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Committee Organization in the Virginia General Assembly

by

Genevieve Markee

Honors Thesis

Submitted to:

Political Science Department

University of Richmond

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Advisor: Dr. Daniel Palazzolo

Abstract

Political scientists have developed several theories to explain how the United States Congress organizes its committees. According to the informational theory, members of Congress view committees as the most efficient way to divide the labor associated with processing a broad range of bills. Since it would be impossible for each individual member to have expertise in every policy area, information-gathering responsibility is distributed among the different Members through the committee system. Committees provide information about policy outcomes and produce legislation preferred by a majority of Members. According to the partisan model, on the other hand, committees are organized primarily to support the political agenda of the majority party. My study tests the extent to which these two theories explain committee organization in the Virginia General Assembly. I put forth and test several hypotheses based on the predictions of these two theories, using data on the occupational backgrounds, party affiliation, and ideological preferences of General Assembly members. I find that both informational and partisan theory apply in the General Assembly. Differences in organization between committees can be explained by chamber rules, policy types, and the size of the party majority. A House rule requiring proportional representation on committees has resulted in a more informational model for the House. In the Senate, which has no such rule, committees conform more to the expectations of the partisan theory. Committees that control important issues like business and government spending tend to be organized more along the lines of the partisan model, whereas committees with specialized jurisdictions in areas like agriculture and transportation follow a more informational model. Committees that control important but specialized issues like the legal system show a mix of partisan and informational characteristics.

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Introduction and Research Question

Over the past three decades, the Virginia General Assembly has transitioned from a century of unified Democratic control to an era of increasing electoral competition and split governance. After a century of Democratic majorities, the House of Delegates spent almost two decades as a Republican stronghold before a Democratic takeover in 2020. The Virginia Senate has proved more competitive in the twenty-first century, with some years of unified Republican control between the House and Senate and some years when Republican majorities in the House were countered by Democratic majorities in the Senate. The swearing-in of the first female Speaker of the House of Delegates in 2020 signals that change for the General Assembly may not yet be over. As the legislature continues through this new chapter of its four hundred year history, it is important to understand the institutional practices that undergird the General Assembly's work, particularly as it relates to the organization of committees—the “heart of the legislative process” (Finch, Maddrea, and Garrett 2012, 66).

Two primary modes of explaining congressional committee organization come from the work of Keith Krehbiel (1991) and Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins (1993). According to these scholars' respective theories, committees attempt to produce policy in line with either the preferences of the chamber as a whole (informational theory) or the preferences of the majority party (partisan theory). With a few exceptions (Battista 2006), applications of these theories in the literature have largely occurred within the context of the U.S. Congress or in cross-state comparisons, rather than within specific states. My research determines the extent to which informational and partisan theory explain committee organization in the Virginia General Assembly.

Based on each theory, I develop hypotheses that predict committee makeup in terms of members' occupational background, partisan affiliation, and ideological preferences. I find that the House and Senate exhibit characteristics of both the informational and partisan models. However, partisan theory explains committee organization in the Senate more so than in the House, whose rules restrain the majority party from disproportionately assigning its own members to committees. In addition to differences between chambers, the applicability of informational and partisan theories also varies by committee and by session. Committees that control important issues like business and government spending tend to follow a more partisan model, while committees with specialized jurisdictions in areas like agriculture and transportation follow a more informational model. Committees like Courts of Justice, which control important but specialized issues, show a mix of partisan and informational characteristics. Moreover, the analysis produced some evidence that partisan organization is more prevalent during when the majority controls the chamber by a narrow margin.

Theoretical Background

For most of the twentieth century, studies of legislative committees were dominated by distributional theory, which theorizes committees as groups of homogenous, high-demanding legislators who use logrolling to pass bills which may be adverse to majority interests. In the 1990s, Krehbiel (1991) and Cox and McCubbins (1993) challenged the distributional consensus with alternative models for committee organization. Their respective informational and partisan theories have since become foundational to studies of legislative organization, initially in the United States House of Representatives but later extending to state legislatures.

Krehbiel's book *Information and Legislative Organization* argues that the distributional model fails to account for the importance of informational concerns in legislative organization.

Based on the assumption that legislatures seek to acquire the greatest possible knowledge regarding policy outcomes, Krehbiel proposes an informational framework in which legislatures are organized to maximize the degree to which the actual outcomes of a particular policy align with those preferred by the majority of legislators. To that end, legislatures attempt “to capture gains from specialization” (5) by assigning committee members who, through seniority or personal and legislative experience, will have the most knowledge about policy in the committee’s jurisdiction. At the same time, legislatures try to create committees that will produce legislation in line with the preferences of median legislators. Krehbiel uses game theory models to develop empirical expectations about how distributive and informational theories would play out through assignment and composition of committees, the use of restrictive rules, and the procedural enforcement of logrolling deals. He then compares these expectations with data from legislative sessions in the U.S. House of Representatives. Krehbiel concludes that the House rarely creates committees of homogenous high-demanders, as the distributional theory would have predicted. Exceptions to this trend mostly occur when high-demanders can offer low-cost specialization in a particular policy area, offsetting the desire for majority-preferred policy with informational capacity. Krehbiel also produces evidence that special rules and post-floor procedures are not used to facilitate gains from trade, suggesting that the House does not operate in a fashion consistent with a distributive mode of organization. Importantly, Krehbiel argues that committees, as informational bodies, serve as ideological reflections of the chamber and produce policies amenable to the median legislator.

Cox and McCubbins, in *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*, instead contend that committees serve the interests of the majority party. Their partisan or cartel theory holds that individual legislators in the majority party see their electoral success as more closely

tied to the party's actions than to the legislature's. Therefore, both the legislators and the committees which they control take actions which will support the preferences of the majority party, rather than simply supplying the floor with information about policy outcomes. Cox and McCubbins further support the cartel theory by pointing out the procedural mechanisms that grant majority party leadership in the House of Representatives control over committee organization, encouraging committee outcomes supported by the majority party. These mechanisms include discretion in assigning committee members and chairs, allotting committee tasks and resources, and scheduling hearings for committee bills on the floor. The final consequence of such control is that "[most] bills reported from committee are sponsored by members of the majority party and come to the floor with the support of almost all the majority party's committee contingent" (244), a reflection of tight party control inducing party-friendly outcomes at the committee level. Once on the floor, Cox and McCubbins find that "non-committee Democrats agreed with the decisions of most committees most of the time," and certainly supported committee decisions more than did non-committee Republicans (245). Cox and McCubbins use these findings to support their thesis: that committees do not act as autonomous agents within the legislature, but rather are firmly bound by the goals and aims of the majority party.

Whereas Krehbiel, Cox, and McCubbins restrict their research to the U.S. House of Representatives, other scholars have applied informational and partisan theories of committee organization to the legislatures meeting in state houses across America. Overby and Kazee (2000) demonstrate that these models can and should be applied to state legislatures. Their analysis of twelve state lower chambers shows that state legislatures rarely form outlying committees, either in terms of alignment between committee members and the floor or between

committee party delegation and party caucus. Similarly, taking a larger sample size, Prince and Overby (2005) interpret the rareness of preference outliers among state committees as supporting the informational theory. However, they also point out that the relatively greater “evidence of outliers *among party delegations* on committees provides some support for the party-dominant theory” (68, emphasis added), noting that majority parties might appoint more extreme members to certain committees to counter minority delegations. Thus, it is possible that both informational and partisan theories may apply in either chamber of the General Assembly.

Further research has built upon the foundation laid down by this early scholarship, providing more evidence of both informational and partisan organization in state legislatures. In support of informational theory, some researchers have pointed to the correlation between policy complexity and committee autonomy (Martorano 2006) or the overrepresentation of members with prior knowledge, experience, and expertise on certain policy committees (Hamm et al. 2011). These studies could indicate that legislatures primarily rely on their committees to efficiently gather information on policy outcomes. Other scholars have focused on partisan theory, demonstrating that committees more often act at the behest of the party when they can exercise greater negative agenda control, or when party leadership’s committee appointment decisions are not subject to the approval of the full chamber (Anzia and Jackman 2013, Jackman 2013, Anderson et al. 2016). Majority size can also impact both the autonomy of committees relative to party leadership (Francis 1989) and the extent to which committee membership is reflective of the chamber’s ideological makeup. Some studies have found that narrow majorities produce more committees which are more ideologically reflective of the chamber (Aldrich and Batista 2002, Battista 2009), while other studies have found that majorities—and narrow

majorities in particular—produce committees whose members’ ideological preferences do not reflect those of the chamber (Hedlund et al. 2009, McGrath and Ryan 2019).¹

My research will explore how well the informational and partisan models explain committee organization in the House and Senate of the Virginia General Assembly. No study has attempted to test legislative organization theories in the General Assembly, as Battista (2006) does for the California state legislature. Do committees of the Virginia General Assembly seek primarily to serve and reflect the interests of their parent chambers? Or, do they serve as agents of the majority party, preventing bills which the party leadership dislikes from making it to the floor and advancing those which the leadership likes? In addition to analyzing the relevance of the informational and partisan theories to the General Assembly, I will compare the Senate and House committee systems. I develop hypotheses to test the informational and partisan models in both the House and Senate and test them with data provided by the Virginia Public Access Project, Virginia’s Legislative Information System, and the American Legislatures project.

