Why Caucuses? Factions as Secondary Heuristics

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Abstract

Why do politicians join factional caucuses? This paper argues that members of Congress use ideological membership organizations to construct and cultivate faction brands. Using data from the 107th to the 112th Congress, I test conditions that are consistent with a theory of caucuses as auxiliary instruments, used to improve the probability of legislative and electoral victory. I find that politicians are most likely to use caucuses when faced with (1) conditions of electoral vulnerability and (2) congressional districts that look very different from the median member of their political party. These results lend plausibility to a theory of factional caucuses as secondary heuristics.

"Ambitious politicians turn to the political party to achieve such goals only when parties are useful vehicles for solving problems that cannot be solved as effectively, if at all, through other means" (Aldrich 1995, 5).

I. INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 1999, a collection of self-identified centrists gathered for the first of many official press conferences. The stated mission of this new group–the Blue Dog Coalition (BDC)–was to stand, collectively, as a fiscally conservative wing of the Democratic Party. As Chris John (D-LA), the group's Co-Chair of Communications, explained, "if you look around the 29 districts of the Blue Dogs, they are mirror images of each other" (C-SPAN2, 1999). Blue Dogs came from competitive, conservative, Democratic districts, making a subset of liberal policies electorally unpalatable.

The press conference proceeded with a litany of poorly received dog metaphors, formal introductions of all BDC leaders, and a few brief statements from intra-caucus policy task force chairs. Fielding questions from the press, Charlie Stenholm (D-TX), the Co-Chair of Policy, summarized the impetus for the creation of the BDC, stating, "We will not sit back and wait for others to define the terms of the debate in ways that force us to choose between two extremes. If we feel that our perspective is not being represented by the leadership of either party, we may have our own proposals and our own legislation ... to move their proposals to the center" (C-SPAN2, 1999).

In turn, the press seemed eager to define the Blue Dog label. What was the Blue Dog position on trade policy, campaign finance reform, the most recent State of the Union address, and the Clinton impeachment?[1] Stenholm answered by explaining the way the caucus operated as an *institution*. "We will be going forward with specific policy on any subject that you might want to ask us about, but our policy requires that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the 29 of us support it before it becomes a *Blue Dog position* ... That's important for y'all to remember. When we take a position, you'll know that $\frac{2}{3}$ of us agree" (C-SPAN2, 1999 emphasis added).[2]

Caucuses, a term used interchangeably with congressional membership organizations, are "voluntary associations of Members of Congress, without formal recognition in chamber rules or line-item appropriations" (Mulhollan and Richardson 1986, 1). This research focuses on *factional caucuses*–the subset of caucuses that self-identify in terms of political ideology.[3] As the inaugural Blue Dog press conference

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[1]Four Blue Dogs had voted for impeachment, so they seemed particularly interested in evaluating the state of the Clinton-Blue Dog relationship.

[2]The Blue Dog $\frac{2}{3}$ rule implies some binding mechanism to keep dissenters in line with the caucus. One could speculate that Blue Dog campaign finance resources might be withdrawn as punishment, or, in an extreme case, members could be removed from the caucus entirely. The hierarchy established by the group also suggests that caucus leadership positions are of some value (as more salient signals to donors, perhaps). The desire to become a caucus chair might keep members in line. Still, further research is necessary to empirically evaluate these speculations.

[3]Among the nearly 400 caucuses in the last 50 years most are not ideological factions. Some represent regional interests (e.g. the

illustrates, these groups are similar in many ways to their parent partisan organization. They coordinate to shift the policy status quo. They elect whips, chairpersons, vice-chairs, policy task-forces, and public relations officers. They marshal well-funded Political Action Committees and recruit candidates to win in both primary and general elections. Importantly, the media uses these groups as a sort of ideological short hand; journalists frequently interview caucus leaders as representatives of important voting coalitions. As Table 1 suggests, the BDC is far from the only factional caucus in the modern House:

Table 1: *Factional Caucuses of the House, 2001-2012*

Caucus	Peak Membership	Founded	Purpose
Progressive Caucus	74	1991	Liberal Dems
Blue Dog Coalition	50	1995	Fisc. Conserv. Dems
Main Street Partnership	52	1995	Centrist GOP
New Democrat Coalition	75	1997	Centrist Dems
Populist Caucus	28	2009	Liberal Dems
Tea Party Caucus	59	2010	Conservative GOP

Why do politicians join these factional caucuses? Assuming electoral success is the proximate goal of Members of Congress, this paper theorizes that *Representatives construct and cultivate faction brands as secondary heuristics for key constituents.* Faced with (1) conditions of electoral vulnerability and (2) congressional districts that look very different from the median member of their political party, lawmakers employ caucuses as auxiliary instruments to improve the probability of legislative and electoral victory. In other words, I expect Representatives to join factional caucuses if they have difficulty selling the generic party brand to their districts.

After constructing a theory of factional caucuses that weds the notion of party brands to the existing literature on caucuses, I turn to empirical analysis of data on individual Members of Congress (MCs) from the 107th to the 112th sessions of Congress. By engaging in survival analysis, I find that politicians are more likely to join factional caucuses in the House of Representatives when they receive smaller margins of victory and their district donors, on average, differ from those of the median member of their party.

II. Congressional Caucus Literature

What does the literature on congressional caucuses say about the decision to join these groups? Despite the emergence of hundreds of membership organizations over the last five decades, relatively little work has addressed caucus formation, membership, and effects. Scarcely any work has incorporated longitudinal

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Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition), demographic groups (e.g. the Congressional Black Caucus), particular industries (e.g. the Congressional Steel Caucus), and more (e.g. the Mushroom Caucus). One could make the argument that all policy preferences are ideological to some extent, but the groups I analyze here are *explicitly* ideological.

data or looked specifically at factional caucuses. As a result, many of the expectations in the caucus literature are directly at odds with the theory put forth in this paper.

The work of Bob Dilger and Sula P. Richardson at the Congressional Research Services (CRS) has clearly influenced much of the research done on congressional caucuses. Decades of annual reports have provided researchers with counts of caucus organizations (although not rosters of legislators within caucuses), the institutional lineage of modern congressional membership organizations[4], a summary of regulations and resources available to caucuses, and an overview of any changes to the constellation of caucus objectives. By providing descriptive statistics on these groups, often complete with contact information, CRS documents allow for macro-level considerations of caucus as a system of organizations (Dilger 2009, 2012, 2013; Richardson 1987).

