

An Essay on Factions and Theories of Centralization  
in the U.S. House of Representatives

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The degree of centralization and decentralization has long been a subject central to the study of legislatures and is a prominent feature of the study of the U.S. Congress. This paper calls into question the primary argument of the associated literature—that the degree of majority party preference homogeneity drives centralization in the U.S. House of Representatives. In its place, the paper reports an alternative account based more explicitly on the factional composition of the majority party. Although related to the now traditional homogeneity argument, the factional argument emphasizes the importance of the dimensionality of the policy space and the presence of winners and losers in the degree of centralization in the House. The factional argument is confirmed in the record of centralizing and decentralizing events in the modern history of the House.

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### Research on Congressional Centralization

The pivotal study of centralization in congressional policy-making processes is Cooper and Brady (1981), who argued that the degree to which power is centralized in the hands of the Speaker is a by-product of the degree to which the party is homogeneous.<sup>1</sup> Comparing the House of Speaker Joseph Cannon at the turn of the 20th century with the House of Speaker Sam Rayburn in the mid-20th century, Cooper and Brady concluded that “the higher the degree of party unity or

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<sup>1</sup> Brady anticipated this argument in previous work (Brady 1972, 1978) and followed it with analyses of electoral coalitions and the centralization of power (Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989, Brady 1985).

cohesion the more power in both the formal and party systems can be concentrated in the hands of party leaders and the more leadership style will be oriented to command and task or goal attainment” (Cooper and Brady 1981, 424). The study drew the attention to the fact that congressional parties’ electoral coalitions vary over time, creating variation in party cohesion with the legislative parties. Once cohesive, legislators are more willing to license their elected and appointed leaders through formal rules and informal processes to be more aggressive in pursuit of party policy goals. Cannon enjoyed a relatively cohesive party and was a Speaker who could command compliance and direct the actions of a House majority; Rayburn suffered a divided party and was a Speaker who serviced committees and their chairs in a decentralized House.

At about the same time that Cooper and Brady were writing, Sinclair (1981) was making the same inference about House party leadership in the late 20th century. After reviewing the basic strategies of House Democratic leadership at the start of the 1980s, Sinclair observed:

The majority party leadership does not have now and never has had the resources necessary to lead successfully an utterly fragmented party. Without agreement among a substantial portion of the Democratic membership on at least some basic tenets, the most skillful leadership is doomed to failure (Sinclair 1981a).

In a period with a still-divided majority party caucus, the innovative leadership efforts reported by Sinclair represented a “coping strategy” that were necessary because of the weak position in which leaders found themselves. Cooper and Brady (1981, 424) seemed to agree in their brief observation that Speaker Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill was limited to the influence of Sam Rayburn because he, too, suffered a

divided party. Moreover, they went on, because the House of the late 1970s was even more “fractionalized”—taken to mean burdened by more committees and subcommittees—“O’Neill therefore is likely to have far less success overall than Rayburn.” The floor losses suffered by O’Neill and the majority party Democrats in that very year, the first of the Reagan administration, highlighted the predicament of party leaders at the time (Sinclair 1983; also see Bach and Smith 1988; Smith 1985).

In the 1980s, majority party leadership appeared to become more important. Outside observers noted the more pro-active efforts by leaders to influence legislators and the more creative use of special rules to structure floor action on major bills. O’Neill left the speakership at the end of 1986 as a far more assertive leader than he started in 1977; Speaker James Wright openly aggressive, setting schedules for acting on major legislation, restricting minority opportunities to floor amendments, and demanding compliant behavior from fellow partisans. Plain to all was that the composition of the Democratic party in Congress was changing. Republicans began to win seats in the Democratic stronghold of the South in the 1970s and continued to be successful in that region in the 1980s (Abramowitz 1980; Abramowitz 1994; Cohen 1981; Rohde 1992). As Republicans replaced conservative southern Democrats, the Democrats became more uniformly liberal and the Republicans become even more conservative, producing more polarized parties in the House and Senate.

These developments internal and external to Congress were associated in a way that Cooper and Brady would have predicted. House parties were more polarized and majority party leaders--Speakers Wright and his successor, Thomas

Foley--appeared to be wielding more influence. Sinclair, writing in 1989, observed that “House Democrats are more cohesive in their voting behavior than they have been in decades,” contributing to “strong, policy-oriented leadership” (Sinclair 1989). Writing in 1990 about the influence of standing committees, Smith and Deering hypothesized that

the alignment of members on important issues shapes the role of committees as well. The alignment of members, of course, is primarily a function of constituency preferences, although forces internal to Congress—the persuasiveness of a party leader, for example—can make a difference at times. But whatever the cause, if the majority party is highly cohesive on the issues and most issues are salient, it will be in a position to impose policy decisions by virtue of having enough votes to win, and a system of party-dominated committees will develop...[The] development of stronger parties and weaker committees is exactly what came to pass in Congress during the 1980s” (Smith and Deering 1990).

Finally, in 1991, Rohde summarized the lessons of the 1980s by going a step farther: “Parties are consequential in shaping members’ preferences, the character of the issues on the agenda, the nature of the legislative alternatives, and ultimate political outcomes, and they will remain important as long as the underlying forces that created this partisan resurgence persist” (Rohde 1991) This argument was labeled “conditional party government” (CPG) by Rohde.

Spurred by the remarkable centralization under the new Republican majority following the 1994 elections, Aldrich and Rohde picked up on the theme emerging in the late 1980s to define a central proposition of CPG: Legislators’ willingness to delegate power to central leaders of their party increases as the policy preferences of legislators become more polarized by party. Polarization had two components: the internal homogeneity of the parties and the distance between the parties (Aldrich and Rohde 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 1997; Aldrich and Rohde 2000a;

Aldrich and Rohde 2000b; Aldrich and Rohde 2000c; Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde 2002; Aldrich and Rohde 2004). While Cooper and Brady placed little emphasis on leadership power beyond the benefits of having a cohesive party, Aldrich and Rohde implied that the majority party experiences increasing returns on polarization: With polarized parties, the majority party wins more than it should from the imported preferences alone. Polarized parties generate a more influential majority party leadership. Polarization produces centralization.

### Two Elaborations of the Theory of Centralization

#### A Supply and Demand Theory of Party Influence

The line of argument from Cooper and Brady, Sinclair, Smith and Deering, and Aldrich and Rohde is a theory of the *supply* of party influence (willingness to delegate to leaders) but gives little attention to the *demand* for the exercise of party influence. Two observations are particularly important.

First, the demand for strong central leaders in the majority party, not just its supply, is conditioned by the party's cohesiveness. A homogeneous majority party can win without exercising influence over its members. Only an imperfectly cohesive majority party—surely the typical condition—may require the exercise of influence to win.

Second, the supply account misses the importance of party size: A larger majority party needs to be less cohesive than a smaller majority party to win. The larger the majority party, the more votes it can afford to lose from its own members and still win. It is reasonable to conjecture that the larger and more cohesive the

majority party, the less influence is required to be exercised by majority party leadership for a majority of their party to win on the floor.

Plainly, both the supply of and demand for party influence are conditional on circumstances. In fact, we can employ the concept of *party strength* (size x cohesiveness) and hypothesize that party strength is negatively related to the demand for influential leadership within the majority party. These relationships are depicted in Figure 1. Increasing homogeneity increases the supply of influence (willingness to license strong leaders) and decreases demand for party influence (need for strong leaders). Increasing party size increases the supply but reduces demand. Homogeneity influences both supply and demand, but, because the correlation between size and homogeneity is of only moderate strength (for Democrats, the correlation between size and the standard deviation of the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE is .42), the dynamics for demand are somewhat different than for supply. Thus, the location of the supply and demand lines are somewhat independent of each other and the intersection of supply and demand lines indicates the expected level of party influence (centralization) to be exercised. The net effect of changes in homogeneity and size on centralization warrants empirical investigation.

