Commitment and Consequences:
Reneging on Cosponsorship Pledges in the U.S. House

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ABSTRACT

We argue that bill cosponsorship in Congress is a mechanism for logrolling and coordination through which individual legislators can build coalitions in support of their introduced measures. We explore these dynamics in the House, targeting the causes and effects of MCs' choices to renege on a pledge by voting no on a bill for which they were a cosponsor. We predict that if cosponsorship fosters legislative deals, MCs will only rarely back out on their pledges, and when they do, these choices will be systematic. Further, legislators who violate their cosponsorship agreements will face punishment from their colleagues, compromising their ability to gain support for their own bills. Our analyses, focusing on all cosponsorship decisions in the 101st-108th Houses, reveal that patterns of reneging and its consequences are consistent with the idea that cosponsorship functions as a commitment mechanism.

Legislators seeking to make policy through their introduced legislation face an uphill climb. Of the five to six thousand bills introduced in the House every Congress, only a small number progress far in the legislative process. Success requires the assistance of colleagues, so bill sponsors devote considerable time and effort to soliciting the support of other MCs, building coalitions to promote their legislation. Assembling these coalitions involves making deals, compromising on key policy provisions, or trading support across bills.[1] However, these deals are always potentially fragile because MCs face a variety of competing electoral and policy goals that can lead them to waver in their initial support of a bill. How can a bill sponsor, intent on shepherding a bill through the legislative process, be sure that a fellow legislator will follow through on his or her commitment to support the measure?

We contend that cosponsorship of legislation provides a solution to the dilemmas of coalition-building by acting as a commitment device. A decision to cosponsor represents a public pledge to support the sponsor's bill should it come up for a vote on the floor. A failure to follow through on this commitment will be noticed not only by the sponsor, but also by other legislators and party leaders. An MC's decision to renege on a cosponsorship pledge could therefore result in a reputation for not honoring commitments. Such a reputation could, in turn, jeopardize the ability to build coalitions in favor of his or her own legislation and to pass that legislation. This threat of punishment for backing out on a cosponsorship makes pledges more credible, allowing MCs to trade support more easily. Cosponsorship, therefore, is a vital institutional component of the broader system of logrolling, facilitating vote trading across issues and over time.

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[1] The theoretical literature on logrolling focuses primarily on trading of support on roll call votes (see, for example, Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Carrubba and Volden 2000; Ferejohn 1986; Shepsle and Weingast 1981, 1987), but the logic applies more broadly.

We investigate the observable implications of cosponsorship as a commitment mechanism. Our analyses focus on the reneging behavior of legislators on the 843,557 cosponsorships made on the 44,779 bills and joint resolutions introduced by members of the House of Representatives in the 101st-108th Congresses (1989-2004). Reneging occurs when an MC who cosponsored a measure votes against that bill at final passage. We predict, first, that if cosponsorship helps foster legislative deals, legislators will only rarely back out on their cosponsorship pledges, and that when they do, these choices will be systematic—a function of characteristics of the cosponsor, the sponsor, and the relationship between them, as well as features of the particular measure. Second, when MCs violate their cosponsorship agreements, we expect to see evidence of punishment, as manifested in their legislative success. These dynamics have potentially far-reaching consequences for our understanding of legislators' coalition-building strategies and of the development and maintenance of legislative reputations.

The Policy Implications of Cosponsorship

Cosponsorship has been a regular component of legislative activity in the House since the late 1960s, when rules prohibiting it were relaxed and then formally lifted.[2] Legislators today average about 200 cosponsorships per Congress across a variety of issues. The importance of these activities has long been a source of debate among congressional scholars. Early arguments built on the (entirely correct) observations that cosponsorship is a relatively undemanding task and that most cosponsors are attached to legislation that never makes it to a vote to conclude that cosponsorship represents a largely symbolic activity (see, for example, Mayhew 1974).

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[2] The prohibition on cosponsorship ended in 1967, and, in 1978, limits on the number of cosponsors per bill were removed.

In recent years, though, scholars have begun to revise this view, drawing on evidence that cosponsorship can indeed affect policymaking. Bill sponsors often tout the number of cosponsorships their measures attract, offering this as an indication that the bill has broad appeal and should be supported by other members. Empirical support for such bandwagon effects exists, although it is conditional--all other things equal, large numbers of cosponsors for a measure increase the probability of committee consideration, but not ultimate success on the floor (Browne 1985; Krutz 2005; Wilson and Young 1997). More subtly, the ideological distribution of a bill's cosponsors and the timing of their cosponsorship decisions can serve as a signal about its policy placement, providing other legislators with information about the content of the measure (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; see also Aleman, Calvo, Jones, and Kaplan 2009). And, as Koger (2003) notes, cosponsorship, even of unsuccessful bills, can still have clear policy consequences when those measures are "incorporated into subsequent legislative proposals…stop another bill or class of bills…[or] send a signal of congressional interest to the executive branch on some regulatory issue" (230; see also Kingdon 1984).

The trajectory of the literature, therefore, recognizes that cosponsorship has the potential to be an integral part of the legislative process. Moreover, recent work on cosponsorship networks among MCs has shown that understanding the social structure of Congress and the relationships between legislators offers insight into a variety of phenomena, including individual legislative influence (Fowler 2006a) and aggregate legislative productivity (Cho and Fowler 2010). As of yet unexplored, though, is whether the act of cosponsorship itself influences how these relationships are created and how they are maintained (or eroded). Our examination of the causes and effects of reneging on cosponsorship pledges provides new evidence of the important role that cosponsorship plays in congressional politics.

Cosponsorship and Commitment

We argue that cosponsorship represents an institutional arrangement to facilitate deal-making and coalition-building between legislators. What makes cosponsorship a credible commitment device? In this context, commitment requires two things--information on whether an MC has followed through on his or her pledge and some sort of punishment mechanism for a failure to do so. The public nature of cosponsorship facilitates both of these, enabling MCs to monitor the behavior of their colleagues and creating the possibility of meaningful consequences for a failure to follow through on a promise to support legislation. In particular, a cosponsor who reneges on a pledge may be seen as an untrustworthy coalition partner and hence will be less likely to receive the support of colleagues for his or her own measures. Legislators thus have incentives to follow through on their commitments to protect their reputations.