Recent CRS documents appropriately take Susan Webb Hammond's work, *Congressional Caucuses in National Policy Making*, as foundational (1998). Relying on a rich assortment of qualitative and quantitative evidence, Hammond's work presents a typology of all membership organizations. Consequently, her answer to the question "why caucuses?" is quite broad. She writes, "The achievement of policy, power, re-election, and most immediately, publicity entice members to join caucuses" (Hammond 1998, 79). Hammond does, however, provide more specific analysis of "party caucuses" in the 97th Congress–a category that includes intraparty factions and class clubs,[5] but excludes the possibility of interparty factions. She finds that party leaders, seniority, and conservatism are significant variables affecting memberships in party caucuses, while committee leaders and increasingly conservative Democrats are less likely to be members of party caucuses (Hammond 1998, 71-73). [6]

A singular, unifying theory of congressional caucuses, as put forward by Hammond, may be problematic. In choosing an aggregate analysis of all such organizations, much of the caucus literature has obscured important heterogeneity across these groups. Factional caucuses, I argue, are substantively different from special interest caucuses. Like other groups (e.g. The Mushroom Caucus; the Hispanic Caucus), members appear to utilize factional caucuses to refine their effectiveness as legislators. The hierarchical structure, financial capacities, and political relevance of factional caucuses, however, suggests that our understanding of party organizations might be usefully employed at the caucus level. For these reasons, I restrict the scope of my analysis to self-identifying ideological groups.

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[4]Fascinating work remains to be done on this subject. The role of the Republican Revolution and the abolition of Legislative Service Organizations (LSOs), which received House resources, seems to me an exceptionally promising avenue of future work. Unfortunately, this remains outside of the scope of this research project.

[5]Class clubs are membership organizations for all recently elected legislators.

[6]It is important to note that the conceptual typology established in the front of the book is loosened in the empirical sections (e.g. class clubs are dropped from any statistical analysis). Moreover, Hammond appropriately notes that CRS data underreports caucus memberships (1998, 24), but she fails to acknowledge similar patterns in *Congressional Yellow Book* data. This self-reported data contains significant omissions (e.g. a chairman of the Blue Dog Coalition failing to self-report his membership in the organization, despite its public display on his website) that pose threats to both statistical and substantive interpretations of these findings

A large portion of the remaining literature on congressional membership organizations has focused on information and specialization (Loomis 1981; Stevens, Mulhollan, and Rundquist 1981; Hammond Mulhollan, and Stevens 1983). Likening caucuses to legislative apprenticeships, these scholars often compare these institutions to the committee system. Following from informational theories of Congress (Krehbiel 1991), Ainsworth and Akins argue that caucuses should be analyzed in conjunction with relevant committee analogues (1991). Using interest group scores, they make the compelling case that "the caucus system acts to counterbalance the inherent biases of the committee system" by providing fresh informational perspectives for the floor (Ainsworth and Akins 1997, 407).[7] This research, however, explicitly excludes all factional caucuses (along with minority and state caucuses) (Ainsworth and Akins 1997, 427).

Interesting work by Victor and Ringe has put forward a theory of caucuses as institutions designed "to connect lawmakers in a loose web of relationships that enable vital information to flow efficiently through lawmaking bodies" (Nils and Victor 2013, 2). As highly informal organizations, these groups provide legislators with key networking opportunities (Victor and Ringe 2003). Unfortunately, social networking theories of caucuses also exclude the Blue Dog Democrats and related groups, because they "operate more like party factions or voting coalitions and thus fall outside the scope" of those works (Nils and Victor 2013, 22-23).

Caucuses are frequently depicted as vehicles of policy change, but very little work has been done on the electoral nature of these organizations. Kris Miler has filled important gaps in the literature, by addressing this very issue. In recent work, she found that members representing politically, racially, and economically homogeneous districts[8] will join fewer caucuses (Miler 2011, 901). Interestingly, her count model finds that electoral security, operationalized as the percentage of general election vote received, has a significant and *positive* effect on caucus membership[9] (Miler 2011, 901).

Miler also employs logit analysis in a cross-sectional study of the 108th Congress to test whether constituent factors influence the probability of joining a party caucus. She finds "at best little evidence that [electoral safety, party status, or seniority] affects legislators' choice of caucuses" (Miler 2011, 913). In fact, Miler argues that "partisan caucuses are the subset of caucuses in which membership is least likely to be affected by constituency considerations"–a finding directly at odds with my own expectations (Miler 2011, 911). It is possible, however, that membership is too blunt of a measure to capture these motivations. One might plausibly imagine members joining caucuses when they are electorally vulnerable, and remaining in the organization even as the probability of reelection improves. For this reason, this research attempts to

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[7]Note, however, that like Hammond's work, Ainsworth and Akins rely on self-reported memberships in the individual biographical entries of the *Congressional Staff Directory* (1997, 427).

[8]Miler uses the Cook Partisan Voting Index (PVI)

[9]Here again, caucus membership is taken as an aggregate variable. Note that, by her own count, fewer than 3% of House members do not belong to a caucus when operationalized in this fashion (Miler 2011, 916).

isolate the decision to *join* caucuses from the decision to *remain* in caucuses.

This paper differs from the existing literature on congressional caucuses in a number of ways. First, I choose a subset of caucuses. By deciding against an aggregate approach to the study of caucuses, I can thus engage in statistical analysis without losing substantively significant differences in the purposes of these groups. Second, I choose to analyze caucus enlistment rather than all counts of caucus membership. By separating the decision to join caucuses from the decision to remain in caucuses, I hope to isolate factors that make a complementary institution more appealing, all else held constant. Third, this research includes temporal variance. Most caucus research, to date, looks only at individual sessions of Congress. Finally, the unit of analysis in this research is the individual politician, and the dependent variable is not restricted to a specific subsection of the ideological spectrum (Lucas and Deutchman 2007, 2010).

III. Theory

This paper presents a theory of factional caucuses as secondary heuristics. The decision to join factional caucuses in the House of Representatives from 2001-2012, I argue, can be explained by considering the informally binding nature of complementary, faction brands. This is in keeping with the logic of political parties, the nature of congressional institutions, and the capacity of sophisticated voters. Two hypotheses emerge from these claims. I expect politicians to turn to the services of factional caucuses (1) when they are electorally vulnerable and (2) when their district preferences clearly diverge from those of the party mainstream.

The Endogenous Nature of Congressional Institutions

Following Mayhew (1976), I assume that the central goal of Members of Congress is the probability of attaining and maintaining public office. Lawmakers almost certainly value good public policy, power, prestige, career advancement, and personal convictions. The goal of reelection, however, is a gateway to many of these considerations. For these reasons, I take electoral security to be the proximate goal of legislators.[10]

Factional caucuses, like any other legislative institution, are a product of the political conditions in which they emerged. Legislators that join factional caucuses have to win primary and general campaigns every two years in single-member districts across the country. They are further constrained by the dominance of two long-established, highly polarized political parties. Following Mayhew, I argue that politicians join caucuses, because these innovative, endogenous institutions are "tailored to suit members' electoral needs"

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[10]For interesting work on how the electoral connection might be "severed"–allowing members to shirk representative responsibilities–see Rothernberg and Sanders (2000).

(1976, 97). In short, lawmakers must find ways to satisfy the basic demands of their office, and in the context of the House, this means embracing auxiliary institutional support to facilitate greater opportunities in advertising, credit claiming, and position taking (Mayhew 1976, 49, 62).