General Assembly Background

The Virginia General Assembly, like most state legislatures, is bicameral, with a lower chamber of one hundred members (the House of Delegates, or House) and an upper chamber of forty members (the Senate). Delegates, each of whom represents approximately 80,000 Virginia

¹ David Rohde’s (1991) theory of conditional party government specifies the role of party in committee organization and legislative outcomes. Under this theory, the majority party leadership’s power to use committees in advancing a partisan agenda depends on the degree of party unity; more homogenous parties delegate more power to party leadership, who in turn serve the collective electoral goals of the party. Empowered leadership appoints committee delegations representative of the caucus, resulting in more representative committees overall. According to Rohde’s model, the primary agent whom legislative committees serve can change over time: “as partisan-based elections increasingly elect members whose policy preferences are similar within and differentiated between the two parties, these members choose to strengthen partisan organization within the [legislature]” (Aldrich and Rohde 1997, 546). Under a less polarized system, therefore, committees should not be beholden to the preferences of the majority party and its leadership. The opposite is also true; more polarized parties produce committees that are more responsive to the party leadership and the preferences of the majority party. Aldrich and Battista (2002) provide evidence that the conditional party government model can explain committee organization in state legislatures. Unfortunately, insufficient data on polarization in Virginia meant that I was unable to test conditional party government theory in the General Assembly.

citizens, serve for two-year terms, while senators represent approximately 200,000 citizens each and serve four-year terms. Beyond differences in size, the unique rules of each chamber may affect the way that they organize their respective committees. This section addresses key differences in the chambers' leadership structures, their committee systems, and their electoral history.

Chamber Characteristics

Proceedings in the House are dominated by the Speaker of the House, who has the power to make committee appointments, designate committee chairs, and assign bills to committees. According to former Speaker William Howell, the Virginia House Speakership is generally recognized as an unusually strong one, with considerably more power over legislative proceedings than speakers in other state lower chambers. Howell referenced South Carolina and Georgia as states where the Rules Committees, rather than House Speakers, determine committee membership and bill assignment. In Virginia, the Speaker exercises both of these powers. Virginia House Speakers may, as Howell did, choose to work with a "kitchen cabinet" of key majority party members who provide advice on assignments. As the leader of the majority party, Speakers may also seek to accommodate the requests of party members when possible. After receiving this input, the Speaker has final say in all decisions, and challenges from other legislators are infrequent. In the committee assignment process under Howell, members were expected to take the initiative in making their preferences known to the Speaker. However, input from the minority party and its leadership was rarely taken into account (W. Howell, personal communication, November 9, 2020).

Since 1998, the rules of the House of Delegates have required that Speakers implement proportional representation of the two major parties on every committee except for Rules. The

change came about because of a partisan shift that allowed Republicans to share power with Democrats in 1998 and 1999, after decades of unchallenged Democratic control. By pushing for the adoption of a rule to require proportional representation on committees, newly empowered Republicans hoped to end what they considered to be a history of unfair committee assignments that overrepresented Democrats on key committees and packed Republicans onto powerless committees like Interstate Cooperation (Christman 2018).

In contrast to the House, the Senate does not empower a single actor like the Speaker with the power to make committee assignments. Rather, according to the rules of the Senate, the majority caucus submits a nominations report for committee membership elections. This list of nominations must then be agreed to by a majority of the Senate. During my time observing the 2020 session of the Virginia Senate, the majority leader, in consultation with committee chairs, appeared to lead the process of deciding membership recommendations. Majority party leadership engaged in dialogues with both majority and minority membership to craft a nominations report that would achieve the necessary support from the full chamber. Although Senate rules facilitate a more consultative assignment process than the House, they do not require proportional representation on committees. In theory, this would allow a Senate majority to overrepresent their own members on key committees.

In addition to differences in rules, the House and Senate differ in their traditions and bipartisan relations. For example, multiple observers have described the Senate as more collegial and inclined to bipartisanship than the House. Laura Vozzella, who covers Virginia politics for the *Washington Post*, noted that “although they are politically divided, [the senators] actually all like each other ... Even after some very heated floor sessions, they all basically like and respect each other” (L. Vozzella, personal communication, April 22, 2020). Senator Jennifer McClellan,

who spent ten years in the House before her election to the Senate, attributed this difference to the upper chamber's smaller size and the longer tenure of its members. "When you're forty, it's hard to be partisan and petty and take things personally," she said, adding that with four-year terms, senators do not have to spend all of their time thinking about reelection (J. McClellan, personal communication, April 22, 2020). By contrast, the greater size and continual campaigning of House members translates into greater competition and vitriol in relations between delegates. These differences in atmosphere may produce differences in legislative outcomes. Anecdotally, I have both personally observed and been told by Assembly staff and elected officials that the collegiality between senators leads them to pass more moderate, bipartisan legislation than their House counterparts.

Committee Systems in the House and Senate

Over the twenty-six year period covered by this study, the House has reorganized its committees several times, while the Senate committee structure has remained constant. In 1998, the House replaced the Nominations Committee with a committee on Science and Technology. Four years later, the House consolidated four committees (Agriculture, Chesapeake and Its Tributaries, Conservation and Natural Resources, and Mining and Mineral Resources) into one (Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources), while Corporations, Insurance and Banking, and Labor and Commerce became Commerce and Labor. The virtually powerless Interstate Cooperation Committee was done away with, as was the Claims Committee, taking the House from twenty committees to fourteen. When Democrats took control of both chambers in 2020, they did not amend the committee structure, although a couple of committees were renamed to more accurately reflect their existing jurisdictions: the House Commerce and Labor Committee was renamed Labor and Commerce, and House Science and Technology was renamed

Communications, Technology and Innovation. Also in 2020, the Senate Courts of Justice Committee was renamed Judiciary; and Senate Finance was renamed Finance and Appropriations. Thus, as of 2020, the General Assembly had twenty-five total committees: fourteen in the House and eleven in the Senate. A list of these committees can be seen in Table 1. Unless otherwise specified by parentheticals in Table 1, the 2020 committee names will be used to refer to committees in all sessions.

Table 1. General Assembly Committees in 2020	
House Committees	Senate Committees
Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources (Agriculture)	Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources (Agriculture)
Appropriations	Commerce and Labor (Commerce)
Communications, Technology and Innovation (Technology)	Education and Health
Counties, Cities, and Towns (Counties)	Finance and Appropriations (Finance)
Courts of Justice (Courts)	General Laws and Technology (General Laws)
Education	Judiciary (Courts)
Finance	Local Government
General Laws	Privileges and Elections (P&E)
Health, Welfare and Institutions (Health)	Rehabilitation and Social Services (Rehabilitation)
Labor and Commerce (Commerce)	Rules
Privileges and Elections (P&E)	Transportation
Public Safety	
Rules	
Transportation	

Prior to the 2002 reorganization of House committees, senators and delegates would each serve on approximately four committees. Since 2002, senators usually still serve on four committees, while delegates usually serve on three committees. Most Senate committees have fifteen members, although Rules, Commerce, or Finance may have one or two more members, in keeping with their relative prestige and power. By contrast, Local Government, P&E, and Transportation may have fewer members; for instance, in the 2016 session all three of these committees had just thirteen members. In the House, committees since 2002 have usually had twenty-two members, with the exception of Rules, which has a membership closer to fifteen, and Appropriations, which may have a membership above or below average. Before 2002, committees varied much more widely in membership size.

Electoral History

Because of changes in Virginia's partisan orientation between 1996 and 2020, control of the two General Assembly chambers has gone back and forth over the years. After the end of Democratic control with a 50-50 partisan split in 1998 and 1999, the House was a reliably Republican institution until 2020, when Democrats gained a ten-seat majority. The tie in 1998 and 1999 resulted in a power-sharing agreement between the two major parties, with divided control of committees. The Senate had a similar power-sharing agreement from 1996 to 2000. While the Senate had two other instances of 20-20 splits in 2012 and 2014, in these cases the balance of power was determined by the Lieutenant Governor, who serves as President of the Senate, and is allowed to vote on legislation in the event of a tie. In 2012, while Democrats and Republicans both held twenty seats, the Senate was controlled by Republicans under the Republican Lieutenant Governor at the time, Bill Bolling. In 2014, when Ralph Northam became Lieutenant Governor, party control in the Senate transferred to the Democrats. After the end of

Democratic control in the Senate in 1996, Democrats held a majority of Senate seats only in 2008, 2010, and 2020.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and legislature backgrounds previously described, I formulate hypotheses that anticipate certain outcomes in committee makeup. These hypotheses are divided into sections based on the specific theories that they address and the metrics used to assess committee membership.

Informational Theory and Talent-Tapping

Under informational theory, committees are organized to produce legislation with predictable outcomes that are in alignment with the preferences of the chamber majority. Ideally, committees should achieve these ends at minimal cost to the chamber in terms of information-gathering. To that end, legislatures assign committee members who can reduce uncertainty about policy outcomes within a given jurisdiction to the greatest degree, but at the least cost. Krehbiel (1991) accounts for this tendency in his seminal work on informational theory, theorizing that unrepresentative committees emerge because their members, despite being preference outliers within the chamber, have the most to offer in terms of low-cost expertise and information gathering. For example, a legislature may attempt to “tap the talents” of its members by assigning legislators with professional experience in a certain field to a committee whose policy jurisdiction overlaps with that field (Hamm, Hedlund, and Post 2011). If informational theory applies in the General Assembly, where part-time legislators engage in separate occupations outside of their policymaking roles, then this sort of talent-tapping should be visible. Health care professionals should be overrepresented on health-related committees, lawyers should be overrepresented on judiciary-related committees, farmers should be overrepresented on

agriculture-related committees, and so on. In this way, the chamber would obtain the most policy expertise at the lowest cost of time and resources for information-gathering.

H1: If informational theory applies, then committees will be disproportionately made up of legislators whose occupations align with the policy jurisdictions of the committees.

