# Donor Networks and the Incentive to Defect in Congress*

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**Abstract**

Although canonical measures indicate the parties in Congress are increasingly ideologically cohesive, conflict within majority parties on procedural votes is rising. I explain this discrepancy with a new theory that predicts regardless of the parties' ideological distributions, party leaders' agenda power depends upon their ability to punish defection. If leaders cannot control resources that induce compliance, members can obstruct procedure to extract concessions without fearing reprisal. I test this theory with a new measure of legislators' financial reliance on the party-donor network. I show obstructionist caucuses have grown less reliant on their party's network of corporate PACs, and this financial independence predicts defections within-Congress, within-district, and even within obstructionist factions. I provide evidence these changes weakened leaders' disciplinary capacity, as the corporate-dollar cost of voting against a GOP speaker election decreased significantly between 2015 and 2023. Governing capacity requires controlling resources legislators desire, not simply a particular distribution of ideology.

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# 1 Introduction

According to canonical measures of ideology and scholarly accounts, the parties in Congress are increasingly polarized and internally cohesive (Barber and McCarty 2015; Curry and Lee 2020; Lee 2015).[1] Yet since the early 2010s, conflict within the House majority party on procedural votes is rising.[2] Among Republicans, members of the Tea Party in 2013 cast the first majority party votes against a Speaker nominee in 16 years — only the second case of such defection since 1923 (Struyk and Petulla 2019). In 2015, the House Freedom Caucus (HFC) forms and begins organizing procedural threats to extract agenda power from party leaders (Bloch Rubin 2022). In 2023, the HFC starts directly voting down these measures, derailing 14 speaker elections, 7 special rules, and ousting a speaker for the first time in history. Such defection is incredibly rare — the last failed special rule was in 2002, and the last failed speaker election was in 1923 — and consequential, as bills generally cannot see the floor without passing these votes.

Certain Democratic factions are also increasingly willing to challenge their leaders. For example, 19 moderates publicly vowed to challenge Nancy 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). Many of these defectors came from the Blue Dog Coalition (BDC), the moderate and obstructionist Democratic faction.

What explains increasing procedural threats to leaders' agenda power?

I argue that regardless of the parties' ideological distributions, party leaders' governing capacity depends on their ability to punish disloyalty. If they lack sufficient control over

[1] Section 3.1 addresses measurement concerns.

[2] As Frances Lee writes, "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).

resources that induce compliance, then a faction which disagrees with how legislative influence is distributed within the party may obstruct procedure without fear of reprisal. Pivotal factions specifically target procedure rather than substance, because it generates greater leverage to extract concessions, as leaders must pass procedural votes to even bring substantive legislation to the floor. It also allows them to challenge leaders' authority over the agenda without directly expressing policy disagreement, and, in the case of speaker elections, to bargain for enduring structural concessions unavailable after the House adopts its rules, such as Rules Committee seats or rules changes.

This theory implies that rising procedural conflict is a function of resource independence. Certain factions are growing less reliant on resources leaders control, circumscribing party leaders' ability to punish and enabling defection. I test this implication by measuring changes in financial reliance on party leaders.

I first show that procedural threats are not only increasing over time, but also asymmetric across parties, as Democratic moderates (especially members of the BDC) and GOP conservatives (especially members of the HFC) are most likely to defect on speaker elections and special rules. Existing measures of ideology cannot explain these defection patterns, as they suggest that a) HFC members are, if anything, ideologically closer to party leaders than GOP moderates, 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 an original measure of a legislator's financial reliance on party leaders' donor networks and find that variation in this measure, unlike measures of ideology, is consistent with both asymmetric and over-time defection patterns. The BDC and HFC are least reliant on party leaders' donor networks, and over time, are growing less reliant on leaders' corporate donors.

Reliance on party leaders' corporate network predicts defection in numerous settings, consistent with independence from party leaders' donors enabling defection. It negatively correlates with defection within each Congress, even after accounting for ideology. It even

predicts defections within obstructionist factions, which is particularly revealing given obstructionist caucus members are selected based on their ideology and willingness to challenge party leaders (Bloch Rubin 2022; Clarke 2020). In the panel setting, it also predicts within-district variation in defection. When an incumbent is replaced by someone equally ideologically distant from party leaders, but less financially beholden to the party's corporate network, defections on average increase.

Waning reliance on party leaders' corporate donors has limited their punishment capacity. Using a matched difference-in-differences design, I show that defectors against John Boehner's speaker election in 2015 and Kevin McCarthy's speaker elections in 2023 were both punished through leaders' corporate donors. However, McCarthy's defectors lost fewer dollars, and those losses composed a smaller share of their total fundraising. Conservatives have increased their total fundraising while shrinking the amount they receive from leaders' corporate network — limiting both the size of punishment leaders can deliver and its impact.

I make several contributions. First, ideological conditions alone do not determine leaders' governing capacity (as in Aldrich and Rohde 2001; Cox and McCubbins 2005; Schickler and Rich 1997). Regardless of how polarized and internally homogeneous the parties are, if leaders cannot punish disloyalty, then pivotal factions have an incentive to seek more power by obstructing leaders. Second, existing theories presuppose leaders' disciplinary capacity (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Aldrich and Rohde 2001), debating only when political conditions enable its exercise (Schickler and Rich 1997; Pearson 2015). Instead, I show that leaders' disciplinary capacity itself may be absent, as it depends on their control over a legislator's valued resources and thus varies across members and time. Third, donors are key among these resources. By linking leaders' disciplinary capacity and agenda control to their centrality in the donor network, I am among the first to show how shifts in the external electoral environment, such as campaign finance, can reshape internal power structures. Fourth, I explain why existing theories' prediction that legislators remain especially loyal on procedure has broken down (as in Cox and McCubbins 2005; Schickler and Rich 1997; Kirkland and

Slapin 2017). Finally, empirical work neither describes factions' procedural voting patterns, measures financial independence, nor links their donor bases to intra-party conflict (Clarke 2020; Gaynor 2022; McGee 2021). My empirical analysis fills these gaps.

# 2 Setting: Rising Intra-Party Conflict on Procedural Votes

The historic number of failed rules and speaker elections in the 118th Congress (2023-2025)[3] are not isolated but part of a warming trend. Over the past decade, factions increasingly withhold support of 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. While only one speaker election from 1925-2012 saw any majority party members vote against their party's nominee (Struyk and Petulla 2019), a subset of moderate Democrats or extreme Republicans has defected in every speaker election since (Figure SI.2). These defections were coordinated by the BDC and HFC (see Figure SI.3).

Factions not only defect on the floor, but also collectively withhold support *before* the floor vote — an equally subversive tactic. For example, in 2018, 19 moderate Democrats (8 of whom BDC members) publicly vowed to oppose Pelosi's speaker bid (Foran and Raju 2018), a pivotal bloc that forced concessions on committee seats, leadership term limits, and House rules weakening leaders' negative agenda control. SI C.1 details these threats and concessions.

On the right, Tea-Party conservatives who later formed the HFC voted against Boehner's speakership in 2013 and 2015 but lacked pivotal numbers. After unifying their ranks, they leveraged their pivotal status to force Boehner's retirement in July 2015 by filing a motion-to-

[3] 7 failed rules, 17 failed speaker elections, and two votes to vacate the Speaker's office, one of which succeeded.

vacate resolution (Lizza 2015) and essentially hand-pick Paul Ryan as successor (Bloch Rubin 2022). SI C.2 further details the Boehner-HFC battles.

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), and according to political scientist Ruth Bloch Rubin were "previously thought to be outside the bounds of acceptable behavior" (Bloch Rubin 2022, p. 2). 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 SI D.1). But this ignores the organized *threat* of defection which may prevent a rule from even reaching the floor. Like speaker elections, such threats sharply intensified with the HFC's birth in 2015.

From the 1970s reforms (when the Speaker gained appointment and removal power over the majority party's Rules Committee members) until the Tea Party's emergence, procedural conflict within the majority party fell dramatically. During this period, leaders increasingly "*expect* and *get*" procedural loyalty from their rank-and-file (Cox and McCubbins 2005, p. 30). 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 opposed a substantive bill often still supported 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).[4]

The HFC reversed these patterns. The caucus was founded to influence leaders by opposing procedural motions when necessary. Its founders understood both the power and risk[5] of derailing rules and thus only recruited legislators who had "the spine" to do so (Mulvaney 2023; Lizza 2015, SI B provides further quote evidence). This allowed them to challenge rules on signature party-backed legislation, such as tax reform and free trade, under Speakers Ryan and Boehner (Bloch Rubin 2022; Lizza 2015). Although they did not undermine a rule on the floor before the 118th Congress, their intransigence stalled key components of the Republican agenda and forced Speaker Ryan to "regularly consult[] with the HFC's leadership on procedural and policy issues" (Bloch 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 faced fewer organized threats on special rules. Indeed, she never lost a rule on the floor, resolving the few pivotal threats she did face through amendment concessions. Thus, among Democrats, the novel temporal pattern is the emergence of floor defections and pivotal threats against speaker elections.

## 2.3 Who Defects?

As previously discussed, defections on speaker elections almost exclusively come from the moderate left and extreme right (see Figure SI.2) and are organized by the BDC and HFC (see Figure SI.3). But do the same ideological factions that defect on speaker elections also defect on special rules?

[4]For example, former Rules Committee chairman (a powerful arm of the party leadership) Pete Sessions said "vote against the rules, I'll kick your ass" (Diaz and Tully-McManus 2024); footnote 5 furthermore demonstrates the rank-and-file internalized this norm.

[5] For example, co-founder Rep. Mulvaney said, "the one thing they [party leaders] said is you never ever, ever, ever vote against a rule" (Lizza 2015).

### 2.3.1 Ideology and Defection

Figure 1 plots the average defection rate on special rules among members of each intra-party caucus (I use "caucus" interchangeably with "faction"), which legislators select into based on their sub-party ideological affiliation (Clarke 2020).

I define procedural defection only for majority-party members, since it targets the majority party's agenda power. A majority-party legislator's defection rate on special rules is the share of 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[6]. For speaker elections, all Present votes are counted as defections, since, unlike in ordinary rule votes, even a non-pivotal Present vote represents a highly visible and direct rejection of the party's head.[7]

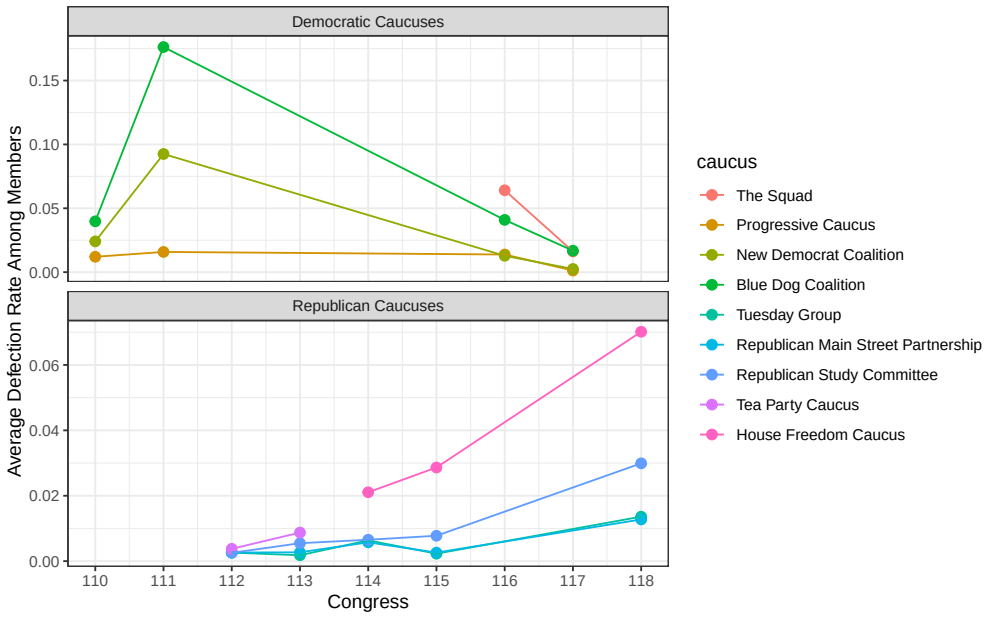


Figure 1: Average Defection Rate on Special Rules by Caucus Membership and Congress. Legend orders caucuses ideologically from left-to-right.

Defection patterns mirror those on speaker elections. Moderate Democrats and extreme

[6] i.e., when the bill-level defection rate (Equation 6) is at least 0.5 (see SI D.1 for further explanation)

[7] The results are the same if we also count non-pivotal Present votes on special rules as defections.

Republicans defect most, as Blue Dogs defect but Progressive Caucus members do not,[8] while Tea Party and HFC members defect but Tuesday Group members do not. The average Squad member does defect more than the average Blue Dog in the 116th Congress, but their size (4 members) is minuscule relative to the BDC (26 members) and Progressive Caucus (95 members). So in terms of sheer numbers, Pelosi has more to fear from her moderates. The same partisan asymmetries emerge when measuring ideology quantitatively (see SI D.3).[9]

**Ideology Does Not Explain Asymmetric Defection Patterns** SI E.2 shows that ideological distance to leaders does not explain why procedural defection has intensified from each party's conservative faction. Based on canonical measures, HFC members have not grown ideologically further from leaders over time, and are, if anything, ideologically *closer* to leaders than moderates. Although BDC members are modestly further from party leaders than progressives, this difference is stable over time, despite their increased willingness to challenge Pelosi.[10]

### 2.3.2 Within-Caucus Variation in Defection

Although obstructionist caucuses like the HFC and BDC only accept legislators willing to buck the leadership when necessary (Bloch Rubin 2017, 2022; Mulvaney 2023; Clarke 2020), even within these factions, there is considerable variation in defection rates on both special rules (see Figure SI.6) and speaker elections.

Figure 2 shows that on the speaker votes with significant levels of defection in the caucus (more than three 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

[8] The spike in the 111th Congress reflects Democrats' 79-seat majority seat-margin, which allowed more defections without endangering passage.

[9] Using DW-Nominate, Carson et al. (2014) also find conservative, not progressive, Democrats defect in the 110th and 111th Congresses.

[10] Similarly, Figure SI.9 shows GOP leaders are typically chosen from *right* of their party's median, and there is no clear time-trend of Democratic leaders being increasingly chosen from left of theirs.

(Bloch 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.

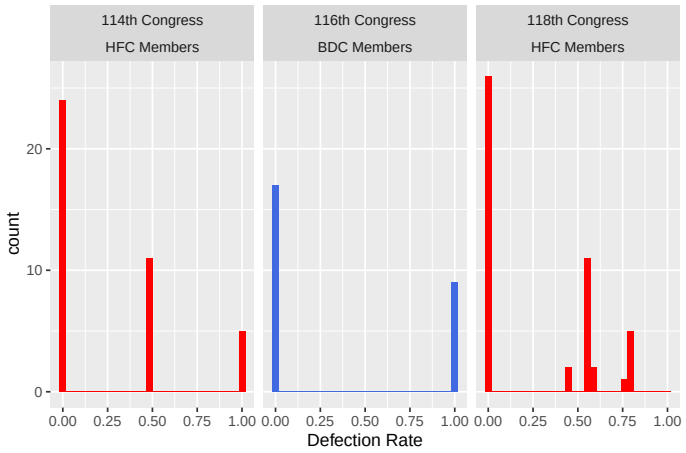


Figure 2: Defection Rates on Speaker Election Votes among Blue Dog Coalition and House Freedom Caucus members.

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

# 3 A Theory of "Internal" Procedural Defection

Party leaders may face "external" and "internal" defection threats. External defections are when majority party members join the minority on ideological grounds, while internal defections are challenges stemming from within-party disagreements over the agenda.

The external threat dissipates as the parties polarize, since moderates have less ideological or electoral incentives to aid the minority. Indeed, as dissident conservative Democrats sorted into the Republican party and the parties began polarizing in the 1970s (Barber and McCarty 2015), defections on substance (Rohde 1991) and procedure (Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008;

Sinclair 2002; Cox and Poole 2002) generally decreased until the Tea Party's emergence. However, in polarized legislatures, party leaders must still protect against internal challenges.

**What Motivates Internal Defection** In today's polarized Congress, the rank-and-file do not want to cooperate with the minority (external threat), but if a faction feels left out of the legislative process — for example, through limited consultation, restricted amendment opportunities, or denial of influential committee positions — they may obstruct party leaders' agenda power to signal displeasure or extract concessions.

Indeed, procedural conflict within both parties over the past decade is driven by frustration with leaders' centralization of policymaking — their reliance on closed and structured rules, control over committee assignments and chairmanships, bypassing of the committee process, and lack of open debate and consultation of rank-and-file on legislation. For example, both BDC and HFC members withheld support of Pelosi's and McCarthy's speaker elections, respectively, in pursuit of structural concessions addressing these grievances (SI C.1 summarizes the demands and concessions), and HFC members derailed six special rules in the 118th Congress over restrictive amendment structures or feeling unconsulted (SI D.2 details the motivation for each failed rule). Obstructionists have also explicitly stated that their irritation stems from leaders' centralized power (see SI B).

**Why Defect on Procedural Votes** In order to extract agenda power from leaders via obstruction, factions must target the tools leaders require to control the agenda. Chief among these tools are procedural motions like special rules and speaker elections.

Without passing these procedural votes, leaders struggle to bring legislation to the floor. Each special rule structures debate for at least one substantive bill and typically one ore more amendments, so derailing a single rule blocks *multiple* downstream substantive votes *at once*. Leaders subsequently cannot even initiate debate on their desired bills and amendments, let alone bring final passage votes, preventing them from using floor debate and the visibility

of substantive votes to pressure and convert holdouts.[11] Speaker elections are even more fundamental: without electing a speaker, House business cannot begin whatsoever. Holding procedural votes hostage therefore maximizes disruption and leverage while minimizing organized defections, which are difficult to coordinate and risk severe punishment (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Green 2019; Pearson 2015). Indeed, the legislative delays and reputational costs imposed on leaders by failed procedural motions are both why leaders demand loyalty on these votes (Cox and McCubbins 1993)[12], and why the HFC target them.[13]

Targeting procedure is desirable for additional reasons. By obstructing speaker elections, factions can demand and extract agenda-setting positions, such as Rules Committee seats or committee chairmanships, prior to the adoption of House rules, upon which these positions are largely set. This allows them to bargain for structural power that secures enduring leverage over policy throughout that congressional term. Indeed, in the two most recent speaker election challenges, obstructionist factions made notable gains (see SI C.1).

Challenging rules also allows factions to focus their opposition on rejected amendments or retaliate against non-germane actions taken by leaders without expressing policy disagreements with the underlying bills. For example, six out of seven special rules derailed by the HFC in the 118th Congress were primarily motivated by excluded amendments, closed-rules, and/or retaliating against leaders compromising with Democrats on cutting spending levels (actions not germane to the rule and its underlying bills), rather than disagreement with the underlying substantive legislation (see SI D.2). As Rules Committee Chair Tom Cole lamented after HFC members derailed rules associated with defense funding, "if there's nothing in this bill you disagree with, tell me why you're voting no...There's no justification" (O'Brien 2023).

Procedural defections are therefore not mere proxies for significant policy disagreement. This helps rationalize why ideology alone cannot explain rising procedural conflict and par-

[11] SI D.2 further discusses this mechanism and provides an example.

[12] See footnotes 4 and 5.

[13] When drafting their strategy, HFC co-founders deemed voting against rules "going nuclear" (Lizza 2015) and "among the most mutinous maneuvers we could contemplate" (Mulvaney 2023).

tisan asymmetries in who defects. Budget-driven defections, which were a central source of the historic conflict within the GOP in the 118th Congress[14], make this logic clearest. House Republicans agreed ideologically: they passed a partisan budget framework in April 2023 that cut federal spending largely by gutting Biden's legislative successes. The conflict only emerged when both Speakers McCarthy and Johnson, facing a Democratic Senate and White House, were forced to compromise on that framework to avoid a shutdown, and shook hands with Democrats on these spending compromises without consulting conservatives (Tran and Beggin 2024; Hauf 2023).[15] Procedural defection therefore stemmed less from differing ideal points, than anger over how leaders' wielded the party's bargaining power and supposedly betrayed conservative interests. SI C.2 demonstrates Speaker Boehner's procedural battles with his conservatives were driven primarily by this same dynamic.

Even when defectors are not pivotal, procedural defection may be a strategically attractive signal. Because leaders require speaker elections and rules to organize and control the agenda, challenging these votes violates deeply entrenched party norms, even more so than challenging substantive bills[16] (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Absent leverage, defectors can still brand themselves as challengers of leaders' centralized authority. As Freedom Caucus co-founder David Brat observed, "If you start threatening rules, then that starts questioning the whole process, the way the place is run" (Lizza 2015).

**When Do Defection Threats Emerge** I develop a bargaining model in SI F to induct the conditions under which a faction threatens procedural defection. Here, I describe the model and its key insights in words.

After leaders propose a rule or speaker nominee, obstructionist factions can either accept,

[14]Spending fights shaped McCarthy's speakership concessions, motivated four of the seven failed rules, and precipitated McCarthy's ouster and the floor vote to oust Johnson.

