Donor Networks and the Incentive to Defect in Congress

Abhinav Ramaswamy[*]

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Abstract

The parties in Congress are increasingly ideologically cohesive, yet majority-party defection on procedural votes is rising. I argue defections emerge as the party's capacity to punish wanes. To test this theory, I introduce a graph-based measure of legislators' financial reliance on the party donor network. Unlike ideology scores, the distribution of financial reliance has splintered in both parties, as obstructionist caucuses grow less reliant on their party's network of corporate PACs. Such reliance predicts defections within-Congress, within-district, and even within obstructionist factions. I show that these changes have circumscribed party leaders' ability to punish, as the corporate dollar cost of voting against McCarthy's 2023 speaker election was nearly half the cost Boehner's defectors faced in 2015. I update the Conditional Party Government and cartel theories of Congress by demonstrating that positive agenda power depends not only on ideological homogeneity within the majority party, but also on party leaders' punishment capacity.

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[*]PhD Candidate. Stanford University. Department of Political Science. `acr122@stanford.edu`

1 Introduction

The parties in Congress are increasingly ideologically cohesive (Lee (2015); Curry and Lee (2020)), yet within-party conflict on procedural votes is rising.[1] Among Republicans, this trend begins in 2013, when members of the Tea Party cast the first majority party votes against a Speaker nominee in 90 years. It crystallizes with the formation of the House Freedom Caucus (HFC) in 2015, which threatens collective procedural defection to extract power and policy concessions from party leaders (Rubin (2022)). It then peaks in 2023, when the HFC begins directly voting down these measures, derailing 14 speaker elections, 6 special rules, and ousting a speaker for the first time in history. Such defection is unprecedented — the last time a special rule failed was in 2002, and the last failed speaker election was in 1923.

Certain Democratic factions are also increasingly willing to challenge their leaders. For example, 19 moderates publicly vowed to challenge Pelosi's 2019 speaker bid, enough to jeopardize her election and force her to make concessions (such as committee seats and term-limiting herself) in order to attain the position (Foran and Raju (2018)). Despite the concessions, several moderates still voted against her election in both the 116th and 117th Congresses, constituting the first speaker election defections among Democrats in over a century (Struyk and Petulla (2019)). These defectors almost exclusively come from the Blue Dog Coalition (BDC), the moderate and obstructionist Democratic faction.

Existing theories of Congress predict *decreasing* procedural conflict. Both Procedural Cartel Theory (Cox and McCubbins (2005)) and Conditional Party Government (e.g. Rohde (1991); Aldrich and Rohde (2001)) theories agree that positive agenda control is conditional on ideological homogeneity within- and heterogeneity between-parties. Based on our existing ideological measures (Lee (2015); Curry and Lee (2020); Barber and McCarty (2015)), this implies that defections should be decreasing. Procedural Cartel Theory (PCT) goes a step further. It argues that regardless of their ideology, legislators specifically avoid defecting on procedure for fear of punishment. Party leaders may withhold resources like money, committee seats, and leadership positions from procedural defectors, because speaker elections and rules votes are necessary to control the agenda. Purely spatial models of conflict (e.g. Schickler and Rich (1997); Krehbiel (1991)) and theories of organization under slim majorities (e.g. Lee (2016)) make similarly erroneous predictions.

I argue that procedural defections emerge as the party's capacity to punish wanes. In polarized two-party legislatures, majority party factions agree they should not cooperate with the minority, but may disagree on how legislative influence is distributed within the party. If a faction is pivotal and feels the party ignores their interests, then holding the agenda hostage creates bargaining leverage that may coerce leaders to grant concessions. However, this threat is credible only if the cost obstructionists face for defection is less than the cost the party faces for stalled legislation.

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[1]As Frances Lee writes in a review article on polarization, "on the basis of the available data, it is undeniable that the two parties in the United States have grown more sharply differentiated, and each party has become more cohesive...But it is by no means clear that these more cohesive parties are any more effective at governance" (2015, p. 262).

Given that party punishment is the primary cost of defection (Schickler and Rich (1997); Cox and McCubbins (2005)), rising defections are a function of resource independence. Certain factions are growing less reliant on party resources like committee seats and donor networks, circumscribing party leaders' ability to punish and enabling defection. I test this theory by examining changes in financial reliance on party leaders.

I first show that procedural defections are not only increasing over time, but also asymmetric across parties, as Democratic moderates (members of the BDC) and GOP conservatives (members of the HFC) are most likely to defect on speaker elections and special rules. Existing measures of ideology cannot explain these defection patterns. Based on existing ideological measures, a) GOP moderates are equidistant, if not, further from party leaders than conservatives, and b) neither the BDC nor HFC are moving further from the leadership over time, despite their increasing willingness to challenge leaders.

I then introduce a measure of a legislator's financial reliance on party leaders (NS) and find that changes in NS are consistent with both asymmetric and temporal defection patterns. Unlike existing measures of ideology, the within-party distributions of NS are fragmenting, as Blue Dogs and HFC members grow less reliant on their party's corporate PAC network (corporate donors who contribute to party leaders). These obstructionist caucuses are also least reliant on their party's network of non-corporate PACs.

Reliance on party leaders' PAC network predicts defection in numerous settings, suggesting independence from party leaders' donors enables defection. It negatively correlates with defection within each Congress, even after accounting for ideology, and this association grows as the network fragments. It even predicts who challenges speaker elections within obstructionist factions, which is particularly revealing given obstructionist caucus members are selected based on their ideology and willingness to challenge party leaders (Rubin (2022); Clarke (2020)). In the panel setting, PAC reliance also predicts within-district variation in defection. When an incumbent is replaced by someone less financially beholden to the party's PAC network, even if equally ideologically distant from party leaders, defections on average increase.

Waning reliance on party leaders' corporate donors has limited their punishment capacity. Using a difference-in-differences design, I show that defectors against John Boehner's speaker election in 2015 and McCarthy's speaker elections in 2023 were both punished primarily through shared corporate donors. However, the raw-dollar punishment Boehner's defectors faced was nearly double that of McCarthy's, because party leaders had a much smaller pool of corporate money to influence.

I make the following theoretical and empirical contributions. First, I update CPG and PCT by demonstrating that positive agenda power is not simply a function of ideological homogeneity within the majority party, but also party leaders' ability to withhold valuable resources from defectors. Second, PCT presupposes that party leaders are in the position to punish. While arguably true when the theory was first articulated, party leaders' disciplinary capacity has waned in recent years. Third, quantitative work on factions neither describes their procedural voting patterns nor links their donor pools to intra-party conflict (e.g. Clarke (2020); Gaynor (2022)), while qualitative work

proposes drivers of defection without rigorous testing (e.g. Rubin (2022); Jenkins and Stewart (2023)). My empirics fill these gaps.

2   Rising Intra-Party Conflict on Procedural Votes

The historic number of failed rules and speaker elections in the 118th Congress (see Appendix A for a detailed account of these defections) are not isolated but part of a warming trend. In the past decade, factions began withholding support on speaker elections and special rules to extract concessions from party leaders, and in some cases, depose them.

2.1   On Speaker Elections

Unprecedented tension has emerged on speaker elections in the past decade. Floor voting patterns make this clear. While not a single majority party legislator voted against their party's speaker nominee from 1925-2012 (Struyk and Petulla (2019)), a subset of moderate Democrats or extreme Republicans has defected in every speaker election since (see Figure 19 in the Appendix). These defections were coordinated by the BDC and HFC (see Figure 20 in the Appendix).

Factions not only defect on the floor, but also collectively withhold support *before* the floor vote — an equally subversive tactic. For example, 19 moderate Democrats (8 of whom were BDC members[2]) publicly vowed[3] to oppose Pelosi's speaker bid in the 116th Congress and called for new leadership (Foran and Raju (2018)). The contingent was pivotal, forcing Pelosi to gift committee seats, accept rules changes which weaken the leadership's negative agenda control, and even place term limits on Democratic leaders, including herself, to secure the speakership[4].

On the right, conservatives (most of which became HFC members in the 114th Congress) grew furious with Speaker Boehner's unwillingness to achieve hardline conservative wins on the budget, immigration, and health care by threatening government shutdowns (Green (2019); Rubin (2022)). After voting against his speaker elections in the beginning of the 113th and 114th Congresses

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[2]These insurgents were a mix of moderate factions: 11/19 were New Democrat Coalition (NDC) members, 8/19 were Blue Dogs, 6/19 were Problem Solvers Caucus members, and 7 were caucus-unaffiliated moderates (they do not sum to 19 because many are members of multiple caucuses). The NDC had 103 total members compared to the BDC's 26, so these challenges are better viewed as organized by BDC members, who convinced a few NDC members to join.

[3]16 signed a public letter, while 3 others told media outlets they plan to oppose Pelosi (Foran and Raju (2018)).

[4]For example, Marcia Fudge (a longtime Pelosi critic) was granted the chair of the subcommittee on elections, while Seth Moulton and Tim Ryan got their request for term limits for all House leadership positions, which bound Pelosi to a maximum of two more speaker terms. But more importantly, the rank-and-file received sweeping rules changes that force bills with bipartisan support out of committee and onto the House Calendar, expedite discharge petitions, require the Rules Committee to prefer amendments with bipartisan support, and privilege Motion to Vacate the Speaker's Office resolutions if offered by a majority party caucus (e.g., the BDC) (Struyk and Petulla (2019); Problem Solvers Caucus (2018)). The first three changes erode party leaders' negative agenda power by weakening committees' ability to withhold bills and amendments that pull outcomes towards the floor median. The final change severely destabilizes the speaker's office by allowing any caucus' to get a floor vote on ousting the speaker. With tight majority seat margins (35 in the 116th Congress) and a unified minority opposition, this makes any Democratic caucus (other than the Squad) pivotal. Although these rules changes were initially proposed by the Problem Solvers Caucus, they were immediately endorsed by the BDC (Blue Dog Coalition (2018)), and ultimately, more Blue Dogs both withheld support of Pelosi and defected on the floor than Problem Solvers

but lacking pivotal numbers, the HFC forced Boehner to preemptively retire by unifying its ranks and filing a motion-to-vacate resolution in July, 2015. They then again leveraged their pivotal status to essentially hand-pick the successor, unilaterally rejecting Kevin McCarthy in favor of the ideologically congenial Paul Ryan, despite McCarthy being next in the leadership chain (Rubin (2022)).

These threats from within the majority party are as political scientist Jeff Jenkins says, radical "deviations from the organizational cartel arrangement that was set up around the Civil War" (quoted in Struyk and Petulla (2019)). Disagreements on the party nominee are traditionally worked out during the closed-door caucus vote. In the past decade, however, bargaining has hardened and gone public. Certain legislators are comfortable withholding support for their party's nominee, publicly signaling this obstruction, and even voting against them on the floor.

2.2 On Special Rules

If we plot defection rates on special rules over time, the 118th Congress look aberrant (see Appendix C.1). But this ignores the organized *threat* of defection which prevents a rule from even seeing the floor. Like speaker elections, such threats began with the HFC's birth in the 114th Congress (calendar year 2015).

Prior to the HFC, there was minimal procedural conflict within the majority party. From the 1970s reforms (when the Speaker gain appointment and removal over the majority party's Rules Committee members) until the Tea Party's emergence, party leaders increasingly "*expect* and *get*" procedural loyalty from their rank-and-file (Cox and McCubbins, 2005, p. 30). During this period, special rules and previous question votes increasingly fell on party lines (Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008)), majority party members were significantly more likely to vote with their party on procedure than substance Cox and Poole (2002), and majority party members who vote against a substantive bill often still vote for its associated rule (Sinclair (2002); Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008)). Party leaders openly demand procedural loyalty (e.g. see (Cox and McCubbins, 2005, p. 29)), and rank-and-file members are acutely aware these votes are a "litmus test of party loyalty" (Cox and McCubbins, 2005, p. 58).[5]

The HFC reversed these patterns. The caucus was founded to advance conservative goals by opposing procedural motions when necessary. Its founders understood both the power and risk of derailing rules[6] and thus only accepted legislators who had "the spine" to do so (Mulvaney (2023)). This allowed them to challenge rules on signature party-backed legislation, such as tax reform and free trade, under Speakers Ryan and Boehner (Rubin (2022); Lizza (2015)). Although they did not undermine a rule on the floor before the 118th Congress, their intransigence stalled signature

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[5]For example, when asked about the demands of party leaders, Rep. Mick Mulvaney said "the one thing they said is you never ever, ever, ever vote against a rule" (Lizza (2015)), while former chairman of the Rules Committee (a powerful arm of the party leadership) Pete Sessions said "vote against the rules, I'll kick your ass" (Diaz and Tully-McManus (2024)).

[6]For example, co-founder Rep. Mick Mulvaney said that voting against rules was "among the most mutinous maneuvers they could contemplate (Mulvaney (2023)), while another co-founder, Rep. Raul Labrador, compared opposing rules to "going nuclear" (Lizza (2015)).

components of the Republican agenda and forced Speaker Ryan to "regularly consult[] with the HFC's leadership on procedural and policy issues" (Rubin, 2022, p. 21). The historic floor defection in the 118th Congress was less a sudden break than the product of a decade of rising tension.

Pelosi never lost a special rule on the floor, but she faced unprecedented defections from moderates on other less salient procedural votes, such as motions to recommit, which delayed legislation and added conservative amendments to key Democratic bills (Caygle and Bresnahan (2019)).[7] Again, these defections primarily came from BDC members (see Figure 29). Off-the-floor, public feuds with the far-left quartet "The Squad" led to party in-fighting that Pelosi herself said she had "never seen anything like" (Page (2019)).[8]

2.3 Who Defects?

On speaker elections, Jenkins and Stewart (2023) have already documented that, since the 113th Congress, non-zero defection is the norm, and defectors almost exclusively come from the extreme right and moderate left (see Figures 18 and 19 in the Appendix). But do the same ideological factions that defect on speaker elections also defect on rules?

2.3.1 Ideology and Defection

Figure 1 plots the average defection rate among members of each intra-party caucus (I use "caucus" interchangeably with "faction"). A legislator's defection rate is the share of special rules she voted No or cast a pivotal Present vote — a Present vote when the number of defections is large enough to require minority party help to pass the rule, i.e. when the bill-level defection rate (defined in 5) is at least 0.5 (see Appendix C.1 for further explanation). The defection rate is only defined for majority party legislators, because the goal of procedural defection

For each party, the defection rate is only defined when they are the majority. The goal of procedural defection is to disrupt the majority party's agenda power. The minority party has no agenda power to disrupt, so my formal definition (5) reflects the substantive reality that only legislators in the majority party can defect.

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[7]In the first two months of the 116th Congress alone, moderate Democrats joined with Republicans to pass two GOP-led motions to recommit. One added unfavorable (to Democrats) immigration language on a universal backgrounds check bill. Another removed special privileges in the Senate for a bill barring U.S. involving in the Yemeni Civil War, causing it to fail in the Senate and thwart Democrats' challenge of Trump's foreign policy agenda (Caygle and Bresnahan (2019)). Pivotal defections on these procedural votes are quite rare, as zero motions to recommit passed under the GOP controlled Congresses from 2011-2019. The dissent forced Pelosi to scold moderate defectors in a closed-door party meeting (Caygle and Bresnahan (2019)) and later eliminate the motion-to-recommit with instructions altogether (Library of Congress (2025)).

[8]Conflict between Pelosi and her progressive flank erupted in the public eye after the far-left quartet "The Squad" voted against a bipartisan border security bill. Pelosi effectively labeled them impractical ideologues in a NYT interview (Dowd (2019)), prompting Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, the leading voice of The Squad, to chirp back on Twitter and, in a Washington Post interview, even imply that Pelosi singled her caucus out because they are women-of-color. Ocasio-Cortez's chief-of-staff then tweeted that she was a better leader than Pelosi and compared moderate Democrats to segregationist Southern Democrats, sending the conference into a frenzy and forcing Pelosi to hold a closed-door meeting to condemn intra-party feuds (Page (2019); Snell (2019)). The second such meeting in the 116th Congress.

Members select into caucuses based on their sub-party ideological affiliation (Clarke (2020)). The Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) and New Democratic Coalition (NDC) are large caucuses representing the liberal and moderate-centrist segments of the Democratic party, respectively, while the Squad and Blue Dogs are much smaller factions representing the most progressive and moderate flanks of the party, respectively. Among Republicans, from moderate to conservative, we have the Tuesday Group, Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP), Republican Study Committee (RSC), Tea Party, and HFC. The Tuesday Group is a particularly moderate subset of the RMSP, and the RSC is on average centrist, but being the largest caucus in Congress (with 137 members in the 118th Congress for example), it encompasses members from across the GOP's ideological spectrum. See Data for details on my caucus membership data collection.
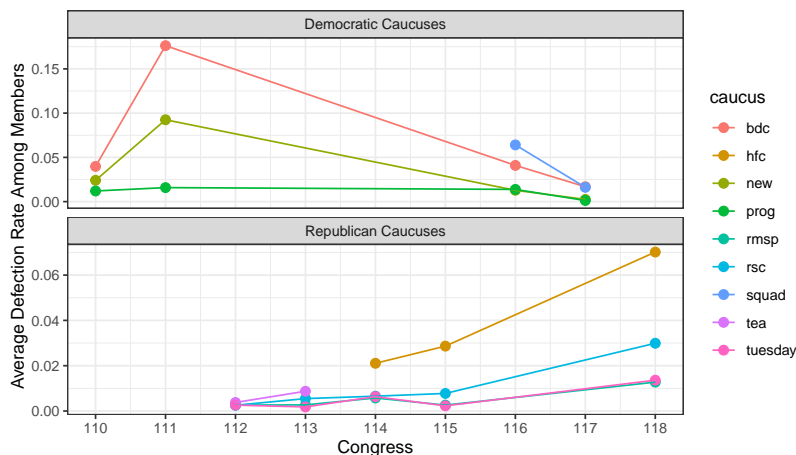
Figure 1: **Average Defection Rate on Special Rules by Caucus Membership and Congress.** Ideologically, from left to right: `squad` = The Squad, `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus, `new` = New Democratic Coalition, `bdc` = Blue Dog Coalition. `tuesday` = Tuesday Group, `rmsp` = Republican Main Street Partnership, `rsc` = Republican Study Committee, `tea` = Tea Party, `hfc` = House Freedom Caucus.

Defection patterns mirror those on speaker elections. Moderate Democrats and extreme Republicans defect most, as Blue Dogs defect but CPC members do not, while Tea Party and HFC members defect but moderate Tuesday Group and RMSP members do not. The average Squad member does defect more than the average Blue Dog in the 116th, but their size in the 116th (4 members) is miniscule relative to the BDC (26 members) and CPC (95 members). So in terms of sheer numbers, Pelosi has more to fear from her moderates.

We find the exact same partisan asymmetries when measuring ideology with modern scaling methods, such as DW-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal (1991)), CF-Scores (Bonica (2014)), or Bonica et al. (2024)'s Composite measure, which is a weighted average of various roll-call and donation-based scalings (see Figures 22, 24, 23 in Appendix C.2). Again, defections generally come from the far-right and moderate left.

2.3.2 Within-Caucus Variation in Defection

Scholars characterize caucuses as either obstructionist, i.e. willing to defect against the leadership, or "majoritarian", i.e. they sway the leadership by growing their ranks (e.g. Rubin (2022)). Obstructionist caucuses like the HFC and BDC therefore only accept legislators willing to buck the leadership when necessary (Rubin (2022); Green (2019); Mulvaney (2023)). Curiously then, even within these obstructionist factions there is considerable variation in defection rates on both special rules (see Figure 28) and speaker elections.

Figure 2 shows that on the speaker votes with significant levels of defection (more than two defectors), there is a sharp split between defectors and non-defectors within the HFC and BDC. For example, although the HFC notoriously challenged Boehner's speakership in the 114th Congress, and some even opposed Ryan's bid after Boehner stepped down (Rubin (2022)), the majority of the caucus never defected. Even in the 118th Congress, which held 15 votes on McCarthy, the majority of the caucus did not defect even once. Similar differences exist among the Blue Dogs, as just nine members out of 26 voted against Pelosi's speakership in the 116th.
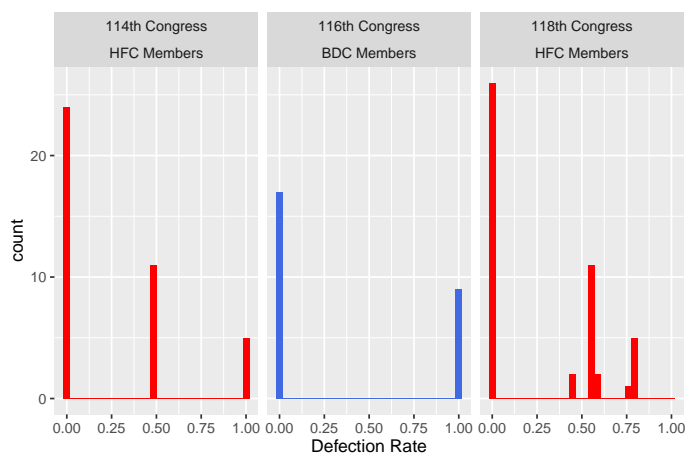

Figure 2: Defection Rates on Speaker Election Votes among Blue Dog Coalition and House Freedom Caucus members

What explains rising conflict on key procedural votes, such as rules and speaker elections? Why do we observe partisan asymmetries as well as variation within obstructionist factions in who defects?

3 Existing Models of Party Loyalty Predict Decreasing Procedural Conflict

3.1 Spatial Models of Floor Voting

In one-dimensional spatial models, put forth by Schickler and Rich (1997) and Krehbiel (1993) for example, the median legislator determines procedural floor outcomes, because they can credibly

align themselves with either party. These models predict defection exclusively comes from majority party moderates and only occurs when there is sufficient ideological overlap between the parties. Extremists cannot credibly align with the minority, because they always prefer the party median, and without overlap, moderates have less incentive to cooperate with the minority. Of course, both predictions are incorrect in the past decade. Defection has grown as ideological overlap shrinks (Curry and Lee (2020)), and GOP extremists, but not moderates, defect.

3.2 Conditional Party Government

Conditional Party Government (as outlined first in Rohde (1991) and Aldrich and Rohde (2001), and clarified further in Rohde and Aldrich (2010) and Rohde (2013)), makes a very similar claim. It argues that positive agenda power is a function of ideological homogeneity within and heterogeneity between parties. When there are minimal ideological disagreements within the majority party, the rank-and-file grant leaders greater positive agenda power, as they are not worried about the leadership pulling legislative outcomes significantly away from their ideal point. Party leaders can push their agenda through with relative ease, as they have less need to coerce roll-call loyalty through discipline. As internal preferences become heterogeneous, however, floor-voting cohesion decreases and party leaders must rely on the threat of punishment to compel loyalty and pass legislation.

Existing measures of ideology, which scale roll-call votes (e.g. Poole and Rosenthal (1991); Poole and Rosenthal (1997); Clinton et al. (2004); Duck-Mayr and Montgomery (2023)) or campaign donations (Bonica (2014)) suggest this is increasingly the case — legislators' ideologies are growing more homogeneous within and polarized across parties (Barber and McCarty (2015), Lee (2015)). As an illustration, Figure 30 plots the ideology distributions using Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure, which amalgamates several ideological measures into one. Even after the 110th Congress, by which time all ideological overlap between the parties had already dissipated, the distributions are still growing narrower within and polarized across parties. Based on CPG, purely spatial models, and Procedural Cartel Theory (discussed next), this should produce greater cohesion on procedural votes.

3.3 The Procedural Cartel Model

Procedural Cartel Theory (PCT) (Cox and McCubbins (2005)) agrees with CPG that positive agenda power increases as the majority party grows more ideologically cohesive. Party leaders grant greater proposal power to its central agents (e.g. committee chairpersons) when the party is homogeneous, because they are less likely to propose a bill that others disagree with on the floor (Cox and McCubbins, 2005, p. 204).

PCT goes a step further on procedural votes. Regardless of their ideological distance to party leaders, legislators specifically avoid defecting on procedure for fear of punishment. The model assumes that legislators connect their reelection chances to a productive majority party brand and

obtaining party resources like committee seats and leadership positions.[9] Party leaders can therefore use these resources to incentivize loyalty on procedure. Defectors do not receive leadership positions or desirable committee seats, and they lose the electoral value of the majority party's brand by besmirching its legislative record (Cox and McCubbins (1993), Chapter 7). Legislators seeking to challenge leadership are thus more likely to do so on substantive votes, where the threat of punishment is less. Constituents and interest groups are generally less aware of procedure than substantive votes, which makes procedural compliance an easier pill to swallow for such legislators.

The model's predictions fall apart after the Tea Party emerges. Polarization and intra-party homogeneity has only increased in the 2010s and onwards, but party leaders (particularly on the Republican side) increasingly struggle to secure procedural support when they most need it (recall Section 2). Instead, majority party unity on substantive roll-calls, where PCT suggests legislators have more latitude, has increased. Recent breakdowns in the procedural cartel, such as the 17 failed speaker elections in the 118th Congress, require us to revisit the model.

Frances Lee's model of party dynamics is similar to PCT in that majority party legislators view a productive party brand as critical to retaining majority status. She argues that because legislators attach being in the majority party to greater reelection chances, they are particularly inclined to vote cohesively under slim majorities, as the threat of losing majority status is at its greatest (Lee (2016)). However, majority party seat margins are generally decreasing over the past ten Congresses, while procedural tension increases. In recent slim majorities, most notably but not limited to the 118th Congress, factions have ignored the party's collective interests and held leaders' hostage, questioning the assumptions of Lee's model.

3.4 Testing Alternative Explanations: What Ideology Does and Does Not Reveal

Given that the within-party ideology distributions are homogenizing, the cartel and CPG intuitions alone cannot explain why intra-party procedural conflict is rising. Another possibility is that Democratic moderates and GOP conservatives are growing ideologically further from party leaders. If party leaders are increasingly drawn from one flank of the party, or extreme legislators (in terms of ideological distance to party leaders) are selecting into obstructionist caucuses, then ideology may explain why procedural warfare is rising in these camps.

I investigate these possibilities using dynamic CF-Scores (Bonica (2014)), rather than roll-call based scalings like DW-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal (1991); Poole and Rosenthal (1997)) or the composite measure (Bonica et al. (2024)), because it is tautological to use ideological measures which incorporate roll-call votes to explain procedural voting.

