Abstract

While political observers frequently attribute influence to ideological factions, political scientists have paid relatively little attention to the emergence of highly organized, extreme, sub-party institutions. In the first systematic analysis of the House Freedom Caucus, I argue that non-centrist factions embolden lawmakers to push back against their political party by offsetting leadership resources with faction support. As a result, extreme blocs in the House of Representatives can more effectively distort the party brand. To test these claims, I analyze the impact of Freedom Caucus affiliation on changes in legislative behavior and member-to-member donation patterns. I find that Republican lawmakers become (1) more obstructionist and (2) less reliant on party leadership donations after joining the conservative faction. These findings suggest that Freedom Caucus institutions empower lawmakers to more aggressively anchor the Republican Conference to conservative policy positions by offsetting the informational and financial deficits imposed by party leaders.
In 2015, the highly organized and deeply secretive House Freedom Caucus formed in the U.S. Congress. Journalists credited the faction with overthrowing the Speaker of the House, hand-packing his successor, and pushing the House Republican Conference to adopt an increasingly extreme and aggressive posture with the Obama administration — all within a year. Shortly after, Republicans won unified control of the federal government, and the Freedom Caucus quickly reasserted its role a major player in legislative affairs.

How have these firebrand conservatives so effectively influenced Republican party politics? According to political observers, they have improved their position “by acting as a bloc [...] and choosing their fights carefully.”\(^1\) But the apparently out-sized impact of the House Freedom Caucus raises significant questions for legislative scholars. The group lacks a concentration of prestigious committee assignments, significant party leadership positions, and as Figure 1 highlights, they make up a relatively small share of the Republican Conference.\(^2\) Moreover, the caucus covers an ideological space that is far from pivotal in the sense espoused by spatial theories of lawmaking, and these institutional disadvantages are compounded by overt efforts to force party discipline on the small group of conservatives. These facts raise a general question about power in the U.S. House of Representatives: how can extreme blocs of legislators pull their party towards non-centrist positions?

**Figure 1:** House Freedom Caucus Seat Share in the Present Congress

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\(^1\)“What is the House Freedom Caucus, and Who’s In It?” Drew Desilver, October 20, 2015, *Pew Research Center Fact Tank*

\(^2\)This figure was generated using Thomas Leeper’s ggparliament package.
I argue that extreme factions distort their party brand by more effectively entrenching non-centrist policies. More specifically, sophisticated faction institutions reduce the probability of defection under immense partisan pressure by hiring staff to coordinate legislative maneuvers and cultivating an independent donor base to blunt the financial costs of intra-party rebellion. In short, extreme factions, like the House Freedom Caucus, embolden lawmakers to push back against moderating impulses within their party and fight for a more ‘purist’ (i.e., non-centrist) Republican or Democratic brand.

This research makes contributions to several well-established literatures in political science. First, I apply prominent theoretical work on congressional parties to a sub-partisan level (Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Jenkins and Monroe, 2014). Organized factions have constructed intricate whip systems, membership hierarchies, and binding rules on voting behavior. Most pool resources through the collection of obligatory dues and set up extensively-staffed research operations. Factions recruit, endorse, and interview congressional candidates, fill the coffers of associated Super PACs, and regularly coordinate media events. Simply put, factions share many of the institutional features that draw scholars to the study of political parties, and their voluntary nature presents useful, individual-level variation within the House of Representatives.\(^3\)

Second, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship on ideological factions (DiSalvo, 2012; Dewan and Squintani, 2015; Koger, Masket, and Noel, 2009; Sin, 2014). Political scientists interested in this subject frequently focus on centrist organizations (Seo and Theriault, 2012). This attention is natural given prominent theories of lawmaking; the influence of moderate organizations follows from the pivotal significance of the median voter in legislative affairs. Consequently, the Blue Dog Coalition (Yoshinaka, 2015), the New Democrat Coalition (Medvic, 2007), and the Republican Main Street Partnership (Lucas and Deutchman, 2007) have all garnered scholarly attention in the last decade. By contrast, research on non-centrist factions is rare. In fact nearly all research on extreme factions focuses on a singular, notable, and presently inactive organization — the Tea Party Caucus (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel, 2012; Gervais and

\(^3\)This, of course, presents a challenge for identifying any causal effect of membership in the House Freedom Caucus. I employ a difference-in-difference design to address, in part, this concern.
Morris, 2012; Hendry and Sin, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2015; Ragusa and Gaspar, 2016) — and the social movement that motivated its foundation (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012).

Finally, I build on existing research on non-ideological congressional caucuses (Hammond, 2001). Scholarship on this subject has shown that caucuses play a valuable informational role (Ainsworth and Akins, 1997; Ringe, Victor, and Carman, 2013) in legislative politics. Moreover, legislators appear to use caucuses to better represent the specific and varied interests of constituencies within heterogeneous electoral districts (Miler, 2011). I build upon this research to consider the impact of a new and highly organized party caucus that places a premium on informational asymmetries in the House of Representatives.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I consider the incentives of a non-centrist faction by expanding on Jenkins and Monroe (2014)’s modified version of the “Cartel Agenda Model” (Cox and McCubbins, 2005). Second, I provide an overview of the origins, institutional features, and influence of the House Freedom Caucus. Despite an extraordinary amount of media attention, the Freedom Caucus has not yet been the subject of social science research. Two systematic analyses follow. In the first, I investigate the individual-level effect of joining the Freedom Caucus on legislative behavior. In the second, I evaluate the consequences of Freedom Caucus affiliation on member-to-member donation patterns. Both contribute to our understanding of intraparty bargaining and conservative politics in the United States Congress.

In sum, I find that Republican lawmakers become (1) more obstructionist and (2) less reliant on party leadership donations after joining the conservative faction. These findings suggest that Freedom Caucus institutions empower lawmakers to more aggressively anchor the Republican Conference to conservative policy positions by offsetting the informational and financial deficits imposed by party leaders.