Partisan Theory and Stacking

In addition to looking at legislators' occupations, I look at their party affiliation to determine the ratio of majority party members to minority party members in the full chamber and in individual committees. Under partisan theory, majority party leadership should attempt to prevent minority obstructionism in committee by creating an imbalance of representation that favors the majority party, allowing committees to better represent majority party opinions. Studies by Hedlund et al. (2009) and Ryan and McGrath (2019) both found evidence of majority parties "stacking" committees with their own members. A higher majority-to-minority party member (M:m) ratio in committees than in the full chamber would indicate the presence of stacking in committees, and thereby provide evidence that partisan theory helps to explain committee organization in the General Assembly.

H2: If partisan theory applies, then the ratio of seats held by the majority party compared to the minority party will be greater in committee than in the full chamber.

Additionally, according to Cox and McCubbins (1993), majority party leadership should do the most stacking in committees that have a high likelihood of impacting the collective electoral fortunes of the majority. The committees that legislators view as more important to party image, referred to here as *control committees*, should have a greater degree of stacking than

non-control committees. While studies of the U.S. Congress designate Finance, Appropriations, and Rules as control committees, these designations do not translate well to the Virginia General Assembly. William Howell, Speaker of the House of Delegates from 2003 to 2018, considers the Committees on Appropriations, Commerce and Labor, and Courts of Justice to be the most important committees in the House. According to Howell, the Committee on Rules, while commonly viewed as an assignment for more senior and influential party members, does little to impact the functioning or outcomes of the House (W. Howell, personal communication, November 9, 2020). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the House and Senate Appropriations (Finance in the Senate), Commerce and Labor, and Courts of Justice committees will be regarded as control committees.

H3: If partisan theory applies, then the ratio of seats held by the majority party compared to the minority party will be greater in control committees than in non-control committees.

In addition to variation between committees, partisan theory predicts that stacking would vary across sessions based on the size of the majority party. According to studies by Hedlund, Coombs, and Martorano (2009) and McGrath and Ryan (2019), majority party stacking should be greater in years with narrower majorities. In theory, less secure majorities should seek to prevent minority party obstruction at the committee stage, as well as to ensure that committees will not bring legislation to the floor that is likely to divide the majority party and result in a losing vote (Anzia and Jackman 2013; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Hedlund et al. 2009). To that end, majority leadership will seek to tighten their control over committees by overrepresenting their party through stacking.

H4: If partisan theory applies, then majority overrepresentation on committees will be greater when there is a smaller majority-to-minority ratio in the chamber than when there is a greater majority-to-minority ratio.

For this section of the study, twenty-three total committees will be considered: eleven Senate committees, eleven House committees whose jurisdictions have not appreciably changed over time, and the House Commerce and Labor committee, for which Corporations is used as a proxy before 2002. I consider Corporations to be a reasonable proxy for Commerce and Labor because, as former Speaker Howell observed, Commerce and Labor derives the greater part of its power from its ability to affect the workings of Virginia businesses (W. Howell, personal communication, November 9, 2020). The success of these businesses can impact economic growth—and thereby electoral outcomes—across the state. Well-endowed corporations may also work to support members of the Commerce and Labor (or Corporations) committee in elections in order to garner support on key legislation. Thus, the most “controlling” or significant work of Commerce and Labor maps well onto the work formerly done by Corporations.

Informational Model, Partisan Model, and Ideology Scores

In addition to legislators’ occupations and party affiliation, scholars have relied on ideology scores derived from roll call votes and questionnaires to test informational and partisan theories. In order to determine the ideological preferences of Virginia legislators, I utilize data from the American Legislatures project, which Shor and McCarty (2011) use to test spatial models of state legislators’ voting patterns. Shor and McCarty derive individual-level ideology scores for state legislators based on the legislators’ responses to Project Vote Smart’s National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) and roll call votes. Scores for Virginia legislators since 1996 have ranged from -1.63 to 1.53, with positive scores indicating more conservative preferences

and negative scores indicating more liberal preferences. A higher absolute score value indicates a more extreme position. The 2020 update to the Shor-McCarty NPAT data sets shows scores for General Assembly members in all twelve even-year sessions between 1996 and 2018.

According to informational theory, committees are organized to produce bills preferred by the delegate in the chamber with median ideological preferences, so committee ideological makeup should reflect that of the chamber (Krehbiel 1991). By contrast, partisan theory claims that committees, especially control committees, should be stacked with loyal partisans who shift the ideological balance of the committee in the majority party's preferred direction. Therefore, if informational theory is the model for committee organization in the General Assembly, the absolute difference between the committees' average ideology scores and the chamber medians should be less than the absolute difference between the committee averages and the majority party median. This outcome would indicate that committees produce legislation preferred by the chamber median over the majority party median.

H5: If informational theory applies, then the median ideology scores of committees will be closer to the median ideology score of the full chamber than to the median scores of the majority party.

In the case of H5, if the partisan model guides committee organization, then the opposite will be true. Majority party leadership will seek to ideologically stack committees, either by overrepresenting the majority party or by assigning more loyal partisans to sit on committees with narrower majorities. This results in an ideological stacking that shifts average committee ideology scores away from the chamber median and towards the majority party median. Support for H5 would indicate an informational model of committee organization, while a lack of support would indicate a partisan model. Moreover, if the partisan model applies in the General

Assembly, then majority leadership should also seek to achieve more ideological stacking—that is, to assign more loyal partisans—to control committees than to non-control committees, to ensure majority-supported outcomes in the most electorally significant policy areas.

H6: If partisan theory applies, then the median ideology scores of control committees will be closer to the majority party median than non-control committees.

Additionally, similar to H4's test for greater overrepresentation of majority party members on committees during sessions with narrower majorities, narrower majorities should also lead majority leadership to seek tighter control over committee outcomes by assigning more loyal partisans to committees and producing ideological stacking.

H7: If partisan theory applies, then the median committee ideology scores of majority party delegations will be closer to the majority party median in years with lesser majority-to-minority ratios in the full chamber than in years with a greater majority-to-minority ratio.

Inter-Chamber Differences

For each of the foregoing hypotheses, I will be analyzing data from both the House and the Senate. As I draw conclusions about the use of informational and partisan models for understanding General Assembly committee function, I will also consider whether my results indicate differences between the two chambers.

In considering whether the House or the Senate is more likely to follow the informational model, one could make a case for either chamber. On the one hand, the House has historically been less competitive than the Senate, in that it has wider majorities and changes control less frequently. This would theoretically decrease the incentives for majorities to engage in more

partisan stacking to ensure that they achieve key successes during their time in power.

Additionally, the House rule requiring proportional committee assignments leaves less latitude for partisan stacking by House majorities than by Senate majorities. Both of these characteristics could result in a more informational model in the House than in the Senate.

On the other hand, based on my experience in and around General Assembly offices at the Pocahontas Building in Richmond, VA, as well as interviews with important actors in the legislative process, the Senate is anecdotally considered to be a more collegial body than its larger counterpart, as well as a chamber which values bipartisan cooperation. This non-polarizing environment could work against the formation of partisan committees. Party leadership in the Senate also does not have the unusually ingrained power possessed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, making party leadership's control over committee outcomes more uncertain in the upper chamber. Additionally, according to Virginia's Legislative Information System, the Senate continuously introduced a greater number of bills relative to its members than has the House since at least 1996. Theoretically, this difference would indicate a greater value on information-gathering via committee organization in the Senate than in the House.

Taking into consideration the differences between the chambers in terms of electoral competitiveness, rules, and bipartisanship, I anticipate that both chambers could feasibly engage in more partisan or more informational forms of organization.

H8: The information model is as likely to explain organization of Senate committees as House committees.

Methods and Results

This section explains the method by which I tested my hypotheses, as well as the results of those tests. The hypotheses are tested in the order they were presented, grouped into subsections for occupation data, party affiliation, and ideology scores.

Testing the Informational Model: Occupation Data (H1)

I begin by testing my hypothesis that *if informational theory applies in the General Assembly, then committees will be disproportionately made up of legislators whose occupations align with the policy jurisdictions of the committees* (H1). My data for testing this hypothesis comes from two sources. The first is the Legislative Information System (LIS) maintained by Virginia's Division of Legislative Automated Services. LIS provides extensive information on committee membership, daily floor and committee proceedings, and bill histories for every session of the General Assembly going back to 1994. Based on the information contained in LIS, I assigned legislators a binary variable for committee membership in each committee of the relevant chamber and session, with "1" representing committee membership and "0" representing committee non-membership. My second source of data for this test was the Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP), a nonpartisan not-for-profit organization which promotes campaign finance transparency and provides access to information on Virginia politicians, including the demographic, partisan, and occupational makeup of Virginia's legislative chambers. For the past eight regular sessions of the General Assembly, VPAP has classified senators and delegates within a set of twelve occupation groups. This study focuses on even-year sessions (that is, post-election sessions, 60-day sessions, or budget sessions), and presents occupational data from four such sessions: 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020.

For the House, I will examine the Agriculture, Commerce, Courts, Education, and Health Committees. For the Senate, I will examine the Commerce, Education and Health, and Courts Committees. I selected these committees because of their significance in terms of policy focus, as well as their clear relationship to certain occupation classifiers listed by VPAP. Following the model of Hamm, Hedlund, and Post (2011), I created a data set for each of the selected committees in each of the selected sessions. Committee members were assigned a binary code based on the relevance or irrelevance of their occupation field, with “1” representing a relevant occupation field and “0” representing an irrelevant occupation field. The occupations assumed to be “relevant” to each committee are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Committees and Relevant Occupation Fields		
	Committee	Occupation
House	Agriculture	Farmers/Agriculture
	Commerce	Business People
	Courts of Justice	Lawyers
	Education	Educators
	Health	Medical Professions
Senate	Commerce	Business People
	Courts	Lawyers
	Education and Health	Educators; Medical Professions

For each committee, I find the proportion of members in the full chamber with the relevant occupation field and the proportion of committee members with the relevant occupation field. I then calculate the hypothetical committee occupation proportion at which there is the least absolute difference between the committee and chamber proportions without altering the size of the committee. I then determine how many committee members with a relevant occupation would need to be replaced by members with irrelevant occupations to achieve the expected occupation proportion.