These observations suggest a more complicated relationship between party polarization and the exercise of party influence than provided by the CPG story, which focuses on supply (willingness to delegate). Both supply and demand warrant consideration. We would expect the exercise of centralized influence in the majority party to be the product of the interaction between party cohesiveness and



size. Because (a) cohesiveness has mixed effects on supply and demand and (b) cohesiveness and size vary somewhat independently of each other, predicting the centralization of party influence is not as readily predicted from cohesiveness as previous accounts suggest.

### A Factional Theory of Party Influence

While the cohesiveness and size of the majority party are the place to look for an explanation for the varying role of central party leaders, we need something more concrete to explain the distribution of power within the majority party. My observation is that legislators have a good idea about how party power will be used and their support for strong leadership is conditional on whether they expect to benefit or be harmed by the exercise of party power. Legislators form coalitions or factions, generally defined by their location in policy space, contend with each other in leadership contests, in appointments to key committees, *and* in the allocation of power within the party. The preferences of factions about the allocation of power within the majority party may be a key missing ingredients in defining the way cohesiveness and size are translated into the exercise of party influence.

A Unidimensional View. If legislators can calculate whether the party position makes them better off than the status quo, we can think of the party as being composed of three groups (Figure 3). The midpoint of the segment between the House median and the party median separates legislators who favor the party position over the House median's position (the intra-party majority) from those who favor the House median's position (the party moderates). Those who are on

the opposite side of the House median from the rest of the party (the party outsiders) are most likely to coalesce with the minority party—the frequency of which depends on the location of the status quo.

These intra-party groups are likely to differ in their attitude about party power. Partisans located to the party median's side of the party indifference point favor the party median to the House median and so would favor the exercise of party power to gain or retain a policy outcome at that location. In a unidimensional world, there always will be an unconflicted majority. This implies that the closer the policy space is to truly unidimensional the more likely it is that a centralized process will be favored by the majority of the majority party.

Under all circumstances, partisans on the far side of the House median from the party median prefer to grant power to the House median rather than to the party median. Partisans located in the region between the midpoint of the segment between the party and House medians and the House median also favor the House median over the party median, but they favor changes in the direction of the party median. They may accept limited party influence over outcomes. They may prefer a more decentralized institution in which they have an opportunity to control the agenda on matters of greatest interest to them.

A reasonable proposition—the key proposition of factional theory—is that the power delegated to central party leaders is a function of the relative size of these groups. Support for delegating power to central party leaders grows as the relative size of the party majority group grows. This is a more precise conception of the effect of the distribution of policy preferences on party power than the somewhat

ambiguous concepts of homogeneity, heterogeneity, and polarization are defined in expositions of CPG.

The faction theory differs from CPG in an important way. The factional view is that it is neither an average nor an uncertain cost of delegation that drives attitudes about the centralization of power. Rather, it is the relative size of the party factions, with some factions winning and others losing in the distribution of power.

**A Multidimensional View.** It is essential to extend the argument to multiple dimensions. In a two-dimensional world, the legislators who comprise the majority, moderate, and outsider factions may not be similar for the two dimensions (Figure 4). Because a legislators' location relative to the status quo may differ for the two dimensions, they may be conflicted in their views of centralized power. A set of legislators who may want strong party leaders to influence efforts to pull policy away from the status quo on one dimension also may want to defend the status quo against party leaders on the other dimension.

While a majority faction will always exist in a unidimensional policy space, it is likely in a multidimensional policy space that there will be no faction that is both (a) unconflicted on the relevant dimensions and (b) constitutes a majority of the party. If the ideal points of majority party legislators are characterized by more than one dimension, then it is likely that some of the legislators who constitute a majority faction on one dimension will be moderates or outsiders on the other relevant dimensions. Thus, unidimensionality is a sufficient condition for the existence of a majority faction, but multidimensionality is likely to prevent an unconflicted majority faction from forming. Lacking an unconflicted majority

faction, a multidimensional policy space is unlikely to produce a faction large enough to clearly prefer strong central leadership.

The real world of congressional policy making is likely to vary widely in the extent to which the policy making space is multidimensional. The factional view is related to CPG claims about heterogeneity, but, by focusing on whether a majority faction within the majority party has consistent preferences about the allocation of agenda power, it elaborates our explanation of the way in which legislators' policy alignments are translated into party strategy. Plainly, an elected party leader operating in a multidimensional world faces serious challenges. A leader committed to representing the central tendency of the party will associate with different colleagues at different times. This is the kind of leader whose power may be held in check by his colleagues and who may favor deferring to committee leaders because he or she will have delicate relations with many elements of the party. The several elected leaders may represent different factions. And the identity of real leadership—the legislators who do the work to build coalitions for the party—may vary from issue to issue.

#### New Propositions about Centralized Party Influence

These observations encourage us to look at somewhat different features of congressional alignments for the forces that drive the allocation of influence within the majority party than are suggested by previous accounts. They suggest that while the polarization of the parties and the homogeneity of the majority party are important, we also must consider the size of the parties, the dimensionality of the

policy space, and the presence of a majority faction within the majority party that has the ability to control party strategy in that space.

These observations also give more definition to “party.” The members of a legislative party who are likely to decide on strategy are members of the majority faction, when it exists. Preferences about strategy and leaders (treated as the same thing here) are often controversial within a party and, in this account, factional location drives the controversy. When party influence is exercised, it is exercised by those legislators capable of electing leaders—again the majority faction when it exists. When an unconflicted majority faction does not exist, which is expected to be typical in a multidimensional policy space, candidates for leadership posts must build coalitions from multiple factions with somewhat conflicting preferred strategies for the use of party influence. Leaders elected with such diverse coalitions are likely to be handicapped by the conflicting policy objectives represented in their supporting coalition.

The supply and demand theory of party influence yields two testable propositions about the House majority party:

*Proposition 1—Supply: Homogeneity and centralization. Ceteris paribus, Centralization increases with the homogeneity of the party.*

*Proposition 2—Demand: Party strength and centralization. Ceteris paribus, the demand for party influence decreases with the strength of the party.*

The factional theory of party influence yields three testable propositions about the House majority party:

*Proposition 3— Dimensionality and centralization. Ceteris paribus, the closer the policy space approximates a unidimensional space, the more centralized the policy making process.*

*Proposition 4—Support for centralization. The supporters of centralization are from an unconflicted party majority faction when it exists and opponents are the party moderates and outsiders.*

*Proposition 5—The timing of centralization. Ceteris paribus, the probability of a centralized distribution of power increases as an unconflicted party majority faction gains strength.*

### Party Goals

These propositions extend, and perhaps challenge, CPG in a fundamental way. First, by treating demand and party size explicitly, these propositions add a dynamic largely absent from the supply-side account of CPG. Second, by adding dimensionality explicitly, these propositions provide that even the supply-side dynamic of CPG is due to the ebb and flow of political divisions that cut across the long-standing left-right spectrum. There is some discussion of this in CPG accounts, but it is a minor theme at best. We have taken a few steps toward a more complete theory.

Even if these propositions represent an important extension to the demand-side and account for the dimensionality of the policy space, they follow from an implicit theory that focuses exclusively on the policy interests of party members. Nothing has been said about the non-policy interests of the members or the

collective party interests that party leaders are expected to pursue. They qualify the expectations from the policy-based supply and demand for strong leadership.

We could, as others have, base a theory on the electoral interests of legislators and their legislative parties. Cox and McCubbins (199\*) argue that partisans' common interest in a good party record motivates them to create a party organization with leadership that is charged with maintaining and enhancing that party record. Others observe (Smith 2007) that gaining and maintaining majority party status is useful in legislators' policy and electoral pursuits and constitutes a self-conscious goal of legislative parties and their leaders. If these arguments capture motivations central to the strategies of rank-and-file legislators and their leaders, then they should be incorporated in our thinking about the organizational dynamics of congressional parties.

