

**Measuring the Impact of the Freedom Caucus on
Congressional Efficiency**

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Introduction

The United States Congress is arguably one of the most important institutions within the United States Government. Congress has many jobs but one of its main ones revolves around its basic duty to keep the lights on. Funding the government and its expenditures is not only a difficult task, but a controversial one. Every year the annual budget comes into review as the current Congress is asked to reauthorize many of the government's programs. More recently this fundamental task has become more polarized, weaponized, and outright exploited due to its important nature.

The Freedom Caucus is a far-right group of members of the United States House of Representatives. A caucus is a group of individuals that organize themselves based on shared ideology and goals. They could also be compared to a coalition or other similar group. The Freedom Caucus is considered in the media to be extremists and dangerous to our institutions as a whole.

The aim of my project is to assess the effectiveness of the United States Congress with the presence of the Freedom Caucus and without the Presence of the Freedom Caucus to determine if they have a negative impact on Congressional efficiency. In order to do this I, compared different congressional records. By comparing the records of a normal Congress to one with factions I was able to determine what a "normal" and "effective" Congress looks like. The underlying part of my project is to analyze the Freedom caucus and measure their impact on how Congress runs and operates. My expectation for this research project would be that in creating extreme factions within Congress, it will function at a less effective rate. Our elected officials are focused on representing their 'political party beliefs' by this I mean focusing on controversial

and polarizing issues and tend to forget to represent the will and beliefs of the American people and their constituents' needs.

I hypothesized that: The Freedom Caucus has a reputation for being disruptive with some even claiming that they want a government shutdown as it would give them more leverage/power and the attention that they seek. With this in mind in addition to the fact that they are generally seen as an anti-government group, I believe the data will show that they are disruptive to the legislative process and will negatively affect passage rates.

First however I must determine a baseline for how Congress is supposed to operate. During my literature review, I analyzed scholarly pieces on Congress to see how it works with and without the presence of not only the Freedom Caucus but factions in general. I used the Tea party, another far-right group present in the early years of the Obama administration as a case study to determine how the Freedom Caucus' impact differed from that of other factions and caucuses. The Tea-Party is commonly considered to be the predecessor of the Freedom Caucus as they shared similar anti-government views, yet executed these positions very differently. They have stood out in the media as extremists. I aim to determine whether the number of their impacts on our legislatures efficiency reflect these characterizations.

I am also interested in looking into the Freedom Caucus as they were a major reason that speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy was removed which in turn caused chaos within the House. Throughout his reign as speaker, members of the Freedom Caucus received positions and leadership roles in committees of their choice and single handedly almost caused a government shutdown. This is a dangerous and extreme group of individuals that just want to cause chaos for their own benefit. In order to ascertain whether their actions undermined the efficiency of

Congress, I compare Congressional sessions to see if the presence of the Freedom Caucus impacts legislative outcomes.

Throughout this project I will answer the question is Congress more or less effective when extreme factions such as the Freedom Caucus are present and do they play a role in affecting the work congress is able to do for the American people.

Literature Review

The Freedom Caucus has a reputation throughout the media and even amongst other Representatives for being not only disruptive but causing damage to the institution of Congress as a whole. To evaluate whether they were having a significant impact on the legislative process I analyzed four different aspects of Congress. First, I looked at what scholars are saying about Congress in general. Then I looked at the overall opinion on the Freedom Caucus and their impacts. I also looked at the Tea Party and their rule as an example to compare the Freedom Caucus to. Finally, I looked at the Freedom Caucus's impact on outcomes such as their desire for spending cuts which correlates to not wanting to pass the annual budget, and their role in working with and eventually ousting speaker Kevin McCarthy.

When looking at the article "Assessing the US Congress," I believe it important to have a fundamental understanding of Congress itself. An article by Ross M. English answers the question about different ways in which Congress runs through a historical lens. Specifically this article goes through and addresses the historical pieces of Congress that will be great for laying the groundwork. But the main piece I am interested in for this article is the section where it addresses the gridlock present. This analysis through a historical lens as well as the discussion of other items such as social security and other factors that all play a part in the way a congress runs. Another article by Stephen Ansolabehere and Shiro Kuriwaki in the American Journal of Political Science, analyzed multiple bills to track how constituents feel about their Representatives and the way the Representatives voting is reflective of the constituents. I also looked at other scholars who determined that overall the United States Congress is becoming more polarized due to its voting tendencies.