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[9]Indeed, committee seats and leadership positions allow legislators to claim credit for legislative activities, publicly take stances on relevant issues (Mayhew (1974); Weingast and Marshall (1988)), and also increase the likelihood of receiving money from access-seeking donors like corporate PACs (Hall and Wayman (1990); Powell and Grimmer (2016)), while a reputable party brand provides an electoral cushion for all majority party members.
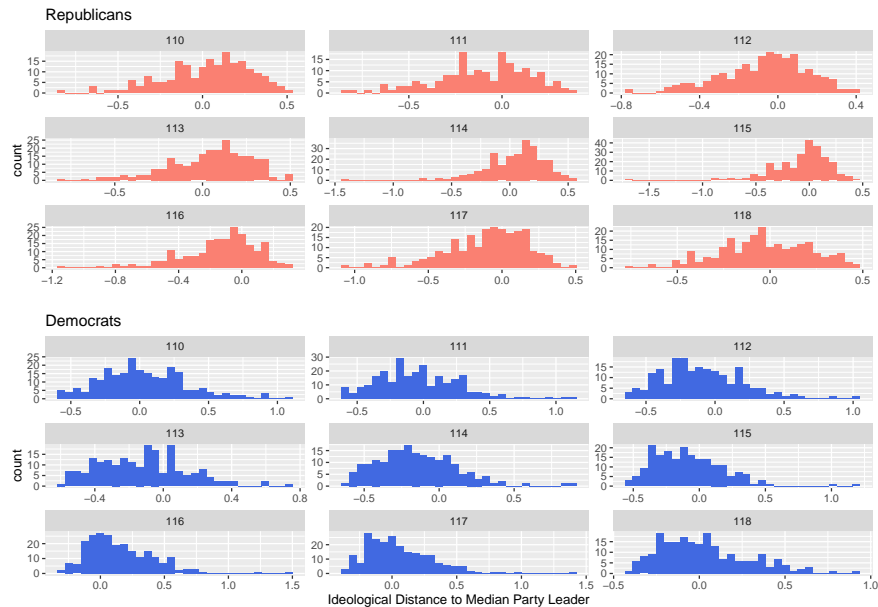
3.4.1 Shifting Composition of Party Leaders

Figure 3: Distribution of ideological distances to the median party leader. Ideology is measured with Bonica (2014)'s Dynamic CF-Scores.

Figure 3 plots the distribution of ideological distances to the median party leader. GOP moderates are actually further from party leaders than conservatives and growing more so over time. Among Democrats, the set of legislators furthest from leaders are indeed moderates. This difference grows in the 116th Congress onward, because party leaders are chosen from left of the party median in these Congresses (see 31). It is worth noting, however, that these patterns among Democrats change when using other ideological measures. When using the composite measure, for example, Democratic moderates are moving closer to the leadership over time (see 33), as the median party leader is scaled as equivalent to the party median in the 116th Congress onward (see 30).

3.4.2 Selection into Obstructionist Caucuses
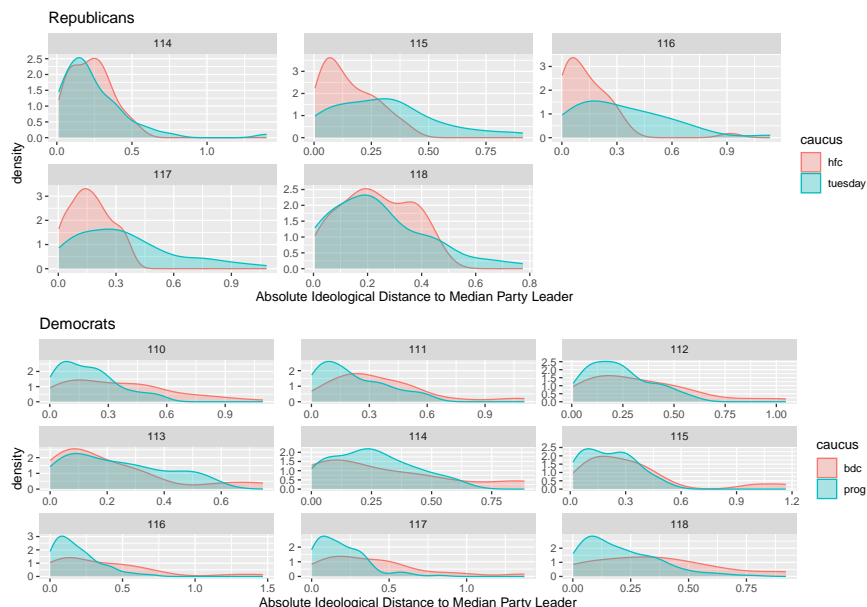
Figure 4: Distribution of ideological distances (absolute value) to the median party leader among obstructionist caucuses' members. Ideology is measured with Dynamic CF scores from Bonica (2014). `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus. `tuesday` = Tuesday Group. `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus. `BDC` = Blue Dog Coalition.

Figure 4 compares the ideological distributions of obstructionist caucuses (the BDC, HFC, and Tea Party caucus) to their more agreeable and opposing ideological counterpart (the Progressive Caucus and Tuesday Group, respectively). There is no evidence that the HFC is growing more extreme vis-à-vis GOP leaders. In fact, the average Tuesday Group member is further from the party leaders than the average HFC member in all Congresses. Among Democrats, BDC members are slightly further from party leaders, but are not growing more so over time.

Put together, ideology provides no insight into why GOP conservatives defect but not moderates. It does suggest that Democratic moderates are further from party leaders than progressives, but there is no evidence that the obstructionist BDC is growing further from the leadership over time, despite their increased willingness to challenge Pelosi.

4 A Theory of "Internal" Procedural Defection

Party leaders may face two kinds of procedural threats, "external" and "internal". External defections are when majority party members form an ideological floor coalition with the minority, while "internal" defections are when majority party members defect to gain influence on the party's agenda.

As the parties polarize, party leaders become less concerned about the external defection threat, since their moderates have less ideological or electoral incentives to aid the minority party. Instead,

party leaders must protect against "internal" challenges. The rank-and-file agree they do not want to cooperate with the minority ("external" threat) but may disagree about which factions deserve legislative influence. If a faction feels they are getting a raw deal (for example, party leaders do not consult them on legislation, restrict the offering or acceptance of amendments, and/or deny them powerful committee seats), they may obstruct party leaders' agenda power to reap concessions that increase their legislative power.

To achieve these ends, factions obstruct procedure rather than substance, because they desire structural power more than any particular policy concession. They are less interested in revising individual bills than in securing enduring influence, such as seats on the Rules Committee, the ability to propose amendments on the floor, or the power to vacate a speaker. Rather than organizing defection on each substantive bill as they arrive, shutting down House business by obstructing speaker elections and special rules is a more systematic way of coercing concessions from leaders. It also directly signals their frustration lies with the Rules Committee's use of closed rules[10] and the centralization of policymaking in the Speaker's office.[11]

The potential benefit of such a challenge is clear. By holding the agenda hostage, the faction creates bargaining leverage that pressures leaders to concede their demands.[12] However, this internal threat is credible *only if* 1) the faction is pivotal, 2) party leaders cannot credibly recruit the minority's help, and 3) the cost legislators face for defecting is less than the productivity cost party leaders face for a failed rule. If the faction is not pivotal or leaders can enlist minority party support, the faction has no bargaining leverage. Leaders can pass rules with or without their support. If the defection cost is greater for the faction than the leaders, then leaders have greater holdout power. Should a pivotal faction defect, leaders can absorb the cost for longer than the faction. Defection is not credible, because leaders can simply "wait out" the faction until it acquiesces.

Whether or not the faction is pivotal is known to both the leaders and faction before a procedural vote is offered, and increasing polarization severely limits the credibility of leaders securing minority help (e.g. McCarthy refused to ask Democrats to save his speakership). The costs of defection are thus central to explaining a faction's decision to defect.

Defectors face two potential costs: 1) electoral or financial cost for unproductivity and 2) party punishment. Indeed, it is these two costs that PCT argues ensure rank-and-file loyalty on procedural votes. To the extent that voters prefer legislative productivity, defecting tarnishes the majority party

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[10]A closed rule is a type of special rule that limits floor amendments to those approved by the Rules Committee, barring all others from being proposed.

[11]For example, HFC member Matt Rosendale noted on the House floor on January 5th, 2023 during the McCarthy speaker crisis: "the voices that were sent here to equally – equally – represent each of the 435 districts across this nation have become diminished through the consolidation of power into the hands of the speaker and a fortunate few who happen to serve on the Committee on Rules, which controls every aspect of legislation that travels through this body." (Bennett (2023))

[12]Indeed, in the two most recent speaker election challenges, the obstructionist factions made notable gains. Moderate Democrats opposing Pelosi's speakership in the 116th Congress received desirable committee seats, term restrictions on party leaders, and greater access to the floor (see Section 2.1). By challenging McCarthy's speaker bid in the 118th Congress, the HFC received two seats on the Rules Committee and the ability for just one legislator to bring a privileged motion-to-vacate resolution to the floor. Of course, ousting McCarthy gave the HFC a significantly more conservative Speaker (see Section 2.1).

brand and may elicit punishment at the polls. The same mechanism may apply to donors (although PCT does not discuss the donorate). In addition, PCT assumes that party leaders can withhold resources, such as committee seats, requested committee transfers, and leadership positions, from rank-and-file members who threaten their agenda power.

This implies that the likelihood of a credible internal defection threat increases as the party's capacity to punish wanes. I therefore argue that rising factionalism is a function of growing resource independence. Certain factions are becoming less reliant on resources controlled by party leaders, such as donor networks, committee seats, and leadership positions, and are thus less fearful of party punishment.

In Appendix E, I formalize this theory with a sequential bargaining game. It provides additional insights, such as how bargaining outcomes are affected by the indivisibility of side-payments and whether there is complete or asymmetric information about the leaders' and faction's costs. In any setting, the core result is the same: internal defections emerge as the party's ability to punish diminishes.

4.1 Related Literature

A few scholars have entertained this possibility, but they merely state the hypothesis without case studies, formalization, or empirical testing. In an unpublished manuscript, Jenkins and Stewart (2023) hypothesize that "a segment of members has emerged over the last decade who are relatively insulated from any resource pressures that party leaders can place on them" (p. 43), allowing them to "buck the party occasionally, and sometimes block votes on issues that harm the faction" (p. 43-4). Rubin (2022) similarly claims that obstructionist factions may offer material payoffs, such as "exclusive access to private donor networks", "to compensate members for the resources the party may withhold in punishment for defying party leaders" (p. 4). Ideological extremists are "less dependent on the party purse" and simply have "less to lose" monetarily when defecting (p. 6). This work is an important theoretical starting point, but without empirical or qualitative evidence, we cannot draw meaningful inferences from it.

Empirical work on factions focuses on their fundraising, often showing that faction members have ideologically homogeneous donor networks (Clarke (2020); Gaynor (2022); McGee (2021)). None, however, connect factions' donor pools to intra-party conflict. We do not know the extent to which factions' donor networks overlap with party leaders and whether such reliance is associated with obstruction.

Gaynor (2022) provides the closest effort to quantifying network connection to party leaders, but she only considers donations from the 115th and 116th Congresses and focuses exclusively on direct money received from party leaders' LPACs. While direct money is important, it is a small fraction of a legislator's total receipts and does not capture how similar a legislator's donorate is to that of party leaders. An optimal measure of resource independence must therefore consider a legislator's reliance on the broader set donors connected to party leaders.

Both the quantitative and qualitative literature ignore within-faction differences in resource

independence and party obstruction. An ideal theory of defection not only explains why certain factions obstruct and others do not, but also why certain members within obstructionist factions remain loyal.

5   Empirical Strategy

I test my theory by examining changes in financial reliance on party leaders. My model predicts that obstructionist factions have grown less reliant on party leaders' donor networks, thereby weakening the party's punishment threat and enabling defection.[13] This mechanism assumes that party leaders can incentivize loyalty by influencing money in their donor network. Ample anecdotal evidence suggests this is the case (see Appendix F).

5.1   Data

I collect campaign contributions data from the 2008-2024 election cycles for House legislators in the 110th-118th Congresses from the DIME database (Bonica (2016)). DIME pulls the donations data from the FEC, but it has the key benefit of linking earmarked donations to candidates made through conduit organizations (primarily ActBlue and WinRed) back to the candidates' file. This linkage is critical, as the share of contributions from individual donors arriving through ActBlue and WinRed is rapidly increasing. The FEC often solely includes these donations in the conduit organizations' receipts.

My data on caucus membership from the 110-115th Congresses comes from Clarke (2020). Using a combination of caucus websites, candidate websites, press releases, and news articles, I update his dataset for the 116th-118th Congresses and add Tuesday Group membership. Except for the HFC and the Tuesday Group between the 110-116th Congresses, all caucuses advertise their membership on their website, so I use the Internet Archive to record their ranks. If a legislator left or joined the caucus in the middle of a congressional cycle, I still code them as a member during that Congress. For the few caucus-congress combinations that lack Internet Archive snapshots, I imputed membership based on the previous Congress and validated the result against Ballotpedia's caucus membership lists. I then used press releases, candidate websites, and news articles to investigate any discrepancies between the imputation result and Ballotpedia.

The Tuesday Group only began keeping an official roster in the 117th Congress, so no official membership lists exist between the 110-116th Congresses. To find members who were not identifiable through online media, I code those who received money from the caucus' fundraising arm (Tuesday

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[13]While the model applies to other party resources, such as committee seats and leadership positions, I focus on money because it is easier to measure changes in a legislator's financial reliance than to quantify how much they value a committee assignment. In addition, much of the value of committee seats and leadership roles stems from the access they provide to corporate donors (Powell and Grimmer (2016); Hall and Wayman (1990); Fouirnaies (2018)). Financial reliance on party money therefore captures a significant part of what makes those positions valuable. For instance, a legislator heavily reliant on the party's corporate donor network stands to lose far more by forfeiting a committee seat than one who was less financially dependent to begin with. Financial reliance on the party network is therefore linked to the value of committee seats and leadership positions.

Group PAC) as members. The resulting total number of members in each Congress matched the estimates of various news outlets.

The HFC also does not publish a comprehensive roster. However, a significant portion of members self-identify on their congressional webpage or through press releases. Others are identifiable through official caucus statements or news articles. I therefore imputed membership for the 116th based on membership in the 115th (already identified by Clarke (2020)) and individually investigated all 116th Republican freshmen. I then individually verified all deviations between this result and Ballotpedia's collection. I took the same approach for the remaining Congresses, except I also verified deviations against Newsweek and Pew articles, which published their own list of confirmed and likely members for the 117th and 118th Congresses, respectively (Roche (2022); Desilver (2023)).

5.2   Measuring Network Similarity

To test this prediction, I create a network similarity metric between a legislator and their party's leaders that captures how financially reliant they are on party leaders' donor networks (i.e. "the party network").

I define a legislator's network similarity (hereafter NS) with the leadership as the share of her total donations that come directly from party leaders or from donors who also donated to a party leader. Treating every donor-candidate dyad as an edge with weights equal to the donation size, this is the share of a legislator's weights coming from a party leader node or nodes sharing an edge with a party leader. Party leader nodes include national, state, and local party PACs and party leaders' campaign committees and leadership PACs. Formally, for legislator i with a set of donors $\mathcal{D}_i$, let a_d denote the amount given by donor d, $\mathcal{D}_L$ denote the party leadership's donor pool, and $\mathcal{P}$ denote the set of party leader nodes, then

$$NS_i = \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L \bigcup d \in \mathcal{P}\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} \tag{1}$$

When $NS = 1$, the legislator is perfectly dependent on the leadership — all of her donors are connected to the leadership. When $NS = 0$, the legislator is perfectly independent from the leadership — none of her donors are connected to the leadership.

We can decompose this measure by donor type to understand whether a legislator's network is connected to the leadership through individual donors, non-corporate organizations, corporate PACs, or direct party money. Where NS_Corp, NS_Ind, and NS_Org are the share of a legislator's donations coming from leadership-connected corporate, individual, and non-corporate

PAC donors, respectively, because each donor must fall into one of these categories, we have that

$$NS_i = \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Ind\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} + \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Org\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d}$$
$$+ \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Corp\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} + \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{P}\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d}$$
$$\equiv NS\_Ind_i + NS\_Org_i + NS\_Corp_i + NS\_Direct_i$$

With these individual components of NS, we can interrogate whether certain network connections to the leadership have greater impact on defection likelihoods. For example, it is possible that party leaders have more sway over corporate donors than individuals, and thus a legislators' reliance on corporate donors, NS_Corp, is more predictive of defection than overall NS, which factors in NS_Ind.

Table 1 displays the set of party leaders for each party. The positions are slightly different across parties and change based on majority status.

Table 1: Party Leader Positions for Democrats and Republicans

Party	Status	Leader Positions
Democrats	Majority	Speaker, Majority Leader, Whip, Chair, Vice Chair, Assistant Speaker, DCCC Chair
Democrats	Minority	Minority Leader, Assistant Leader, Whip, Senior Chief Deputy Whip, Chair, Vice Chair, DCCC Chair
Republicans	Majority	Speaker, Majority Leader, Whip, Chair, Vice Chair, Policy Committee Chairman, Chief Deputy Whip, Conference Secretary, NRCC Chair
Republicans	Minority	Minority Leader, Whip, Chair, Vice Chair, Conference Secretary, NRCC Chair

6 Results

6.1 Temporal Changes in Network Similarity Fit Procedural Defection Patterns

Figures 5 and 6 plot the party-level distributions of NS by donor type over time. NS is computed with respect to party leaders in the given Congress using campaign finance data during the contemporaneous Congress. For example, for the 118th Congress, campaign contributions from the 2024 election cycle is used to compute NS with respect to 118th Congress party leaders. Note that any discontinuities in the distributions are simply due to scaling the y-axis for optimal visualization.
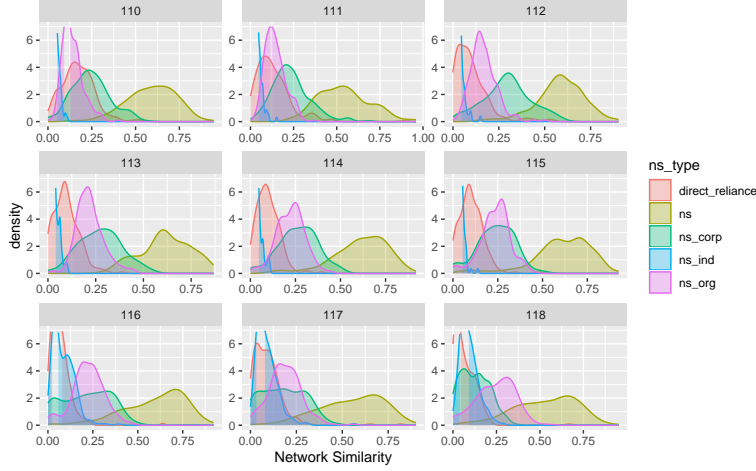
Figure 5: Network Similarity by Donor-Type and Congress Among Democrats
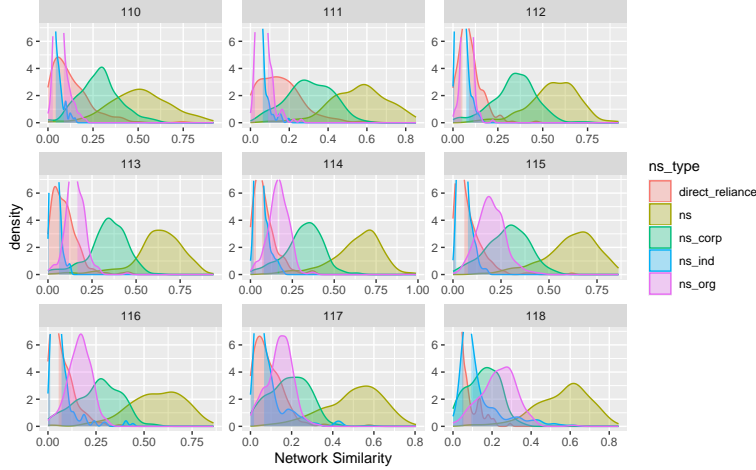

Figure 6: Network Similarity by Donor-Type and Congress Among GOP

While ideological measures suggest the parties are increasingly homogeneous within, the donor network within each party is increasingly fragmented. A growing segment of legislators are less reliant on party leaders, specifically their corporate donors.

From the 112th Congress onwards, the overall NS distributions, which amalgamate all donor types, have increasingly fat left-tails in both parties. These changes in the overall NS distribution are minor, however, when compared to glaring changes in legislators' reliance on leadership-connected corporate donors (corporate PACs who donate to party leaders). While both parties NS_Corp distributions were roughly normal during the 110-115th Congresses and centered between 0.25-0.35, they have since grown bimodal with one mode nearing 0. In the 113th Congress, the average Republican (Democratic) legislator received 34% (28%) of his or her donations from leadership-connected corporations. That number was just 15% (12%) in the 118th Congress.
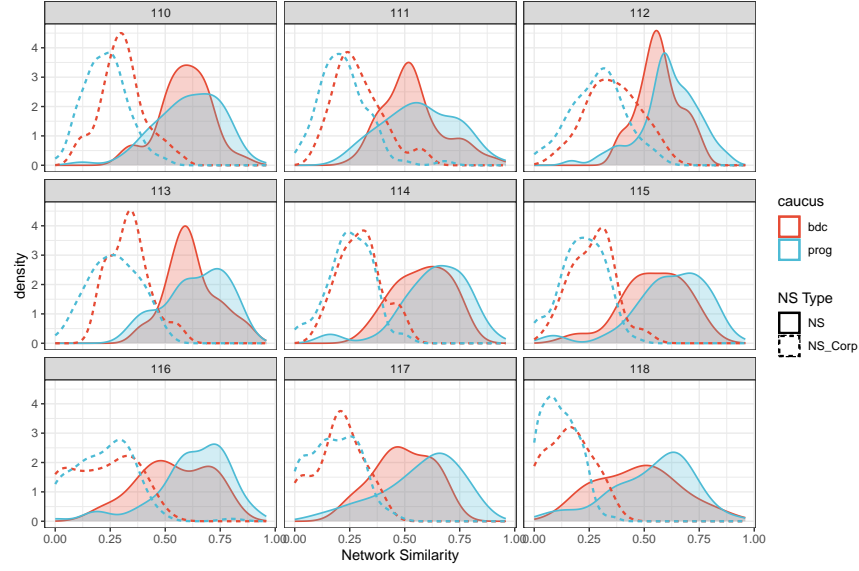
Figure 7: Among Democrats: Caucus-Level Variation in Network Similarity Fits Defection Patterns. bdc = Blue Dog Coalition. prog = Congressional Progressive Caucus. Dashed distributions are NS_Corp. Filled distributions are NS.
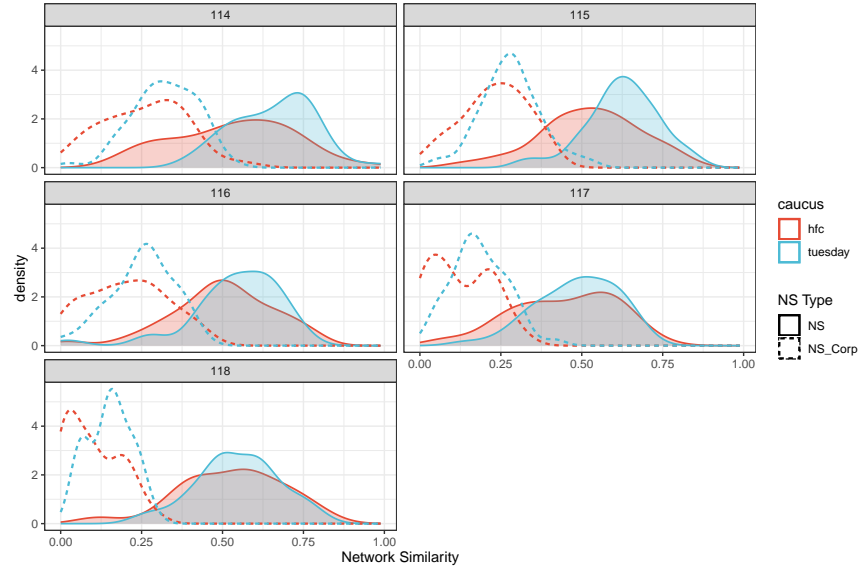
Figure 8: Among Republicans: Caucus-Level Variation in Network Similarity Fits Defection Patterns. hfc = House Freedom Caucus. tuesday = Tuesday Group. Dashed distributions are NS_Corp. Filled distributions are NS.
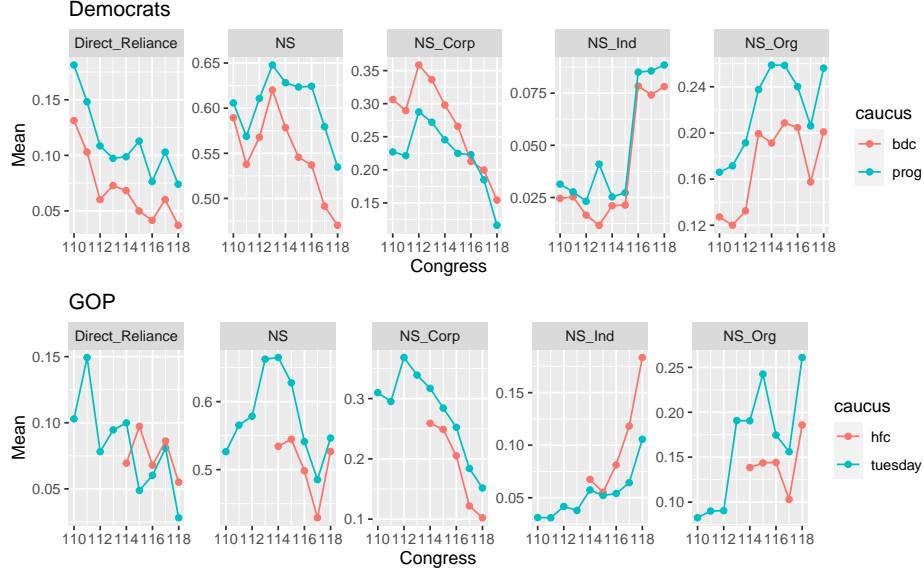
Figure 9: Mean NS by Caucus and Donor-Type

NS is also consistent with partisan asymmetries in who defects. Ideological measures suggest Blue Dogs' distance to party leaders is stable over time (see Figure 4), despite their increasing willingness to obstruct.[14] In the donor network, however, the Blue Dogs have grown independent from the leadership, as their NS distribution pulls away from their non-obstructionist counterpart, the Progressive Caucus. While Blue Dogs and Progressives had similar NS values in the 110th Congress, by the 116th, Blue Dogs were on average over 7.5 pp less reliant on the party network. This divergence is driven by corporate donors: between the 110–112th Congress, Blue Dogs were on average 6–8 pp more reliant on the party's corporate network than Progressives; but by the 116th, the two were equally reliant.

Ideological measures also suggest that the non-obstructionist Tuesday Group is, if anything, *further* from party leaders than the HFC. But since their founding, the HFC has remained less reliant on party leaders' donors than their moderate counterpart.

Like the BDC, HFC members are growing less reliant on their party's corporate network. Though the HFC and Tuesday Group's aggregate NS distributions nearly converge in the 118th Congress, Figure 8 shows the growing distributional differences in NS_Corp are drastic. In the 114th Congress, both the HFC and Tuesday Group's NS_Corp distributions were centered at roughly 0.3, but by the 118th Congress, the HFC's mode is less than 0.05, while the Tuesday Group's mode is greater than 0.15. By then, 37% of the HFC receives less than 5% of their donations from the party's corporate network, compared to just 9% of the Tuesday Group. Both caucuses' NS_Corp declined, but only the HFC saw such dramatic growth in its left-tail mass.

Obstructionist caucuses are also less reliant on their party's network of non-corporate PACs, but

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[14]Their willingness to hold the agenda hostage only emerged in the beginning of the 116th Congress, when they withheld support for Pelosi's speaker election in exchange for legislative power concessions (see Section 2 of the paper).

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these gaps are stable over time. Instead, they are specifically growing less reliant on their leaders' network of corporate PACs. These cross-caucus differences in financial reliance on leadership-connected PACs are particularly relevant, given party leaders have greatest influence over their PAC donors.[15] For this reason, and because there is minimal within-party variation (see Figures 5 and 6), the remaining analyses exclude NS_Ind.

