative session after reapportionment
Chamber Size	Accounts for impact of chamber size on the adoption of legislative procedures	Raw number of members in the chamber
Sometimes	Accounts for recommendations for minority rights reform	Coded one 1973 forward in states that the report suggested needed to improve minority rights
Professionalization	Accounts for the impact of legislative professionalization	Index score from King (2000)
New Speaker	Accounts for the influence of a new Speaker of the House	Coded one when the Speaker is new
Tenure of Previous Speaker	Accounts for the effect of having a single Speaker serve for a number of sessions	# sessions served by the previous Speaker of the House
Majority Party Strength	Accounts for the relative strength of the majority political party	% of seats held by the majority party
Turnover	Accounts for the impact of changes in membership	% of new members in the chamber
Joint Rules	Accounts for those states that share legislative rules of procedure between the two chambers	Coded one for states with joint rules
Baseline Score of Committee Effectiveness	Accounts for each chambers initial level of committee system effectiveness	Value of the Committee Effectiveness measure in 1955

Table 3
Accounting for Committee System Effectiveness[^]

	Committee System Effectiveness	
	B (PCSE)	z
Policy Complexity	.007 (.004)	1.80*
Reapportionment	-.121 (.173)	-.70
Size	.002 (.003)	.63
Sometimes	.082 (.201)	.41
Professionalization	3.017 (.951)	3.17**
New Speaker	.139 (.100)	1.38
Tenure of Previous Speaker	-.036 (.040)	-.90
Majority Party Strength	.006 (.007)	.86
Turnover	-.001 (.004)	-.22
Joint Rules	-1.294 (.790)	-1.64
Base Comm. System Effectiveness	.751 (.115)	6.50****
Passage of Time	.189 (.029)	6.61****
Policy comp. * Time	-5.68e-07 (4.34e-06)	-.13
Constant	-1.010 (.822)	-1.23
N	377	
# of States	24	
Avg. # obs/state	15.71	
Rho	.835	
R-Square	.301	

* p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01, ****p<.001

[^]Computed in STATA using Prais-Winsten Regression with panel corrected standard errors.

Table 4
Accounting for Changes in Committee System Effectiveness[^]

	Decrease in Effectiveness B (Rob. Std. Err.)	Increase in Effectiveness B (Rob. Std Err.)
Cum. Δ Policy Comp.	.068 (.062)	-.048 (.030)
Reapportionment	.621 (1.09)	.223 (.619)
Size	-.003 (.007)	-.002 (.004)
Sometimes	2.364 (.920)**	-.641 (.579)
Professionalization	.396 (2.43)	1.787 (.947)**
New Speaker	.485 (.606)	.667 (.301)**
Tenure of Previous Speaker	-.673 (.426)	-.098 (.090)
Majority Party Strength	-.058 (.039)	.020 (.014)
Turnover	.027 (.023)	-.012 (.012)
Joint Rules	-.740 (.949)	.563 (.625)
Base Comm. System Effectiveness	.179 (.102)*	-.066 (.054)
Passage of Time	-.158 (.089)*	-.026 (.053)
Policy Comp. * Time	-.006 (.004)	.002 (.002)
Time Until Change	.032 (.104)	.038 (.048)
Constant	1.111 (2.51)	-2.160 (1.29)*
N	380	
Log Likelihood	-239.65	
Wald X ²	63.38****	
Pseudo R ²	.087	

* p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01, ****p<.001

[^]Computed in STATA using multinomial logit regression with robust standard errors. The comparison group for both categories is no change.

Table 5
Changes in Hazards of Altering Procedures Relating to Committee System Effectiveness
For Selected Factors

	Separate Reform Indicators (Table 3)		Combined Reform Period (Table 4)	
Factor	Decrease Effectiveness	Increase Effectiveness	Decrease Effectiveness	Increase Effectiveness
Cum. Δ Policy Comp.*				-243.56%
Sometimes**	963.34%			
Reform Period**				203.81%
Professionalization*		29.12%		
New Speaker**		94.84%		187.20%
Baseline Comm. Effectiveness**	19.6%		16.65%	
Time* Cum. Δ Policy Comp.***				107.53%
Passage of Time**	-17.2%			

*The calculation is based on a 1 standard deviation (18.15) increase in cumulative change in policy complexity. For professionalization the calculation is also based on a 1 standard deviation (.143) increase in the professionalization measure.

**For all of these measures, the calculation is based on the variable taking on a value of one (i.e., the existence of the condition)

***The calculation is based on a 1 standard deviation increase in cumulative change in policy complexity multiplied by a one unit (1 legislative session) increase in time.

Table 6
Accounting for Changes in Committee System Effectiveness Combining
Reapportionment and Sometimes into one Reform Period Variable[^]

	Decrease in Effectiveness B (Rob. Std. Err.)	Increase in Effectiveness B (Rob. Std. Err.)
Cum. Δ Policy Comp.	.061 (.050)	-.068 (.030)**
Reform Period	-.022 (.531)	.712 (.322)**
Size	-.004 (.007)	-.001 (.003)
Professionalization	.310 (2.58)	1.577 (.989)
New Speaker	.451 (.569)	.627 (.300)**
Tenure of Previous Speaker	-.656 (.416)	-.082 (.089)
Majority Party Strength	-.045 (.037)	.016 (.013)
Turnover	.016 (.019)	-.007 (.013)
Joint Rules	-.463 (.890)	.484 (.646)
Base Comm. System Effectiveness	.154 (.092)*	.067 (.053)
Passage of Time	.019 (.048)	-.051 (.038)
Policy Comp. * Time	-.006 (.004)	.004 (.002)**
Time Until Change	-.022 (.106)	.045 (.046)
Constant	.465 (2.97)	-2.589 (1.339)**
N	380	
Log Likelihood	-241.92	
Wald X ²	75.18****	
Pseudo R ²	.079	

* p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01, ****p<.001

[^]Computed in STATA using multinomial logit with robust standard errors. The comparison group for both categories is no change.

Figure 1
Number of Procedural Changes in Committee System Effectiveness, 1957-1995

