

Bill Reintroduction in the U.S. House

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March, 2025

Abstract

What happens to bills that do not become laws in a given Congress? Which of these bills are reintroduced in the next Congress, and why? Answering these questions is increasingly important, as it becomes ever more difficult for a bill to advance through all legislative stages and become law. In this paper, we propose a theory of bill reintroduction from a utility perspective. Building on the premise that most Members of Congress (MCs) have policy incentives and seek to be cost-efficient, we posit that MCs value both the extent and intensity of external support when making the reintroduction decisions. Specifically, we argue that MCs are more likely to reintroduce bills with more cosponsors, especially those with early and committee-based support. We also contend that public and media attention can serve as additional signals of a bill's value. Using a text reuse approach, we identify reintroduced bills from 2003 to 2023 and estimate fixed effects models to test our hypotheses. We find strong support for the idea that both elite and public cues shape strategic reintroduction decisions. Our findings deepen the understanding of the dynamics behind legislation and provide insights into the internal workings of the U.S. House.

Keywords: bill reintroduction, cosponsorship, co-partisan support, referred committee

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Introduction

In recent years, it's become common to see news articles labeling a particular Congress as the latest "do-nothing" Congress.¹ During the 116th Congress, only 214 bills, or 2.36%, were enacted into law, and this rate dropped further to 2.05% in the 117th Congress. When the legislative productivity of the past two decades is compared to that of the historically do-nothing Congress (the 80th), it's clear that no Congress in the 21st century has achieved even half the rate of the 80th. These bills will be considered "dead" by the end of the Congress, but many MCs will reintroduce the failed bills in the new Congress. For example, Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-Michigan) introduced the *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act* back-to-back for nearly thirty years, beginning in the 101st Congress (1989-1991) and continuing until his retirement in the 115th Congress (2017-2019). The practice of reintroducing bills is no exception to this particular bill, with many other bills such as the *Voter Empowerment Act* (now as the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act*) and the *Redistricting Reform Act* also being reintroduced multiple times in different Congresses.

Despite the growing trend of more bills becoming "dead" and the common practice of bill reintroduction among Members of Congress (hereafter MCs), we know relatively little about whether and which "dead" bills will be reintroduced by re-elected MCs in a new Congress.² Our argument begins with the utility perspective, positing that bills that already have some support from other MCs are more likely to be reintroduced.³ MCs value their

¹For example, see [Desilver \(2021\)](#) about the 117th Congress at Pew Research, and [Lehmann \(2024\)](#) about the 118th Congress at *the Nation*.

²See [Krutz and Lebeau \(2006\)](#) and [Gelman \(2024\)](#) for notable exceptions. For instance, [Gelman \(2024\)](#) uncovers how MCs' internal characters such as issue expertise and agenda-setting powers impact the fate of bills.

³An important assumption here is that MCs introduce bills primarily for policymaking purposes. We acknowledge, however, that a significant number of bills today are introduced for position-taking purposes

legislative accomplishments and must prioritize their limited legislative agenda space. Bills that have garnered some level of support or interest from colleagues are more likely to navigate the legislative process successfully, providing MCs with an incentive to include them again on their agendas. Furthermore, we emphasize the need to incorporate intensity into our analyses. Not all cosponsors carry equal weight; we argue that original cosponsors—those who join a bill at the time of introduction—signal stronger and more reliable support than those who add their names later. Similarly, MCs place particular value on support from members of the relevant committee, as most bills stall at the committee stage. Meanwhile, both types of support serve as early and relevant signals of viability that are especially consequential during the formative phases of the legislative process. Meanwhile, both types of support serve as early and relevant signals of viability, particularly because party and committee leaders often rely on such cues to decide which bills merit further attention or advancement. Finally, we posit that public attention, captured through media coverage or online engagement, provides an additional cue that can shape MCs’ reintroduction decisions. Beyond signaling symbolic relevance, public visibility may enhance a bill’s perceived viability by elevating its profile among constituents, interest groups, and party leaders. In this way, attention is not merely a reactive force but a proactive consideration—offering MCs both expressive value and strategic opportunity as they navigate a crowded legislative agenda.

We test our theory by analyzing the official titles of all bills introduced in the House between 2001 and 2023 (107th through the 117th Congresses). Using a text reuse approach, we construct a matrix containing nearly half a million bill pairs and calculate their Jaccard similarity scores. Based on this method, we identify 61,557 bills that could belong to the universe of potentially reintroduced legislation, and of these, 17,084 (or 27.8%) are actually reintroduced in the next Congress.⁴ We then estimate two-way fixed effects models (control-

(Lee, 2016; Gelman, 2020, 2024).

⁴The total number is smaller than the sum of all bills introduced because bills sponsored by last-term MCs or those that became law are excluded from the reintroduction risk set. This rate is also consistent with

ling for Congress and individual MCs) to evaluate the factors associated with reintroduction.