Take the 2016 House Courts Committee as an example. In 2016, a total of twenty-three delegates were occupied in some aspect of the legal profession, resulting in a Courts-related occupation proportion of .23 for the chamber. The Courts Committee has twenty-two members. If five of these members represented Courts-related professions, then the committee occupation proportion would be .227, which is the closest possible value to the chamber proportion of .23 without altering the size of the committee. The 2016 House Courts Committee had fifteen members with relevant occupations, making the actual committee occupation proportion .682. Ten of these specialized members would need to be replaced by nonspecialized members to achieve the committee occupation proportion that is most representative of the chamber occupation proportion. Thus House Courts overrepresents occupational specialists, illustrating a strong preference for information based organization on this committee.

Table 3 displays the number of members with a relevant occupation that would need to be replaced with nonspecialists to make their committees more representative of the chamber occupation proportion. A positive value indicates that the profession in question is overrepresented on the committee, supporting the informational model's argument that legislatures seek to "tap the talents" of members who are in relevant occupational fields. A

negative value indicates the opposite: that the relevant occupational field is underrepresented on the committee relative to what would be expected in a random assignment.

The data laid out in Table 3 show that H1 was almost universally true in both chambers. Legislators with occupational experience in a certain field are almost always overrepresented on committees that legislate on issues related to that field, suggesting that the General Assembly does attempt to “tap the talents” of its members. However, the extent to which this overrepresentation occurs varies between committees and by sessions. The Courts Committees of both chambers are routinely stacked to a greater degree than any other committee. The effect is particularly pronounced on House Courts, where as many as eleven more members with law-related professions will be on the Courts Committee than would be expected in a random assignment. The Senate Commerce Committee, as well as the House committees on Agriculture, Education, and Health, have overrepresented members with relevant occupations to different degrees in different years. By contrast, the Senate Education committee has overrepresented educators to the same degree for each of the four sessions studied. Thus, the value of a relevant occupational background in Education has remained constant over time, while its value in other committees has changed from session to session.

The only exception to the general pattern of positive values is the House Commerce Committee, which was only overrepresented by Business People in the 2020 session. Before that, the proportion of Commerce Committee members who were Business People was equal to or less than the proportion of all delegates employed in that field. Thus, the House Commerce and Labor Committee does not appear to be guided by informational theory, because delegates with relevant occupational backgrounds are not disproportionately selected to serve on this committee. On the other hand, the overrepresentation of lawyers in Senate and House Courts

Table 3. Difference Between Chamber Occupation Proportions and Committee Occupation Proportions					
	Committee	2014	2016	2018	2020
House	Agriculture	4	4	3	1
	Commerce/Labor	0	-1	-1	1
	Courts	11	10	9	11
	Education	1	1	3	1
	Health	4	4	2	4
Senate	Commerce/Labor	0	2	1	1
	Courts	6	5	5	6
	Education	2	2	2	2

suggests that the Courts Committees operate under an informational model, where legislators with occupational backgrounds in the practice of law are selected to serve on the committee and employ their expertise in evaluating legislation.

Testing the Partisan Model: Party Affiliation Ratios (H2-4)

My next set of hypotheses looks for evidence of stacking, or majority party overrepresentation on committees. If partisan theory applies, then H2 predicts that *the ratio of seats held by the majority party compared to the minority party will be greater in committee than in the full chamber*; H3 predicts that *the ratio of seats held by the majority party compared to the minority party will be greater in control committees than in non-control committees*; and H4 predicts that *majority overrepresentation will be greater in years with narrower majorities*. To

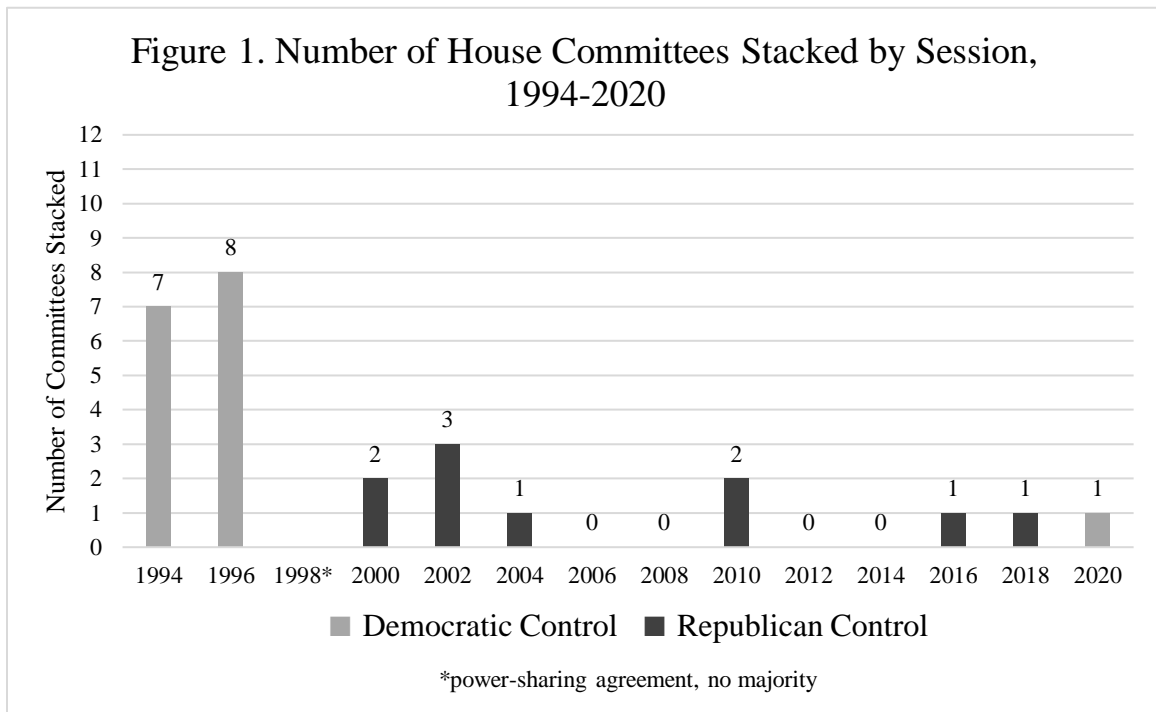
test these hypotheses, I compare the majority-to-minority (M:m) ratios of the full chamber and the individual committees.

I use a similar method to assess the difference between chamber and committee M:m ratios as I used to compare chamber and committee occupation ratios. However, rather than determine the projected committee M:m ratio at which there would be the least absolute difference between the chamber and committee ratios, I found the least committee M:m ratio at which the committee ratio would be greater than or equal to the chamber ratio. This modification is based on the rules of the House of Delegates, which since 1998 have required proportional representation on committees. If it is impossible to achieve exact equality in chamber and committee ratios, then committee assignments may err on the side of overrepresenting the majority party. While the Senate has no such rule, applying this standard to both chambers will allow for a more exact comparison.

To better understand this method of analysis, consider a Senate chamber with an M:m ratio of 22:18 (1.22). A fifteen-member committee created by this chamber has an M:m ratio of 10:5 (2.00). A committee M:m ratio of 8:7 (1.14) would produce the least absolute difference between committee and chamber M:m ratios, but would be less than the chamber ratio. The expected committee M:m ratio is therefore 9:6 (1.50), the least possible ratio at which the committee M:m ratio could remain greater than or equal to the chamber ratio. In this case, one committee member would need to change from majority to minority to bring the committee M:m from the actual ratio (10:5) to the expected ratio (9:6). A positive difference between the actual and expected ratio indicates that stacking has occurred; the number of committee members who would need to change indicates the extent to which it has occurred. This allows me to test for the

presence of stacking, and therefore to determine whether the majority party presses its advantage in committees, as predicted by the partisan theory.

Figures 1 and 2 provide results for H2 in the House, with Figure 1 displaying how many committees were stacked per session and Figure 2 displaying how often each of the twelve committees was stacked out of the fourteen sessions being considered. As Figure 1 shows, stacking occurred frequently in the House prior to 1998, when an amendment to the rules required proportional representation on all committees except for Rules. In accordance with Rule 16(a), comparatively few committees have been stacked following the end of power-sharing in 2000.² The fact that the House adopted a rule requiring proportional party representation on its



² Rule 16(a) reads as follows: “Except for the Committee on Rules, membership on all standing committees and subcommittees will be contingent upon membership or nonmembership in the majority party caucus. The apportionment of members will be according to the same ratio of members in the House of Delegates who are members or nonmembers of the majority party caucus. If such ratio would represent a fractional number of the committee or subcommittee membership assigned to the majority party caucus, then the number of majority party caucus members will be the next highest whole number of committee or subcommittee members. For the purposes of this rule only, members who do not caucus with the majority party caucus or the largest minority party caucus will be deemed part of the majority party caucus.”