**Understanding the Incentives of Extreme Factions**

American political parties are not monolithic blocs. They are large coalitions bound together both by genuine policy agreement and the strategic imperative of the U.S. electoral

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4See Ringe, Victor, and Gross (2013) for related work on social contacts in the European context.
system. When co-partisans disagree, however, they generally submit to their elected leadership. Figure 2 illustrates over a century of generally high levels of party unity in the House.\(^5\) Consistent legislative behavior is encouraged and, at times, enforced by party leaders, because legislators broadly agree that a “noisy” or “diluted” party brand will less effectively serve them at the polls (Grynaviski, 2006, 2010; Lupu, 2014).

**Figure 2: Party Unity Scores in the U.S. House**

(1901 – 2013)

Despite these patterns, many lawmakers will suffer from their party’s legislative agenda (Jenkins and Monroe, 2012). Legislators represent geographically and ideologically diverse districts, and, as Cox and McCubbins (2007) note, the party’s record unevenly benefits lawmakers. In other words, the party’s legislative record will “help some of that party’s incumbents, have no effect on some, and hurt still others” (Cox and McCubbins, 2007, p.111). The collective electoral benefit preserved by party leadership is essentially a summary statistic — a “central tendency” — in perceptions of a party’s political actions. Party leaders cultivate their party’s reputation, because voters often rely upon their perceptions of a generic Republican or Democratic candidate in their political evaluations Butler and Powell (2014). Lawmakers that wish to be identified in the tails

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\(^5\)These data are publicly available at http://www.voteview.com/Party_Unity.htm. Scores are calculated from votes in which a majority of Democrats oppose a majority of Republicans.
of the party’s ideological distribution will be less satisfied in the cartel arrangement.

I argue that non-centrist factions, like the Freedom Caucus, will engage in obstructionist behavior to distort the party brand. Factions are organized ideological blocs that represent a different type of partisan with distinct beliefs about which public policies would most successfully maintain and improve the party brand. Extreme blocs of legislators will create institutions that increase their capacity to block moderating elements of the House’s legislative agenda, in part, because they believe a “purist” brand would more effectively serve the national party. When party leaders contest that a more centrist position is appropriate, internal discord is likely to follow, and factions invite significant threats by airing their malcontent on the House floor. Organizations like the Freedom Caucus, I argue, are designed to offset the considerable tools of party discipline by filling in the extra-legislative party resources that may be withheld as retribution for their dissent. In this section, I provide two expectations that follow from prominent theories of party power, journalistic accounts, and elite interviews conducted in 2015.

**Extreme Factions Distort the Brand through Legislative Obstruction**

To understand faction influence, it is important to examine the nature of party-faction disagreements. Following the logic of party brands, I rely upon Cox and McCubbins (2005)’s Cartel Agenda Model to identify conditions of party infighting. The Cartel Agenda Model begins with a proposal to move a status quo along one-dimensional policy space under an open amendment rule. Legislators are assumed to sincerely vote their policy preferences, which are both single-peaked and symmetric. Given this legislative environment, the median voter theorem dictates that all proposals will beat the status quo and move policy to the floor median ($F$). The Cartel Agenda Model further assumes that the majority party median ($M$) wields gate-keeping power (i.e., the ability to prevent a final passage vote). Because the open amendment rule guarantees the success of proposals located at $F$, $M$ will prevent votes on proposals to revise status quos located between $F$ and $M$’s reflection point through $F$, denoted $(2M - F)$. This “Majority Party Blockout

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6For simplicity, I normalize the policy space and set $F$ to 0.
“Zone” represents the bedrock of partisan power in the House. The use of negative agenda control on status quo policies between $F$ and $(2M - F)$ allows the leader of the majority party cartel to distort legislative outcomes and prevent a loss in policy utility for a majority of her organization.

I build upon a theoretical extension offered by Jenkins and Monroe (2014) to incorporate the preferences of a Non-Centrist Faction leader ($N$). For simplicity, $N$ may be assumed to operate as a second veto actor by orchestrating the behavior of his faction, but in practice, the inclusion of $N$ is merely intended to illuminate the set of reversion points most likely to engender intraparty disagreement. As the median member of the faction, $N$ will work to prevent the revision of status quo policies between $F$ and the reflection point of $F$ through $N$, denoted $(2N - F)$. Figure 3 depicts a conservative party blockout zone subsumed within a conservative, non-centrist factions blockout zone (i.e., the set of reversion points $N$ finds preferable to the floor median’s position). The “Obstruction Region” indicates the space in which the party leader wishes to moderate policy and the faction wishes to prevent a floor vote from occurring.

**Figure 3: Applying the Cartel Agenda Model to a Non-Centrist Faction**

Note that the faction and party leader are expected to agree on much. Both $M$ and $N$ will cooperate to preserve status quos located between $F$ and $(2M - F)$, and both will coordinate to move any policy to the left of $F$ in a conservative direction. As a staunchly

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7Jenkins and Monroe (2014) consider the Conservative Coalition – a centrist, interparty bloc.

8One may assume that factions capitalize on concentrated committee assignments (Jenkins and Monroe, 2014). For example, the House Freedom Caucus appears to be particularly concentrated in the Oversight Committee, allowing them to overrule their chairman on at least one occasion. Alternatively, one may assume that an internally binding faction rule effectively shifts non-centrist faction members’ ideal points to $N$. As I will discuss later, there are likely to be members incurring a net policy loss within the faction. This, following Jenkins and Monroe (2012), suggests that extra-legislative resources must be provided to moderate members of a non-centrist faction.

9Empirically, the House Freedom Caucus is led by individuals very close to their median member. Using first-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores, Justin Amash (R-MI) — a founding board member — is the exact median. Former chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH) and current chairman Mark Meadows (R-NC) are well within one standard deviation away from Amash.
conservative faction, $N$ will agree to preserve any status quos located within the Majority Party Blockout Zone.

By contrast, the party and non-centrist faction leader will disagree on how to handle extreme, conservative status quos. While $M$ will want to release policies to the right of $(2M - F)$ for an open vote, $N$ will reject attempts to moderate policy between $(2M - F)$ and $(2N - F)$. In short, members of the faction will work to entrench the most conservative status quos (or proposals with extreme reversion points).