Consistent with our theoretical expectations, we find that both elite cues and public attention significantly predict the likelihood that a bill will be reintroduced. Specifically, bills with more cosponsors are more likely to be reintroduced, and this relationship is strongest when cosponsors signed on at the time of the bill's original introduction. A one standard deviation increase in the number of cosponsors is associated with a 12% increase in the likelihood of reintroduction. Importantly, not all cosponsors carry equal weight: the relationship between cosponsorship and reintroduction is driven primarily by original cosponsors. We also find support for the *Attention Hypothesis*—bills that received greater public attention, measured using logged Google search volume, are modestly but significantly more likely to be reintroduced. A one standard deviation increase in public attention corresponds to a 5.9% increase in the probability of reintroduction. However, we do not find support for the *Committee Hypothesis*. Contrary to expectations, cosponsorship by committee members does not significantly increase the likelihood of reintroduction. Instead, it is the number of cosponsors outside the committee of jurisdiction that is positively associated with the outcome, suggesting that broader, external support may serve as a more meaningful cue for future legislative viability.

We make several contributions to the study of legislative politics. First, we bring new theoretical and empirical attention to the question of bill reintroduction—an important but often overlooked feature of congressional behavior. Rather than treating reintroduction as a mechanical or symbolic act, we show how it reflects the incremental nature of policymaking. Second, our study adds to existing research on agenda setting by showing how rank-and-file lawmakers—not just party leaders or committee chairs—use available cues to decide which bills are worth reintroducing. Original cosponsorship, committee support, and public attention all serve as signals that help members navigate a crowded and competitive legislative

[Gelman \(2024\)](#), who report a reintroduction range between 23 and 41 percent, depending on the cutpoints used.

environment. Third, by using a text reuse approach and leveraging detailed bill-level data, we move beyond sponsor-level analyses to show that the features of the bill itself also influence its legislative trajectory. Finally, we speak directly to research on legislative effectiveness by examining what lawmakers do after their proposals fail. Reintroduction, we argue, is one strategy legislators use to adapt to institutional friction, highlight priorities, and push for progress over time. In this way, reintroduction is not simply a fallback—it's part of how legislators work to make policy under constraint.

Theoretical Expectations

With respect to the likelihood of bill reintroduction, our theoretical expectations are based on the view that (a) MCs make utility-based decisions about whether a bill is worth reintroducing, (b) cosponsorship serves as a credible signal of support and viability, (c) the intensity and quality of that support — including who cosponsored and when — vary in politically meaningful ways, and (d) bills that attract greater public or constituent attention offer additional incentives for reintroduction by enhancing the symbolic or communicative value of sponsorship.⁵

MCs face Time Constraints and Cost Considerations

MCs are tasked with managing multiple responsibilities, each demanding considerable effort and often involving difficult trade-offs (Mayhew, 2004; Guenther and Searle, 2019). MCs — especially the rank and files — have very limited time and resources to dedicate to lawmaking (Curry, 2015; Gelman, 2024). These constraints have only intensified over time, as members now allocate increasing portions of their schedules to fundraising (Lee,

⁵For an approach centered on member-level characteristics and institutional positioning in shaping reintroduction, see (Gelman, 2024). In contrast, this paper focuses on the features and attached value of individual bills.

2016), with the average cost of a congressional campaign nearly tripling from 2000 to 2020 (OpenSecrets, 2024). Internal party guidance reinforces this dynamic: materials from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recommend that MCs spend more than five hours per day on donor outreach, leaving less than four hours for committee work, legislating, and constituent services (Grim and Siddiqui, 2013; Master, 2016).

Despite these competing demands, MCs still aim to maintain a minimum level of legislative productivity (Adler and Wilkerson, 2013; Volden and Wiseman, 2014).⁶ Most members seek to see at least some of their bills advance — if not into law, then through subsequent legislative stages.⁷ This motivation is both personal and political. As Fenno observed, “To the extent possible, even if it requires a bit of imagination, members will picture themselves as effective users of insider power” (Fenno, 1978).⁸

Legislating, however, is costly. As Schiller (1995) notes, lawmaking entails resource, opportunity, and political costs. More recently, Gelman (2024) categorize the costs of bill introduction into two broad types: policy and political. Policy costs include the effort to generate policy ideas and translate them into legislative text, while political costs include coalition-building and engaging constituents. These burdens help explain why the typical MC introduces only a limited number of bills. For example, in the 117th Congress, the median number of bills sponsored was 19, with a mean of 21. This constrained portfolio reflects deliberate decisions about which issues to prioritize. Approximately one-third of MCs are policy specialists who concentrate on narrow issue areas where they have developed

⁶As Adler and Wilkerson (2013) find, these competing demands have led to a significant number of bills being introduced during the first session of Congress, suggesting a strategic front-loading of legislative initiatives to navigate the constraints of reduced lawmaking time. Another trend is that MCs are increasingly relying on congressional staff for assistance in lawmaking (Gui, 2021; Ommundsen, 2023).

⁷Although Speakers of the House sometimes do not sponsor bills, they can influence the legislative process through other means.

⁸Approximately 1% of MCs are inactive in terms of lawmaking and do not sponsor any bills.

expertise ([Bernhard and Sulkin, 2018](#)).⁹ Cultivating such expertise takes time, and it must be recognized by other MCs in order to be effective ([Volden and Wiseman, 2014](#)).¹⁰

By contrast, reintroducing a bill is relatively inexpensive and can be employed as a cost-saving strategy. MCs do not need to pay the same policy and political costs as with original legislation; often only minor modifications are required. As such, reintroduction offers an attractive strategy for maintaining an active legislative agenda under severe time and resource constraints. That said, it is not entirely cost-free: as [Gelman \(2024\)](#) notes, reintroduced bills still require maintenance — MCs must demonstrate the bill’s continued relevance or attempt to expand its base of support.

