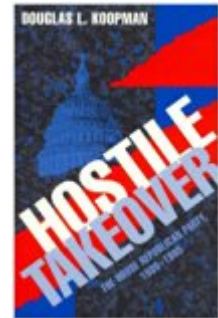


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Douglas L. Koopman. *Hostile Takeover: The House Republican Party, 1980-1995*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996. viii + 181 pp. \$52.50 (cloth), \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8168-6.

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House GOP Factions

In 1994, Newt Gingrich became the first Republican Speaker of the House in forty years, because Bill Clinton became president in 1992. After winning the presidency, so goes the conventional wisdom, President Clinton pushed a liberal domestic agenda for two years. Reacting against Clinton's health care plan, among other things, voters in 1994 rewarded Republicans with control of the House for the first time since 1954.

In 1996, Bill Clinton became the first Democratic President to be re-elected in sixty years, because Newt Gingrich became Speaker in 1994. After winning the House, so goes the conventional wisdom, Newt Gingrich and the House GOP pushed a domestic agenda that went too far and the voters, blaming Gingrich and Congressional Republicans for the government shutdown, rewarded Clinton with a second term. While there is much to be said for this *Clinton vs. Gingrich* view of politics, Douglas Koopman in *Hostile Takeover* helps the reader understand that there is more to politics than the competition between Democrats and Republicans. Just as important to understanding the election of 1994 are intra-party House Republican divisions.

Koopman's story begins with the race for Minority Whip in 1989 between Newt Gingrich and Ed Madigan, a moderate and consensus-oriented representative from Illinois. Interestingly, Koopman finds Gingrich's supporters were not significantly more conservative than Madigan's supporters. "The common trait of most Gingrich supporters," he writes, "was estrangement from

both the Democratic and Republican leadership. These issue-oriented, restless elements in the House GOP arayed along the entire ideological spectrum, but they joined to form a narrow majority over the accommodating insiders" (p. 18).

The *hostile* in the title refers to House Republicans who were hostile not only to the Democratic leadership for increasingly shutting them out of power, but to Republican leaders, such as Robert Michel, for being too accommodating to the Democrats. Madigan was seen as part of the Michel bunch and thus lost narrowly to Gingrich. From 1989 to 1994, Gingrich would bring the various Republican factions together in opposition to Democratic rule. This is how Koopman puts it: "the key 1994 election strategy, the Contract With America, was the emerging House Republican Leadership's vehicle to bring together the hostility of the party's diverse factions: Moralists hostile to dominant social trends they saw as evil, Enterprisers hostile to dominant economic policy they saw as foolish, and Moderates ... hostile to dominant congressional procedures and norms they saw as unfair. Activist leaders calculated that if all factions were on board with a unified agenda, the passivist groups would accept, or at least not interfere in, the attempt to nationalize the 1994 elections" (p. 142).

Koopman is an assistant professor of political science at Calvin College and, most important for this book, a fifteen year veteran of congressional staff positions. He says he wrote the book partly because what

he saw on Capitol Hill did not coincide with what many scholars were writing about Congress: “I found little connection between the House described in academic literature and the House I have observed since 1980. While most scholars saw a decentralized House with junior entrepreneurial members making creative contributions, I witnessed a growing centralization that excluded many members (of both parties) with creative policy approaches. While reading about the decline of partisanship, I saw major-party leaders limiting minority-party participation and virtually shutting out all Republican members. As most commentators saw an increasingly homogeneous and conservative House GOP Conference, I observed fights over issues, tactics, and leaders, usually conducted by leaders of several party factions—many of which were won by moderates. Finally, while the literature talked about the growing localization of member activities to serve constituents, many minority-party members were pursuing party-building strategies. In brief, the literature did not match experience” (p. 6).

One strength of the book is a well-documented chapter on the methods Democratic leaders used to exclude Republicans from power during the 1980s. Two examples include the increasing number of rules to limit floor amendments and multiple referral bills that required compromises often worked out only among Democrats. My guess is that Koopman worked for the Republicans in Congress but I found no evidence that this or any other chapter was biased in one direction or the other.

Another strength is his use of measures beyond roll call votes to create the different GOP factions. In addition to using issue and ideological measures, Koopman includes measures of legislative activity. He explains his choice of measures this way: “Simple ideology does not fully explain these divisions, although ideology is important. But the new information in this analysis is important. Legislative activity is critical—the number, type and relative importance of caucus, standing committee, party committee, and intra-party group attachments. Those interested in national themes and estranged from the previous leadership tended to back Gingrich, and the pro-

portion of activist groups supporting the Georgian grew as group ideology became more conservative ...” (p. 22).

After reading Koopman’s book, I have a much better understanding of the intra-party reasons the Republicans won the House in 1994. Both Jacob Weisberg in *In Defense of Government* and E.J. Dionne in *They Only Look Dead* write about GOP factions. But Koopman’s analysis is superior because it is more systematic and because he includes the legislative activity element. As I think about my own institution, I would have a better understanding of the factions on campus if I grouped my colleagues on the basis of how institutionally active they are as well as their stands on issues, just as I now have a better understanding that there was more than ideology that moved House Republicans from passive bystanders to aggressive revolutionaries. But Koopman also understands that his faction categories are not to be reified. As he says, “There is no fixed mathematical formula or statistical straight-jacket into which the data are forced and by which members are assigned factions. The approach of this analysis is less rigid. The intent is not to achieve perfect results. Rather the approach seeks to describe factions based on a fuller understanding of the ideological complexity and strategic disagreement within the party during the post-reform Congress and now in the new situation of a Republican House” (p. 87).

I highly recommend the book for the general public as well as political scientists. In paperback, I think it would be a useful supplement in an upper level course on Congress. Data is presented clearly, with nothing more sophisticated than cross tabulations and percentages. And while it is easy to get bogged down with Koopman’s descriptions of the factions, the benefit of a deeper understanding of the House GOP makes the struggle worth it.

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