Accordingly, once MCs have made the decision to cosponsor a measure, they should not back out lightly. The tension, of course, is that there are likely to be a number of situations in which an MC might want to renege on a particular cosponsorship decision. One possibility is that during the course of the legislative process (committee markups, amendments, and the like), the bill has changed enough that the cosponsor is no longer in support, or that a competing bill now aligns more closely with his or her position. Another is that the MC's own preferences about the bill remain constant, but other considerations intervene. For instance, a legislator could learn that constituents are strongly against the measure, or there could be a credible threat of a high-quality challenger or well-funded interest group that could use the MC's support for the bill against him or her. Finally, a decision not to follow through on a cosponsorship pledge could be personal. Cosponsorships are inherently dyadic—the choice to cosponsor means support not just for a bill, but for the sponsor of that bill (Harward and Moffett 2010). If that sponsor does something to

displease a cosponsor (e.g., by refusing to reciprocate and cosponsor one of his or her bills, by reneging on a previous pledge, by supporting a bill he or she opposes, etc.), the MC might want to withdraw his or her cosponsorship support to send a message.

Given the potential punishments for reneging, though, the set of instances in which an MC *wants* to back out should be larger than the number of cases in which he or she *actually does*. We expect reneging to occur only when the legislator believes that the benefits clearly outweigh the costs. As we discuss in more detail below, such a decision is most likely when the MC cares more about the outcome of the vote (and when his/her vote is more likely to be pivotal to that outcome), when the sponsor is less powerful, when the relationship between the sponsor and cosponsor is weaker, and when the cosponsor is more secure electorally and in the chamber.

We argue, then, that the choice to renege is strategic and carefully calibrated. Although this should dampen its observable effects, we still expect to see consequences for this behavior. In particular, we contend that reneging will harm MCs' attempts at coalition-building—they will face more difficulty gathering cosponsors for their own introduced legislation and will be less likely to see that legislation pass. Moreover, the magnitude of these punishments will vary with characteristics of the reneging MC and the context under which he or she reneged.

Patterns of Cosponsorship

Our analyses focus on cosponsorship activity on the nearly 45,000 public bills and joint resolutions introduced in the 101st through 108th Congresses (1989-2004).[3] This time period extends across three presidencies and includes a change in partisan control of the House (the

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[3] We limit our focus to these types of measures (i.e., excluding simple and concurrent resolutions) as they are the only categories of legislation that, if passed, have the force of law. We use "bills" to refer to both bills and joint resolutions.

switch to the Republicans in the 104th Congress) and so offers a sample of introduced measures and cosponsorship decisions across a variety of contexts. We compiled data on cosponsorships and characteristics of bills from Fowler's cosponsorship network project (2006a, 2006b), Adler and Wilkerson's Congressional Bills Project, and the Library of Congress's THOMAS site.

Table 1 provides descriptive data on cosponsorship patterns. Across the sample, MCs introduced an average of 5600 measures per Congress (from a low of 4398 in the 104th Congress to a high of 6606 in the 102nd Congress). Each MC, therefore, has about 5600 opportunities to cosponsor in a term. Legislators choose to sign on to only between three and five percent of the bills introduced. Each bill, in turn, averages around nineteen cosponsors, although this masks a wide range of variation across measures, with some receiving hundreds of cosponsors and about one-third receiving none at all.

Insert Table 1 about here

The timing of the decisions made by these bills' cosponsors also varies. Members of the House may choose to sign on to a bill up until the time it is reported from committee, but a basic distinction can be drawn between original cosponsors, who make the decision to cosponsor prior to or coincident with the introduction of a bill, and post-introduction cosponsors, who sign on after introduction. An original cosponsor is more likely to have learned about the measure from the sponsor (typically through a Dear Colleague letter) and has agreed to cosponsor before observing colleagues' reaction to the bill. We expect, therefore, that original cosponsorship indicates a stronger signal of support on the part of the cosponsor and so will be less common. The results confirm this; original cosponsorships comprise only between about one-fourth and one-third of cosponsorship decisions.

The Prevalence of Reneging

Before testing our hypotheses about reneging, we must first identify when it occurs. Reneging is only possible if a bill gets to a vote on the floor, so our analyses target the 56,765 cosponsorship pledges made on measures that reached that stage. We constructed our indicators using Poole and Rosenthal's roll call voting data and the Congressional Bills Project's matches between roll call number and bill/resolution number. To identify the final passage vote for each bill that progressed to that point (~4% of all introduced bills), we coded the description of each vote and then matched the yea-nay totals with those reported on THOMAS. Reneging is defined as a "no" vote on a bill for which an MC was a cosponsor, and where the sponsor voted yes.[4]

Figure 1 presents some descriptive statistics on reneging. Across the sample, there are a total of 840 instances of this behavior. Thus, as expected, it is rare for MCs to back out on their pledges. Just how rare, though, depends upon the frame of reference. The first column for each congress shows that only a very small proportion of cosponsorship decisions (about 1.5%) are reneged upon when MCs cast their roll calls. However, when we calculate rates of reneging at the level of bills or MCs, the levels are higher. The second set of columns shows that about 20% of all measures that receive cosponsors have at least one later withdraw support,[5] and the third set of columns shows that in every Congress, about one-tenth to one-third of MCs renege. And, if we aggregate across the entire time period, we find that 48% of MCs reneged at least once.

Insert Figure 1 about here

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[4] There are several instances in which the sponsor of a bill votes no on final passage. This is likely due to large changes in the bill during the legislative process. We do not include these.

[5] These calculations are limited to bills that had at least one cosponsor, since reneging is not possible for bills that are not cosponsored.

Thus, reneging, though infrequent, is not unheard of. In fact, it is a regular part of the legislative process. The patterns across bills suggest that these choices to back out on cosponsorship commitments are driven by individual calculations, as mass reneging does not occur very often. Figure 2 demonstrates that about half of bills that were the subject of reneging had only one reneger, and only one-fifth had more than four renegers. As with all of the measures of reneging calculated here, these rates are fairly steady across congresses.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Along the same lines, Figure 2 also shows that instances of reneging are spread across legislators. It does not appear to be the case that a few MCs are serial renegers, responsible for the bulk of the decisions to back out on pledges. Of the 451 legislators in the sample who renege (out of a total of 937 unique members in the 101st-108th Congress), 54% do so only once, and just 3% renege more than four times. Therefore, the patterns in the analyses that follow are not driven by just a few MCs or a few bills.

Who Reneges?

What explains the decision to renege? We posit that the choice is complicated, a function of contextual factors and of characteristics of the MCs involved in a particular cosponsorship decision. Specifically, we expect to observe legislators backing out on a cosponsorship pledge only when the benefits to them offset the potential costs. This will be most likely when an MC cares enough about policy that he or she is willing to prioritize the outcome of the vote over the risk of appearing to be untrustworthy or indecisive, when a legislator is secure enough electorally and in the chamber to withstand any negative consequences that may arise from the decision to back out on his or her support of a measure, and/or when the relationship between the sponsor and cosponsor is weaker, such that the MC feels less obligation to follow through.

