



Leadership Organizations in the House of Representatives: Party Participation and Partisan Politics (Legislative Politics and Policy Making)

By Scott Meinke

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In recent Congresses, roughly half of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives served in whip organizations and on party committees. Rank-and-file representatives who use party service to advance their own careers benefit from this growing rate of participation in the party hierarchy, as do the party leaders who use participation in order to advance the party's agenda through coordination, communication, and persuasion. According to Scott R. Meinke, however, rising electoral competition and polarization over the past 40 years have altered the nature of party participation. In the 1970s and 1980s, the participation of a wide range of members was crucial to building consensus. Since then, in the partisan battle for control of the chamber, organizations responsible for coordination in the party have become dominated by those who follow the party line. At the same time, key leaders in the House use participatory organizations less as forums for internal deliberations over policy and strategy than as channels for exchanging information with supporters outside Congress and broadcasting sharply partisan campaign messages to the public. This transformation of leadership organizations generally serves a party's collective goals in an era of close electoral competition and ideological polarization. Yet it also hinders a party's ability to reach a strategic consensus over divisive issues and to develop its own policy alternatives.

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Review

"This book fills an important void in our understanding of how the party leadership structure in the U.S. House has steadily changed since the 1970s and is a must-read for anyone interested in how House leadership organizations have assisted the parties in fulfilling their electoral and political goals." -Jamie Carson, University of Georgia "Meinke has collected a ton of data. But what he has done with that data is even more impressive. His thorough examination of members' lives through the lens of House leadership organizations says a lot about them and the institution in which they work. His impressive study gives us a more nuanced view not only of how the House has worked in the past, but more importantly, how it is likely to work in the future as the role of parties strengthens." -Sean M. Theriault, University of Texas at Austin

About the Author

Scott R. Meinke is Associate Professor of Political Science at Bucknell University, USA.

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