Scholars such as Zachary McGee, from the University of Texas Austin who have researched the Freedom Caucus have addressed issues such as the questions revolving around the current polarization that is not only found throughout the US but more specifically throughout the House of Representatives. The question is about how factions survive within powerful parties. The author examined the networks of Freedom Caucus members in order to determine if there is anything that stands out in how they support each other vs how other members of the same party support one another stating, “I find an active and defensive House Freedom Caucus (HFC), whose members support one another more than they support other House Republicans. And, I show how HFC members create an independent fundraising network to insulate themselves from partisan retribution”. This source stood out to me for my project in that it analyzed the Freedom Caucus and more specifically the differences between them and other Republican members. Along these lines I analyzed another study on how the US Congress is Dysfunctional, and is it really? Author Sarah Binder examined both the decisions being made by congress in recent years and the quantity of votes in which are happening. The relevance that this article holds to my project is that I must first understand how Congress works “normally”, to understand the role the Freedom Caucus or other groups have played in causing chaos within Congress. I am then able to differentiate between chaos that was intentionally caused and just the everyday dysfunction of congress.

The next area I tackled was attempting to understand the impact of the Tea party movement. The relevance the Tea Party holds to my project is in that it is in a way the predecessor to the Freedom Caucus. Both parties stood out in their own parties and were uniquely characterized. Since the Freedom caucus tends to have a large desire for media presence I would like to see if this was also something that was found in the Tea Party Movement.

Authors Jules Boykoff and Eulalie Laschever examined over 800 news packets in order to see the role the US media had in creating the Tea Party. Another Article I looked at answers the question about the relationship between factions and policy within the US government. The chapter draws comparisons between both the freedom caucus and the tea party as well as addresses their policy and typical modes of operation and priorities. The chapter analyzes the policies of Tea Party and uses the Freedom Caucus as a case study to show their combined impact from 2007-2017. Both factions in turn caused difficulties for the Obama administration in tackling key pieces of their legislative agenda. This analysis is useful to me as it creates a timeline between the two different factions I analyze. The chapter relates to my project through its direct comparison and analysis of both the Tea Party and Freedom Caucus. Its analysis of policy and duration during the Obama administration specifically allows me to compare effectiveness of congresses whose parties have the presidency or not.

The last area of research I include at the effects of the Freedom Caucus on the race for speaker arguably one of the most important positions in American government. I also looked at the effect factions have on the party leader and how much influence they held over him in this process. The author analyzed different factors of the race including the agenda of members involved. I use their insights to analyze the faction's impact on the effectiveness of Congress. I also believe that the example of the freedom caucus' effect on the speaker election and eventual removal of the speaker will be a critical piece to analyze in determining the overall effects. This article directly addresses the Freedom Caucus' effects in congress when it comes to federal spending. This is one of the most hotly debated issues when it comes to congressional appropriations every year. Adding the Freedom Caucus into the mix only further complicates and intensifies the issue. I believe that methods used including the tables created to show the quantity

of discussion these members are participating in. This information can be directly derived from the members websites. Having this quantifiable data to show the timelines may also show a trend for other bills being introduced to congress only adding to the data about the freedom caucus overall effect on Congress as a whole.

Throughout my literature review process, I was determined to not only figure out what scholars thought of the Freedom Caucus but Congress and other Congressional Caucuses as a whole. I was able to determine from a wide variety of sources that from a normative standpoint most would argue that the Freedom Caucus is disruptive to the institution as a whole. With their power stretching as far as being able to push the Speaker of the House into giving them powerful Committee positions and therefore inflicting their will on the rest of the house even though they are in the minority overall. When Republicans and Democrats teamed up to pass the annual budget it lost Speaker Kevin McCarthy his job, but also simultaneously isolated Freedom Caucus members into a super minority where they were the only ones who didn't want to see bills being passed. When making comparisons to the Tea party even they weren't this disruptive and even they also sought to be financially conservative did not have such a dramatic impact on the Congress as a whole.

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Examples: hr5, s435, h.r.425, S.896, HJ59, sconres19, H.Res.99, sa213, hamd13, 104PL104

For multiple bills, separate numbers with a comma

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Examples: budget* finds budget, budgeting, budgets, budgetary. *coastal zone management act* finds words or word variants in the exact order. *elementary education*~5 finds words within the specified distance of each other.