Security of Cosponsor

Because reneging is potentially risky, we expect that the more secure the legislator, the more willing and able he or she will be to absorb any intra-chamber and external consequences that might come with it. Thus, seniority (number of years in office) and electoral safety (the MC's proportion of the two-party vote share in the previous election) should both be positively associated with reneging. Along the same lines, if a lack of concern about colleagues' reactions frees legislators to renege, then those MCs who have made the decision to retire after their current terms (measured as a dummy variable coded 1 if the legislator retires and 0 otherwise) will have a higher probability of backing out on a pledge.

Relationship between Sponsor and Cosponsor

Our theory of the dynamics underlying reneging also suggests that features of the sponsor and the relationship between the sponsor and a cosponsor influence the reneging decision. In general, cosponsors will be less willing to renege on pledges they have made to powerful colleagues, so, all else equal, we expect to observe a lower probability of reneging if the sponsor is senior (as measured in years in office), secure electorally (as measured by his or her percentage of the two-party vote in the previous election), a leader (Speaker, majority/minority leader, or whip), or a member of the majority party. MCs should also be less likely to renege on a pledge if they have close connections to the sponsor, so at the dyadic level, we expect that rates of reneging will be lower when the sponsor and cosponsor share a party affiliation and/or come from the same state, are members of the same congressional class (i.e., elected in the same year), or serve on the same committees.[6]

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[6] We include two indicators here, one for whether they share any committee assignments, and a second for whether they both sit on the same committee of referral for a measure.

For similar reasons, we anticipate that cosponsors who are members of the majority party will be less likely than those in the minority to renege, since bills that reach a final passage vote are most often those that are supported by powerful members of the majority. Voting no on these measures, especially after having previously signed on in support of them, is therefore likely to elicit disapproval from party leaders. In contrast, in most cases a reneging minority MC is backing out on a pledge on a bill sponsored by a majority member, and so has less to lose.

Perhaps most importantly, we expect that the nature of a particular cosponsorship agreement between the sponsor and a given cosponsor and their past cosponsorship interactions affect the probability of reneging. We have argued that the choice to be an original cosponsor (vs. a post-introduction cosponsor) indicates a stronger link to the sponsor. It follows, then, that original cosponsors should be less likely to renege on a cosponsorship pledge than post-introduction cosponsors. We also anticipate that when the sponsor of a bill had previously signed on to a bill introduced by one of the cosponsors, the probability of that cosponsor reneging will be lower. Our measure, "history," is taken at the date of the final passage vote for a particular bill, and is a dummy variable for whether the sponsor of the bill had cosponsored a measure introduced by a cosponsor in the current or previous term. We expect that when history exists between the sponsor and cosponsor, the cosponsoring MC will feel more obligation to reciprocate by following through on his or her pledge and voting yea.

Policy Considerations

Finally, we predict that policy considerations will be central to the reneging decision. In short, if a legislator does not care very much if a bill passes or fails, it should not be worth risking the negative consequences that can come with reneging. Accordingly, reneging is likely to be more common when policy considerations are at the fore. Most obviously, we expect to see

more reneging when the content of a measure has changed across the legislative process (i.e., from the time that cosponsors chose to sign on). Given the very large number of bills we study, we opt for a simple indicator of change—a count of the number of successful amendments attached to a measure when it reaches a final passage vote.

We also anticipate that reneging will occur more often on more policy-relevant measures. "Relevance" or "importance" are notoriously difficult concepts to measure, but we employ several proxies. One is a dummy variable for whether the measure was mentioned in the *CQ Almanac*. Across this time period, about 300 bills and resolutions per Congress were discussed by *CQ,* and such discussion is generally viewed as a sign that the measure is particularly high-profile (Volden and Wiseman 2009). We supplement this with an indicator that captures policy importance at the other end of the spectrum—whether the measure was identified in Adler and Wilkerson's Congressional Bills Project as "commemorative" (dealing with naming buildings, minting coins, designating non-official days, and the like). In addition, we incorporate some more general indicators of potential policy relevance, including whether a measure is a bill or joint resolution. Both categories of legislation have the force of law if passed, but taken as group, resolutions often deal with matters of less pressing importance. Therefore, we include a dummy variable for "bill" and anticipate that there will be more reneging on bills than on joint resolutions. We also control for the issue content of measures (i.e., whether they are about agriculture, defense, health, taxes, etc.). We do not have theoretical expectations about which issues are likely to be the subject of the most reneging, but assume that differences could emerge,

so in the analyses discussed below, we control for this with a series of nineteen dummy variables for the issue content of a bill or joint resolution.[7]

When making decisions about whether to renege, policy-motivated MCs will also consider the likelihood that their choice will make the difference between the measure passing or failing. If the outcome of a vote on a bill is a foregone conclusion, there is little incentive to back out, as it opens one up to the punishments that can come from reneging without offering any policy benefit. We therefore expect to see a positive relationship between the closeness of a vote (measured as the absolute value of the yeas minus the nays) and the likelihood of reneging.

We also anticipate that certain cosponsors may care more about policy than others and so be more willing to renege. In particular, if ideological extremity is correlated with the intensity of preferences, then the probability of reneging will be higher among relatively extreme legislators (as measured by the absolute value of their common-space NOMINATE scores) since they are more concerned about the specifics of the measures they support and more likely to place policy above other considerations.

Our independent variables include the features of bills and MCs described above, plus a number of controls. Because rates of reneging could vary across congresses and within a term, we take time into account in two ways: by controlling for Congress (with a series of dummy variables) and by including a measure that taps the number of days that elapsed between the start

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[7] The scheme is exhaustive and mutually exclusive, such that each bill receives one and only one issue code (see Sulkin 2009). The categories include agriculture, budget, campaign finance, children's issues, civil rights, consumer issues, corporate regulation, crime, defense & foreign policy, education, environment, government operations, health, jobs & infrastructure, Medicare, moral issues, Social Security, taxes, and welfare.

of a term and the date of the vote on a bill. This "elapsed" variable runs from 0 (the vote took place on the first day) to 693 (the vote took place near the end of the second year of the Congress). We also control for the number of each MC's cosponsored bills that made it to the final passage stage in a particular Congress since this affects the number of opportunities to renege. And, we include controls for whether the MC served a partial or full term, for whether he or she switched parties, and for the size of an MC's state delegation (because those from larger states will have more opportunities to cosponsor with "same state" legislators).