Factional caucuses seem to do a pretty good job responding to these needs. When Raùl Grijalva (D-AZ) is introduced as co-chairman of the Progressive Caucus and interviewed for "the liberal perspective" on the State of the Union, he is provided with valuable publicity. Similarly, members of the Blue Dog Coalition can reasonably claim credit in shifting the terms of legislative debate after a Blue Dog budget proposal is incorporated into Democratic strategies (Bruce Reed email, Clinton Records, 1997). More generally, the Populist Caucus and Tea Party Caucus can co-opt the positions of grass-roots movements (the Occupy Wallstreet and Tea Party movements, respectively) with little legislative follow-through.

Parties are clearly the most successful of legislative institutions, but they are not the only possible solution to legislators' problems. After all, politicians "have created and maintained, used or abused, reformed or ignored the political party when doing so has furthered their goals and ambitions" (Aldrich 1995, 3). Were it the case that parties perfectly provided support for all members of Congress, we would expect no further institutional innovation. Empirically, however, we know that this is not true. Members are outspent by opposition parties. Their policy proposals are frequently ignored. Their requests for influential leadership positions are often refused. Even if party leaders viewed every member as ideal co-partisans, it would be impossible to provide sufficient resources for the needs of hundreds of public officials. Parties are limited insofar as they possess a finite amount of resources to assist others.

What form should we expect new legislative institutions, like caucuses, to take? Given what we know about the development of political parties, we should expect institutional *complements* rather than surrogates. In a less entrenched party system, we might expect new parties to emerge and replace current parties, but "once a set of institutional arrangements is in place, the set of equilibrium possibilities is greatly reduced, and change from the existing equilibrium path to a new and possibly superior one may be difficult or impossible" (Aldrich 1995, 5). Consequently, members underserved by political parties will not seek to start from scratch. Instead, enterprising politicians are likely to follow the development path of the national party system, which "turned to extant organizations rather than building wholly new ones" (Aldrich 1995, 103, 112, 124). Caucuses are perhaps best understood as a set of institutions *layered* on top of the unquestionably successful foundations of the two party system. This conceptualization is in line with the "strategic parties hypothesis" presented in John Aldrich's seminal work (1995, 124).

In sum, caucuses are endogenous institutions, created by underserved politicians to shore up or compensate for a lack of traditional party support. Following Mayhew, we might reasonably expect those facing electoral uncertainty to be less averse to institutional innovation (1976, 68). This produces our first

hypothesis:

Electoral Vulnerability Hypothesis (H_1):
Electorally vulnerable politicians will be more likely to join factional caucuses.

Narrow margins in congressional races and a basic vulnerability to electoral dynamics will thus make lawmakers more sensitive to constituency interest and more willing to adopt insurgent, radical, and alternative party platforms (Jenkins & Stewart 2013, 191). Facing significant threats to their political future, marginalized politicians are most likely to embrace complementary institutions such as factional caucuses.

Faction Brands

Party brands are featured prominently in the cartel theory of congressional politics. Building on theories of the firm, these works are founded on the central premise that "the party's legislative record is an important contributor to their reelection prospects" (Jenkins & Stewart 2013, 12). As a result, politicians create privileged positions in the House to induce individuals to "internalize the collective electoral fate of the party" (Cox & McCubbins 1993, pg 133). In this way, the national reputation, or *party brand*, is preserved, and politicians can sway the tides of Congressional elections (Cox & McCubbins 1993, 277).

Cartel theory speaks only to aggregate party perceptions, and yet many members of Congress are aversely affected by the national party brand. Geographical and ideological heterogeneity across congressional districts necessarily produces tails of the distribution of intraparty policy preferences. According to Cox & McCubbins, "a party's record is best understood as the *central tendency* in mass beliefs," because incumbents tend to face similar perceptions of their party's record regardless of where they run (1993, 111, emphasis added). They hasten to add, however, that "different individuals may identify the party with different actions, beliefs, and outcomes," and "the difference between the Democratic party's record in Alabama and Massachusetts is rather large, which is why our definition refers to *national* parties" (Cox & McCubbins 1993, 111). While the majority of politicians gain from clear and consistent party brands, heterodox partisans may face strong incentives to deviate from mainstream positions.

Voters' reliance on party brands, however, immediately complicates the prospect of deviation from the national party record. On average, voters are more likely to trust generic partisan brand name information, because they are aware that individual candidates have incentives to mislead the electorate (Grynaviski 2010). Party principles are reduced to heuristic form as a means of credibly committing policy positions in conditions of low-information decision-making. Consequently, voters' use of brand names prevents individual candidates from committing to actions in conflict with party principles. In *Partisan Bonds*, Grynaviski forcefully makes the argument:

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> *"American political parties perform the role of a surety (i.e. a third party guarantor, such as a bail bondsman) who offers a credible signal to voters about the performance of its candidates in office when individual candidates cannot"* (2010, 2)

Brands effectively prevent individual candidates from throwing off the policy positions of their parties. The informational advantages of relying on heuristics drown out any distinctions a challenger might make to better cater to their district.

Factional caucuses, as organizations, allow individual candidates to credibly commit to divergent policy preferences in a world of incomplete information. Individual politicians pool staff resources, coordinate voting behavior, provide consistent sound bites to members of the press, and distribute campaign finance resources in an attempt to persistently cultivate a collective, complementary reputation. Through the lens of the factional caucus, candidates can effectively communicate their ideological *type*. [11] Facing adverse effects of national party stereotypes (i.e. fiscally conservative constituents' dismissal of Democratic candidates as "tax-and-spend" liberals), politicians can custom-fit their image to constituency preferences. This leads to our second hypothesis:

District Divergence Hypothesis(H_2):

Politicians will be more likely to join factional caucuses as the preferences of their congressional district diverge from the party mainstream.

In short, factional caucuses allow members to provide key constituents with a secondary heuristic that better fits their district preferences.

The Plausibility of Faction Brands and Secondary Heuristics

Is it plausible that voters actually pay attention to a *secondary heuristic*? Taking prominent research on the capacity of the American voter, one might object to these claims (Campbell, et. al., 1960). Studies of political behavior have argued that voters appear to cast ballots to comport with stable partisan attachments transmitted via socialization at an early age (Campbell, et. al.,1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004). At an extreme, they may hold inconsistent, non ideological, or random political beliefs (Converse 1964). Only slightly better, voters may mediate their opinion through filtered, top-of-the-head samples of salient issues (Zaller 1992). If voters frequently fail to match major policy positions with their relevant political parties, any theory of factions as nuanced signals to constituents should be treated skeptically.