The variables that I tracked included:

- All House – All bills introduced to the House of Representatives
- H.R. (Legislation) – All pieces of actual legislation/ bills passed
- Number of Bills passed – All H.R. (Legislation) passed
- Percent of Bills passed = (Number of Bills passed) / (H.R. (Legislation))
- Who's in control – The party in control during each Congress, labeled either Dem or Rep
- Number of Dem Bills introduced
- Number of Rep Bills introduced
- Number of Other Bills introduced – total number of bills introduced by non-Dem or non-Rep parties

- Percent of Dem introduced = (Number of Dem Bills Introduced)/ (H.R. (Legislation))
- Percent of Rep introduced = (Number of Rep Bills Introduced)/ (H.R. (Legislation))
- Number of Dem passed
- Number of Rep passed
- Number of Other passed – total number of bills passed by non-Dem or non-Rep parties
- Dem passed/ total introduced (%)
- Rep passed/ total introduced (%)
- Dem Passed / total passed (%)
- Rep Passed / total passed (%)
- Dem Passed / Dem intro (%)
- Rep Passed / Rep intro (%)

I then filtered for bills passed in order to calculate the percentage of bills passed by each Congress. I divided the number of bills passed by the total number of bills introduced (H.R. Legislation). I will be comparing the percentages of bills passed by each Congress to determine which party is more effective at strictly passing bills.

For the next two sections I filtered for bills passed and bills introduced within each party. To do this, I filtered for each representative individually. To do so I selected every member of the Democratic party and then repeat for the Republican party. I then calculated the percentages of bills introduced by both parties. I did this by dividing the total number of bills introduced by each party by the total number of bills introduced. From here I found the percentage of bills

passed by each party by dividing the total number passed by each party by the total number the party introduced.

1	Congress Number	118	117	116	115	114	113	112	111	110	109	108	107	106
2	Congress Year	2023-2024	2021-2022	2019-2020	2017-2018	2015-2016	2013-2014	2011-2012	2009-2010	2007-2008	2005-2006	2003-2004	2001-2002	1999-2000
3														
4	All House	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	H.R. (Legislation)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
6	Number of bills passed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7	Percent of Bills Passed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8	Who's in control	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9														
10	Number Dem Bills introduced	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11	Number Rep Bills introduced	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
12	Number Other Bills introduced	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
13	Percent of Dem introduced	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
14	Percent of Rep introduced	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
15														
16	Number Dem passed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
17	Number Rep passed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
18	Number of Other Bills passed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
19														
20	Dem Passed / total intro (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
21	Rep Passed / total intro (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
22														
23	Dem Passed / total passed (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
24	Rep Passed / total passed (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
25														
26	Dem Passed / Dem intro (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
27	Rep Passed / Rep intro (%)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

I also tracked the total number of members apart of the Democratic and Republican party who held a seat during each Congress. I did this to illustrate the fluctuations of passage rates based on those in power as well as to show how there have been major swings with which party is in control.

Finally, the last piece of information that I tracked was the total number of Freedom Caucus members present in the House of Representatives during each Congress. Since I will be comparing the growth of their power to passage rates to determine their impact it is important to see how their numbers have fluctuated throughout the years. Since they were only founded in 2015 there will be no data for their members prior to 2015. I choose to express their power in terms of how many seats they held in the House of Representatives in the form of a percent. For this I divided their members in each Congress by the total number of Representatives (435).

Year	Total bill passage FC members in Hosue	
1999-2000	x	x
2001-2002	x	x
2003-2004	x	x
2005-2006	x	x
2007-2008	x	x
2009-2010	x	x
2011-2012	x	x
2013-2014	x	x
2015-2016	x	x
2017-2018	x	x
2019-2020	x	x
2021-2022	x	x
2023-2024	x	x

Year	Who Was in Co	Number of Dem	Number of Reps
1999-2000	Rep	x	x
2001-2002	Rep	x	x
2003-2004	Rep	x	x
2005-2006	Rep	x	x
2007-2008	Dem	x	x
2009-2010	Dem	x	x
2011-2012	Rep	x	x
2013-2014	Rep	x	x
2015-2016	Rep	x	x
2017-2018	Rep	x	x
2019-2020	Dem	x	x
2021-2022	Dem	x	x
2023-2024	Rep	x	x