There is one vital implication of previous writing on party goals (Bawn 1998, Sinclair 1983, Smith 2007): The value of majority status may motivate legislators to sacrifice some of their policy objectives to enhance the reelection prospects of some of their fellow partisans. If so, a majority faction within the majority party and the leaders they elect may be more willing to compromise with party moderates and outsiders than would be suggested by their policy interests alone. That is, even in a policy space that appears unidimensional, the electoral interests of the party may temper the policy-related strategies of the majority faction. Party leaders, who are elected by a party majority and charged with pursuing the party's collective interests, would not maximize on the policy dimension if it substantially

undermined the party's prospects to retain seats in districts represented by moderates or outsiders and reduced the odds of maintaining majority status.

This suggests the presence of an electoral dimension to leadership strategy that majority factions members expect to have taken into account. In fact, others have observed that the electoral/policy tradeoff is a central function of party leadership (Bawn 1998, Smith 2007). Left to themselves, the members of a party are not likely to make decisions about the tradeoffs wisely or efficiently. Decisions about tradeoffs, therefore, can be viewed as public goods that legislative parties create leadership to address. In the context of the argument about CPG, this observation about tradeoffs means that there may be times when electoral considerations keep leaders from yielding to a majority faction that seeks to maximize its utility measured in policy outcomes alone. A leadership viewed as more tempered, one that reduces the alienation of moderate and outlying districts and their legislators and does not fully exploit opportunities to wield influence, may be desirable even when the majority faction exists.

Moreover, because majority status involves a clear threshold, leaders of a smaller majority party are likely to value retaining seats more highly than leaders of a large majority party. Small majority parties confront more difficult tradeoffs because party size influences both demand (Proposition 2) and the relevance of collective electoral considerations. Increasing party size reduces both demand for party influence from the majority faction and the negative electoral consequences for exercising party influence. Conversely, decreasing party size increases the demand for the party influence from the majority faction but also increases the costs



for exercising it. In the middle range of majority party size, we can expect electoral considerations to have some weight in leaders' calculations.

The empirical proposition is:

*Proposition 6—Conditionality of party size. Ceteris paribus, the size of the majority party is inversely related to the weight of the electoral considerations in leaders' strategic choices about the use of party influence.*

### Preliminary Evidence and the Need for New Theory

Aldrich and Rohde have offered several narrative accounts of the distribution of power in the House in the 1990s and 2000s intended to serve as evidence for the CPG thesis (Aldrich and Rohde 2009). Polarized parties and centralized policy making went hand-in-hand during the period. Missing has been an effort to test the CPG argument outside of the context of the late 20th century in which it was developed. The more recent elaboration (Rohde, Stiglitz, and Weingast 2008) offers a narrative of institutional developments since World War II that is intended to confirm the argument. The key elements of the narrative are:

- 1961. "Greater preference homogeneity in the majority and strong desires to change policy provided sufficient incentives to change the organizational structure and redistribute agenda power" in the 1961 expansion of the Committee on Rules to allow the appointment of more liberal Democrats (Rohde, Stiglitz, and Weingast 2008, 23). That is, the greater centralization

emerged under conditions of greater homogeneity and a desire to move policy away from the policy status quo.

- *1970-1975.* “The northern faction of the Democratic Party was increasingly numerically dominant and increasingly homogeneous in preferences...[A] series of important domestic events compelled legislative action in the late 1960s and early 1970s,” creating incentives to centralize agenda power (Rohde, Stiglitz, and Weingast 2008, 23-24). This was done by limiting the power of full committee chairs and giving the Speaker the power to appoint the Democratic members of the Committee on Rules.<sup>2</sup>
- *1995.* Republicans won a new House majority with very homogeneous preferences and uncertainty about its ability to hold majority status, inducing centralization (Rohde, Stiglitz, and Weingast 2008, 27).

The 1961 and early 1970s reforms are similar in at least one obvious respect—they were responses to surges in the election of liberal Democrats who argued that it was past time that their legislation made it to the floor and passed. In 1961, liberals argued that Speaker Sam Rayburn had failed to produce on his promise two years earlier, following the big Democratic election year of 1958, to open the flow of liberal legislation through the Committee on Rules. President John F. Kennedy recognized the importance of Rules, too, and pushed for expansion of the committee to allow the appointment of liberals.

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<sup>2</sup> The introduction of the size of the northern faction in these arguments introduces a factor that is, strictly speaking, not a part of the RSW account; it suggests theorizing about factions, but it is not a part of the core conditional party government or RSW propositions.

In the early 1970s, reforms followed the election of new liberals in 1968, 1970 (modest numbers), and 1974 (large numbers), who provided the votes in the Democratic caucus for successive waves of reform. The last push, in late 1974, followed the election of 75 new Democrats, the “Watergate Babies,” who imposed sweeping new rules that undermined the power of committee chairs, and deposed four conservative committee chairs, and enhanced the power of the Speaker.

It is a critical test of the CPG argument that these developments are associated with a homogeneous majority party (or a greater distance between the parties). I offer three roll-call measures of within-party homogeneity. The first is standard deviation of the first dimension of common space scores. Common space scores allow comparison across Congresses and are based on all roll-call votes. The second is the frequency of conservative coalition appearances, which is the frequency with which a majority of southern Democrats and a majority of Republicans voted against a majority of northern Democrats. This yields some sense of the seriousness of the divisions with the Democratic caucus. The third is mean party unity score for each party—the mean relative frequency of voting with the party majority when the majority of Democrats voted against a majority of Republicans.

Figures 4-6 report the time series for the three measures for Democrats in the Congresses since the 1930s. In each case, the vertical reference lines mark the 87th Congress, when the Committee on Rules was expanded to accommodate more liberals, and the 94th Congresses, which ended the reform wave of the early 1970s. The standard deviation of common space scores for the primary dimension shows

no trend during the period covering these reform episodes. The conservative coalition reached a peak of activity and moderate success by 1970. Mean levels of support for the party position on party unity votes show no trend up to and through the 87th Congress but decline and reach a nadir in the early 1970s.

Plainly, there is little evidence that the reforms of 1961 and the early 1970s are associated with significant changes in the distribution of policy positions within the Democratic caucus. Kernel density plots of common space scores confirm this. Figure 7 provides a reference line at zero (roughly, the location of the median) so that the size of the conservative contingent (the Outsider faction) is easily observed on the right. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and first half the 1970s, the Democratic caucus included a sizable number of conservatives, largely from the South, who kept the party quite heterogeneous. If anything, the reforms of the early 1970s occurred at a low point in party homogeneity. In fact, as I have noted, Cooper and Brady and Sinclair observed around 1980 that Speaker O'Neill suffered from an incohesive party and a decentralized House.<sup>3</sup> Not until the 1980s, long after the reform period, did the conservative wing of the House Democratic caucus become quite small and the distribution of power more centralized.

The story is not strongly supportive CPG. The correlation between party homogeneity and centralization is not as predicted for events of the early 1960s and

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<sup>3</sup> In the short-term, scholars found the decentralizing moves of the early 1970s to be far more important than the centralizing moves (Murphy 1974, Dodd 1977, Dodd and Oppenheimer 1977, Brady, Cooper, and Hurley 1979, and Mann and Ornstein 1981). Hyper-decentralization was the concern (Oppenheimer 1977). Several years passed before some of the tools created in the early 1970s were used aggressively by the Democratic Speaker for liberal causes. It is not obvious why only the centralizing moves of the early 1970s are emphasized in the RSW version. Indeed, in the short term, scholars

early 1970s, although the situation is different for the 1990s when Republicans took over as the House majority party in the 104th Congress following the 1994 elections. Figure 5, which shows the standard deviation of the first dimension of common space scores, is sufficient to make the point. Republican standard deviations are generally smaller than for Democrats since the 1930s but dipped below their already modest levels in the early 1990s and continued for the following Congresses.