Yet we know that individuals frequently and effectively use heuristics to overcome many of these apparent informational deficiencies. In other words, low information does not preclude the possibility

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[11]Over time, these labels have made their way into the mass media. Take, for example, Brian Williams' *Inside Congress* interview with Speaker John Boehner (July 31, 2011). "But there's another party in there, too," Williams comments, "You have this Tea Party Caucus that didn't come to Washington with the same values." On the other end of the GOP distribution, former Rep. Steve LaTourette has taken to major cable television shows to argue that the Republican Main Street Partnership is the centrist, "governing wing of the Republican Party" (CSPAN, 2013).

of reasoned electoral decision-making (Lupia and McCubbins 1998), because heuristics reduce the world to a series of summary statistics, thereby easing the strain of voters' cognitive resources (Huckfeldt, et. al 1999, 891; Rahn 1993, 472-3). Informational shortcuts efficiently allow individuals to group "discrete bits of information into a meaningful cognitive structure" (Lodge and Hamill 1986, 507) and effectively "reduce the infinite variability of the world into a manageable number of categories," (Rahn 1993, 472-3). These conclusions have consistently been borne out in panel interviews (Conover and Feldman 1989), survey analysis (Koch 2001), and an assortment of experimental work (Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993; Huckfeldt, et. al 1999; Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

The prospects of secondary heuristics improve in the context of factional politics for three reasons. First, voters appear to be more capable of grasping ideological positions of groups than individuals (Snyder and Ting 2002, 90). Second, citizens should have no trouble using multiple heuristic devices as they simplify the political world (Huckfeldt, et. al 1999). Finally, the use of partisan heuristics has been linked to the more "sophisticated" (i.e. high levels of political knowledge) portion of the voting public (Sniderman, et. al, 1991, 24-25). This is, in part, because those "citizens who readily think about politics in partisan or ideological terms are better able to employ these points of orientation as useful heuristic devices in making sense out of the complexity and chaos of politics" (Huckfeldt et. al 1999, 910). In this way, the effectiveness of stereotypes is built upon an interesting paradox. Those who understand the political world, who keep tabs on current events, and regularly consider government policies are both least likely to need heuristics and most likely to use them effectively (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 967). The wide body of literature on political heuristics, then, suggest that factional caucuses might reasonably create a secondary heuristic that "sticks" with key constituents in their district.

To summarize my theory, Representatives will join caucuses when the generic party brand is not easy to sell. Electorally vulnerable members are particularly likely to be "pioneers" in the innovation of institutions that provide opportunities to improve their probability of reelection (Mayhew 1976), but rather than reinventing the proverbial wheel, legislators will strategically layer on complementary institutions (Aldrich 1995). Factions thus turn to caucuses as a way of cultivating a *secondary heuristic* for key constituents.

IV. Data

Dependent Variable: Caucus Enlistment

This work is primarily concerned with the decision to join a factional caucus. Consequently, my dependent variable is *caucus enlistment*. If a member of the House of Representatives joins any factional

caucus, that Congress-Member of Congress observation is coded as 1; all others are coded as 0.[12] To construct this variable, I collected the rosters of six factional caucus from 2001-2012. These caucuses included centrists and non-centrists in both major political parties.[13] I relied upon the *CQ Quarterly Almanac*, *the Congressional Yellow Book*, Congressional records, and press releases from groups' archived web sites (via the *Wayback Machine*) throughout the data collection process. The informal nature of these groups, however, posed serious challenges to data accumulation. The *Yellowbook* provides valuable, but incomplete, membership lists, and unfortunately for researchers, not all caucuses file with the House in a timely manner (if at all). The modern lack of chamber support for these organizations has, in this sense, complicated the data process.[14] Consequently, I rely most heavily on the *CQ Quarterly Almanac* and archived caucus web sites. These proved to be the most comprehensive and most reliable sources of data. Fortunately, a theory of caucuses as secondary heuristics renders the use of caucus websites appropriate–if not necessary–for the integrity of my theory.[15] The total membership of the six factional caucuses in this study are graphically displayed in Figure 1 (on the next page).

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[12]It is possible that members join multiple factional caucuses. Members of the New Democratic Coalition and Blue Dog Coalition, sharing common ideological and organizational roots, tend to overlap in membership from time to time. Similarly, there are cases of members joining both the Progressive and the Populist Caucus. Note that by dichotomizing this variable, I am not measuring the quantity of factional caucus membership. I am merely capturing the event of joining any factional caucus.

[13]Caucus rosters are generally presented at the beginning of a session of Congress. These data cannot, therefore, identify the exact date of enlistment.

[14]Note that the precursor to Congressional Membership Organizations (CMOs)–the modern caucus institution– was the Legislative Service Organization (LSO). LSOs were provided with House office space, funds for caucus staff, and more. In 1994, Republicans, under the leadership of Speaker Newt Gingerich, abolished all LSOs, and prohibited institutional resources for CMOs.

[15]Individual members of caucuses often provide descriptive information on their caucus membership as well, and they nearly always provide links to the primary caucus web presence.

Figure 1

Factional Caucus Membership
2001 - 2012
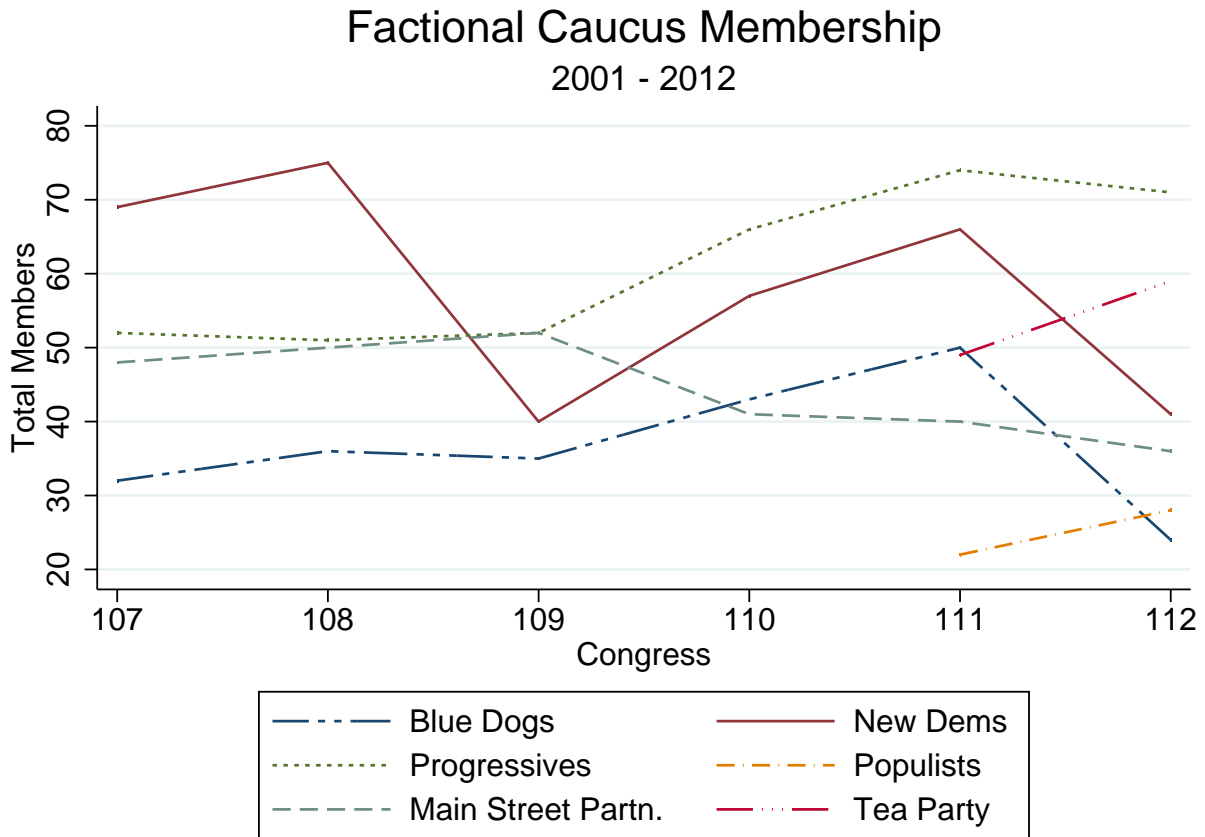
As previously stated, this work departs from previous research on congressional caucuses by attempting to parse out the distinct determinants of *joining* (rather than *remaining*) in caucuses. By employing survival analysis, my focus is exclusively on the effect of my independent variables on "failure" or "death" (joining a caucus) over time. Figure 2 depicts the differences between "joins" and "total membership" among factional caucuses:

Figure 2

Factional Caucuses: New vs. Total Membership
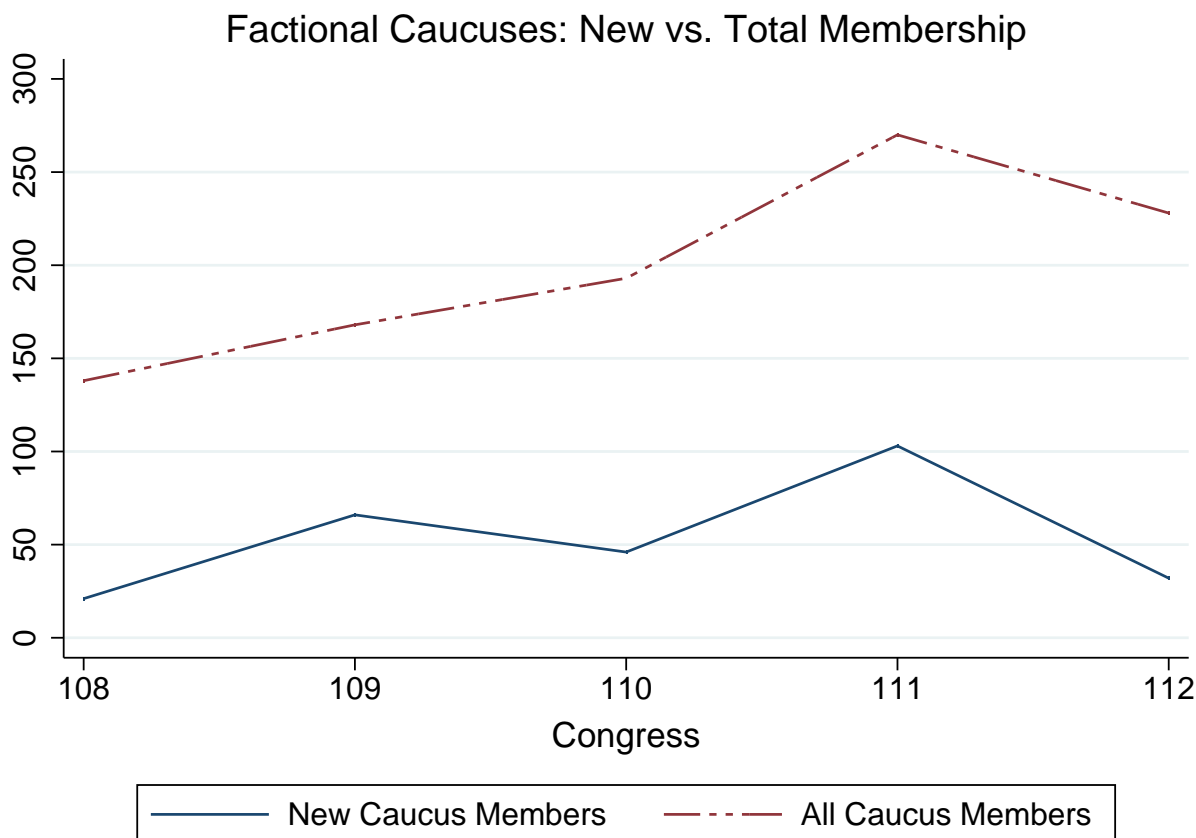
Independent Variable #1: Electoral Vulnerability

The first explanatory variable in my analysis is a measure of **electoral vulnerability**. I have hypothesized that as the margin of victory narrows in the election that matters most to legislators, complementary institutions become more appealing, and we should expect the probability of caucus enlistment to increase. To construct this variable I use FEC data on *both general and primary* election returns from 2000-2012. The inclusion of primary election data, which is surprisingly uncommon in studies of congressional politics, is necessary in the context of factional politics. Specifically, I take the margin of victory from the most competitive stage of the most recent election cycle as my measure of electoral vulnerability.[16] For a snapshot of what this actually looks like in the database, see the Appendix.

Two clarifying notes on this measure are necessary. First, unlike other coding schemes, I am able to produce a continuous measure. I do not create relatively arbitrary cut points for "competitive" elections in

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[16]Roughly 12% of the 2,616 candidate-campaigns in the original data had a more competitive primary than general election. After dropping all members of Congress that were incumbents prior to the 107th Congress–which I do to account for left censoring, as described later–roughly 20% of members faced more difficult primary than general elections.

the fashion of popular forecasting models (see *The Cook Report* and *The Crystal Ball*). Instead, I allow changes in the margin of victory at the most competitive stage of a campaign to stand on their own. Categorical variables seeking to capture electoral vulnerability often focus on general elections, which in turn obscures the complex nature of contemporary American politics and precludes the possibility of primary election prospects being most troubling to sitting or hopeful members of Congress.

Second, unlike other measures of primary competitiveness, I do not drop uncontested races from my data. I consider uncontested primaries to be, by definition, a 100% margin of victory. As I am hoping to capture some proxy for electoral security, dropping those circumstances of virtually complete electoral security would substantively bias my data in unacceptable ways. Note, however, that my coding process will only count a 100% margin of victory in the event that *both* the primary and general election are uncontested.[17]

Independent Variable #2: District Divergence

My second key independent variable is **District Divergence**. This paper argues that factional caucuses act as secondary heuristics for key constituents. In the context of congressional elections, I consider district donors to be key constituents. For this reason, I use Adam Bonica's (-2 to 2) common space campaign-finance scores (CF-Scores), which are a series of ideal points constructed from political donations data (Bonica 2013). The problems with trying to "back out ideology" have been well documented (Krehbiel 2000; Smith 2007; Lee 2009). Still, monetary contributions to political candidates seem to be a salient proxy for policy preferences.[18] To measure the extent to which a member might face distinct electoral pressures–pressures that may make the national brand unpalatable–I use Bonica's average district donor CF Score variable in the following way:

| Average Donor CF Score in District - Average Donor CF Score of Party Median's District |

A greater value of this District Divergence measurement suggests a growing separation in electoral preferences.