The above model highlights the desire to obstruct moderating proposals originating on the conservative end of the policy space. According to the Cartel Agenda Model, however, the non-centrist faction will remain powerless to block the positive agenda power of the party. Faction members to the left of $2M - F$ will vote sincerely, rather than adopting the position that benefits the collective goal of the sub-party organization. Faction members are thus faced with competing pressures. On the one hand, party leaders will attempt to advance policy reform that they sincerely prefer to the more extreme reversion point or status quo. On the other hand, the faction represents the group of lawmakers they most frequently agree with, and by joining the organization, faction members will have invested in a new, collective effort to pull the party brand to the right.

In a departure from the constraints of cartel theory, I argue that faction *institutions* improve the bloc’s capacity to mobilize opposition to proposals in the Obstruction Region. In the basic Cartel Agenda Model, faction members between $M$ and $N$ will unevenly support the bloc’s efforts to entrench extreme status quo policies. When $M$ wishes to release the most extreme policies in the Obstruction Region (i.e., those closest to $2N - F$), many faction members will sincerely agree. The employment of faction staff, however, allows an organized bloc — through whip counts, policy research, and parliamentary planning sessions — to more adeptly unify their opposition. Faction institutions reduce lawmakers’ dependence on party leaders for critical information in an attempt to counteract an important tool of party discipline (Curry, 2015). Binding rules and whip systems further maximize the faction’s natural strength in Congress by effectively pulling faction members closer to the positions of their faction leader ($N$). In short, unifying the bloc around
$N$ makes it more difficult to moderate extreme policies located near $2N - F$. This leads to my first hypothesis:

**Legislative Obstruction Hypothesis:** *Lawmakers will be more likely to vote against moderating proposals supported by a majority of co-partisans after joining an extreme faction.*

This hypothesis is consistent with the rhetoric employed by non-centrist factions. For example, the short-lived Populist Caucus sought “to construct a voting bloc of members within the Democratic Caucus and block proposals” that stripped worker rights or environmental protection measures.\(^{10}\) But interviews with the Populist Caucus also reveal that delays in establishing a political action committee crippled the faction’s efforts to mobilize the less committed members of their group. Lawmakers know that obstructing their party’s legislative agenda invites retribution, and when party leaders revoke their campaign contributions, factions must be prepared to offset these costs with an independent resource network.

**Dealing with the Consequences of Obstruction**

Party leaders are not passive observers to obstructionist coalitions within their organization. On the contrary, they are uniquely positioned to reward – or punish – rank-and-file co-partisans commensurate with their support for the party’s legislative agenda. Over the last half-century, political resources have been increasingly concentrated in the hands of party leaders (Ban, Moskowitz, and Snyder Jr., 2016), and these resources are strategically employed to maximize the party’s legislative and electoral success. Party leaders can also *indirectly* aid co-partisans. They can urge grassroots organizations to lend much needed support, hold major fund-raising events, and build meaningful political connections for legislators in need of assistance. Donations can also act as a force multiplier by signaling top-priority recipients to more secure co-partisans eager to curry favor with party leaders (Bernhard and Sulkin, 2011). Party leaders also control committee assignments, which invite generous campaign contributions from relevant industries seeking immediate access.

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\(^{10}\)Interview with Congressional Staffer, May 22, 2015.
(Powell and Grimmer, 2016). In short, prospective faction members must consider the costs of joining an obstructionist organization, and the threat of losing critical, party directed resources may outweigh the benefits of more aggressively preserving conservative policies.\footnote{This may be even more pronounced in the case of the Freedom Caucus, as Republicans are particularly inclined to reward those that for hew close to the party line (Kanthak, 2007).}

Organized factions attempt to off-set these costs by cultivating an independent network of political resources. A growing body of research suggests that factions make the politics of resource capture a central political objective. Cox and Rosenbluth (1993) find that the political fortunes of Japanese factions are deeply tied to each bloc’s relative fund-raising capacity. Hendry and Sin (2014) provide evidence that legislators strategically joined the Tea Party Caucus in search of an alternative campaign finance network, and recent work suggests that admission into a highly organized, conservative faction can lead to a more conservative donor base — even after accounting for pre-membership donation patterns (Clarke, 2017b).

Large shifts in the American political landscape have reinforced the benefits of resource independence. In 1995, the new Republican House leadership stripped sub-party organizations of all official institutional resources, forcing long-established organizations to scramble for outside political support or abruptly disband (Clarke, 2017a). Since 2002, courts have also reduced or removed limitations on political donations, allowing for a greater influx of money in congressional politics. At the same time, coordinated networks of well-funded, political organizations have emerged to influence the direction of public policy (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez, 2016). Factions consequently experience a heightened demand for political resources — to offset instruments of party discipline and compensate for the loss of official financial support in the House — \textit{and} greater opportunities to build an alternative network of supporters.

I argue that factions intent on opposing their co-partisans must counteract the carrots and sticks of informal party power if they are to be successful. When party leaders withhold financial support as retribution for obstructionist behavior, faction leaders can quickly deploy an independently cultivated resource base. Consequently, factions capi-
talize on overt methods of party punishment to remove the “golden handcuffs” of party resources and further unify their bloc. This produces my second hypothesis.

**Resource Hypothesis:** *Lawmakers that join an extreme faction will be more likely to rely on faction, rather than party, resources.*

Factions offer an alternative source of political resources more closely aligned with the policy preferences of its members. Joining an extreme faction allows lawmakers to more effectively resist party pressure, entrench extreme policy reversion points, and pull the party brand away from the ideological center. To test these hypotheses, I analyze the effect of joining an extreme faction on leadership donation patterns. Before proceeding to these analyses, however, I provide an overview of the newest sub-party institution in Congress: the House Freedom Caucus.

Despite a preponderance of media attention, the Freedom Caucus has not yet been the subject of systematic political science research. In the following section, I discuss the origins of the conservative faction, sketch the group’s political infrastructure, and highlight early intraparty skirmishes. Descriptive membership patterns are also presented in the appendix.

