



Fighting for the Speakership: The House and the Rise of Party Government (Princeton Studies in American Politics: Historical, International, and Comparative Perspectives)

Jeffery A. Jenkins, Charles Stewart

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The Speaker of the House of Representatives is the most powerful partisan figure in the contemporary U.S. Congress. How this came to be, and how the majority party in the House has made control of the speakership a routine matter, is far from straightforward. *Fighting for the Speakership* provides a comprehensive history of how Speakers have been elected in the U.S. House since 1789, arguing that the organizational politics of these elections were critical to the construction of mass political parties in America and laid the groundwork for the role they play in setting the agenda of Congress today.

Jeffery Jenkins and Charles Stewart show how the speakership began as a relatively weak office, and how votes for Speaker prior to the Civil War often favored regional interests over party loyalty. While struggle, contention, and deadlock over House organization were common in the antebellum era, such instability vanished with the outbreak of war, as the majority party became an "organizational cartel" capable of controlling with certainty the selection of the Speaker and other key House officers. This organizational cartel has survived Gilded Age partisan strife, Progressive Era challenge, and conservative coalition politics to guide speakership elections through the present day. *Fighting for the Speakership* reveals how struggles over House organization prior to the Civil War were among the most consequential turning points in American political history.

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