[15]As HFC member Chip Roy said after obstructing rules to protest the Biden-McCarthy debt-limit deal, "We warned them not to cut that deal without coming down and sitting down and talk[ing] to us" (Lerman et al. 2023)

[16]As explained by Rep. Don Bacon, "If you don't like the bill, vote no on the actual bill." (Diaz and Tully-McManus 2024)

cast protest votes, or threaten to cast pivotal defections. The potential benefits of obstruction are clear. By protesting procedure, factions can signal to voters their opposition to the party establishment, brand themselves as firebrands, collect ego rents from challenging leaders, and strengthen their position in future bargaining disputes by demonstrating the credibility of their threat to defect. And by threatening to hold the agenda hostage, factions may create bargaining leverage that pressures leaders to concede their demands.

The pivotal threat is credible only if party leaders cannot credibly recruit the minority's help. Absent this condition, the faction has no bargaining leverage, as leaders can pass votes with or without their support. Factions can typically rely on this condition being met, as increasing polarization severely limits the credibility of leaders securing minority help. For example, both Boehner and McCarthy refused to seek Democratic votes to save their speakerships, and the minority party almost always votes in unified opposition on rules.

Most importantly, factions must weigh the potential benefits of defection against the risk of facing punishment from party leaders. Indeed, PCT argues leaders' capacity to withhold committee seats and leadership positions helps ensure procedural loyalty (Cox and McCubbins 2005), while other work suggests leaders may also use money to encourage discipline (Green 2019; Pearson 2015). For a sufficiently large punishment, factions are better off accepting leaders' initial offers than defecting on the floor. Therefore as leaders' punishment capacity wanes, all else equal, the faction's threat to defect becomes more credible. Its members are both more willing to cast protest defections and, if pivotal, threaten to block passage altogether.

**When Do We Observe Floor Defections** Equilibrium outcomes depend, in part, on the faction's size. When the faction is not pivotal, defection follows a simple cost–benefit logic: legislators cast protest votes when the expressive, signaling, and/or future bargaining benefits outweigh expected punishment.

When a faction is pivotal, however, and can credibly defect, leaders may anticipate defec-

tion and adjust their offers ex ante. Specifically, in equilibrium under complete information, leaders offer just enough legislative influence to secure a majority, neutralizing pivotal threats while allowing residual protest defections that do not jeopardize passage. Once leaders have bought off a minimally sufficient subset of defectors, the number of observed defections is again determined by legislators' individual cost–benefit calculations. Consequently, all else equal, weakening punishment capacity should produce more protest defections and appeased threats (via side-payments), rather than more failed floor votes. SI F.3.3 provides evidence this is consistent with bargaining dynamics over the past decade, as in response to rising procedural threats, leaders have typically delivered ex-ante concessions to win votes. Floor failures only emerge in the 118th Congress, likely due to information asymmetry — leaders believed the faction's threat was not credible and thus made insufficient floor offers (see SI F.3.3 for examples).

Regardless of why floor failures occasionally occur, legislators can only cast protest votes or threaten pivotal defection when sufficiently protected from party leaders' capacity to withhold committee seats, chairs, amendment rights, and money. I therefore argue that rising procedural threats are a function of growing resource independence. Certain factions are growing less reliant on these resources controlled by party leaders, enabling them to credibly threaten or protest high-stakes procedural votes in pursuit of power concessions or signaling benefits.

**Leaders' Financial Disciplinary Capacity** Leaders' financial influence extends well beyond their *direct* contributions to members (made through personal campaign accounts, leadership PACs, and party committees), which constitute a small and dwindling share of most legislators' total receipts (see Figure 3 and 4).

Leaders can credibly threaten larger pockets of money through two channels. First, they can dissuade access-seeking donors by stripping committee positions (Powell and Grimmer 2016). Second, leaders' deep connections to lobbyists, corporate PACs, interest groups, and

mega-donors (Heberlig et al. 2006; Issue One 2017) enable them to influence members' access to elite networks by (a) removing members from their joint fundraising committees which facilitate large-dollar contributions from elites, (b) withholding party donor lists (Canes-Wrone and Miller 2022), (c) excluding members from leader-hosted fundraisers (see Kates and Thieme 2023), (d) signaling to PACs which members merit prioritization (e.g. Palmer and Kucinich 2010), or (e) threatening consulting and lobbying firms with loss of access if they continue serving defectors (e.g. Martin 2021). Consequently, greater reliance on access-seeking interests or leaders' networks (groups with significant overlap) implies greater risk from defection. SI G provides examples of how leaders leverage their influence with business and corporate interests.

The rank-and-file internalize leaders' broad financial powers. As Congress scholar Matt Green observes, challenging leaders 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). Former HFC member and Representative David Brat says, "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).

## 3.1 Theoretical Contribution

A few scholars suggest obstructionists may be insulated from leaders' resource threats (Jenkins and Stewart 2023; Bloch Rubin 2022), but they neither provide case or empirical evidence, nor situate this mechanism within a theory of agenda power — one that explains what motivates defection, why factions target procedure, when threats become credible, and when floor failures occur.

Most canonical theories of positive agenda power — the majority party's ability to implement its legislative agenda — focus on ideology. Conditional Party Government (CPG) (Aldrich and Rohde 2001), Procedural Cartel Theory (PCT) (Cox and McCubbins 2005), and others (Schickler and Rich 1997; Lebo et al. 2007) predict it increases with ideologi-

cal homogeneity-within and heterogeneity-between parties, as intra-party disagreement and cross-party coalitions dissipate. Others argue that to protect majority status, majority-party members unify as their seat margin shrinks (Lee 2009, 2016; Patty 2008).

These theories cannot explain rising intra-party conflict. First, procedural conflict has risen precisely as margins have grown razor-thin. Second, both quantitative measures and scholarly accounts find internally cohesive parties that are increasingly polarized, which if anything implies *decreasing* procedural threats (see Lee 2015, Barber and McCarty 2015, Curry and Lee 2020, and SI E).[17] Even if these accounts are wrong and the parties are ideologically fragmenting within, this is inconsistent with continued (and if anything rising, see Theriault 2008, Chapter 8) cohesion on substantive legislation. Moreover, ideological theories' limited explanatory power here is unsurprising, given I showed that recent procedural threats reflect irritation with leaders' disproportionate internal power more than major policy disagreement.

Consequently, changes in ideology alone do not imply changes in leaders' positive agenda power. If leaders cannot punish bad behavior by redistributing resources legislators want, then regardless of how ideologically homogeneous-within and polarized-across the parties are, a pivotal faction can always obstruct leaders to obtain more power.

My conceptualization of punishment departs from existing accounts, which presuppose leaders' disciplinary capacity unconditionally (CPG and PCT) or question only whether political conditions, such as members' ideological preferences (Schickler and Rich 1997) or leaders' strategic goals (Pearson 2015), enable its exercise. I argue instead that disciplinary capacity itself may be absent: leaders may not control the resources a given member values. Capacity therefore varies across legislators and over time, depending on leaders' influence over each member's desired resources. Defining capacity at the legislator level, rather than as a fixed tool leaders deploy against the party, enables granular predictions about who fears retribution.

[17] SI E.1.1 explains why typical measurement-error critiques of canonical ideology measures do not recover existing theories of agenda power.

This granularity provides a testable explanation of why Democratic moderates but GOP extremists obstruct procedure. Such asymmetry eludes existing models of roll-call loyalty, which vary but remain party-symmetric, predicting either moderates (Krehbiel 1993; Minozzi and Volden 2013; Kirkland 2014) or majority-party extremists (Kirkland and Slapin 2017, 2018) defect most.

I link leaders' disciplinary capacity to their influence over legislators' primary fundraising sources — showing how external features of the electoral environment, like campaign finance networks, shape leaders' internal power. Existing theories either ignore money — deriving leaders' disciplinary capacity from internal arrangements like committee seats, amendment rights, and members' ideological preferences — or focus narrowly on leaders' direct contributions to members (Gaynor 2022; Pearson 2015; Heberlig and Larson 2010), which most legislators minimally rely on.

I also rationalize why factions specifically target procedure rather than substance. Indeed, existing theories predict the opposite: fearing stricter punishment (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Schickler and Rich 1997), or for ideological signaling purposes (Kirkland and Slapin 2017), legislators wishing to defect strategically avoid procedure and obstruct substance instead.

# 4 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 money party leaders can influence, thereby weakening the party's punishment threat and enabling defection.

Existing work shows that faction members have ideologically homogeneous donor networks (Clarke 2020; Gaynor 2022; McGee 2021). None, however, empirically connect factions' donor pools to intra-party conflict. We do not know how reliant factions are on party leaders, whether such reliance is associated with obstruction, or why certain members within

obstructionist factions remain loyal.

## 4.1 Why Focus on Money

Although my theory applies to other party resources, like committee positions, money is arguably the most valuable resource in leaders' arsenal. As leaders have centralized agenda control since the 1970s, the legislative value of committee seats and chair positions has diminished (Green and Crouch 2022; Curry and Lee 2019; Curry 2020). Fundraising, however, remains valuable for nearly all members: it appears critical for reelection (Bonica 2017; Thomsen 2025), and indeed, legislators spend over half their schedules phoning donors (Canes-Wrone and Miller 2022). Examining how leaders' financial influence has evolved is thus essential for understanding their disciplinary capacity. In addition, much of what makes committees valuable is they attract access-seeking donors (Powell and Grimmer 2016; Hall and Wayman 1990; Fouirnaies 2018), so reliance on leaders' corporate network already captures a key dimension of committees' value.

## 4.2 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, see SI A for preprocessing details). I collect roll-call votes from the `Rvoteview` package. For the 110th-115th Congresses, I identify all rules votes using the House special rules dataset compiled by Lynch et al. (2025), and for the 116-118th Congresses, I rely on the list of special rules provided by the House Rules Committee's website (House Committee on Rules 2025).

My data on caucus membership for the 110th-115th Congresses comes from Clarke (2020). Using a combination of caucus websites, congressional websites, official press releases from legislators and caucuses, and news articles, I extend Clarke's dataset for the 116th-118th Congresses and add Tuesday Group membership. SI A details this procedure.

## 4.3 Measuring Network Similarity

To test this prediction, I create a measure of network similarity between a legislator and their party's leaders that captures how financially reliant they are on party leaders' direct contributions and 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 from either (i) leadership-connected donors (donors contributing to at least one party leader), or (ii) direct contributions from party leaders or party organizations, which includes donations from a party leader's campaign committee or leadership PAC, as well as donations from a national, state, or local party PAC. 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 set of leadership-connected donors, and $\mathcal{P}$ denote the set of direct contributors, then

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

When $NS = 1$ ($NS = 0$), the legislator is perfectly dependent on (independent from) the leadership — all (none) of her donations come from party leaders, party organizations, or leadership-connected donors.

Decomposing by donor type, let $NS\_Ind$, $NS\_Corp$, and $NS\_Org$ denote the share of a legislator's donations coming from leadership-connected individual donors, corporate PACs, and non-corporate PACs, respectively. Because each leadership-connected donor falls into one of these categories,

$$\begin{aligned} NS_i = &\frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Ind\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} + \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Org\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} \\ &+ \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{D}_L\}\mathbf{1}\{d = Corp\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} + \frac{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d \mathbf{1}\{d \in \mathcal{P}\}}{\sum_{d \in \mathcal{D}_i} a_d} \\ \equiv &\, NS\_Ind_i + NS\_Org_i + NS\_Corp_i + Direct\_Reliance_i \quad . \end{aligned}$$

These components capture the various levers leaders have over members' fundraising described in Section 3. Higher $NS\_Corp$ and $NS\_Org$ reflect greater reliance on access-seeking corporations and interest groups, exposing members to leaders' control over committee positions, JFC inclusion, elite fundraising events and donor lists, and threats to corporate lobbyists and consultants. Higher $NS\_Ind$ proxies reliance on individuals in the party's donor lists, and higher $Direct\_Reliance$ exposes members to leaders' withholding direct contributions.

Decomposing $NS$ therefore lets us interrogate which forms of reliance matter most — for example, whether leaders' sway over corporate donors makes $NS\_Corp$ most predictive of loyalty.

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 |

# 5 Results

In what follows, "aggregate-reliance", "corporate-reliance", and "non-corporate-reliance" refer to $NS$, $NS\_Corp$, and $NS\_Org$, respectively.

## 5.1 Temporal Changes in Network Similarity Fit Procedural Defection Patterns

Figures 3 and 4 plot the party-level distributions of network similarity by donor type over time. Network similarity 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 network similarity with respect to 118th Congress party leaders.

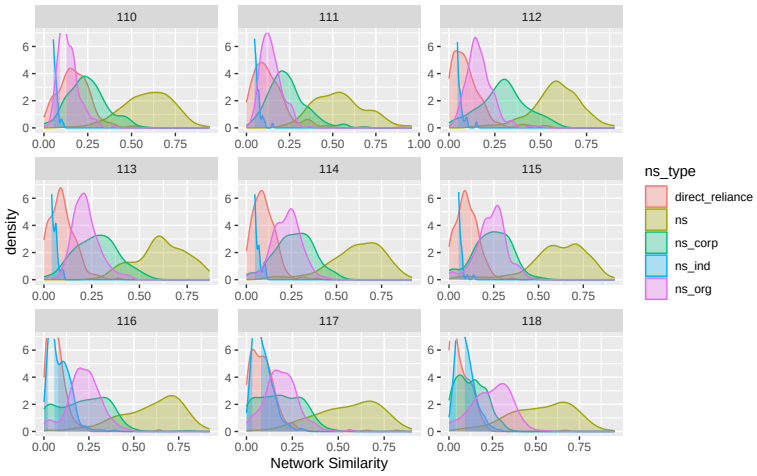


Figure 3: Network Similarity by Donor-Type and Congress Among Democrats. Note: y-axis range is limited for comparing multiple distributions in one pane; density discontinuities reflect this.

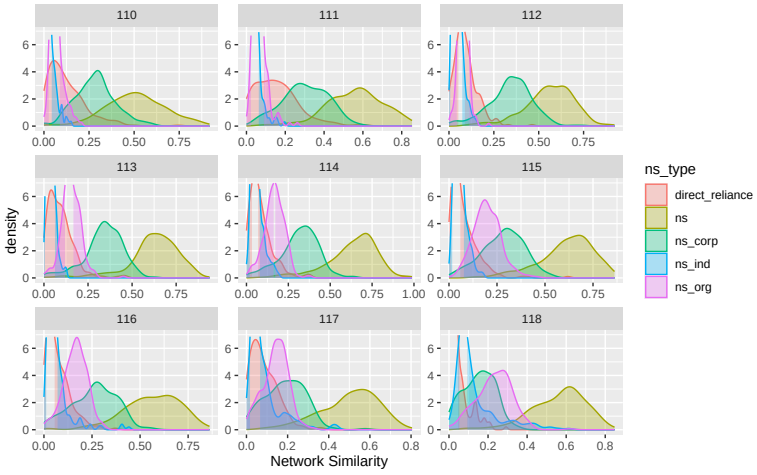


Figure 4: Network Similarity by Donor-Type and Congress Among GOP. See Figure 3 for y-axis note.

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

From the 112th Congress onwards, both parties' aggregate-reliance ($NS$) distributions, which amalgamate all donor types, have increasingly fat left-tails. These changes in the aggregate distribution are minor, however, when compared to glaring changes in corporate-reliance ($NS\_Corp$). While both parties' corporate-reliance distributions were roughly normal and centered between 0.25-0.35 during the 110-115th Congresses, they have since grown bimodal with one mode approaching 0. In the 113th Congress, the average Republican (Democratic) legislator received 34% (28%) of their donations from leadership-connected corporations. That number was just 15% (12%) in the 118th Congress.

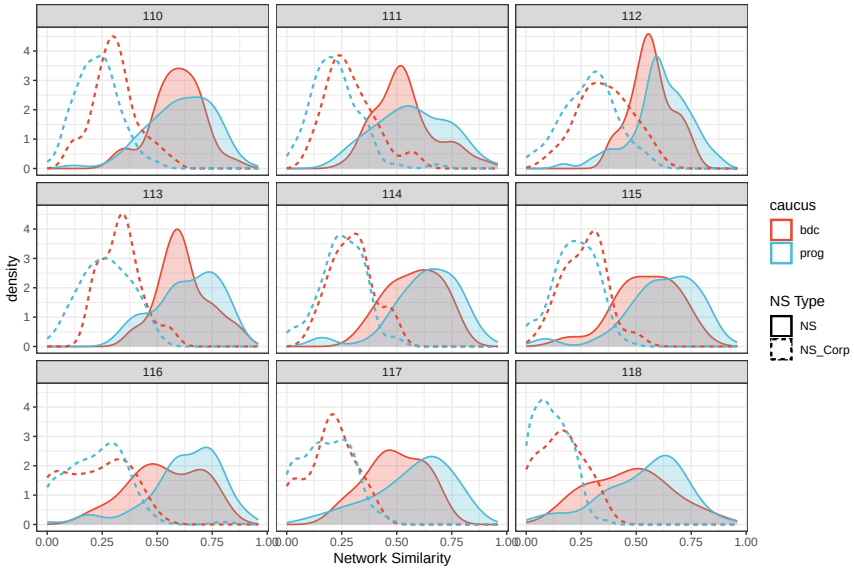


Figure 5: Among Democrats: Caucus-Level Variation in Network Similarity Fits Defection Patterns. `bdc` = Blue Dog Coalition. `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus.

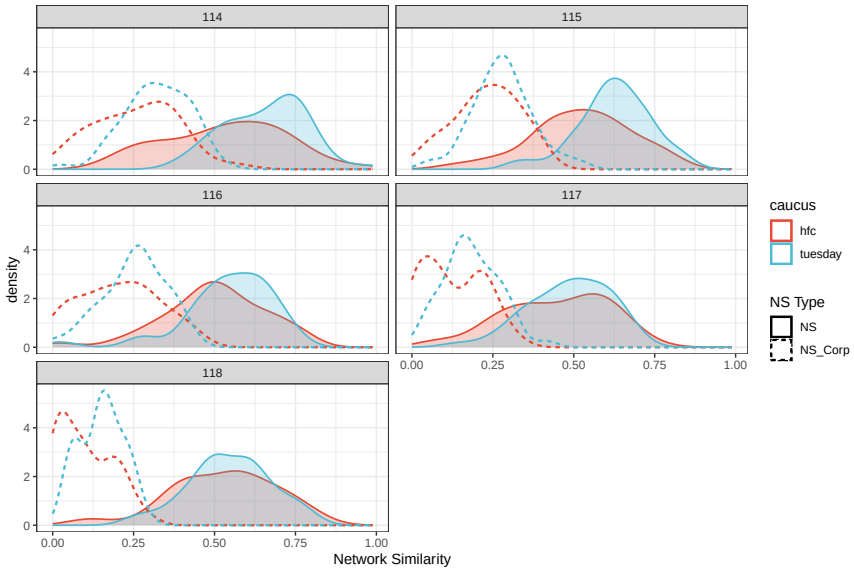


Figure 6: Among Republicans: Caucus-Level Variation in Network Similarity Fits Defection Patterns. `hfc` = House Freedom Caucus. `tuesday` = Tuesday Group.

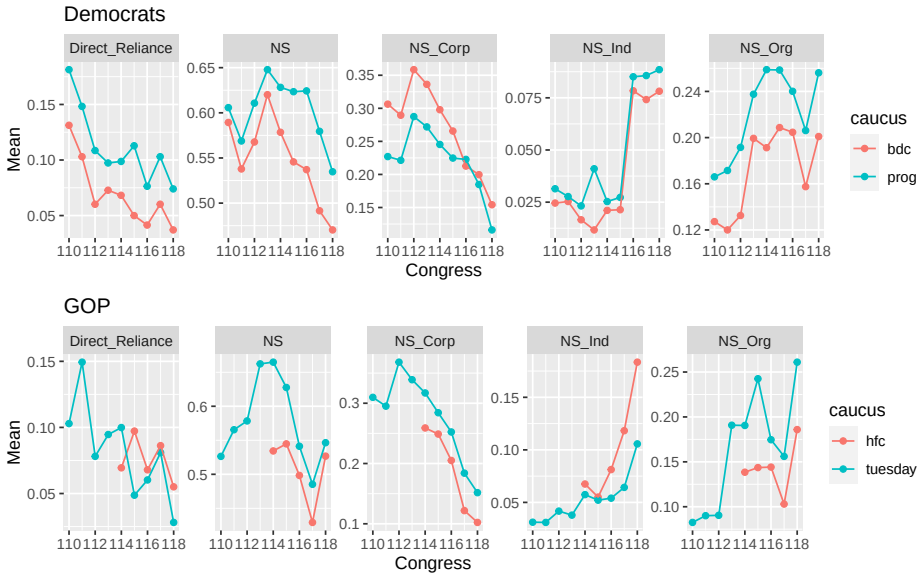


Figure 7: Mean Network Similarity by Caucus and Donor-Type

Figures 5-7 show that network similarity is also consistent with partisan asymmetries in who defects. Ideological measures suggest Blue Dogs' distance to party leaders is stable over time (Figure SI.10), despite their growing challenges of Pelosi's leadership. In the donor network, however, the Blue Dogs have grown independent from the leadership, as

their aggregate-reliance distribution pulls away from their non-obstructionist counterpart, the Progressive Caucus. While Blue Dogs and Progressives were similarly reliant on party leaders' donors 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 (see Figure SI.10). But since their founding, the HFC has remained less reliant on party leaders' donors than their moderate counterpart, and like the BDC, is growing less reliant on their party's corporate network.

