

УДК 327.73.477

DOI [https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2023-6\(72\)-11](https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2023-6(72)-11)

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## ROLE OF THE HOUSE SPEAKER IN DETERMINING U.S. POLICY PRIORITIES

### РОЛЬ СПІКЕРА ПАЛАТИ ПРЕДСТАВНИКІВ У ВИЗНАЧЕННІ ПРІОРИТЕТІВ ПОЛІТИКИ США

*In the intricate matrix of American governance, the House Speaker emerges as a pivotal figure, particularly in policy formulation, an area traditionally dominated by the Executive. This article explores the Speaker's evolving role within the U.S. political framework, mainly focusing on policy prerogatives. Through discourse analysis, it sheds light on the historical dynamics and contemporary implications of the Speaker's influence, challenging the conventional dichotomy between the legislative and executive branches outlined in traditional American political discourse. Historically, the Speaker's role was perceived as confined primarily to the House of Representatives's legislative functions and internal governance. However, this study contends that the Speaker's influence extends significantly into policy, which has traditionally been dominated by the Presidency. This article traces the evolution of the Speaker's role by dissecting historical transitions from the era of speakers such as Henry Clay to the complex political landscapes of the 21st century, which are characterized by increased Speaker visibility and authority. This transformation is crucial for understanding the current dynamics of U.S. policy-making, especially in light of the recent political upheavals and the historical events surrounding the elections and tenures of speakers such as Kevin McCarthy and Mike Johnson. This study delves into the strategic interplay between the House of Representatives and the White House, underlining the Speaker's instrumental role in setting the legislative agenda and framing the policy debate. The analysis is grounded in the nuances of the American constitutional framework, which envisages a balance of power but has been subject to varying interpretations and implementations over time. The study meticulously examines the power of the purse, the legislative branch's prerogative to declare war, and its authority over international trade and immigration, illustrating how these powers give Congress, spearheaded by the Speaker, a significant stake in foreign policy. The implications of this expanded role are profound. The Speaker's ability to shape foreign policy through legislative priorities, committee assignments, and agenda-setting reveals a significant shift toward a more pronounced legislative footprint in global affairs. This shift prompts a reevaluation of the traditional presidential control over foreign policy. It suggests a gradual but discernible movement towards a more balanced distribution of power that reflects the original intentions of the framers of the Constitution. The findings of this study are instrumental for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners engaged in American politics and international relations. It advocates for an enhanced scholarly focus on the legislative dimension of U.S. policy determination. It urges a more collaborative inter-branch dialogue to foster a coherent, balanced, and effective policy framework. This comprehensive analysis enriches the academic discourse on American political dynamics and offers practical insights for navigating the complex interplay of domestic politics and international relations in the 21st century.*

**Key words:** United States Congress, Speaker, House of Representatives, American foreign policy, legislative agenda.

*У складній структурі американського врядування Спікер Палати представників займає ключове місце, зокрема в процесі формування політики – аспекті, який традиційно контролюється виконавчою гілкою влади. Ця стаття досліджує еволюцію ролі Спікера в контексті політичної системи США, головним чином зосереджуючись на формуванні політичної прерогативи. Через дискурс-аналіз стаття висвітлює історичні динаміки та сучасні наслідки впливу ролі Спікера Палати представників, викликаючи сумніви щодо традиційного дихотомічного поділу між законодавчою та виконавчою гілками влади, який окреслений в традиційному американському політичному дискурсі. Історично склалося так, що роль Спікера сприймалася як така, що обмежується законодавчими функціями та внутрішнім управлінням Палати представників. Проте це дослідження стверджує, що вплив Спікера суттєво простягається в область формування політики, яка традиційно перебувала під домінуванням Білого дому. Стаття відстежує еволюцію ролі Спікера, аналізуючи історичні переходи від епохи таких спікерів, як Генрі Клей, до складних політичних ландшафтів 21-го століття, які характеризуються зростанням видимості та авторитетом Спікера. Ця трансформація є вирішальною для розуміння поточної динаміки формування політики в США, особливо у світлі недавніх політичних потрясінь та історичних подій, пов'язаних з виборами та термінами повноважень таких спікерів, як Кевін Маккарті та Майк Джонсон. Це дослідження поглиблюється в*

