

Committees and the Decline of Lawmaking in Congress

The public, journalists, and legislators themselves have often lamented a decline in congressional lawmaking in recent years, often blaming party politics for the lack of legislative output. In *Committees and the Decline of Lawmaking in Congress*, Jonathan Lewallen examines the decline in lawmaking from a new, committee-centered perspective. Lewallen tests his theory against other explanations such as partisanship and an increased demand for oversight with multiple empirical tests and traces shifts in policy activity by policy area using the Policy Agendas Project coding scheme.

He finds that because party leaders have more control over the legislative agenda, committees have spent more of their time conducting oversight instead. Partisanship alone does not explain this trend; changes in institutional rules and practices that empowered party leaders have created more uncertainty for committees and contributed to a shift in their policy activities. The shift toward oversight at the committee level combined with party leader control over the voting agenda means that many members of Congress are effectively cut out of many of the institution's policy decisions. At a time when many, including Congress itself, are considering changes to modernize the institution and keep up with a stronger executive branch, the findings here suggest that strengthening Congress will require more than running different candidates or providing additional resources.

Jonathan Lewallen is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Tampa.

“Lewallen provides fresh insight into one of the most important changes happening inside of the modern Congress—that of the evolving role played by congressional committees. Showing that committee activity has shifted, rather than declined, the findings of this book will surprise many, and challenge the conventional wisdom.”

—James M. Curry, University of Utah

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COMMITTEES and the DECLINE of LAWMAKING in CONGRESS

Jonathan Lewallen



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