These mixed results for the CPG thesis do not rule out of party polarization, and majority party cohesiveness as forces shaping party influence in the House, but they do suggest, along with the theoretical considerations detailed above, that the story is more complicated than the central CPG thesis indicates. The evidence for a broader, more complex theoretical account—reflected in Propositions 2-6—is explored below.

### A Renewed Look at Party Factionalism

The propositions require that we characterize the centralization of the policy-making process in the House, the dependent variable. Table 1 lists several ways to characterize periods of the House, from left to right in increasingly finer-grain classification schemes. The era for Speaker Thomas Reed through Clarence Cannon was an era of centralized policy making (Cooper and Brady 1981, \*\*\*), followed by far weaker speakers, and, finally, an era of strong committee chairmen (Davidson and Oleszek 1977). Moves by the Democrats in the early 1970s strengthened the speakership, but Speakers Albert and O'Neill only gradually

increased their exploitation of their new tools. Speaker Wright (1987-1989) was more assertive, but Speaker Gingrich was easily the most aggressive speaker since Cannon. Policy making has been quite centralized in party organs since then.

We begin with the strength of the liberal-conservative dimension in structuring the observed House voting behavior and, when that dimension is strong, size of the majority faction (Propositions 3-5). Figure 7 shows the Congress-by-Congress differences in DW-NOMINATE APREs between a two-dimensional model and a one-dimensional model of House voting and the relationship of this difference to the centralization classification. The larger this difference, the relatively stronger is the second dimension. Vertical lines demark major eras of centralized and decentralized decision making. During most of the first two-thirds of the mid-20th century—from the 1910s after the demise of the Cannon speakership to the O’Neill speakership—a strong (orthogonal) second dimension was visible in House voting and was associated with decentralized policy making. On either side of that period were decades in which a single dimension structured voting in most Congresses and policy making was more centralized. The more strongly one-dimensional Congresses, in which there must exist an unconflicted majority faction of the majority party, are those in which the majority party will move to or retain strong party leadership. Thus, the pattern is consistent with predicted relationship between dimensionality and centralization (Proposition 3).

The long 20th century period of decentralized policy making is associated with cross-cutting divisions within the majority parties. By the middle of first decade of the 20th century, candidates of the Progressive movement were elected to

Congress and created divisions among Republicans that produced the revolt against Speaker Cannon in 1909-1910 and lasted into the 1930s (Sinclair 1978, Reichley ). In reaction to the power of Eastern capital, populists and farm state legislators from the West and South played a role in both parties during the 1890s and afterward, but were more supportive of the Democrats. In the 1920s, the Farm Bloc, comprised of legislators of both parties, overcame the Republican majority party leadership to pass legislation providing economic relief to farmers (Hanson ). By the mid-1920s, Progressives and Farm Bloc legislators had melded in the “radical bloc,” usually known as the Insurgents, in contrast to the Stalwarts from the industrial states. Following the crash of 1932, Insurgents lost many of their seats in the Democratic tide—and some supported the election of Franklin Roosevelt to the presidency in the 1932. After World War II, moderate and liberal Republicans occasionally won seats in the Northeast and Midwest, creating some diversity of views among House Republicans.

With the exception of the Wilson administration (1913-1920), Republicans were the dominant party from the late 1890s until 1930, following the crash of 1929. During the Wilson administration, the majority party Democrats were generally supportive of Progressive legislation. After a few years of being a unified party in favor of New Deal programs, Democrats experienced a division over domestic and eventually civil rights issues, one that soon produced the “conservative coalition” between Republicans and southern Democrats. Many Republicans did not share the southerners views on race and civil rights once those issue again rose to prominence in the late 1940s, but on other issues the

conservative coalition often controlled a majority on the House floor, creating cross-cutting divisions on civil rights issues and other domestic issues.

To demonstrate this for a Congress typical of the mid-20th century, Figure 9 shows the distribution of majority party Democrats on the first two dimensions of DW-NOMINATE scores for the 85th Congress (1955-1956). Two factions were present in the 1950s. One faction, made up of many southerners (lower right), was anti-civil rights and moderate-to-outliers (in the conservative direction) on the liberal-conservative dimension. The other faction (upper left) was moderate-to-pro civil rights and liberal. But neither group was a party majority on either, let alone both, dimensions. Perhaps counter-intuitively, party majority group on the civil rights dimension was anti-civil rights and the party majority group on the liberal-conservative dimension was liberal. The intersecting set—those in the party majority group on both dimensions—that is, to the party median's side of the midpoint on both dimensions—was just 35 percent of the membership. A case can be made the Speaker Sam Rayburn's position reflected that intersection that seems odd by today's standards.

#### Additional Observations on the RSW Propositions

Unfortunately, the intuitively appealing RSW propositions about new majorities and presidents and the importance of status quo locations capture little of the variance in status quo locations we observe. The new Republican majorities of 1947 and 1953 did not seek or develop new agenda powers. The new majority party presidents of 1953, 1965, 1977, 1993, and 2001 arrived without new



enhancements of majority party agenda power. 1961 seems to fit the predicted pattern, but even then a majority party faction attempted to accomplish the same reform two years before a president of their party was elected.

Why do such sensible propositions of the RSW elaboration fair so poorly? Much of the explanation lies in the third force in the RSW elaboration—new issues. New issues arise with such frequency that the need to pass legislation is commonplace. A new issue may represent a new dimension, dividing legislators in new ways with unknown implications for who would support or oppose new legislation. A new issue also may be perceived as relevant to long-standing divisions but nevertheless requires new legislation. Moreover, many legislative episodes include a mix of old and new issues and exhibit multidimensional divisions among legislators (Jones 1961, Hurwitz, Moiles, and Rohde 2001, Smith 2007, Roberts, Smith, and Haptonstahl 2008). Consequently, in most Congresses, both NAP and PAP are useful.

In practice, a large part of the congressional agenda involves legislation that is considered on a recurring basis. Appropriations and periodic authorization bills, created because of inter-branch and inter-committee politics, often force the majority party to pass legislation even to maintain the policy status quo. PAP is essential to party influence when the reversion point is less acceptable than the policy status quo.

Part of the explanation lies in the focus on heterogeneity and lack of emphasis on party factions. For the Democrats of the period between the 1930s and early 1970s, liberals, even after they became a majority faction, complained bitterly

about the blocking power of conservative committee chairs and Speakers willing to back them up. Liberal Democrats' place in a long-term majority party ultimately did not assuage their frustration with the way agenda power was used. To be sure, some of them sympathized with their leaders' efforts to keep peace in the family, but ultimately one of the longest majority parties altered agenda power to accomplish a redistribution of power among party factions. The length of majority party status is probably not the key factor; not a partisans view the status quo from the same vantage point. Long-term control *by the same party faction* probably is more to the point.

### Conclusion

Faction politics appears to be a more useful foundation for theorizing about the distribution of power in the House than the degree of heterogeneity in the majority party. The CPG thesis is too vague and probably is wrong or far from complete. The lack of a fully defined policy or spatial theory plagues efforts, such as the RSW elaboration, to extend the argument to address important features of congressional policy making.

Perhaps my suggestion—that we focus more carefully on intra-party factional politics—will be viewed as a merely elaboration of the conditional party government thesis. I think it is more than that. Most descriptions of the conditional party government account refer to a general distrust of centralized power among majority party members when they hold diverse policy preferences. While it is reasonable to argue that party leaders may not want to alienate their colleagues and

electorates, it is not obvious why *policy*-oriented legislators—and that is what the RSW elaboration proposes—of a party majority faction would fail to structure agenda power in their own interest. In fact, a better account of the change in agenda power over the last half of the 20th century is that control over agenda power changed between factions of the majority party as their relative numbers changed and then was inherited and enhanced by a new majority party with a fully dominant party majority faction.