6.2 Within-Congress Relationship Between Network Similarity and Defection

If financial reliance on party leaders discourages defection, then NS should positively correlate with procedural loyalty *within*-Congress. This correlation should also strengthen over time, given that the donor network is fragmenting.
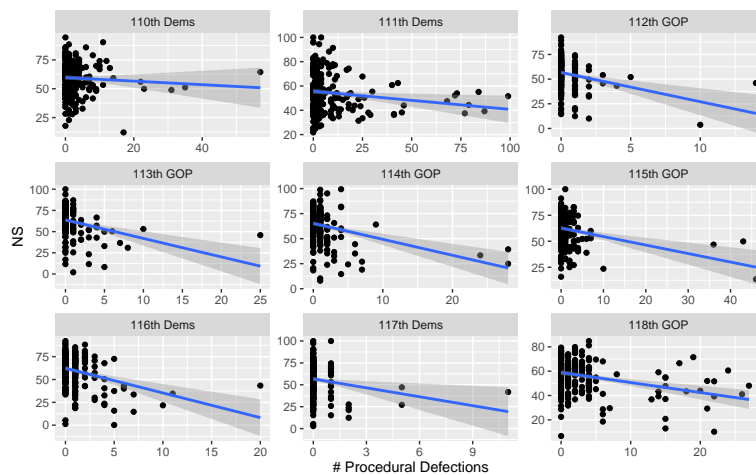
Figure 10: Procedural Defections and Network Similarity

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[15]Section 5 provides anecdotal evidence that party leaders punish defection with PAC money. Section 8.4 empirically shows that party leaders specifically punish with corporate PACs. PACs have established forms of contact with party leaders through fundraisers and lobbying efforts. It follows that leaders can better influence this small set of large-dollar donors than the vast, faceless network of individuals who each donate small amounts.
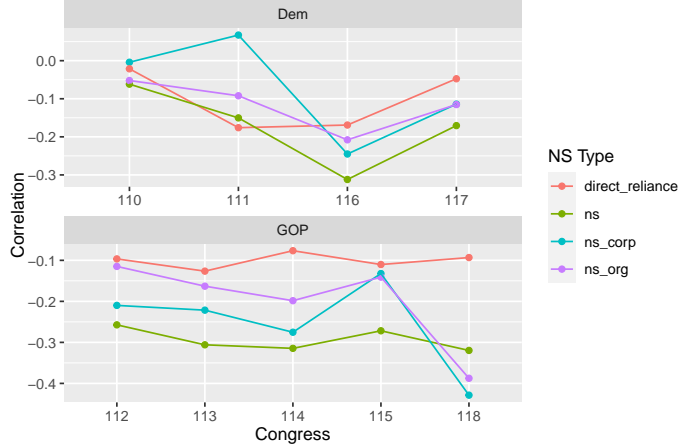
Figure 11: Correlation between Procedural Defections and Network Similarity by Donor-Type

NS is negatively associated with procedural defections in every Congress except the 110th. Figure 11 breaks these correlations down by donor-type. Among Republicans, as expected, the correlations decrease as the donor network fragments. Reliance on party-connected corporate donors is generally the strongest predictor of defections, but by the 118th Congress, NS_Org is similarly correlated with defection.

Outside of the 117th Congress, the correlations are also decreasing among Democrats. NS_Org is negatively correlated with defection in each Congress, because Blue Dogs are consistently less reliant on leadership-connected non-corporate PACs. NS_Corp only becomes negatively associated with defection in the 116th Congress, because the corporate network fragments after the 112th Congress, and Democrats only recapture the majority in the 116th Congress. The correlations in the 117th Congress are smaller, because there are few defections under the Democrats' then slim majority. But looking at Figure 10, those who did defect came from the lower end of the NS distribution.

6.2.1 Conditioning on Ideology

When we condition on ideology, within-Congress correlations between money and defection should evaporate, because defection comes from the ideological flanks within each individual Congress (see Figure 22). Although temporal changes in existing ideological measures do not predict rising factionalism or partisan asymmetries in which flanks defect, these measures still capture considerable within-Congress variance in defection. Thus for a stronger test of money's relevance, I examine whether these within-Congress relationships remain after controlling for ideology.

I first exploit within-caucus variation in speaker election defections (see Figure 2). Because legislators select into obstructionist caucuses not only based on ideology, but also their willingness to vote against the party (Rubin (2022); Mulvaney (2023); Green (2019)), within-caucus variation implicitly controls for ideology and other unobserved traits correlated with defection. Although caucus members are not ideologically identical, they share more similar ideological and donor profiles

than the party at large, making within-caucus contrasts particularly informative (Gaynor (2022); McGee (2021); Rubin (2022); Clarke (2020)).

In each Congress where three or more HFC or BDC members defected on speaker votes, their caucuses were internally split. Figure 12 compares the distribution of NS between defectors and non-defectors in these Congresses. Because speaker elections occur at the start of a Congress, I use lagged donations data from the prior cycle to ensure NS is measured pre-defection. For example, for HFC members in the 118th Congress, I use donations from the 2022 election cycle and compute NS with respect to party leaders in the 118th Congress.

To benchmark these patterns, I also compare ideology scores and lagged district vote margins. Table 2 summarizes the distribution means and decomposes NS by donor type. Because this is a finite population not a sample, I compute p-values using randomization inference under the sharp null that there are no ex-ante differences between defectors and non-defectors — i.e. selection into defection is random.
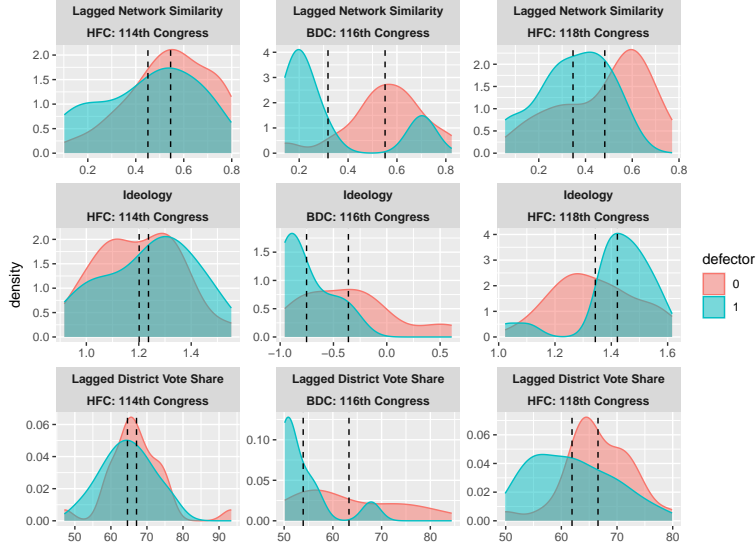
Figure 12: Network Similarity Predicts Within-Caucus Variation in Speaker Vote Defections. Each plot compares the distribution of the labelled outcome variable between caucus members who defected against Boehner and/or Ryan (114th Congress), Pelosi (116th Congress), or McCarthy's speaker election (118th Congress) and those who never did. `Ideology` is measured using lagged dynamic CF scores (Bonica (2014)). `Network Similarity` uses lagged donations data for HFC plots only. `District Vote Share` is the vote share received in the general election preceding entrance into the given Congress (e.g. 2022 election for the 118th Congress), as reported by the FEC. Vertical lines denote distribution means. `BDC` = Blue Dog Coalition. `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus.

Table 2: Within-Caucus Differences Between Defectors and Non-Defectors

	HFC 114th		HFC 118th		BDC	
	Δ	p	Δ	p	Δ	p
NS	-0.09	0.118	-0.14	0.011	-0.23	0.004
NS Ind	-0.01	0.464	0.01	0.666	0.01	0.582
NS Corp	-0.04	0.005	-0.08	0.000	-0.17	0.000
NS Org	-0.03	0.575	-0.05	0.084	-0.09	0.181
Direct Reliance	-0.02	0.432	-0.01	0.497	0.01	0.469
Ideology	0.04	0.505	0.08	0.080	-0.39	0.021
District Vote Share	-2.51	0.320	-4.67	0.017	-9.40	0.018
Share Donations from IOOS	0.00	0.862	0.01	0.837	0.12	0.025
n	16, 24		21, 26		9, 17	

[1] Δ is difference in means between defectors and non-defectors.

[2] "IOOS" = individual out-of-state donors.

[3] n reports number of defectors, number of non-defectors

Even within caucuses with relatively homogeneous donor networks (Gaynor (2022); McGee (2021)) and members selected based on their ideology and readiness to challenge leaders (Rubin (2022)), those who challenge speaker nominees are significantly less reliant on party donors.

In the 118th Congress, McCarthy-defectors are on average 14 percentage points less reliant on party leaders' donors than their fellow HFC members ($p < 0.02$). This within-caucus difference, exceeds the largest cross-caucus difference in average NS — 12.6 pp. between the HFC and RSC. This shocking given the RSC is the GOP's centrist body and even includes members of the leadership itself.

There are even greater differences among Blue Dogs in the 116th Congress. Defectors are on average 23 pp. less reliant on party leaders' donors ($p < 0.005$). Ignoring the Squad since they only have four members, this exceeds the largest cross-caucus difference in average NS of 10.4 pp. between CPC and BDC members, despite the anecdotal evidence of Pelosi's influence over the CPC and the fact that 2/7 Democratic leaders in the 116th Congress are CPC members (Grim (2023)).

In both cases, the within-caucus differences in NS are driven by corporate donors. Differences in NS_Org are notable but smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant, underscoring the central role of shared corporate donors in maintaining party control.

Both ideology and district safety show mixed patterns. The average HFC defector is slightly ideologically further from party leaders and comes from a safe district (above 60% vote share), while the average BDC defector is ideologically *closer* to party leaders and comes from a competitive district (below 55% vote share).

In the 114th Congress, HFC defectors are also less reliant on the party's corporate network, but the magnitude of the difference is much smaller. This is unsurprising, given the GOP network did not fragment until the 2016 election cycle (see Figure 8), which is *during* the 114th Congress. Because NS is computed with lagged (2014) donations, defectors and non-defectors should have comparable networks. In Section 6.4, I show that these defections actually initiated the network's fragmentation in the 114th Congress.
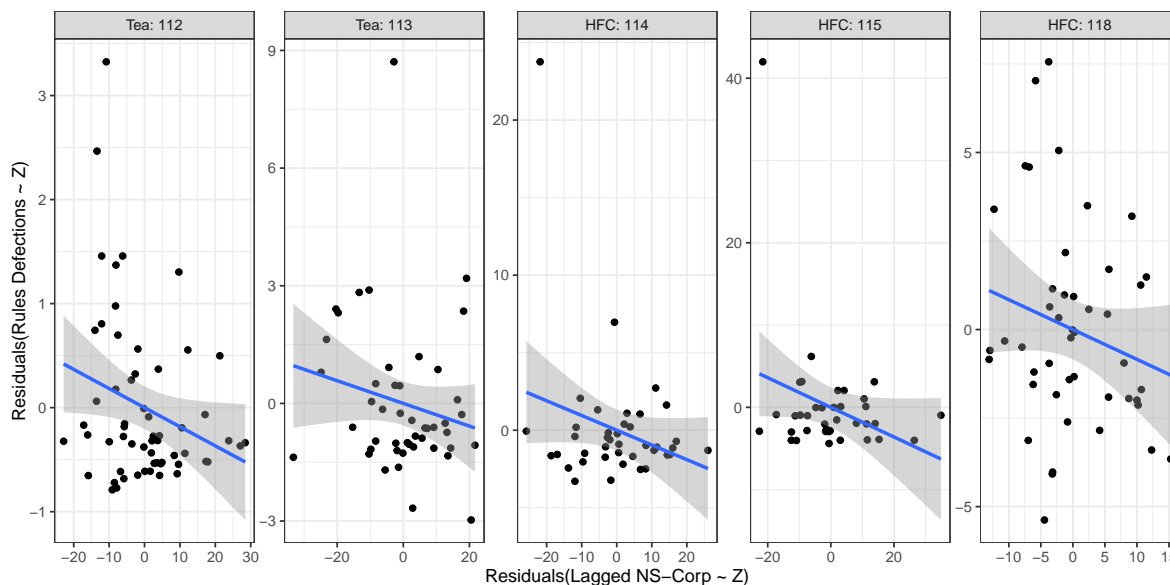
Figure 13: Greater Reliance on Party Leaders' Corporate Donor Network is Associated with Fewer Rules Defections Within Obstructionist GOP Caucuses Even After Residualizing Out Ideology and District Vote Share. NS_Corp is lagged. Z includes lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress and caucus, where `Tea` = Tea Party and `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus.
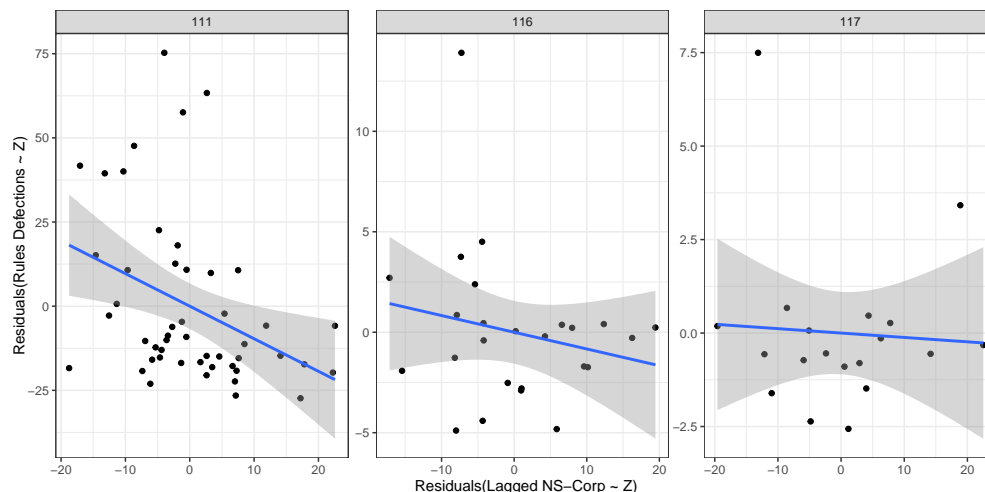

Figure 14: Greater Reliance on Party Leaders' Corporate Donor Network is Associated with Fewer Rules Defections Among Blue Dogs Even After Residualizing Out Ideology and District Vote Share. NS_Corp is lagged. Z includes lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress.

Reliance on the party's network of PACs also predicts within-caucus variation in special rules defections. Figures 13 and 14 plot the relationship between the number of special rules defections and lagged corporate financial reliance (lagged NS_Corp) among members of Republican and

Democratic obstructionist caucuses[16], respectively, after residualizing out lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district competitiveness.[17] Even when restricting the analysis to obstructionist caucuses — already a natural control for ideology — and further netting out any minor ideological differences remaining within them, greater NS_Corp is still associated with fewer defections in each Congress. Appendix Figures 45 and 46 show the relationship is similar for reliance on non-corporate PACs (NS_Org).

I now extend the analysis to all majority party legislators in the 111–118th Congresses, estimating negative binomial (NB) regressions of the following form for each Congress separately.

$$Defections_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 NS_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 |IdeologicalDist|_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 IdeologicalDist^2_{i,t-1}$$
$$+ \beta_4 DistrictVS_{i,t-1} + \mathbf{1}\{Freshman_{i,t}\} + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{2}$$

$Defections_{i,t}$ is the total number of speaker election and special rules defections by legislator i in Congress t. I lag all of the independent variables to avoid roll-call defections affecting the right-hand side. NS_{t-1} uses campaign contributions during the previous $(t-1)$ Congress to measure network similarity with respect to the current party leadership in Congress t. $DistrictVS_{i,t-1}$ is the district-level vote share the legislator received upon entrance into Congress t. I measure ideology with lagged dynamic CF-scores from Bonica (2014) to avoid using ideological measures which incorporate the dependent variable (such as Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure or DW-Nominate) or may be affected by the dependent variable (e.g. DW-DIME and static CF-scores include donations which occurred after the defections to scale legislators). For easier interpretation, I define ideology as the magnitude of the legislator's ideological distance to the median party leader and include a square term given the relationship between ideology and defection appears quadratic (see Figure 22). I control for whether legislator i is a freshman (first-time) legislator in Congress t. Freshmen legislators typically have lower lagged NS values, since NS_{t-1} is computed with contributions from when they were challengers, and non-incumbents have lower network connection to party leaders. All confidence intervals are constructed using robust standard errors.

Because the dependent variable is non-negative integers with a large proportion of zeroes (see Appendix Figure 47), it is heavily right-skewed and inappropriate for OLS. NB regressions are a workhorse model in such cases, because they allow us to directly model the counts while being robust to overdispersion (Wooldridge (2010); see Djourelova and Durante (2022) and Kaufman and Rogowski (2024) for recent political science papers using this model in a similar data setting.). I show in Appendix D.1 that the zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) model is not preferable,

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[16]I include the Tea Party Caucus in this analysis because they are the progenitor to the HFC, and its members famously challenged Speaker Boehner's agenda. I did not include them in the within-caucus analysis of Speaker election defections, however, because only 5 of 47 members voted against Boehner's speaker election in the 113th Congress — too few to estimate reliable differences in NS between defectors and non-defectors

[17]I plot the residuals from an OLS regression of rules defections on lagged ideology and lagged district vote share against the residuals from an OLS regression of lagged NS_Corp on lagged ideology and lagged district vote share. By the Frisch-Waugh-Lovell theorem, this allows us to visualize the bivariate relationship between rules defections and lagged NS_Corp net ideology and district safety.

because, it does not improve model fit or MSE, or better predict the number of zeroes (non-defectors). It does, however, create convergence issues when estimating the coefficients and forces the researcher to theoretically justify which variables should go in the count and zero-inflated model. In Appendix D.2, I include alternative specifications which code ideology with other contributions-based metrics like DW-DIME and static CF-Scores, estimate OLS and logistic regressions after making $Defections_{i,t}$ binary, or estimate ZINB regressions. The results are qualitatively similar.
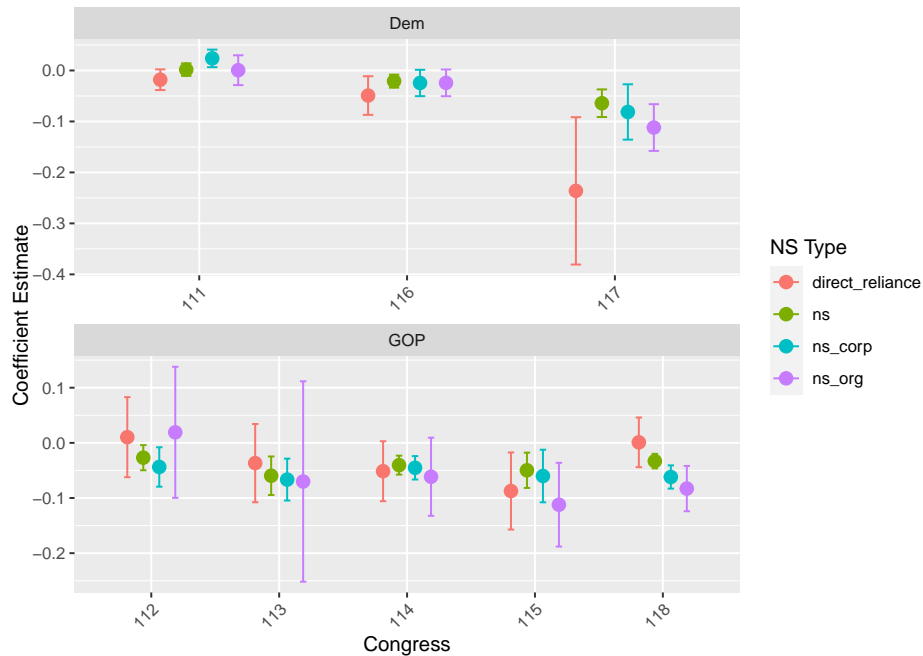
Figure 15: Within-Congress Relationship between NS and Procedural Defections when Conditioning on Ideology

When directly conditioning on legislators' ideological distance to party leaders, NS is still statistically significant and negative in all Congresses except the 111th. NB regressions model the logarithm of expected counts, so we exponentiate these coefficients to interpret them as percentage changes in defection.[18] Appendix Figure 51 plots these transformed coefficients.

As the donor network fragments, the relationship between NS and defection strengthens. Among Democrats, both NS_Corp and NS_Org grow more predictive – by the 117th Congress, a one-standard deviation increase in NS_Corp is associated with a 68% decrease in the expected number of defections, holding ideology, district safety, and tenure fixed. Among Republicans, NS_Org grows more predictive, while NS_Corp remains equally important over time – by the 118th Congress, a one-standard deviation increase in NS_Corp is associated with a 48% reduction in expected defections, holding other predictors constant.[19]

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[18]Specifically, a ΔX change in NS is associated with a $100(\exp(\beta)^{\Delta X} - 1)$ percent change in defections.

[19]If one prefers an Average Marginal Effect (AME) interpretation, Appendix Figure 52 shows that these percentage change associations are roughly equivalent to the AME of a one-standard deviation change in NS, as a share of mean defections. Scaling the AME by average defection levels is a natural step, allowing us to compare effects across

6.3 Legislator Turnover Drives Relationship Between Network Similarity and Defection

The previous section (6.2) shows that within a given Congress, legislators more reliant on the party's donor network are less likely to defect, even when conditioning on ideology. I now estimate two-way fixed effect NB regressions of the following form to test whether this relationship holds over time — that is, whether changes in NS are associated with changes in procedural defection across Congresses. If so, comparing models with legislator and district fixed effects allows me to assess whether this over-time association is driven by within-legislator changes in NS ("churn") or by legislator replacement ("turnover").

$$Defections_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \tau NS_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{i/d} + \alpha_t + f(\boldsymbol{X_{it}}) + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{3}$$

where $Defections_{i,t}$ are legislator i's total number of procedural defections in congress t, $\gamma_{i/d}$ are either legislator (i) or district (d) fixed effects, α_t are Congress fixed effects, and $\boldsymbol{X_{it}}$ are lagged time-varying controls, including district vote share, squared ideological distance to party leaders (with the lower-order term as well), and an indicator for a freshman legislator. We measure ideology with dynamic CF-scores and include alternative models using static CF-scores, DW-DIME scores, and Bonica composite scores (a strong test given this measure is trained on roll-calls) in Appendix J — the results are similar with any measure. Standard errors are clustered at the level of the fixed effects (legislator or district).

I estimate the model for each party separately in the Congresses in which they held the majority, because procedural defection, as conceived in this paper, can only occur in the majority party. Democrats held the majority in the 111th, 116th, and 117th Congresses[20], while Republicans held the majority in the 112th-115th and 118th Congress.

Congresses with different baseline defection levels.

[20]Because my campaign finance data only goes back till 2008 (corresponds to the 110th Congress), I cannot include the 110th Congress voting data for Democrats because these regressions require lagged contributions. I would need donations data from the 2006 cycle

Table 3: Defection and NS Among Democrats

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
NS_{t-1}	-0.013	0.000						
	(0.008)	(0.016)						
NS_Corp_{t-1}			-0.031	-0.028				
			(0.012)	(0.025)				
NS_Org_{t-1}					-0.047	-0.012		
					(0.014)	(0.049)		
$DirectReliance_{t-1}$							0.019	0.029
							(0.015)	(0.023)
n	558	490	558	490	558	490	558	490
Congress FE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Legislator FE		X		X		X		X
District FE	X		X		X		X	
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

[1] n excludes units (legislators or districts) with constant defections over time.

Table 4: Defection and NS Among GOP

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
NS_{t-1}	-0.017	0.002						
	(0.004)	(0.004)						
NS_Corp_{t-1}			-0.029	-0.003				
			(0.007)	(0.009)				
NS_Org_{t-1}					-0.023	0.009		
					(0.013)	(0.017)		
$DirectReliance_{t-1}$							-0.007	0.012
							(0.009)	(0.009)
n	951	818	951	818	951	818	951	818
Congress FE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Legislator FE		X		X		X		X
District FE	X		X		X		X	
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

[1] n excludes units (legislators or districts) with constant defections over time.

In both parties, when including legislator fixed effects, the association between each metric and defections is null, but when including district fixed effects, the association between NS_Corp and total defections is significant and negative. This suggests the relationship between financial reliance and defection is driven by legislator turnover rather than churn (i.e. within-legislator changes). In either party, when a House seat is replaced by a co-partisan who is one standard deviation less reliant on the party's corporate donors (σ_{Dem} = 12.93, σ_{GOP} = 13.49), the expected number of defections increases by over 32%, even when conditioning on the seat's change in ideological distance to the

party leadership (i.e. the change in ideological motivation to defect).

One might argue that the null within-legislator coefficients imply procedural defection is explained by a legislator's "type". That is, certain legislators have predispositions to defect (e.g. political outsiders or those with less respect for institutions), which cause them to have independent donor networks. To support this claim, any such predisposition cannot be captured by measures of ideology, since we control for them. Even if we grant this, this argument faces additional empirical and theoretical challenges.

Among Democrats, the "type" explanation is empirically weak, as adding legislator fixed effects barely shifts the estimated relationship between NS_Corp and defection. Instead, it merely inflates the standard error because of the sharp increase in estimated parameters, and the fact that only 85 out of 424 Democrats are observed in all three Congresses (111th, 116th, and 117th). The latter concern mechanically limits within-legislator variation in NS_Corp, attenuating power.

Beyond these data limitations, the smaller within-legislator coefficients, particularly among Republicans, are consistent with structural features of our theory and empirical features of the donor network. Regardless of how financially independent a legislator becomes, defection, as conceived here, is only credible if they are pivotal. This requires coordinating defections, which is likely difficult for legislators unaffiliated with a caucus that organizes obstruction. We therefore expect an association between financial independence and defection to be driven by members of obstructionist caucuses.

However, as is the case in the overall dataset, where the within-district variance is 137% and 59% larger than the within-legislator variance among Democrats and Republicans, respectively,[21] there is minimal within-legislator variance in NS_Corp even within these obstructionist caucuses. Figure 16 shows that the HFC and BDC are growing independent through a process of legislator turnover, not churn. Almost every freshman cohort is less financially reliant than the last, but within each cohort, there are minimal changes in financial reliance over time.[22] Thus, the null within-legislator coefficients do not contradict our theory but rather reflect the sticky nature of a legislator's donor network.

Indeed, if we subset to HFC members that experienced significant changes in NS_Corp across the GOP-controlled Congresses after the HFC's formation (114th, 115th, and 118th), we typically find changes in defections consistent with our theory. For example, two of the three members that did not defect against Boehner's speakership in the 114th Congress, but did against McCarthy's speakership in the 118th Congress, each saw over 15 percentage point decreases in their level of NS_Corp relative to the GOP congressional average[23]. Similarly, four of the six members that

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[21]The within-legislator variance is defined as $\frac{1}{N-L}\sum_{l=1}^{L}\sum_{i=1}^{n_l}(NS\_Corp_{i,l} - \overline{NS\_Corp}_l)^2$, where N is the total number of observations, L is the total number of legislators, and n_l is the number of observations for legislator l. The within-district variance is defined analogously as $\frac{1}{N-D}\sum_{d=1}^{D}\sum_{i=1}^{n_d}(NS\_Corp_{i,d} - \overline{NS\_Corp}_d)^2$, where D is the total number of districts and n_d is the number of observations within a district. Among Republicans and Democrats, respectively, the within-legislator variance is 47.9 and 10.3, compared to within-district variances of 76.0 and 24.3.