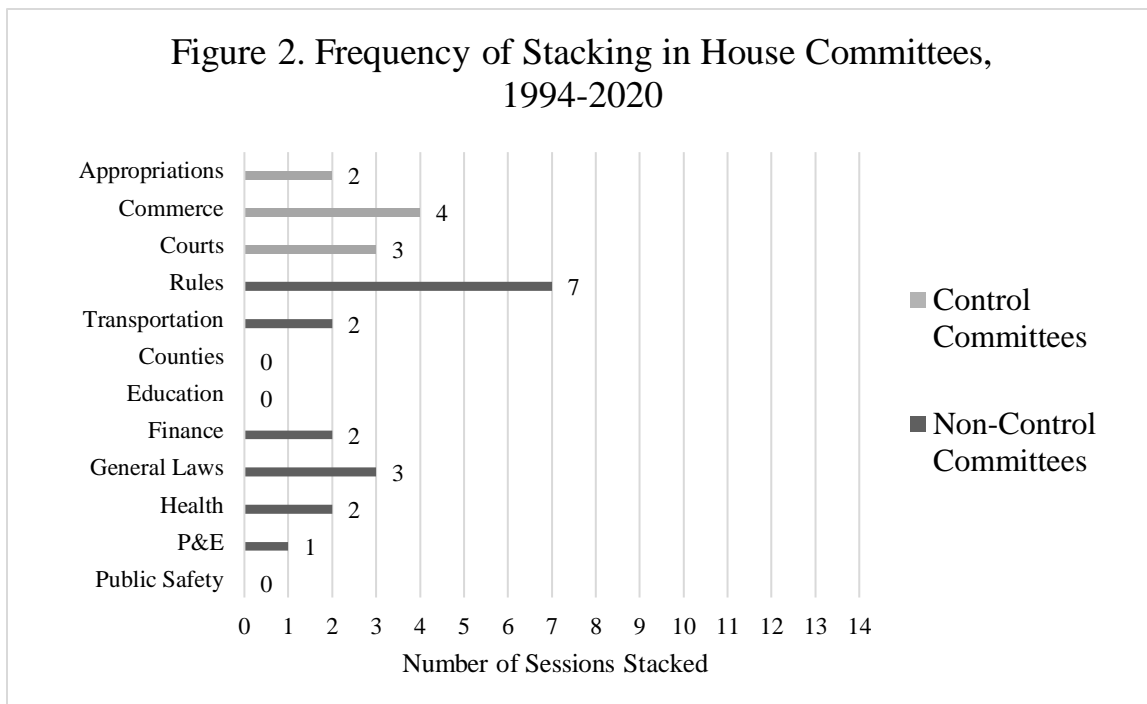
committees, as well as the fact that this rule has largely been adhered to since its adoption, suggests that the House has attempted to create an informational committee system that serves the full chamber rather than the majority party. Prior to the adoption of this rule, a more partisan pattern of majority stacking guided committee assignments. Additionally, disproportionate representation on Rules is allowed under Rule 16(a), and House majorities have continued to exercise stacking on that committee. The Rules Committee therefore exhibits more partisan characteristics than other committees in the post-1998 period, having been stacked more often than any other committee.

There have been some violations of Rule 16(a) since 1998, as seen in 2000, 2002, and 2010.³ Majority parties have also frequently done as much as possible to overrepresent their party while remaining in the bounds of the proportionality rule. For example, in 2008, a unique situation allowed Republicans to achieve a 1.44 M:m ratio on many committees despite a 1:2 M:m ratio in the chamber. An M:m ratio of 1.2 (12:10) could have been achieved in the 22-person committees had Republicans not made use of an additional rule clarifying that independents not caucusing with either party are counted as part of the majority for purposes of committee proportionality. Under this rule, independent Delegate Watkins Abbitt, Jr., was counted as part of the majority caucus, creating a chamber ratio of 1.22 and allowing Republicans to overrepresent themselves on committees. Additionally, both Democratic and Republican majorities have made use of the stipulation that committee assignments can err on the side of overrepresenting the majority party, rather than requiring that ratios be as close as

³ By cross-referencing with Table 4, which appears later in this section, we can determine which non-Rules committees were stacked in the post-1998 sessions. In 2000, the non-Rules stacked committee was Courts. In 2002, Rules was not stacked, but Commerce, Transportation, and General Laws were. In 2010, Rules was not stacked, but Commerce and Transportation were. All other instances of stacking post-1998 (including 2000, 2004, 2016, 2018, and 2020) occurred in the Rules committee, as permitted by Rule 16(a) of the House of Delegates.

possible. For example, in 2020, the closest possible committee M:m ratio to the 1.22 chamber M:m ratio would have been 1.2 for a 22-person committee; however, the Democratic majority established 1.44 M:m ratios on most committees. Thus, while the House rules attempt to establish an informational model for committee membership, committee assignments since 1998 suggest that House Speakers still seek to overrepresent their party on committees by exploiting certain provisions in Rule 16(a).

While information theory appears to be more applicable in the House with regards to overall frequency of stacking, there is still some evidence for partisan theory in terms of which committees are most frequently stacked. In keeping with H3, which predicts a greater incidence of stacking on control committees than non-control committees within a partisan model, Figure 2 shows that Commerce is the most frequently stacked committee aside from Rules. Commerce was stacked four times between 1994 and 2000, indicating that it was stacked at least twice after

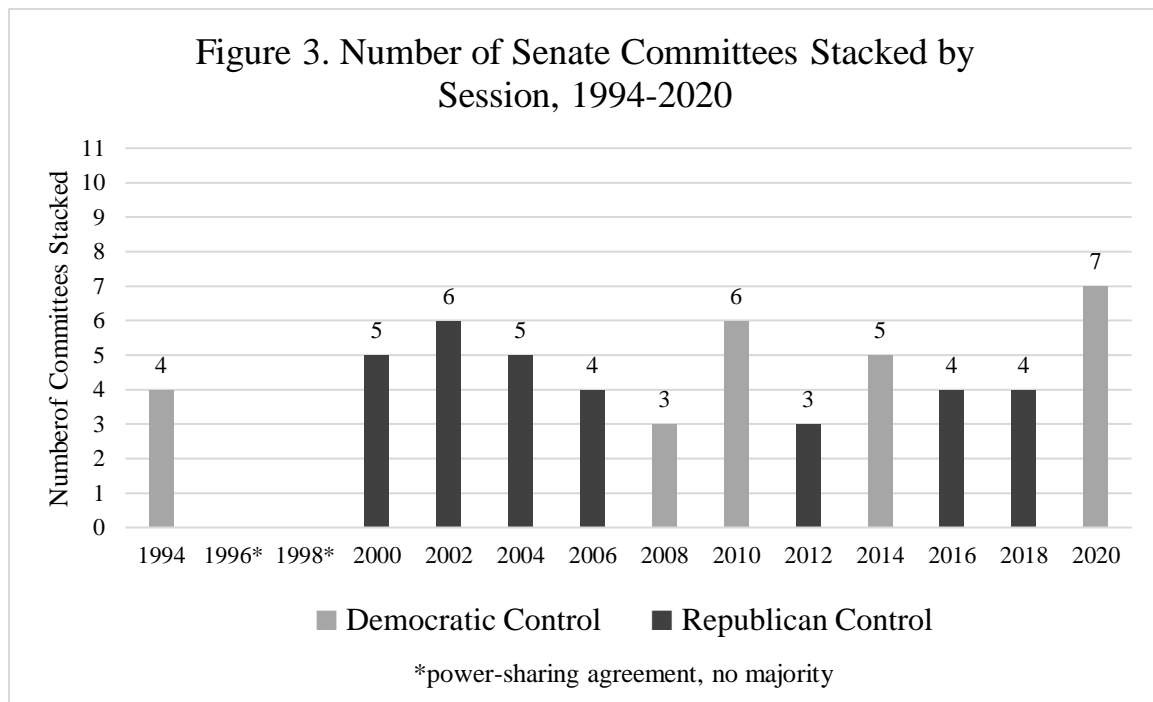


the proportionality requirement was established in 1998.⁴ Courts was also stacked at least once after the establishment of this requirement, tied with the non-control General Laws committee for overall frequency of stacking.⁵ The relatively high degree of stacking on Commerce and Courts, both designated as control committees, suggests that partisan theory is partially true in the House, despite the proportional representation rule. Later in this section, examining the degree of stacking on control and non-control committees will provide more insight into informational and/or partisan arrangements prior to 1998, when the majority of House stacking occurred.

Figures 3 and 4 show stacking by session and by committee for the Senate, with fourteen sessions and eleven committees being considered. Stacking occurs much more frequently in this chamber than in the House, likely because the Senate has no proportional representation rule. Except for 1996 and 1998, when a power-sharing agreement meant that no party had a majority of seats, at least three Senate committees have been stacked every year since 1994. This includes 2012 and 2014, when the Senate had an even split of twenty Democrats and twenty Republicans. Democratic senators complained when Republicans used Lieutenant Governor Bill Bolling's tie breaking vote to stack committees in 2012; however, Democrats also engaged in stacking when the election of Ralph Northam as Lieutenant Governor gave Democrats an edge in the Senate (Gorman 2014). In fact, while Republicans stacked three committees with a 21-20 advantage in the chamber in 2012, Democrats stacked five committees while holding the same margin in 2014. When Democrats returned to power in 2020, they once again engaged in more stacking than the previous Republican majority, stacking seven committees to Republicans' three. While