The clear focus on dimensionality introduces a theoretical twist that is not given adequate treatments in expositions of the CPG argument or the RSW elaboration. We should observe that a multidimensional space implies greater heterogeneity for one or both parties than a unidimensional space. Thus, we might defend CPG by saying that the basic proposition that heterogeneous parties are associated with decentralized decision making is equivalent to the FST argument that (in multidimensional space) the absence of an unconflicted majority faction is associated with decentralized decision making. The crucial difference is that FST has legislators' strategies more fully elaborated and explicitly recognizes winning, losing, and conflicted factions.

Figure 1. The Effect of an Increase in Cohesiveness and Size on the Demand and Supply of Majority Party Influence.

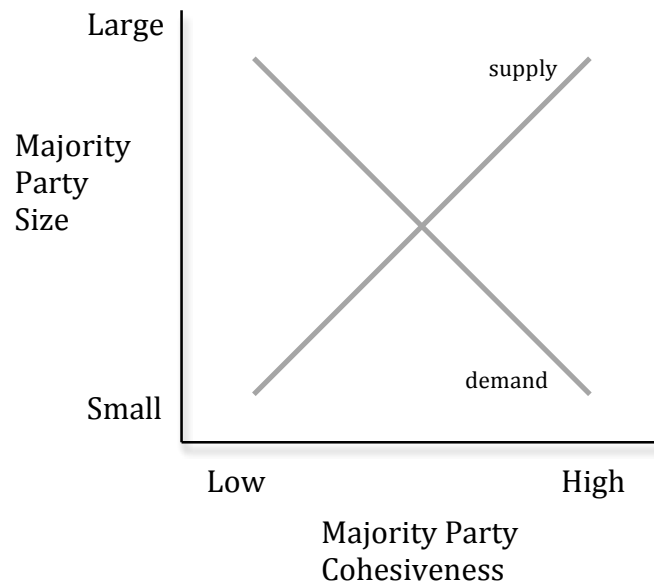


Figure 2. Intra-Party Factions and Alternative Locations for the Status Quo

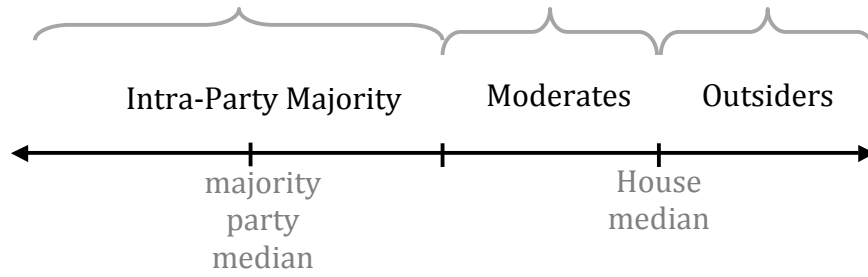


Figure 3. Party Factions in Multidimensional Space

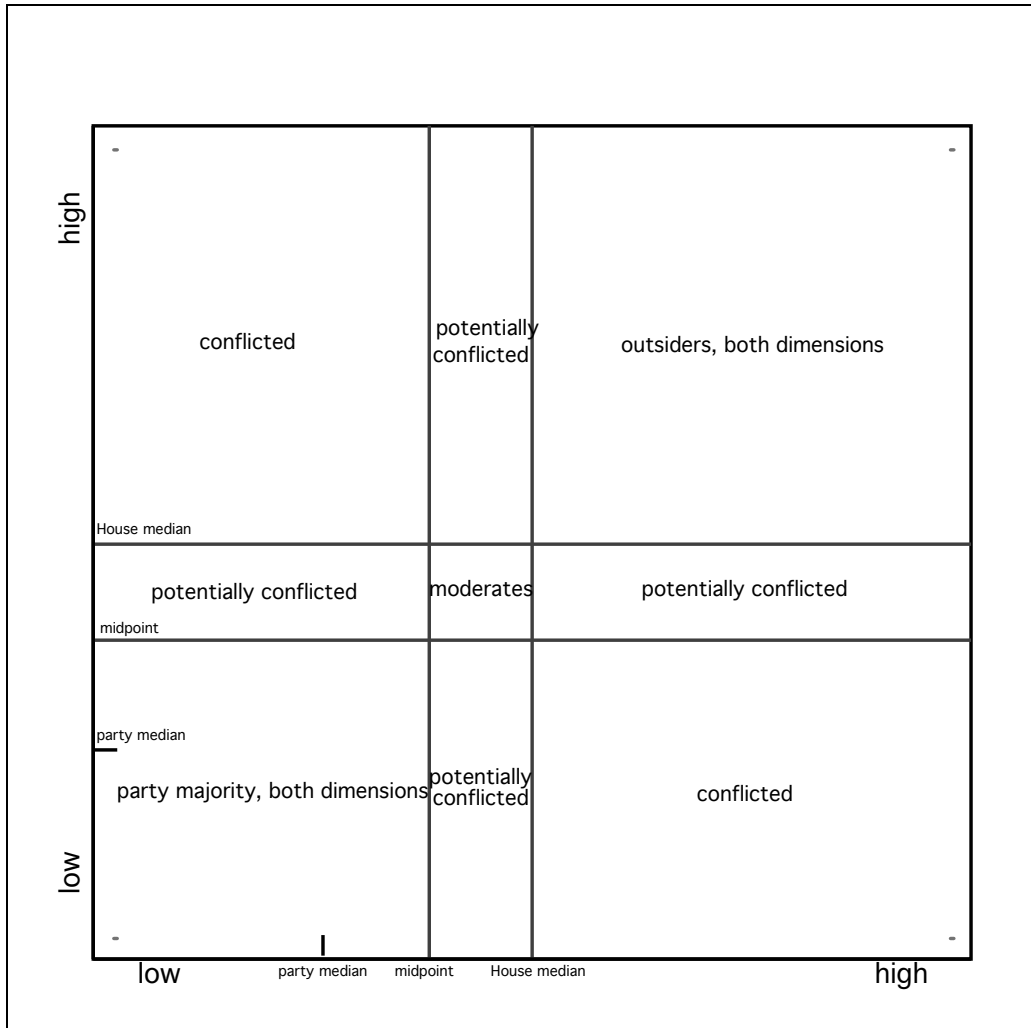


Figure 4. Democrats' Common Space Scores Standard Deviation

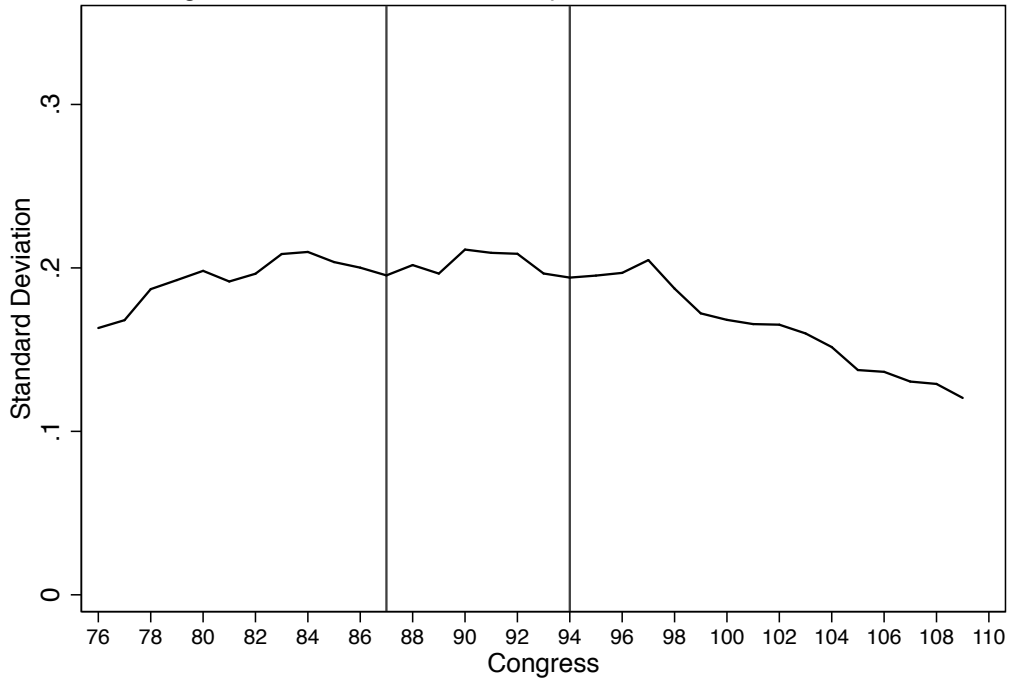


Figure 4. Conservative Coalition Appearances and Success Rate

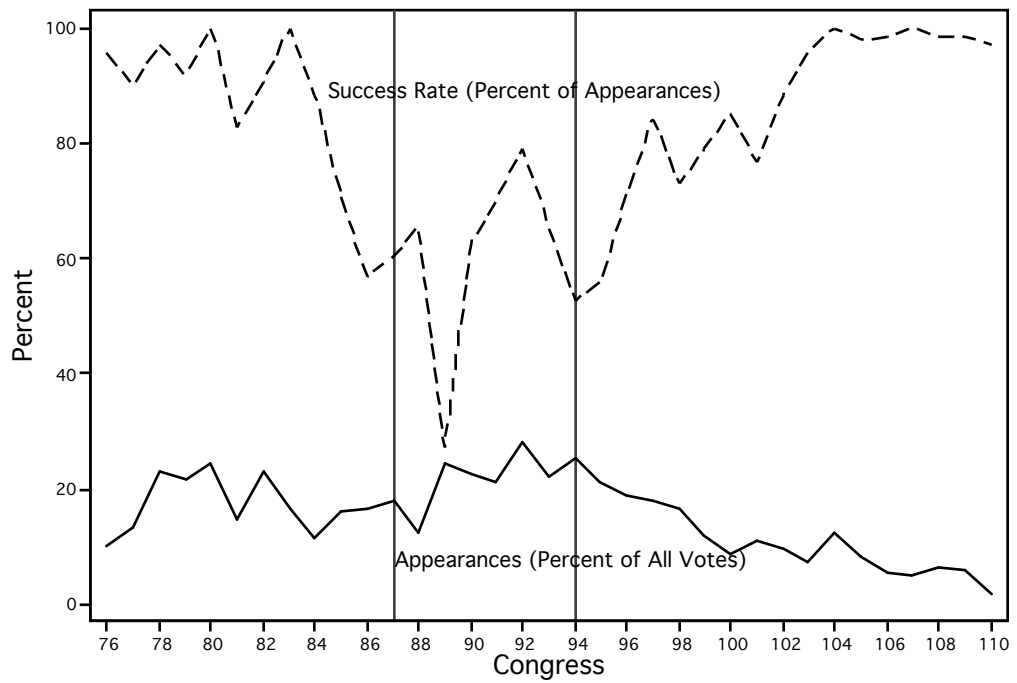


Figure 6. Mean Proportion of Democrats Voting with Party on Party Unity Votes

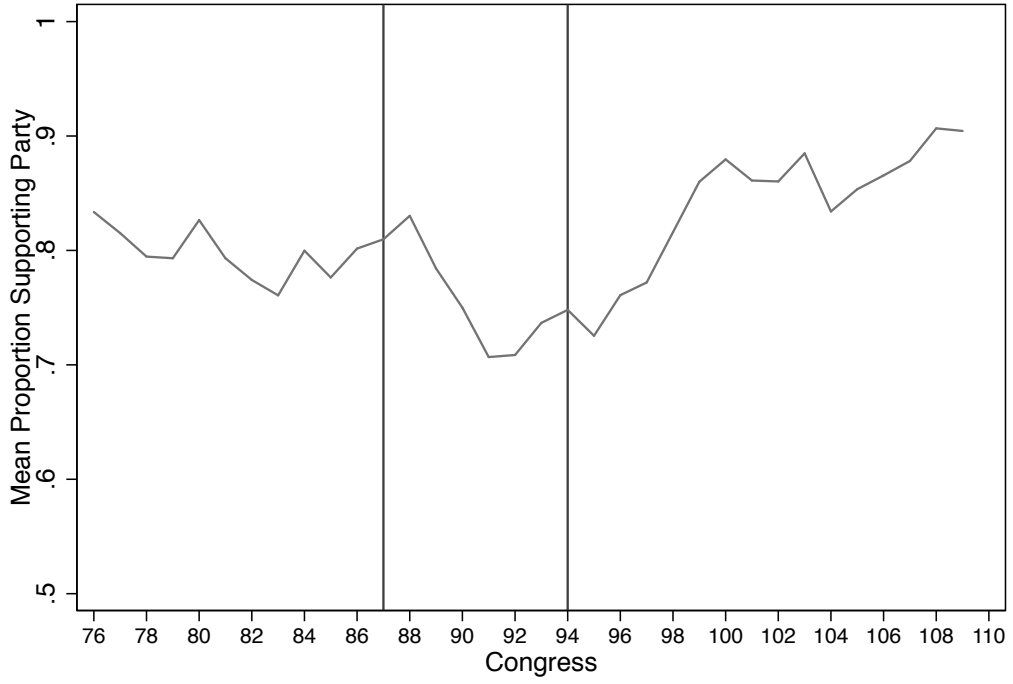




Figure 7. Difference in APREs for Two- and One-Dimensional DW-NOMINATE Models, 40th-110th Congresses.

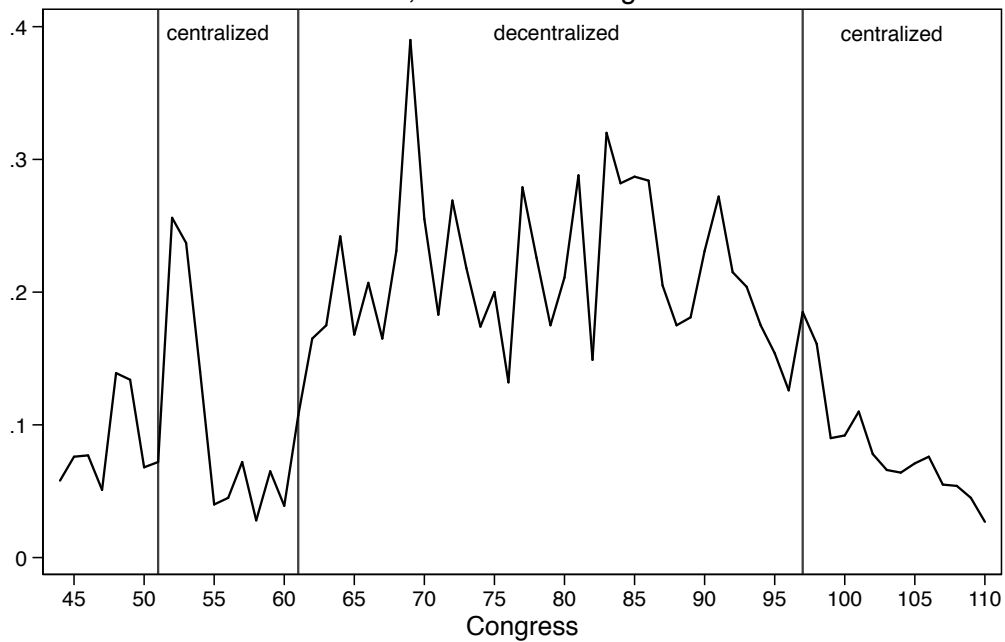


Figure 8. Distribution of Democrats' Common Space Scores, Kernel Density, 1937-2006