[22]Appendix Figure 55 also confirms this is not due to legislators in a cohort experiencing heterogeneous trends such that the mean cohort-level trend is flat. Instead, legislators within each cohort generally exhibit minimal temporal changes.

[23]We report demeaned values of NS_Corp with respect to the average GOP NS_Corp value in that Congress to

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defected against Boehner, but not McCarthy, saw over 10% increases in NS_Corp relative to the GOP congressional average.

Most importantly, if we assume that all legislators believe fundraising is important for reelection, then "crazy" types, like other legislators, must consider the potential financial punishments before defecting. Financial reliance on party leaders therefore must factor into the strategic calculus of even those predisposed to defect. Even for so-called "crazy" types, NS_Corp is a structural constraint that conditions when such dispositions can be acted upon. Additionally, at present we do not have any quantitative measures beyond ideology which might capture what it is about "crazy" types that allow them to defect. Our measure and theory provide an explanation.
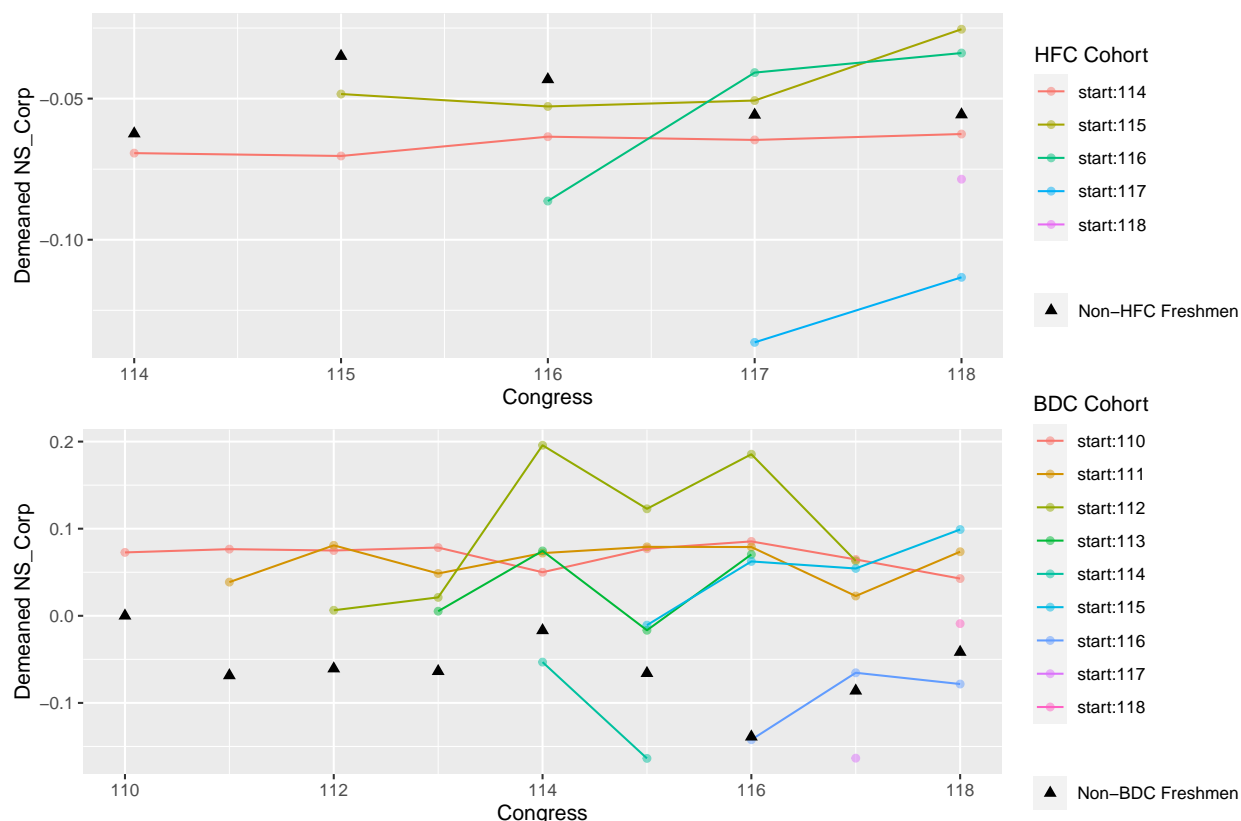
Figure 16: **Changes in NS_Corp Within Obstructionist Caucuses are Driven by Legislator Turnover not Churn.** Y-axis is the average difference between caucus members' and other party members' NS_Corp in that Congress. Triangles show how each incoming cohort compares to other co-partisan freshmen in Congress. We notice: 1) almost every freshmen caucus-cohort has lower NS_Corp than the last, 2) HFC freshmen have considerably lower NS_Corp than typical GOP freshmen, 3) BDC freshmen increasingly resemble typical freshmen Democrats in terms of low NS_Corp, 4) Minimal within-cohort changes.

account for the party-level downward NS_Corp trend. For example, one of the three members' (Rep. Andy Harris) raw NS_Corp value went from 27% to 9% from the 114th to 118th Congress, but after demeaning, this is actually a slight increase in relative NS_Corp.

6.4 Financial Independence Limits Party Leader's Punishment Capacity

My model predicts that fragmentation in the donor network has curbed party leaders' ability to punish defectors. I evaluate this prediction with a difference-in-difference design that tests the effect of speaker election defections among Republicans in the 113th, 114th, and 118th Congresses on direct party money received, money from the party network (numerator of NS), total receipts, and contributions from out-of-district individuals. The latter two outcomes test whether legislator financially *gain* from defecting. I focus on speaker elections rather than rules, because they occur in-between financial cycles[24] and thus provide a clean pre-post comparison of fundraising.

I estimate the following event study for each instance of defection separately. For legislator i in Congress t,

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \sum_{t \in T: t \neq -1} \beta_t \text{EventTime}_t D_i + \boldsymbol{X_{it}\beta} + \gamma_i + \epsilon_{it} \tag{4}$$

where Y_{it} is the logged fundraising outcome of interest, EventTime_t are dummies for each Congress sans a hold out period, D_i is a treatment indicator where $D_i = 1$ if legislator i voted against the speaker nominee in Congress $t = 0$, $\boldsymbol{X_{it}}$ are a vector of time varying controls that may be correlated with the decision to defect and fundraising outcomes (i.e. dynamic ideology measures and district competitiveness), and γ_i are legislator fixed effects which account for time-invariant legislator-specific characteristics like legislative style (Bernhard and Sulkin (2018)) and baseline fundraising capacity which may impact both D_i and Y_{it}.

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[24]The speaker election occurs at the very beginning of a new Congress. It is therefore right after the close of an election (financial) cycle.
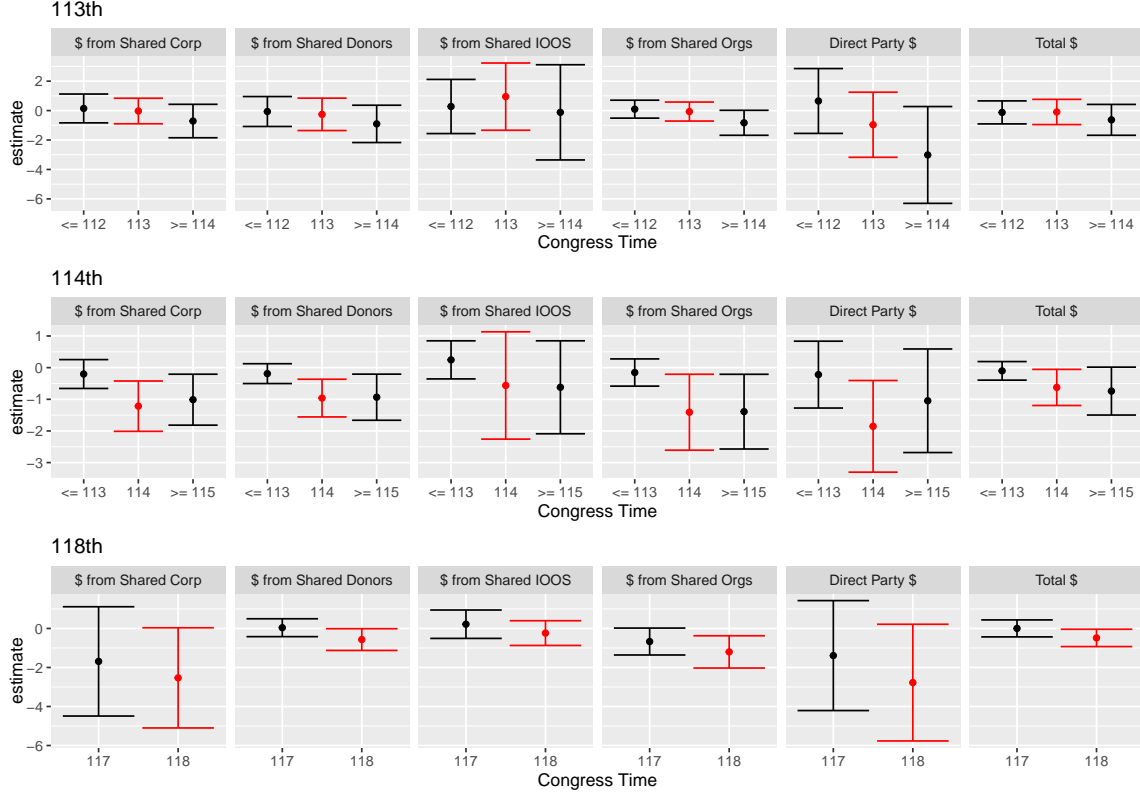
Figure 17: Effect of GOP Speaker Election Defections in the 113th, 114th, and 118th Congress. Legislators' outcomes two or more Congresses before defection, and all Congresses after, are averaged.

Figure 17 plots the interacted coefficients from the event study. All outcomes are logged, so $100 * (e^{\beta} - 1)$ gives the effect of defection in terms of percentage change, relative to non-defectors. Prior to taking their logarithm, outcomes between the 110th Congress and two Congresses before treatment onset, as well across the post-treated periods, are averaged within-legislator. In the Appendix, I include the event study results without averaging across periods. The magnitudes of the coefficients remain qualitatively similar but we gain precision with the averaging approach, because we increase degrees of freedom and reduce multicollinearity by dropping irrelevant interactions. Using either method, there is no evidence of pre-trends, as none of the interactions between the treatment indicator and pre-treatment periods are significant (see Figure 56 in Appendix).

Defectors against Boehner in the 114th Congress and McCarthy in the 118th Congress both faced severe punishment, but the punishment was much steeper for Boehner's defectors. Relative to the counterfactual in which they did not defect, the model suggests that Boehner and McCarthy's defectors experienced a 62 ($p < 0.005$) and 43 ($p < 0.05$) pp. loss in money from party-connected donors, respectively.

The pool of money party leaders can influence has decreased over time because of growing financial independence. The difference in punishment magnitudes is therefore even greater (qualitatively) in terms of raw dollars. The average Boehner defector dropped \$319,296 in party-connected money

between the 113th and 114th Congress, while the average McCarthy defector dropped just \$63,784 between the 117th and 118th Congress.[25]

These punishments are primarily driven by corporate donors. Excluding the few members that were freshman when defecting, the average 114th-defector dropped \$214,733 from leadership-connected corporations compared to \$85,205 from leadership-connected non-corporate PACs and \$39,631 in direct party money. The model only estimates similar effects on these outcomes, because it reports percentage changes. The average 118th-defector dropped \$111,885 from leadership-connected corporate donors, and actually gained \$61,200 from leadership-connected non-corporate PACs. They did drop \$142,042 in direct party money, but non-defectors also lost \$134,395. Defectors are most in jeopardy of losing corporate money, which is consistent with the fact that obstructionist factions are specifically growing less reliant on party leaders' corporate donors.

The effect on non-corporate money for 118th-defectors is negative despite the raw dollar increase, because non-defectors experienced an even larger increase in such money. This highlights an important distinction. Growing financial independence has limited party leaders' capacity to remove donors from legislators' networks, but leaders can still reward non-defectors by introducing them to new donors.

The effects of defection in the 113th Congress are null, potentially because of differences in the severity of the challenge. The defection rate (defined in 5) against Boehner in the 113th Congress was 0.32 compared to 0.45 in the 114th[26], the latter just three No votes shy of sinking the speaker election. Boehner therefore had to expend much more energy whipping votes to secure his 114th, and of course, defections against McCarthy in the 118th Congress forced 14 failed votes.

GOP leaders can still punish conservatives, but the raw dollar punishment in corporate donors was nearly 50% less in the 118th Congress than in the 114th Congress. This is because the pot of party-connected corporate money conservatives (specifically HFC members) have to lose has dwindled (see 9 and 39). All the while, their total fundraising still outpaces that of their 114th HFC predecessors and most of their current colleagues, so even the *relative* impact of losing further corporate money has decreased.

Despite suggestions that factions may "raise money by opposing the mainstream party leadership" (Jenkins and Stewart (2023), p. 49), the effects on total donations are negative. In the 113th, 114th, and 118th Congresses, respectively, the model estimates a 9 (although not statistically significant), 47 ($p < 0.05$), and 42 ($p < 0.05$) pp. loss in total money relative to the counterfactual of not defecting. In raw dollars, excluding members who were freshman when defecting, this translates to average pre-post losses of \$1,923, \$425,486, and \$520,806, respectively. Defectors also made no inroads among out-of-state individual donors, a group the literature suggests may be most receptive to ideological signaling like speaker election defections (Canes-Wrone and Miller (2022)).

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[25]This excludes defectors that were freshman when defecting.

[26]In the 113th Congress, the majority margin was 33 seats and only 9 members votes No along with 3 either voting Present or not voting. In the 114th Congress, the majority margin was 59 seats but 24 voted No along with 5 either voting Present or not voting.

7 Conclusion

This paper develops and tests a theory of party disloyalty in ideologically cohesive majority parties. I argue that procedural defections emerge as the party's capacity to punish wanes. To extract power concessions from leaders, certain factions can obstruct procedural votes, because they are less reliant on party resources and therefore less fearful of punishment.

I test this theory by examining changes in legislators' financial reliance on party leaders. While party leaders' ideological proximity to their rank-and-file has increased (Curry and Lee (2020)), their centrality in the donor network has fractured, as obstructionist caucuses grow less reliant on their corporate donor networks. These changes have circumscribed party leaders' capacity to punish, because they rely on shared corporate donors to discipline disloyal members. In both parties, corporate financial reliance predicts defection within-Congress, within-district, and even within obstructionist factions. Indeed, defectors against Boehner and McCarthy's speaker elections, in 2015 and 2023 respectively, were primarily punished with corporate money. However, McCarthy's defectors suffered roughly half the corporate dollar punishment that Boehner's defectors faced, demonstrating how dwindling dependence on the party's corporate network has curbed party leaders' threat to punish.

My theory updates our understanding of party power. Positive agenda power is not simply a function of ideological cohesion within the majority party, as CPG and PCT argue, but also party leaders' ability to influence resources their rank-and-file require for reelection. PCT presupposes party leaders have this power by assuming majority party members, regardless of their ideology, remain loyal on procedure to avoid punishment. Changes in the donor network make clear this assumption is increasingly incorrect.

Important questions remain. Perhaps most notably, why was Pelosi more effective at controlling her obstructionists (i.e. members of the Squad and BDC) than McCarthy? My empirics cannot explain why Democrats do not obstruct special rules, particularly on budget legislation, but Republicans do. GOP leaders are just as central in their party's donor network as Democratic leaders, and while Pelosi struggled with her extreme flanks at times, she never suffered a failed rule or budget crisis while overseeing similarly thin majority margins.

Cross-party differences in procedural discipline could also be function of resource dependence. Obstructionist Democrats may place greater electoral value on receiving influential committee seats and leadership positions, and thus fear punishment to a greater extent than obstructionist Republicans. Indeed, this paper only tests the relationship between financial reliance on party leaders and defection, leaving these other resources party leaders also control to future work. But mechanisms other than resource independence and party punishment may be at work. Perhaps Democrats, even those on the ideological extremes, face greater electoral penalties for legislative unproductivity than Republicans. This may explain why Democratic factions, no matter how extreme or irritated with the agenda they may be, do not threaten government shutdowns to achieve their ends. Because Democratic voters are generally more supportive of federal agencies, programs, and spending, Democratic legislators cannot credibly threaten to obstruct the budget process as some Republicans do. In

addition to testing whether the value of committee seats and leadership positions has changed over time, the role of accountability and the value legislators place on productivity is another important avenue to explore.

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8   Appendix

A   Detailing Defection in the 118th Congress

The level of procedural defection in the 118th Congress is historic. Although the last time a speaker vote failed was in 1923, Kevin McCarthy required 15 ballots to secure the speakership, due to extreme conservatives. Despite granting considerable concessions to these hardliners, such as placing two HFC members on the rules committee and allowing just one legislator to bring a motion to vacate the speaker resolution to the floor, the far-right remained intransigent. The last time a special rule failed was in 2002, but HFC members voted down three rules under McCarthy's tenure, all of which were associated with budget negotiations, while a government shutdown loomed in the background. McCarthy was forced to deal with Democrats to pass a budget, and a subset of HFC members immediately ousted him for it, constituting the first time in history a speaker has been voted out.

After three more failed elections, Mike Johnson was elected speaker. Despite being ideologically closer to the HFC and even a former informal member of the caucus[27], intense factionalism persisted. The far-right derailed three rules under his tenure, two of which were budget-related and again due to irritation with spending levels and closed rules (RollCall (2023)). They even launched another motion-to-vacate resolution after, just like McCarthy, HFC obstruction forced Johnson to pass a bipartisan budget. The share of defectors was large enough to require Democrats to save Johnson's speakership.

These events are not isolated but part of a warming trend. In the past decade, factions have begun withholding support on speaker elections and special rules to extract concessions from party leaders, and in some cases, depose them.

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[27]In the 2014 and 2016 election cycles he received six-figure funding from the HFC's caucus spending arm, the House Freedom Fund, and according to Republican sources in Congress, was "for all intents and purposes" an HFC member, as he regularly attended meetings and was part of its internal vote process (Desiderio (2018); Diaz (2023)). Johnson himself said in late 2018 that he is in "close alignment" with the HFC (Desiderio (2018)).

B Defections on Speaker Elections
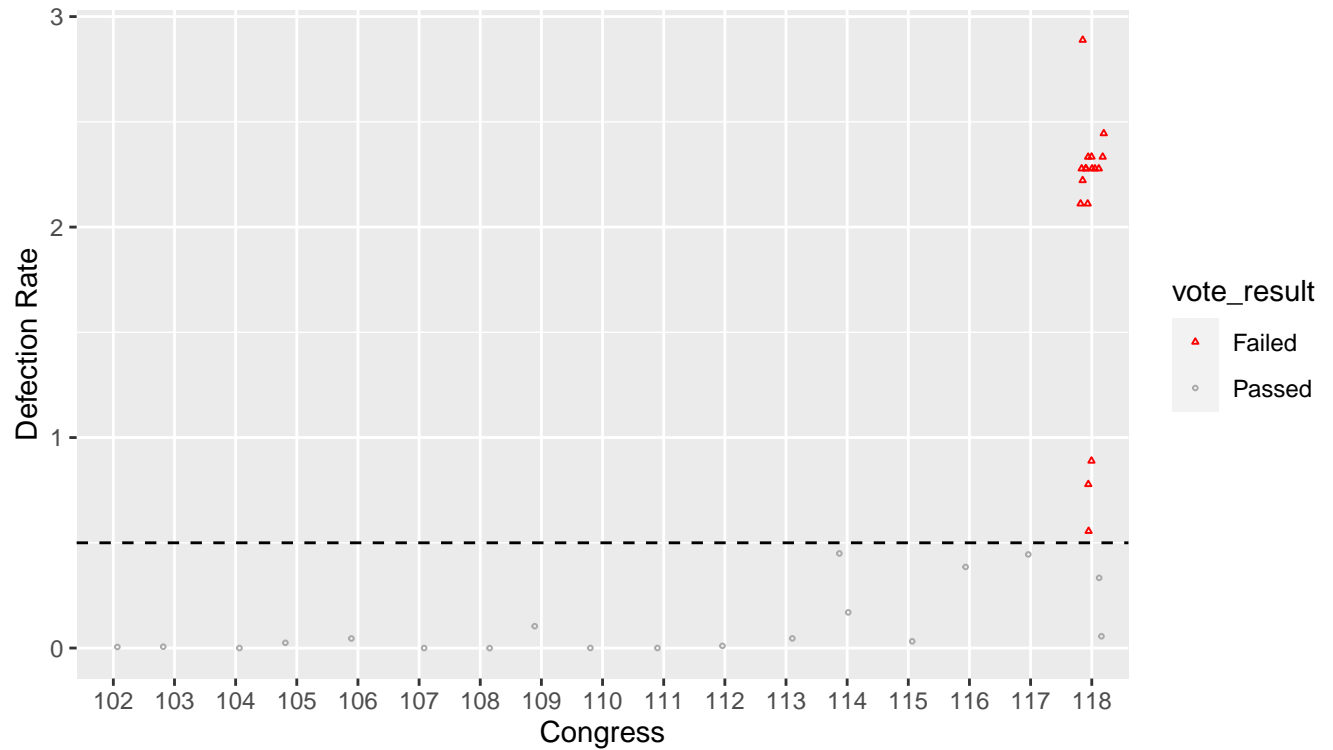
Figure 18: Defection Rate on Speaker Election Votes. Each point is a speaker election vote. When the defection rate ≥ 0.5, the majority party needs minority support to elect the Speaker.
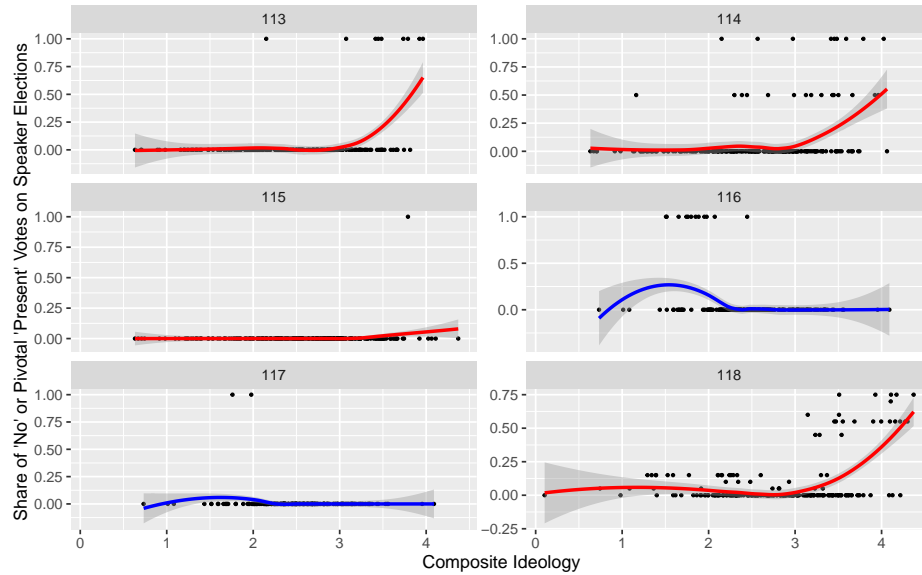
Figure 19: **Ideology and Defection on Speaker Election Votes.** Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of speaker elections the legislator cast a No or pivotal Present vote. In all Congresses but the 114th and 118th, this is either 1 or 0, because there was only one speaker election. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite ideology score. Blue (red) curves indicate that the majority party is Democratic (Republican). Democrats' scores by -1 for easier interpretation. Larger ideology scores indicate more extreme legislators — for Democrats this means more progressive, and for Republicans this means more conservative.
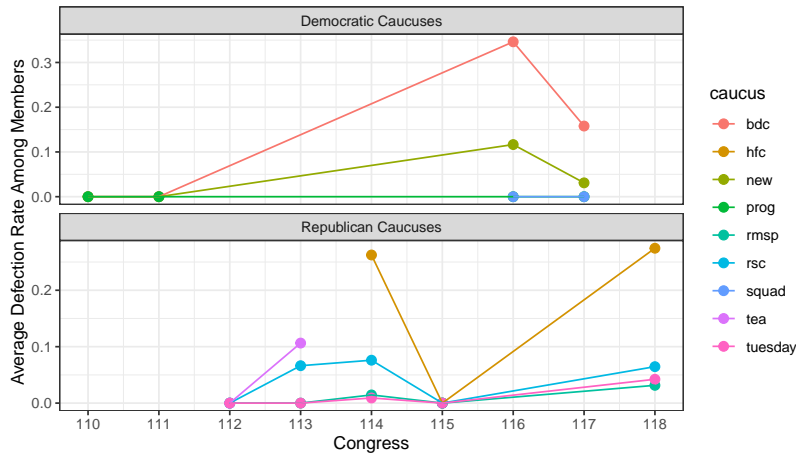
Figure 20: **Average Defection Rate on Speaker Elections by Caucus Membership and Congress.** This gives the average proportion of elections that a caucus member defected. In all Congresses except the 114th and 118th, there was only one speaker election, so the measure in these cases can be interpreted as the share of legislators who defected.

A couple notes:

  1) In Pelosi's speaker election in the 116th Congress, there were technically more defectors in

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the New Democrat Coalition (NDC, coded as `new` in Figure 20) than BDC. 12/15 defectors were NDC members, while 9/15 defectors were BDC members[28]. But the number of NDC defectors is minuscule relative to its 103 members. The defections were much more coordinated within the BDC, which only had 26 members. We can therefore think of these defections as organized by the BDC, who successfully plucked a few NDC members to join.

2) 8/12 GOP defectors in the 113th Congress (5 of which were Tea Party Caucus members) join the HFC when it's founded in the 114th Congress, so we can think of these defectors as affiliated with the HFC as well.

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[28]Legislators can be in multiple caucuses. All but one BDC defectors were also NDC members, and all but four NDC defectors were also BDC members

C Defections on Rules

C.1 Defection Rates Over Time

On special rules, if we simply plot the distribution of defection rates over time, the 118th Congress appears aberrant. In Figure 21, I define the defection rate as the share of the majority party's seat margin that votes against the rule[29], where the seat margin is the difference in seats owned by the majority and minority parties. I count Present votes as one-half a defection, as they do not transfer votes to the minority. Thus, for rule r during congress c, we have

$$\text{Defection Rate}_{r,c} = \frac{\#no_{r,c} + \frac{\#present_{r,c}}{2}}{\text{majority margin}_c} \quad . \tag{5}$$

By normalizing differences in majority margins across Congresses, this approach makes clear when a defecting subset is pivotal — when the rate is ≥ 0.5, the majority party needs at least one minority No or Present vote to pass the rule.
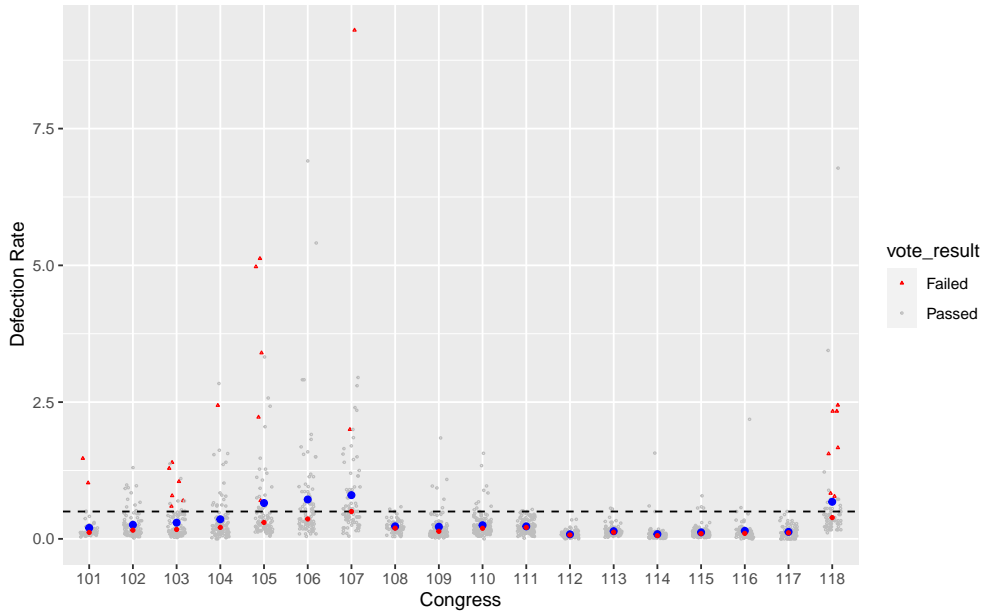
Figure 21: Defection Rates on Special Rules. Each data point is a rule vote. The blue and red dots are the mean and median defection rates, respectively, within that Congress. When the defection rate is at or above the dashed line (i.e. ≥ 0.5), the majority party needs minority support to pass the rule. The 118th Congress data does not yet include votes from the second session.