**What Do We Know About the House Freedom Caucus?**

On January 26th, 2015, nine conservative lawmakers formally organized the House Freedom Caucus to “advance an agenda of limited, constitutional government in Congress.” The emergence of the Freedom Caucus marks the latest in a half-century old evolution of conservative, sub-party institutions. The group’s founding members believed that the House Republican Conference needed to be anchored to conservative principles, and the largest organization committed to this role — the Republican Study Committee (RSC) — had been diluted with party loyalists. The RSC formed in 1973 as a conservative reaction

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13 Since the Republican Study Committee, at least two other non-centrist, conservative factions have emerged: the Tea Party Caucus and the House Liberty Caucus.
to the relatively moderate Nixon administration. Mimicking the successful Democratic Study Group, the RSC established a sweeping research operation as a means of coordinating and consolidating the conservative wing of the party. In many ways, the Freedom Caucus and RSC share political objectives; two-time Freedom Caucus chair Jim Jordan (R-OH) even served as the leader of the RSC in 2011. But, like the Democratic Study Group, the RSC offered an open invitation to co-partisans, and the valuable information offered by their organization enticed well over one-hundred Republicans to nominally join their ranks. The Freedom Caucus believed that the RSC, in its numerical bloat and close relations with party leaders, had betrayed its primary political objective.  

Mounting dissatisfaction within the RSC came to a head when, in 2014, Boehner-backed candidate Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX) defeated Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC) to lead the organization. The Freedom Caucus splintered off as a distinct conservative faction soon after.

The design of the Freedom Caucus marks a clear departure from the RSC model. Unlike larger caucuses in the House of Representatives, the faction is selective, ideologically homogeneous, and rigid in their commitment to serve as the “tip of the spear” for the activist, conservative wing of the Republican party. The Freedom Caucus is invitation-only. The ideological credentials of prospective members are thoroughly vetted, and sufficiently conservative candidates must secure sponsorship from a current member. Freedom Caucus by-laws also state a procedure for forcibly removing members from their ranks, although the details of this mechanism remain unclear. The faction’s goal, as explained by a founding member, was to have a “smaller, more cohesive, more agile and more active” organization; consequently, members — not merely their staffers — are expected to meet weekly to discuss political strategy.

14 In the words of one senior GOP aide, “So the fact that the RSC can’t be the ‘no’ caucus, they have to create their own ‘no’ caucus.” Matt Fuller, February 4, 2015, “House Freedom Caucus Looks to be a Force – in Leadership and Lawmaking,” Roll Call.

15 If anything, the group has expanded upon the organizational style of the centrist Blue Dog Democrats.

16 Interview on Capitol Hill, July 15, 2015.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

plot in Figure 4 illustrates, the Freedom Caucus remains a small, relatively cohesive, right-wing bloc within the Republican Party.

**Figure 4:** *The Ideological Location of the House Freedom Caucus*  
(115th Congress)

The Freedom Caucus is led by an annually elected, nine-member board of officers. Within this board, several officers appear to have designated responsibilities. Foremost among board members is a term-limited chairman, but the board has also included a coalitions coordinator, a whip, and an officer focused on public communication. All members are required to pay into a tiered dues system, but officers are expected to heavily invest in the group’s administrative capacity. These dues subsequently allow the bloc to overcome the collective action problems that undermined earlier, less formal conservative organizations. Three full-time staffers produce rhetorical, procedural, and substantive policy information for faction members, which diminishes the advantaged position of party leaders and allows the faction to more consistently vote in unison.

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20 Jim Jordan (R-OH) was, despite the one-term limit in their by-laws, elected to a second term. It is unclear if this marks a change in the institution or an exception made for the founding chair of the organization. Mark Meadows (R-NC) is the current Freedom Caucus chair.  

21 Officer dues are referred to as “mortgages.”  

22 Interview on Capitol Hill, July 15, 2015.  

23 Freedom Caucus staff include an executive director (Justin Ouimette), a policy director (recently
The staff effect on faction unity is further amplified by a binding, internal rule; when 80% of the Freedom Caucus agree on policy, all members are required to vote as a unified bloc.

Despite its reputation for secrecy, the Freedom Caucus has engaged in a broad political branding campaign. In two years, the organization has issued nearly 100 press releases, complete with a professionally designed logo and boilerplate mission statement. These statements seem to target conservative activists\(^\text{24}\) in a position to support their political action committees: the House Freedom Fund and the House Freedom Action Fund.\(^\text{25}\) Freedom Caucus leaders regularly appear as conservative spokespersons on prominent talk shows and news outlets, and the bloc’s communication director runs a comprehensive social media operation (Pew Research Center, 2017).\(^\text{26}\) Over 2,500 news articles mention the group in just over two years, and as Figure 5 illustrates, media attention dramatically spikes in moments of party infighting.

\(^{24}\) Members will occasionally advertise their affiliation in congressional newsletters. For example Matt Salmon (R-AZ), in a February 2015 email, writes, “Many have questioned the direction the Republican house is taking, and we’ve heard those concerns. For that reason, a number of members have come together to form the House Freedom Caucus to represent America’s agenda in the House” (source: The DC Inbox Project).

\(^{25}\) According to Open Secrets, the House Freedom Fund collected about $1.4 Million in the 2016 election cycle, which funded hundreds of thousands of dollars in operational expenses and generous donations for seasoned veterans, new incumbents (e.g., Andy Biggs, Warren Davidson), and conservative challengers (e.g., Mary Thomas and Mike Crane).

\(^{26}\) The Freedom Caucus twitter account has over 26,000 followers. Their Facebook page has over 16,000 likes and 17,000 follows.
The Freedom Caucus narrative tends to focus on their out-sized capacity to influence the congressional agenda. Former chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH), for example, was labeled “a master of political leverage” because he “embraces obstruction” both on floor and procedural votes. Unlike centrist factions, which can threaten defection on key votes to reap concessions, political observers claim that the Freedom Caucus use their extremism to hold legislation hostage.