Legislative Effectiveness is Rewarded by Voters and Donors

Despite its low cost, not all previously introduced bills are reintroduced. A key reason for this selectivity is that MCs must consider how their legislative behavior contributes to their reputations for effectiveness — both among colleagues and constituents. An indiscriminate reintroduction of failed or low-support bills may risk portraying the MC as unstrategic or ineffective.

A growing body of research underscores the political value of being perceived as effective. [Butler et al. \(2023\)](#) show that voters respond to information about legislative effectiveness, evaluating more effective lawmakers more favorably and penalizing less effective ones. Similarly, [Simas et al. \(2025\)](#) find that when legislative performance is made salient, voters are more likely to hold representatives accountable. Legislators themselves appear to recognize this incentive: [Hunt and Miler \(2025\)](#) document how MCs use constituent communications to

⁹For instance, Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), whose husband was killed and son injured in a mass shooting, focused her legislative efforts on gun control after taking office, earning her the reputation of being Congress’s “fiercest gun control advocate.”

¹⁰See [Volden and Wiseman \(2014\)](#) for a detailed discussion on Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO) and his reputation in environmental protection and conservation issues.

highlight their legislative accomplishments. Moreover, effectiveness pays electoral dividends — especially in primary elections, where engaged voters are more likely to evaluate performance records (Treul et al., 2022). Strickler (2024) further demonstrates that perceived productivity and bipartisanship enhance electoral resilience. Taken together, these studies make clear that legislative effectiveness is a valuable political asset. Accordingly, MCs are more likely to reintroduce bills that previously attracted meaningful support — such as a high number of cosponsors — as these provide credible signals of legislative viability and reinforce an MC’s image as an effective lawmaker.¹¹

The reputational value of legislative activity extends beyond voters and also influences how interest groups and political donors allocate resources. Political action committees (PACs), guided by the investment theory of campaign finance, tend to reward legislators who demonstrate legislative productivity and publicly signal alignment. Box-Steffensmeier and Grant (1999) show that PACs invest more heavily in effective lawmakers who can deliver policy benefits at low cost, while Rocca and Gordon (2010) find that PAC contributions are responsive to non-roll call position-taking, such as bill sponsorship, which signals ideological intensity and policy commitment. Expanding on this logic, Gui (2023) shows that registered lobbyists, as individuals, also strategically direct their personal contributions toward more effective legislators — especially freshmen, for whom legislative performance offers a clearer signal of value. These patterns suggest that legislative effectiveness is not only electorally advantageous but also a political asset recognized and rewarded by organized interests and policy professionals.

Why Cosponsorship Matters

Given their limited time and resources, MCs must prioritize which bills to reintroduce based on cues about a bill’s likelihood of advancement. One of the most salient and observable

¹¹This logic is consistent with evidence that reintroduction can serve as a strategic step toward eventual policy success, as suggested by Krutz and Lebeau (2006).

of these cues is cosponsorship. Cosponsorship serves as a signal of a bill's prior support, its political viability, and the degree of legislative effort behind it. Compared to a floor vote — which may occur only after a bill has already gained traction — cosponsorship reflects an earlier and more proactive form of engagement. As [Canon \(1999, p. 191\)](#) explains, “A member...who sponsors or cosponsors the legislation cares more intensely about the bill than does a member who only supports it through their vote.” In this sense, cosponsorship indicates genuine alignment or interest in the bill's content, especially among early or original cosponsors.

Cosponsorship also provides important informational shortcuts for party leaders, committee chairs, and other agenda-setters, who must decide where to allocate limited floor and committee time. Because legislative agendas are tightly controlled — particularly in the House — leaders often rely on cosponsor counts as a low-cost signal of a bill's political feasibility ([Koger, 2003](#)). A bill with a substantial number of cosponsors may face fewer transaction costs in terms of whipping votes or negotiating amendments, making it a more attractive candidate for movement through the legislative process.

Equally important, the number of cosponsors reflects the sponsor's legislative effort and strategic investment. Securing cosponsors typically requires active outreach, such as contacting colleagues, circulating “Dear Colleague” letters, and presenting the bill in party or committee meetings ([Koger, 2003](#); [Craig, 2021](#)). These activities require time, political capital, and sometimes reciprocal favors. In this way, building a broad cosponsor coalition is not just a sign of a bill's popularity, but evidence of behind-the-scenes legislative work. Thus, bills with many cosponsors are often those in which the sponsor has invested heavily — both substantively and strategically.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that cosponsorship offers MCs a multidimensional cue: it indicates not only how many colleagues supported a bill, but also how much the sponsor invested in it, and how likely it was to gain traction. As a result, MCs looking to appear effective — without expending unnecessary legislative effort — are more likely to

reintroduce bills that previously attracted substantial cosponsorship, and this lead to our first hypothesis:

Cosponsorship Hypothesis: *MCs are more likely to reintroduce bills associated with more cosponsors than bills with fewer cosponsors.*