Results

The results presented in Table 2 test these hypotheses about the effects of cosponsor security, sponsor-cosponsor relations, and policy considerations on the probability of reneging. Our unit of analysis is an MC's vote at final passage on each of his or her cosponsored bills that reached this stage. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the legislator reneged (i.e., voted no) and 0 otherwise. We estimate the model using probit and, because legislators can appear in the sample in multiple Congresses, cluster the standard errors on the cosponsor.

Insert Table 2 about here

The results support our hypotheses about the factors driving reneging. Electoral safety is positively related to reneging—more secure cosponsors are more likely to back out on their pledges, as are those who do not plan to run for reelection. This suggests that MCs are cognizant of the potential ramifications of looking like a "flip-flopper" and avoid reneging on a pledge if they are particularly concerned about their electoral prospects. The results for retirement also support our contention that those who are less concerned about what their colleagues think of them feel freer to back out on their pledges.

Policy considerations also operate in the manner predicted. Reneging increases in probability the more amendments have been attached to a measure, is more frequent for bills than for joint resolutions, occurs more often for some issues than for others,[8] and increases in probability the closer the vote. Relatively ideologically extreme legislators are also more likely than their moderate colleagues to back out on a pledge. Contrary to initial expectations, reneging is less common on high-profile measures mentioned in the *CQ Almanac*. However, it is also less common for commemorative measures. Taken together, these findings indicate that policy importance does indeed matter (i.e., with reneging generally more likely on more policy-relevant measures), but, on the few most highly salient measures, where reneging is most likely to be noticed (and, hence, punished), legislators avoid engaging in it.

Finally, the choice to renege on a measure is linked to characteristics of its sponsor and a cosponsor's relationship with him or her. Reneging is less common when the sponsor-cosponsor dyad has a history (that is, when the sponsor has previously cosponsored the cosponsor's introduced bills), shares a party affiliation,[9] and when the MC was an original cosponsor. And, as expected, majority party cosponsors are less likely to renege than minority members, even after controlling for the majority status of the sponsor.

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[8]All else equal, MCs are significantly more likely to renege on education and health measures and significantly less likely to renege on bills and resolutions dealing with children's issues, moral issues, and civil rights.

[9] Once we control for all of the common features of dyads, there are no significant independent relationships for same state, same class, or same committee, though, as shown, most of the coefficients are in the expected direction.

These findings provide strong support for our theory of reneging. Not only is it a systematic and predictable phenomenon, but it is also a function of the particular interactions between the sponsor and cosponsor in a dyad. Importantly, the effects we uncover are more than just statistical regularities; they are also substantively meaningful in magnitude. To estimate the likelihood of reneging in different scenarios, we used CLARIFY (see Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) to calculate the probability of a "no" vote on a bill cosponsored by an MC when characteristics of that MC, his or her relationship with the bill's sponsor, and the nature of the measure are varied. Recall that at the level of the cosponsorship decision, reneging is a rare event (comprising only about 1.5% of all decisions).

For instance, if we take a relatively safe and relatively ideologically extreme legislator from the minority party and calculate the likelihood that he or she will renege on a non-*CQ/*non-commemorative bill with three amendments (the average for measures with amendments) for which he or she was a post-introduction cosponsor and for which he or she shares no history or same-party or same-state affiliation with the sponsor, the probability of reneging is 5.82%. In contrast, the probability of a relatively vulnerable and moderate majority MC voting no on a non-amended, *CQ*-mentioned or commemorative joint-resolution for which he or she was an original cosponsor, has a history with the sponsor, and shares party and state affiliations is virtually zero (.002%).[10] Thus, common differences in the context of the voting decision can have a big impact on the likelihood that a legislator will choose to renege.

[10] For these calculations, we hold sponsor and cosponsor seniority, sponsor vote share and ideological extremity, closeness of the vote, time elapsed, number of cosponsored bills that reached a vote, and delegation size at their means. We also set the same class and same committee indicators at zero. We further assume that the sponsor is not a leader and that the MC

The Consequences of Reneging

Our theory is predicated on the idea that cosponsorship represents a pledge of commitment and that backing out on this commitment has negative consequences. The results in Table 2 indicate that MCs appear to be aware of the potential for such consequences and act only when they feel confident they can withstand them, or when they value the policy effects of a "no" vote on a bill enough that they are willing to risk the ramifications of reneging.

However, as is the case with other legislative activities that may yield a payoff or cost, it is entirely possible that legislators are overly cautious, behaving *as if* there were a consequence for failing to follow through on a pledge, even if in reality such punishments were rare. This anticipatory response could produce the patterns of behavior we see in Table 2 in the absence of an actual effect of reneging. As a next step, then, it is important to assess more directly the consequences of reneging. We do so by examining the relationship between reneging and a variety of indicators of legislative success, including MCs' ability to assemble cosponsorship coalitions for their own introduced legislation and the effects of reneging on the likelihood that their measures pass.

Our expectations about reneging and legislative success are straightforward. If cosponsorship is viewed by other MCs as a commitment, then backing out on this commitment should yield consequences. Most directly, the sponsor of the measure upon which a cosponsor reneged is likely to react negatively and be less willing to sign on as a cosponsor to that MC's bills in the future.

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does not plan to retire, is not a partial termer, and did not switch parties. The differences in the probability of reneging are even larger if we allow these variables to vary across their ranges.

To test this hypothesis, we step back to model the cosponsorship decision at the dyadic level. Therefore, our unit of analysis is each MC's decision about whether to cosponsor each bill introduced during the 101st through 108th Congresses. This yields a total of about 20 million observations (~5600 bills * ~435 legislators * 8 congresses). Accordingly, we conduct separate analyses for each congress. The dependent variable in our models is a simple dummy for whether or not a legislator cosponsored a particular bill, and our primary independent variable of interest is reneging (i.e., whether the sponsor had reneged on a measure introduced by a potential cosponsor). We include two indicators of the latter—one for whether, at the point of introduction of a bill, the sponsor had reneged on a potential cosponsor during the *current* Congress, and another for whether the sponsor had reneged upon that MC in the *previous* Congress.

Other independent variables include the various characteristics of individual sponsors and cosponsors included in the "who reneges?" analysis in Table 2, such as vote share, seniority, ideological extremity, and majority status. These are designed to capture the intuition that some legislators are more likely than others to cosponsor and that some sponsors are, in general, more or less likely to attract cosponsors for their bills. Along the same lines, we also add features of the particular measure that may affect the probability that it receives cosponsors, such as whether it is a bill or joint resolution, whether it was multiply referred, its issue category, and whether the sponsor or potential cosponsor sat on a committee of referral for it.