This tactical approach has frayed relations with many co-partisans. To many in the Republican Conference, the Freedom Caucus is composed of “bomb-throwing ideologues” intent on scoring political points at the expense of the party’s agenda. Charlie Dent (R-PA), a leader of the moderate Republican Main Street Partnership (which includes the informal Tuesday Group), referred to the bloc as the “veto caucus”, and a “group of rejectionists.” In an exchange with Freedom Caucus member Dave Brat (R-VA), he went on to say that, “Some of us, the governing wing, want to use the process to advance good legislation. Others want to use the process to obstruct legislation.”

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27 Tim Dickinson, October 6, 2016, “Meet the Right-Wing Rebels Who Overthrew John Boehner,” *Rolling Stone*

28 Jake Sherman, October 15, 2015, “The Obsession of the House Freedom Caucus,” *Politico*


commitment to blocking Republican-sponsored proposals has led several members to quit the organization. For example, Tom McClintock (R-CA) claimed, upon leaving the conservative faction, that the Freedom Caucus had “unwittingly become Nancy Pelosi’s ally” in thwarting the GOP’s agenda. 

To many activists, however, the Freedom Caucus is a band of “rock-ribbed” allies willing to aggressively advance conservative principles in the House of Representatives. To detractors, the Freedom Caucus forestalls the positive political power of the majority; to supporters, however, the bloc is effectively and appropriately wielding negative political power. Freedom Caucus supporters contend that legislative obstruction is incorrectly loaded with normative implications. For example, Rep. Raúl Labrador (ID-01) explains that, “When we stop bad legislation, it’s just as functional as when you pass good legislation.” Dave Brat (R-VA) echoes this sentiment by stating that, “People call us obstructionists. We were obstructionists to bad policy.”

Republican leaders have responded to Freedom Caucus obstruction with traditional means of party discipline. Describing the consequences of voting against his party, Freedom Caucus member Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC) claims that, “You dont get on any good committees, you dont get on the money committees, you dont get money. The leadership shuts you off from PAC funding, and so on.” In 2015, for example, the Freedom Caucus had forced Speaker Boehner (R-OH) to appeal to Democrats to secure key rules, renew the Export-Import Bank, and maintain funding for the Department of Homeland Security. In response to these early skirmishes, party leaders removed three Freedom Caucus members.

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31 It is unclear if any of the recent Freedom Caucus ‘quitters’ were actually kicked from the faction. Their by-laws include a mechanism for removing members that break with the faction on key votes. The precise mechanism was not shared throughout my interviews (Interview on Capitol Hill, July 15, 2015).


33 Tim Dickinson, October 6, 2016, “Meet the Right-Wing Rebels Who Overthrew John Boehner,” Rolling Stone

34 Lindsey McPherson, November 29, 2016, “House Freedom Caucus Elects Board Members, Meadows to Run for Chairman,” Roll Call


36 Note that both of these proposals have extreme reversion points, as illustrated in the prior section.
Caucus members from the GOP whip team, prevented another member from serving as GOP freshman class president, and stripped now-Freedom Caucus chairman Mark Meadows (R-NC) of his subcommittee gavel. Boehner-allied PACs simultaneously aired ads intended to pressure Freedom Caucus members to toe the party line. In short, the Republican leadership team responded to Freedom Caucus obstruction with public displays of party power.

These punitive measures were largely offset by the institutional capacity of the House Freedom Caucus. For example, the House Freedom Caucus staff quickly discovered a rule that empowered a majority of committee members to overrule the Oversight committee chair’s decision, and Mark Meadows (R-NC) was — in a publicly embarrassing defeat to GOP leadership — reinstated his full committee authority within a few short days. The faction also used its public relations operation to use party discipline as a fund-raising asset among highly organized conservative activist groups. As Greg Walden (R-OR), former chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, put it, “Some of the reward-and-punishment mechanisms that have existed in the institution effectively for decades, centuries, dont work anymore [...] You try to provide some party discipline, and you create a martyr.” Several Freedom Caucus members would subsequently boycott Republican party dues and contribute to Freedom Caucus-affiliated PACs.

The GOP leadership’s decision to retaliate against the Freedom Caucus led the obstructionist bloc to shift its resources away from party leaders and depend more heavily on sympathetic outside groups. As a result, the group was emboldened — not cowed — by these attempts. In the words of one Freedom Caucus affiliate, they had “removed the golden handcuffs” of party power. Ensuing skirmishes support this claim. The Freedom

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37 Reps. Trent Franks (R-AZ), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), and Steve Pearce (R-NM).
38 Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO)
40 As an example of this form of pressure, Republican leadership-affiliated Super PACs launched an extensive ad campaign against the former Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-KS) in the lead up to his primary loss.
42 Interview on Capitol Hill, July 15, 2015.
Caucus would be named “kingmakers” in the wake of John Boehner’s resignation, and more recently, they would publicly defy a newly elected Republican president’s direct threats.

**Legislative Obstruction Analysis**

The Legislative Obstruction Hypothesis claims that lawmakers that join a non-centrist faction will be more likely to vote against their party, conditional on the reversion point of the party sponsored proposal. In the case of the Freedom Caucus, joining the conservative faction should increase the probability of obstructionist behavior only for moderating proposals with extremely conservative reversion points.

To measure my dependent variable, I begin by identifying all roll call votes (2011-2016) in which a majority of House Republicans vote “yes.”\(^43\) The time-series for this analysis includes the three complete congresses since the Republicans took the House in 2011. Party unity remained high over these six years; a majority of Republicans supported 2,598 of the total 4,126 roll call votes (63%). My dependent variable is a binary indicator for voting to block the Republican majority’s desire to pass a proposal. For these legislator-vote\(_{(ij)}\) level data, a Republican\(_{(i)}\) that votes “no” when a majority of their party votes “yes” on a vote\(_{(j)}\) are coded as 1. All others are coded as 0.