Within this broader logic of cosponsorship, original cosponsors provide particularly strong cues. These are the members who sign on to a bill at the time of its introduction, often following direct appeals by the sponsor. Original cosponsorship suggests a higher level of pre-existing coordination and commitment, compared to those who join later in the legislative process. Securing original cosponsors often requires the sponsor to engage in targeted outreach — identifying potential allies in advance and offering reasons for early endorsement. This early coalition-building serves not just as a substantive signal of support but also as a framing device: it helps shape how a bill is perceived by other members and by agenda-setters. A bill introduced with a robust slate of original cosponsors may appear more serious, better prepared, and more likely to advance — increasing its appeal for reintroduction. In contrast, bills with weak or last-minute cosponsorship may reflect rushed or less committed legislative efforts. The aboved discussion lead to our second hypothesis:

Original Cosponsor Hypothesis: *Bills with more original cosponsors are more likely to be reintroduced than those whose cosponsorship builds gradually.*

In addition, cosponsorship from members of the committee to which a bill is referred serves as a particularly strong institutional cue in the legislative process. Legislative gridlock frequently occurs at the committee stage — often well before bills reach the floor. For example, in the 117th Congress, only 11.4% of introduced bills were reported out of committee, with the vast majority dying without formal consideration (Ballard, 2022). Committees act as powerful gatekeepers: they determine whether bills receive hearings, markups, and ultimately whether they advance to the floor. As such, members recognize that committee-level dynamics — more than floor voting patterns — shape the legislative fate of most proposals.

In this context, cosponsorship from committee members provides a high-quality signal

that a bill is more likely to survive early scrutiny. These members not only possess subject-matter expertise but also enjoy privileged access to procedural tools and institutional relationships that can influence a bill's trajectory. A committee cosponsor may advocate for the bill during internal discussions, raise it directly with the chair, or push for hearings and markups. For agenda-setters and legislative entrepreneurs, this kind of insider backing indicates that the bill has already cleared an important threshold of credibility and viability.

For bill sponsors deciding whether to reintroduce a proposal, these cues are consequential. A bill that previously stalled but had support from relevant committee members may be seen as having unrealized potential — particularly if institutional conditions or leadership priorities have shifted in the new Congress. By contrast, a bill that lacked any committee-level support may appear fundamentally unworkable under similar circumstances. Thus, committee-member cosponsorship does not merely reflect ideological alignment or vote signaling; it suggests procedural leverage, which can be decisive in determining whether a bill lives or dies in Congress (Krehbiel, 1992; Curry and Lee, 2020). We therefore reach our third hypothesis:

Committee Hypothesis: *MCs place greater value on the support from cosponsors who hold seats on the committees to which the bill is referred. The impact of committee cosponsors on the likelihood of bill reintroduction is more pronounced than noncommittee cosponsors.*

Attention and Communication

Reintroduction may also reflect legislators' strategic use of media to shape policy discourse. As Grossman (2022) argues, the media is a key arena in which policy conflicts are expanded and political agendas are constructed. Reintroducing previously publicized bills allows MCs to leverage existing media frames and narratives (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010). According to Baumgartner and Jones's theory of punctuated equilibrium, political attention is distributed unevenly — with long periods of stasis punctuated by bursts of activity. In this context, bills that already enjoy some degree of public visibility may be better positioned to

break through during these moments of heightened institutional or public attention. This logic resonates with Kingdon’s concept of “softening up the system,” wherein repeated bill introduction helps acclimate policymakers and stakeholders to a policy idea, increasing its chances of success when a window of opportunity opens (Kingdon, 2003).

Beyond this strategic logic, MCs may also consider the symbolic and communicative value of reintroduction. Legislative behavior is often as expressive as it is instrumental — some bills are introduced not necessarily to become law, but to communicate values, priorities, or partisan positions (Lee, 2016). In such cases, attention becomes the currency of influence. Media coverage, constituent engagement, and visibility in newsletters or social media amplify a bill’s messaging power. As Russell, Dwidar and Jones (2016) note, the mass media plays a central role in shaping the policy agenda by spotlighting issues and attributing importance to them. Reintroducing attention-getting bills thus enables MCs to reinforce their message, signal responsiveness, and reengage with constituents on salient topics.

Further, research on political communication highlights that voters respond more favorably when they are made aware of their representative’s behavior. Butler et al. (2023) and Simas et al. (2025) show that communication is essential for electoral accountability — constituents cannot react to what they do not know. Legislators, in turn, actively engage in this process. Russell (2021) demonstrates that MCs use media, including social platforms like Twitter, to craft political identities and highlight legislative engagement. Taken together, these insights suggest that attention is not simply a byproduct of reintroduction but a driving factor in the decision itself. For both expressive and strategic reasons, MCs may choose to reintroduce bills that previously gained attention — to rekindle engagement, maintain symbolic presence, or capitalize on shifting opportunity structures.

Attention Hypothesis: *MCs are more likely to reintroduce bills that previously received greater public or media attention.*

Data and Measurement

Using bill data scraped directly from Congress.gov, we construct a matrix of 499,587 bill pairs covering all legislation introduced between the 107th and 117th Congresses (2001 to 2023). Because we are interested in the likelihood of a bill being reintroduced by the same MC, these pairs are restricted to bills sponsored by the same MC in different Congresses.¹² To reduce the number of potential pairings and facilitate the textual comparison process, we compare only bills that fall under the same policy area. These policy areas are classified by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and publicly available via Congress.gov’s Subject – Policy Area taxonomy.¹³ For example, Rep. Lewis first introduced the *Voter Empowerment Act of 2012* (H.R.5799) during the 112th Congress, which is classified under the “Government Operations and Politics” policy area. We then compare this bill to all other bills introduced in the 113th through 116th Congresses by the same sponsor and within the same policy area, resulting in four bill pairs—one in each subsequent Congresses.