To capture the dyadic relationships between the sponsor and potential cosponsor, we incorporate a variety of measures of common interest (whether they come from the same state, from the same party, were elected in the same class, share a committee assignment, and, if so, whether that shared assignment is for a committee to which the bill was referred) and indicators of past history. The history variable is very similar to that used in the "who reneges?" analysis in

Table 2, though in this case it is measured at the point of introduction of a bill and reflects the number of times that the sponsor of that bill had cosponsored a measure introduced by the potential cosponsor. We include a measure of history in the current term and, for all but the 101st Congress (where our data collection begins), the previous term.[11]

Our basic expectation is that if a bill sponsor has reneged on a potential cosponsor in the past, that will significantly *decrease* the likelihood that that MC will choose to cosponsor the reneging sponsor's measure, yielding a negative coefficient on reneging. In the interest of space, we do not present the full sets of probit results for all eight congresses[12] and focus instead on the marginal effects for current and past reneging, as presented in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

For six of the eight congresses, current and/or past reneging by one MC on another significantly reduces the likelihood that the latter will cosponsor a bill of the former's in the future. The two exceptions are the 101st Congress, where we cannot include past reneging (but where the negative coefficient on current reneging comes very close to standard levels of statistical significance), and the 104th Congress, which marks the first term after the Republicans took the majority in the 1994 election. The lack of a finding there is perhaps not surprising, as the change in party power shook up relationships between MCs (majority members became the minority, committee assignments changed more markedly, turnover was higher, etc.).

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[11] We estimated these models in a variety of ways. In the reported specifications, a dyad is coded as having zeroes for history and for reneging if one member was not in the previous Congress. We obtain the same results, though, if the analysis is limited to dyads who were both in Congress in the previous term.

[12] Full results for the analyses summarized in Figure 3 and 4 are available from the authors.

Importantly, the effects are substantial. As a point of comparison, across these congresses, the average probability of cosponsoring a bill ranges from 2.8% to 5.2%. As shown by the magnitude of the marginal effects, reneging reduces these probabilities by anywhere from one-fifth to two-thirds, depending on the Congress. For example, the observed probability of cosponsorship for the 108th Congress is 4.3%. If the sponsor of a bill had reneged upon an MC in the 107th Congress, the probability of that MC cosponsoring the sponsor's bill drops to just 1.6%.

These findings provide strong confirming evidence about our theory of cosponsorship as a commitment mechanism. Reneging damages the relationship between an MC and the colleague upon whom he or she reneged, so reneging often means losing the support of that MC in the future. For our next test, we examine an even more difficult standard of the effects of reneging-- if they extend to losing the support of *other* MCs. Indeed, if reneging is viewed as indication of untrustworthiness on the part of an MC, or if close colleagues of the aggrieved MC also wish to punish the reneger, then we will observe broader reputational effects.

Reneging and Cosponsorship Coalition Size

To test for such reputational effects, we first compare the size of the cosponsorship coalitions for an MC's introduced bills before and after a reneging incident, with the expectation that we will see fewer cosponsors after. We conduct regression analyses, presented in Table 3, where the units of analysis are MCs' bill introductions and the dependent variable is the number of cosponsorships sponsors receive for these bills. (Standard errors are clustered on the MC.) Because we are interested in assessing the effects of reneging, we limit the sample to those members who engaged in this behavior. This provides for a stricter test, since it targets whether the size of their coalitions *changes* after reneging (i.e., rather than just comparing the average number of cosponsors for the bills of renegers and non-renegers).

We identify the date of an MC's reneging incident and construct a "spell" around this of the five introductions preceding and following it.[13] The coefficient on the reneging variable in the model thus reflects the difference in the number of cosponsors for the measures introduced in the spell before and after the date of reneging. More specifically, a negative coefficient means that the size of MCs' cosponsorship coalitions decreases post-reneging.

These analyses are designed to compare within individuals, which reduces the need for controls. Nevertheless, the effects of reneging may be subtle and swamped by differences in cosponsorship coalition size linked to characteristics of bills, so we do take into account the type of measure (bill or joint resolution), whether the bill was referred to multiple committees (since multiply-referred measures tend to receive more cosponsors), and dummies for Congress and bill issue category. Given potential differences in dynamics for majority and minority party members, we also include a control for majority party status.[14]

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 presents these results (minus the coefficients for the Congress and the issue category dummies, which we omit in the interest of space). The critical finding is that backing out on a cosponsorship pledge does indeed have a negative effect on the size of the coalitions for the reneging MC's subsequent bill introductions. As shown in column one, a failure to follow through on a cosponsorship commitment is associated with a decrease of three to four cosponsors

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[13] These spells often cross Congresses (for MCs for whom the number of introductions in a Congress does not reach five preceding and/or following the reneging incident), but if we limit them to a single Congress, the substantive conclusions are the same.

[14] We also estimated models that include the full set of characteristics of MCs, with no substantive differences in results.

on the bills an MC introduces after the reneging incident. Because the average number of cosponsors per bill is only about nineteen, this reflects a substantial difference.

The results presented in columns two and three provide more insight into how this punishment comes about. While the coefficient on reneging in column one reflects the average number of cosponsors lost post-reneging, the coefficients in columns two and three show the effects of reneging on the number of copartisan and outpartisan cosponsors. As expected, the effect is more pronounced for copartisans, but reneging also leads to a significant reduction in the average number of cosponsors and MC receives from the *other* party. That a reneging MC also loses support from members of the opposite party offers evidence that the punishments we observe are for reneging, rather than just the no vote on a bill.

It is impressive that evidence of an effect of reneging on cosponsorship coalition size shows up in aggregate analyses, since we might reasonably expect to see the amount of punishment for reneging vary across different contexts. For instance, the consequences for reneging are likely to be harsher for members of the majority than members of the minority since their decisions to renege typically reflect backing out on a copartisan and are thus more likely to be looked upon with disapproval by their party leaders. Along the same lines, reneging on a copartisan is likely to have more effect on future ability to construct coalitions than reneging on a bill sponsored by an MC of the opposite party, regardless of whether one is in the majority or minority. The nature of the measure on which one reneged may matter as well—MCs may be punished more when they back out on high-profile measures, and may face fewer consequences when they renege on a bill that had been amended (i.e., changed) prior to the vote.

Figure 4 summarizes the results of a series of analyses designed to test these hypotheses. We replicated the analysis in the first column of Table 3, but with different models for each

reneging situation. For the effects of majority status, we ran separate analyses for majority and minority members. To determine whether there are differences in the extent of punishment for reneging on a copartisan vs. a member of the other party, we included two indicators of reneging—"same party" reneging and "cross party" reneging. We used the same approach for comparing reneging on *CQ* and non-*CQ* measures[15] and on amended vs. non-amended measures. To illustrate these effects, we present just the coefficients on the measures of reneging (represented by the dots), along with the 95% confidence interval for each (represented by the lines). The more negative the coefficients, the greater the effect, since they reflect the difference between the number of cosponsors for an MC's bills pre- and post-reneging.