My ‘treatment’ variable is a straightforward, dichotomous measure of Freedom Caucus membership. Members are coded as 1, all other Republicans are coded as 0.\(^44\) These data were collected from journalistic accounts, Freedom Caucus press releases, and 143 phone calls made in July 2015. Membership in the Freedom Caucus was, initially, a closely guarded secret. Concerned about the consequences of faction affiliation, many members were reluctant to publicly declare loyalty to the organization. The group has increasingly publicized their roster, however. For example, the faction issued press releases to publicly

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\(^43\)Note that this is distinct from a “party unity vote,” which requires a majority of the minority party voting against a majority of the majority party. I am not interested in the unity of the Democratic Party in this analysis.

\(^44\)As a robustness check, I drop all three lawmakers that quit the House Freedom Caucus in the 114th Congress. Dropping quitters does virtually nothing to alter the results in both the legislative and resource analyses.
welcome new members\textsuperscript{45} and thank departing legislators\textsuperscript{46} throughout 2016.

The expected effect of Freedom Caucus membership on obstructionist behavior is conditional, however. The institutional capacity of the Freedom Caucus (e.g., the whip system) is expected to be active only if the proposal moves in a \textit{less} conservative direction. Unfortunately, moderating proposals (i.e., proposals with extreme reversion points moving towards the chamber median) are difficult to identify, as political scientists lack the ability to systematically locate policy reversion points.

As a proxy, I collect interest group “key votes” data to identify the subset of votes deemed critical by staunchly conservative stakeholders. More specifically, I hand-code all key votes for FreedomWorks, Heritage Action, Club for Growth, and Americans for Prosperity (2011-2016). I interact my primary independent variable — the dichotomous indicator of Freedom Caucus membership — with a conditioning variable that indicates whether or not a conservative interest group takes an official “no” position on a vote in which a majority of House Republicans vote “yes.” Conservative interest groups took a position on 328 of all roll call votes cast (8\%) during this time period, and 98 votes received Conservative Group Opposition (2\%). By identifying disagreements between Republicans and conservative activist groups, I hope to capture those votes most likely to exist within the “Obstruction Region” displayed in Figure 3.

There are several benefits to using interest group votes in this fashion. First, interest group votes are announced \textit{ex-ante}, rather than identified after the results have been tallied. Second, these alerts are closely monitored by conservative lawmakers in the lead up to each roll call. Third, key votes refine the scope of votes analyzed, without making categorical judgments about the vote types (i.e., the question) that matter most to lawmakers. Conservative groups care about the public final passage votes frequently employed in congressional scholarship, but they also mobilize opposition to rules and amendments at odds with their own policy agendas. Finally, this measure has the addi-

\textsuperscript{46}“Freedom Caucus Thanks Departing Members,” Alyssa Farah, December 8, 2016, \textit{Press Release from the Office of Congressman Jim Jordan}
tional benefit of simultaneously speaking to the theoretical underpinnings of the *Resource Hypothesis*. Factions that wish to blunt tools of party punishment are likely to seek alternative sources of political donations, and these votes offer an opportunity to display their willingness to vote with a conservative group, instead of supporting party leaders.

I also control for a battery of time- and unit-varying confounding variables. I include two dichotomous measures of electoral vulnerability, calculated by taking each incumbent House Republican’s most recent margin of victory, for each stage in the election, using official Federal Election Committee data. For this variable, legislators are coded as 1 if their vote margin is 10% or less.\(^{47}\) Congressional membership and leadership data, provided by Stewart III and Woon (2017), are also included in the analysis. I code whether an individual legislator is a member of a ‘Power’ committee (i.e., Appropriations, Ways and Means, Budget, or Rules) or a congressional leader (i.e., committee chair, majority whip, majority leader, or the speaker of the house).\(^ {48}\)

I employ a linear probability model with both legislator and vote fixed effects. Note that observable and unobservable time-invariant confounders are captured by the legislator fixed effects (e.g., a member’s anti-establishment core beliefs or conservative ideology). Observable and unobservable unit-invariant confounders are captured by the vote fixed effects (e.g., votes that all members of congress view to be *pro forma*). Vote fixed effects, in this case, are equivalent to a granular time-fixed effects, making the analysis effectively a generalized difference-in-difference model. Democrats are excluded from the analysis, making the reference category the votes cast by safe, rank-and-file Republicans not in the House Freedom Caucus. All standard errors are clustered by legislator, and coefficients should be interpreted as the change in the gap between those that eventually join the Freedom Caucus and those that never join the Freedom Caucus. Table 1 presents the results of this analysis.

---

\(^{47}\) All results are robust to a lower (5%) threshold and continuous specifications.

\(^{48}\) Estimates of candidate ideology are not included because leading ideal point estimates are time-invariant. The candidate fixed effects effectively capture ideological positions that do not change between the 112th and 114th Congress. Dynamic estimates may be included, but as far as I know, no such estimates exist for the 114th Congress. All results are robust to the inclusion of a Republican Study Committee indicator variable.
Table 1: Joining the Freedom Caucus Increases the Probability of Obstruction (Data: 112th - 114th Congress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Vote No When Majority of Republicans Vote Yes (0,1)</th>
<th>(a)</th>
<th>(b)</th>
<th>(c)</th>
<th>(d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Caucus</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₁)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Caucus X</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₂)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Group Opposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₃)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in Primary (t₁)</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₄)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in General (t₁)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₅)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Power&quot; Committee Member</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₆)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Leader</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₇)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Fixed Effects</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislator Fixed Effects</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>620,042</td>
<td>620,042</td>
<td>620,042</td>
<td>620,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Estimation Test</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(β₁ + β₂)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: OLS Point Estimates with Standard Errors Clustered by Legislator. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, two-tailed tests

The results support the Legislative Obstruction Hypothesis. Joining the Freedom Caucus leads to an increased likelihood in voting to block Republican proposals — even accounting for pre-existing obstructionist tendencies.