There are indeed minimal changes in the distribution of defection rates between the 111-117th Congresses, but examining floor defections alone ignores the organized *threat* of defection, which

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[29]More specifically, I define it as the share of the majority margin voting against the "majority party position", where the majority party position is the side taken by the majority of the conference. This is almost always a Yes vote, as there are only a few instances where the majority of the majority party votes against the rule. So, these definitions are functionally equivalent.

began being weaponized before the 118th Congress. Because the hardball bargaining transpired behind closed doors rather than on the House floor, Figure 21 obscures the rising tension on rules within the GOP before the 118th Congress.

C.2 Ideology and Defection

These figures plot the relationship between a majority party legislator's defection rate within a Congress and their ideology, as measured by different scaling approaches.

A legislator's defection rate is the share of special rules she voted No or cast a pivotal Present vote — a Present vote when the number of defections is large enough to require minority party help to pass the rule, i.e. when the bill-level defection rate (defined in 5) is at least 0.5 (see Appendix C.1 for further explanation). For each party, the defection rate is only defined when they are the majority. The goal of procedural defection is to disrupt the majority party's agenda power. Therefore both substantively, and by my formal definition (5), only legislators in the majority party can defect.

Blue (red) curves indicate that the majority party is Democratic (Republican). I multiplied all Democrats' scores by -1 for easier interpretation. Larger ideology scores indicate more extreme legislators — for Democrats this means more progressive, and for Republicans this means more conservative.

C.2.1 Composite Measure

Bonica et al. (2024)'s "Composite" measure is a weighted average of the roll-call scalings DW-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal (1991); Poole and Rosenthal (1997)) and GGUM (Duck-Mayr and Montgomery (2023)), and the following donation-based scalings: recipient and contributor CF-Scores (Bonica (2014)), DW-DIME (Bonica (2018)), and Hall-Snyder scores (Hall and Snyder (2015)). The results are substantively similar, however, when using any one of these traditional measures individually (see Figures 23 and 24).
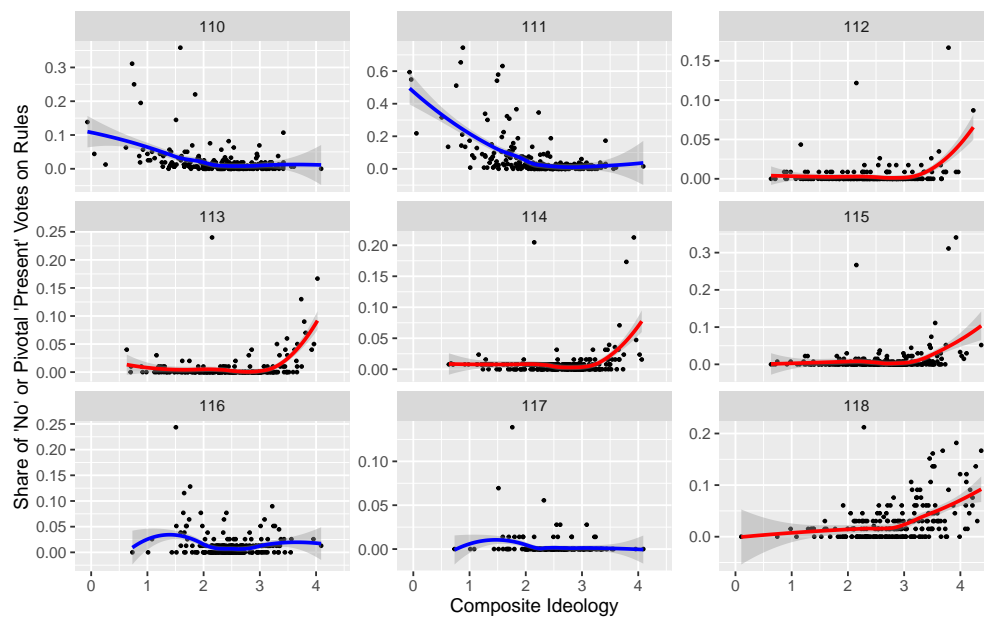
Figure 22: Ideology and Defection Rates on Special Rules. Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of rules the legislator voted against the party or cast a pivotal Present vote. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite ideology score. Curves are LOESS smoothers. Blue (red) curves indicate Democratic (GOP) controlled Congresses.

C.2.2 DW-Nominate
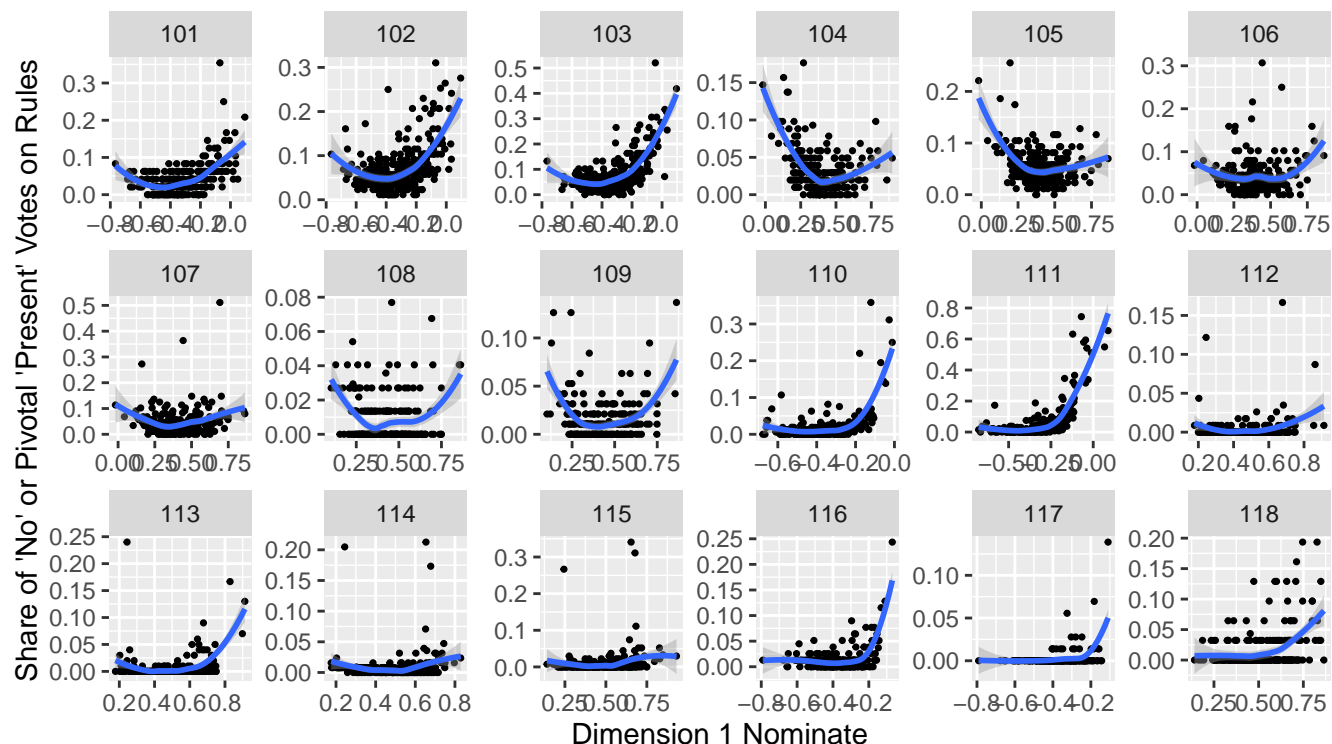
Figure 23: Ideology and Defection on Special Rules. Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of rules the legislator voted against the party or cast a pivotal Present vote. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by DW-Nominate's first dimension. Blue curve is a LOESS smoother.

Focusing on the 110-118th Congresses, we notice the same partisan asymmetries as when using Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure — Democratic moderates and GOP extremists defect. But these patterns appear even stronger among Democrats in the 116th and 117th Congresses, because DW-Nominate scores extreme Democrats in these Congresses as moderates due to ends-against-the-middle voting (see Duck-Mayr and Montgomery (2023) for a full discussion). Members of the Squad are scaled as ideologically similar to Blue Dogs, an obvious measurement error.

C.2.3 CF-Scores
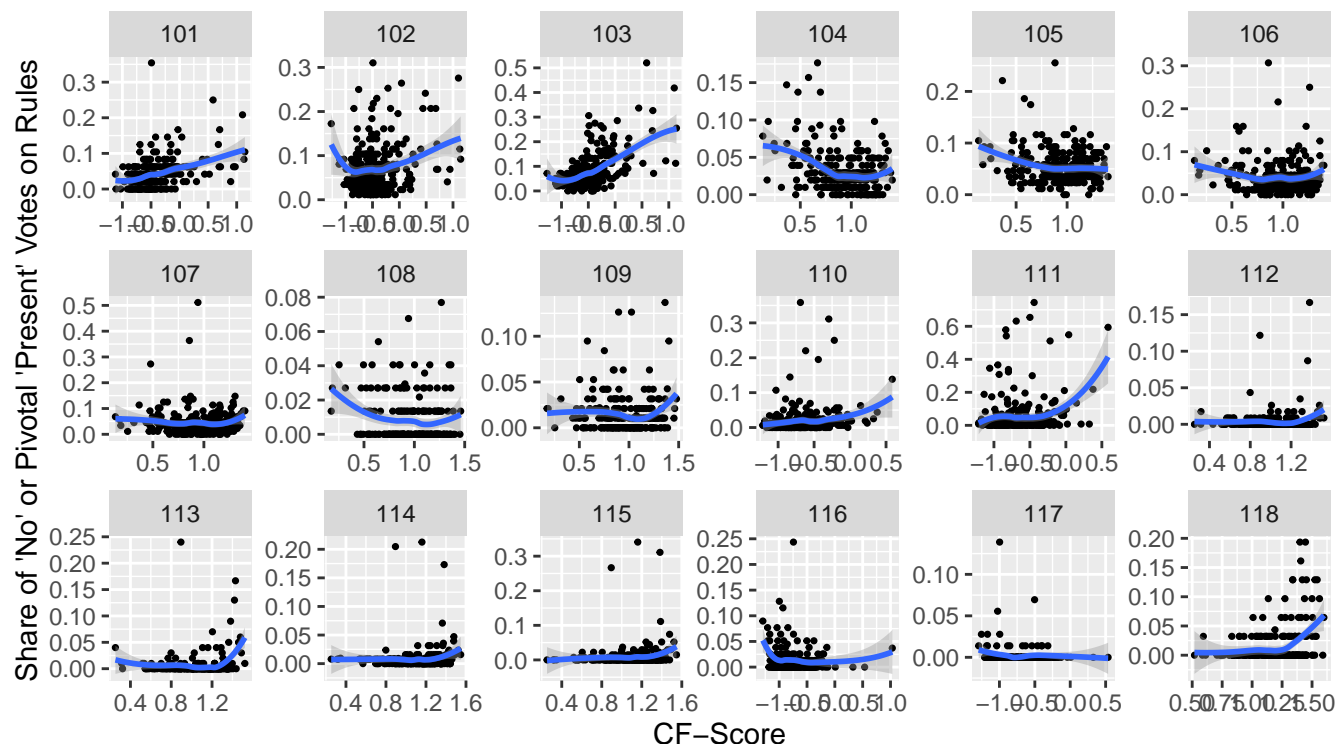
Figure 24: Ideology and Defection on Special Rules. Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of rules the legislator voted against the party or cast a pivotal Present vote. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by Bonica (2014)'s CF-Scores. Blue curve is a LOESS smoother.

When measuring ideology with CF-Scores (Bonica, 2014), it appears that Democratic extremists, rather than moderates, defect in the 116th and 117th Congresses. But this is simply because CF-Scores incorrectly label many known moderates (primarily Blue Dogs) as ideological centrists or even left of the party median. For example, Rep. Jared Golden, the Blue Dog Coalition's chair in the 118th Congress who defected against both of Pelosi's speaker elections and has the second and first highest defection rates in the 116th and 117th Congresses, respectively, is scaled as *left* of the party median in both of these Congresses. DW-Nominate and the composite measure, however, more intuitively scale him at least 1.5 standard deviations to the right of the party median in both Congresses.
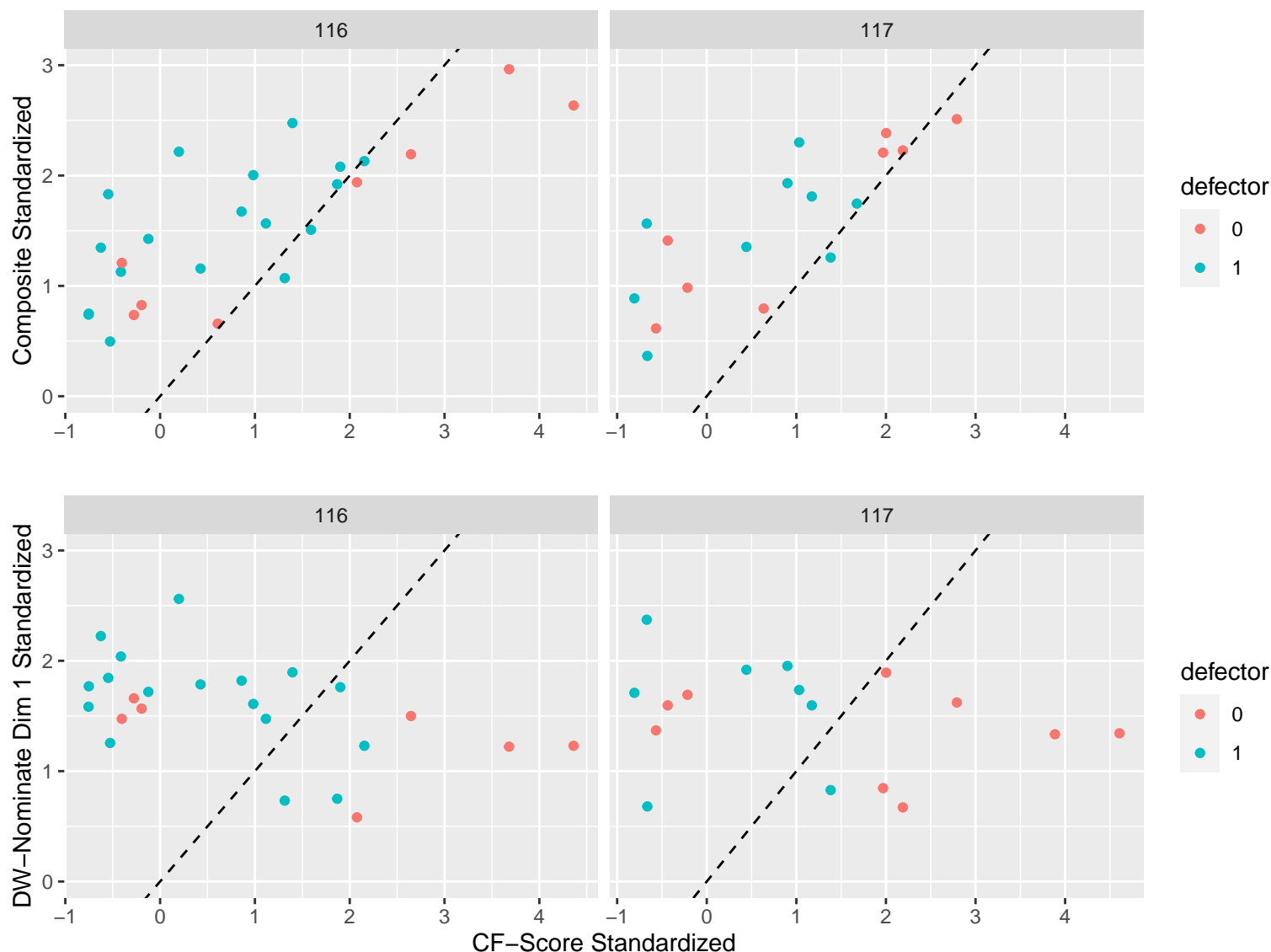
Figure 25: CF-Scores Scale Blue Dog Democrats as Drastically More Liberal than DW-Nominate or the Composite Measure. All measures are standardized with respect to the party median, so an x- or y-value of 1 means that the BDC member is 1 standard deviation to the right (more moderate) than the party median. `defector` indicates whether the member cast at least one defecting vote on rules.

To make clear this measurement issue is driving the flipped defection pattern, Figure 25 plots BDC members' CF-scores versus composite and nominate ideologies after standardizing each metric against the party median. Almost every defector has significantly more liberal CF-scores than composite or nominate ideologies, with an average difference of nearly +1 standard deviations in both Congresses. That is, both the composite and nominate measures code the average Blue Dog defector as nearly one standard deviation more moderate than CF-scores. Most egregiously, there are several Blue Dog defectors who CF-scores scale as *left* of the party median, but the composite

and nominate measures correctly code as significantly more moderate than the party median. And to be clear, there is no domain evidence that suggests these legislators are actually progressive and that we should trust the CF-scaling here, as this figure is subsetted to the explicitly moderate Blue Dog Coalition.

Figure 26 shows how this measurement issue ultimately affects the ideology by defection plot in Figure 24. The colors indicate whether the standardized CF-scaling measures the legislator as more liberal than the standardized composite (top pane) or nominate scaling (bottom pane). The shapes indicate whether the standardized CF-score is left of the median but the standardized composite (top pane) or nominate (bottom pane) score is ≥ 0.5 (i.e. 0.5 standard deviations more moderate than the party median). Clearly, a majority of defectors who CF-scores label as liberal, are scaled as more moderate by the other metrics. In addition, some of the largest defectors are those who CF-scores scale as left of the party median, while the other measures scale as over 0.5 SDs right of the median.
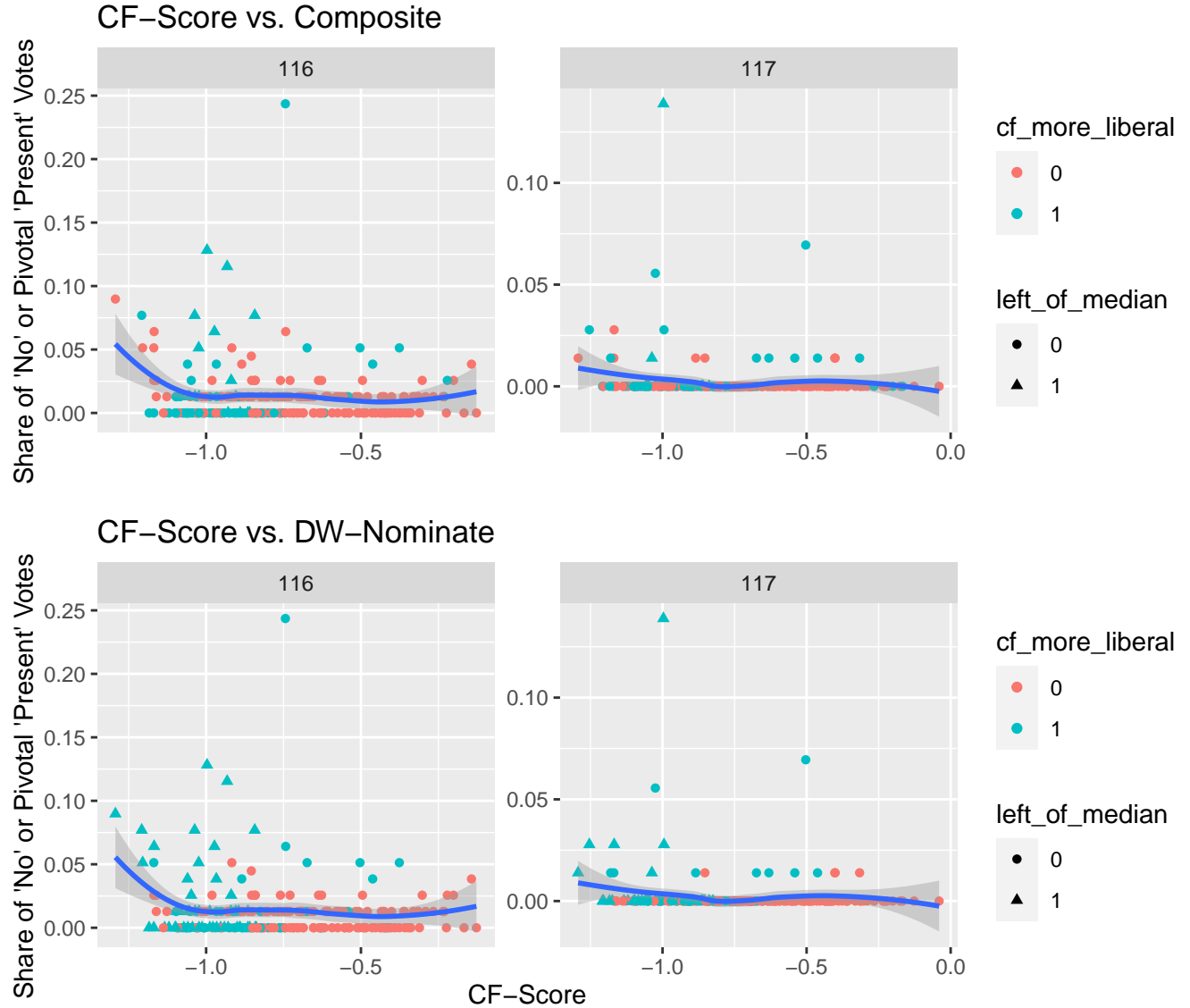
Figure 26: CF-Scores Scale Defectors as More Liberal than Composite Measure or DW-Nominate. X-axis is legislators' CF-scores and y-axis is their defection rate. `cf_more_liberal` indicates whether the legislator is scaled more liberal by standardized CF-scores. `left_of_median` indicates whether CF-scores scale the legislator as left of the party median, but the other metric scales them as ≥ 0.5 standard deviations right of the median.

Figure 27 shows that if we substitute the standardized composite score for standardized CF-score, just among the subset of BDC members for whom the latter scales as more liberal than the former, the result mirrors the main figure in the paper (22). Therefore, the result in the paper that Democratic moderates defect on procedural votes is not sensitive to coding ideology with the composite measure or DW-Nominate rather than CF-scores.
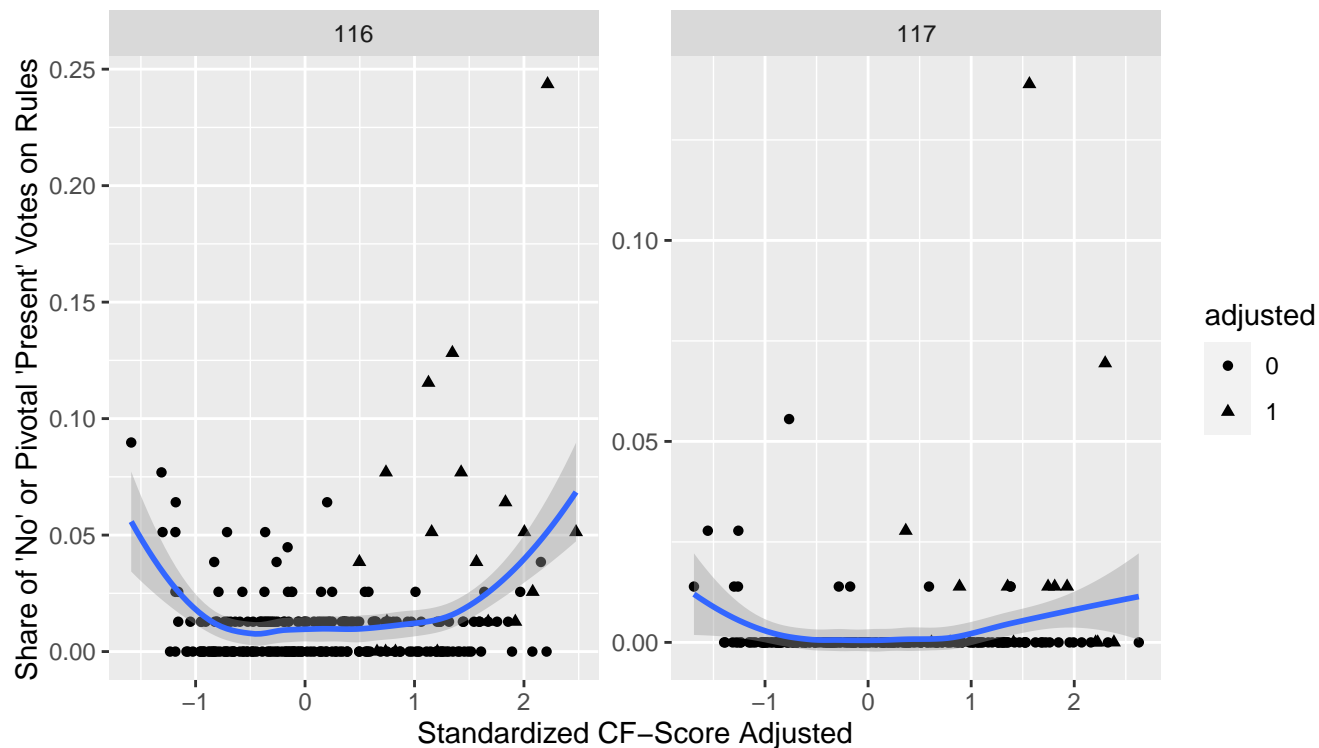
Figure 27: Ideology and Defection on Rules with Adjusted Standardized CF-Scores for Blue Dogs. I substitute standardized composite scores for Blue Dogs with more liberal CF-scaling than composite scores. `adjusted` identifies these legislators. For all other legislators, the x-axis is their standardized CF-Score. Y-axis is a legislator's defection rates on rules.