<center>Insert Figure 4 about here</center>

As shown, all of the coefficients are negative, indicating that reneging generally decreases MCs' success at assembling cosponsorship coalitions. However, as predicted, the consequences are more pronounced for members of the majority party, when an MC reneges against a copartisan, and when he or she backs out on a high-profile measure. Contrary to our expectations, the effects of reneging on an amended measure are larger than the effects of reneging on a non-amended one. However, it may be that the process of amending raises the salience of a measure, increasing the probability that other MCs will notice and react negatively to a colleague's reneging decision.

Reneging and Bill Passage

Our final test of the legislative consequences of reneging targets the most tangible possible effect--whether the punishments for this behavior extend beyond affecting MCs'

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[15] There was not a sufficient number of instances of reneging on commemorative measures to include that comparison in these analyses.

coalition-building abilities to influence whether their bills ultimately pass in the chamber. Our expectation is that if reneging harms legislators' reputations, leading their colleagues to be less willing to support their initiatives, it should also influence their "hit rates" (the percentage of each legislator's introduced bills that pass in the chamber) from one term to the next.

In the regression analyses presented in Table 4, the dependent variable is an MC's hit rate in a particular term. Given the timing of the legislative calendar, final passage votes on measures tend to be grouped toward the end of a Congress. Thus, the overall hit rate in one term should most likely be affected by reneging early in that Congress and late in the previous one. Accordingly, our primary independent variable of interest is a count of each MC's number of reneging incidents in year two of the previous term and year one of the current term. We estimate three models—one where the independent variable is a total count of reneging incidents, a second where it is a count of reneging incidents on *CQ*-mentioned measures, and a third where it is a count of reneging incidents on lower-profile measures. Importantly, we include an indicator for hit rate in the previous term, so that the coefficient on reneging indicates its effect above and beyond past hit rate. We also control for Congress (in the interest of space, we do not present the coefficients on these dummies), the total number of bills introduced by an MC, and a variety of characteristics of MCs that could influence hit rate, including their membership in majority or minority party, leadership status, and seniority, electoral security, and ideological extremity. These analyses are limited to MCs who introduced more than a single measure, and we cluster the standard errors on the MC.

<center>Insert Table 4 about here</center>

These results demonstrate that reneging does indeed have a demonstrable effect on hit rates. For every reneging incident, legislators' hit rates drop by about one percent. Because the

average hit rate for all MCs is only about 12%, this effect reflects a substantively meaningful difference.[16] Moreover, the effect is more pronounced for reneging on high-salience *CQ*-mentioned measures. Thus, this serves as strong evidence of the legislative consequences of MCs' failure to follow through on pledges. Not only do MCs who renege lose cosponsors for their own bills, they also enjoy less success in getting these bills passed in the future.

Conclusions

These findings tell us much about the microfoundations of coalition-building and logrolling in the House. Theories of legislative behavior and organization have long noted that the transaction costs of legislating can lead to suboptimal outcomes, where desired bills are left unpassed. In turn, much of the literature focuses on the macrolevel institutions that MCs create to solve this problem, such as committee structures (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast 1981, 1987) or party organization (Cox and McCubbins 2005, 2007). We argue that cosponsorship performs a similar role, serving as an institutional arrangement to aid in making commitments credible. Cosponsorship facilitates deal-making and thus enables legislators to achieve their policy goals.

Our results have shown that patterns of reneging are consistent with the idea that cosponsorship functions as a commitment device. Legislators rarely back out on the pledges they make, but when they do so, these choices are systematic. MCs are sensitive to their own status in the chamber, to the context surrounding a particular bill, and to their relationship with a measure's sponsor, and so renege only when they can afford to and/or when they are willing to pay the potential costs. And, even though these strategic considerations dampen the observable effects of reneging, we still see clear evidence of punishment. Legislators who renege harm their

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[16] These findings are robust to a variety of different specifications.

reputations and, as a result, face difficulty in assembling coalitions in favor of their own legislation and in getting that legislation passed.

This finding bears on a number of current debates about legislative politics. It pushes forward arguments about networks in Congress, demonstrating that cosponsorship reciprocity is not only a consequence of relationships between legislators, but also a cause of them. Relatedly, it highlights the dangers of viewing legislative activities like cosponsorship as merely symbolic or limited to mostly electoral effects. Instead, these activities can have a subtle but important influence on the policy process, and may also affect legislators' reputations for trustworthiness, and, potentially, their career trajectories in the chamber. Thus, exploring the links between MCs' reputations and their lawmaking and career success is a fruitful area for future research.

Perhaps most importantly, our results suggest that cosponsorship has had underappreciated consequences for the development of the legislative process over the past thirty years. If cosponsorship helps legislators to trade support, then it provides individual MCs with the ability to create coalitions in favor of their preferred policies. Thus, changes in rules about cosponsorship in the 1960s and 1970s may have empowered individual legislative entrepreneurs in unanticipated ways. The impact of these rule changes, therefore, should be reflected in the macro-patterns of coalition-building and legislative success in the House over time.

In short, the choices MCs make about whether to follow through on their pledges to support legislation have a tangible and long-lasting legacy. Understanding the dynamics of cosponsorship thus has the potential to offer new insight into the most fundamental question underlying the study of Congress and legislatures more generally--how the strategic decisions of individual legislators interact with institutional structures to produce policy outcomes.

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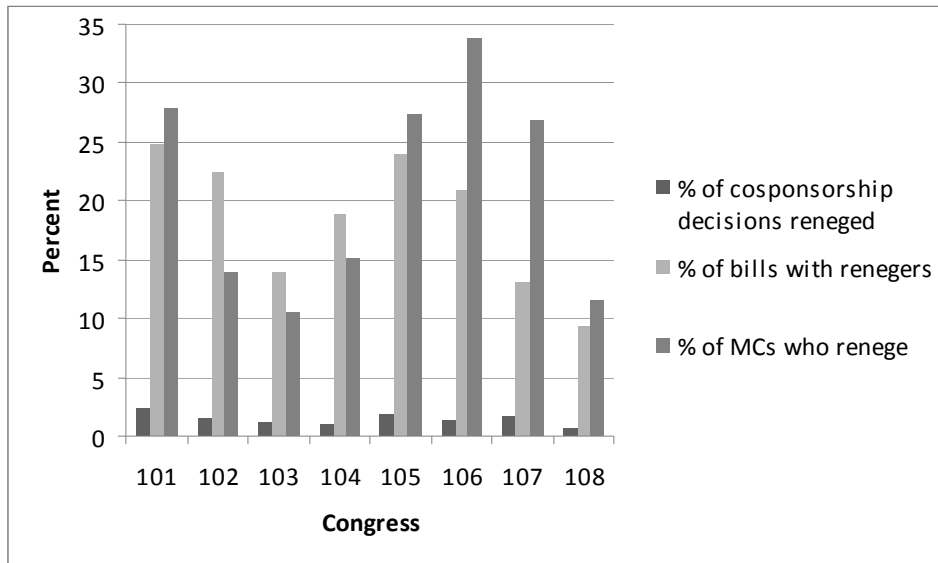
Figure 1. The Prevalence of Reneging by Congress