The base effect of joining the Freedom Caucus is statistically significant but of a small magnitude in columns (a) and (b). These models are likely to include votes from within the Majority Party Blockout Zone and the Obstruction Region. In other words, the estimate of the ‘treatment’ effect is likely diluted by votes in which the faction does not mobilize against their party leaders (e.g., votes that move policy in a conservative direction or are less ideological in nature).

The full model, reported in column (d), supports this interpretation. Joining the Freedom Caucus leads to a greater probability of voting “no” when a majority of Republicans
vote “yes,” but the effect is present only for those votes in which a conservative interest group disagrees with the position of the Republican Party. These results support the accounts presented in the prior section and the theoretical extension presented to the Cartel Agenda Model. After formally organizing the House Freedom Caucus, the right-wing of the Republican Party became more willing to vote against their party leaders to entrench conservative policy.

Resource Analysis

Next, I analyze changes in donation pattern after lawmakers join the Freedom Caucus. I have argued that extreme faction members are better equipped to obstruct attempts to moderate the party brand. The previous section provided some evidence to support this claim. Party leaders – charged with preserving the collective benefits of party membership – are expected to punish obstructionist behavior in pursuit of what they deem to be the optimal combination of policy positions. The Resource Hypothesis claims that extreme factions will offset these costs and, as a result, reduce their members’ reliance on party resources. The overview of the House Freedom Caucus provided some preliminary support for this claim. Speaker Boehner and his allies attempted to discipline the nascent faction by withdrawing political resources, which, according to journalistic accounts, merely increased their appeal among conservative activists.

I test this hypothesis in two steps. First, I test if Freedom Caucus membership reduces the probability of receiving party support. To test this hypothesis I first hand-code each Republican House member’s donations from the leadership PACs of the Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader, the Majority Whip, and the Republican Conference Chair for each congress. From these data, I construct a dichotomous variable. Lawmakers are coded as 1 if they receive funds from party leaders, and 0 if they do not receive financial support from these leaders.

Second, I evaluate if Freedom Caucus members rely more heavily upon member-to-

49These include the “Freedom Project,” “Prosperity Action,” “Every Republican is Crucial PAC,” the “Majority Cmte PAC,” the “Eye of the Tiger PAC,” the “CMR PAC,” and the “Jobs, Economy & Budget Fund.”
member donations from faction, rather than party, leadership funds. Here I sum donations received from the leadership PACs affiliated with the founding members of the House Freedom Caucus, providing pre- and post-treatment variation in faction-affiliated support.\textsuperscript{50} My dependent variable is a dichotomous measure indicating whether an individual Republican, received more money from a leadership PAC affiliated with the nine board members of the House Freedom Caucus or from PACs affiliated with the GOP leadership team. Lawmakers are coded as 1 if they receive more money from Freedom Caucus-affiliated PACs. The Resource Hypothesis predicts that joining the Freedom Caucus will reduce the likelihood of party dependence.

Tables 2 and 3 present the results of this analysis using legislator-congress(\textit{it}) level data from 2011-2016. I continue to include the control variables, which vary over legislator and time, from the Legislative Obstruction analysis, as they threaten to influence both the decision to join the Freedom Caucus and member-to-member donation patterns. I include both congress and legislator fixed effects, and all standard errors are clustered by lawmaker. As before, the analyses are restricted to Republican members of the House of Representatives.

\textsuperscript{50}These include the “Buckeye Liberty PAC,” the “Louisiana Values PAC”, the “First Principles Fund,” the “SALMON PAC,” the “House Liberty Fund,” the “House Freedom Action Fund,” and the “House Freedom Fund.”
Table 2: Joining the Freedom Caucus Decreases the Probability of Receiving Party Funds
(Data: 112th - 114th Congress)

DV: Legislator Receives Party Leader Donations (0,1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate 1</th>
<th>Estimate 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Caucus</td>
<td>-0.42***</td>
<td>-0.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in Primary (t−1)</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in General (t−1)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Power&quot; Committee Member</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Leader</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Congress Fixed Effects ✓ ✓
Legislator Fixed Effects ✓ ✓
N 728 728
R² 0.59 0.61

Note: OLS Point Estimates with Standard Errors Clustered by Legislator
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, two-tailed tests

The results in Table 2 suggest that the gap between Republicans that join the Freedom Caucus and those that never join the extreme organization widens after the 114th Congress. The relative probability of receiving a donation from a party leadership PAC decreases significantly (-0.4, p<0.01) once these individuals join the House Freedom Caucus. These results are robust to the inclusion of recent time- and unit-varying electoral trends, shifts in the party hierarchy, and political circumstances that uniformly affect the Republican Conference. Joining an extreme faction has consequences, and this analysis suggests that party leaders are willing to withhold party resources in response to concerted legislative obstruction.
**Table 3: Joining the Freedom Caucus Reduces Reliance on Party Funds**  
(Data: 112th - 114th Congress)

| DV: Faction Leader Donations Exceed Party Leader Donations (0,1) |
|------------------|------------------|
| Freedom Caucus   | 0.26** (0.12)    | 0.25** (0.12)    |
| Vulnerable in Primary \(t-1\) | -0.04 (0.04) | |
| Vulnerable in General \(t-1\) | 0.03 (0.03) | |
| "Power" Committee Member | -0.01 (0.03) | |
| Congressional Leader | -0.01 (0.01) | |
| Constant | 0.001 (0.004) | 0.01 (0.02) |
| Congress Fixed Effects | ✓ | ✓ |
| Legislator Fixed Effects | ✓ | ✓ |
| N | 728 | 728 |
| \(R^2\) | 0.59 | 0.60 |

*Note: OLS Point Estimates with Standard Errors Clustered by Legislator  
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, two-tailed tests*

The results in Table 3 offer support for the *Resource Hypothesis*. Republicans that join the House Freedom Caucus become even more likely to rely upon faction, rather than GOP, leadership PAC donations. These results are estimated with time- and unit-fixed effects, explicitly accounting for the voluntary nature of faction affiliation and differences in pre-faction donation patterns across the Republican Party.