Though the HFC and Tuesday Group's aggregate distributions nearly converge in the 118th Congress, Figure 6 shows the growing distributional differences in corporate-reliance are drastic. In the 114th Congress, both the HFC and Tuesday Group's corporate-reliance 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. The HFC experienced particularly dramatic growth in members with near-zero corporate-reliance.

Obstructionist caucuses are also less dependent on their party's network of non-corporate PACs, but these gaps are stable over time. Instead, they are specifically growing less reliant on their leaders' network of corporate PACs.

This independence from leadership-connected PACs is particularly enabling, given party leaders have greatest influence over their PAC donors (see Section 3 and SI G). For this reason, and because there is minimal within-party variation (see Figures 3 and 4), the remaining analyses do not individually examine $NS\_Ind$.[18]

[18] $NS\_Ind$ still factors into the aggregate $NS$ measure.

## 5.2 The Relationship Between Financial Independence and Procedural Defection

If financial reliance on party leaders encourages loyalty, then network similarity should negatively correlate with both protest defections and pivotal threats. I use observed defections to evaluate this prediction across various cross-sectional and panel settings: within-Congress, within obstructionist factions, within-legislator, and within-district.

This directly tests the protest defection prediction. However, we cannot directly observe pivotal threats, because as my model predicts, leaders often neutralize credible pivotal threats by paying off a minimally sufficient subset of defectors (see Sections 3, F.3.2, F.3.3). Nonetheless, it still partially tests the pivotal-threat prediction, since observed defections includes pivotal threateners who were not bought off. It also evaluates the shared mechanism underlying both predictions: whether lower financial reliance enables procedural challenges. Regardless, this approach is conservative. Because pivotal threats typically come from obstructionist factions, which Section 5.1 shows have low financial reliance, using observed defections if anything underestimates the relationship between financial independence and procedural obstruction.

### 5.2.1 Within-Congress

I first examine the relationship between network similarity and defection (defined as special-rules defections plus speaker-election defections) within each Congress. Given that the donor network is fragmenting, this relationship should strengthen over time.

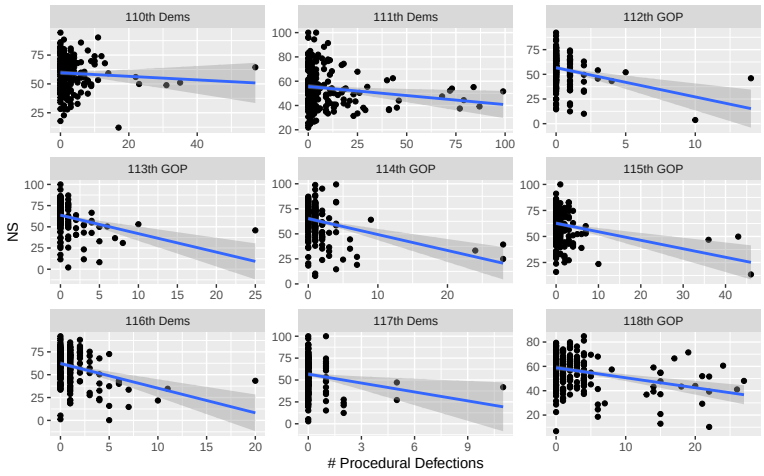


Figure 8: Procedural Defections and Network Similarity. Facet titles denote the Congress and its majority party. Procedural defection is only defined for members of the majority party.

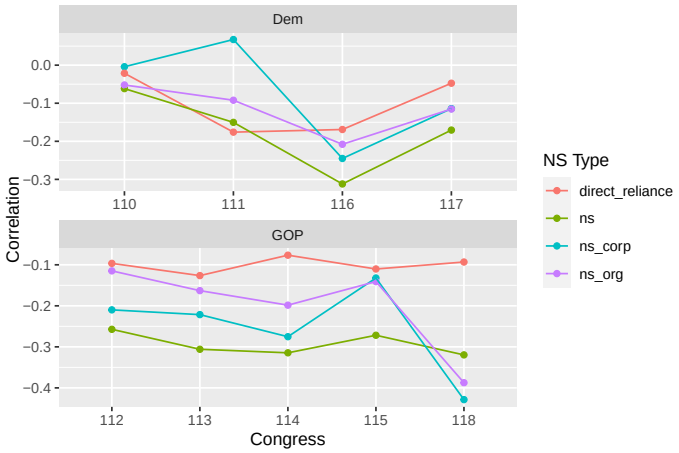


Figure 9: Correlation between Procedural Defections and Network Similarity by Donor-Type. For each party (facet), procedural defection is only defined when they hold the majority.

Network similarity is negatively associated with procedural defections in every Congress except the 110th. Figure 9 breaks these correlations down by donor-type. Among Republicans, the correlations indeed decrease as the donor network fragments, and reliance on leadership-connected corporate donors is generally the strongest predictor of defections.

Outside of the 117th Congress, the correlations are also decreasing among Democrats. Non-corporate-reliance ($NS\_Org$) is negatively correlated with defection in each Congress, because Blue Dogs are consistently less reliant on leadership-connected non-corporate PACs.

Corporate-reliance becomes negatively associated with defection beginning in the 116th Congress, reflecting the fact that the corporate donor network did not begin fragmenting until after the 112th, and Democrats were not in the majority again until the 116th. The correlations in the 117th Congress are smaller, because there were fewer defections under the Democrats' then slim majority. But Figure 8 shows that defectors still come from the lower end of the network similarity distribution.

**Conditioning on Ideology** When conditioning on ideology, within-Congress correlations between money and defection should evaporate, because defection largely comes from an ideological flank within each Congress (see Figure SI.5). Despite not explaining why certain flanks increasingly defect more than others, ideological measures will therefore 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.

For all majority party legislators in the 111–118th Congresses, I estimate negative binomial (NB) regressions of the following form for each Congress separately.

$$\begin{aligned} Defections_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 NS_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 |IdeologicalDist|_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 IdeologicalDist^2_{i,t-1} \\ + \beta_4 DistrictVS_{i,t-1} + \beta_5 \mathbf{1}\{Freshman_{i,t}\} + \epsilon_{i,t} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

$Defections_{i,t}$ 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), which avoid scaling legislators using the dependent variable (as DW-Nominate and

Bonica et al. (2025)'s composite measure do) or post-defection donations (as DW-DIME and static CF-scores do).[19] 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 SI.5). 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 integer counts with many zeroes (see Figure SI.16), OLS is inappropriate. NB regressions handle this count structure and are robust to overdispersion — where the variance exceeds the mean (Wooldridge 2010). SI I justifies model selection and shows the results are robust to using zero-inflated models or alternative ideology measures.

[19] Although $NS$ and dynamic CF-scores both derive from contribution data, they capture different features of the donor network. $NS$ is a nonlinear ratio-function measuring legislators' funding concentration in party leaders' networks, while CF-scores are a linear projection recovering legislators' latent ideological positions. Regardless, any empirical overlap only inflates $\text{SE}(\hat{\beta}_1)$ through collinearity, making our test conservative.

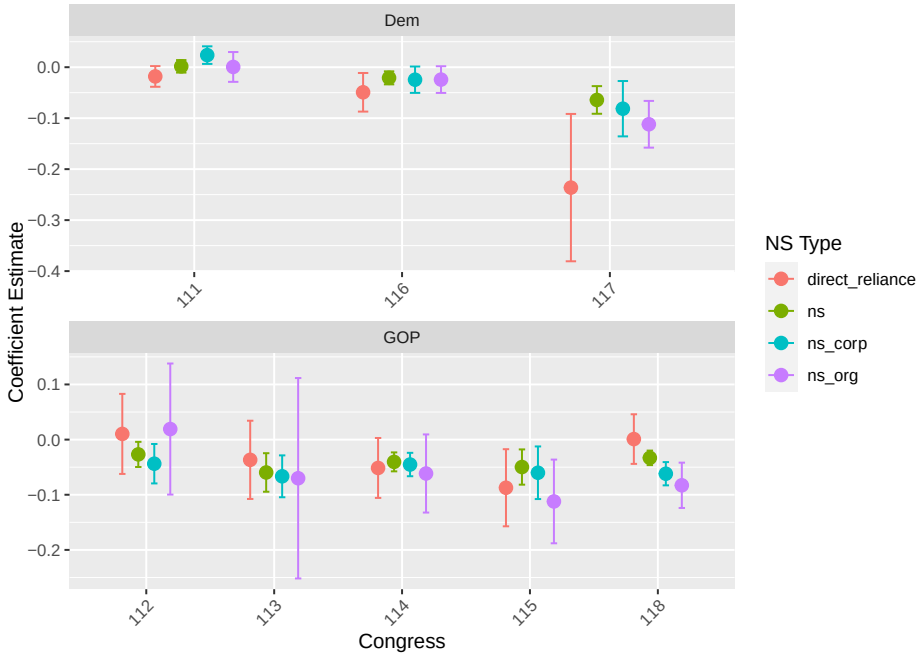


Figure 10: Raw Negative-Binomial Coefficients (each from separate model) with 95% CIs. Sample sizes: $n_{111}$ = 248, $n_{112}$ = 241, $n_{113}$ = 231, $n_{114}$ = 243, $n_{115}$ = 240, $n_{116}$ = 231, $n_{117}$ = 226, $n_{118}$ = 221.

NB regressions model the logarithm of expected counts, so Figure SI.18 plots the exponentiated coefficients to interpret them as percentage changes in defection.

When directly conditioning on legislators' ideological distance to party leaders, network similarity is still statistically significant and negative in all Congresses except the 111th. As the donor network fragments, the relationship between network similarity and defection strengthens. Among Democrats, both corporate- and non-corporate-reliance grow more predictive — by the 117th Congress, a one-standard deviation increase in reliance on party leaders' corporate donors is associated with a 68% decrease in the expected number of defections, holding ideology, district safety, and tenure fixed. Among Republicans, non-corporate-reliance grows more predictive, while corporate-reliance remains equally important over time — by the 118th Congress, a one-standard deviation increase in corporate-reliance is associated with a 48% reduction in expected defections, holding other predictors constant.

### 5.2.2 Within Obstructionist Factions

Obstructionist caucuses select members based on their ideological fit and willingness to vote against the party when necessary (Bloch Rubin 2022; Mulvaney 2023; Green 2019). Caucus members also have ideologically similar donor networks (Gaynor 2022; McGee 2021; Clarke 2020). Within-caucus contrasts are therefore particularly informative, comparing legislators similar on ideology, unobserved traits associated with defection, and donor profiles.

In each Congress where three or more HFC or BDC members defected on speaker votes, their caucuses were internally split (see Figure 2). Figure 11 compares the distribution of aggregate-reliance between defectors and non-defectors in these Congresses. I again use donations data from the prior cycle to ensure financial reliance is measured pre-defection.

To benchmark these patterns, I also compare lagged ideology scores (dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote margins. Table 2 summarizes the distribution means and decomposes aggregate-reliance by donor type. Because this is a finite population not a sample, I compute p-values using randomization inference under the null hypothesis that there are no ex-ante differences between defectors and non-defectors — i.e. selection into defection is random.

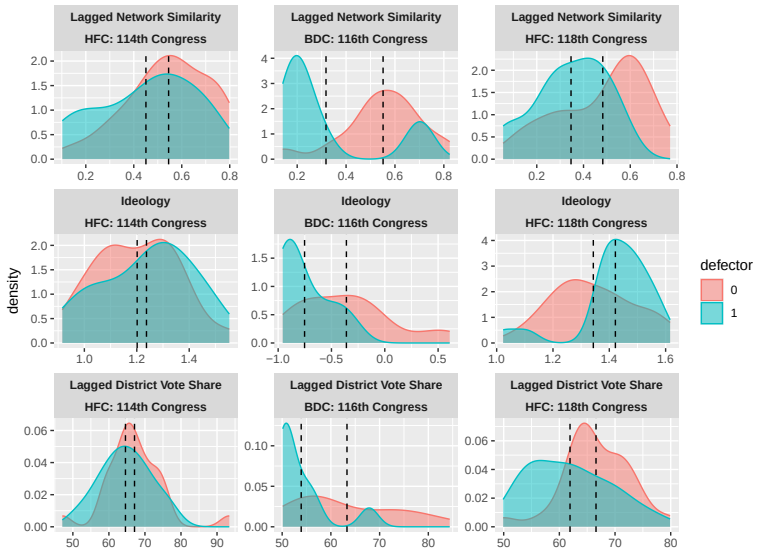


Figure 11: Network Similarity Predicts Within-Caucus Variation in Speaker Vote Defections. Each plot compares the distribution of the labelled outcome variable between caucus members who defected against Boehner and/or Ryan (114th Congress), Pelosi (116th Congress), or McCarthy's speaker election (118th Congress) and those who never did. `Ideology` = lagged dynamic CF scores (Bonica 2014). Vertical lines denote distribution means.

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

| | HFC 114th | | HFC 118th | | BDC | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outcome | Δ | p | Δ | p | Δ | p |
| NS | -0.09 | 0.118 | -0.14 | 0.011 | -0.23 | 0.004 |
| 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 (Bloch Rubin 2022; Mulvaney 2023), 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 network similarity — 12.6 pp. between the HFC and Republican Study Committee (RSC). This is 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 network similarity of 10.4 pp. between Progressive Caucus (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 aggregate-reliance are driven by corporate donors, underscoring leaders' particular sway with corporate elites. Differences in non-corporate-reliance are notable but smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant.

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).

Although the magnitude of the difference is smaller, HFC defectors in the 114th Congress are also less reliant on the party's corporate network.

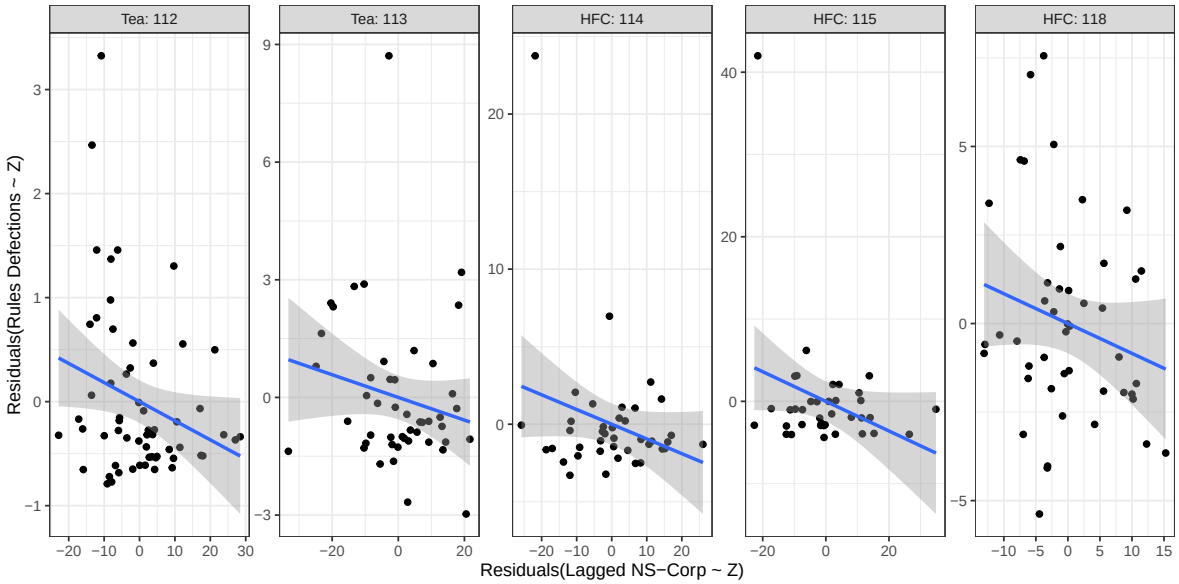


Figure 12: Within-Tea-Party and Within-HFC: Corporate-Reliance and Rules Defections, Net Ideology and District Safety. $Z$ includes lagged dynamic CF-scores and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress and caucus. Table SI.1 provides full model results.

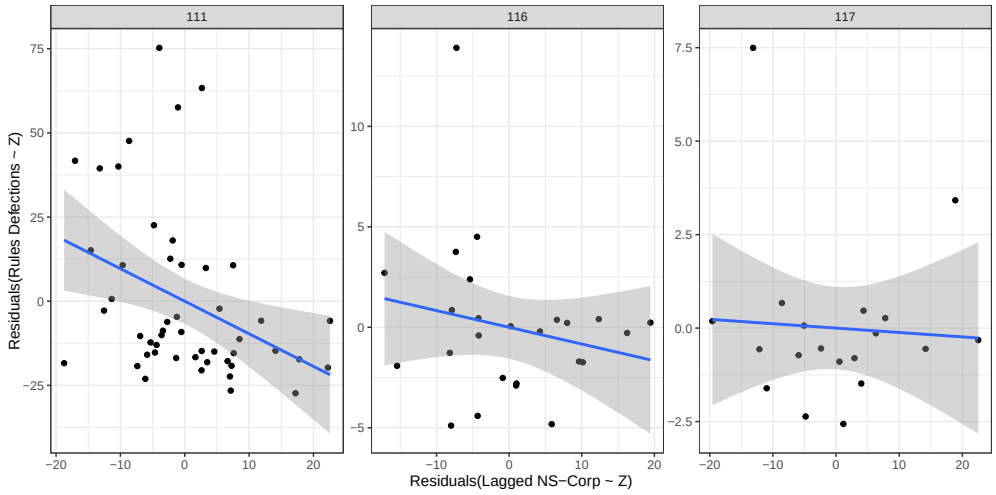


Figure 13: Within-BDC: Corporate-Reliance and Rules Defections, Net Ideology and District Safety. Figure 12 caption defines $Z$. Facet titles denote the Congress. Table SI.2 provides full model results.

Reliance on the party's network of PACs also predicts within-caucus variation in special rules defections. Figures 12 and 13 plot the relationship between the number of special rules defections and lagged corporate-reliance among members of Republican and Democratic ob-

structionist caucuses[20], respectively, after residualizing out lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district competitiveness. Even when restricting the analysis to obstructionist caucuses — already a natural control for ideology and unobservables associated with defection — and further netting out any minor ideological differences remaining within them, greater corporate-reliance is still associated with fewer defections in all Congresses but the 117th. The same pattern holds, though slightly less consistently, for non-corporate-reliance ($NS\_Org$), see Figures SI.14 and SI.15. Importantly, the corporate-reliance association is robust to handling the outlier in the 114th and 115th Congress via winsorization, and removing the outlier defector in the 116th Congress entirely (see SI H.2).

#### 5.2.3 Panel Setting: Legislator Turnover Drives Relationship Between Financial Independence and Defection

Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 show that in various cross-sectional settings, legislators more reliant on the party's donor network are less likely to defect, even when conditioning on ideology. I now estimate the following NB regressions with panel data to test whether this relationship holds over time. Comparing models with legislator vs. district fixed effects disentangles whether any over-time association is driven by within-legislator changes in network similarity ("churn") or by legislator replacement ("turnover").

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

where $Defections_{i,t}$ are legislator $i$'s total procedural defections in Congress $t$, $\gamma_{i/d}$ are legislator or district fixed effects, $\alpha_t$ are Congress fixed effects, and $\boldsymbol{X_{it}}$ are lagged district vote share, lagged ideological distance to the median party leader (includes a square term and, as before, measured with dynamic CF-scores), and a freshman indicator. Standard

[20]Tea Party is included in this analysis because it was the HFC's precursor and famously challenged Boehner's agenda, but excluded from the speaker-election analysis because too few (5/47 members) defected in the 113th Congress.

errors are clustered at the level of the fixed effects. Figure SI.20 shows results are robust to alternative ideology measures.

The model is estimated separately for each party using the Congresses it held the majority (Democrats: 111th, 116th, 117th[21]; Republicans: 112th-115th, 118th).

Table 3: Panel Relationship between Network Similarity and Defection Among Democrats

| | *Dependent Variable: Procedural Defections* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (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.
[2] Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

[21] The 110th Congress requires contribution data from 2006.

Table 4: Panel Relationship between Network Similarity and Defection 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.
[2] Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

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 corporate-reliance ($NS\_Corp$) and total defections is significant and negative. This suggests the over-time relationship between financial reliance and defection is driven by legislator turnover rather than churn (within-legislator changes). In either party, when a House seat is replaced by a co-partisan equally ideologically distant to leaders, but one standard deviation less reliant on the party's corporate donors ($\sigma_{Dem}$ = 12.93 pp., $\sigma_{GOP}$ = 13.49 pp.), the expected number of defections increases by over 32%.

These results reflect the minimal within-legislator variation in corporate-reliance (see SI J.1). Changes over time in corporate-reliance itself are driven by turnover not churn — even within obstructionist caucuses (Figure SI.21). The null within-legislator coefficients are therefore mechanically expected. Indeed, when meaningful within-legislator changes do occur, defection patterns often shift accordingly (see SI J.1).

Null within-legislator coefficients therefore do not imply that legislator "type" — unobservable dispositions unexplained by ideology — correlate with both defection and financial

independence. But even granting such predispositions, financial reliance still conditions when they can be acted upon: if legislators value fundraising, then even "crazy" types must weigh financial punishments before defecting. Resource independence therefore provides a structural explanation and quantitative measure of what enables "crazy" types to defect, beyond simply ex-post labeling them as such. SI J.1 treats this concern in full.