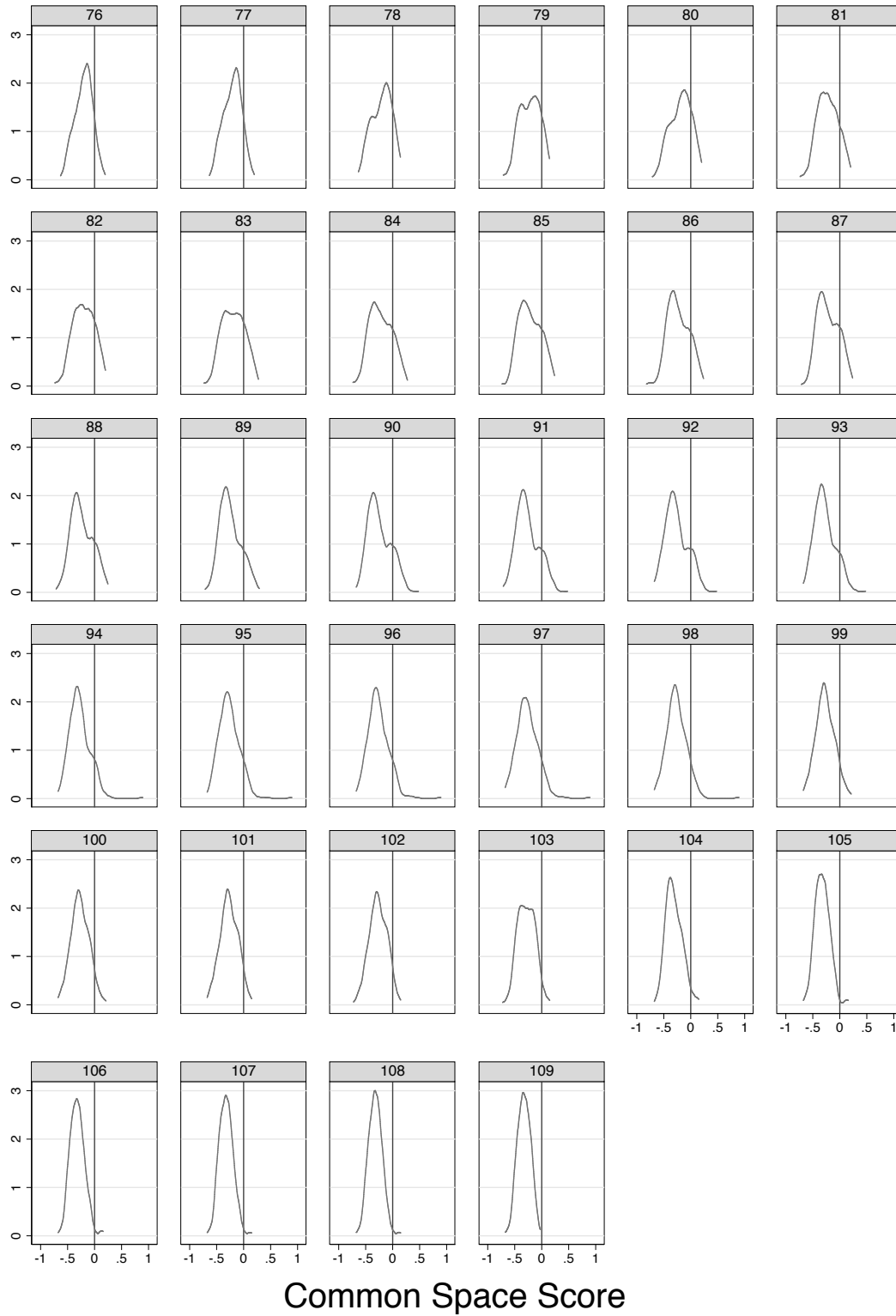
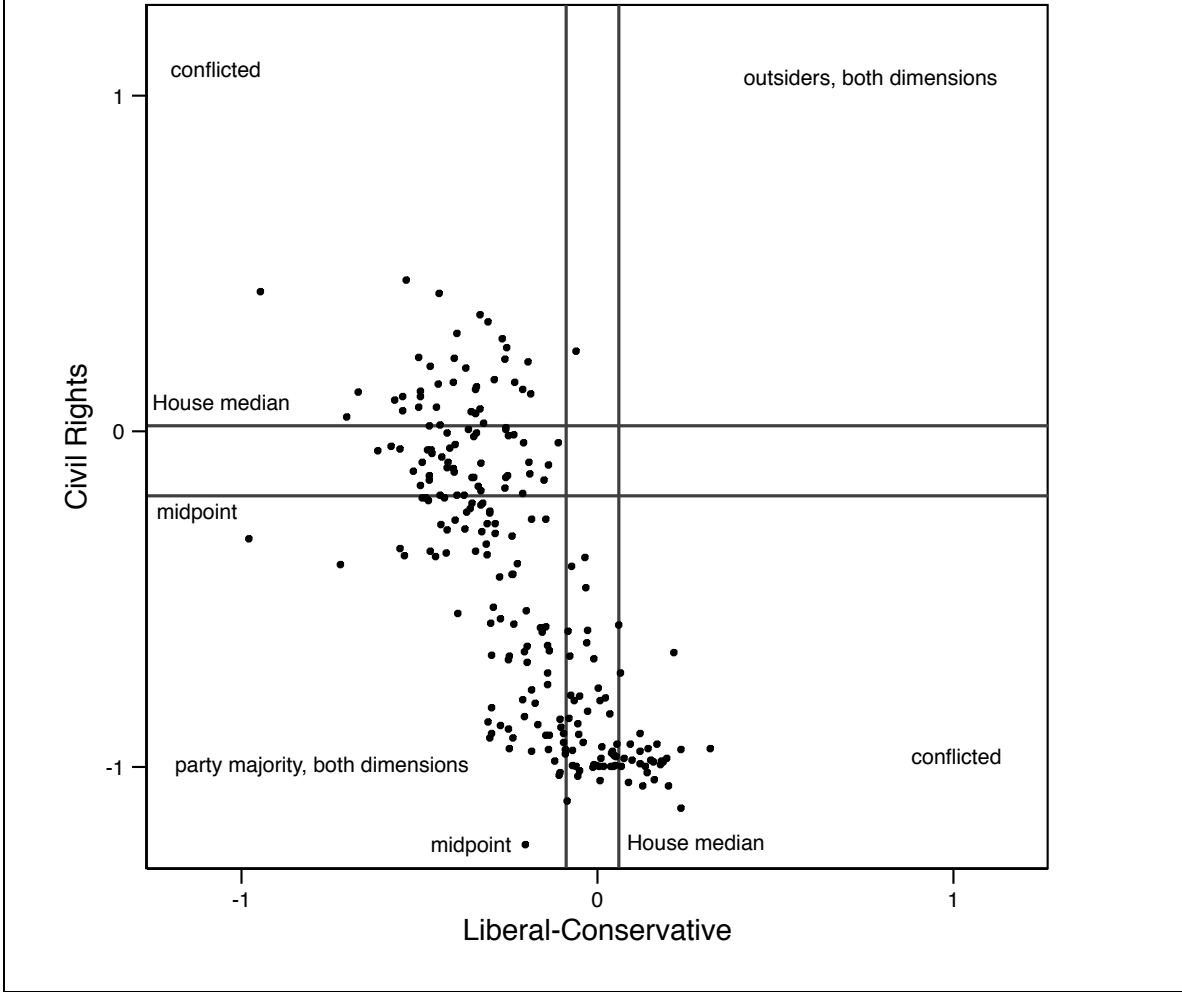


Figure 9. Democrats in the 84th Congress (1955-1956)



Appendix (Surplus Figures)