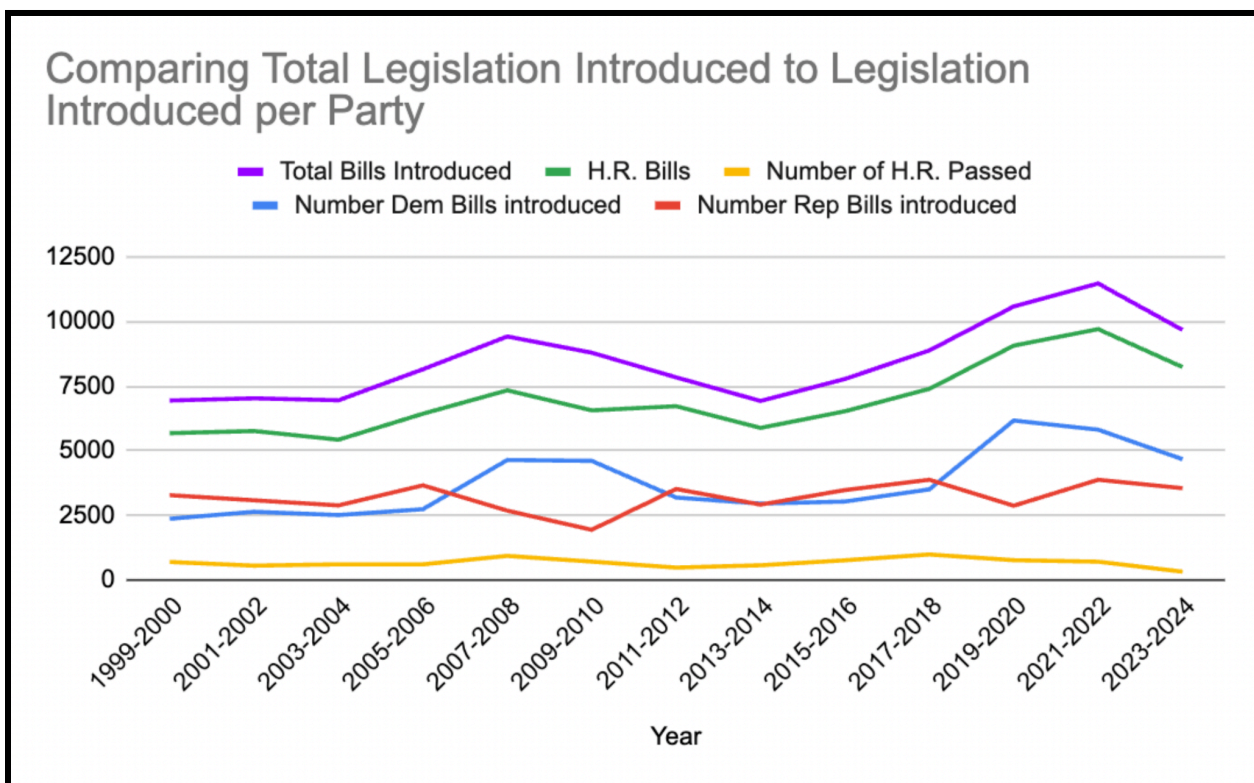
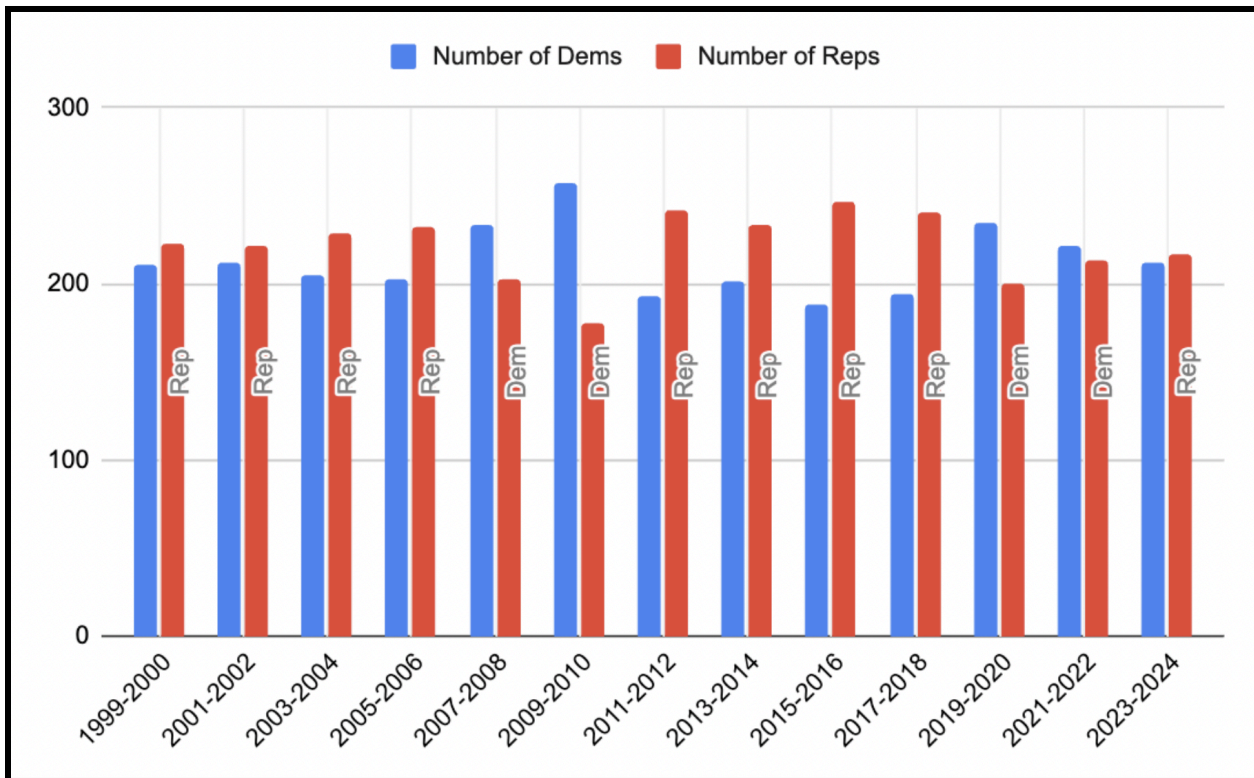
Results