## 5.3 Financial Independence Limits Party Leaders' Punishment Capacity

My theory predicts that waning reliance on party leaders' donors has curbed their ability to punish defectors. I evaluate this prediction with a matched difference-in-differences design that tests the effect of speaker election defections among Republicans in the 114th and 118th Congresses separately on six fundraising outcomes: money from leadership-connected corporate donors, all leadership-connected donors, leadership-connected non-corporate PACs, direct party money, individual out-of-state donors, and total fundraising. I examine speaker elections rather than rules votes because they occur in-between election cycles and thus provide a clean pre-post comparison of fundraising.

For each defection instance, the panel is unbalanced: legislators enter Congress in different terms, so the number of pre-treatment periods varies across units. The standard event study specification (interacting a defector indicator with lead- and lag-Congress dummies) is inappropriate in this setting, because the pre-treatment interactions are estimated on changing subsets of treated and control units. They therefore do not test parallel trends for the full sample used to estimate the contemporaneous treatment effect. For example, in the 114th Congress defection study, legislators who enter in the 113th Congress (the immediate pre-treatment period) do not contribute to the interaction at Congress 112 or earlier. A null coefficient at $t = 112$ thus says nothing about whether parallel trends holds for these legislators.

To prevent such composition changes from biasing pre-trend evaluations, I match units,

conduct pre-treatment diagnostics, and estimate effects *within* entry-cohort — the legislators first entering the sample in a given Congress. This also accounts for unobservable characteristics associated with each entry-cohort.

I first restrict the sample to Republicans observed in the Congress of defection and seeking reelection. This ensures pre-treatment diagnostics only include legislators who contribute to the ATT. Then for each outcome and within each cohort separately, I drop defectors (treated units) whose pre-treatment values fall outside the control (non-defector) support, so estimates are local to defectors with pre-trends comparable to controls.

Next, I match units *within* their entry-cohort based on propensity scores. Propensities are estimated via logistic regression using pre-treatment trends, ideology (dynamic CF scores), and general-election vote share (see SI K for specification and details). Matches are enforced within cohort using 1:2 nearest-neighbor matching without replacement.

For each entry-cohort $c$'s matched sample, I then estimate the following two-group two-period DiD regression separately:

$$\log(Y_{it} + 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_i + \beta_2 \mathbf{1}(\text{congress} = t_{post}) + \beta_c D_i \cdot \mathbf{1}(\text{congress} = t_{post}) + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{4}$$

where $D_i$ indicates a defector and $t_{post}$ is the Congress of the speaker election. The cohort-specific ATT is $\hat{\beta}_c$, so the overall ATT is the weighted average:

$$\hat{\tau} = \sum_c w_c \hat{\beta}_c \tag{5}$$

where weights $w_c$ are the share of all treated units (defectors) in cohort $c$.

Confidence intervals for $\hat{\tau}$ are bootstrapped. In each of $B = 1{,}000$ replications, I resample control units with replacement within each cohort (holding treated units fixed), re-estimate the propensity score, re-match, re-compute the cohort-specific 2×2 DiDs, and obtain $\hat{\tau}^{(b)}$.[22]

[22] SI K justifies this theoretically.

The 95% confidence interval is the 2.5th to 97.5th percentile of the $\hat{\tau}^{(b)}$ distribution.

Identification of each $\hat{\beta}_c$ requires the parallel trends assumption: within each cohort, had they not defected, treated legislators would have on average experienced the same change in outcome as the matched controls from the immediate pre-period to the Congress of defection. For cohorts with multiple pre-treatment periods, I assess this assumption with trajectory plots and event studies comparing mean outcomes over time for matched treated and control units within each cohort (Figures SI.22–SI.25). In both defection instances, cohorts' treated and control groups track one another closely before defection, with consistently null and near-zero pre-treatment interaction coefficients.[23]

Freshman defectors—those entering Congress in the same term as the defection—are the only cohort observed for a single pre-treatment period (their challenger fundraising from the immediately preceding election cycle). For these units, parallel trends cannot be evaluated from prior trajectories, so causal interpretation requires assuming that legislators with similar immediate pre-treatment outcomes, ideology, and vote share would have followed similar trends absent defection. Pre-period outcome levels are similar across treated and control freshmen (Figures SI.22, SI.23). Ideology balances well (all SMDs under $|0.25|$ except Boehner's corporate-donor design at $-0.39$); district vote share less so, particularly for Boehner's freshmen (Table SI.4). Regardless, the aggregate ATTs hardly change when we exclude the freshman cohorts (Table SI.5), confirming the main results are not driven by these units.

Tables 5 and 6 report the aggregate ATTs for the 114th (Boehner) and 118th Congress defection (McCarthy), respectively.

[23] The only exception is the 116th Congress cohort in the McCarthy defection, which contains only one defector and therefore contributes minimally to the aggregate ATT.

Table 5: Aggregate ATTs: 114th Congress Defection (Boehner)

| | Shared Corp | Shared Donors | Shared Orgs | Direct Party $ | IOOS | Total $ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATT (log) | −0.464 | −0.363 | −0.447 | −1.394 | 0.014 | −0.104 |
| % change | −37.1 | −30.4 | −36.0 | −75.2 | 1.4 | −9.9 |
| 95% CI (Boot.) | [−0.62, −0.38] | [−0.45, −0.22] | [−0.55, −0.31] | [−1.83, −1.23] | [−0.25, 0.39] | [−0.24, −0.04] |
| $n_{\text{removed}}$ | 3 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 20 | 17 | 19 | 20 | 23 | 22 |
| $n_{\text{total}}$ | 60 | 51 | 57 | 60 | 69 | 66 |

*Note:* Aggregate ATTs computed as weighted averages of cohort-specific 2×2 DiD estimates, with weights proportional to treated units per cohort. % change = $100 \times (e^{\text{ATT}} - 1)$. 95% bootstrap CIs are from $B$ = 1,000 replications resampling controls and re-matching. $n_{\text{removed}}$: defectors removed as outliers (outside common support) out of the 23 (114th defection) or 19 (118th defection) total defectors who run for reelection into the Congress following defection. $n_{\text{treated}}$: defectors retained. $n_{\text{total}}$: matched sample size (1:2 matching).

Table 6: Aggregate ATTs: 118th Congress Defection (McCarthy)

| | Shared Corp | Shared Donors | Shared Orgs | Direct Party $ | IOOS | Total $ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATT (log) | −0.837 | −0.193 | −0.350 | −0.490 | 0.008 | −0.347 |
| % change | −56.7 | −17.6 | −29.5 | −38.7 | 0.8 | −29.3 |
| 95% CI (Boot.) | [−1.18, −0.70] | [−0.33, −0.09] | [−0.57, −0.15] | [−0.99, −0.28] | [−0.18, 0.17] | [−0.49, −0.23] |
| $n_{\text{removed}}$ | 5 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 14 | 16 | 10 | 16 | 18 | 17 |
| $n_{\text{total}}$ | 42 | 48 | 30 | 48 | 54 | 51 |

*Note:* See Table 5 note.

On the subset of defectors who ran for reelection in the post-period and had pre-treatment outcome trends which matched a set of controls, leaders primarily punished through their corporate PAC networks and personal coffers. Relative to having remained loyal, challenging Boehner's election resulted in a 75.2% ($p < 0.05$) and 37.1% ($p < 0.05$) loss in direct party money and leadership-connected corporate donations, while challenging McCarthy's election resulted in a 38.7% ($p < 0.05$) and 56.7% ($p < 0.05$) loss in these sources. The estimated effects on leadership-connected non-corporate PACs are also negative and significant, but considerably smaller in the 118th Congress.

Boehner's defectors faced steeper punishments than McCarthy's on direct and overall money from the party network — consistent with waning reliance circumscribing leaders'

punishment capacity. The estimated effect on leadership-connected corporate money is a seeming exception, larger for McCarthy's defectors (−56.7% vs. −37.1%), but this reflects the very mechanism at work. With less leadership-connected corporate money at risk to begin with, even a smaller raw-dollar loss may register as a larger percentage-change loss. Indeed, descriptively between the immediate pre- and post-period, the average Boehner-defector dropped $134,000 in corporate money compared to $121,000 for the average McCarthy-defector.[24] These losses were also more detrimental to Boehner's defectors, as they composed a greater share of their total fundraising (11.6% vs. 8.1%).[25]

Waning corporate reliance also forced a particularly "local" estimand — five McCarthy-defectors had already grown too independent from the corporate network to be matched to comparable controls, whereas only three Boehner-defectors were removed for this reason. When we include all defectors,[26] the raw-dollar differences magnify: the average Boehner-defector lost $110,000 (10.6% of post-period total) compared to $87,000 (6.0%) for McCarthy's. The defectors the design cannot identify effects for actually illustrate the paper's mechanism. Today's conservatives have a smaller pool of corporate money available to be influenced by leaders while possessing larger fundraising totals from other donors — both contribute to financial independence, limiting leaders' punishment capacity.

I detect no financial benefits of voting against speaker elections. 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 114th and 118th Congress, the model estimates a 9.9% and 29.3% loss in total money. Defectors also made no significant 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).

[24] Excludes the few freshman defectors, whose pre-period is challenger fundraising, rendering their pre-post changes not comparable to incumbent defectors.

[25] Accounting for control trends likely widens these gaps, as Boehner's matched non-defectors *gained* $68,500 while McCarthy's gained only $4,250.

[26] Again, excluding freshman, see footnote 24.

# 6 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that power requires tools to induce compliance. Even when majority party members have similar ideological stances, they may disagree with how leaders allocate agenda power within the party. If party leaders lack control over resources their rank-and-file need, pivotal factions can obstruct procedure to extract power without fearing punishment. This implies that rising procedural defections in today's seemingly cohesive majority parties are a function of resource independence: certain factions are growing less reliant on party resources, freeing them from punishment and enabling defection.

I test this theory with an original measure of legislators' financial reliance on party leaders. When accounting for ideology and looking within-Congress, within-district, and even within obstructionist factions, those that obstruct procedure are less reliant on leaders' corporate donors. Obstructionist factions have also grown increasingly independent from these networks over time, while expanding their total fundraising. These changes weaken both the size of the punishments leaders can impose and the share of members' fundraising those punishments affect. For example, despite engaging in a significantly more disruptive challenge,[27] defectors against Kevin McCarthy's speaker elections in 2023 lost fewer leadership-connected corporate dollars than defectors against John Boehner's speaker election in 2015, and their losses composed a smaller share of their overall fundraising.

More broadly, this paper pushes scholars to reconsider how power operates in today's Congress. Internal growths in polarization, slim majorities, and leaders' monopolization of policymaking, alongside external explosions of anti-establishment public sentiment and alternative fundraising and communication networks, separate today's chamber from the eras canonical theories study. While the internal changes' effects on agenda power are well-theorized, the external shifts that typify the modern era are not. This paper takes a first step: theoretically connecting external forces to leaders' governing capacity via legislators' reliance on resources leaders control, and as an illustration, empirically linking fundraising-network

[27] They derailed 14 speaker elections, while Boehner's speaker election still passed on the first vote.

changes to rising procedural conflict. Understanding other aspects of today's dysfunction requires further examination of how the dramatic external changes in recent years shape leaders' internal power.

# AI Disclosure

Claude Opus 4.8 was used for assistance with revising individual paragraphs, code for Section 5.3, and literature search. I reviewed all outputs extensively.

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# Supplementary Information for

## *Donor Networks and the Incentive to Defect in Congress*

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# Contents

# A Data Collection Details

**DIME 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 is constructed from FEC filings and is well-suited for my application, because it provides unique donor IDs, which enables computation of network similarity across candidates. Because DIME and the FEC sometimes differ slightly in reported total receipts, I implement an extensive cleaning and de-duplication pipeline to align candidate contribution totals in DIME with the FEC. As an additional robustness check, I also recompute the network-similarity measure using FEC totals in the denominator of Equation 1. Its correlations with the pre-processed summed DIME totals are never below 0.75, and are typically between 0.85-0.95. For all $NS$ components, the median within-party correlations (taken over the Congresses) all lie between 0.87 and 0.96.

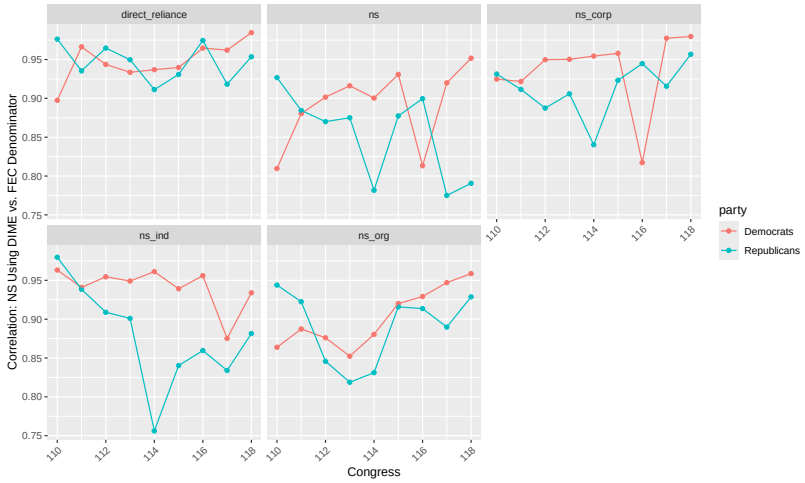


Figure SI.1: Within-Congress and -Party Correlation between $NS$ Components When Using FEC-Reported Total Contributions versus DIME Totals

**Caucus Membership Data** Other than the HFC and the Tuesday Group, all caucuses publish their rosters 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 congressional cycles where Internet Archive snapshots are missing, I assume that incumbent caucus members remain and individually investigate freshmen using caucus and legislator press releases, congressional websites, and news articles. I then cross-check resulting rosters against Ballotpedia's caucus membership lists and reconcile any discrepancies with online media. Members often self-identify through their congressional website or press releases, or are mentioned as members in press coverage or official caucus statements, so these sources are effective.

The HFC never publishes a comprehensive roster on their caucus website, so I use this same approach to identify members in the 116th-118th Congresses (Clarke (2020)'s dataset has their members for the 110th-115th). In addition to cross-checking membership against Ballotpedia's lists in each Congress, I also validate membership against lists published by *Newsweek* (Roche 2022) and Pew Research Center (Desilver 2023) for the 117th and 118th Congresses, respectively.

The Tuesday Group did not publish an official roster until the 117th Congress, and because neither Ballotpedia nor Clarke's dataset includes this caucus, we cannot rely on the imputation

strategy used for the other caucuses. I therefore identify members through press releases, congressional websites, and news coverage, and additionally code as members any legislators who received contributions from the caucus's fundraising arm (the Tuesday Group PAC). The resulting membership totals for each Congress closely match the estimates reported in news outlets.

# B Quote Evidence on HFC's Motivation and Strategy

**Motivation: Centralized Power** Since its founding, the HFC's primary gripe with leaders has been their centralized power over negotiations and the agenda. In 2015, HFC co-founder Mark Meadows filed a motion-to-vacate resolution against Boehner, which ultimately forced him to preemptively resign. The resolution claimed Boehner had "caused the power of Congress to atrophy" by "consolidat[ing] power and centraliz[ing] decision-making, bypassing the majority of the 435 Members of Congress and the people they represent" (Lizza 2015). The faction had the same irritation with McCarthy. 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).

**Strategy: Procedural Obstruction** Understanding both its power and risks, founders made procedural obstruction an integral component of their playbook. As HFC co-founder Rep. Mulvaney said: "Ever since I got here [Congress], in 2010, the one thing they said is you never ever, ever, ever vote against a rule. And what we told the guys we recruited into the Freedom Caucus was that you have to be able to do it" (Lizza 2015). Similarly, he said voting against rules was "among the most mutinous maneuvers we could contemplate" (Mulvaney 2023), while HFC co-founder Rep. Labrador compared opposing rules to "going nuclear" (Lizza 2015).

**Recruitment: Credible Threats** To ensure their threats were credible, HFC founders recruited potential members based on their willingness to obstruct procedural motions when necessary. Co-founder Rep. Mulvaney explained: "to screen potential members, we had a two-part test. We were looking for members of Congress who could both vote against a procedural motion (known commonly as a 'rule') and vote for a short-term continuing funding resolution or CR...We created that test because we knew there were so-called conservatives who...while they talked a good game, would never have the spine to vote against a rule" (Mulvaney 2023).

# C Defections on Speaker Elections

This section examines which ideological groups challenge speaker elections.

A couple notes on Figure SI.3:

1) In Pelosi's speaker election in the 116th Congress, there were technically more defectors in the New Democrat Coalition (NDC) 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

[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

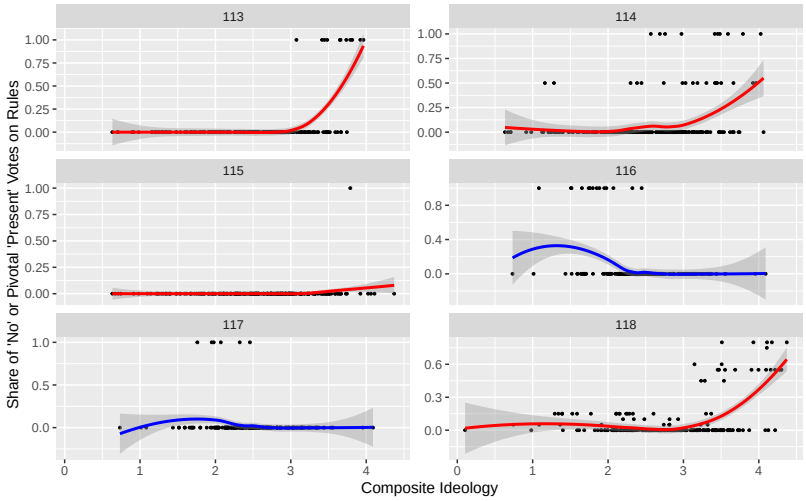


Figure SI.2: Ideology and Defection on Speaker Election Votes. Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of speaker elections the legislator cast a No or Present vote. In all Congresses but the 114th and 118th, this is either 1 or 0, because there was only one speaker election. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by Bonica et al. (2025)'s composite ideology score. Blue (red) curves indicate that the majority party is Democratic (Republican). Democrats' scores are multiplied 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.

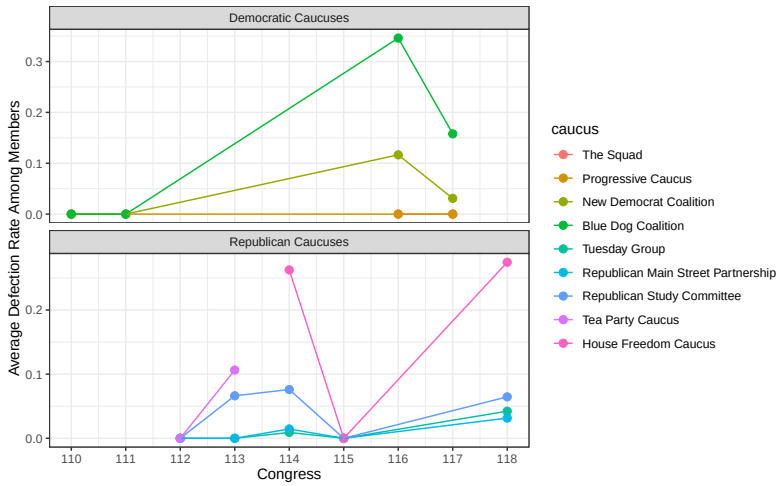


Figure SI.3: Average Defection Rate on Speaker Elections by Caucus Membership and Congress. This gives the average proportion of elections that a caucus member defected. In Congresses with only one speaker election (all except the 114th and 118th), this is simply the share of caucus members who defected. Legend orders caucuses ideologically from left-to-right.

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.

## C.1 Detailing Speaker Election Threats: Demands and Concessions

This subsection provides supporting details referenced in the main text for the speaker-election threats against Pelosi and McCarthy.

**Demands** In exchange for supporting McCarthy's speaker election bid in 2023, the HFC's demands included, but were not limited to, requiring all legislation be open to floor amendments, abolishing the Steering Committee (heavily influenced by the Speaker, this body determines committee seats and chair positions), requiring each committee of jurisdiction support legislation before floor consideration, and allowing all rank-and-file members to speak during conference meetings (Baer 2023).

Prior to Pelosi's 2019 speaker election, 19 moderates publicly threatened to oppose her — sixteen signed a public letter, while three others told media outlets (Foran and Raju 2018). These insurgents were members 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). However, 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.

In exchange for their support, Blue Dogs demanded similar concessions as the HFC, such as fewer closed rules, greater debate on legislation and amendments, strengthening the discharge petition to prevent leadership-friendly committee chairs from delaying legislation, and guaranteeing floor votes on sufficiently bipartisan bills and amendments (Blue Dog Coalition 2018; Problem Solvers Caucus 2018).