C.3 Within-Caucus Variation in Defections
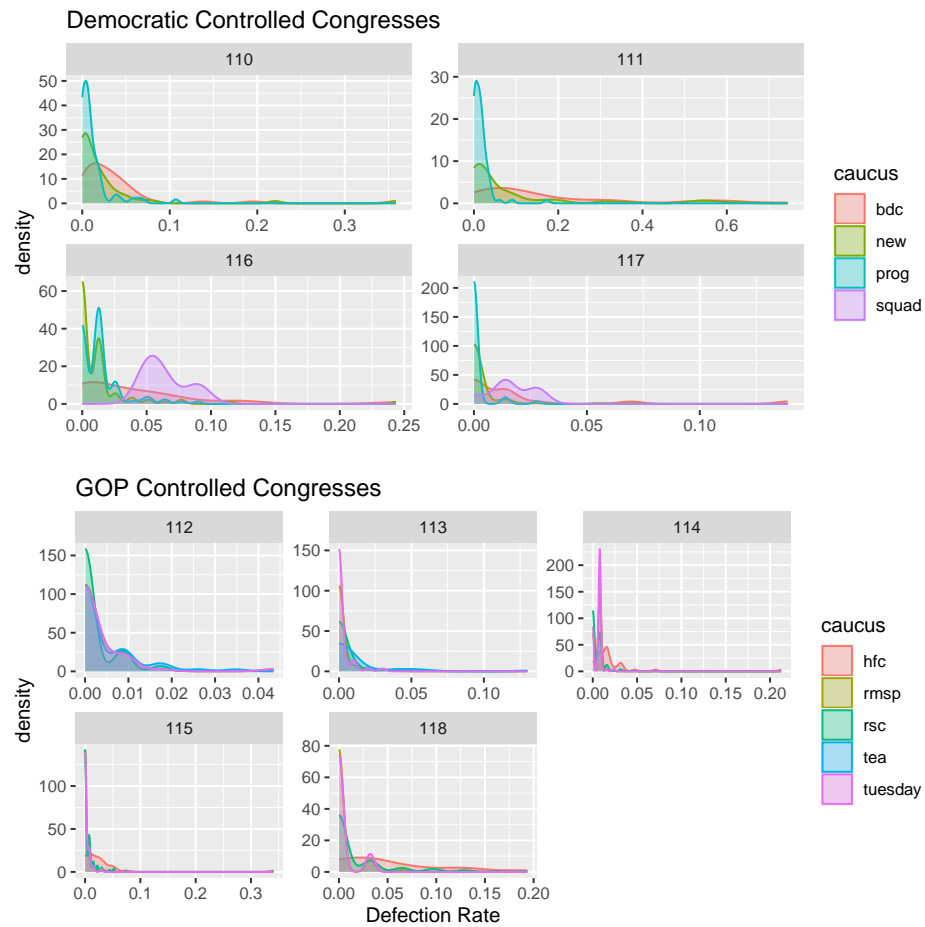
Figure 28: Distribution of Caucus Members' Defection Rates on Special Rules

C.4   Defections on Motions to Recommit
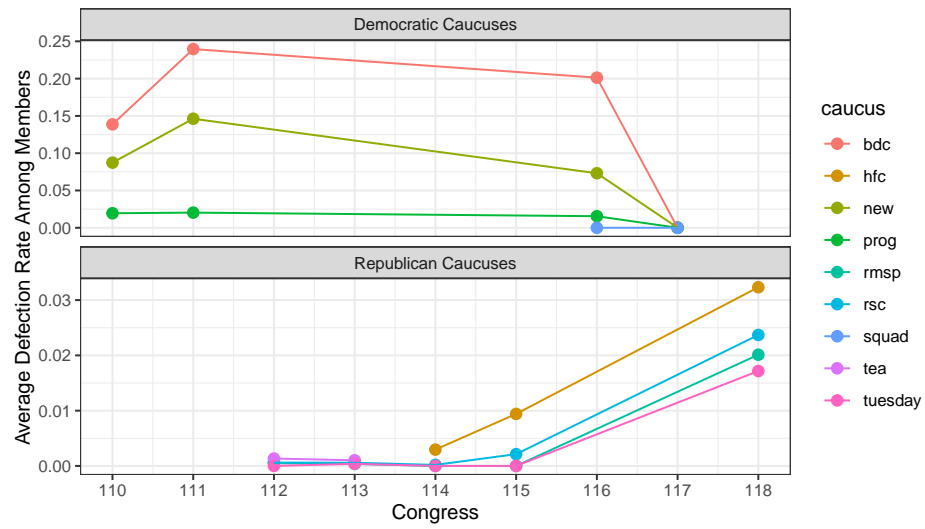
Figure 29: **Average Defection Rate on Motions-to-Recommit by Caucus Membership and Congress.** This gives the average proportion of MTRs that a given caucus's members defected.

D Ideology Distributions

D.1 Party-Level
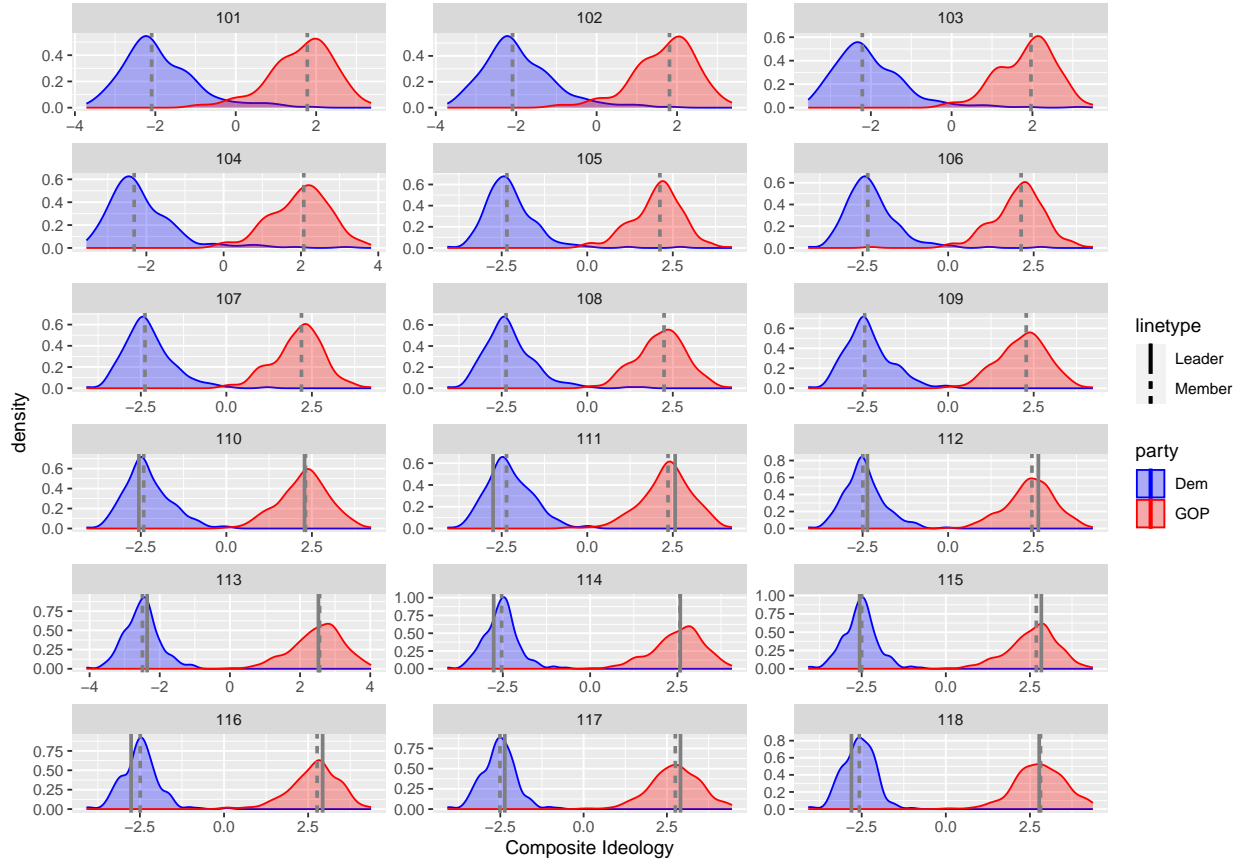
Figure 30: Distribution of House Legislators' Ideologies by Party and Congress. Ideology is measured with Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure. Solid (dashed) line is the median party leader's (member's) ideal point. See Table 1 for set of positions in party leadership.
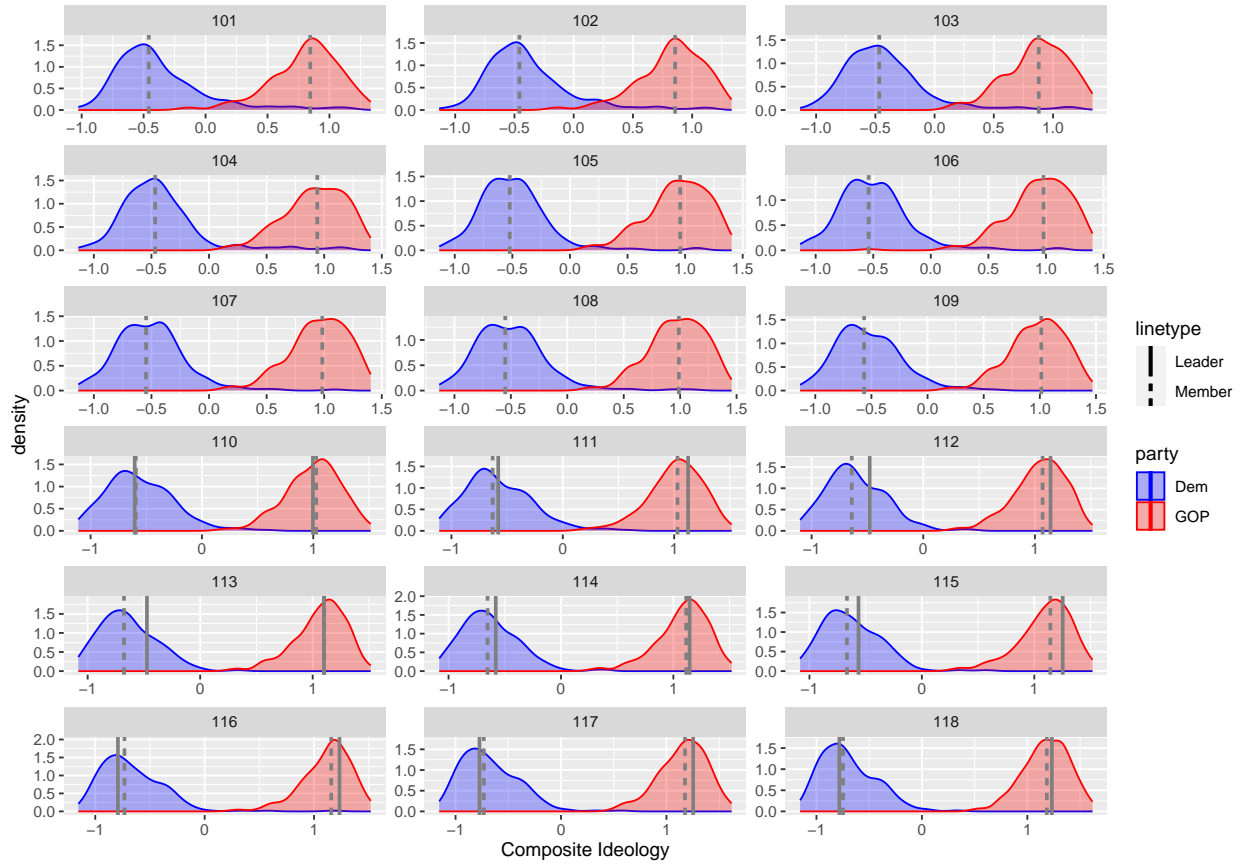
Figure 31: Distribution of House Legislators' Ideologies by Party and Congress using CF-Scores from Bonica (2014). Solid (dashed) line is the median party leader's (member's) ideal point. See Table 1 for set of positions in party leadership.
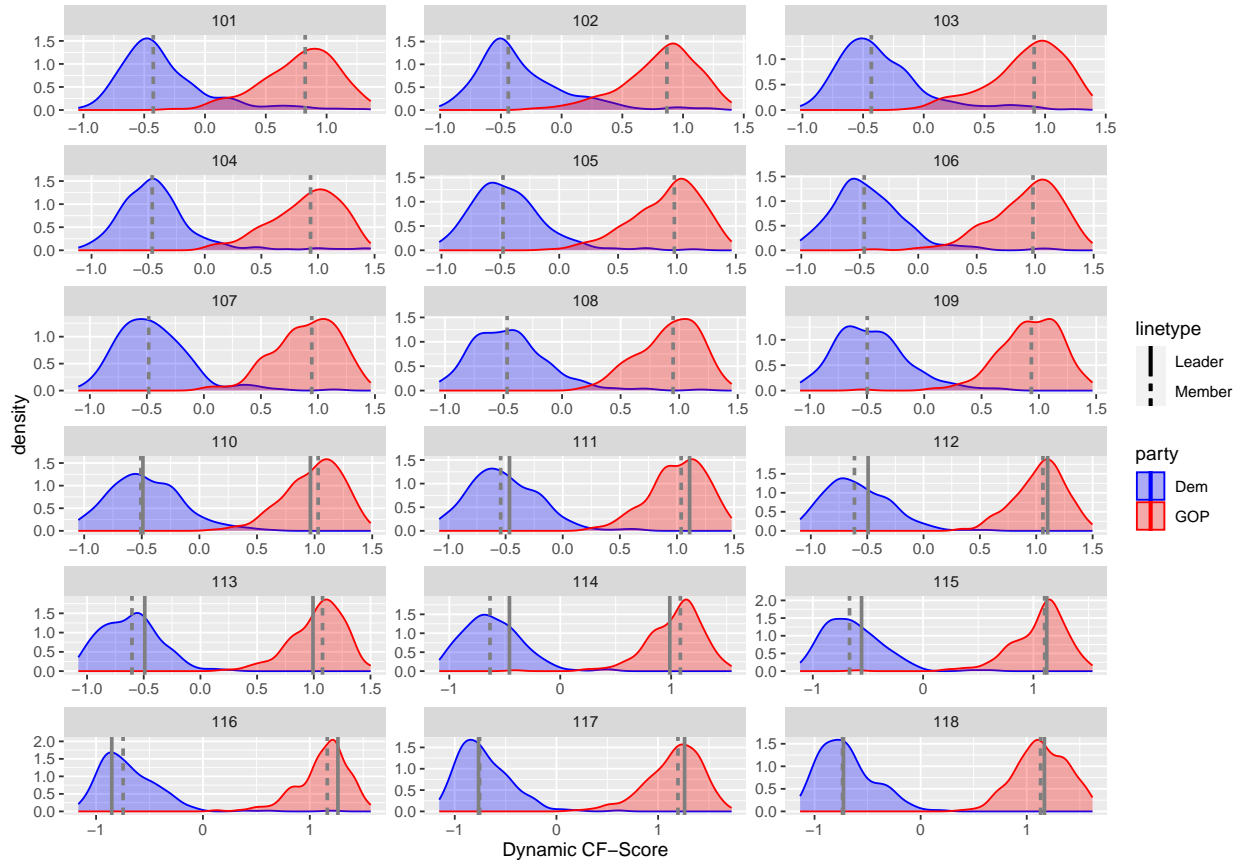
Figure 32: Distribution of House Legislators' Ideologies by Party and Congress using Dynamic CF-Scores from Bonica (2014). Solid (dashed) line is the median party leader's (member's) ideal point. See Table 1 for set of positions in party leadership.

D.2 Distance to Party Leaders
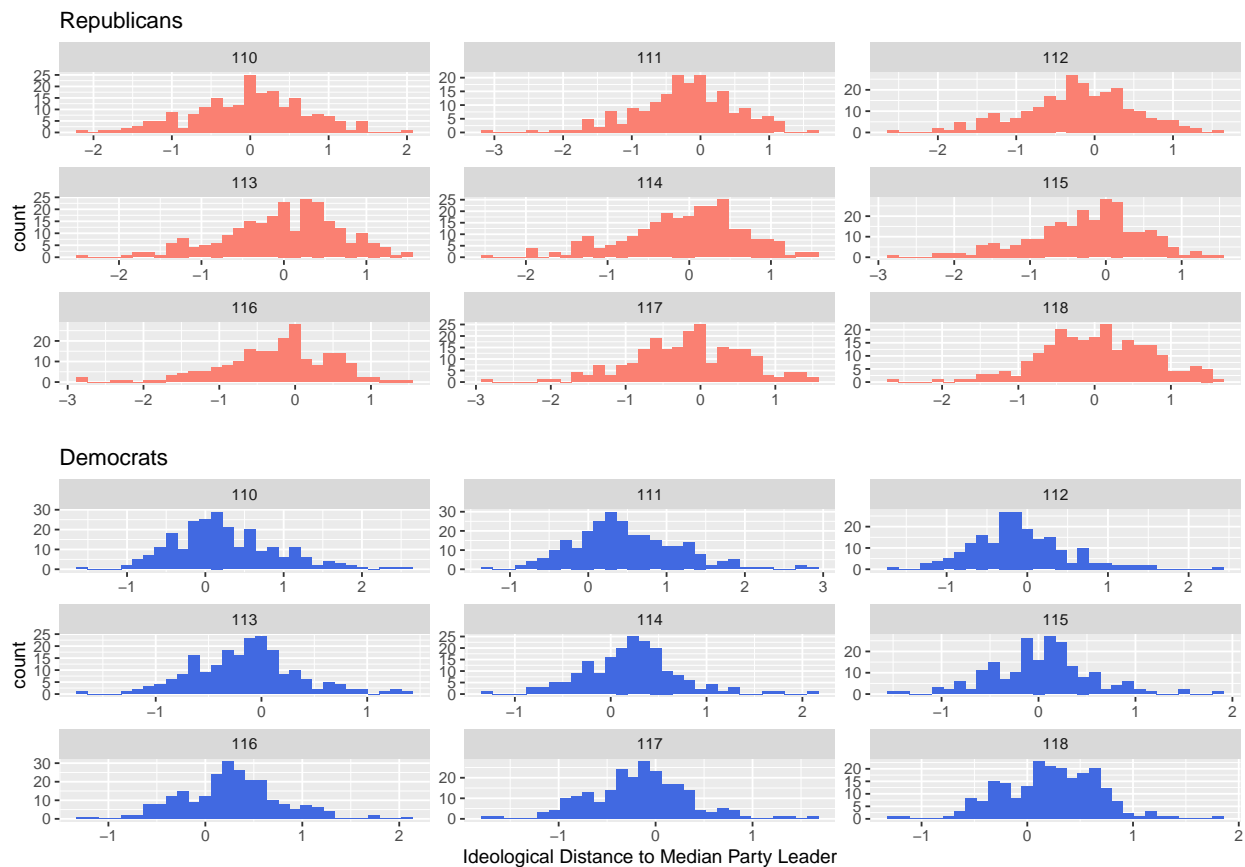
Figure 33: Distribution of legislators' ideological distances to the median party leader by party and Congress. Ideology is measured with Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure.
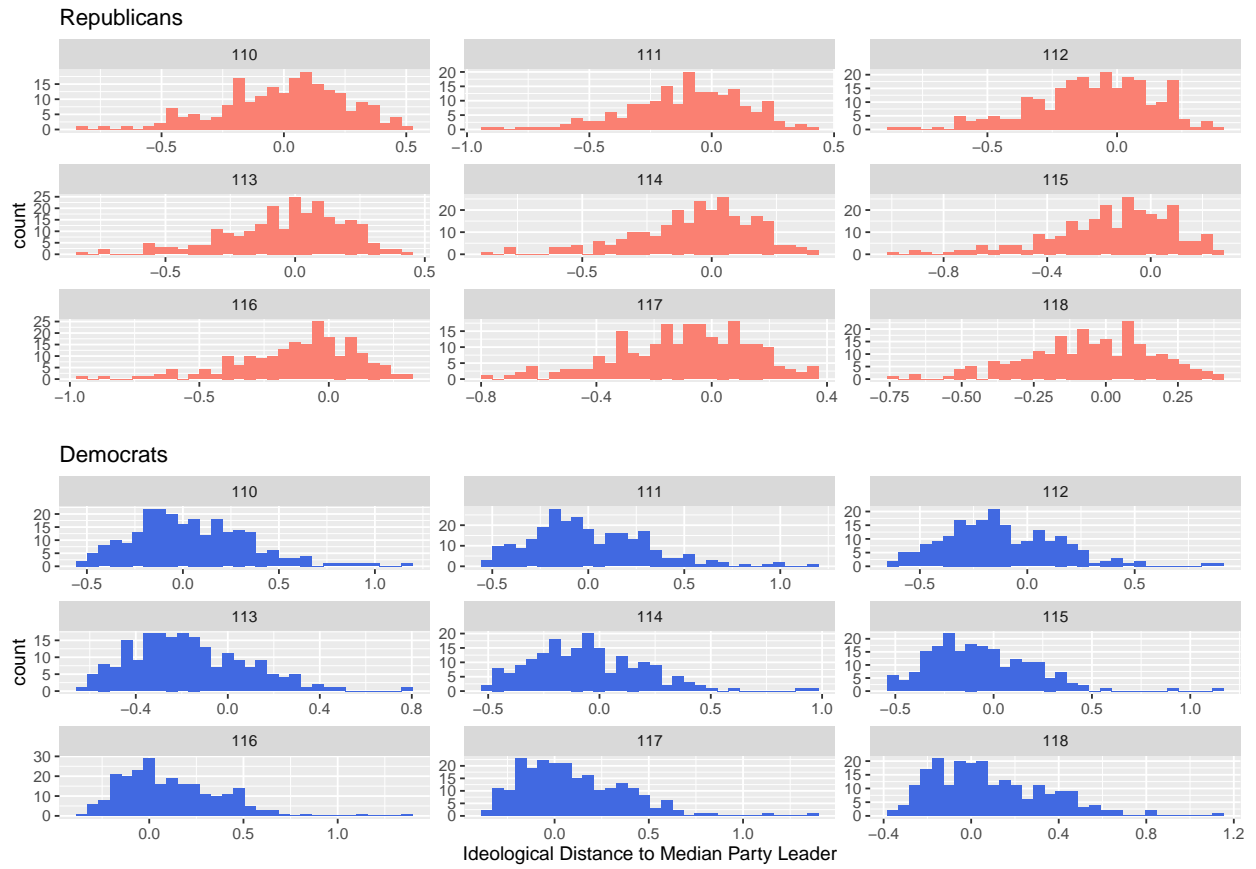
Figure 34: Distribution of legislators' ideological distances to the median party leader by party and Congress. Ideology is measured with dynamic CF-Scores from Bonica (2014).

D.3 Caucus-Level
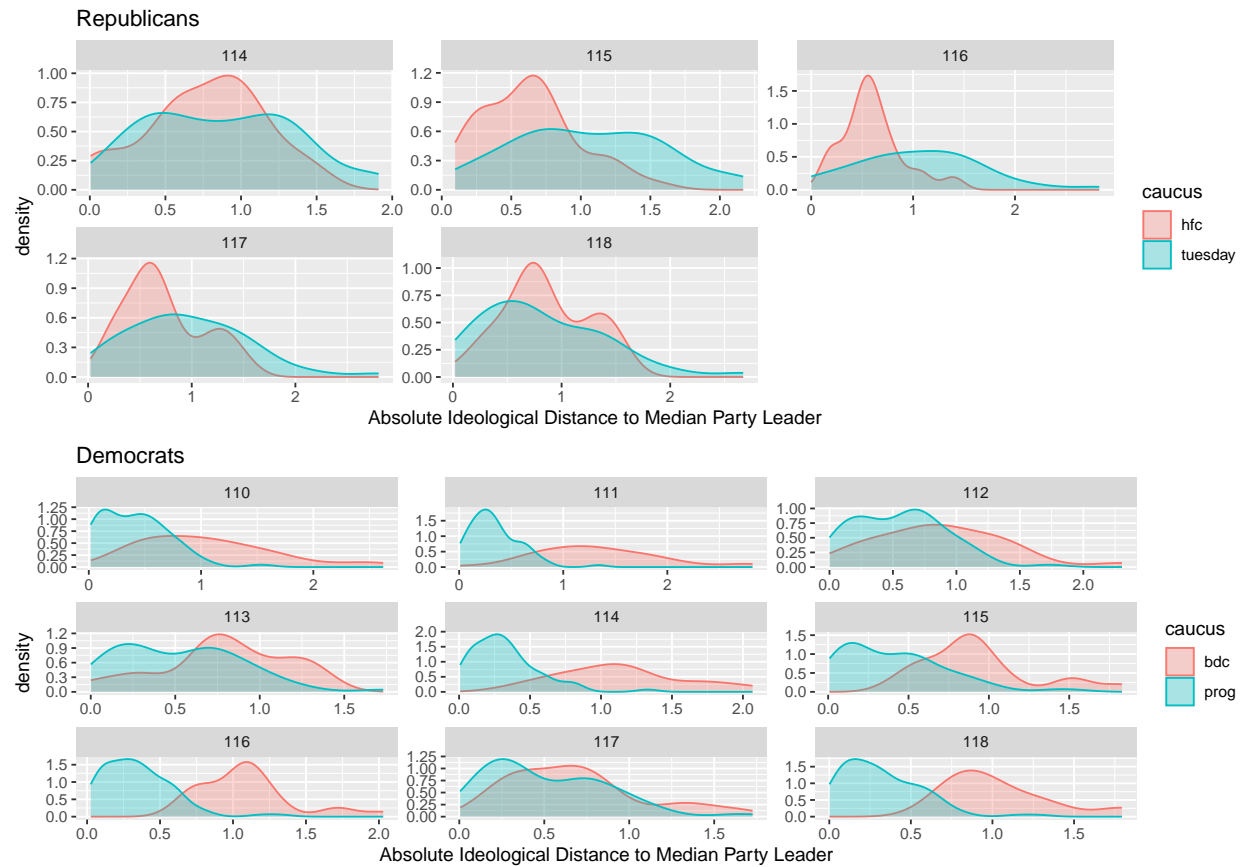
Figure 35: Distribution of ideological distances (absolute value) to the median party leader among obstructionist caucuses' members. Ideology is measured with Bonica et al. (2024)'s composite measure. HFC = House Freedom Caucus. tuesday = Tuesday Group. prog = Congressional Progressive Caucus. BDC = Blue Dog Coalition
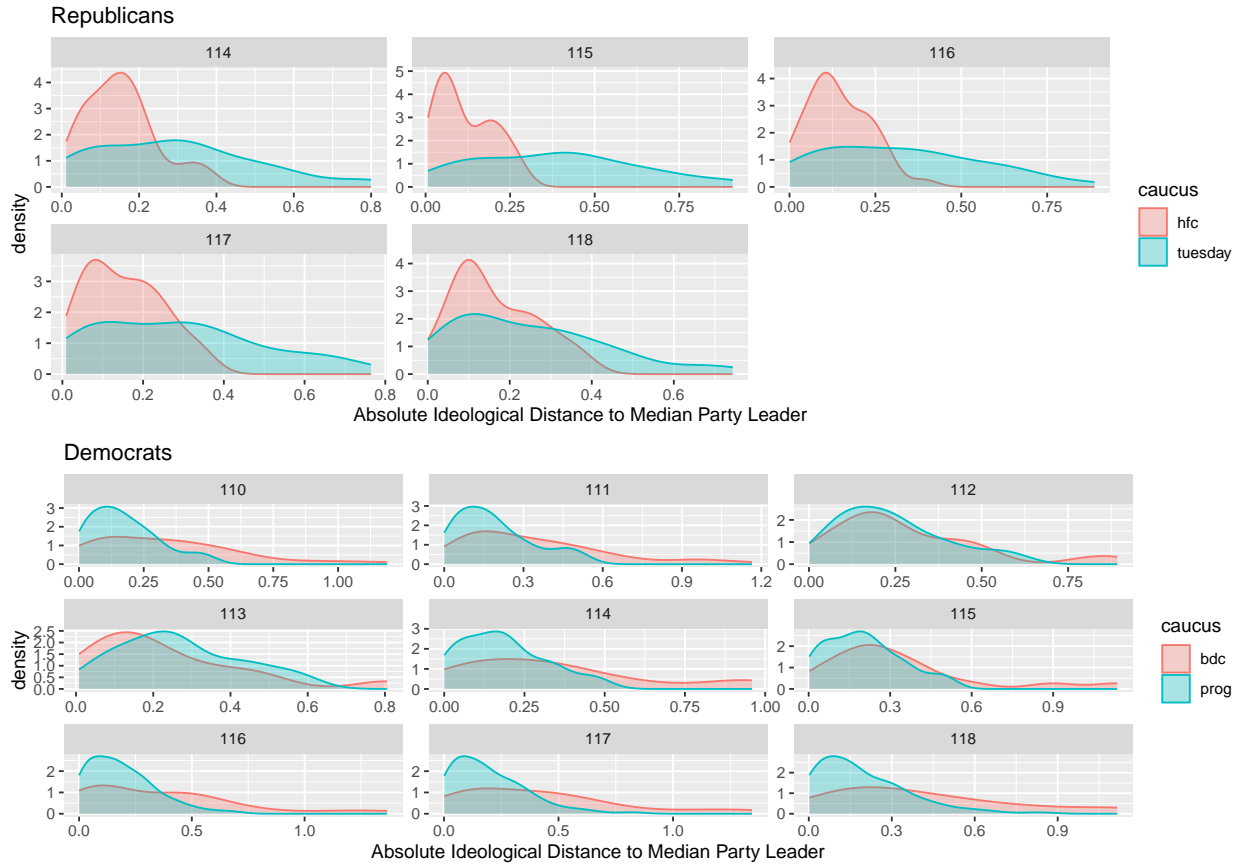
Figure 36: Distribution of ideological distances (absolute value) to the median party leader among obstructionist caucuses' members. Ideology is measured with CF-Scores from Bonica (2014). HFC = House Freedom Caucus. tuesday = Tuesday Group. prog = Congressional Progressive Caucus. BDC = Blue Dog Coalition

E Formal Model of "Internal" Procedural Defection

E.1 Setup

Consider the faction's problem when presented with a rule. Party leader L proposes rule r allocating $x_r \in [0, 0.5]$ legislative influence to a pivotal faction F. x_r captures whether r accepts F's amendments, whether F can propose amendments on r's associated bills, and the extent to which F was consulted on r's associated bills. Given x_r, F chooses whether to Support or Defect r. We assume that the leader cannot recruit the minority's help to pass r, so if F defects, then the floor vote on r fails.