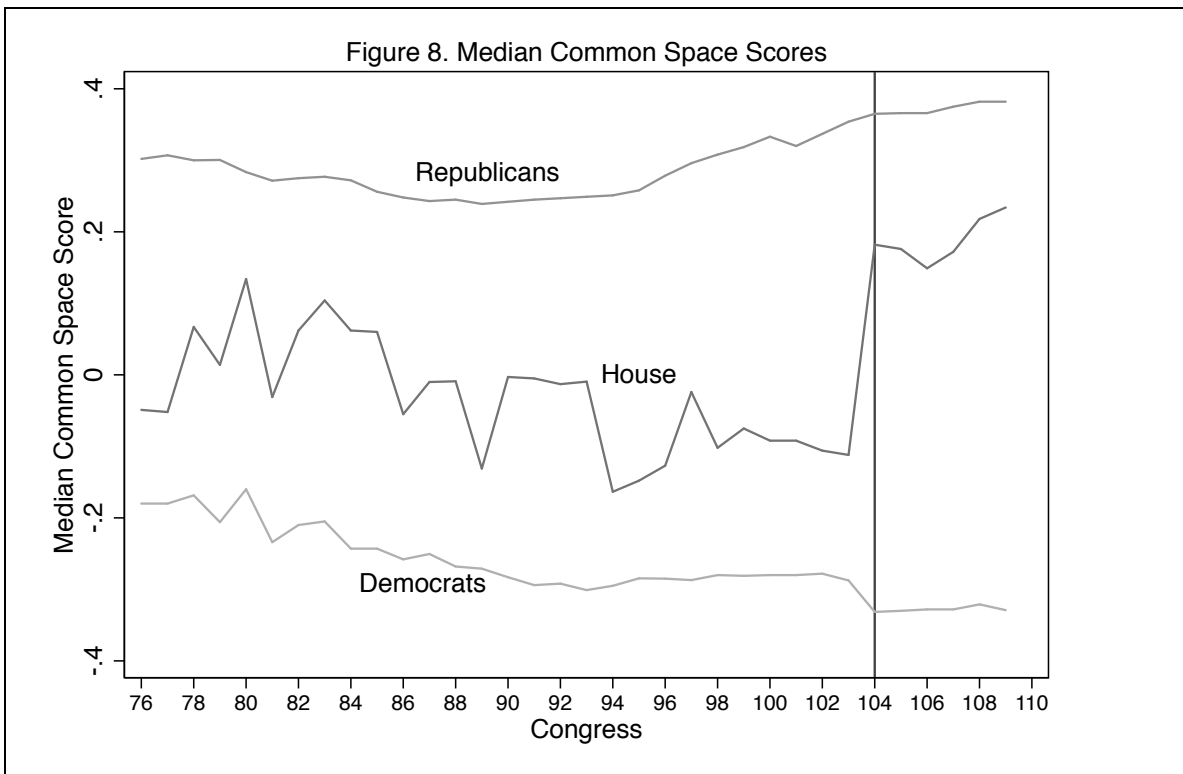
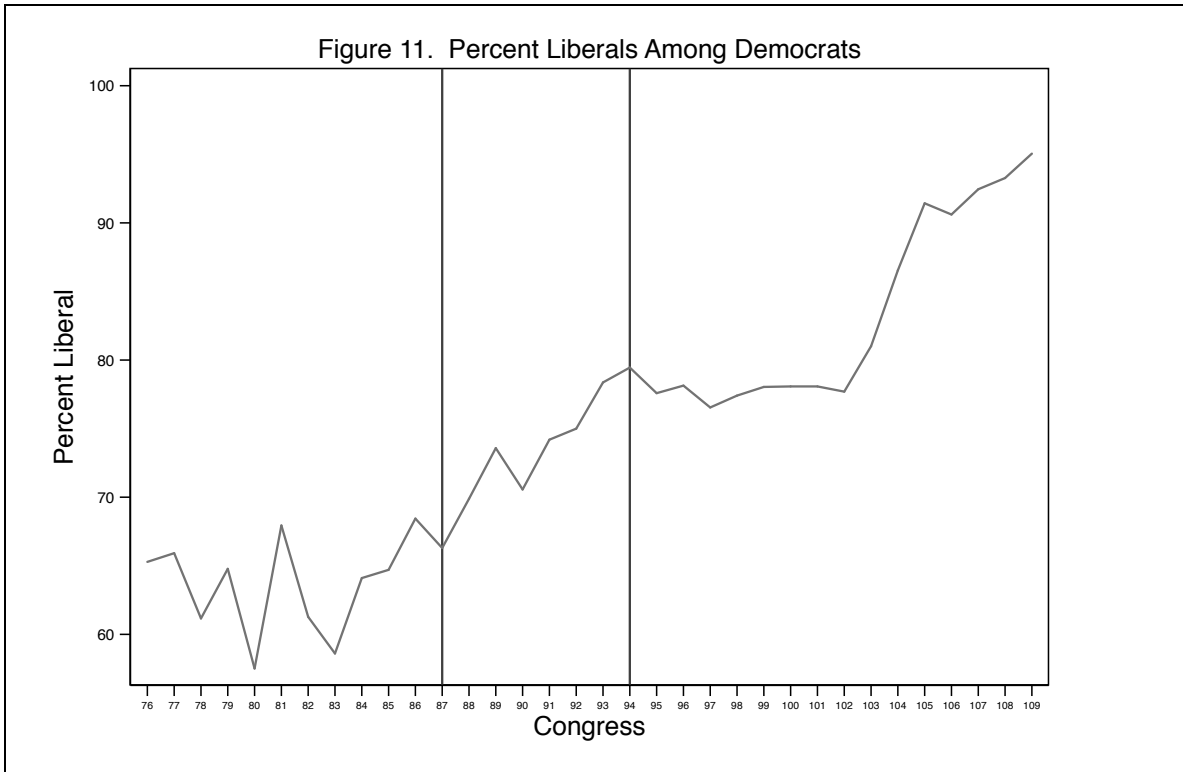


Figure 9. Size of Democratic Factions

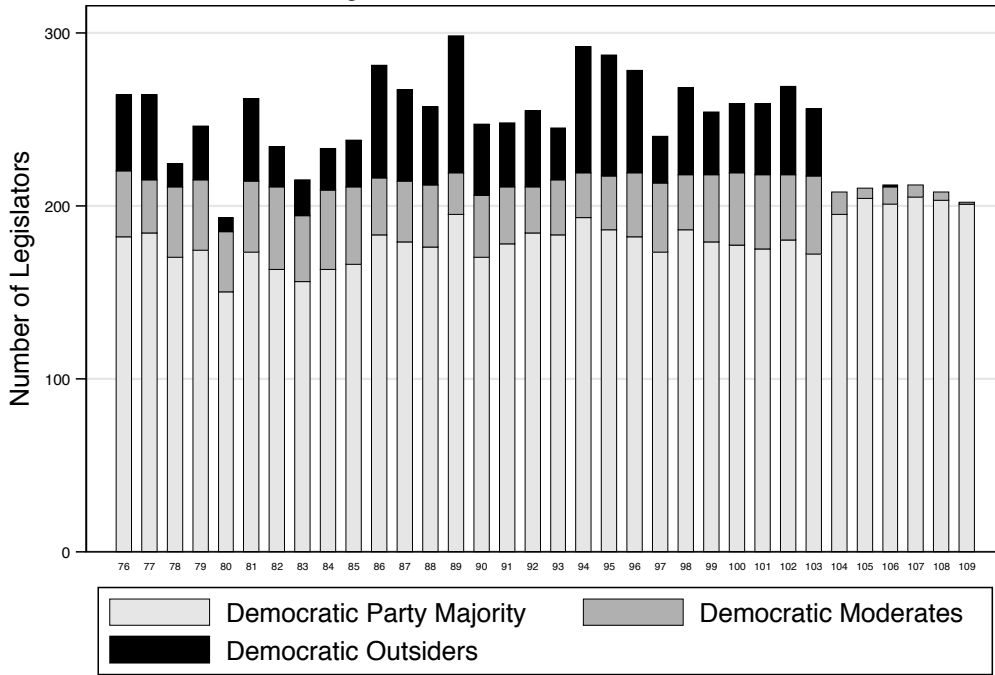


Figure 10. Size of Republican Factions