**Concessions** Pelosi made several concessions to secure the speakership. 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. 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, and require the Rules Committee to prefer amendments with bipartisan support (Struyk and Petulla 2019; Problem Solvers Caucus 2018). These rules changes erode party leaders' negative agenda power by weakening committees' ability to withhold bills and amendments that pull outcomes towards the floor median.[29]

The HFC received significant representation on power committees, including two seats on the Rules Committee and four seats on Appropriations. They also gained the ability for just one legislator to bring a privileged motion-to-vacate resolution to the floor, which ultimately allowed

[29]These rules changes were initially proposed by the Problem Solvers Caucus, but 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.

them to oust McCarthy and install Rep. Mike Johnson as speaker, a former informal member of the HFC.[30]

## C.2 Boehner's Battles with the Early HFC

By 2013, Tea-Party conservatives, most of whom would form the HFC in the 114th Congress, had grown furious with Speaker Boehner's unwillingness to achieve conservative wins on the budget, health care, and immigration by threatening government shutdowns (Lizza 2015; Bloch Rubin 2022). This frustration prompted speaker-election protest defections in the 113th Congress, and in the 114th Congress, the creation of the HFC to generate real leverage against leaders by coordinating dissent. This enabled credible pivotal threats, which they leveraged to oust Boehner and replace him with Paul Ryan, rejecting Kevin McCarthy despite him being next in the leadership chain (Lizza 2015; Bloch Rubin 2022).

These fights reflect disagreement over inter-party compromise and bargaining strategy more than sharp differences with party leaders on ideal policy preferences. Boehner and his fellow leaders campaigned on largely the same conservative goals the eventual HFC members (then Tea Party members) sought. GOP leaders famously published their platform in a "Pledge to America" manifesto in 2010, who's key provisions matched Tea Party priorities, such as reducing budget by 100 billion dollars and returning to pre-Obama spending levels, repealing Obamacare, and extending Bush-era tax cuts. Similar to later conservatives' irritation with McCarthy, the rupture came from what conservatives saw as leadership betrayal: once in office, leaders compromised with the Democratic-controlled Senate and White House rather than using procedural brinkmanship to force these conservative policy victories (Lizza 2015). As part of their broader irritation with leaders' centralized power over negotiations and the agenda, rebels leveraged procedural threats to force leaders to bargain more aggressively on behalf of shared partisan priorities.

# D Defections on Rules

## D.1 Defection Rates Over Time

On special rules, if we simply plot the distribution of defection rates over time (as in Figure SI.4 below), the 118th Congress appears aberrant. I define the defection rate as the share of the majority party's seat margin that votes against the rule[31], 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

$$\text{Defection Rate}_{r,c} = \frac{\#no_{r,c} + \frac{\#present_{r,c}}{2}}{\text{majority margin}_c} \quad . \tag{6}$$

[30] 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).

[31] 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.

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 Yes or Present vote to pass the rule.

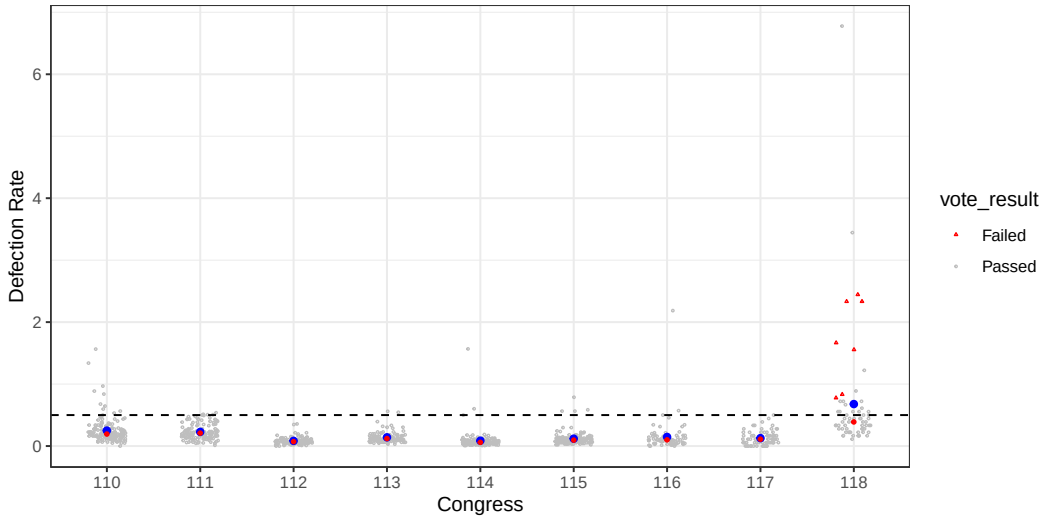


Figure SI.4: Defection Rates on Special Rules. Each data point is a rule vote. The blue and red dots are the mean and median defection rates, respectively, within that Congress. When the defection rate is at or above the dashed line (i.e. ≥ 0.5), the majority party needs minority support to pass the rule.

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 began being weaponized before the 118th Congress. Because the hardball bargaining transpired behind closed doors rather than on the House floor, Figure SI.4 obscures the rising tension on rules within the GOP before the 118th Congress (detailed in main text Section 2).

## D.2 Motivations for Failed Rules in the 118th Congress

Six out of the seven failed rules in the 118th Congress were driven by excluded amendments, closed-rules, and/or retaliating against leaders compromising with Democrats on cutting spending levels, rather than disagreement with substantive legislation underlying the rule.

Two failed rules (HRES 463 and HRES 947) were in retaliation against leaders increasing the debt ceiling while accepting topline spending levels that preserved many Biden administration priorities, actions extraneous to the rules' underlying bills (Lerman et al. 2023; Hauf 2023; Kaplan 2023; Freking 2024). HFC members challenged HRES 680 and 712 primarily to oppose spending levels in leaders' proposed stopgap, which was not governed by either rule (O'Brien 2023b). Though some wanted to add conservative social provisions to the underlying defense spending bill (O'Brien 2023), many defectors had no substantive disagreement with it (O'Brien 2023b). They derailed HRES 869, which governed an appropriations bill and an Iran bill, in part because of substantive disagreements with the underlying legislation, but also because of closed rules and skirted committee markup sessions which prevented conservative amendments from being offered, and retaliation against Johnson using Democrats to pass a continuing resolution (Krawzak et al. 2023). Finally, HRES 1125, which governed the FISA-renewal bill, failed because it excluded an HFC-sponsored amendment to FISA's controversial Section 702 (Carney and Beavers 2024; O'Brien et al. 2024).

By challenging the rule rather than the vote on the underlying legislation, the HFC prevented leaders from using floor debate and the visibility of substantive votes to pressure and convert holdouts. Through debate, leaders can directly persuade wavering members, and because debate and substantive votes receive more attention from voters and interest groups than procedure, leaders often believe these stages may induce capitulation, as holdouts fear being visibly responsible for blocking legislation. Therefore, even when unsure about whether they have a floor majority, leaders sometimes hope to force a debate and floor vote to build a coalition via pressure. This logic was evident during consideration of the defense spending bill in the 118th Congress, which GOP leadership attempted to bring to the floor despite acknowledging insufficient support, hoping that pressure generated during debate and a highly anticipated substantive vote would peel off defectors (Smith 2023; O'Brien 2023b).

## D.3 Ideology and Defection

This figure plots the relationship between a majority party legislator's defection rate on special rules within a Congress and their ideology, as measured by Bonica et al. (2025)'s composite ideology score. The legislator-level defection rate is the share of rules a legislator cast a No or pivotal Present vote (Present vote when the bill-level defection rate (see Equation 6) $\geq 0.5$, i.e. such that leaders require minority support to pass the rule). The composite is an ensemble method that combines multiple ideological scalings — DW-Nominate (Poole and Rosenthal 1991), GGUM (Duck-Mayr and Montgomery 2023), recipient and contributor CF-Scores (Bonica 2014), DW-DIME (Bonica 2018), and Hall-Snyder scores (Hall and Snyder 2015) — into a weighted average, smoothing measurement error from any one approach. It also correlates highly with each of its individual components.

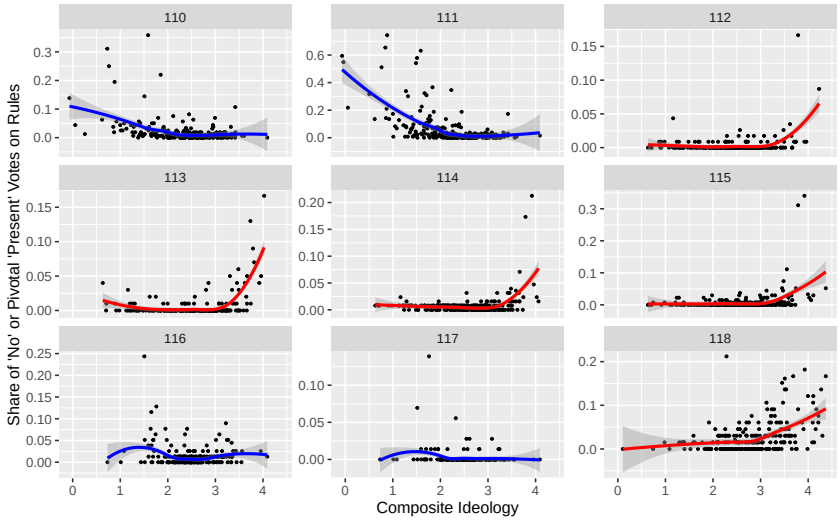


Figure SI.5: Ideology and Defection Rates on Special Rules. Each dot is a legislator in the majority party. Y-axis is the share of rules the legislator voted against the party or cast a pivotal Present vote. X-axis is the legislator's ideology, as measured by Bonica et al. (2025)'s composite ideology score. Curves are LOESS smoothers. Blue (red) curves indicate Democratic (GOP) controlled Congresses. All Democrats' scores are multiplied by -1. Larger scores therefore denote more extreme legislators — for Democrats this means more progressive, and for Republicans this means more conservative.

We find an asymmetry: the moderate wing of the Democratic party and the extreme wing of the Republican party are most likely to defect.

## D.4 Within-Caucus Variation in Defections

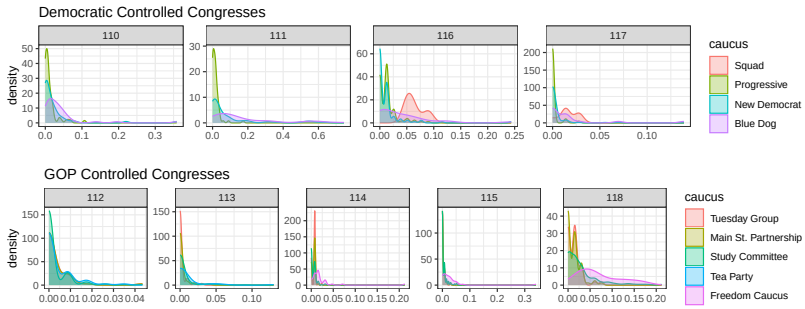


Figure SI.6: Distribution of Caucus Members' Defection Rates on Special Rules. Legends order caucuses ideologically from left-to-right.

As is the case on speaker elections (see Figure 2), we find meaningful within-caucus variation in defection rates on special rules. This is particularly intriguing for the Blue Dog Coalition (BDC) and House Freedom Caucus (HFC), as these are obstructionist caucuses which select members based on their willingness to buck the party when necessary to advance collective caucus goals (Bloch Rubin 2022).

# E Investigating Ideological Explanations of Agenda Power

Here I provide evidence that ideological theories of positive agenda power cannot explain rising procedural conflict in recent years. First, Section E.1 shows that using measures of ideology derived from observable data, the parties are polarizing, and if anything, growing more internally homogeneous. Existing theories argue such conditions such conditions should reduce defections and increase leaders' governing capacity. Second, Section E.2 shows that ideological measures are not consistent with growing conflict coming from Democratic moderates and GOP extremists.

## E.1 Party-Level

All measures indicate that the distance between the parties' medians is growing over time, and that within-party variation among Democrats is shrinking. Within-party changes are less clear among Republicans: DW-DIME and DW-Nominate show little systematic change, while CF-scores indicate a marked decline in within-party variation. However, DW-DIME and DW-Nominate incorporate defections[32] — the outcome of interest — so we should prioritize the donation-based scalings. Indeed, the spike in within-GOP variance in the 118th Congress is produced by the internal fighting on speaker elections and special rules, which is the phenomena we are trying to explain.

Regardless, to make meaningful comparisons across Congresses, within-party variance should be evaluated relative to the full ideological distribution in each Congress, as the spread of the first dimension of competition changes substantially over this period. When scaled by total variance, all measures agree that the relative magnitude of within-party ideological variation has shrunk.

[32] Although DW-DIME uses donations as its input, it is trained to predict DW-Nominate, which observes the roll-call defections

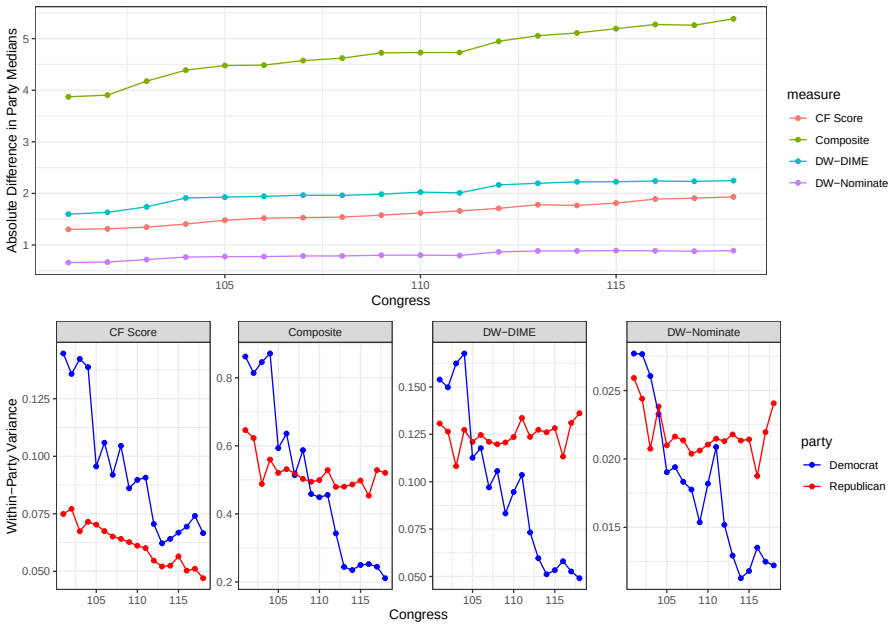


Figure SI.7: Distance Between Parties and Homogeneity Within Parties are Growing. Top Figure: absolute value of difference between each party's median ideal point by ideological measure. Bottom Figure: variance in ideal points within each party by ideological measure. `CF Score` = Recipient CF-Scores from Bonica (2014); `Composite` = Composite measure from Bonica et al. (2025); `DW-DIME` = DW-DIME scores from Bonica (2018); `DW-Nominate` = first dimension DW-Nominate from Poole and Rosenthal (1991).

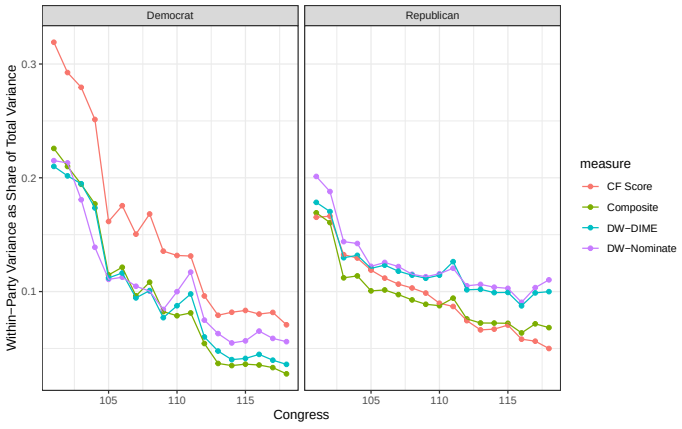


Figure SI.8: Within-Party Variation in Ideology Composes a Shrinking Proportion of Total Variance. Total variance is the variance in ideal points among all legislators in a Congress. See Figure SI.7 caption for `measure` descriptions.

### E.1.1 Measurement Error Critiques Cannot Recover Existing Theories

The typical critique of roll-call based ideological measures, that they conflate increasing party influence over legislators and the agenda with ideological polarization and internal cohesion (see Lee 2015), does not recover ideological theories of agenda power. First, changes in preferences still account for a substantial share of observed roll-call polarization (McCarty et al. 2006; Moskowitz et al. 2024; Cox and Poole 2002), and donation-based measures, which avoid agenda effects and are less susceptible to party influence, exhibit similar trends. More importantly, this concern produces a contradiction. If increasing party influence explains observed polarization and intra-party cohesion, this is inconsistent with conflict particularly emerging on special rules and speaker elections, as leaders exert the most pressure on procedure (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Schickler and Rich 1997, see main text footnotes 4 and 5).

Similarly, Frances Lee argues that polarization and internal cohesion partly reflect partisan teamsmanship rather than changes in legislators' ideologies (2009). As majority status becomes more competitive, majority-party legislators have stronger incentives to behave cohesively in order to deny the minority legislative and reputational wins and build a productive party brand that helps them retain control. McCarty (2016) launches several empirical defenses against this possibility, such as same-state same-party senators' voting records differing markedly and DW-Nominate capturing within-party differences consistent with experts. But more importantly, rising internal procedural conflict within the majority party contradicts this critique of ideology measures, as it is inconsistent with stronger partisan team behavior.

## E.2 Ideology Does Not Explain Asymmetric Defection Patterns

I examine whether Democratic moderates and GOP conservatives are growing ideologically distant from party leaders. Dynamic CF-scores are preferable — using other measures (DW-Nominate, Composite scores, CF-scores, and DW-DIME) to explain procedural voting is statistically dishonesty, as they incorporate roll-call defections into their scalings and/or use future campaign donations, which are likely influenced by defections, to re-scale ideologies in earlier cycles. However, I include all measures for completeness.

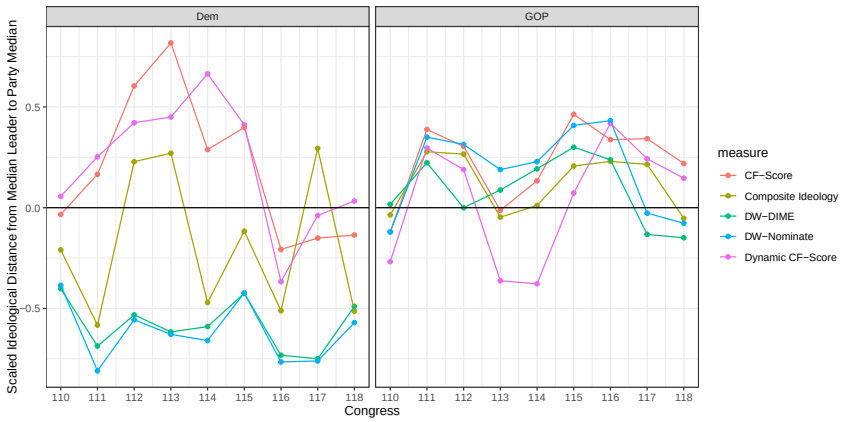


Figure SI.9: Ideological Composition of Party Leaders: Standardized Ideological Distance between Median Party Leader and Median Party Legislator. In terms of different ideological measures, the y-axis gives the number of standard deviations the median party leader is from the party median. Positive values indicate the median party leader is right of (more conservative than) the party median. See Table 1 for the roster of party leadership positions in each party.

Regardless of the measure employed, there is no time trend in leaders' relative positioning consistent with defection increasing from each party's conservative wing. In fact, based on dynamic CF-scores (our preferred measure, see above), leaders are often *closer* to the conservative wings. Among Republicans, this is the case for all measures. Among Democrats, although DW-Nominate and DW-DIME suggest leaders are left of the party median, there are no changes over time consistent with an *increasing* ideological incentive for moderates to challenge Pelosi. Indeed, the composite scores, which amalgamate all measures, find Democratic leaders simply oscillate around their party's median.

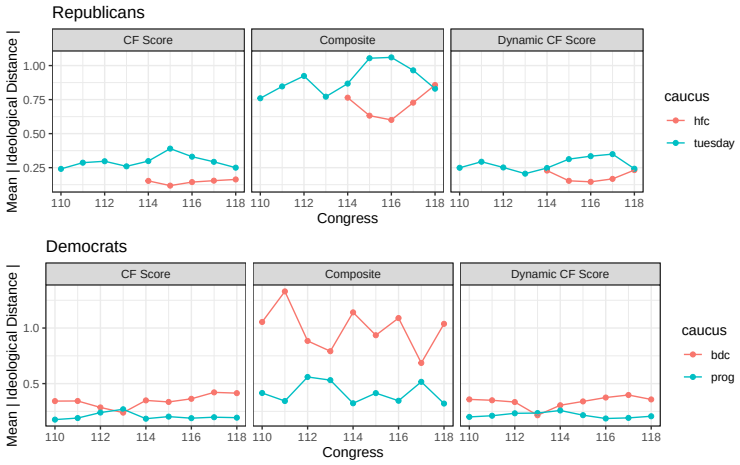


Figure SI.10: Average Ideological Distance (absolute value) to the Median Party Leader Among Obstructionist Caucuses' Members. Ideology is measured with Dynamic and Static CF scores (Bonica 2014) and the Composite measure (Bonica et al. 2025). `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus. `tuesday` = Tuesday Group. `prog` = Congressional Progressive Caucus. `BDC` = Blue Dog Coalition.

There is no evidence that the HFC is growing more extreme vis-à-vis GOP leaders. In fact, across all Congresses, the average Tuesday Group member is at least as far, and typically further, from party leaders than the average HFC member. Among Democrats, BDC members are slightly further from party leaders, but are not growing more so over time, despite their increasing willingness to challenge Pelosi. These results hold regardless of which ideology measure is used, even despite the fact that the composite score uses procedural voting in its scaling, and static CF-scores use data occurring after, and plausibly affected by, procedural voting.