When conducting my research, the main objective was to determine the Freedom Caucus's impact on overall passage rates throughout the House of Representatives. In order to establish a baseline, I collected data to determine the average number of bills introduced and/or passed in Congress. I looked at the last two and a half decades (1999-2024) worth of Congressional data to establish these standards.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	Congress Number	118	117	116	115	114	113	112	111	110	109	108	107	106
2	Congress Year	2023-2024	2021-2022	2019-2020	2017-2018	2015-2016	2013-2014	2011-2012	2009-2010	2007-2008	2005-2006	2003-2004	2001-2002	1999-2000
3														
4	All House	9,666	11,461	10,573	8,876	7,774	6,925	7,837	8,789	9,415	8,148	6,951	7,027	6,942
5	H.R. (Legislation)	8,233	9,698	9,062	7,394	6,526	5,885	6,723	6,562	7,336	6,432	5,429	5,765	5,681
6	Number of bills passed	333	719	777	998	773	581	491	722	943	616	618	566	708
7	Percent of Bills Passed	4.04%	7.41%	8.57%	13.50%	11.84%	9.87%	7.30%	11.00%	12.85%	9.58%	11.38%	9.82%	12.46%
8	Who's in control	Rep	Dem	Dem	Rep	Rep	Rep	Rep	Dem	Dem	Rep	Rep	Rep	Rep
9														
10	Number Dem Bills introduced	4,676	5,816	6,170	3,511	3,042	2,962	3,197	4,612	4,646	2,746	2,520	2,646	2,376
11	Number Rep Bills introduced	3,557	3,882	2,880	3,883	3,484	2,923	3,526	1,950	2,690	3,667	2,893	3,090	3,288
12	Number Other Bills introduced	x	x	12	x	x	x	x	x	x	19	16	29	17
13	Percent of Dem introduced	56.80%	59.97%	68.07%	47.38%	46.61%	50.33%	47.55%	70.28%	63.33%	42.69%	46.12%	45.90%	41.82%
14	Percent of Rep introduced	43.20%	40.03%	31.78%	52.52%	47.12%	49.69%	52.45%	29.72%	36.67%	57.01%	53.29%	53.60%	57.88%
15														
16	Number Dem passed	73	522	575	233	179	132	105	574	731	121	127	118	140
17	Number Rep passed	260	197	202	765	594	449	386	178	212	494	491	447	567
18	Number of Other Bills passed	x	x	0	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	0	1	1
19														
20	Dem Passed / total intro (%)	0.89%	5.38%	6.35%	3.15%	2.74%	2.24%	1.56%	8.75%	9.96%	1.88%	2.34%	2.05%	2.46%
21	Rep Passed / total intro (%)	3.16%	2.03%	2.23%	10.35%	9.10%	7.63%	5.74%	2.71%	2.89%	7.68%	9.04%	7.75%	9.98%
22														
23	Dem Passed / total passed (%)	21.92%	72.60%	74.00%	23.35%	23.16%	22.72%	21.38%	79.50%	77.52%	19.64%	20.55%	20.85%	19.77%
24	Rep Passed / total passed (%)	78.08%	27.40%	26.00%	76.65%	76.84%	77.28%	78.62%	24.65%	22.48%	80.19%	79.45%	78.98%	80.08%
25														
26	Dem Passed / Dem intro (%)	1.56%	8.98%	9.32%	6.64%	5.88%	4.46%	3.28%	12.45%	15.73%	4.41%	5.04%	4.46%	5.89%
27	Rep Passed / Rep intro (%)	7.31%	5.07%	7.01%	19.70%	17.05%	15.36%	10.95%	9.13%	7.88%	13.47%	16.97%	14.47%	17.24%