After defining the scope of pairs, we compare the official titles of bills A and B. When bills are introduced, there will be an official title section, which often includes one sentence or a brief paragraph succinctly describing the main intent or objective of the bill, and such titles (summaries) will allow other legislators and interested parties to quickly grasp the purpose of the bill. For instance, the *Voter Empower Act of 2012* starts with the sentence: “To modernize voter registration, promote access to voting for individuals with disabilities, protect the ability of individuals to exercise the right to vote in elections for Federal office, and for other purposes.” This opening sentence outlines the intent of this bill, highlighting efforts

¹²In very rare situations, a bill may also be reintroduced by a different MC. For example, after Rep. John Lewis’s death, a more recent version of the *Voter Empowerment Act* was introduced by Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL). In this paper, we do not examine the reintroduction of bills by different MCs.

¹³To filter bills by policy area on Congress.gov, we use the Subject – Policy Area filter, which groups legislation into categories such as Commerce, Education, and Energy. For more details, see: <https://www.congress.gov/help/legislation-types>

to streamline voter registration process, improve accessibility for voters with disabilities, and ensure the protection of voting rights in federal elections.

Before calculating similarity scores, the text is first pre-processed by removing all capitalization, punctuation, and numbers. This prepares the text for the tokenization process, which is the next step in preparing the data for similarity measurement. In this case, tokenization involves breaking down the official titles into sequences of words, or n-grams, to create chunks of text that will be used for comparison. The specific method of tokenization used here generates trigrams. We then compare the jaccard similarity score of bill A and B in a specific pair.¹⁴ The Jaccard similarity is the division of the size of the intersection and the size of the union in the pair, and scores between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 meaning higher similarity.¹⁵

$$J(A, B) = \frac{|A \cap B|}{|A \cup B|} \quad (1)$$

In our analysis, we adhere to a stringent criterion for identifying reintroduced bills, counting a bill as reintroduced in Congress t+1 only if it achieves a Jaccard similarity score of 1 with a bill from Congress t. We adopt this exact-match standard because bill summaries contain relatively sparse information; even minor discrepancies at the summary level likely mask larger substantive differences in the underlying text. This approach implicitly assumes

¹⁴Unlike methods that create overlapping sequences, this approach does not overlap. For an official title that contains six words, it results in two distinct trigrams: the first trigram comprises the first three words, and the second trigram consists of the last three words, 4-6.

¹⁵The summary for HR259-108 is “To secure the Federal voting rights of persons who have been released from incarceration.” and the summary for HR1300-109 is “To ensure the Federal voting rights of persons who have been released from incarceration.”, and both bills are sponsored by Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) under the topic of civil rights. After tokenization, both texts can be divided into five non-overlapping trigrams. Four out of the five tri-grams are the same, with the difference being the starting tri-grams: “to secure the” and “to ensure the”. Therefore, the size of the intersection is 4 and the size of the union is 6, giving a score of 0.667.

that legislators treat bills as discrete, indivisible units — either a proposal is reintroduced in full, or it is not.¹⁶ We have a universe of 61,557 bills introduced in the 107th through the 116th Congress.¹⁷ Of these, 17,084 bills (27.8%) are reintroduced in the following Congress. Rep. Robert E. Andrews (D-NJ) reintroduced 68 bills from the 107th to the 108th Congress, the highest number by any legislator in a single Congress. This total is three times greater than the number of bills introduced by the median legislator during the same period. Reintroduction, however, is not limited to a few prolific members; it is a widespread strategy. Over 97% of legislators (813 out of 835) reintroduced at least one bill during the study period. A particularly notable case is Rep. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), who reintroduced all nine of his bills from the 108th Congress in the 109th Congress.

To construct our key independent variables, we supplement bill text data with information on cosponsorship and public attention. Cosponsorship data are also scraped directly from Congress.gov, which, in addition to bill texts, provides the full list of cosponsors for each bill, including the date on which each member signed on. This date information allows us to distinguish between original cosponsors — those who joined at the time of introduction — and later cosponsors, who added their support afterward. We further identify committee cosponsors by cross-referencing cosponsor names with committee assignment data from [Stewart \(2021\)](#), which includes comprehensive rosters for House committees during our pe-

¹⁶We are also mindful of a growing body of research suggesting that members may approach bill introduction more flexibly, often strategically recycling portions of prior proposals. Legislative ideas frequently persist across Congresses even when they are repackaged, divided into multiple bills, or embedded within broader legislative vehicles ([Casas, Denny and Wilkerson, 2020](#); [Eatough and Preece, 2024](#)). To account for this possibility, we relax our similarity criteria and assess reintroduction based on overlap in bill sections and provisions. This alternative approach captures a more modular understanding of legislative persistence and allows us to evaluate whether our core empirical patterns hold when reintroduction is defined at the bill section level.

¹⁷We exclude bills from the 117th Congress, as reintroduction outcomes are not yet observable. Bills that became law in the introduced Congress are also excluded, as they are unlikely to be reintroduced.

riod of study. This enables us to determine whether a bill received support from members sit on the committee to which it was referred to. On average, a bill will have 16.6 cosponsors, 5.7 original cosponsors, and 3.8 committee cosponsors.