There are many advantages to using CF Scores. If caucuses provide a secondary heuristic for members of Congress to use, I need a measure that captures the preferences of those most likely to effectively use political heuristics–those with high levels of political information. Moreover, by using campaign donations as the basis of ideal points, this measure captures salient policy preferences that are somewhat exogenous to the behavior of politicians in the House of Representatives. Remarkably, these measures remain highly

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[17]There were 9 instances of 100% margins of victory. After dropping these observations, my findings do not change in substantive or statistical significance.

[18]See Bonica 2013 for an exhaustive discussion on this topic.

correlated (r=.92) with traditional measures (DW-NOMINATE) of spatial policy preference (Bonica 2013).

I also include presidential vote share as a distinct measure of district preferences. I construct this alternative measure of district divergence using Bonica's measure of "the district-level percentage of the two-party vote share won by the Democratic presidential nominee in the most recent presidential election" (Bonica 2013). Once again, I take the absolute difference between the value of an individual member's district and that of their party median. These findings are evaluated both in separate and common models.

CONTROL VARIABLES

In addition to my two key independent variables, I control for seniority, or tenure, in Congress. This variable tests the theory that more junior members of Congress are more likely to join and create caucuses as they are shut out from traditional forms of institutional opportunities to improve their probability of reelection and influence on policy. Without direct and immediately accessible ways to learn the trade of legislation-crafting, for example, freshmen may create informal sub-groups to improve technical expertise and refine their ability to draft policy proposals. Here I construct a variable, **Tenure**, based on a count of appearances in Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE dataset. By counting the number of times unique legislator identity codes emerge throughout all of congressional history (to date), I create a persistent, reliable count of congressional terms served. By using this variable, I can directly test the findings of Hammond and Miler.

In several models, I include a measure of **DW-NOMINATE Divergence**, using similar calculations (absolute differences with party median) as my District Divergence variables. If members consistently "vote their district" instead of the party line, we might imagine members turn to caucuses to coordinate dissenting policy positions. I also construct a variable, **Primary Most Competitive**, for those members that faced a greater electoral threat in the primary than the general election. If party factions are purely a product of party infighting, we might expect to pick up a significant effect at the primary stage of congressional campaigns.

Finally, I construct dummy variables for **the South**, **the Democratic Party**, and an interaction of these two variables. Colloquially, people discuss the Blue Dogs, the New Democrats, and the Tea Party as remnants of southern conservatism. Consequently, I test for the possibility of regional effects by constructing a dichotomous variable for all representatives of states that are members of the Southern Governors' Association. The inclusion of the Democratic Party dummy variable speaks to accounts of Democrats pursuing a strategy of a maintaining a broad coalition of disparate policy preferences, while the Republicans allegedly prefer ideological purity and strict party loyalty. In alternative models, I interact the party dummy variable with each of my District Divergent effects, to evaluate whether a misfit with the

party brand differs depending on *which* party is being evaluated. A brief table of descriptive statistics of these variables is included in the Appendix.

V. MODEL

Survival analysis seeks to answer the question: "how long did it take for an event to happen?" I employ a Cox Proportional Hazard (CPH) model to test the rate at which members join factional caucuses. In this context, the Cox model will compute the product of the probability of an individual member joining a factional caucus in any Congress (time, *t*), given the total number of legislators that have the potential to join a factional caucus at that time.[19] The Cox Proportional Hazard model analyzes the order in which members join caucuses ("fail").[20] The goal is to establish reliable measures of the instantaneous "risk" of joining a factional caucus per Congress, given that an individual has not joined a factional caucus yet. In other words, if we want to establish the probability of an event occurring among those still at risk of experiencing the event, we must "condition on the event not yet having occurred at time *t*" (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2012, 799). We can usefully express this in terms of the density function and the survival function:[21]

$$h(t) = \frac{f(t)}{S(t)}$$

Censoring can pose serious threats to models of survival analysis. In the context of the House of Representatives, this complication is compounded by late entries and early departures before the treatment period has been completed. Members enter Congress and join caucuses before the 107th Congress and after the 112th Congress, making our test period ragged on both ends. To mitigate the effect of left censoring, I include only those politicians that experience their inaugural term of Congress within the scope of this research (again, between 2001-2012).[22] In my analysis, I run five models accounting for different forms of variable specification. All models are stratified by congressional session, to control for confounding, time interval-specific effects.

VI. RESULTS

Both the *Electoral Vulnerability* and *District Divergence* Hypotheses receive considerable support. As Representatives' margin of victory increases, at the most competitive of stage of the campaign season, they

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[19]This has been referred to as a "partial likelihood maximization" (PLM) approach

[20]Because this model does not focus on *duration*, less information is used in the Cox Prop. Hazard model, which unfortunately, increases standard errors. Unlike other forms of survival analysis, however, CPH models do not require restrictive assumptions about hazard rates over time.

[21]the probability of "surviving," or not experiencing an outcome, to a certain point

[22]I expect a non-trivial number of ties. The standard way of dealing with this in a Cox Proprotional Hazard model is the Breslow method, which adds up the likelihood contributions of tied durations together.

are less likely than their counterparts to join a factional caucus. Stated differently, lower margins of victory increase the probability of joining a factional caucus, conditional on a member not having joined a factional caucus to date.[23] The minimum margin of victory is consistently in the expected direction (negative), and receives reliable levels of statistical significance across all five models.

Our constituency divergence hypothesis also finds support. As the gap increases between the average donor's CF Score in a given district and that of the party median's district, the probability of joining a factional caucus improves. In other words, caucus enlistment is influenced by the extent to which a member's district donors hold preferences distinct from the party mainstream. Here again, the direction and statistical significance of this measure behaves in an expected fashion across models. Note that the alternative measure of district divergence, recent Democratic presidential vote share, receives less consistent support.

Both the South and interaction of Southern and Democratic dichotomous variables receives no (commonly used) levels of statistical significance. Surprisingly, Democrats, all else equal, have a clear and consistent effect on caucus enlistment. This variable was included to capture the notion that Democrats sought a big-umbrella party–a coalition–and Republicans desired ideological loyalty and consistency. Indeed, the Democratic Party was the epicenter of factional politics for much of the 20th century. While these findings certainly seem to support the hypothesis of Democrats as faction-prone, a more developed theory is necessary. Table 2 summarizes the results of all five Cox Proportional Hazards Models:[24]

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[23]The small magnitude of the Min. Margin. of Victory coefficient is a product of the way the data are coded. See the appendix for an illustration of these data.