# F Formal Model of "Internal" Procedural Defection

## F.1 Setup

Party leader $L$ privately proposes rule $r$ allocating $x_r \in [0,1]$ 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 Threaten Defection (behind closed doors) against $r$. 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.

If $F$ threatens defection, $L$ proposes a revised offer $x_r' \in [0,1]$ on the floor ($L$ need not adjust their offer, as $x_r'$ may equal $x_r$). If $F$ supports this offer, the rule passes and payoffs are $(1-x_r'-\epsilon,\ x_r')$, where $\epsilon > 0$ captures a small cost (e.g. time or reputational) leaders incur from allowing bargaining to escalate to a pivotal threat rather than securing support at the outset. If $F$ instead defects on the floor, the rule fails. In that case, the faction suffers punishment from leaders $c_F \in [0,1]$ but gains leverage $b_F \in [0,1]$, both on $r$ and in future contests, by demonstrating a credible defection threat, yielding payoff $b_F - c_F$. By losing the floor vote, the leader suffers productivity cost $c_L \in [0,1]$ but retains bargaining position $b_L \in [0,1]$ on $r$ and in future contests, yielding payoff $b_L - c_L$.

For simplicity, we assume complete information over all parameters. Later, I discuss how information asymmetry affects play.

**Interpretation of Payoffs** The parameter $b_L$ summarizes leaders' bargaining strength following a failed rule, encompassing institutional authority, reputational capital, electoral security, and any downstream gains from punishment. By punishing, $L$ strengthens their bargaining position on $r$ and in future contests by making $F$ electorally weaker and dissuading future dissidents from challenging rules.

The parameter $b_F$ carries an analogous meaning for the faction. It captures any ego rents or signaling benefits $F$ enjoys from challenging the leader, as well as any gains in their present and future bargaining position. By derailing the rule and demonstrating that their defection threat is credible, they may reap greater concessions both on $r$ and in future contests.

The parameter $c_F$ captures the resource punishments the leader can inflict upon $F$. As discussed in the theory section of this paper, this includes removing committee seats, leadership positions, and/or money from the faction.

$c_L$ captures the productivity cost that party leaders face for failing to pass $r$. Losing rules threatens their ability to pass the party's agenda and consequently risks forfeiting their majority status.

$b_F - c_F$ and $b_L - c_L$ therefore capture each player's resilience and future-orientation. If $b_L - c_L$ is large, then $L$ is future-oriented — she can withstand the productivity loss today from failing $r$ in pursuit of future bargaining gains. If it is small or negative, however, she will be inclined to offer $F$ greater influence to pass $r$ today. Similarly, if $b_F - c_F$ is large, the faction can withstand punishment. It is thus more likely to forgo supporting $r$ today in pursuit of a greater bargaining position in future disputes. But with small or negative $b_F - c_F$, the faction fears punishment and/or believes they are minimal benefits of defection for future bargaining outcomes, and therefore is inclined to support $L$'s offer and pass the rule today.

$x_r'$ captures the concessions $L$ can make to secure passage of the rule following a threatened defection. In particular, offering $x_r' > x_r$ represents a concession relative to the initial proposal, in which the leader cedes additional legislative influence to the faction in order to avoid a failed vote. This revised offer can reflect direct policy concessions via changes to the bill underlying $r$, or changes to $r$ itself that grant a floor vote on $F$'s desired amendments. More generally, the re-offer may capture power concessions that do not directly involve the $r$th rule, but instead grant $F$ greater influence over future rules and legislation, such as commitments to provide open rules, committee seats, or future floor consideration of a desired bill. A prime example is Kevin McCarthy elevating two HFC members to the Rules Committee in order to secure his speakership. Of course, $x_r'$ need not incorporate concessions. $L$ may retain their inital offer ($x_r' = x_r$) or even reduce it ($x_r' < x_r$).

We include $\epsilon$ so that for the same amount of influence ceded to $F$, $L$ strictly prefers to pass the rule without dealing with a pivotal threat.

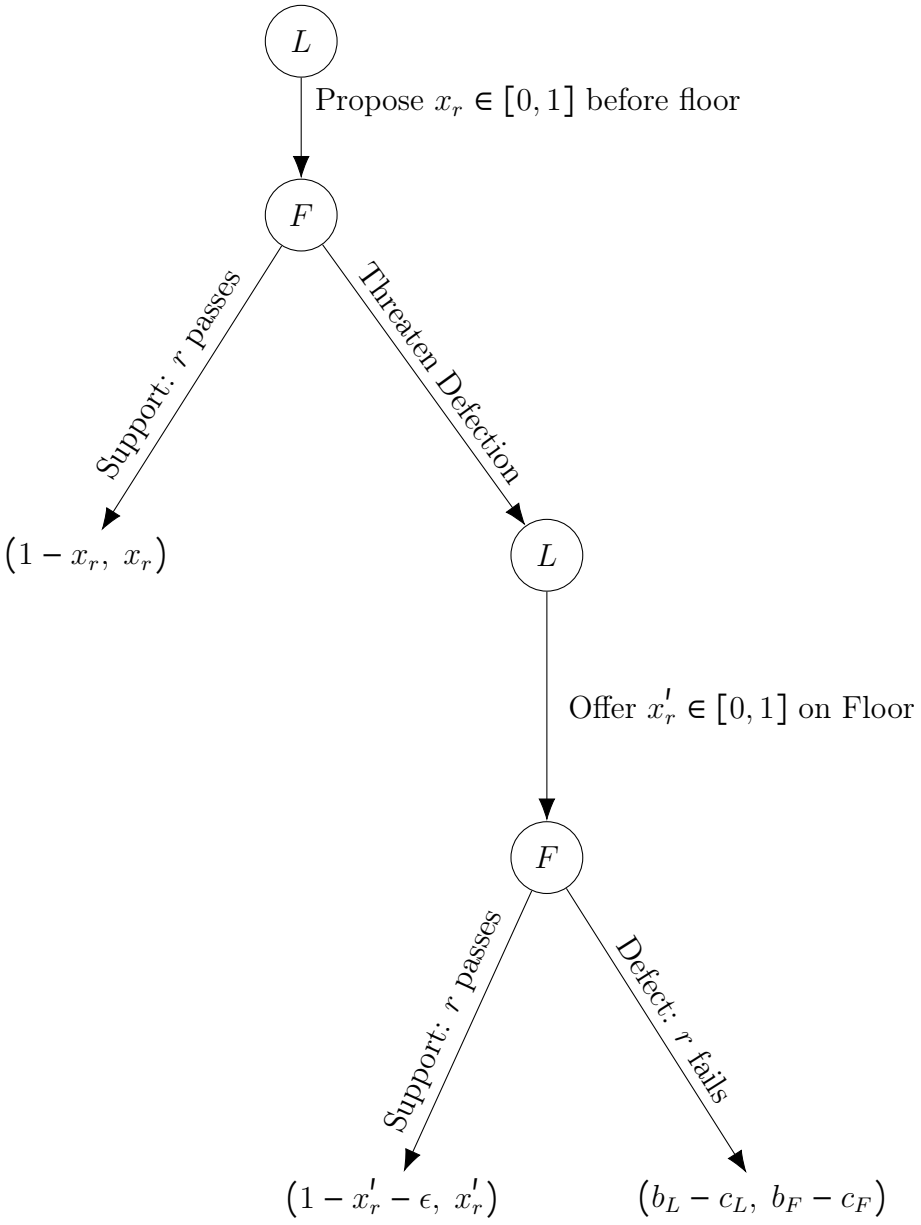


Figure SI.11: Game tree. Payoffs are $(L, F)$. $\epsilon > 0$ and $c_F, c_L, b_L, b_F \in [0,1]$ are fixed parameters known to both players. "Passes" means $r$ passes a floor vote; "fails" means $r$ fails on the floor vote.

## F.2 Solving

We can restrict our attention to three possible strategies for $L$:

1. Offer the cheapest $x_r$ to secure initial *Support*.
2. Offer the cheapest $x_r$ to secure *Threaten Defection* and then cheapest $x_r'$ to secure later *Support*
3. Offer the cheapest $x_r$ to secure *Threaten Defection* and then cheapest $x_r'$ to secure *Defect*

**Case 1:** $b_F - c_F \leq 0$

If $b_F - c_F \leq 0$, we can ignore strategies (2) and (3), as $F$ cannot credibly chose *Defect*. $L$ offers $x_r^* = 0$ and $F$ chooses *Support*.

**Case 2:** $b_F - c_F > 0$ **&** $b_L - c_L \leq 1 - (b_F - c_F)$

To implement (1), $L$ offers $x_r = b_F - c_F > 0$ and $F$ accepts — they cannot expect any additional concessions in $x_r'$, as they are indifferent between *Support* and *Defect*. To implement (2), $L$ offers $x_r = 0$ and $x_r' = b_F - c_F$. $L$'s payoff under this strategy is $1 - (b_F - c_F) - \epsilon < u_L(x_r = b_F - c_F) = 1 - (b_F - c_F)$, so strategy (1) strictly dominates (2). To implement (3), $L$ offers $x_r = x_r' = 0$ .

By the case condition,

$$u_L(x_r = b_F - c_F) = 1 - (b_F - c_F) \geq b_L - c_L = u_L(x_r = 0, x_r' = 0),$$

so $L$ offers $x_r = b_F - c_F$ (we assume that when indifferent between allowing a floor failure and coercing support by offering greater legislative influence, $L$ chooses to coerce support).

**Case 3:** $b_F - c_F > 0$ **&** $b_L - c_L > 1 - (b_F - c_F)$

$L$'s action set remains the same as in Case 2, but by flipping the case condition,

$$u_L(x_r = b_F - c_F) = 1 - (b_F - c_F) < b_L - c_L = u_L(x_r = 0, x_r' = 0)$$

so $L$ now offers $x_r = x_r' = 0$.

**Subgame Perfect Nash Equilibrium:**

**Proposition F.1.** *The game has a unique SPNE in which:*

1. *If* $b_L - c_L \leq 1 - (b_F - c_F)$*, then* $L$ *offers*

$$x_r^* = \begin{cases} b_F - c_F, & \text{if } b_F - c_F > 0 \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

*while if* $b_L - c_L > 1 - (b_F - c_F)$*, then* $L$ *offers*

$$x_r^* = 0.$$

2. $F$ *supports if* $x_r^* \geq \max\{0\ ,\ b_F - c_F\}$ *and threatens defection otherwise.*

3. *If $F$ threatens defection on the equilibrium path (which occurs iff $b_L - c_L > 1 - (b_F - c_F)$), then $L$ offers*[33]

$$x_r'^* = 0.$$

*Off the equilibrium path, conditional on $F$ threatening defection in general, $L$ offers*

$$x_r'^* = \begin{cases} b_F - c_F, & \text{if } b_L - c_L \leq 1 - (b_F - c_F) - \epsilon \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

## F.3 Insights

The noteworthy implications of this equilibrium are discussed below.

### F.3.1 When Can Factions Leverage Defection?

**Proposition F.2.** *Holding other parameters fixed, the range of $x_r$ offers in which $F$ threatens defection weakly increases as $c_F$ decreases.*

*Formal Justification.* $u_F(\text{Threaten Defection}) \geq b_F - c_F$, since if $x_r' < b_F - c_F$, then $F$ defects and collects $b_F - c_F$. Consequently, if $x_r < b_F - c_F$, then $u_F(\text{Threaten Defection}) \geq b_F - c_F > u_F(\text{Support}) = x_r$. $\mathcal{S} = \{x_r \in [0,1] : x_r < b_F - c_F\}$ thus denotes the set of offers in which $F$ threatens defection. When $b_F - c_F \leq 0$, $\mathcal{S} = \varnothing$, but when $b_F - c_F > 0$, $\text{Length}(\mathcal{S})$ increases as $c_F$ decreases. Hence, the range of offers in which $F$ threatens defection weakly increases as $c_F$ decreases.

*Intuition.* By derailing the floor vote, the faction can secure a payoff of $b_F - c_F$. As a result, it expects an initial offer at least this large in order to refrain from exercising its defection threat. As leaders' ability to punish the faction ($c_F$) decreases, the value of defection rises, increasing the minimum concession required to deter a threatened defection. The quantity $b_F - c_F$ therefore directly captures the faction's bargaining leverage: it is the exact amount of legislative influence leaders must offer to prevent the faction from threatening defection.

### F.3.2 When do Leaders Offer Concessions Ex Ante to Avoid Conflict?

**Proposition F.3.** *Assuming $b_F - c_F > 0$ and holding other parameters fixed, when $c_L$ is sufficiently high ($c_L > b_L + b_F - c_F - 1$), leaders offer ex-ante concessions ($x_r = b_F - c_F$) to avoid the threat and execution of defection. Moreover, once $c_L \geq b_L$, leaders concede ex ante regardless of how large $b_F - c_F$ is.*

*Formal Justification.* $u_L(x_r = b_F - c_F) = 1 - (b_F - c_F) \geq u_L(x_r = x_r' = 0) = b_L - c_L$ iff $c_L \geq b_L - \Big(1 - \big(b_F - c_F\big)\Big) \equiv c_L^*$. Therefore at this threshold $c_L^*$, $L$ offers concessions ($x_r = b_F - c_F$). Furthermore, once $c_L \geq b_L$, $u_L(x_r = b_F - c_F) \geq u_L(x_r = x_r' = 0) \quad \forall c_F, b_F$. So $L$ offers these concessions ($x_r = b_F - c_F$) regardless of the values of $b_F$ and $c_F$. We assume $b_F - c_F > 0$, because if not, $L$ offers $x_r = 0$ $\forall c_L, b_L$ and $F$ accepts.

*Intuition.* As the cost of a failed floor vote increases, leaders are more willing to offer ex-ante concessions rather than low-ball the faction and risk floor failure. Once the cost of a floor failure

[33] In equilibrium play, $F$ only threatens defection if $L$ offers $x_r^* = 0$. $L$ only makes this offer if $b_L - c_L > 1 - (b_F - c_F) > 1 - (b_F - c_F) - \epsilon$. Therefore, conditional on reaching this stage on the equilibrium path, $L$ only offers $x_r'^* = 0$.

exceeds the benefits of standing firm against the faction, leaders acquiesce ex ante regardless of how large a concession the faction's bargaining position commands ($b_F - c_F$ characterizes the size of concession $F$'s bargaining position commands). These dynamics only arise when the faction is sufficiently protected from leaders' capacity to punish them (when $c_F < b_F$). When leaders can deliver sufficiently large punishments, floor defection is never credible, so leaders can ignore the faction and offer minimal legislative influence.

### F.3.3 Why Do We Observe Floor Defections: Information Asymmetry and Anticipating Defection

Under complete information over $b_F, b_L, c_F, c_L$, floor failures only occur when $c_L$ is sufficiently low such that leaders prefer to fight the bargaining battle rather than offer ex ante concessions. Given that factions target procedural votes, which are particularly high-stakes, this path is unlikely. We therefore should not observe pivotal defections in the complete-information model. When there exists a range of initial proposals for which floor defection is credible, leaders offer just enough legislative influence to coerce compliance.

This is consistent with bargaining patterns during the past decade of rising procedural conflict. Factions with credible defection threats challenge procedural votes where productivity costs are high, necessitating concessions ex ante to avert floor failures. For example, after the HFC consistently demonstrated a credible defection threat in 2015 (by voting against Boehner's speaker election and later ousting him), Paul Ryan, in order to obtain the speakership, was forced to keep the procedural tool used to oust Boehner (French and Sherman 2015), and then during his tenure as Speaker, "regularly consult[] with the HFC's leadership on procedural and policy issues" before bringing floor votes (Bloch Rubin 2022, p. 21). Pelosi was similarly forced to grant insurgent moderates significant power concessions to secure the speakership in 2019 (see Section 2.1). In 2023, to win over a pivotal HFC faction with a credible defection threat on budget negotiations, McCarthy was forced to add so many conservative concessions to some appropriations bills that observers knew they were dead-on-arrival in the Senate (O'Brien 2023,b).

Only in the 118$^{\text{th}}$ Congress do we observe pivotal defections on special rules and speaker elections. Information asymmetry is a likely explanation. Leaders may have overestimated the value HFC members ascribed to the resources they could withhold, or underestimated the defection benefits HFC members perceived, and thus believed the HFC could not credibly defect. For example, Speaker McCarthy believed conservatives' threat to oust him in October 2023 lacked teeth, retorting in a CBS interview, "I'll survive...Bring it on" (CBS News 2023). Behind closed doors he even dared them to try ousting him, screaming "File the f***ing motion" (Smith 2023). Similarly, GOP leaders brought procedural votes to the floor that the HFC had committed to opposing. Leaders believed the HFC could not actually withstand the blame for delaying legislation and would thus capitulate. For instance, after the HFC threatened to prevent debate on a defense spending bill (O'Brien 2023b), McCarthy still brought the rule to the floor, telling reporters, "We'll bring it to the floor, win or lose, and show the American public who's for the Department of Defense" (Smith 2023). Of course, in these cases among others, defectors believed otherwise and successfully executed their threat.

### F.3.4 Explaining Protest Defections

Thus far, we have considered a unitary, pivotal faction. But of course, we also observe *protest* defections (a set of non-pivotal defections) on many special rules and speaker election votes. These

defections are either the result of a neutralized pivotal faction (leaders picked off enough, but not all, members of a formerly pivotal faction), or a non-pivotal set of displeased legislators.

The costs ($c_{leg,p}$) and benefits ($b_{leg,p}$) of protests are slightly muted versions of those of pivotal defections. Protesters still enjoy the signaling, ego, and future bargaining benefits of floor defection, but lose the possibility of gaining influence on rule $r$. They still risk punishment from leaders, as voting against procedure, even if non-pivotal, still deeply violates party norms (Cox and McCubbins 2005). However, leaders may not punish protests to the same extent as pivotal obstructions, so likely $c_{leg,p} < c_F$.

A protester's payoff is $x_r + b_{leg,p} - c_{leg,p}$, where they receive $x_r$ because the rule passes despite their opposition. Because leaders do not condition their offer on non-pivotal legislators' strategies, whether legislators cast protest votes depends entirely on if $c_{leg,p} < b_{leg,p}$. Therefore Proposition F.2 applies to protest votes as well. All else equal, legislators less at risk from party punishment, i.e. those with smaller $c_{leg,p}$, should cast more protest votes.

# G How Leaders Influence Can Influence Members' Fundraising

Here I detail how leaders' elite connections allow them to credibly threaten key sources of members fundraising and provide examples of leaders' using this leverage against dissidents.

## G.1 Leaders' Connections to the Elite Donor World

Party leaders enter their posts with deep fundraising connections, having been selected for their ability to raise and redistribute money on the party's behalf (Heberlig and Larson 2012). Once in office, they attract further access-seeking donations because they control the legislative agenda (Fouirnaies 2018). These accumulated connections give leaders disproportionate influence over money flows, operating through several channels.

**K Street and corporate networks.** Leaders maintain sustained contact with representatives of lobbying firms, corporate PACs, and interest groups. They steer these donors' contributions towards preferred members by threatening their access to the legislative agenda. Tom DeLay's (then GOP majority-whip) K Street Project (1995–2006) is a classic example. He "made known very publicly" that lobbying firms and PACs seeking access to GOP leadership must redirect their contributions, which had previously primarily gone to Democrats, to Republicans (Heberlig and Larson 2012, pp. 50–52). In April 2010, NRCC Deputy Chair Greg Walden convened over 100 corporate PAC representatives at the Capitol Hill Club and pressured them to give less to Democrats — instructing attendees to "be very strategic and practical, to take a look at their giving patterns and just don't mindlessly give," making clear "Republican leadership is watching" (Murray 2010). The following month, then-Minority Leader John Boehner leveraged his K Street network to direct contributions toward Republican members he placed "at the top of his political priority list" (Palmer and Kucinich 2010). Given party leaders' leverage over access-seeking donors, those more reliant on leaders' corporate network have more to lose financially from losing favor with the leadership.

**Fundraisers and donor events.** Leaders host fundraisers — from large annual NRCC and DCCC dinners to smaller gatherings at venues like the Capitol Hill Club and Washington restaurants — that aggregate corporate and elite donors. Access is often gated through tiered donation programs, in which donors pay defined annual amounts to attend leadership receptions and policy briefings. These events serve two functions for rank-and-file beneficiaries: (1) they provide

structured access to large-dollar donors members would struggle to reach independently, allowing members to maintain and grow their large-dollar network (Kates and Thieme 2023); (2) they signal which members are in good standing with leadership, since invitation lists are at the leader's discretion. A member excluded from these events loses both the direct contribution flow and the credibility signal that attracts further access-seeking giving.

**Party donor lists and infrastructure.** Leaders may also withhold access to the party's donor lists and data infrastructure (e.g. NGP VAN for Democrats). These lists are built over time and include both individual and PAC donors pulled heavily from leaders' networks. The data infrastructure stores biographical information about each donor that members target in their phone calls. It also stores past-donation behavior that allows members to call donors who are most-likely to contribute. These tools are given to members during call time, which absorbs over half of their working hours. They are therefore critical for sourcing new donors (O'Donnell 2016).