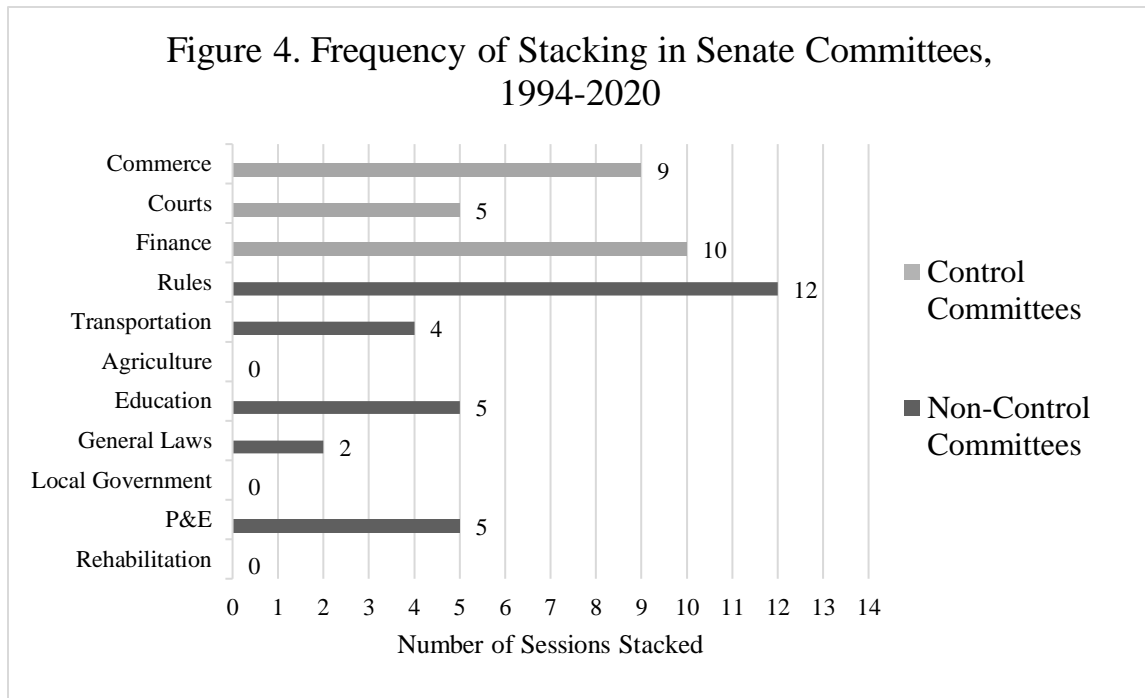
⁴ Cross-referencing with Table 4, which appears later in this section, shows us that Commerce was stacked in 1994, 1996, 2002, and 2010.

⁵ Cross-referencing with Table 4, which appears later in this section, shows us that Courts was stacked in 1994, 1996, and 2000. General Laws was stacked in 1994, 1996, and 2002.



Democrats appear to have stacked more frequently, both committees have engaged in stacking when in the majority. In comparison to the House, Senate committee organization follows a more partisan model.

As Figure 4 shows, Senate committees differ in how often they are stacked, demonstrating that application of the partisan model varies by committee. Three Senate committees—Agriculture, Local Government, and Rehabilitation—were never stacked. Meanwhile, the most frequently stacked committees—Commerce, Finance, and Rules—were stacked nine, ten, and twelve times, respectively. In accordance with H3's prediction that greater stacking would occur on control committees, two of the three most frequently stacked committees were control committees. The last control committee, Courts, was tied for fourth most frequently stacked committee, along with Education and P&E. Viewed in conjunction with the findings under H1 that Courts disproportionately represents occupational experts (i.e., lawyers), the finding that Courts was not stacked as often as other control committees provides



further evidence that Senate Courts subscribes to an informational model, rather than to a partisan model. Overall, however, the lack of a proportionality rule in the Senate and the frequency with which majority parties stack committees, especially control committees, demonstrates that most Senate committees have a more partisan organization than their House counterparts.

Tables 4 and 5 show results on the degree to which stacking occurs. The values in these tables represent the number of majority party members on a committee who would need to be replaced by minority party members to achieve a committee M:m ratio representative of the full chamber. With regards to H2 and the prediction that committees would overrepresent majority parties relative to the chamber, Table 4 shows that stacking in the post-1998 House is rare, and the degree of stacking is usually quite small. Actual committee ratios after 1998 were rarely more than one member away from the expected ratio, if they differed at all. By contrast, prior to 1998, these data indicate that the House used to operate by a much more partisan model. A

majority of committees were stacked in 1994 and 1996, often by factors greater than one.

Control committees were stacked by factors of three or more, suggesting prioritization of majority control over important committees. While stacking has been significantly reduced since 1998, the recent upward trend in stacking on the Rules committee suggests that the House may be returning to a more partisan model while remaining within the bounds of Rule 16(a).

Table 4. Degree of Stacking in the House															
values represent the number of majority party committee members who would need to be replaced by minority party members to achieve the expected M:m committee ratio															
	'94	'96	'98	'00	'02	'04	'06	'08	'10	'12	'14	'16	'18	'20	
Appropriations*	4	5	P O W E R S H A R I N G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Commerce*	3	3		-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Courts*	3	3		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rules	2	2		1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	3
Transportation	-	-		-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Counties	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finance	2	3		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
General Laws	1	1		-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Health	1	1		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
P&E	-	1		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public Safety	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* control committee

Table 5. Degree of Stacking in the Senate														
values represent the number of majority party committee members who would need to be replaced by minority party members to achieve the expected M:m committee ratio														
	'94	'96	'98	'00	'02	'04	'06	'08	'10	'12	'14	'16	'18	'20
Commerce*	-1	P O W E R S H A R I N G		1	1	2	2	-	-	1	1	3	3	4
Courts*	-1			-1	-1	-1	-1	-	2	-	1	1	1	1
Finance*	3			1	1	1	1	-	-	1	2	2	2	2
Rules	3			4	4	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4
Transportation	-1			1	1	1	1	-	-1	-	-	-	-	-
Agriculture	-1			-	-	-	-	-	-1	-	-1	-	-	-
Education	1			-	-	-1	-1	2	1	-	1	-	-	1
GenLaws	-1			-	-	1	-	-	-1	-	-	-	-	1
Local Government	-1			-	-	-1	-2	-1	-	-1	-1	-	-	-
P&E	-			1	1	-	-1	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Rehab	-1			-1	-	-1	-1	-	-1	-	-1	-	-	-

*control committee

Table 5 shows that, in addition to stacking more often than the House, the Senate also stacks to a greater degree. Senate committees were more frequently stacked by a factor greater than one as compared to their House counterparts, excluding the pre-1998 House sessions. Senate majorities have also occasionally undersold their advantage on particular committees, creating situations in which the actual committee ratio is *less* than the expected ratio. Since a

limited number of majority party members must be distributed among committee seats, and all members of the major parties must have a committee seat, it makes sense that a greater degree of stacking on some committees would necessitate that other committees have fewer majority party members than expected. Local Government and Rehabilitation have both been frequent victims of this phenomenon, which maintains majority party control of the committee but narrows the margin of control from what would be considered an equitable ratio. By contrast, Rules is always stacked to a greater degree than any other committee. The control committees also have relatively high degrees of stacking relative to other committees, and especially so in recent years, indicating a tendency towards partisan organization that has become stronger in the past few sessions.

The exceptionality of the Rules Committee in these data merits some discussion. While the House Rules Committee is the only committee exempted from the proportionality requirement, there is not a similar structural explanation for the fact that the Senate Rules Committee is stacked more often and stacked to a much greater degree than any other Senate committee. I propose two possible explanations for this trend. The first is that the majority party prefers to give the prestige posts on Rules to its own members, thereby allowing leadership to either reward loyal partisans or curry the favor of more reluctant partisans. Alternatively, the Rules Committees may have more sway in the Senate than Howell implied it to have in the House. Even if the bills and resolutions considered by the Rules Committee have little direct impact on the electorate, Senate leadership may view Rules as a key enabler of the majority party's ability to enact its agenda.

Next, I test my hypothesis that narrower majorities in the full chamber encourage greater stacking in committees. For this analysis, I selected three sessions for the House (2012, 2014,

and 2018) and three sessions for the Senate (2004, 2016, and 2018). In the House, I compare two sessions when Republicans had a greater than 2:1 majority (2012 and 2014) with a session when the party had a narrow two-seat majority (2018). In 2012 and 2014, no stacking occurred, even on the Rules committee where disproportionate representation is permitted. In 2018, however, Rules was stacked by a factor of two, suggesting that the Republican majority was attempting to assert their advantage in this committee.

In the Senate, I compare a session with an M:m ratio of 1.50 (2004) to two sessions with a ratio of 1.04 (2016 and 2018). In 2004, the Republican majority stacked five committees: Commerce and Rules by a factor of two; Finance, General Laws and Transportation by a factor of one. In 2016 and 2018, navigating just a two-seat majority, the Republicans stacked fewer committees, but to a greater degree: Rules by a factor of four, Commerce by a factor of three, Finance by a factor of two, and Courts by a factor of one. Republicans in 2018 thus appeared to prioritize stacking of control committees. The evidence suggests that in both chambers, when majorities become narrower, the majority party engages on a greater degree of stacking to ensure control of key committees.

In summary, I find evidence of stacking in the Virginia General Assembly, but much more so in the Senate than in the House. Stacking is also leveraged more frequently on control committees than non-control committees. Majority overrepresentation becomes more pronounced in situations with a narrower majority in the full chamber.

Testing the Theories: Ideology Scores (H5-7)

Having analyzed partisan theory on the basis of party identification, I next turn to ideology scores to test further hypotheses for the informational and partisan theories. H5 predicts that *if informational theory applies in the General Assembly, then the median ideology scores of*

committees will be closer to the median ideology score of the full chamber than to the median scores of the majority (H5). If partisan theory applies, then the opposite will be true. To test this theory, I used Shor and McCarty's NPAT scores for Virginia legislators to calculate median NPAT scores for the chamber, for the two major parties, and for a selection of committees. I chose to focus on control committees, with Transportation serving as a comparison non-control committee.⁶ I place these different medians in relation to one another for each of the twelve sessions for which I had data. This allows me to compare the median NPAT scores of a committee with the chamber median, with the majority and majority party medians, and with the medians of other committees. Analyzing the data this way also allows me to test my hypothesis that, *if partisan theory applies in the General Assembly, then the median ideology scores of control committees will be closer to the majority party median than non-control committees* (H6).