[24]*Sources:* Bonica (2013) DIME data; Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE Scores; FEC election returns

Table 2: *Cox Proportional Hazard Model of Joining Factional Caucuses*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Minimum Margin of Victory	-.013***	-.015***	-.012**	-.014***	-.014***
	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)
	[.008]	[.004]	[.018]	[.007]	[.009]
South	.120	.059	.090	.133	.233
	(.238)	(.235)	(.237)	(.239)	(.248)
	[.613]	[.801]	[.705]	[.578]	[.348]
Democrat	.948***	.909***	1.036***	.945***	.
	(.210)	(.212)	(.214)	(.217)	.
	[.000]	[.000]	[.000]	[.000]	.
South X Dem	.122	.105	.102	.010	-.064
	(.325)	(.327)	(.327)	(.335)	(.339)
	[.709]	[.749]	[.756]	[.975]	[.849]
Tenure	-.108 ‡	-.086	-.091	-.092	-.096
	(.081)	(.081)	.081	(.081)	(.082)
	[.181]	[.288]	[.260]	[.259]	[.244]
Primary Most Competitive	-.052	-.056	-.018	-.061	-.066
	(.191)	(.194)	(.191)	(.194)	(.197)
	[.788]	[.773]	[.925]	[.755]	[.738]
Dist. Div. (CFScores)	.955**			.694 ‡	1.571**
	(.391)			(.442)	(.754)
	[.015]			[.116]	[.037]
Dist. Div. (Pres)		2.828**		1.413	-.826
		(1.164)		(1.406)	(2.364)
		[.015]		[.315]	[.727]
DWNOM Div.			1.522*	.768	1.540
			(.813)	(.899)	(1.243)
			[.061]	[.393]	[.215]
Dist. Div. (CFScores) X Dem					-1.418 ‡
					(.938)
					[.130]
Dist. Div. (Pres) X Dem					4.201 ‡
					(2.93)
					[.152]
DWNOM Div X Dem					-1.892
					(1.818)
					[.298]
N	675	666	675	666	666

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, ‡ p<0.2
Standard errors in parentheses; P-Values in brackets
Stratified by Session of Congress

A more convenient way of displaying these results might be to observe a smoothed hazard function over time for different values of our two primary independent variables. The smoothed hazard functions below demonstrate the probability that an individual member of Congress will join a factional caucus, conditional on that legislator not having joined in previous sessions of Congress. Figure 3 shows that lower

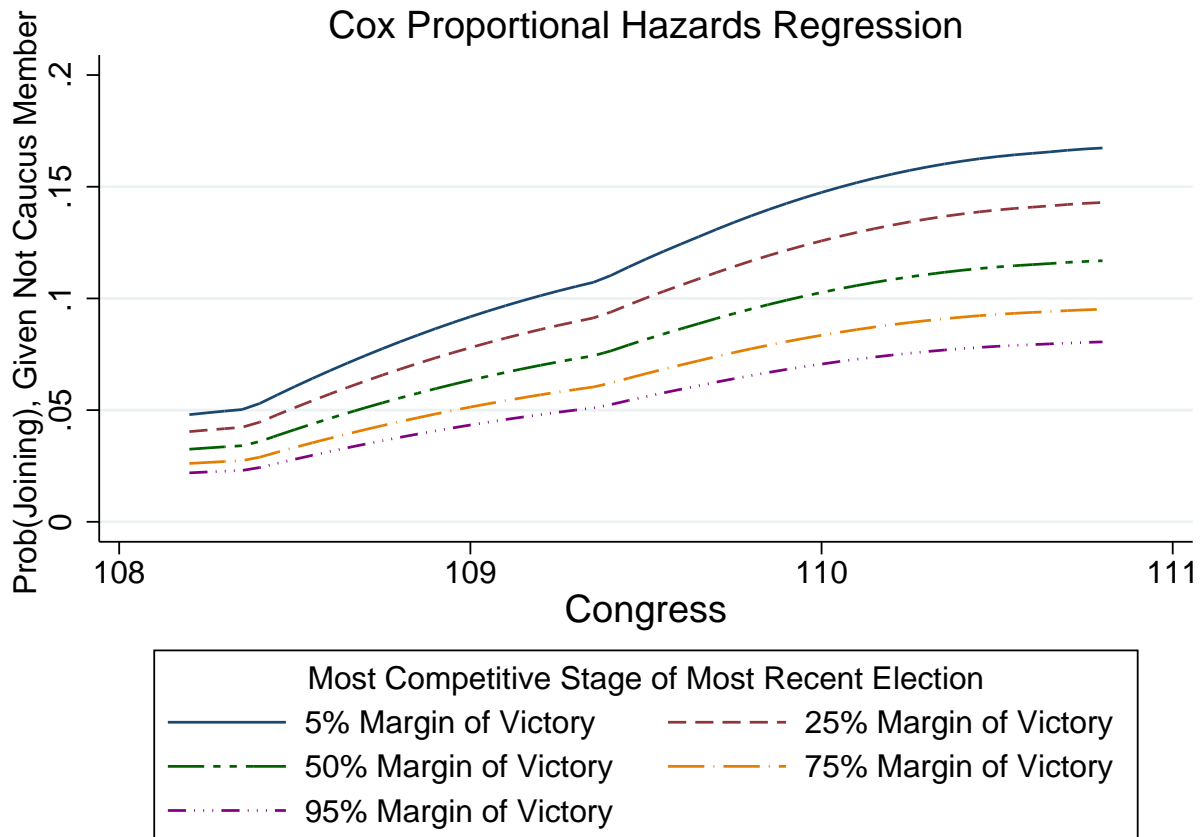margins of victory correlate with a higher instantaneous "risk" of joining factional caucuses over time.[25]

Figure 4 demonstrates the analogous results for my primary measure of District Divergence (using CF Scores). District Divergence is, across the board, associated with increased values of smoothed hazard functions. The probability of joining a factional caucus, conditional on that member not having joined to date, increases as legislators' district donors diverge from those of the party median. Note that these results are consistent across sessions of Congress and both key independent variables, even after incorporating the time-series nature of the data.

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[25]Because I cannot construct a model of a smoothed hazard function on stratified data, I rerun the model without stratifying data to achieve these figures. The substantive and statistical significance of these models do not change.