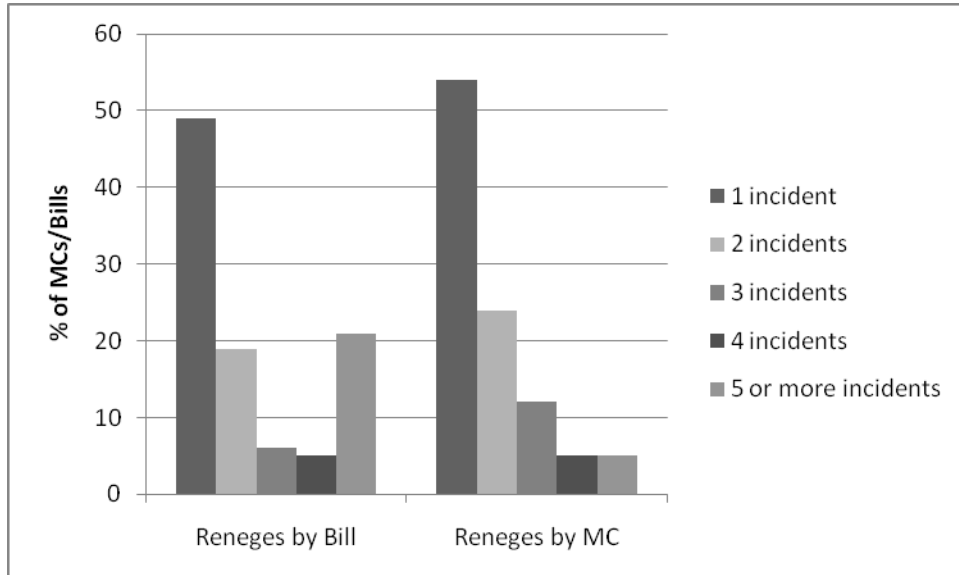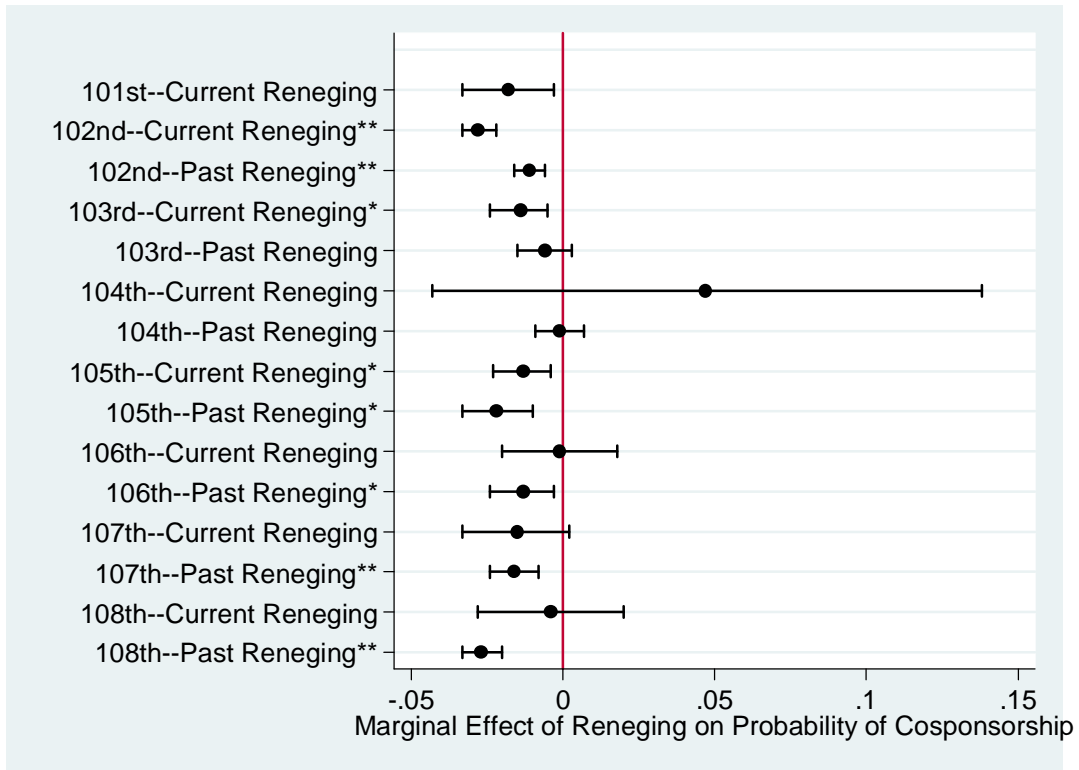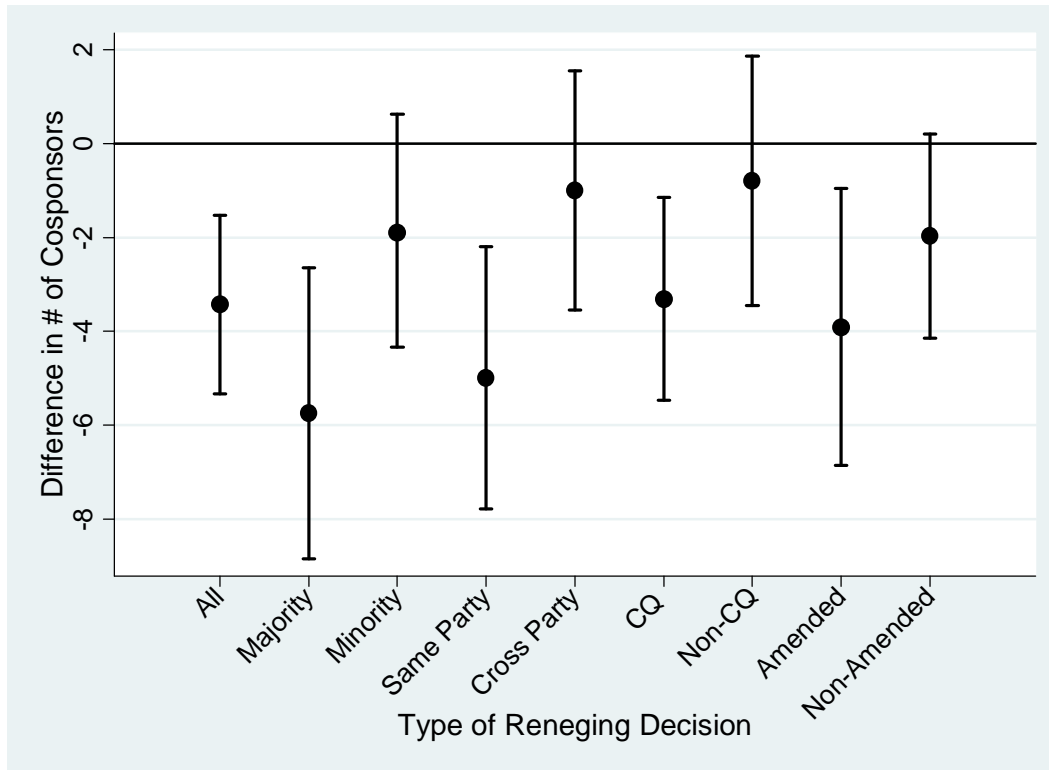**Figure 2. Distribution of Reneging**