Similarly, to measure public and media attention, we retrieve data using the Google Search API. For each bill, we conduct automated queries using both the bill's official title and its short (popular) title, as listed in Congress.gov metadata. To focus on contemporary attention, we restrict the time frame to the two years prior to the bill's last recorded action. This window captures the period during which the bill was actively under consideration, rather than retrospective or post-enactment mentions. The total number of search results returned from these queries is used as a proxy for the level of external attention a bill received. On average, a bill yields 120.1 million Google search results. The Federal Immigrant Release for Safety and Security Together Act of 2020 (FIRST Act) garners the most attention, with 9.58 billion results. Meanwhile, 2.4% of the bills in the dataset (1,645 in total) receive zero search results.

Before turning to our model estimates, we examine the data and observe a discernible pattern in the number of cosponsors between bills that were reintroduced and those that were not. Figure 1 presents the trends in both total and original cosponsors for bills across our study period, with all data plotted in a single graph. The dashed line represents bills that were reintroduced in the subsequent Congress, while the solid line corresponds to those that were not. In alignment with the *Cosponsorship Hypothesis*, the average number of total cosponsors for reintroduced bills (dashed line with circular markers) consistently exceeds that of bills that were not reintroduced (solid line with circular markers). Moreover, we also find support for the *Original Cosponsor Hypothesis*: the average number of original cosponsors (represented by triangle markers) is always significantly lower than the total number of cosponsors, but nonetheless shows a similar pattern—reintroduced bills tend to have more original cosponsors than non-reintroduced ones.

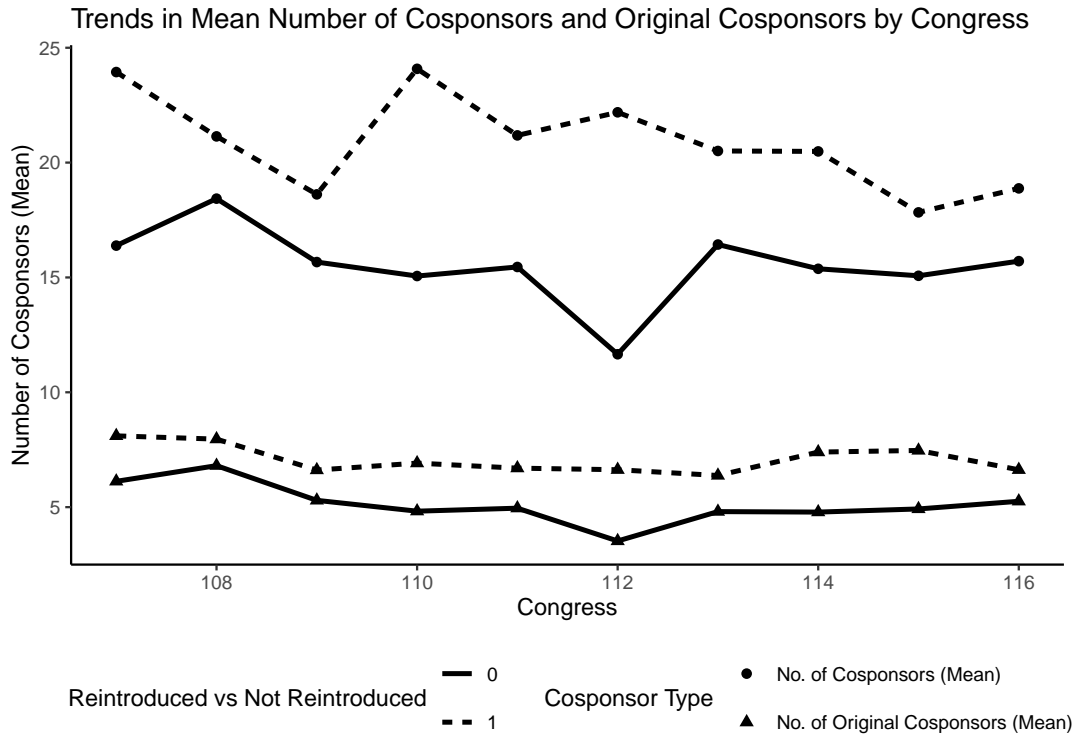


Figure 1: Change of Mean Cosponsors: 107th-116th Congress

Models and Results

We begin by examining the *Cosponsorship Hypothesis* and the *Attention Hypothesis*. To do so, we estimate a two-way fixed effects regression (equation (2)). In that equation, c indicates Congress while i indicates MC, α_c is a Congress fixed effects (FE) and α_i is the MC FE. Congress FE pick up the impact of each Congress (such as polarization level and legislative climate), while ME FE denotes the time-invariant MC characteristics that might be relevant for his or her decision on bill reintroduction, such as contrasting legislative style and issue expertise. In the equation, we clustered the standard errors at MC level. X_{ic} is a vector that includes control variables that could also affect an MC's decision to reintroduce bills, such as an MC's congressional position, seniority and legislative productivity. We also include other variables that might impact MC's decisions of reintroductions such as majority party status, ideological distance to the chamber median, seniority, legislative effectiveness

expectations, committee assignment (chair and subcommittee chairs). We also follow Gelman (2024) by incorporating whether a member of Congress holds a seat on, or serves as the chair or ranking member of, the bill's referred committee.