*стратегічну взаємодію між Палатою представників та Білим домом, підкреслюючи інструментальну роль Спікера у встановленні законодавчого порядку денного та формуванні політичних дебатів. Аналіз базується на нюансах американського конституційного устрою, який передбачає баланс влади, але зазнав різних інтерпретацій та імплементацій з часом. У дослідженні ретельно розглядається «влада щодо виділення коштів», прерогатива законодавчої гілки оголошувати війну та її повноваження щодо міжнародної торгівлі та імміграції, ілюструючи, як ці повноваження надають Конгресу на чолі зі Спікером значний вплив на зовнішню політику. Наслідки цієї розширеної ролі є глибокими. Здатність Спікера формувати зовнішню політику через законодавчі пріоритети, призначення комітетів і встановлення порядку денного свідчить про значний зсув до більш помітного законодавчого впливу у зовнішній політиці США. Цей зсув спонукає до переоцінки традиційного президентського контролю над зовнішньою політикою, вказуючи на поступовий, але відчутний перехід до більш збалансованого розподілу влади, що відображає первісні наміри засновників Конституції. Висновки цього дослідження є корисними для політиків, вчених та практиків, які працюють у сфері американської політики та міжнародних відносин. Воно закликає до посилення наукового зосередження на законодавчому вимірі визначення політики США та спонукає до більш міжгалузевого діалогу з метою сприяння злагодженій, збалансованій та ефективній політичній структурі. Цей аналіз збагачує академічний дискурс з американської політичної динаміки та пропонує практичні рекомендації для орієнтації у складній взаємодії внутрішньої політики та міжнародних відносин у 21-му столітті.*

**Ключові слова:** Конгрес США, Спікер, Палата представників, Американська зовнішня політика, законодавчий порядок денний

**Problem statement.** Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the most popular U.S. presidents, stated that the U.S. The Constitution puts the American President in a position to propose while Congress has to dispose [12].

However, conventional wisdom and empirical evidence demonstrate that this was irrelevant by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. It is clear that the U.S. president's authority has been significantly strengthened since the 9/11 tragedy. Since then, two Republican and two Democratic presidents have taken office, with all four emphasizing the importance of policy determination, a key sphere of competence. In the fall of 2023, the House Speaker was ousted for the first time in American history, while the same Speaker was appointed for a record-breaking 15th time. That tendency ultimately posed another essential question: how influential is the speaker in general, and what role does the Speaker play in determining U.S. policy priorities?

**Analysis of Research and Publications.** The Speaker's powers have received increased attention every time Congress debates its limits of policy power in competition with the executive branch. The academic landscape concerning the role of the House Speaker in shaping U.S. policies is rich and complex, with scholars increasingly recognizing the Speaker's evolving influence beyond mere legislative functions. This analysis begins with examining historical perspectives, focusing notably on the tenures of early Speakers such as Henry Clay, whom D. Peart characterizes as the archetype of modern speakership due to his proactive approach to legislative processes between 1811 and 1825. This period marks the initial shift from a ceremonial role to one of significant political influence, laying the groundwork for understanding the Speaker's evolving prerogatives in U.S. governance.

Further scholarly work, such as that by Clark and Wright, delves into the transformation of the speakership during Thomas O'Neill's tenure from 1977 to 1987, underscoring a period of significant transition in which the Speaker began to assert greater institutional prerogatives [3]. This shift is pivotal for understanding the contemporary dynamics of the Speaker's role, particularly in the domain of foreign policy, where legislative and executive powers frequently intersect and compete. The scholarly discourse around these issues is varied, with researchers like Masters and the team of Wallner, Burgat, Marcum, and Fisher analyzing this legislative-executive tussle's constitutional and historical foundations. They point out that the U.S. The Constitution's vagueness regarding foreign policy authority has fostered an ongoing power struggle, famously described as an «invitation to struggle» by Masters.