These results suggest that Republican punitive action may have back-fired. Because party leaders are less willing to contribute to obstructionist lawmakers, those that join the Freedom Caucus are more likely to depend on faction, rather than party, leadership contributions. As a result, faction leaders have more leverage over their members when they disagree with party leaders’ attempts to moderate the party brand.

Leadership donations provide one relatively clean and observable measure of political resources, but members of the House Freedom Caucus also appear to garner considerable interest group support. In 2016, the CEO of the conservative FreedomWorks penned a Fox News op-ed strongly endorsing the faction:
Conservatives and libertarians alike must mobilize to protect and support these principled members as we close the chapter on the 2016 congressional primaries and prepare to strategize for the 2018 midterm elections. The House Freedom Caucus is the future of our movement, and we must double down in our support of these conservatives and of the bold, principled ideas they represent.51

Heritage Action, which claims to have trained 13,000 conservative activists, has expressed similar sentiments. For example, the group used their digital news platform to label the Freedom Caucus a “loyal and reliable ally” deserving of conservative praise, rather than scorn, in the aftermath of President Trump’s primary threats.52 Another powerful group, Club for Growth, has redirected its considerable super PAC resources to simply support Freedom Caucus endorsed candidates, much to the ire of Republican co-sponsors, such as Rep. Lynn Westmoreland (R-GA):

I was a Club-endorsed candidate when I first ran for Congress. I had to go through a very thorough interview by a committee of Club members at their office ... to make sure I agreed with their issues....Now I’m told that the Club is taking a different approach. Now all a candidate has to do is be endorsed by the House Freedom Caucus Chairman Jim Jordan.53

I have used leadership PAC donations to support my claim that joining the Freedom Caucus reduces an individual lawmaker’s reliance on party resources, but as the above examples suggest, the conservative faction may draw on activist, media, and super PAC resources to further counteract the traditional tools of party discipline.

Conclusion

Political scientists have paid relatively little attention to the role of American party factions in legislative affairs. At the same time, journalists and political practitioners seem keenly interested in the ebb and flow of influence within American political parties.

53“Establishment Frets: Freedom Caucus and Club for Growth in Cahoots,” Rachel Bade, August 26, 2016, Politico
In this article, I have combined interviews, journalistic accounts, a spatial theory of party power, and statistical analyses to better understand the role of extreme factions in the House of Representatives.

I have argued that faction and party leaders will, from time to time, disagree over the nature of the party brand. Formally organized factions develop party-like institutions to preserve extreme policies when they believe a “purist” (i.e., non-centrist) brand is better for the national party. As a result, factions can undermine their party leadership, and pull the party brand away from the ideological center. To test these claims, I focus on a new, conservative faction in the Republican Conference: the House Freedom Caucus.

My results suggest that Freedom Caucus affiliation increases the probability of legislative obstruction and mitigates a candidate’s losses in party leadership funds. These findings are consistent with both the narrative presented by the media and interviews conducted in the faction’s inaugural year. Taken together, the results suggest that traditional instruments of party discipline are unlikely to forestall right-wing dissension in the House; on the contrary, the Freedom Caucus appear able to counteract and capitalize on overt pressure from party leaders.

These findings contribute to a growing body of research on American party factions, but important scope conditions apply. I have focused on the political consequences of joining a non-centrist, or extreme, faction in the House of Representatives. I have investigated the House Freedom Caucus to shed light on an institution that has received considerable public attention and no scholarly research, to date. This research does not address ideological sub-groups in the Senate; nor does it systematically explore the developmental path taken by competing factions. Moreover, the public launch of the California Progressive Caucus, the procedural power of the Texas Freedom Caucus, and similar institutional innovations call out for state-level analyses. Each of these subjects are worthy of future scholarly attention, and simply put, more research is needed to move towards a general theory of faction influence in American legislatures.

American political parties are complex, messy institutions operating in a political environment that inherently favors preservation, rather than reform, of the status quo. It
is incumbent upon political scientists to make sense of faction institutions. Fortunately, scholars of American party factions can draw from a rich literature on party power to understand how these groups break down, maintain, or compound the existing constraints imposed on governing bodies.
References


Appendix

In the 114th Congress, there were 38 members of the House Freedom Caucus. This membership count does not include the three legislators — Tom McClintock (R-KS), Reid Ribble (R-WI), and Keith Rothfus (R-PA) — to resign from the caucus in 2015 or 2016. Dropping these three lawmakers from the analysis does not change any of the results in the manuscript. Note that the 115th Congress is not included because [1] 2016 donation data are not yet available for the resource analysis and [2] any legislative analysis would be incomplete. As Figure 6 illustrates, over one-third of state delegations contain at least one Freedom Caucus member in the 115th Congress (2017-2018). The bloc has strong ties to the Southern and Southwestern regions of the United States — particularly Arizona — but Freedom Caucus members also represent districts in Midwestern states (e.g., Justin Amash (R-MI)), Mid-Atlantic states (e.g., Andy Harris (R-MD)), and Western states (e.g., Rep. Raúl Labrador (ID-01)).

Figure 6: Number of House Freedom Caucus Members, by State Delegation
(115th Congress)

Who joins the House Freedom Caucus? The table below regresses Freedom Caucus membership on a number of possible predictors. Table 4 provides the results of a cross-sectional, linear probability model for Republicans in the 114th Congress (2015-2016). Contrary to popular accounts, electoral vulnerability does not appear to be significantly correlated with Freedom Caucus membership. Freedom Caucus joiners are, however, more likely to be rank-and-file Republicans (i.e., not leaders). The overall pattern from this descriptive analysis suggests that Freedom Caucus members are ideologically distinct but otherwise similar to their co-partisans.
Table 4: *Correlates of Freedom Caucus Membership*
(Data: 114th Congress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Joined Freedom Caucus (0,1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in Primary (_{(t-1)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable in General (_{(t-1)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW-NOMINATE (1st-Dimension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW-NOMINATE (2nd-Dimension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Power&quot; Committee Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N | 247 |
|\(R^2\) | 0.38 |

*Note: OLS Point Estimates with Standard Errors*

\(*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01\), two-tailed tests