$$\text{Bill Reintroduction}_{ic} = \alpha_i + \alpha_c + \beta_1 \text{No. of Cosponsors}_{ic} + \beta_2 \text{No. of Search}_{ic} + \Gamma X_{ic} + \varepsilon_{ic}, \quad (2)$$

Results are reported in Table 1. Consistent with our *Cosponsorship Hypothesis*, we find that bills with more cosponsors are significantly more likely to be reintroduced. Specifically, the coefficient on the number of cosponsors (per hundred) is 0.095 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that a one-unit increase in cosponsors corresponds to a 0.00095 increase in the probability of reintroduction. To better interpret this effect and gauge its substantive magnitude, we follow Mummolo and Peterson (2018) and consider plausible variations in the independent variable. In Model 1, the standard deviation of cosponsor count is 34.4. Thus, a one standard deviation increase in cosponsorship is associated with a 0.033 increase in the probability of reintroduction ($0.095 \times 34.4 \div 100$), which corresponds to a 12% increase relative to the mean probability (0.276). These results support the idea that broader coalitions—reflected in greater cosponsorship—signal legislative viability and increase a bill's chances of returning in the next Congress.¹⁸

Having established the relationship between cosponsor size and the probability of bill reintroduction, we turn to the *Attention Hypothesis*. We find that higher levels of public attention, measured through Google search volume (logged), are also positively and significantly associated with the likelihood of reintroduction. The coefficient on $\log(\text{Search})$ is 0.003 ($p < 0.01$) in Table 1: Model 1, indicating that a one-unit increase in logged search volume corresponds to a 0.003 increase in the probability that a bill will be reintroduced. Although the effect size is smaller than that of cosponsorship, it remains substantively mean-

¹⁸Because the dependent variable is binary, we also estimate a logit model, and find analogous results.

ingful. In our data, the standard deviation of $\log(\text{Search})$ is 5.37, which implies that a one standard deviation increase in attention is associated with a 0.0161 (0.003×5.37) increase in the probability of reintroduction. Relative to the baseline reintroduction probability of 0.276, this represents a 5.9% increase. This suggests that public attention—though might be a weaker signal than elite cues like cosponsorship—still plays a measurable role in shaping the legislative agenda.

To further explore our argument that MCs act strategically in deciding which bills to reintroduce, we consider whether the informational value of cosponsorship and public attention varies based on a bill's progress in the legislative process. One direct cue of a bill's political viability is whether it advances beyond the committee stage—an outcome that is relatively rare and difficult to achieve. For bills that have already been reported out of committee, we expect the marginal informational value of cosponsorship and public attention to be weaker, since the advancement itself signals inherent legislative worth. In contrast, for bills that did not reach the committee reporting stage, members may rely more heavily on signals like cosponsorship and public salience when deciding whether to reintroduce a measure. We then examine this logic empirically in Models 2 and 3. Model 2 restricts the sample to bills not reported out of committee (roughly 90.6% of the bills), and we observe that both cosponsorship and Google search volume exert stronger effects on the probability of reintroduction, as predicted. The coefficient on *No. of Cosponsors* is 0.112, and a one standard deviation increase (32.23) in logged cosponsors is associated with a 0.036 increase in reintroduction probability. Given the mean probability of 0.278 in this sample, this effect corresponds to a 13% increase from the mean (slightly larger than the 12% increase in Model 1). By contrast, Model 3 focuses only on bills that move beyond the committee stage (comprising 9.3% of the sample). In this restricted set, the effects of both cosponsorship and public attention are notably weaker: search volume is no longer statistically significant, while the effect of cosponsorship is substantially smaller and only reaches significance at the 0.1 level. We also find support for [Gelman \(2024\)](#), as the coefficient for *Referred Committee*

Chair is negative across all three models, suggesting that committee chairs face lower costs when drafting new bills.

Table 1: Cosponsoring and Bill Reintroduction: 107th-116th Congress

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Bill Reintroduction		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
No. of Search (Logged)	0.002*** (0.0004)	0.003*** (0.0004)	0.0002 (0.001)
No. of Cosponsors (in Hundred)	0.095*** (0.007)	0.112*** (0.007)	0.017 (0.012)
Referred Committee Chair	-0.108*** (0.020)	-0.087*** (0.025)	-0.177*** (0.037)
Majority Status (Next)	0.057 (0.049)	0.093* (0.049)	-0.203* (0.123)
Legislative Effectiveness (Expectation)	0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.017)
Other MC-level Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Congress FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
MC FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	60,825	55,135	5,690
Adjusted R ²	0.098	0.103	0.073

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at MC level are reported in parentheses. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.001.

In Appendix Table A1, we further explore the nature of cosponsorship by disaggregating the total number of cosponsors into two components: the number of original cosponsors and the number of cosponsors added later. This allows us to test the *Original Cosponsor Hypothesis*, which posits that early cosponsorship carries a stronger informational signal. The results in Model 1 of Table A1 support this hypothesis: the coefficient on the number of original cosponsors is not only statistically significant but also larger in magnitude than the coefficient on added cosponsors. These findings suggest that initial endorsements of a bill are more meaningful indicators of its viability than later-stage or strategically motivated support. With regard to the *Committee Hypothesis*, we do not find supporting evidence. On the contrary, when accounting for both within- and outside-committee sponsors, we find that the number of outside-committee cosponsors is positively associated with the likelihood

of reintroduction.