**Joint fundraising committees.** JFCs allow large-dollar donors to write a single check that is split among a slate of beneficiaries chosen by the leader. Leaders can therefore efficiently funnel cash from their corporate-PAC and mega-donor connections, and rank-and-file beneficiaries gain money from elite networks they might struggle to reach independently. For example, according to the FEC, Kevin McCarthy's Take Back the House 2022 JFC raised nearly $90 million in the 2021–2022 cycle, with its top 30 donors — all corporate-affiliated mega-donors — contributing between $597,900 and $771,900 million each. The rank-and-file beneficiaries profited tremendously from access to such donors. According to Open Secrets, ten GOP members received over $200,000 each from this JFC during the cycle. Inclusion on a leader's JFC slate also signals good standing with leadership, which attracts further access-seeking giving. Removal from the slate severs both flows simultaneously.

## G.2 Examples of Leaders Leveraging These Channels Against Defectors

**The Cheney case.** Following her vote to impeach Trump over January 6th, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy mobilized multiple financial channels against Rep. Liz Cheney. He removed her from the GOP leadership and excluded her from his Take Back the House 2022 JFC, cutting her off from the donor flow that benefited her peers. He also threatened political consulting firms — who provide critical fundraising and campaign infrastructure — that they could not continue working with GOP leaders if they continued serving Cheney (Martin 2021). He used the Congressional Leadership Fund (his aligned super PAC) to fundraise for Cheney's primary challenger, Harriet Hageman (Hillyard 2022), and helped organize over 100 House Republicans to host fundraising events for Hageman (Isenstadt 2022). These fundraisers collected millions, likely pulling access-seeking donors away from Cheney who sensed her loss of power in the party.

Importantly, the power of the consultant-threat mechanism depends on the targeted member's fundraising structure. A consulting firm asked to choose between continued access to leadership and continued work with a defecting member will rationally choose leadership when the firm's broader client base consists of access-seeking corporate donors who themselves prioritize leadership access. The threat is correspondingly weaker against members whose campaigns are funded by small individual donors or regionally embedded PACs that do not depend on leadership goodwill.

**The DCCC blacklist.** Democratic leaders took similar actions. In March 2019, the DCCC formalized an incumbent-protection policy, refusing to work with any consulting firm, digital strategist, or campaign vendor whose client list included a primary challenger to a sitting Democratic incumbent. The policy also discourages sitting House Democrats from working with these consultants as well, by removing them from the DCCC's preferred list (Marans 2019). The policy

responded to anti-establishment progressives who unseated two longtime incumbents in 2018. Because the DCCC and party-aligned PACs are dominant clients for many of these vendors, the policy materially restricted left-flank challengers' ability to raise money, hire digital staff, and access campaign infrastructure. It also further signaled to access-seeking donors that the sitting progressive Democrats who unseated incumbents, and members who align with them, are not in good standing with leadership.

Both cases illustrate how leaders condition donor and vendor access on compliance, using their structural position in the party fundraising ecosystem to redirect resources away from those who challenge the party machine. The bite of these threats depends on the targeted member's reliance on the party-influenced network: members funded primarily by leader-connected access-seeking donors face the greatest exposure, while members funded by sources outside leaders' reach (small individual donors, regionally embedded PACs, ideologically motivated giving) are correspondingly insulated. This logic motivates the paper's empirical focus on $NS\_Corp$.

## G.3 Rank-and-File Internalization

Members recognize these threats. Former HFC member Rep. David Brat described the consequences of procedural defection bluntly: "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 experienced this directly — after voting against Boehner's 2015 speaker election, the NRCC refused to support him. More notable than the discipline itself was his colleagues' lack of surprise. As one Republican legislator put it: "he votes against the Speaker, the largest funder of the NRCC... I mean, come on. You can't help stupid" (Lizza 2015). As political scientist Matt Green observes, 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).

# H Network Similarity and Rules Defections: Within-Caucus Analysis

These analyses correspond to and build on the analyses in main text Section 5.2.2 which examine the association between financial reliance ($NS$) and special rules defections the BDC and HFC (obstructionist caucuses), after netting out ideology and district safety.

## H.1 Full Model Results

The following tables provide the coefficient estimates corresponding to the visual relationships shown in main text Figures 12 and 13 and Appendix Figures SI.14 and SI.15. I report bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals in parentheses because the small sample size and skewed dependent variable make closed-form OLS standard errors prone to downward bias. The analysis is purely descriptive, intended to assess whether financial reliance is negatively associated with procedural defection within obstructionist caucuses. Accordingly, the emphasis is on the direction of the coefficients rather than their statistical significance. The models are necessarily underpowered, given the limited size of each caucus, but even still, the estimates are generally negative and often approach conventional significance levels. It is reassuring that in the largest samples — the Tea Party in the 112th Congress

and the Blue Dog Coalition in the 111th — the relationship between corporate reliance and rules defection remains negative and becomes statistically significant.

Table SI.1: Within HFC & Tea Party Caucuses: NS Reliance and Rules Defections. The corporate-reliance and non-corporate-PAC-reliance models are estimated separately.

| | *DV = Rules Defections* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | (Tea: 112) | (Tea: 113) | (HFC: 114) | (HFC: 115) | (HFC: 118) |
| $NS\_Corp_{t-1}$ | -0.018 (-0.036, -0.002) | -0.029 (-0.077, 0.011) | -0.095 (-0.325, 0.036) | -0.180 (-0.569, 0.045) | -0.084 (-0.193, 0.027) |
| $\text{Ideology}_{t-1}$ | 0.596 (-0.293, 1.556) | 5.060 (1.402, 9.503) | -1.503 (-11.533, 4.782) | -6.149 (-27.384, 6.636) | 3.925 (-2.908, 9.064) |
| $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ | -0.001 (-0.022, 0.021) | 0.048 (-0.031, 0.148) | -0.031 (-0.248, 0.167) | 0.055 (-0.180, 0.199) | -0.062 (-0.188, 0.093) |
| $n$ | 59 | 47 | 40 | 37 | 46 |
| $NS\_Org_{t-1}$ | -0.056 (-0.140, 0.018) | 0.011 (-0.167, 0.230) | -0.216 (-0.763, 0.086) | -0.324 (-1.166, 0.145) | -0.132 (-0.265, 0.005) |
| $\text{Ideology}_{t-1}$ | 0.673 (-0.223, 1.671) | 5.954 (1.606, 10.902) | 0.160 (-8.963, 4.933) | -4.659 (-24.605, 7.865) | 4.005 (-0.778, 9.296) |
| $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ | -0.009 (-0.031, 0.011) | 0.048 (-0.037, 0.151) | -0.047 (-0.260, 0.133) | 0.050 (-0.119, 0.222) | -0.067 (-0.185, 0.085) |
| $n$ | 59 | 47 | 40 | 37 | 46 |

[1] Bootstrapped 95% CIs in parentheses.

[2] Model headers denote the caucus and Congress.

[3] Ideology measured with lagged Dynamic CF-Scores. $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ is lagged district vote share.

Table SI.2: Within BDC: NS Reliance and Rules Defections. The corporate-reliance and non-corporate-PAC-reliance models are estimated separately.

| | *DV = Rules Defections* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | (111) | (116) | (117) |
| $NS\_Corp_{t-1}$ | -0.967 (-1.550, -0.366) | -0.083 (-0.319, 0.035) | -0.012 (-0.169, 0.106) |
| $\text{Ideology}_{t-1}$ | 10.551 (-12.834, 31.858) | -0.218 (-3.326, 11.819) | -1.574 (-3.906, 0.569) |
| $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ | -0.187 (-0.896, 0.252) | -0.122 (-0.291, 0.003) | -0.044 (-0.135, 0.078) |
| $n$ | 49 | 25 | 19 |
| $NS\_Org_{t-1}$ | -0.881 (-2.587, 0.752) | -0.130 (-0.328, 0.078) | 0.057 (-0.058, 0.324) |
| $\text{Ideology}_{t-1}$ | -2.292 (-25.173, 22.511) | -0.877 (-3.530, 5.648) | -1.889 (-6.398, 0.171) |
| $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ | -0.664 (-1.610, -0.147) | -0.153 (-0.365, -0.030) | -0.062 (-0.244, -0.004) |
| $n$ | 49 | 25 | 19 |

[1] Bootstrapped 95% CIs in parentheses.

[2] Model headers denote the Congress.

[3] Ideology measured with lagged Dynamic CF-Scores. $\text{DVS}_{t-1}$ is lagged district vote share.

## H.2 Robustness to Outliers

Rep. Justin Amash is the outlier among HFC members in the 114th and 115th Congresses (see Figure 12), defecting 27 and 46 times in these respective Congresses.[34] Figure SI.12 shows that the negative slope between corporate reliance and rules defections, although attenuated, remains when winsorizing Amash's defections to the 95th percentile (computed using R's default sample quantile interpolator).[35]

[34] Amash left the HFC six months into the 115th Congress, but because this analysis is using HFC membership to control for unobservables associated with defection willingness, keeping his post-HFC votes is appropriate.

[35] $\beta_{114} = -0.008$ (bootstrapped 95% CI: -0.072, 0.041) and $\beta_{115} = -0.028$ (bootstrapped 95% CI: -0.107, 0.041). Emphasis is on coefficient's direction rather than statistical significance (see SI H.1 for explanation).

If we remove Amash entirely, the relationship between rules defections and corporate reliance is flat in these two Congresses (not pictured). However, because this is a small, finite population of caucus members, adjusting or removing Amash's value distorts substantively meaningful variation. In fact, it is theoretically important that in both the 114th and 115th Congresses, the HFC member least reliant on the party's corporate network is also its most frequent defector by a wide margin. This pattern is not captured by ideological scalings: dynamic CF-scores rank Amash only as the 16th and 22nd most extreme HFC member in the respective Congresses. Even winsorization eliminates this signal — after adjustment, Amash no longer appears as the caucus's largest defector. For this reason, we should prefer the unadjusted results in Figure 12 of the main text.

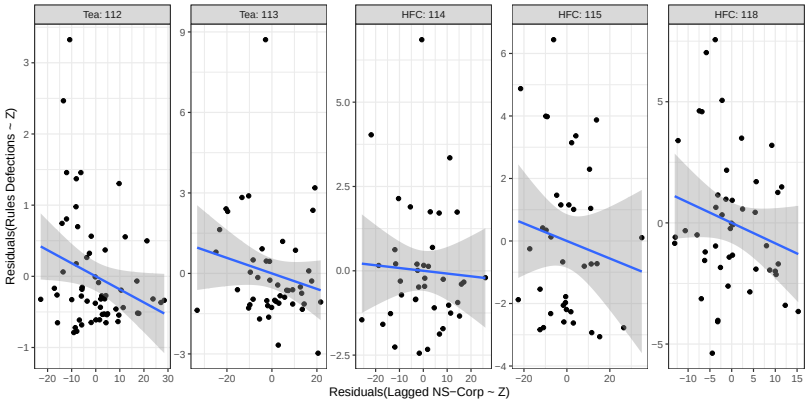


Figure SI.12: Negative Relationship Between Corporate-Reliance and Rules Defections (Net Ideology and District Safety) Within Obstructionist GOP Caucuses Remains After Winsorizing the 114th and 115th Congress Outlier to 95th Interpolated Sample Percentile. $Z$ includes lagged ideology (measured with dynamic CF-scores) and lagged district vote share. Facet titles denote the Congress and caucus, where `Tea` = Tea Party and `HFC` = House Freedom Caucus.

The outlier among BDC members in the 116th Congress (see Figure 13) is not concerning, as when simply removing this observation, Figure SI.13 shows the negative slope between corporate reliance and rules defections, although attenuated, still remains.[36]

## H.3 Non-Corporate PAC Reliance and Rules Defections

Figures SI.14 and SI.15 show that within obstructionist caucuses, and net ideology and district safety, reliance on leaders' non-corporate PAC donors is typically associated with fewer defections on special rules. Unlike corporate-reliance, however, the relationship is flat among Tea Party members in the 113th Congress.

# I Network Similarity and Defection: Within-Congress Analyses

I justify model selection, demonstrate results are robust to other measures of ideology, and provide further interpretation for analyses in main text Section 5.2.1, which applies count models to regress

[36] $\beta_{116}$ = -0.032 (bootstrapped 95% CI: -0.152, 0.072)

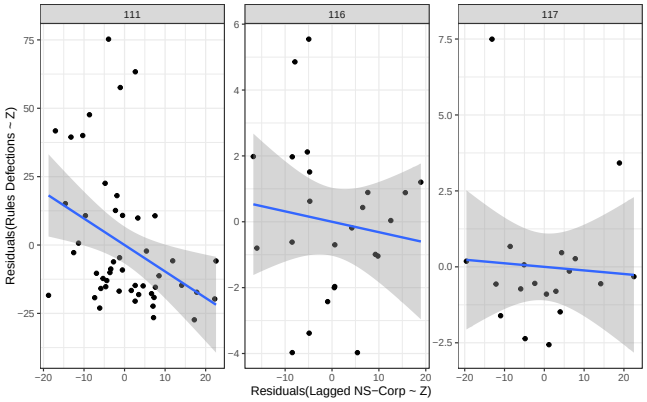


Figure SI.13: Negative Within-BDC Relationship Between Corporate Reliance and Rules Defection (Net Ideology and District Safety) Remains in 116th Congress When Removing the Outlier. Facet titles denote Congress. Figure SI.12 defines $Z$.

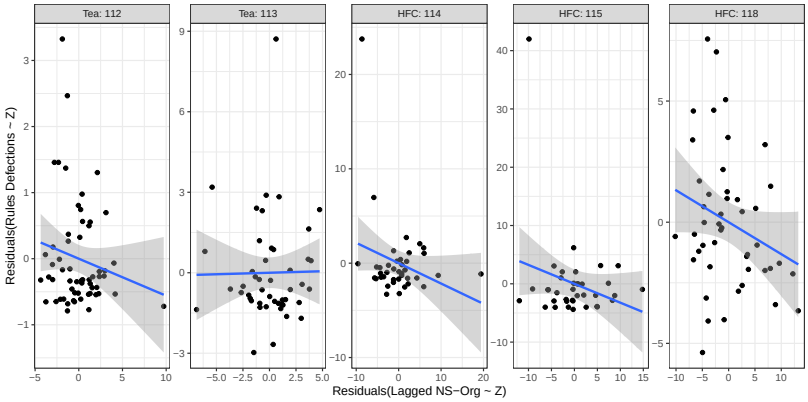


Figure SI.14: Within-Tea-Party and Within-HFC: Net Ideology and District Safety, Non-Corporate-Reliance Typically Associated with Fewer Rules Defections. Figure SI.12 caption defines $Z$ and the facet titles. See Table SI.1 for full model results.

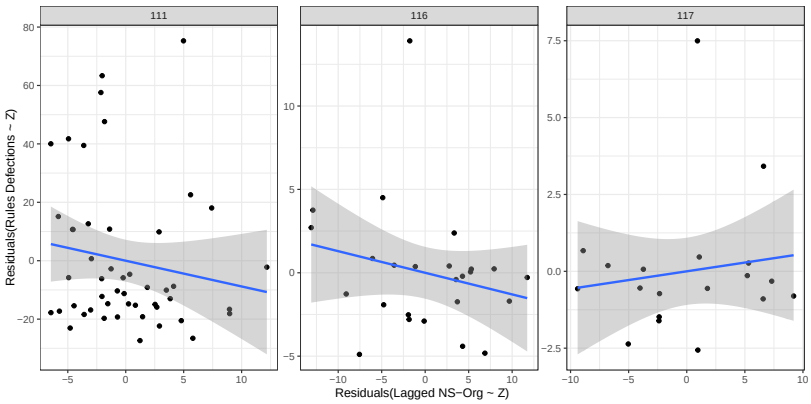


Figure SI.15: Within BDC: Net Ideology and District Safety, Non-Corporate-Reliance Typically Associated with Fewer Rules Defections. Facet titles denote the Congress. Figure SI.12 caption defines $Z$. See Table SI.2 for full model results.

procedural defections on financial reliance among majority party legislators in each Congress separately, conditioning on ideological distance to leaders, district vote share, and tenure in Congress (see Equation 2).

## I.1 Model Selection

Figure SI.16 shows that the dependent variable is heavily right-skewed and strictly positive, which makes OLS unsuitable. Poisson regression is also undesirable, because it assumes that the conditional variance of defections equals the conditional mean. Negative Binomial (NB) regression relaxes this restrictive equidispersion assumption by introducing a dispersion parameter, allowing the variance to exceed the mean. Table SI.3 shows that the unconditional variance of defections is typically much larger than the unconditional mean. While unconditional moments do not directly imply that the Poisson assumption fails conditionally, this pattern provides reasonable evidence that equidispersion may be untenable, making the NB specification more robust and reliable.

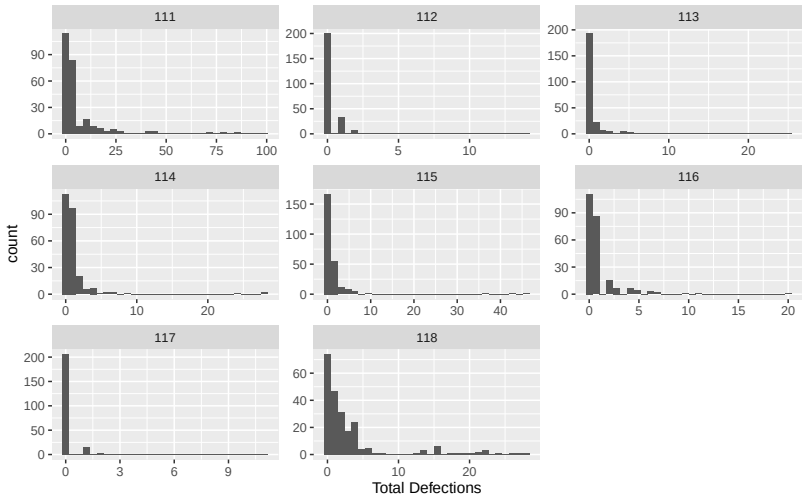


Figure SI.16: Distribution of Dependent Variable by Congress. Total Defections = # Speaker Election Defections + # Special Rules Defections.

Table SI.3: Summary of Defections by Congress (Among 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 information matrix is non-singular (i.e. the Hessian of the joint log-likelihood is invertible).[37]

Figure SI.17 shows that the models' estimated coefficients are effectively equivalent.

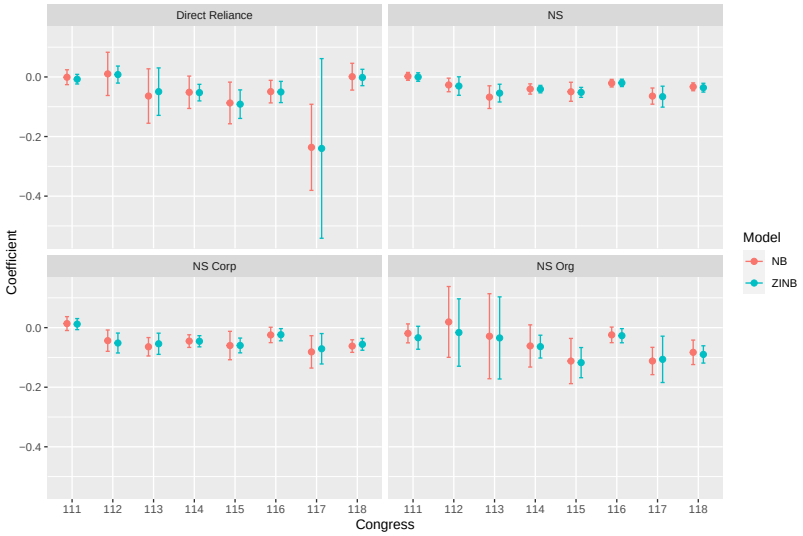


Figure SI.17: Coefficients Estimated by the Negative Binomial and Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Models are Nearly Identical. Each facet is a different $NS$ variable, for which we estimate a model in each Congress. The coefficients from the ZINB regressions are from the count processes. See Tables **??** and **??** for the full NB model results.

## 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

[37] 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.

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 SI.18 applies this transformation to the raw coefficients in the main text (Figure 10).

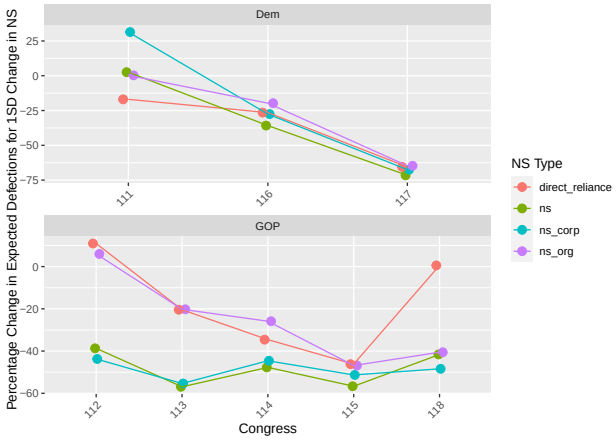


Figure SI.18: Negative-Binomial Regression Results with Transformed Coefficients. Interpretation for each point estimate $b$: a one-standard deviation increase in $NS$ is associated with a $b$ percentage change in the expected number of defections.