If F supports, then r passes. L collects $1 - x_r$, F collects x_r, and the game concludes. Each player's payout from passing the rule depends on how much legislative influence they received. F cannot have more influence than the leader.

If F defects, the leader punishes them with $c_F \in [0, 1]$ by withholding money, committee seats, requested committee transfers, or leadership positions from F, but the leader herself suffers productivity cost $c_L \in [0, 1]$. The game ends when either the leader grants the faction $c_F < b < 1 - x_r$ concessions in exchange for their support to pass the rule, or the faction acquiesces and supports the rule. If the leader concedes, the faction collects payoff $x_r + b - c_F$ and the leader collects $1 - x_r - b - c_L$. If the faction concedes, then the faction collects $x_r - c_F$ and the leader collects $1 - x_r - c_L$[30].
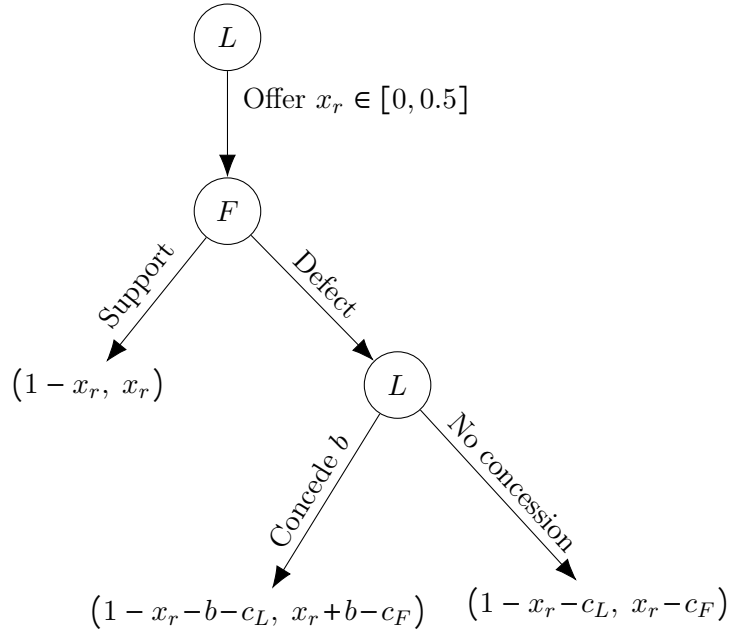
Figure 37: Game tree. Payoffs are (L, F).

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[30]b essentially represents an adjusted x_r. For example, the leader may update r to accept the faction's amendments or provide open rules, effectively increasing x_r. I introduce b to also accommodate concessions that don't specifically involve the rth rule, such as a future commitment to provide open rules, committee seats, or bring a floor vote on a desired bill of the faction.

E.2 When do Bargaining Failures Occur?

The faction's threat to defect is credible *only if* $c_F < c_L$. If the faction's punishment is greater than the leader's productivity loss (i.e. $c_F > c_L$), then the leader can simply "wait out" the faction should it defect. F strictly prefers $x_r - c_F$ to $-c_F$, so the faction will concede, in which case it was better off not defecting in the first place. Conversely, if $c_F < c_L$, then the faction can "wait out" the leader. L strictly prefers $1 - x_r - b - c_L$ to $-c_L$, so she will concede, in which case she is better off granting b before the floor defection to avoid realizing c_L.

Notice that under complete information about c_F and c_L, no pivotal floor defections occur. When $c_F < c_L$, the leader anticipates defection and delivers benefits before offering the rule to avoid c_L, and when $c_F > c_L$, the faction accepts x_r since defection is not credible. This explains why even during the past decade of rising procedural conflict, bargaining transpired behind closed doors rather than on the floor itself. Only in the 118th Congress, do leaders bring rules and speaker elections to the floor that fail. My model suggests this occurred due to asymmetric information. Either L's estimate of the punishment c_F was larger than F's estimate, or vice versa for c_L. That is, either Speaker McCarthy believed he could punish (c_F) the HFC more than they felt he could, or the HFC believed McCarthy's productivity cost for a failed rule (c_L) was greater than what McCarthy himself believed. If the discrepancy in beliefs is large enough such that F believes $c_F < c_L$, but L believes $c_F > c_L$, then L brings the rule to the floor and F defects.

Even under complete information, however, bargaining can fail due to indivisibility of payments. If F credibly threatens defection, the leader's concession b must be within $(c_F, 1 - x_r)$, large enough to give the faction a net gain but small enough to warrant passing the rule at all. In reality, b is not continuous. The leader has a discrete set of indivisible payments to offer, such as an amendment or committee seat, and it is possible that none of which fall within $(c_F, 1 - x_r)$. In this case, we do not get a failed floor vote, but a protracted debate behind closed doors between the leader and faction.

Key Result   All else equal, as $c_F \to 0$, the likelihood of a credible defection threat increases. Under complete information, there is a critical point c_F^* such that $c_F^* < c_L$ and L begins delivering side-payments to pass rules. Under incomplete information, c_L and c_F are now random variables. Assume $c_L \perp c_F$. Then for any distribution of $c_L \in [0, 1]$ that L or F suppose, $\mathbb{P}(c_F < c_L) \to 1$ as $c_F \to 0$, and consequently, F begins leveraging defection with probability approaching 1.

F Anecdotal Evidence of Party Leaders' Capacity to Punish

Members of Congress believe fundraising is critical for reelection (Bonica (2017)); Thomsen (2024)). For evidence, we must look no further than their daily schedules, of which over half is spent calling donors (Canes-Wrone and Miller (2022)). Therefore, if leaders can meaningfully alter a legislators' donor pool, this would powerfully incentivize them to remain loyal.

Indeed, party leaders have the connections to affect members' donor networks. Party leaders are selected based on their ability to fundraise and thus have disproportionate "reach" in the donor network. Former Speakers McCarthy and Pelosi, for example, were consistently the largest fundraisers in their respective parties over the past decade. Due to their overwhelming fundraising edge, it is plausible that party leaders can affect members' finances not only by ceasing personal donations to them, but also by influencing "shared" donors — i.e. the pool of donors donating to both party leaders and the rank-and-file.

Rank-and-file members have certainly internalized these financial pressures to remain loyal. For example, when asked about procedural disloyalty, former member of the HFC, Rep. David Brat, said, "voting against the Speaker flips a switch...you don't get on the money committees, you don't get money. The leadership shuts you off from PAC funding" (Lizza (2015)). Rep. Rod Blum felt this in action. After voting against Boehner's speaker election in 2015, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), the Republican party's premier fundraising arm, refused to support him. More notable than the actual act of discipline, however, was the rank-and-file's lack of surprise. When asked about Blum and the NRCC's decision, a Republican legislator said, "he votes against the Speaker, the largest funder of the NRCC...I mean, come on. You can't help stupid" (Lizza (2015)). The rank-and-file understand that defection entails financial risk. As political scientist Matt Green claims, procedural defection is "a risky thing to do. The speaker is powerful, the speaker has powerful friends...You could put your fundraising abilities in danger" (Rogers (2023)).

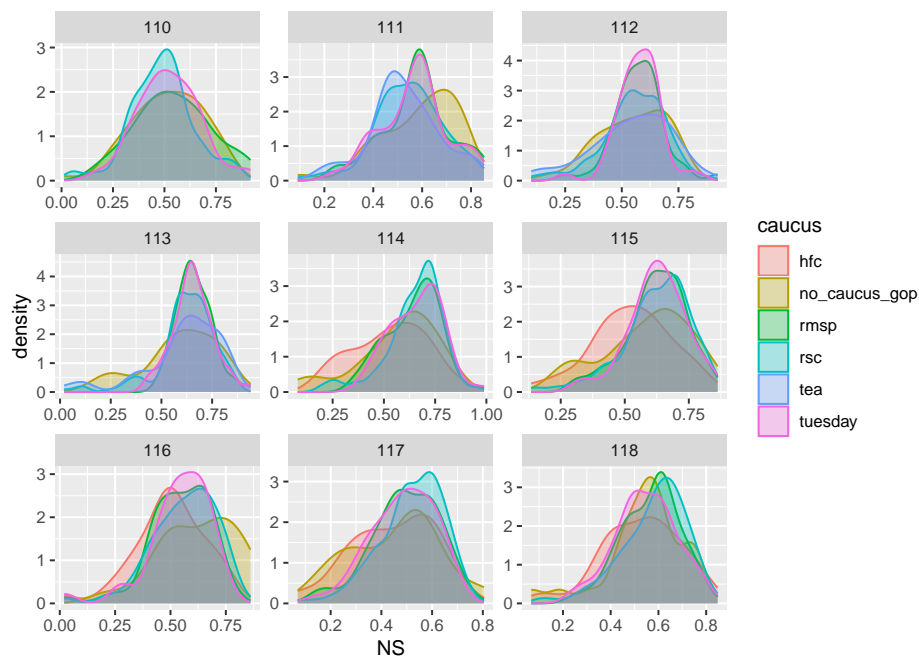# G Cross-Caucus NS Distributions by Donor-Type

G.1 Among GOP

Figure 38: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS among Republicans. Ideologically, from left to right: `tuesday` = Tuesday Group, `rmsp` = Republican Main Street Partnership, `rsc` = Republican Study Committee, `hfc` = House Freedom Caucus. `no_caucus` refers to unaffiliated legislators. `tea` = Tea Party, as the precursor to the HFC, its members were ideologically equivalent.
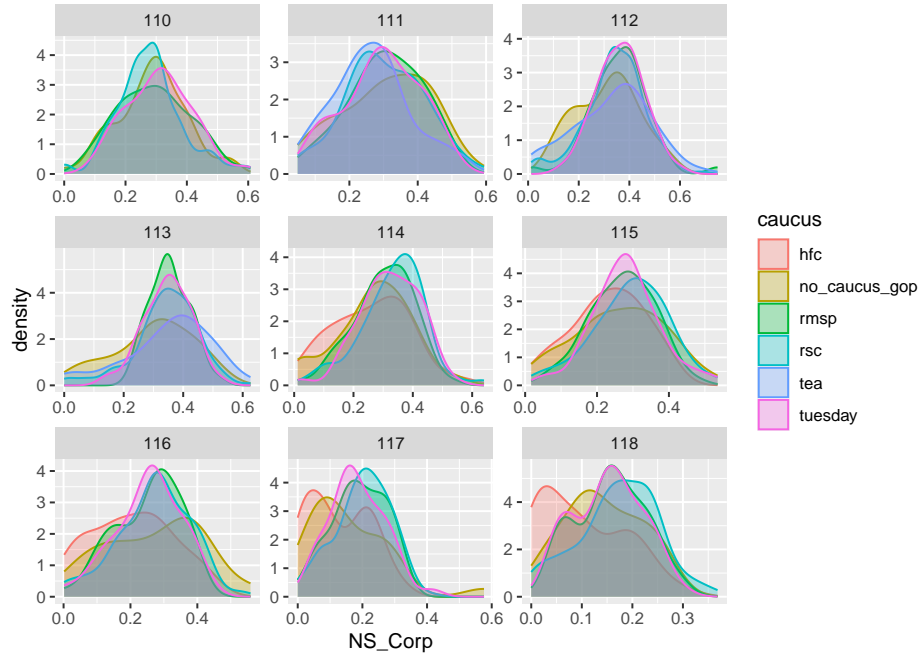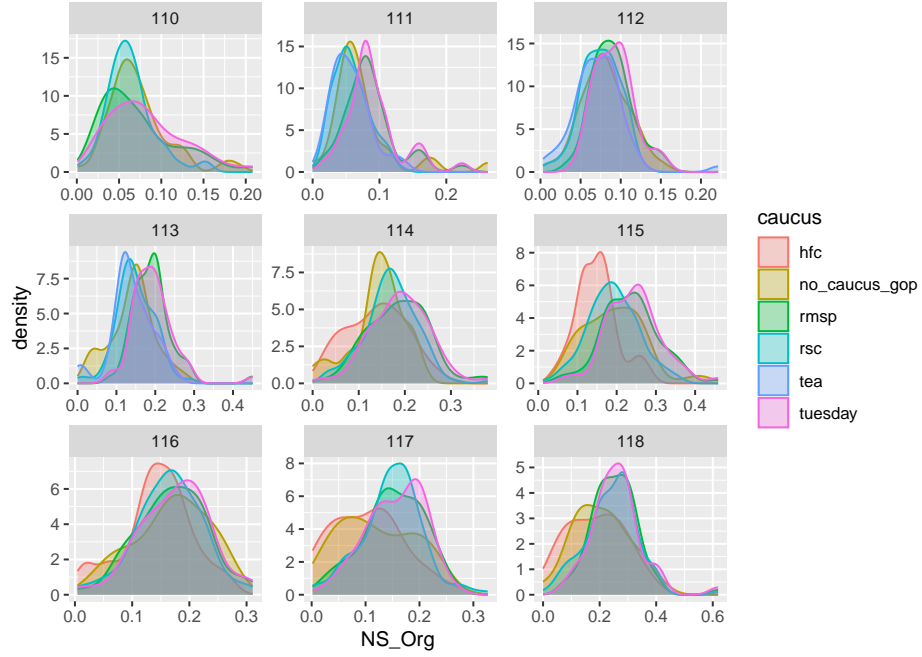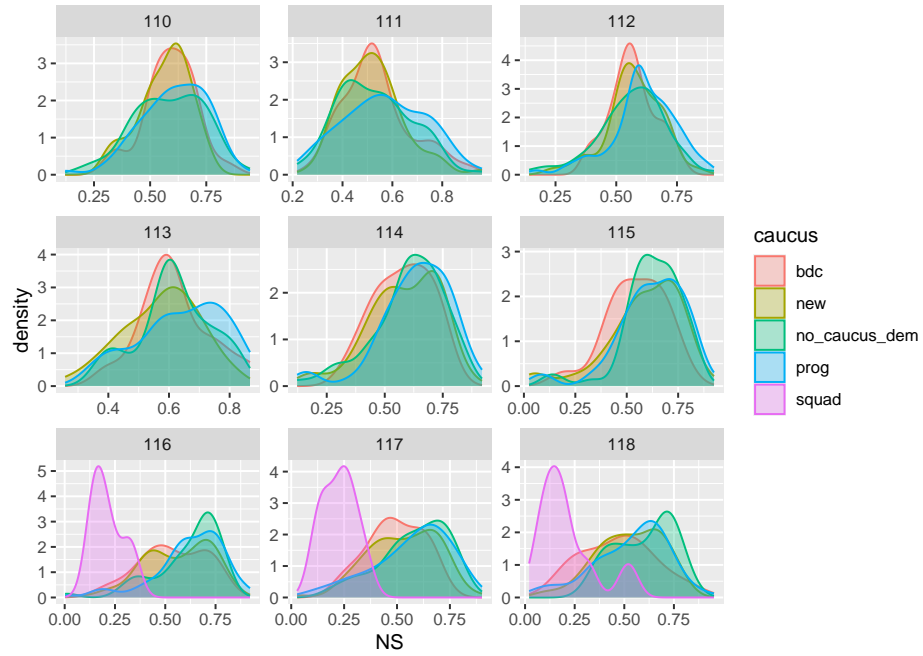
Figure 39: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS_Corp among Republicans. Ideologically, from left to right: `tuesday` = Tuesday Group, `rmsp` = Republican Main Street Partnership, `rsc` = Republican Study Committee, `hfc` = House Freedom Caucus. `no_caucus` refers to unaffiliated legislators. `tea` = Tea Party, as the precursor to the HFC, its members were ideologically equivalent.

Figure 40: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS_Org among Republicans. Ideologically, from left to right: `tuesday` = Tuesday Group, `rmsp` = Republican Main Street Partnership, `rsc` = Republican Study Committee, `hfc` = House Freedom Caucus. `no_caucus` refers to unaffiliated legislators. `tea` = Tea Party, as the precursor to the HFC, its members were ideologically equivalent.

G.2 Among Democrats

Figure 41: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS among Democrats. Ideologically, from left to right: squad = The Squad, prog = Congressional Progressive Caucus, new = New Democratic Coalition, bdc = Blue Dog Coalition. no_caucus refers to unaffiliated legislators.
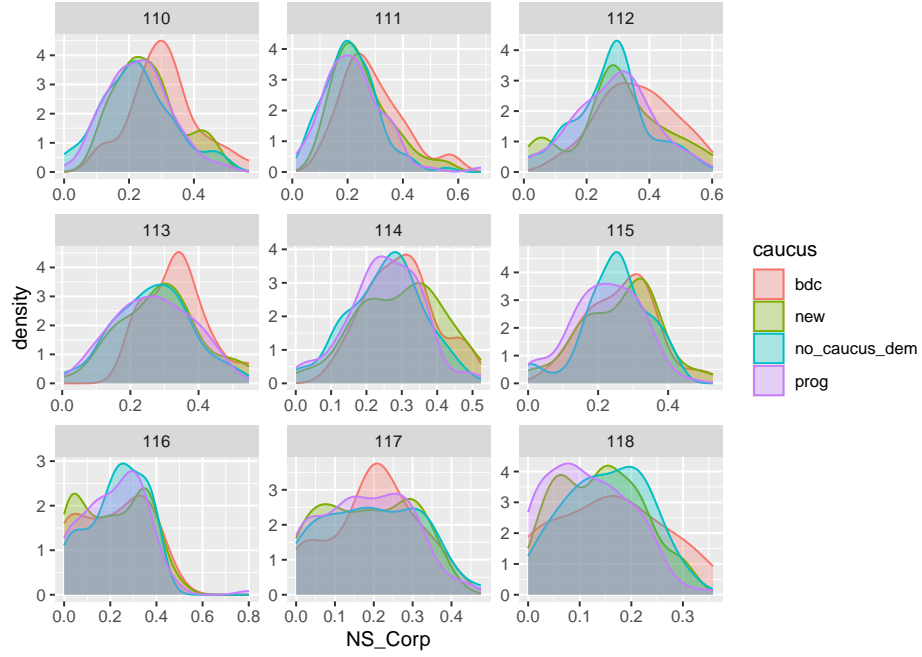
Figure 42: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS_Corp among Democrats. Ideologically, from left to right: `squad` = The Squad, `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus, `new` = New Democratic Coalition, `bdc` = Blue Dog Coalition. `no_caucus` refers to unaffiliated legislators.
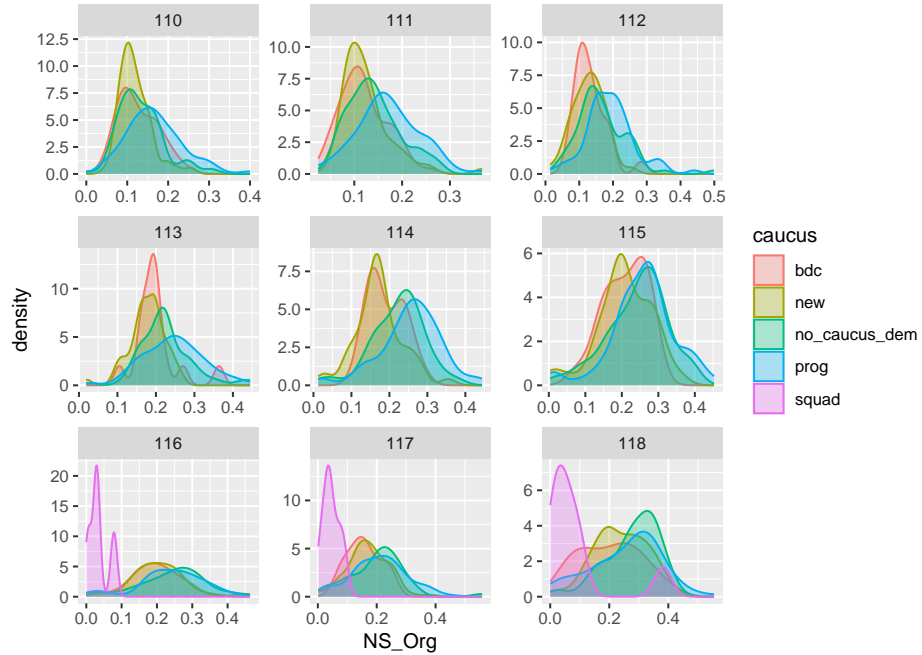
Figure 43: Caucus-Level Distributions of NS_Org among Democrats. Ideologically, from left to right: `squad` = The Squad, `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus, `new` = New Democratic Coalition, `bdc` = Blue Dog Coalition. `no_caucus` refers to unaffiliated legislators.

G.3   Means by Party, Caucus, and Donor Type

Figure 44: Mean NS by Caucus and Donor-Type.

H   Network Similarity and Rules Defections: Within-Caucus Analysis
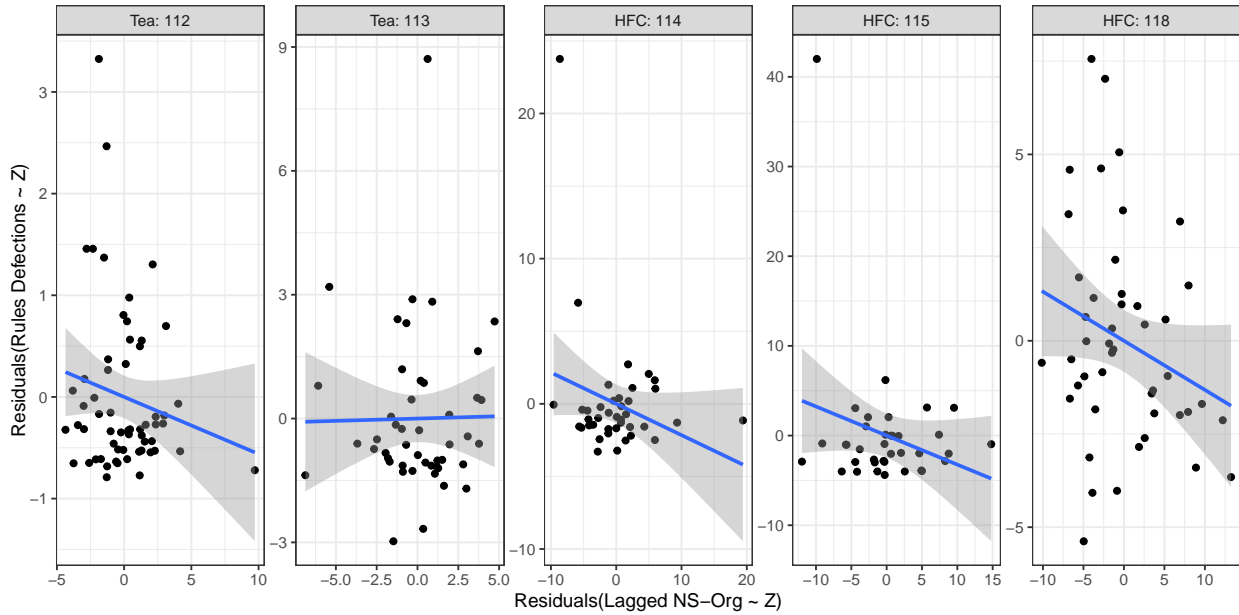
Figure 45: Greater NS_Org is Typically Associated with Fewer Rules Defections Within Obstructionist GOP Caucuses Even After Residualizing Out Ideology and District Vote Share. NS_Org is lagged. Z includes lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress and caucus, where `Tea` = Tea Party and `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus.
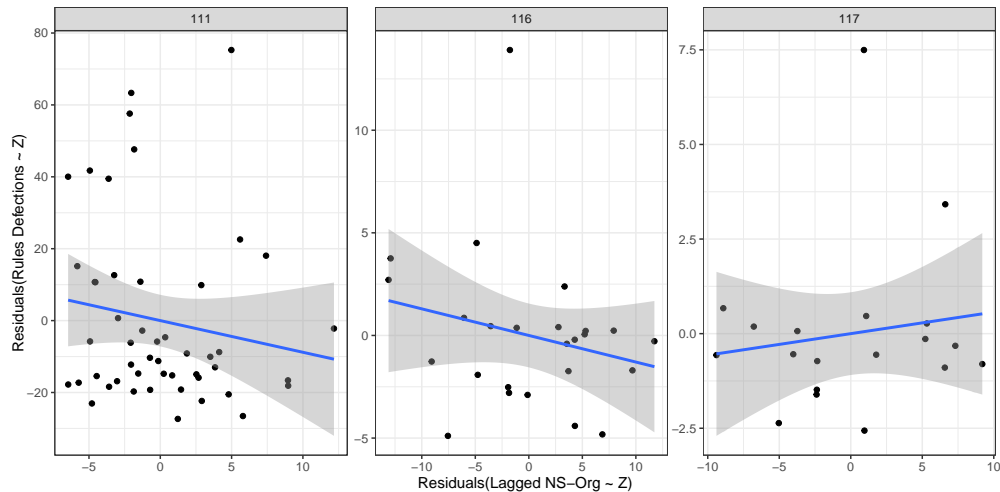
Figure 46: Greater NS_Org is Typically Associated with Fewer Rules Defections Among Blue Dogs Even After Residualizing Out Ideology and District Vote Share. NS_Org is lagged. Z includes lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress.