As mentioned in the theory section, rather than viewing a bill as a single, indivisible unit, members of Congress (MCs) may instead perceive legislation in terms of its individual sections. Gelman (2024) provide a dataset at the bill-section level (until the 115th Congress), allowing for a more granular analysis of reintroduced legislation. By combining their dataset with ours, we find that among the 10,742 bills identified as identical in our dataset, 9,391 (87%) are also classified as exact matches in theirs—that is, every section of the bill was reintroduced by the same MC in the following Congress. This suggests substantial overlap between the two approaches.¹⁹ However, our more stringent matching criteria may exclude some bills that should reasonably be considered reintroductions, raising the possibility that our standard is overly conservative.

To address this concern, in Appendix Table A2, we use the percentage of sections that failed to be reintroduced as the outcome variable. To address this concern, in Appendix Table A2, we use the percentage of sections that failed to be reintroduced as the outcome variable. Higher values indicate that a greater share of a bill's sections were not reintroduced in the next Congress, while lower values reflect more extensive reintroduction. As expected, the variable *No. of Cosponsors* is negatively associated with this outcome, indicating that bills with more cosponsors are more likely to be reintroduced—now assessed at the level of legislative sections. We also find support for the *Attention Hypothesis*, as the coefficient for *No. of Search* is positive and statistically significant. In addition, the *Original Cosponsor Hypothesis* holds: the coefficient for *No. of Original Cosponsors* is larger than that for *No. of Other Cosponsors* in terms of magnitude, further underscoring the importance of early endorsements.

¹⁹Only 415 bills in our dataset are not found to be reused in the bill-section dataset.

Conclusion and Implications

In this paper, we develop and test a theory of bill reintroduction in the U.S. House of Representatives, advancing a deeper understanding of how lawmakers prioritize “dead” bills across legislative sessions. Building on a utility-maximization framework, we argue that House Members assess both elite cues—such as cosponsorship, timing—and broader public attention when deciding whether to reintroduce a bill. Our empirical results affirm this framework: bills with more cosponsors, especially original cosponsors are significantly more likely to be reintroduced. Furthermore, although public attention has a smaller effect size, it remains a statistically meaningful predictor, offering insight into the expressive and communicative goals of legislators.

These findings reinforce the view that bill reintroduction is neither mechanical nor purely symbolic. Rather, it represents a form of incremental policymaking where legislators seek to lower the costs of legislative activity while maximizing the prospects of success or visibility (Kingdon, 2003). Additionally, by emphasizing the value of early and targeted support—particularly from institutional actors such as committee members—we show that MCs are not only concerned with proposing policy but also with managing their legislative portfolios strategically under conditions of institutional friction and limited resources. Moreover, our analysis underscores the importance of timing and institutional progress in the legislative process. Cosponsorship and public attention matter most for bills that stall in committee—the overwhelming fate of most legislation. When a bill clears that hurdle, its intrinsic legislative worth becomes more observable, reducing the marginal value of external signals. This nuance aligns with recent studies of agenda-setting and legislative effectiveness, which emphasize the role of early cues in environments marked by high attrition and gatekeeping (Butler et al., 2023; Simas et al., 2025; Treul et al., 2022).

The implications of our findings extend beyond Congress to broader questions about democratic responsiveness, representation, and political communication. In an era of increased polarization and legislative gridlock, reintroduction serves not only as a strategy for

policy advancement but also as a tool for signaling priorities to constituents, donors, and party leaders. Future research should further investigate how these strategies vary across policy domains, party lines, and institutional contexts. Additionally, the integration of our reintroduction dataset with roll-call voting records, interest group positions, or constituent sentiment data could illuminate how external actors influence the lifecycle of legislation beyond its initial introduction.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Cosponsoring and Bill Reintroduction: Original and Committee Cosponsors

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Bill Reintroduction	
	Model 1	Model 2
No. of Search (Logged)	0.003*** (0.0004)	0.003*** (0.0004)
No. of Original Cosponsors (in Hundred)	0.151*** (0.018)	
No. of Other Cosponsors	0.076*** (0.008)	
Outside Cosponsors		0.130*** (0.010)
Committee Cosponsors (Within)		-0.071** (0.034)
Referred Committee Chair	-0.108*** (0.020)	-0.103*** (0.020)
Majority Status (Next)	0.059 (0.049)	0.058 (0.049)
Legislative Effectiveness	0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)
Congress FE	Yes	Yes
Member FE	Yes	Yes
N	60,825	60,825
Adjusted R ²	0.091	0.091

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A2: Cosponsoring and Bill Reintroduction: Bill Sections

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Bill Reintroduction	
	Model 1	Model 2
No. of Search (Logged)	0.005*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)
No. of Cosponsors	-0.001*** (0.0001)	
No. of Original Cosponsors	-0.001***	(0.0002)
No. of Other Cosponsors		-0.001*** (0.0001)
Referred Committee Chair	0.109*** (0.024)	0.110*** (0.024)
Majority Status (Next)	-0.033 (0.054)	-0.034 (0.054)
Legislative Effectiveness	0.001 (0.007)	0.001 (0.007)
Congress FE	Yes	Yes
Member FE	Yes	Yes
N	39,127	39,127
Adjusted R ²	0.070	0.071
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	