Figure 5 shows median committee NPAT scores for the House between 1996 and 2018 as compared to the chamber and party median scores.⁷ Overall, the data supports H5; most committees during this period had median scores closer to the median of the full chamber than to that of the majority party. In the majority of committees, median ideology scores fell somewhere between the chamber and majority medians, although several committee medians actually fell between the medians of the chamber and the minority party. H5 was not universally true within this sample: a few committees had median scores closer to the majority party median than to the chamber median, and the median score of the 2010 Rules committee fell beyond the majority

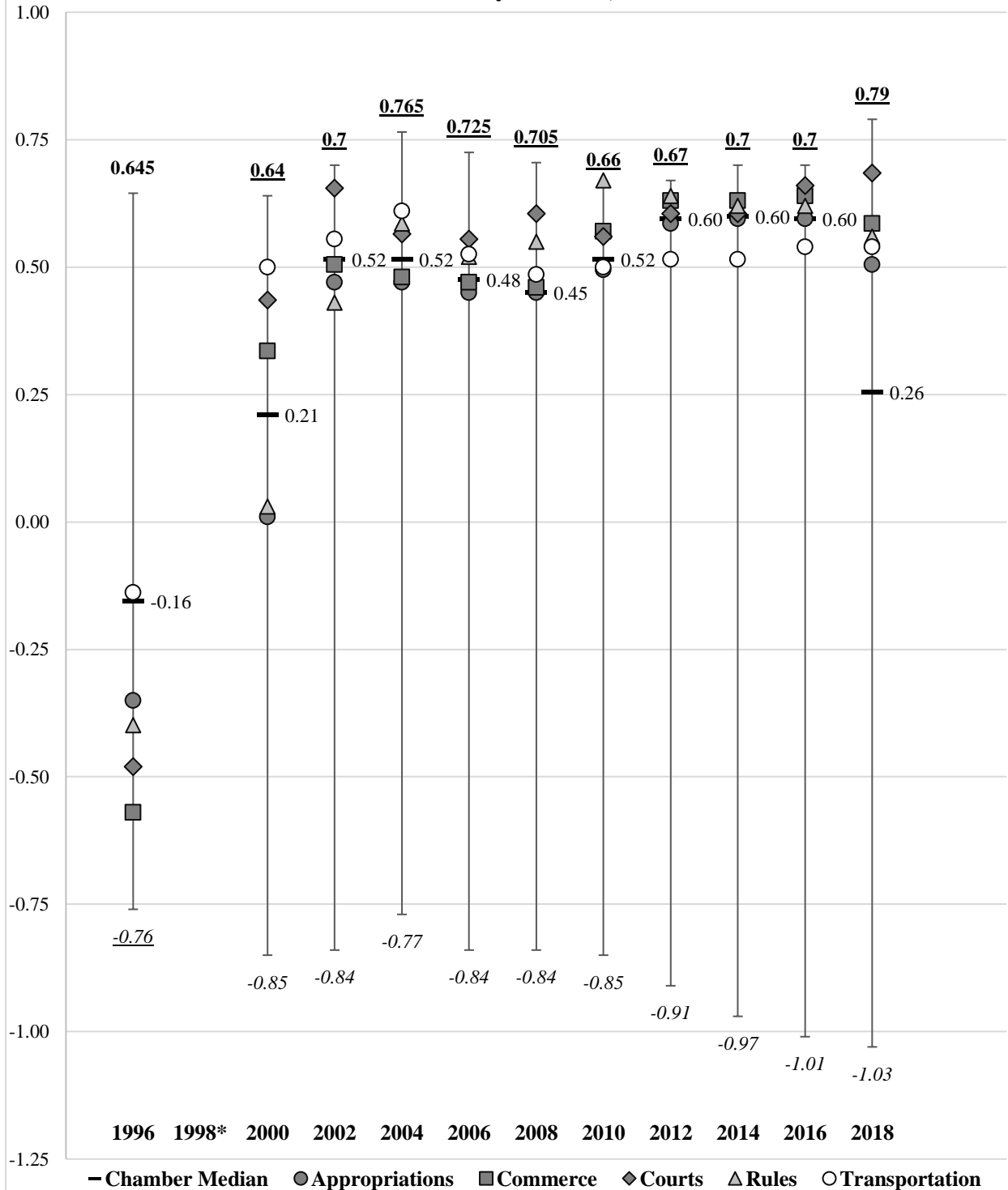
⁶ I selected Transportation as the non-control committee because, according to former Speaker Howell, while most committees deal with some important legislation or policy areas, Transportation is generally viewed as an unimportant committee to the extent that it does not deal with legislation that could substantially impact the electoral fortunes of the majority party (W. Howell, personal communication, November 9, 2020).

⁷ Further information about the data seen in Tables 5 and 6 can be found in Appendix A.

party median. Overall, however, the fact that committee medians tend to reflect the chamber median more closely than the majority party median supports informational theory as a predictor for House committee organization.

In terms of the differences between control and non-control committees, the median NPAT scores of Courts and Commerce have consistently been among the closest, if not the closest to the majority party median as compared to other committees. This corroborates the expectations of partisan theory, which anticipates that control committees will be more reflective of majority party interests than the interests of the chamber as a whole. Appropriations, despite being a control committee, did not display this trend. It usually fell close to the chamber median, or even between the chamber and majority party median. Rules has varied between more informational and more partisan median scores over the years, making it difficult to tell which model more effectively predicts its organization. Transportation is similarly difficult to predict, although it appears to be slightly more informational than Rules because its median scores are closer to the chamber median than to the majority median. Overall, it appears that H6's partisan model applies to some extent in the House, but predicts the activity of some control committees—specifically, Commerce and Courts—more so than others.

Figure 5. House Committee Median NPAT Scores Compared to Chamber and Party Medians, 1996-2018

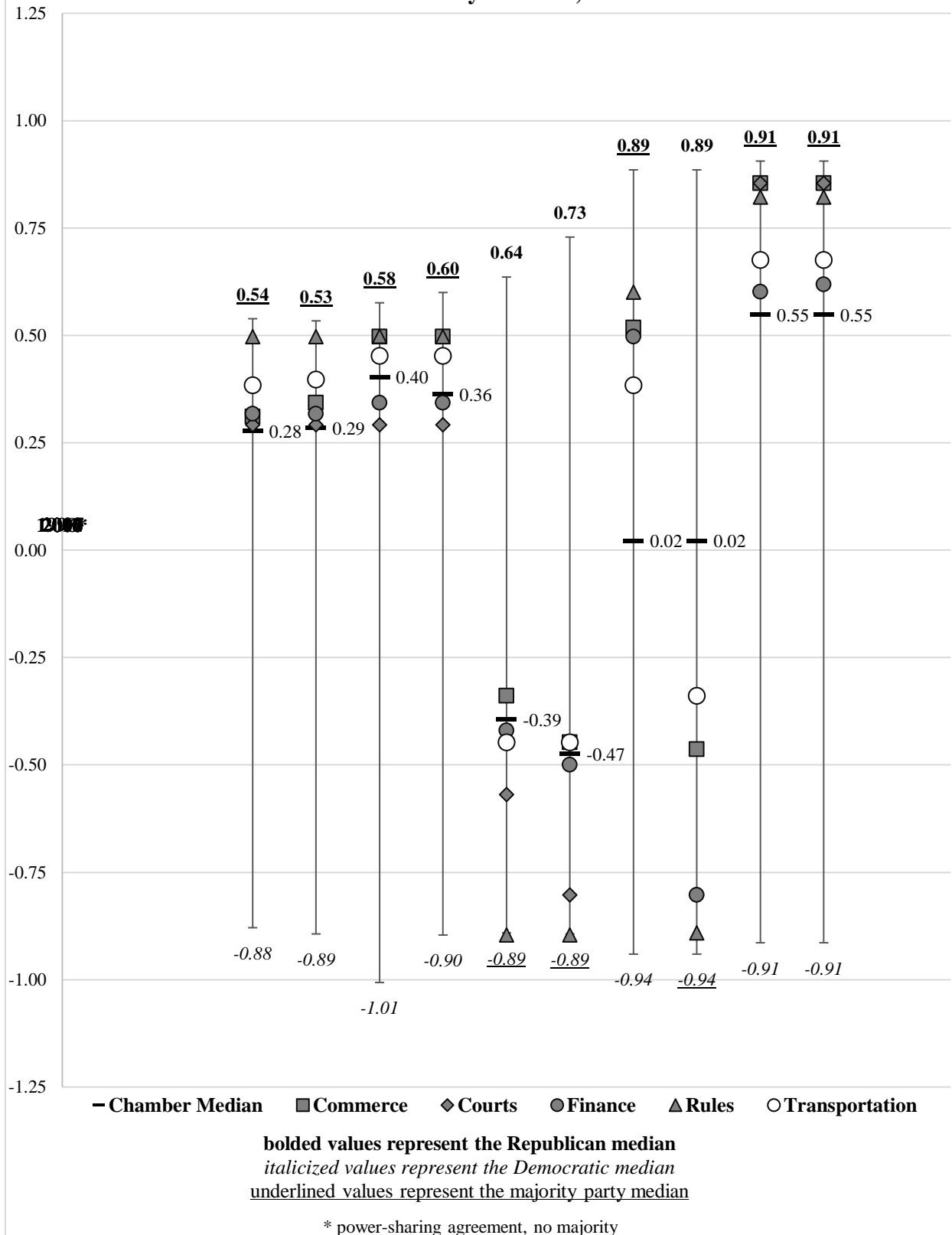


bolded values represent the **Republican median**
italicized values represent the *Democratic median*
underlined values represent the majority party median

* power-sharing agreement, no majority

Figure 6 shows chamber, majority party, and committee medians for the Senate. Median committee scores in the Senate are much more spread out than in the House, but mostly remain in between the chamber and majority medians. There are fewer instances of committee medians falling between the chamber and minority party medians, and more instances of committee medians being closer to the majority party median than to the chamber medians. Thus, although there is evidence for both informational and partisan patterns in Senate committees, the Senate appears to have a more partisan organizational bent than the House in terms of ideological composition. The Senate Rules Committee in particular is much more partisan than its House counterpart. Between 2000 and 2014, the median score for Rules was not only consistently closer to the majority party median than to the chamber median, but also closer to the majority party median than any other committee. Although the median scores of control committees have varied in terms of relative distance from the chamber and majority medians, Commerce and Courts have been consistently closer to the majority median than to the chamber median since 2012, confirming the expectations of partisan theory under H6. By comparison, the Finance and Transportation Committees medians tend to be relatively closer to the chamber median than other committees. This mirrors the pattern followed by committees in the House: Commerce and Courts have a more partisan ideological makeup, while Finance and Transportation exhibit more informational characteristics. These committee-specific findings are interesting in light of what has been learned from previous analyses in this study. For example, the partisan trend seen in the ideology scores of House and Senate Courts Committees conflicts with these committees' relatively low incidence of stacking in comparison to other control committees, as well as their informational "talent-tapping" model. Moreover, the Senate Finance Committee had less partisan ideology scores than might have been expected, given how often it has been stacked.