I   Network Similarity and Defection: Within-Congress Analyses

I.1   Model Selection

Figure 47 shows that the dependent variable is heavily right-skewed and strictly positive, which makes OLS unsuitable. Table 5 shows there is clear evidence of overdispersion (the variance in defections is much higher than the mean), so Poisson regression is also unsuitable.
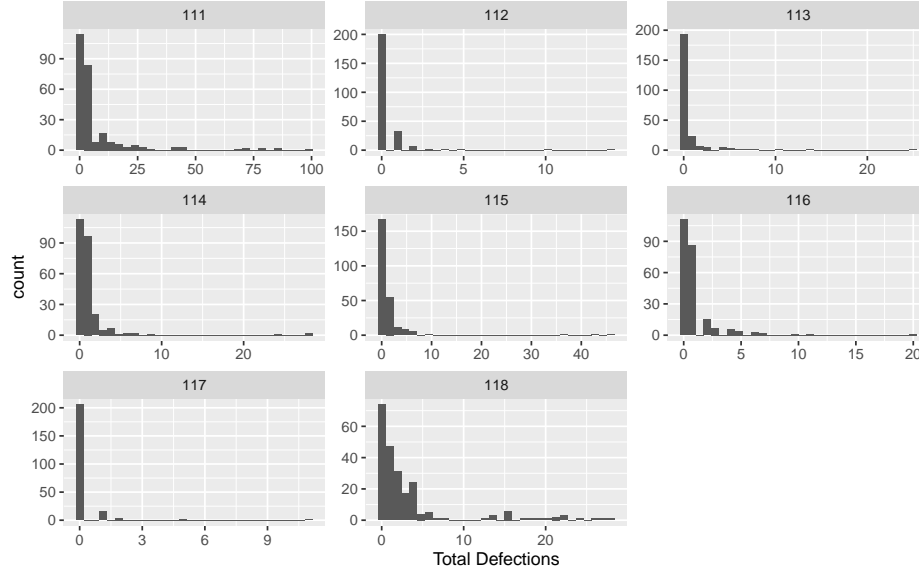

Figure 47: Distribution of Dependent Variable by Congress. Total Defections = # Speaker Election Defections + # Special Rules Defections.

Table 5: Summary of Defections by Congress (Majority Party Members)

Congress	Mean	Variance	# Defectors	# Never-Defectors
111	7.30	237.38	195	68
112	0.35	1.58	45	200
113	0.63	5.05	47	193
114	1.20	9.58	138	113
115	1.21	22.27	83	167
116	1.07	4.07	126	111
117	0.19	0.85	22	206
118	3.32	31.78	153	74

Given the large proportion of zeroes in the outcome, Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial (ZINB) regression is a plausible alternative. However, ZINB requires the researcher to specify two separate

equations: one for the zero-inflation process, which models the probability that a legislator is a "structural zero" (i.e., someone who never defects) with logistic regression, and one for the count process, which models the number of defections conditional on not being a structural zero with a negative binomial regression. The results are often sensitive to which covariates are included in each equation, so the model requires a strong theoretical justification for which variables affect each process.

There is no strong theoretical reason to exclude any predictors in the main specification from the zero-inflated model, so in the following comparisons, I estimate ZINB regressions with Equation 2 in both the count and zero-inflated processes. With this full specification, the ZINB regressions are sometimes computationally singular, while the NB regressions run just fine. This often occurs in ZINB regression, because they have higher-dimensional likelihood equations, adding potential for collinearity, or covariate issues in the zero-inflation process, such as inability to predict structural zeroes or near perfect separation. In these cases, I progressively remove terms from the zero-inflation model, until the standard errors are identifiable (i.e. the Hessian of the joint log-likelihood is invertible).[31]

Diagnostics of fit do not advantage either model. Figure 48 and 49 show that neither model performs better in terms of AIC or predicting the number of zeroes (never-defectors). And most importantly, Figure 50 shows that the models' estimated coefficients and standard errors are effectively equivalent. ZINB regression introduces greater complexity without better performance. It also suffers from mechanical estimation issues rendering variable selection in the zero-inflation component somewhat arbitrary. NB regression is thus the preferable approach.

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[31]The first simplification removes the squared ideological distance terms from both the count and zero-inflation models. Next, from the zero-inflation model, I remove all terms but ideological distance. Finally, if these models still produce singular variance-covariance matrices, I include only an intercept in the zero-inflation model. I remove the square term from the count model as well in the first simplification, because this often allows for an invertible Hessian without removing further terms from the zero-inflation process.
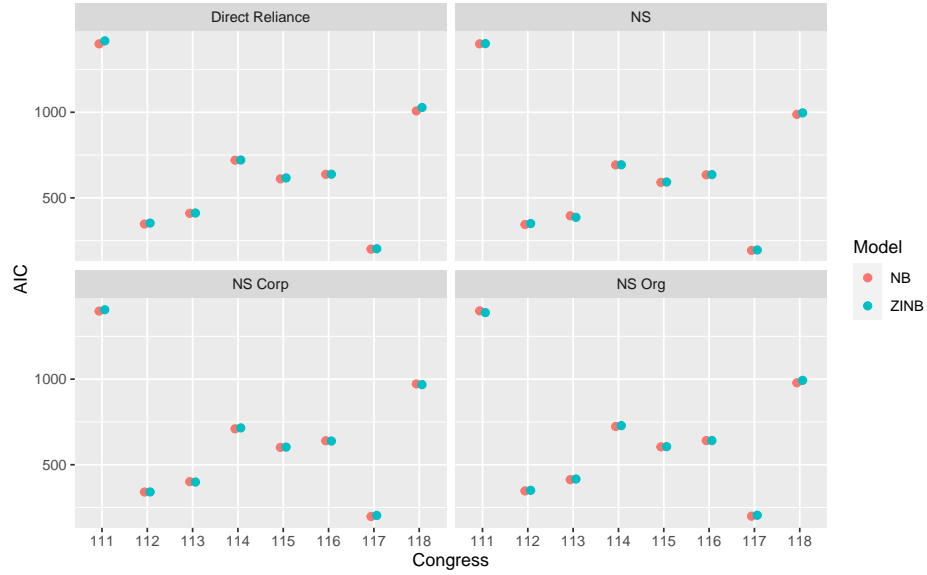
Figure 48: Negative Binomial and Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression Perform Identically in Terms of AIC. Each facet is a different NS variable, for which we estimate a model in each Congress.
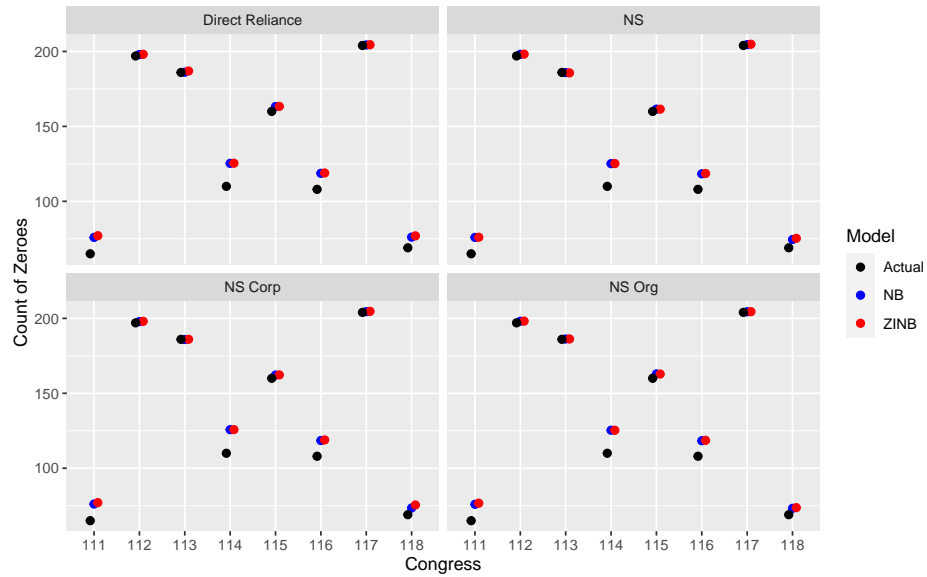

Figure 49: Negative Binomial and Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression Perform Identically in Terms of Predicting Never-Defectors. Each facet is a different NS variable, for which we estimate a model in each Congress. Black dots are the actual number of zeroes (never-defectors), the blue and red dots are the number of zeroes the NB and ZINB models predict, respectively.
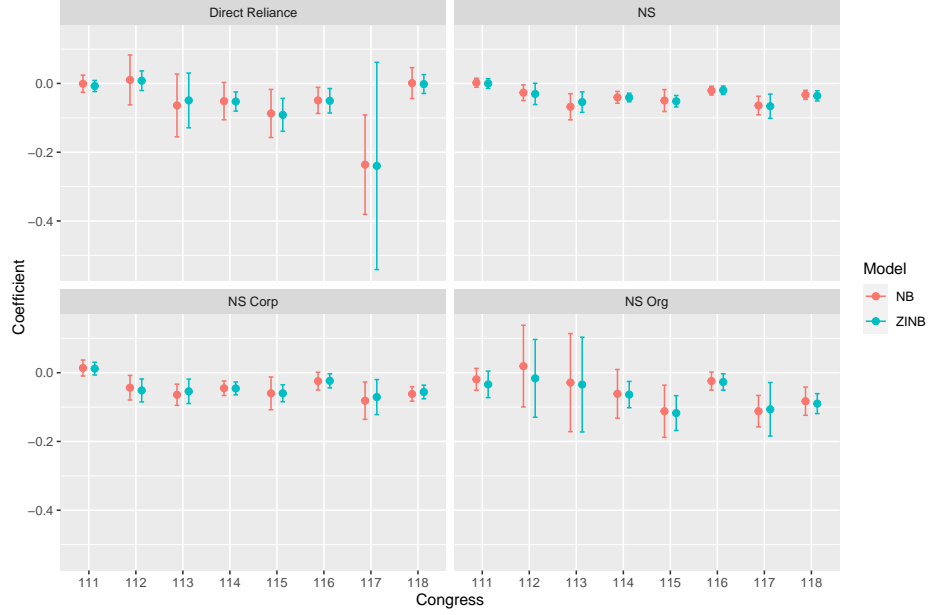
Figure 50: Coefficients Estimated by the Negative Binomial and Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Models are Nearly Identical. Each facet is a different NS variable, for which we estimate a model in each Congress. The coefficients from the ZINB regressions are from the count processes.

I.2 Interpreting the Negative-Binomial Regression Results

Negative-Binomial (NB) regression models the log of the expected dependent variable counts as a linear function of the covariates. We therefore must interpret the coefficients in the main results in terms of percentage changes rather than constant marginal effects. For predictor j, taking $100 * (\exp(\beta)^{\sigma_j} - 1)$ gives the percentage change in expected defections associated with a one-standard deviation increase in j. Figure 51 applies this transformation to the raw coefficients in the main text (Figure 15).
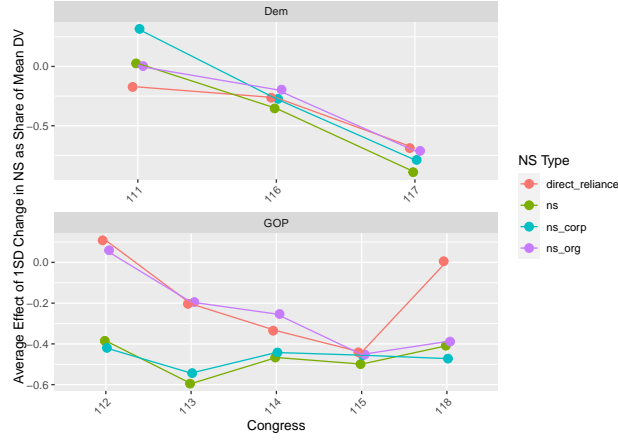
Figure 52: Average Effects of a One-Standard Deviation Changes in each Predictor on the Expected Number of Defections.
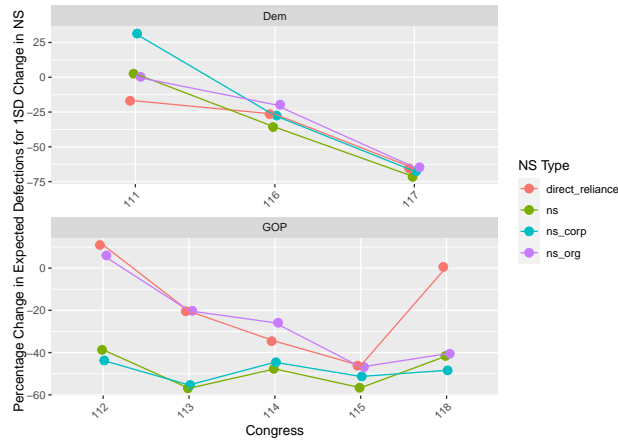

Figure 51: Negative-Binomial Regression Results with Transformed Coefficients. Interpretation for each point estimate b: a one-standard deviation increase in NS is associated with a b percentage change in the expected number of defections.

To place the coefficients on the response variable scale, we can compute Average Marginal Effects (AME). As is the case with all GLMs, we compute the AME across all observations, because the marginal effect of each predictor on the expected outcome (in this case, the expected count of defections) depends on the covariate values. Because we are interested in comparing the magnitude of these coefficients across Congresses with different baseline levels of defections, plausibly due to varying political climates and majority party seat margins, we should scale the AME by the average level of defection in each Congress. Figure 52 plots the AME of a one-standard deviation change in NS, divided by the observed average number of defections in the given Congress. Notice that these scaled AMEs are nearly identical to the percentage change results.

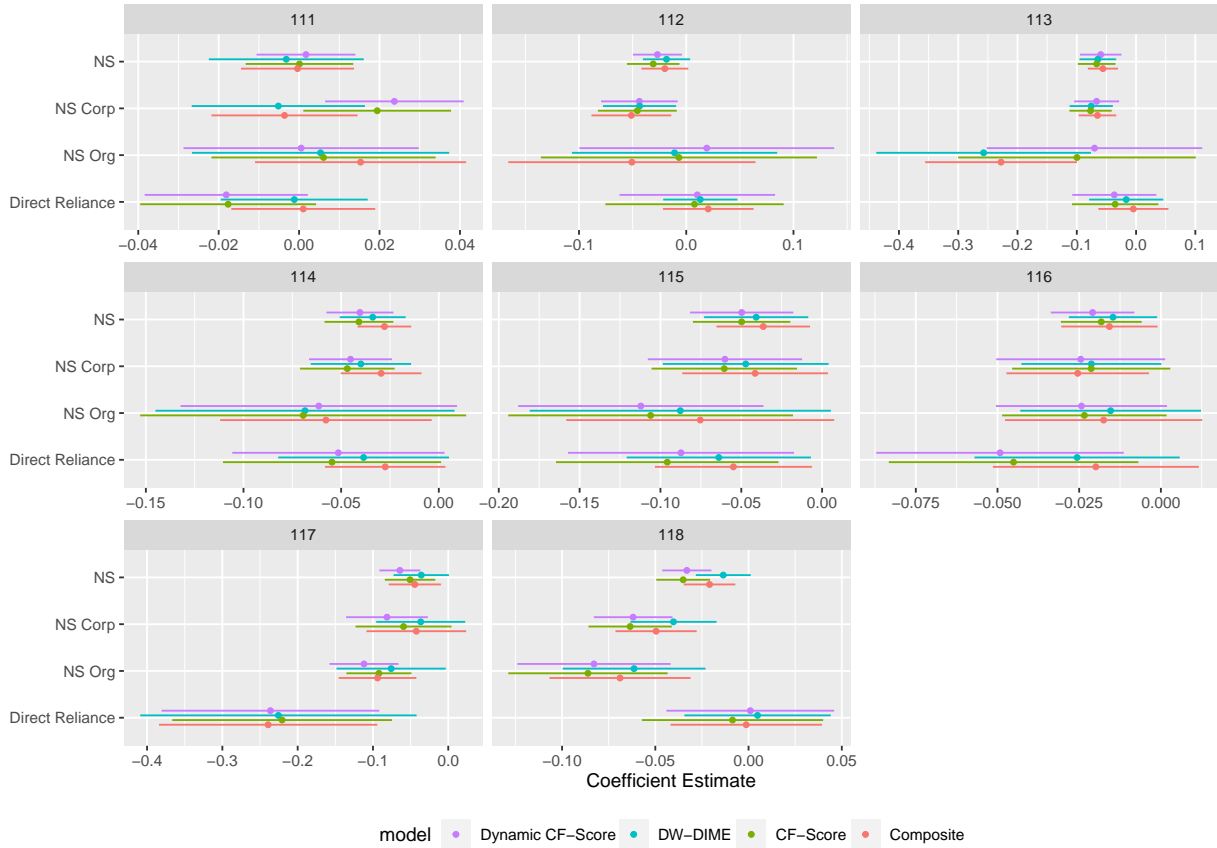## I.3 Results are Robust to Different Measures of Ideology

Figure 53: Coefficients Largely Unchanged with Different Ideology Measures. Each facet contains the regression estimates for a given Congress. `model` denotes which ideological metric was used to measure ideological distance to party leaders in the regression. Dynamic CF-Scores are lagged, while other ideology metrics are static. Within each facet, each variable-model is a separate regression. *NS*, *NS Corp*, *NS Org*, and *Direct Reliance* are all lagged.

Outside of the 111th Congress, the coefficients are generally unchanged when using different ideology measures. We of course, however, should use lagged dynamic CF-scores, because the composite measure is trained on roll-call data that includes the dependent variable in each Congress, and the static CF-Score and DW-DIME measures are trained on post-treatment (defection) campaign finance data, and thus may be impacted by the dependent variable.

J Network Similarity and Defection: Within-District and Within-Legislator Analyses
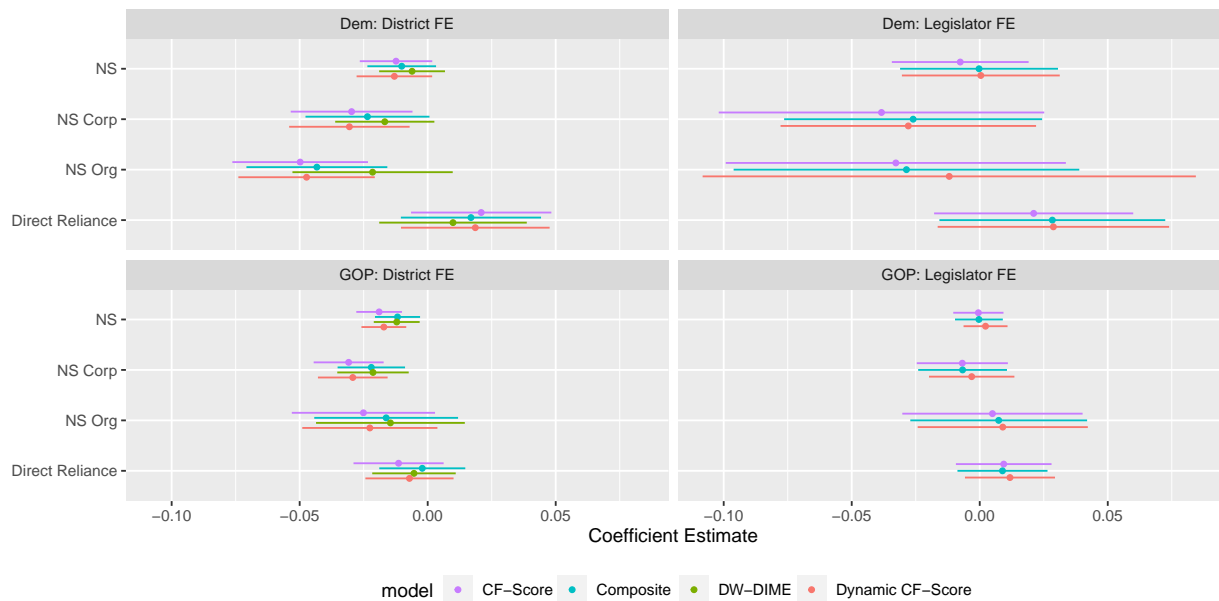
J.1 Regression Robustness Checks

Figure 54: Within-Legislator and Within-District Regression Results Do Not Change with Different Ideology Measures. Each facet contains the regressions for a given party and level of fixed effect. `model` denotes which ideological metric was used to measure ideological distance to party leaders in the regression. Dynamic CF-scores are lagged, while other ideology metrics are static. Within each facet, each variable-model is a separate regression. *NS*, *NS Corp*, *NS Org*, and *Direct Reliance* are all lagged.

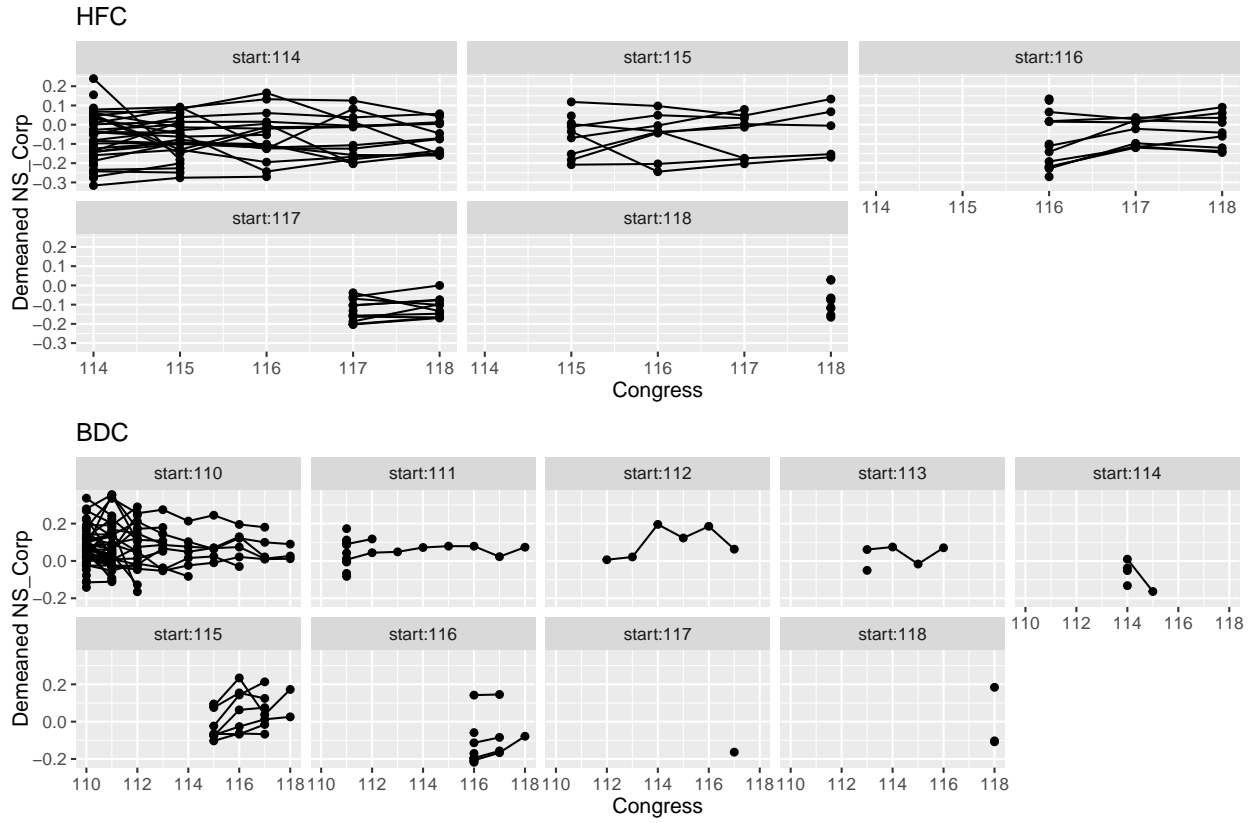## J.2 Examining Within-Legislator Variation in NS_Corp

Figure 55: Minimal Within-Legislator Changes in NS_Corp Among Members of Obstructionist Caucuses. Each facet is a freshmen cohort of the BDC or HFC tracked over time, where each dot is a legislator. NS_Corp values are demeaned relative to the party's average in that Congress to account for common within-party trends.
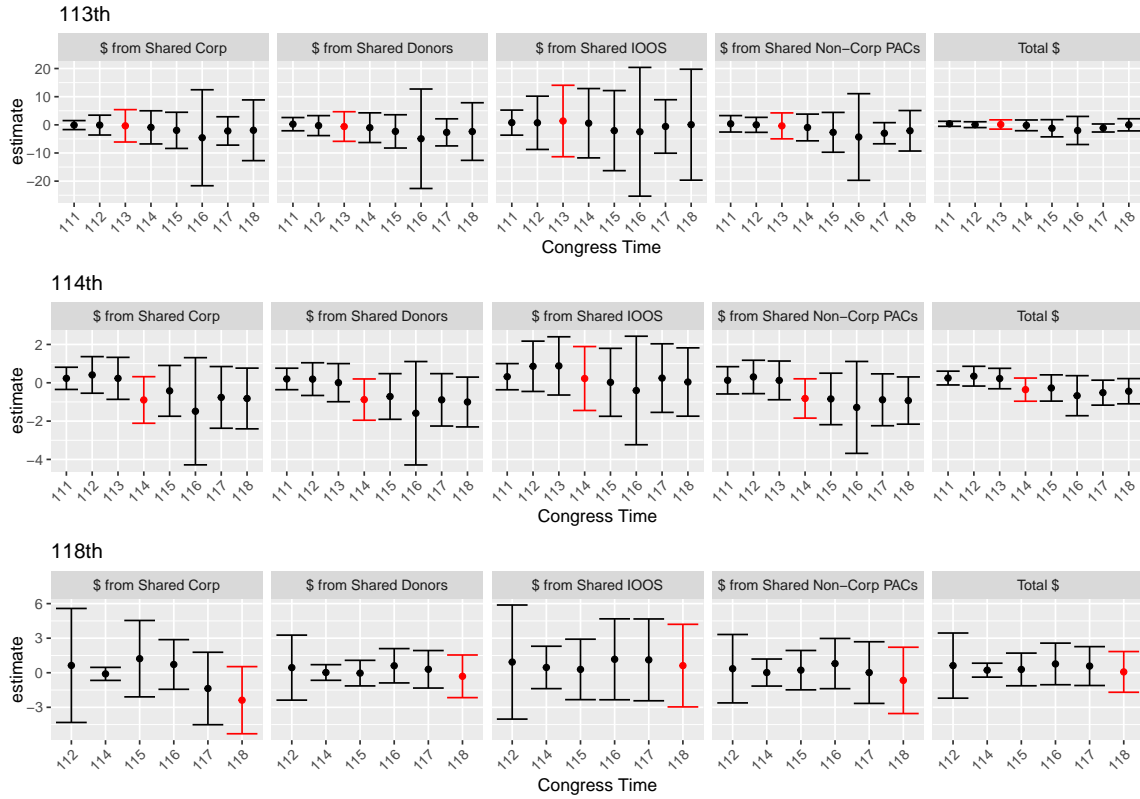
K   The Effects of Defection: Full Event Study

Figure 56: Without Averaging Pre-Post Treatment Data: Effect of GOP Speaker Election Defections in the 113th, 114th, and 118th Congress. Estimates are the coefficients on the interaction terms. In red, is the contemporaneous effect.