Within this context, the Speaker's position is increasingly important, intertwined with Congressional powers such as the power of the purse, war declarations, and regulatory authority over international trade and immigration. These aspects, thoroughly explored in the works of Carter and Scott, position the Speaker not only as a legislative leader but also as a central figure in the foreign policy domain [1]. The concept of «U.S. foreign policy entrepreneurs» further highlights the Speaker's potential to initiate and influence foreign policy discussions and legislation.

Contemporary scholarship, however, points to a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of the Speaker on U.S. policy initiatives. While leadership skills and party politics have been extensively analyzed, less attention has been given to how these factors translate into foreign policy influence. This article seeks to fill that gap by thoroughly examining the Speaker's role in

foreign policy, grounded in qualitative discourse analysis and a post-structuralist theoretical framework that recognizes the interplay between institutional authority and individual agency.

**Primary purpose.** The core objective of this article is to dissect and understand the unique role of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, especially in the context of U.S. foreign policy, a domain traditionally under executive sway. This research is particularly timely, given recent political events highlighting the Speaker's burgeoning influence beyond domestic legislative confines. The analysis seeks to unravel the mechanisms through which the Speaker impacts foreign policy decisions, thereby challenging conventional separation-of-powers doctrine and underscoring the evolving nature of legislative leadership in shaping international relations. Furthermore, this study aims to elucidate the strategic interactions between the Speaker, the presidency, and other key governmental actors, offering insights into the balance of power and inter-branch dynamics. Concentrating on the Speaker's engagement with foreign policy, this article aspires to provide a nuanced understanding of contemporary American political structures and their implications on global diplomacy, contributing significantly to political science and legislative leadership discourse.

**Novelty of Research.** The article attempts to analyze specifics of the responsibilities of the U.S. House Speaker, including the agenda-setting dimension and ultimate impact on U.S. policies in the 21st century. The vast majority of the recent studies on speakership, both in the House of Representatives and in the states' houses, have concentrated mainly on the leadership skills of the speakers. In addition, recent U.S. and international scholarship has focused on presumptions and paradigms of the collective action theory, new institutionalism, and principal-agent theories. At the same time, the speakership power has gained little attention in determining U.S. policy initiatives in particular.

**Research design and methods.** This article primarily uses qualitative methods, so I apply discourse analysis as the central method. In terms of theoretical paradigm, I adopt the postmodern or post-structuralist paradigm as it allows me to trace Speakership both in terms of agency, which is the House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress, and the Speaker's free will regarding the ability to influence Congress' decision-making process. Using that method and paradigm distinguishes this article from other literature that delves into various concepts of majority-party leadership power through Conditional Party Government,

collective action theory, new institutionalism, and principal-agent theory [10].

**The main text of the article.** The U.S. House Speaker is both a well-researched issue and a relatively new area of interest at the same time. The dramatic events of the 118th Congressional session in 2023 will be the central breaking point in U.S. politics regarding speakership. First, Congressman Kevin McCarthy of 2007–2023 (R-CA-23) was elected only on the 15th attempt during the first day of the Congressional session. He was later ousted from his post after the government shutdown was averted in the fall of 2023. The next speaker, Mike Johnson, was elected after another three attempts. These recent difficulties regarding the House's inability to elect a Speaker have once again reaffirmed the need to study the measures of Speaker's predominance to understand how influential the leading position is in the House of Representatives. In particular, this article will concentrate on the Speaker's role in determining U.S. foreign policy priorities.

It is essential to stress that one cannot discuss the role of the House Speaker with no mention of the Congress-White House competition over foreign policy predominance. This article acknowledges that the Constitution sets this clause in advance, paving the way for further debate over who has the final say in foreign affairs. Masters highlights that this notion in the Constitution was «an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy» [9]. Part of the reason was that the founding fathers did not specify which executive or legislative branch should lead in the foreign policy sphere [1]. Delegates at the Federal Convention in 1787, which adopted the U.S. Constitution, known as the Great Compromise, wanted to empower the national government in foreign policy while not abusing its powers [12].

Regarding the Speaker, his/her chances to shape U.S. foreign policy are also inextricably linked to the Congressional role in influencing American foreign policy in general. At the same time, many scholars acknowledge that, despite a frequent shift toward more «presidential control» of foreign policy, it will ultimately shift back to Congress [11].