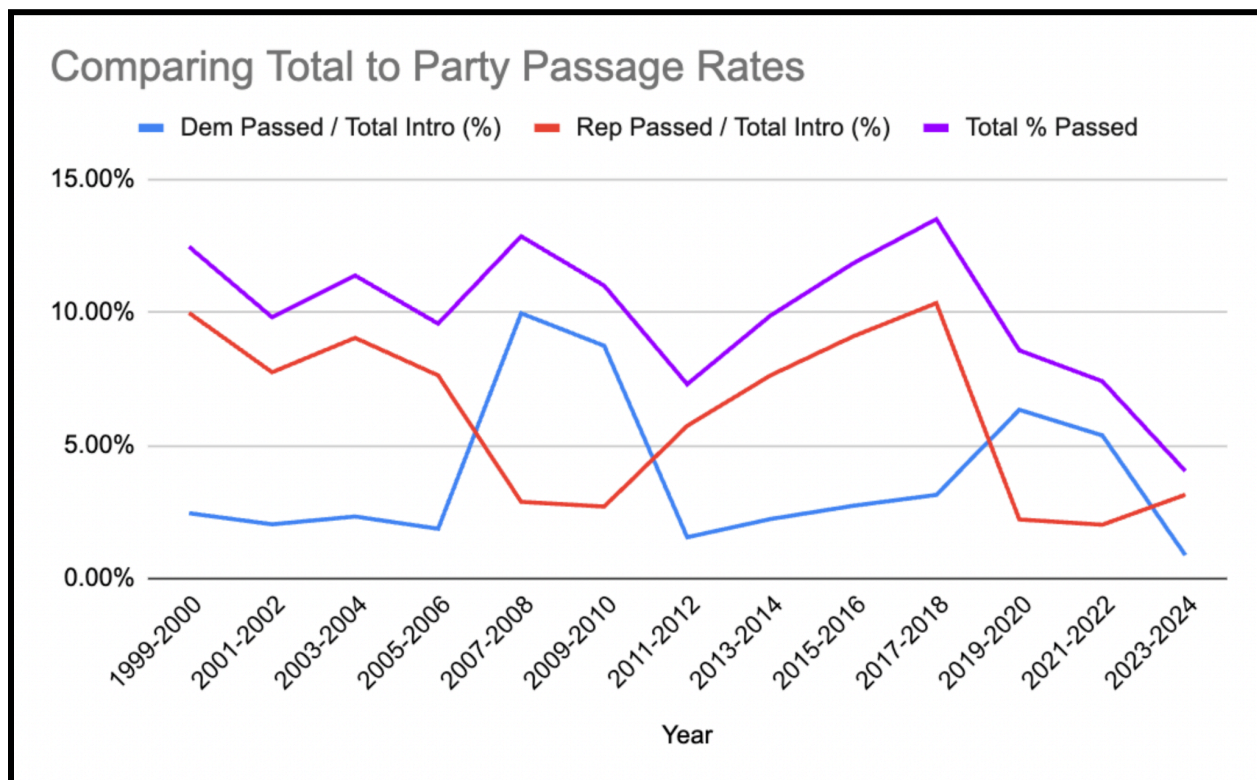
I was able to determine, in general, the number of total bills being introduced each year. This is represented on the graph below in purple has trended upward from 1999 with a little under 7500 to the last complete congressional cycle with over 11,000 with the last seven years all being above the average of the last two decades. This trend was also seen within H.R. bills which are represented on the graph below in green. Additionally, the graph shows how the Republicans and Democrats switch back and forth for who introduces more bills throughout the years. The party that is in control of the House at the time tends to introduce more bills. When the Republicans were in control of the House from 1999-2006, they introduced the majority of the

bills, followed by the Democrats who held control from 2007-2010. This pattern then followed as Republicans help control from 2011-2018 and again then with the Democrats from 2019 to