Figure 6. Senate Committee Median NPAT Scores Compared to Chamber and Party Medians, 1996-2018



My final hypothesis related to ideology scores predicts that, *if partisan theory applies in the General Assembly, then the median committee ideology scores of majority party delegations will be closer to the majority party median in years with lesser majority-to-minority ratios in the full chamber than in years with a greater majority-to-minority ratio (H7)*. To assess H7, I look for a correlation between narrower margins in the full chamber and a smaller difference between majority party medians and committee medians. In completing this test, I use data from the same twenty-three committees used to test H2-4: twelve House committees and eleven Senate committees whose jurisdictions have largely remained the same since 1996. I find the absolute difference between the median ideology scores of the majority party and majority committee delegations for all sessions. I then determine the correlation coefficient between this absolute difference and the chamber ratio, looking for a correlation between smaller majorities and a smaller distance between the majority and committee delegation medians. The House correlation coefficient for the period 1996-2018 was -0.16738, and the Senate correlation coefficient was -0.08793. Both of these values indicate a low degree of correlation between *larger* chamber majorities and smaller distances between majority and committee delegation medians, thus contradicting the expectations of H7 and of partisan theory in both chambers.

Results in Review and Inter-Chamber Comparison

My final hypothesis anticipated that the informational theory was equally likely to explain committee organization in the Senate, purportedly the more “bipartisan” of the two General Assembly chambers, as in the House, which established a rule against partisan stacking (H8). Reviewing the results for both chambers contradicts that expectation. Although both chambers showed evidence of “talent-tapping” in terms of overrepresenting members with certain occupations on committees with relevant jurisdictions, when it came to stacking, the

House's proportional representation rule limited Speakers' ability to stack committees with members of the majority party. The Senate, on the other hand, continued to frequently engage in partisan stacking. Furthermore, the most stacking in the Senate took place on the control committees, as partisan theory would predict. Finally, an analysis of ideology scores showed that, compared to the House, Senate committees were more ideologically similar to the majority party median than to the chamber median. Overall, the data showed that the House had a more informational organization model than the Senate.

From this result, it appears that chamber rules have greater bearing on committee organization than House or Senate culture. Partisan theory provides further explanation for this outcome. The narrower majorities in the Senate, where the margin of control has never surpassed single digits, may encourage more stacking and ideological bias on committees as majority parties seek to consolidate their weaker grip on power. Further study on inter-chamber differences in the General Assembly could help to clarify this question.

Conclusion

Through an in-depth look at the Virginia General Assembly, my research shows that the applicability of informational and partisan theories can vary, not just between different legislatures, but within a single legislature. I found that committee organization in the General Assembly reflects both informational and partisan theory, with stronger evidence for partisan theory in the Senate. Both chambers engaged in "talent-tapping" by assigning members with occupation experience in certain fields to committees with relevant policy jurisdictions. The House attempted to limit the influence of a partisan model by adopting a proportionality requirement for committee assignments in 1998, which significantly decreased the frequency and degree of stacking on all committees except for the Rules Committee. The Senate, anecdotally

considered to be the more bipartisan of the two chambers, has conversely engaged in more partisan displays of stacking, both in terms of number of committees stacked and degree of stacking. The Senate also tended to create committees with median ideology scores closer to those of the majority party than to the chamber median, in contrast to the House.

The comparison of Virginia House and Virginia Senate, as well as intra-chamber comparisons over time, show the influence of internally-imposed rules on committee organization. After implementing the proportional representation requirement in 1998, the House witnessed a significant decrease in stacking. The Senate, which never imposed a similar rule, continued to stack more often and to a more significant degree than the lower chamber. Possibly because of its stacking, the Senate also had more partisan-leaning median committee ideology scores than the House. Contrary to my expectation, chamber rules had a greater impact on committee organization than the potentially greater informational needs or bipartisan relations in the upper chamber.

Inter-committee differences in the General Assembly are as significant as inter-chamber differences. Control committees generally tended to show more partisan characteristics than non-control committees, as predicted by partisan theory. The Commerce Committees in particular showed strong partisan characteristics in terms of frequent stacking and comparatively partisan ideological biases, while simultaneously showing little evidence of an informational “talent-tapping” model. By contrast, the Senate Finance Committee was frequently stacked but was usually closer to the chamber median than to the majority party median, thus demonstrating both informational and partisan characteristics. The House Appropriations Committee was not frequently stacked and had median ideology scores relatively closer to the chamber median than the majority party median. Finally, both informational and partisan theory applied to the House

and Senate Courts Committees. On the informational side, these committees included disproportionately high ratios of information specialists, and Senate Courts was stacked more rarely than other Senate control committees. On the partisan side, both committees had relatively biased median ideology scores.

Future research on General Assembly committees might expand on this study's analysis of the differences between committees. The control/non-control distinction paints with a broad brush, ignoring potential gradations in the importance of non-control committees. For example, the Senate Education and Health Committee may show more partisan characteristics than Transportation or Agriculture. Additionally, Rules appeared to be a strong example of partisan organization in both chambers, although the partisan orientation of its median ideology scores has varied over time. From a partisan theory perspective, former Speaker Howell's opinion that Rules should not be considered a control committee may need reevaluation.

In addition to inter-chamber and inter-committee differences, a return to this line of research might consider yet another line of comparison: inter-party. With the ideology scores available, I had access to very few years with Democratic majorities or majorities comparable to Republican majorities. If the two chambers continue to hold Democratic majorities in future sessions, new data could allow for better comparison between how the two parties organize committees when in power.

As the General Assembly continues to change, observers may be able to watch the evolution of its committee system in real time. Beyond Virginia, more dedicated case studies of committee systems in America's statehouses would go a long way towards clarifying the interaction between informational and partisan models across the divides of chamber, electoral competitiveness, and control/non-control committee.

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Appendix A

Tables 6 and 7 provide more precise data regarding the relationship between committee medians, chamber medians, and majority party medians as shown in Figures 5 and 6. By using M_f to represent the full chamber median, M_m to represent the majority party median, and M_c to represent the committee median, the tables in Appendix A show the difference between the absolute difference of the majority and committee medians and the absolute difference of the chamber and committee medians:

$$|(M_m - M_c)| - |(M_f - M_c)|$$

If the absolute difference between majority and committee median is less than the absolute difference between chamber and committee median, ($|(M_m - M_c)| < |(M_f - M_c)|$), then the value shown in Table 6 or 7 will be positive. This indicates a more informational model and confirms *H5: the median ideology scores of committee will be closer to the median ideology score of the full chamber than to the median scores of the majority*. If the absolute difference between majority and committee median is greater than the absolute difference between chamber and committee median, ($|(M_m - M_c)| > |(M_f - M_c)|$), then the value shown in Table 6 or 7 will be negative. This indicates that committees are more partisan and provides evidence against H5. A higher positive value indicates a more informational model, while a lower negative number indicates a more partisan model.

Table 6. $(M_m - M_c) > (M_r - M_c)$ in the House, 1996-2018					
	Appropriations	Commerce	Courts	Rules	Transportation
1996	0.22	-0.23	-0.04	0.12	0.61
1998	(power-sharing agreement, no majority)				
2000	0.43	0.18	-0.02	0.43	-0.15
2002	0.19	0.19	-0.10	0.19	0.11
2004	0.25	0.25	0.15	0.11	0.06
2006	0.25	0.25	0.09	0.16	0.15
2008	0.26	0.24	-0.06	0.05	0.19
2010	0.15	0.04	0.05	-0.15	0.15
2012	0.08	0.01	0.06	-0.02	0.08
2014	0.10	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.10
2016	0.11	0.01	-0.03	0.05	0.11
2018	0.04	-0.13	-0.33	-0.08	-0.04

Table 7. $(M_m - M_c) > (M_r - M_c)$ in the Senate, 1996-2018					
	Commerce	Courts	Finance	Rules	Transportation
1996	(power-sharing agreement, no majority)				
1998					
2000	0.20	0.23	0.18	-0.18	0.05
2002	0.13	0.24	0.18	-0.18	0.03
2004	-0.01	0.17	0.17	-0.02	0.08
2006	-0.03	0.24	0.24	-0.03	0.06
2008	0.50	0.15	0.45	-0.50	0.39
2010	0.42	-0.24	0.37	-0.42	0.42
2012	-0.13	-0.09	-0.09	-0.29	0.14
2014	-0.01	-0.69	-0.69	-0.86	0.24
2016	-0.25	-0.25	0.25	-0.19	0.10
2018	-0.25	-0.25	0.22	-0.19	0.10