Some scholars call it a legislative Vesting Clause, enshrined in Article I, section 1 of the American Constitution. They claim that Congress has used this power to impose «a fabric of restraints, restrictions» to deter presidential initiatives in foreign policymaking. On the contrary, the Spending Clause, enshrined in Article I, section 8, clause 1 of the Constitution, grants the U.S. Congress the sole authority to

raise revenue «to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States» [12].

Given the existing literature, I believe that the Congressional role in the determination of foreign policy priorities can be perceived in three major dimensions:

The so-called power of the purse refers to appropriating federal funds and all Congress capabilities related to the right to adopt legislative acts [7].

An extraordinary power to declare war, to raise and support armies, to provide and maintain a navy to regulate land and naval forces, and to organize, arm, discipline, and call forth the militia; these powers over war are designed to balance and oversee the president's commander-in-chief role.

Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution also grants Congress powers over international trade, immigration, piracy, and a few other powers, including the right to make all laws necessary and proper for executing the foregoing powers [1]. When discussing the congressional dimension of foreign policy, one of the most important topics is speakership. Carter and Scott even devised a special term for the domestic American actors involved in foreign policy, «U.S. foreign policy entrepreneurs». They conceptualize this term as members of Congress who initiate action on foreign policy issues, hinting at real actions, such as sponsoring a bill or a resolution, and legislative assertiveness, which means providing no support to the bill or ignoring a vote [1]. Speakers, in particular, may perform all of the above. Therefore, it is essential to define the responsibilities of the House Speaker. This article does not focus on leadership styles, but it considers party politics in America through speakership lenses, attempting to explain the unique nature and role of speakership in the 21st century. As M. Green mentions, there are five tactics the speaker can use to influence the legislation being debated on the House floor. First, he/she can label a bill as a part measure or a party policy. Second, the Speaker trades scarce benefits for votes, hinting at his influence in Congress and relationship with the Administration [6]. Third, he/she can lobby lawmakers to vote personally. Fourth, deliver floor statements that clearly define his/her position. Fifth, extend or limit the time specified for voting on the bill [5]. Speakership transformed over time, and many scholars claim that Henry Clay, the seventh House Speaker who intermittently held the post from 1811 to 1825, was the first true Speaker in today's sense. Thus, it may be regarded as an institution's start of the speakership development [11].

The first attempt to analyze it occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chiu mentions that the first sessions of Congress after 1789 allowed for the highlighting of several dimensions of a Speaker, thereby enhancing their position threefold. In particular, the three dimensions include 1) the presiding officer of the House, 2) the titular leader of the party in the lower chamber of Congress, and 3) an individual member of the House [2]. That perception largely corresponds to Peart's notion of the Speaker as an «impartial moderator» who serves primarily ceremonially, akin to a referee with no real authority [11]. However, it has become entrenched in speakership-related scholarship that the institutional development of Congress also contributed to the evolution of the speaker's role.

As the Speaker of the House has usually been elected by a majority of the roll call vote, with only seven times less than a majority of the entire membership of the House since 1913, one can conclude that the Speaker should be first and foremost considered as a leader of the majority [4]. The actual power of the Speaker as the leader of the chamber has been transformed over time. Green argues that there are several periods in the modern history of the U.S. Congress: pre-reform, reform, and post-reform periods of the Congress operation that directly impacted the Speakership's ability to influence the legislative outcome in the House [5]. Thus, the literature suggests that after the 1970s, the Speakership has gained a maximum of its current capacities.

Several lines assess the impact of the Speaker's office.

He/she is in charge of legislative priorities, determining committee assignments, accommodating members' requests, and, through the Rules Committee (discussed below), the agenda of the House as a whole [5].

The Speaker is the chief negotiator when it comes to seeking compromise with the opposing party or with the leadership of the upper chamber, the Senate.

Speakers have a unique ability to centralize power using party leadership position, like Newt Gingrich did with the Speaker's chair by pursuing amendments in Congress that diminish the autonomy of committees [5].

The Speaker decides which bills are heard in committees and which make it to the floor for votes [8].