Figure 3. The Dyadic Level Punishments for Reneging

*Note: The figure presents the effect of having reneged in the past on a colleague on that colleague's probability of cosponsoring a bill of the reneging MC's in the future. The dots represent the marginal effect and the lines the 95% confidence intervals. ** = p <.01; * = p < .05.*

Figure 4. Differential Punishment across Types of Reneging

Note: The figure presents the difference in the average number of cosponsors for MCs' bills before and after they renege. These estimates are derived from models based on the results in presented in Table 3, but where the type of MC (majority/minority) or type of reneging decision (on a post-introduction vs. original cosponsorship, or against a same-party or cross-party sponsor) vary. The dots represent the coefficients and the lines the 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. Cosponsorship in the 101st-108th Congresses

	101st	102nd	103rd	104th	105th	106th	107th	108th
# of Bills Introduced	6438	6606	5550	4398	4891	5657	5787	5452
# of Introduced Bills with Cosponsors	4243	4163	3598	2827	3319	3898	4022	3983
Cosponsorships								
Total	146,269	135,490	101,000	65,112	84,949	105,027	103,793	101,917
% of obs	5.2%	4.7%	4.1%	3.4%	3.9%	4.3%	4.1%	4.3%
Cosponsor Type								
% Original	24.5%	23.6%	24.7%	34.8%	33.7%	34.7%	36.7%	37.2%
% Post-Intro	75.5%	76.4%	75.3%	65.2%	66.3%	65.3%	63.3%	62.8%

Note: The table presents data on the number of bill introductions and cosponsorship decisions (# of bills * number of MCs) for each Congress between 1989 and 2004.

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Table 2. Who Reneges?

	Renege?
Cosponsor	
Vote Share	.004(.001)**
Seniority	.003(.002)
Retire?	.149(.068)*
Majority Party?	-.377(.077)**
Ideological Extremity	.444(.132)**
Sponsor	
Leader?	-.108(.091)
Vote Share	-.004(.001)**
Seniority	-.006(.003)*
Majority Party?	.142(.073)
Ideological Extremity	.434(.123)**
Dyadic Relationship	
Sponsor-Cosponsor History	-.106(.038)**
Original Cosponsor?	-.096(.036)**
Same State?	-.076(.065)
Same Party?	-.321(.073)**
Same Committee?	-.025(.048)
Same Committee of Referral?	.034(.058)
Same Class?	-.086(.069)
Context	
Count of Amendments	.043(.009)**
CQ Mention?	-.112(.041)*
Commemorative?	-.71(.163)**
Bill?	.199(.072)**
Closeness of Vote	.003(.000)**
Time Elapsed	.0004(.000)**
# of Bills to Vote	-.0001(.0003)
Partial Termer?	-.239(.148)
Switch Party?	.024(.245)
Delegation Size	.003(.001)*
Constant	-6.47(6.76)
N	56,765
Pseudo R-squared	.19

Note: The table presents the results of a probit analysis where the dependent variable is whether or not a legislator reneged on a cosponsorship decision and the independent variables include the features of MCs and bills presented, along with a series of dummy variables for Congress and bill category. Standard errors are clustered on the MC. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

Table 3. The Effects of Reneging on Subsequent Cosponsorship Coalition Size

	All Cosponsors	Same Party Cosponsors	Cross-Party Cosponsors
Renege?	-3.43**	-2.36**	-1.07**
	(.97)	(.67)	(.40)
Bill?	-36.51**	-22.75**	-13.76**
	(5.90)	(4.13)	(2.17)
Multiple Referral?	6.81**	5.09**	1.72*
	(1.52)	(1.06)	(.69)
Majority Party?	.08	-1.67	1.75**
	(1.35)	(.96)	(.63)
Constant	51.23	35.61	15.61
	(7.18)	(5.08)	(2.93)
N	6377	6377	6377
R^2	.06	.06	.05

*Note: The table reports OLS regression results, with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of cosponsors for an introduced bill. The number of observations = # of MCs who reneged * their bill introductions in the spells pre and post-reneging. The models also include controls for Congress and bill issue category. Standard errors are clustered on the MC. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.*

Table 4. Reneging and Hit Rates

	Model 1 Reneging Across All Bills	Model 2 Reneging on CQ Bills	Model 3 Reneging on Non-CQ Bills
# of Reneging Incidents	-.011 (.004)**	-.012(.005)*	-.010(.006)
Previous Hit Rate	.284(.030)**	.284(.029)**	.284(.030)**
# of Bills Introduced	-.002(.000)**	-.002(.000)**	-.002(.000)**
Majority Party?	.107(.007)**	.107(.007)**	.108(.107)**
Leader?	.032(.033)	.033(.033)	.033(.033)
Seniority	.003(.001)**	.003(.001)**	.003(.001)**
Vote Share	.000(.000)	.000(.000)	.000(.000)
Ideological Extremity	-.035(.024)	-.034(.023)	-.037(.024)
Constant	6.45(1.04)	6.47(1.05)	6.43(1.04)
N	2389	2389	2389
R-squared	.15	.15	.15

Note: The table presents the results of an OLS regression analysis where the dependent variable is each MC's hit rate in a given Congress, and the independent variables include the features of MCs presented, along with a series of dummy variables for each Congress. Standard errors are clustered on the MC. * = p < .05; ** = p < .01.