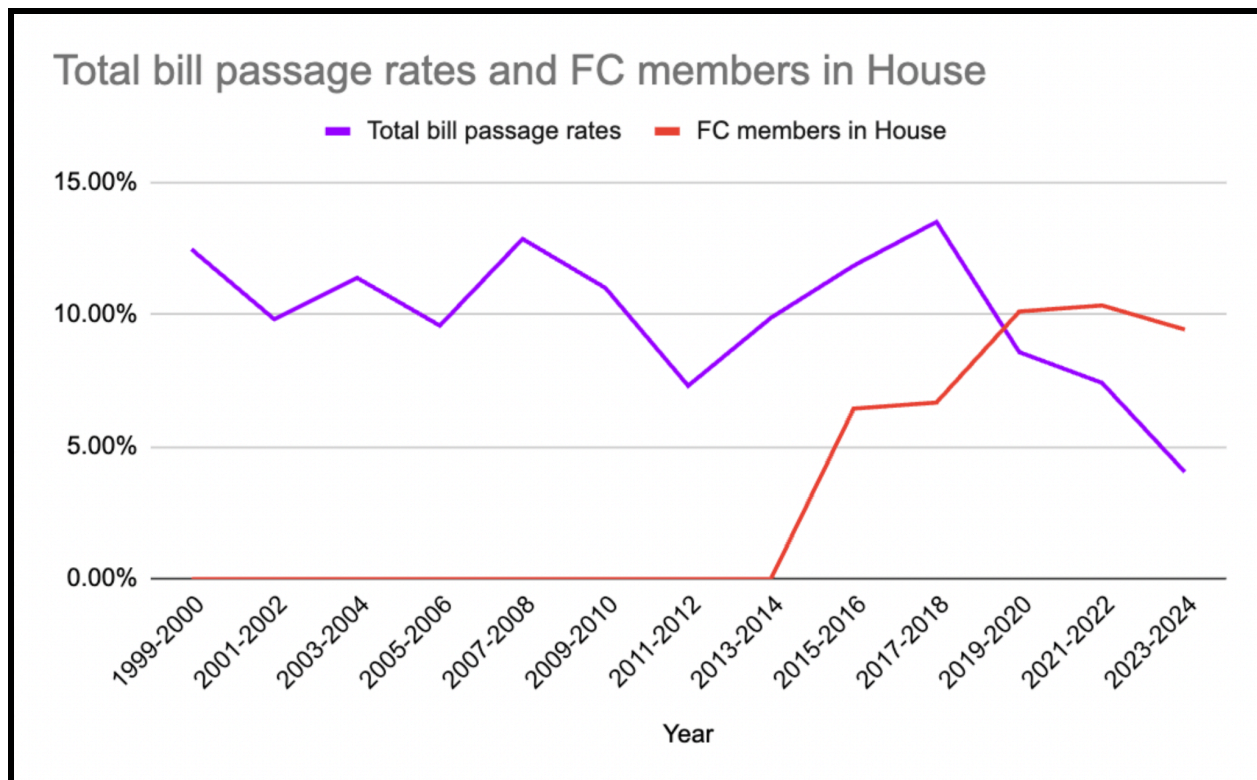
2022. This pattern can be explained in that the party with majority control will be more inclined to introduce legislation as they will have a higher chance of passing their respective bills.

Moving onto looking at overall passage rates, as mentioned above the total number of bills being introduced will typically coincide with whichever party happens to be in control during a given Congress. This statement can also be made about passage rates. That is,



which-ever party has the majority will have the higher number of passage rates during a given Congress as well. The same time periods as mentioned above (Republicans having control from 1999-2006 through Democrats having control from 2019-2022) will also follow the same pattern as the party in control will have the higher passage rates. I also observed that in the last two and half decades, the Republicans had the highest overall passage rate for a given Congress breaking above 10% in the 2018 Congress. As you can see during the 2019-2020 Congress there was a dip in passage rates as well as continual decline over the past 5 years.

After noticing this substantial decrease in the overall passage rates. I mapped total passage rates in comparison to the increase in members of the Freedom Caucus. With the founding of the Freedom Caucus in 2015, their number of members gradually grew until the



2019-2020 Congress where we can see there was a crossing of the two graphs in which, as their numbers grew, passage of bills fell. I represented the power of the Freedom Caucus as their overall membership in the House of Representatives.

Currently, at their peak their total number of members makes up around 10% of the House of Representatives or roughly 40 of the 435 members of the House. As you can tell by comparing the two graphs with the introduction of more Freedom Caucus members we have seen a decline in overall Legislation being passed through the House. We are currently observing the lowest total legislation passage rates in the last two and a half decades. No-where else in the data has the House of Representatives passed less than 5% of total bills. However, the data included

in this study is inconclusive as the 2023-2024 Congress is still in session and may be able to bring that percentage up slightly before the end of the year. However, despite this, when considering the past 5 years of data it is clear that the Freedom Caucus has had not only a negative impact on the House of Representatives legislation passage rates but also its efficiency.