I consider the Speaker's role to be in three dimensions: First, as the majority leader. Second, as the third person in line to the presidency, thus, more of an institution than a political personality; second, ally or an opponent of the incumbent

administration. Many U.S. political scientists point out the exceptional leadership skills of the Speaker. However, the literature demonstrates that the President receives far more media coverage and attention. Thus, it could be argued that among all members of Congress, the House Speaker is the central figure [8].

That's why specifying four primary legislative leadership tactics supporting the goal-driven leadership theory is essential:

1. Effective leadership is characterized by pursuing various objectives beyond merely retaining one's position, including the Speakership's policy initiatives and duties, like supporting the presidential party or the entire House.

2. Leadership often reflects a mix of goals regarding Speakership, such as re-election and aiding or harming the presidential party, demonstrating the ability to balance competing different objectives for broader legislative success.

3. The most common motivation for leadership actions is the desire to stay in power.

4. Leadership tends to be influenced more by the importance of issues than party division. Leaders are willing to navigate party opposition to achieve significant policy goals, highlighting their strategic approach to enhance the party's collective electoral status and enacting key policies [6].

Furthermore, it has become a part of historical institutionalism that shows that Speakership is an influential part of American politics, given that the Speaker is chosen mainly from the majority party. It's become a common practice, rather than set in the Constitution, to cite the leadership of the Speaker in terms.

### **Implications of the Evolved Role of the Speaker in US Politics and Policy Formulation.**

It is important to note that the position of the Speaker has evolved. Still, in the first part of the 21st century, Speakership has emerged as a central figure in US politics and the policymaking process. The evolution of the Speaker's role in the United States politics and policy formulation process, particularly throughout the first part of the 21st century, signifies a pivotal shift in the traditional dynamics of political power within the federal government. Historically perceived as a largely ceremonial role with limited influence outside of the legislative domain, the Speaker's position has undergone a remarkable transformation, centralizing domestic and foreign policy agendas. This evolution has profound implications for the operational dynamics of the U.S. political system, the balance of power, and the formulation of comprehensive policies

that address the nation's internal and external challenges.

Firstly, the enhanced role of the Speaker has redefined the landscape of legislative leadership, conferring upon this position an unprecedented level of influence and authority. The Speaker now plays a critical role in setting the legislative agenda, influencing policy priorities, and steering the direction of political discourse within and beyond the House of Representatives. This expanded scope of influence directly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of legislative processes, potentially accelerating the passage of critical legislation or, conversely, stalling policy initiatives that lack the Speaker's support.

Secondly, the prominence of the Speaker in the policymaking processes has implications for the traditional balance of power among the branches of the U.S. government. As the Speaker assumes a more active role in foreign policy and national security matters, the historical predominance of the Executive Branch in these areas is challenged, leading to a reconfiguration of inter-branch relations. This shift necessitates a new paradigm of collaboration and negotiation between the Executive and Legislative branches, with the Speaker emerging as a key figure in diplomatic and security strategies that were once the purview of the President and their advisors.

Moreover, the Speaker's expanded authority also raises questions about the internal dynamics of the House of Representatives. As the Speaker's power grows, so too does the potential for centralization of authority, which may impact the democratic and collaborative nature of legislative decision-making. This centralization could lead to increased political polarization as opposing factions vie for the Speaker's favor, or it could stifle diverse perspectives and debates within the House, undermining the representative function of the legislative body.

Finally, transforming the Speaker's role has significant implications for public policy and governance. With the Speaker playing a more decisive role in shaping policy priorities, their personal beliefs, party affiliations, and political agendas could have a more pronounced impact on national policies and legislative outcomes. This reality underscores the importance of transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership in the Speaker's office, as the decisions and actions of this single individual increasingly have the power to influence the direction of the nation's policies and its future. To conclude, the evolution of the Speaker's role in the 21st century has significant and far-reaching implications for U.S. politics, governance, and international relations. As this position becomes more increasingly central to

the policy formulation process, understanding its impact on legislative dynamics, inter-branch relations, and global diplomacy becomes crucial for scholars, policymakers, and the public. This

shift necessitates a reevaluation of traditional political theories and practices, as well as a careful consideration of American democracy's future trajectory and role on the world stage.

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