

Securing Influence: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Congressional Tenure and Voting Behavior

Carrington Matthews – Dr. Daniel Sledge – Department of Political Science – The University of Texas at Arlington

INTRODUCTION

Members of Congress consider party loyalty, the concerns of the electorate, and their own re-election campaign when deciding how to vote for a bill. This project explores another factor that could influence how a member votes: tenure.

- **Research Question: What is the relationship between the amount of time a member of Congress spends in office and how that Congress member votes on a bill?**
- This can help us understand why Congress members vote the way they do, and why they may vote against their party.

HYPOTHESIS

- **As a Congress member's time in office increases, the likelihood of a Congress member committing party treason increases.**
- "Party treason" is defined as a Congress member voting "Nay" or "No" on a bill sponsored by his or her own party.

METHODOLOGY

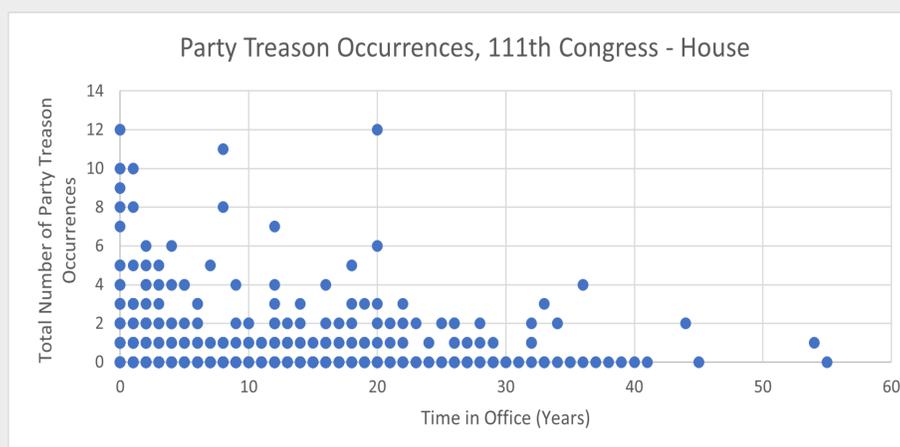
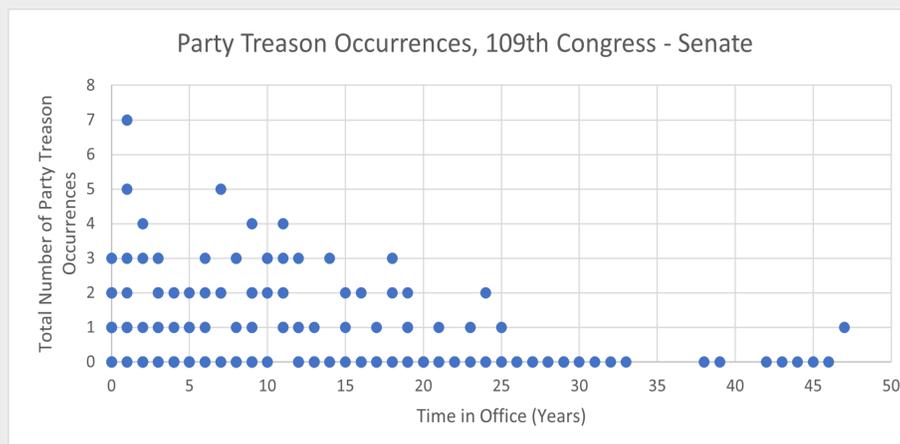
I gathered data from the following sources and created frequency tables to determine the relationship between the years spent in office and the number of party treason occurrences among members of Congress.

- **Library of Congress- number of years served in seat**
- **Congressional Votes Database- how each member voted on roll-call votes with the question, "On Passage"**

RESULTS

There is a negative relationship between the number of years served in Congress and the total number of times that member committed party treason.

- **Newer Congress members committed party treason a greater number of times than the more senior members.**
- This relationship existed across all 5 sessions that were examined in this study, and across both congressional chambers.



CONCLUSIONS

I can reject my hypothesis. This is important because:

- This demonstrates that newer members are going **against their best interests**, for maintaining party loyalty yields rewards that can aid them in influencing legislation.
- This is the **opposite of what would be expected** based on the literature.

Why might newer members commit party treason more often?

- They could try to **distinguish themselves to party leaders and secure influence in their party and Congress.** For example, Representative Paul Ryan committed party treason 6 times during his first session, but later became Speaker of the House.
- These members could have been **elected because of their willingness to vote against their party;** this could be related to personal political ideology (for example, Progressive Democrats and Tea Party Republicans).

Future research:

- Can examine if members who went on to serve in party or congressional leadership positions committed treason party more often in their early years than those who did not later serve in those positions.

REFERENCES

- Library of Congress. 2020. "Legislative Search Results – Congress.gov." <https://www.congress.gov/search?q={%22source%22:%22members%22}&searchResultViewType=expanded> (accessed November 1, 2020).
- GovTrack. 2020. "Congressional Votes Database." <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes#session= ALL> (accessed November 1, 2020).