Year	Total bill passage	FC members in Hosue
1999-2000	12.46%	0.00%
2001-2002	9.82%	0.00%
2003-2004	11.38%	0.00%
2005-2006	9.58%	0.00%
2007-2008	12.85%	0.00%
2009-2010	11.00%	0.00%
2011-2012	7.30%	0.00%
2013-2014	9.87%	0.00%
2015-2016	11.84%	6.44%
2017-2018	13.50%	6.67%
2019-2020	8.57%	10.11%
2021-2022	7.41%	10.34%
2023-2024	4.04%	9.43%

Year	Total bill passage	FC members in Hosue
1999-2000	12.46%	0.00%
2001-2002	9.82%	0.00%
2003-2004	11.38%	0.00%
2005-2006	9.58%	0.00%
2007-2008	12.85%	0.00%
2009-2010	11.00%	0.00%
2011-2012	7.30%	0.00%
2013-2014	9.87%	0.00%
2015-2016	11.84%	6.44%
2017-2018	13.50%	6.67%
2019-2020	8.57%	10.11%
2021-2022	7.41%	10.34%
2023-2024	4.04%	9.43%

Conclusion

Throughout this project I collected not only a wide variety of scholarly sources on Congress but also two and a half decades worth of voting data to determine what an effective Congress looks like and determine whether we have seen a decline in overall Congressional efficiency and passage rates since the introduction of the Freedom Caucus in 2015. Based on the data, tables, and graphs I constructed I noticed various trends that I believe suggest what my hypothesis claims, that the Freedom Caucus does have a negative impact on the passage rates of bills that go through the House of Representatives, therefore decreasing the Houses overall effectiveness.

I would also like to note that I have defined the efficiency of the House of Representatives as the Houses passage rates of bills, which I have filtered to be only real pieces of legislation that would have an impact on the people of the United States. Some however might disagree with this definition. For example, a member of the Freedom Caucus or one of their supporters might argue that we shouldn't be passing legislation at all. Therefore, their obstruction of legislation is their form of efficiency. I however disagree with this argument. While the Freedom Caucus may believe that they are being effective, they make up roughly ten percent of the entire House of Representatives. The other ninety percent would strongly disagree with the idea that we shouldn't be passing legislation. The idea of passing legislation is not a partisan issue, it is not Democrat vs Republican. The Republicans currently have control of the House of Representatives, yet it is their own party that is breaking off and causing them to have the lowest passage rates in the last two and a half decades. In contrast, just six years prior in 2018, they had the highest passage rates for any Congress within the last twenty-five years. The simple truth is the legislature should be passing legislation. Now if the Freedom Caucus's argument is that we

shouldn't be spending any more money, or that we need to reduce the national debt and government deficit, then there are many other ways to do so without halting our entire system.

From a normative standpoint, the Freedom Caucus is doing much more than just lowering the passage rates of Congress. They are holding up vital legislation that has an impact on people all over the country. Congress is already considered to be widely inefficient, so when the Freedom Caucus is constantly holding up the system it is difficult to get anything except the basics done. Other members of Congress aren't able to get funding for their districts because this select group has decided to be not only anti-spending but anti-government. The duality of them holding an anti-government position while holding office is dangerous for our government as a whole because of their approach. As mentioned earlier there are other ways to accomplish their goals of reducing spending through the legislature itself. If this was their objective, they could pass legislation to do so. They could use that as their bargaining chip. But they don't, which leads me to believe they have ulterior motives. Throughout the media they are portrayed as attention seeking and trying to cause chaos simply for the sake of chaos. The first example that comes to mind is the debate over the budget. Not only did they refuse to negotiate but they immediately had the speaker removed for the initial passage because he worked with the other side of the aisle the Democrats. Now if they were truly concerned about spending and budget cuts then this would have been the perfect opportunity to do so. However, not only did they refuse to negotiate, they were going to let the clock burn out on making a deal to force a government shutdown. This is not only careless but also dangerous for the American people. It's hard to believe that them forcing a government shutdown is what their constituents would want when many of them are probably employed by the government to begin with.

Where the country will go from here while the Freedom Caucus still maintains power and relevancy is hard to say. They have already caused substantial damage to our institutions and communities as a whole. The main way I see their rule ending is through being voted out by their constituents, which I don't see happening anytime soon. Their members make up some of the most famous and outspoken members of Congress, such as Lauren Boebert, Matt Gaetz, and formerly Marjorie Taylor Greene. These members feed off of their presence in the media and ability to rile up their constituents over polarizing issues to remain known and controversial at the same time. So long as they are able to incite these emotions in their constituents, they will have a place in the House of Representatives. The dangers they bring into our legislature were obvious before, but after collecting the data and letting the numbers speak for themselves it is clear that the impact they are having is not only real but substantial.

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