Figure 4
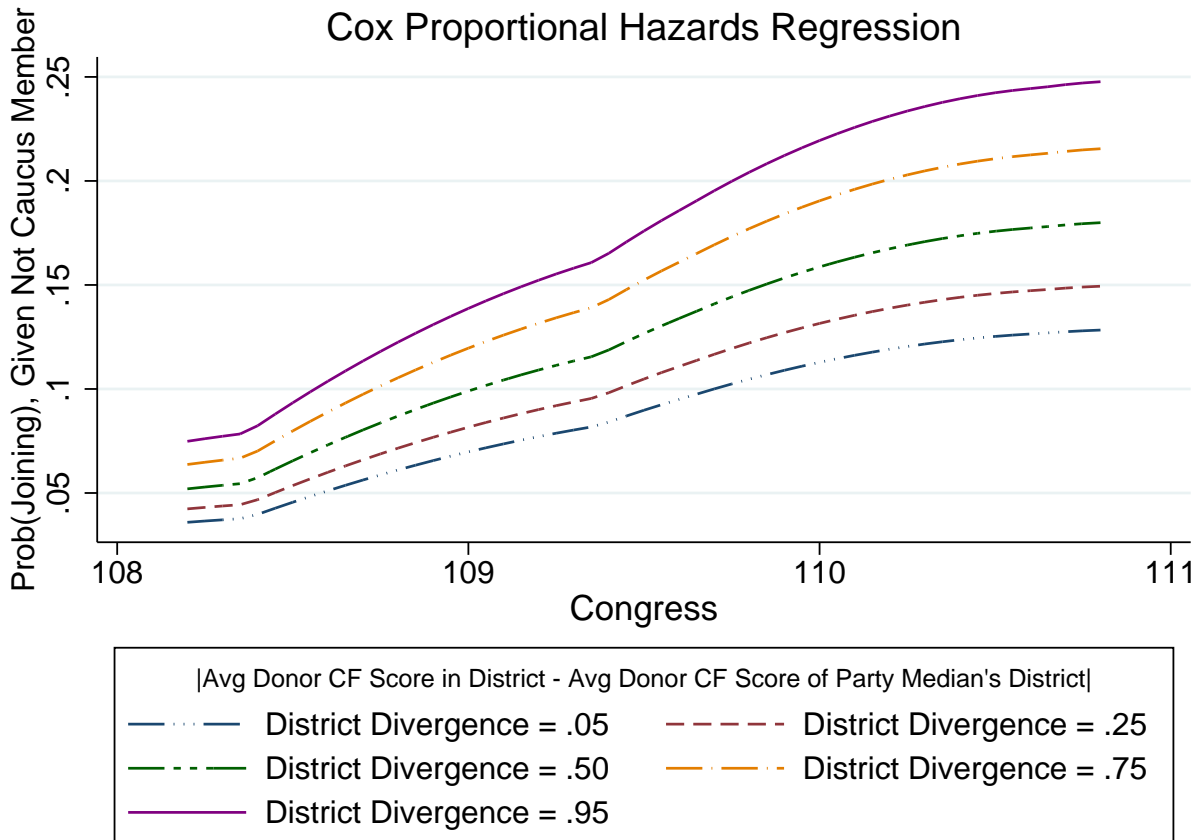
VII. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to bridge gaps between the relatively small literature on congressional caucuses and more general theories of party brands, political heuristics, and legislative institutions. I have argued that politicians construct and cultivate factional caucuses as secondary heuristics for key constituents. Because caucuses must clearly be complements, rather than surrogates, to the Democratic or Republican Party, I have argued that members underserved by these better-established institutions will be most likely to turn to alternative organizations. In other words, those that join the Blue Dog Coalition, the Tea Party Caucus, and so on should be Representatives that have more difficulty selling the generic party brand to their districts.

Empirically, I found support (statistically and substantively) for both the District Divergence and Electoral Vulnerability hypotheses. By engaging in survival analysis, I was able to account for both time and the conceptually distinct event of joining, rather than remaining, in a caucus organization.[26] At

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[26]Results generally hold up for cross sectional logit analyses of these groups. See the Appendix for an interesting disaggregation of

the outside, I made the decision to separate factional caucuses (e.g. the New Democrats) from special interest caucuses (e.g. the Friends of Norway Caucus). Consequently, the inferences I draw are reasonably distinct from much of the similar papers on the topic. By rejecting an aggregate approach to the study of Congressional caucuses (both in terms of caucus counts and total caucus memberships), I depart from a conceptualization of caucuses as fundamentally information-driven institutions.

There is a wealth of research waiting to be done on this subject. In this paper, I have laid out a preliminary theory of factional caucuses as secondary heuristics. Due to time and resource constraints, I have limited my scope to one chamber and one decade of legislative history. Factions have clearly organized in important ways throughout American political history (Bloch Rubin 2012; DiSalvo 2012), and future research on the subject should not shy from approaching temporal variance as causal leverage.

Throughout this paper I have provided what I believe to be substantial evidence of underlying conditions that one would expect of members using factional caucuses as complementary brands. I have *not*, however, tested the direct effect of the caucus label on the voting public.[27] Moreover, for a clear understanding of caucuses as organizational solutions to the collective action problems of its members–coordination and group policing of a secondary heuristic–we must understand the mechanisms of caucus formation. The rise and fall of different forms of factional institutions (e.g. Legislative Service Organizations; Congressional Membership Organizations), suggest that an interesting leadership *vs.* rank-and-file dimension remains relatively unexplored.[28]

Finally, one would be remiss to study the development and motivations of caucus membership without an investigation of the effects of these institutions. How, for example, do members' electoral conditions change as a result of joining these caucuses? How do leaders respond to the formalization of factions? These are questions that require complicated and thorough analysis beyond the scope of the research presented here.

Factional caucuses appear to be developing as a microcosm of their parent, partisan organization. They recruit, fund, organize, advertise, and negotiate as if they are parties-within-the-parties. Importantly, they seem to be most useful to heterodox partisans in need of electoral help. It is is unclear, however, if caucuses mark a positive or a negative development in normative theories of representation. Lacking any real impact on public policy, these groups may unnecessarily muddy the electoral clarity of a polarized political environment. Conversely, caucuses may provide an appealing level of ideological diversity embedded within the bland, catch-all reputations of the two major political parties. Future work should seek to

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individual caucuses.

[27]In the immediate future, I plan to explore some survey data on the Tea Party movement available through the ANES.

[28]I envision this component to be in keeping with the Jenkins & Stewart response to Cox & McCubbins. These institutions are endogenous. They didn't just come from *somewhere*, they were created over decades of political battles. How, exactly, did they establish their apparently prominent position in American politics?

provide an empirical foundation to evaluate these normative concerns.

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XV. APPENDIX

Figure 5: *Example of the* Minimum Margin of Victory *(electoral vulnerability) variable in the data.*

	CongNum	state	CongDist	primarymar~n	generalmar~n	minmargin
454	108	AL	1	19.92	22.72	19.92
455	108	AL	2	.	39.23	39.23
456	108	AL	3	63.45	2.110001	2.110001
457	108	AL	4	.	73.77	73.77
458	108	AL	5	.	48.57	48.57
459	108	AL	6	75.62	79.93	75.62
460	108	AL	7	2.68	85.16	2.68
461	108	AR	1	.	33.68	33.68
462	108	AR	2	44.74001	85.84	44.74001
463	108	AR	3	.	97.8	97.8
464	108	AR	4	.	21.12	21.12

Table 3: *Factional Caucus Enlistment Descriptive Statistics*

	Factional Caucus Member	Factional Caucus Joiner	Other
% Democrat	75%	64%	30%
% Southern	26%	33%	38%
Mean DWNOM	-.127	-.002	.313
Mean Min. Marg.	35%	28%	35%
Mean Terms Served	6	4	6

Marginal Changes in Probability: Cross Sectional Logit

Populists (111)

Tea Party (112)

Progressives (111)

Main Street Partnership (111)

Blue Dogs (110)

New Dems (108)