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

Figure SI.19 shows that 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

This section supports my analyses in main text Section 5.2.3, which uses fixed-effect models to test whether within-legislator or within-district (incumbent replaced by a new co-partisan within a district) changes are associated with changes in defections (see Equation 3). Figure SI.20 shows the results are robust to alternative measures of ideology and SI J.1 further discusses the null within-legislator result.

## J.1 Null Within-Legislator Coefficients Reflect Sticky Donor Networks

One might argue that null within-legislator coefficients imply procedural defection is explained by a legislator's "type". That is, certain legislators have unobservable predispositions to defect (e.g. being political outsiders or holding anti-institutional beliefs), that are associated with having independent donor networks and unexplained by measures of ideology (since we control for them).

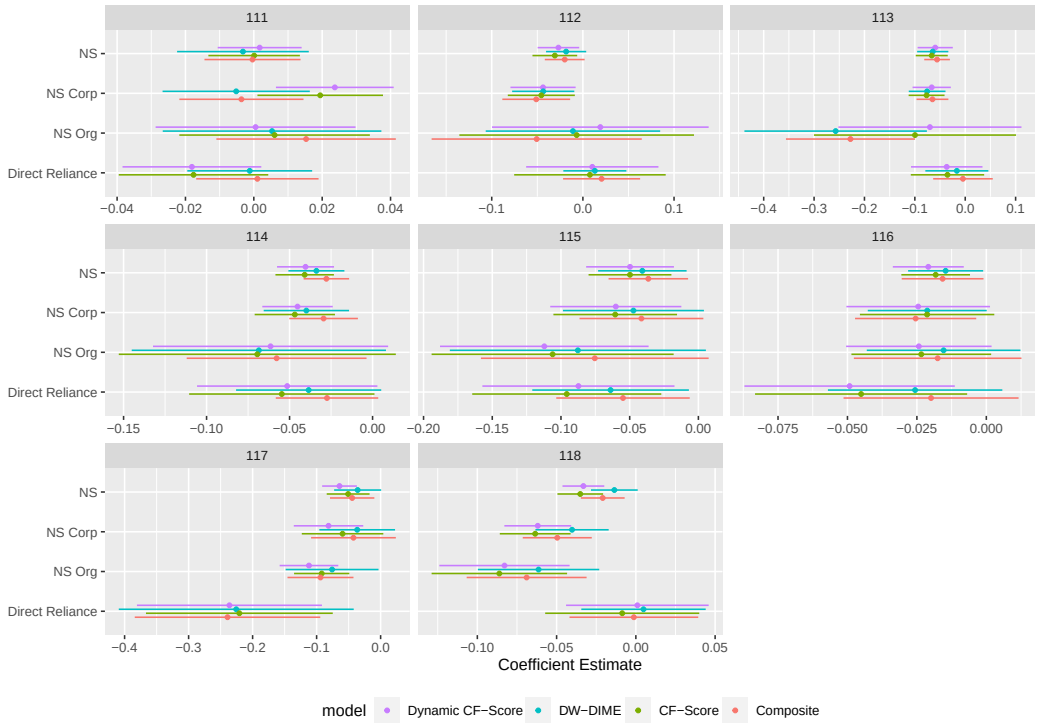


Figure SI.19: Coefficients Largely Unchanged with Different Ideology Measures. Each facet contains the regression estimates for a given Congress. `model` denotes which ideological metric was used to measure ideological distance to party leaders in the regression. Dynamic CF-Scores are lagged, while other 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.

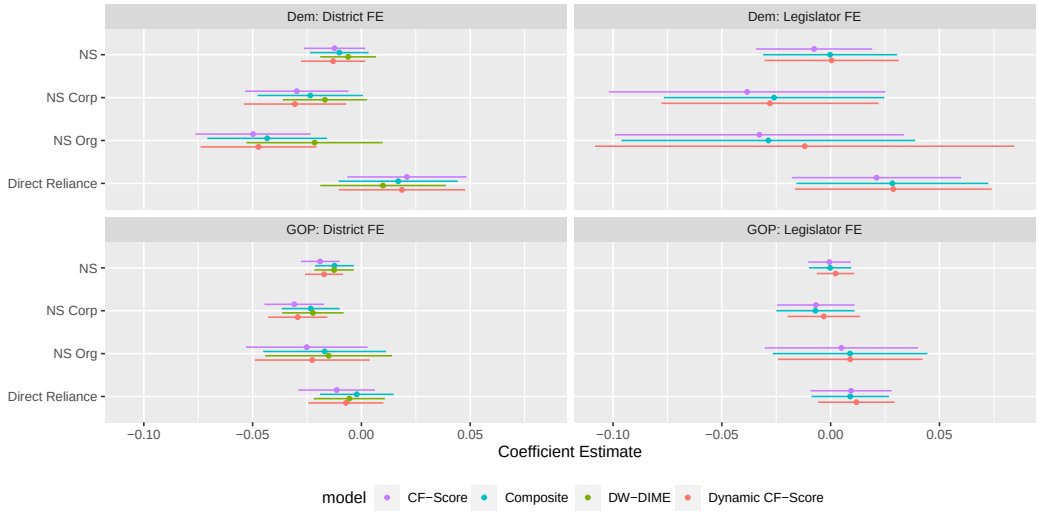


Figure SI.20: Within-Legislator and Within-District Regression Results Do Not Change with Different Ideology Measures. Each facet contains the regressions for a given party and level of fixed effect. `model` denotes which ideological metric was used to measure ideological distance to party leaders in 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. Models with DW-DIME and legislator fixed effects do not run, because in both parties, there is insufficient variation in the median party leader's DW-DIME score, causing serious collinearity between ideological distance to party leaders and the legislator fixed effects.

Among Democrats, this argument is unfounded, as adding legislator fixed effects barely shifts the estimated relationship between corporate-reliance and defection. Instead, it merely inflates the standard error by absorbing degrees of freedom without explaining additional variation in defections.

Furthermore, smaller and noisier within-legislator coefficients simply reflect the minimal within-legislator variation in corporate-reliance. The total within-district variance is 137% and 59% larger than the total within-legislator variance among Democrats and Republicans, respectively.[38] This is in part because only 85 out of 424 Democrats and 53 out of 484 Republicans are observed throughout their entire panel, which mechanically limits variation. But it is also an important feature of legislators' donor networks. Even obstructionist caucuses, whose members should drive associations between financial reliance and defection as they have the largest positive incentive to challenge leaders, have grown independent via legislator *turnover*, not *churn*. Figure SI.21 shows that almost every freshman cohort is less financially reliant than existing members, but within each cohort, there are minimal changes in financial reliance over time.

Absent significant changes in financial reliance, my theory predicts minimal changes in defections. Thus, the null within-legislator coefficients do not contradict my theory but rather reflect the stickiness of legislator's donor networks.

Indeed, if we subset to HFC members that experienced significant changes in corporate-reliance

[38] 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.

across the GOP-controlled Congresses after the HFC's formation (114th, 115th, and 118th), we typically find changes in defections consistent with my 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 corporate-reliance relative to the GOP congressional average.[39] Similarly, four of the six members that defected against Boehner, but not McCarthy, saw over 10 percentage point increases in corporate-reliance relative to the GOP congressional average.

Most importantly, even granting such predispositions to defect, financial reliance still conditions when they can be acted upon. Under the basic assumption that legislators care about fundraising, then even "crazy" types must weigh the potential financial punishments before defecting. Resource independence therefore provides a structural explanation and quantitative measure of what enables "crazy" types to defect, beyond simply ex-post describing them as such.

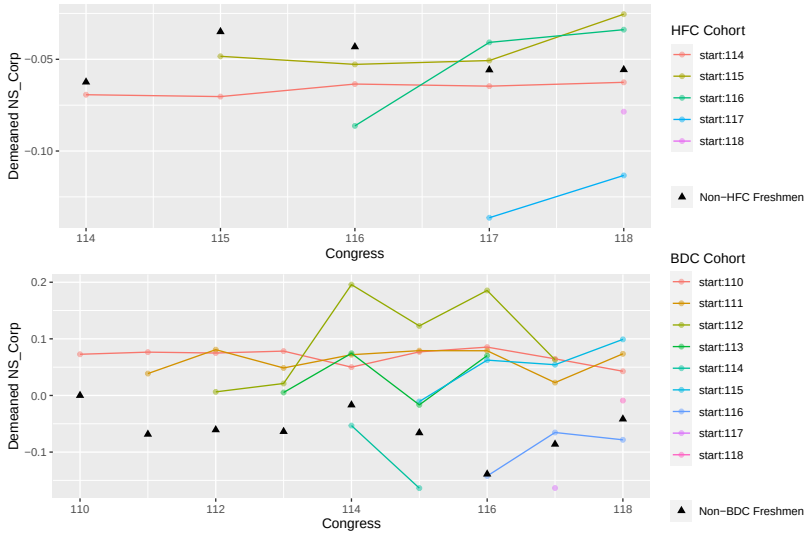


Figure SI.21: Legislator Turnover Drives Changes in Corporate-Reliance Within Obstructionist Caucuses. Circles: average difference between caucus-cohort members' and other party members' corporate-reliance in that Congress. Triangles: average difference between non-caucus freshmen and other non-caucus party members. 1) Almost every freshmen cohort enters with lower corporate-reliance than existing caucus members, but within-cohort changes are minimal. 2) HFC freshmen increasingly enter below typical GOP freshmen. BDC freshmen, usually above typical Democratic freshmen, now match them.

# K The Effects of Defection

This section provides causal diagnostics and further details on the propensity-score estimation for the matched DiD design in Section 5.3, which tests the effect of speaker election defections on six measures of fundraising from the party network.

[39] I report demeaned values of corporate-reliance ($NS\_Corp$) with respect to the average GOP value in that Congress to account for the party-level downward corporate-reliance trend. For example, one of the three members' (Rep. Andy Harris) raw corporate-reliance went from 0.27 to 0.09 from the 114th to 118th Congress, but after demeaning, this is actually a slight increase in relative corporate-reliance.

**Propensity Score Model** Prior to estimating propensities, matching, and estimating cohort-specific ATTs, for the 118th Congress defection analysis, legislators entering in the 115th Congress or earlier are pooled into a single "115th cohort" with their outcomes averaged within legislator across the 110th–115th Congresses before taking logs. This condenses cohorts with individually few entrants.

The propensity-score model borrows information across cohorts to stabilize propensities while also respecting the unique panel structure by allowing the covariate-outcome relationships to vary by cohort. For each pre-treatment Congress $t$, it interacts an indicator for being observed in $t$ with the log outcome at $t$, including the lower-order observed-in indicators but omitting the lower-order outcome terms. Formally, we estimate:

$$\Pr(D_i = 1 \mid X_i) = \Lambda\Big(\alpha + \beta_1 I_{i,s-1} + \beta_2 V_{i,s-1} + \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}^{pre}} \gamma_t \, \mathbf{1}\{i \text{ obs. in } t\} \log(Y_{it} + 1) + \delta_1 L_i \log(Y^{chal}_{i,s-2} + 1) + \delta_2 F_i \log(Y^{chal}_{i,s-1} + 1)\Big)$$

where $D_i$ indicates defection, $\Lambda$ is the logistic function, $I_{i,s-1}$ and $V_{i,s-1}$ are ideology (dynamic CF score) and general election vote share in the immediate pre-period, $\mathcal{T}^{pre}$ is the set of pre-treatment Congresses, $Y_{it}$ is the relevant pre-treatment fundraising outcome for legislator $i$ in Congress $t$, $s$ denotes the Congress of defection (so $s-1$ is the immediate pre-period), $L_i = 1$ if $i$ entered in $s-1$ (the latest-arriving non-freshman cohort), $F_i = 1$ if $i$ is a freshman (entered in $s$), and $Y^{chal}_{i,\cdot}$ is the relevant outcome as a challenger. The lower-order $\mathbf{1}\{i \text{ obs. in } t\}$, $L_i$, and $F_i$ indicators are included but the lower-order $\log(Y_{it}+1)$ terms are omitted, so the model respects the cohort-entrant structure: outcome values only enter the likelihood for units actually observed in that Congress. This lets the relationship between prior fundraising and defection differ by panel span and therefore encourages matches among legislators with the same pre-treatment history.

**Bootstrap Confidence Intervals** The relevant source of uncertainty in $\hat{\tau}$ is the imputation of the counterfactual $Y_i(0)$ via matching—i.e., what defectors would have raised absent defection. The defector set itself is treated as fixed: we observe the full population of Republican legislators (no sampling uncertainty), and the ATT conditions on those who actually defected (no interest in alternative treatment assignments). Each defector's observed $Y_i(1)$ is likewise fixed in the Neyman potential outcomes framework. Resampling the control pool directly targets the remaining uncertainty—which controls are selected and how well they approximate $Y_i(0)$.

**Causal Diagnostics** Figures SI.22 and SI.23 plot pre-treatment trajectories for treated and matched-control units within each entry cohort, and Figures SI.24 and SI.25 formally test parallel trends with within-cohort event studies. Samples are quite small within each cohort, so we should put more stock in the visual trends and the magnitudes of the coefficients than statistical significance.

Across both defection instances, treated and control units generally track one another in the pre-treatment period, and this is reflected in the near-zero pretreatment coefficients in the within-cohort event studies.

For defectors who enter in the Congress of defection itself (the freshman cohort), we lack multiple pre-treatment periods to assess parallel trends. So here covariate balance on ideology and district partisanship becomes more important. Table SI.4 reports standardized mean differences (SMDs): the difference between treated and control means divided by a pooled standard deviation $\sqrt{(\sigma_T^2 + \sigma_C^2)/2}$, where $\sigma_T$ and $\sigma_C$ are estimated using all treated and control units across cohorts for stability. Every ideology SMD is below the conventional $|0.25|$ threshold except Boehner's

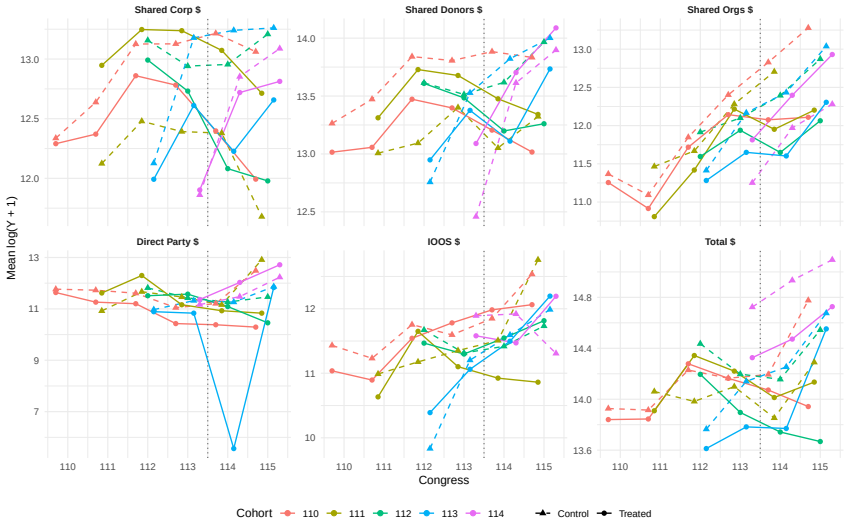


Figure SI.22: Pre-treatment Trajectory Levels: 114th Congress Defection (Boehner). Within-cohort mean log outcome for matched defectors vs. non-defectors across all available pre-treatment periods.

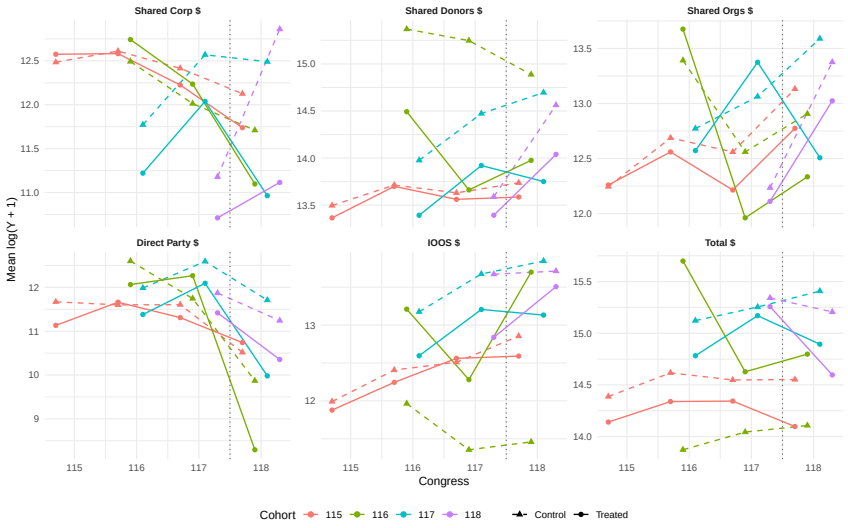


Figure SI.23: Pre-treatment Trajectory Levels: 118th Congress Defection (McCarthy).

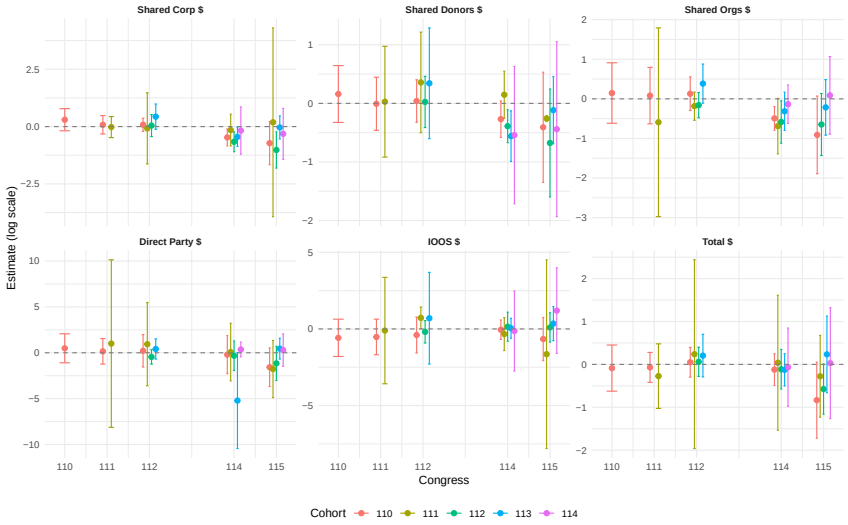


Figure SI.24: Within-Cohort Event Study Coefficients: 114th Congress Defection (Boehner). Pre-treatment coefficients statistically indistinguishable from zero support the parallel trends assumption.

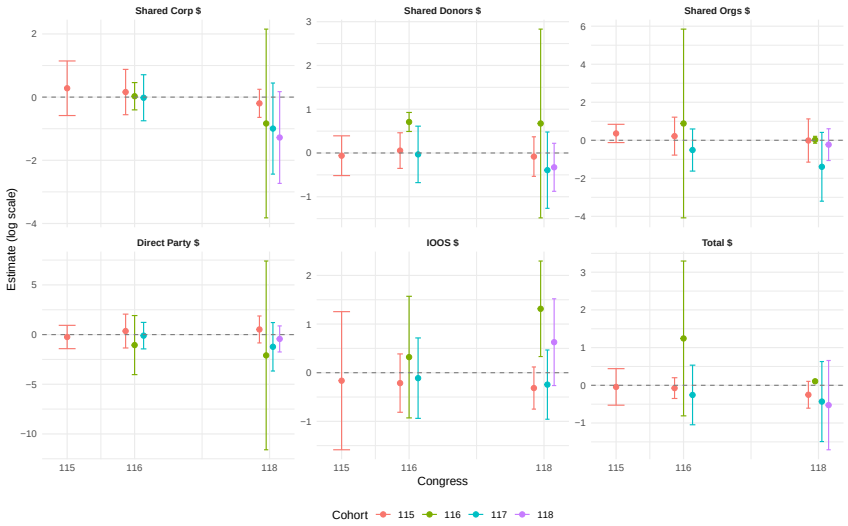


Figure SI.25: Within-Cohort Event Study Coefficients: 118th Congress Defection (McCarthy).

corporate-donor design (SMD = −0.39), but district vote share is less balanced, particularly for Boehner's freshmen. The aggregate ATTs, however, are remain qualitatively similar when we remove the freshman cohort entirely (Table SI.5), so this imbalance does not drive our estimates nor affects conclusions in the main text.

Table SI.4: Covariate Balance for Freshman Cohorts

| | | 114th Cohort (Boehner) | | | 118th Cohort (McCarthy) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Outcome | T mean | C mean | SMD | T mean | C mean | SMD |
| Ideology | Corp | 1.351 | 1.434 | −0.39 | 1.360 | 1.360 | +0.00 |
| | Shared | 1.351 | 1.329 | +0.09 | 1.408 | 1.403 | +0.04 |
| | Noncorp | 1.351 | 1.367 | −0.07 | 1.412 | 1.440 | −0.19 |
| | Direct | 1.351 | 1.397 | −0.24 | 1.405 | 1.403 | +0.02 |
| | IOOS | 1.351 | 1.342 | +0.04 | 1.479 | 1.483 | −0.03 |
| | Total | 1.351 | 1.345 | +0.03 | 1.479 | 1.456 | +0.20 |
| DVS | Corp | 67.7 | 60.4 | +0.88 | 60.5 | 56.6 | +0.53 |
| | Shared | 67.7 | 59.8 | +0.96 | 55.8 | 56.3 | −0.07 |
| | Noncorp | 67.7 | 64.9 | +0.33 | 55.8 | 58.6 | −0.49 |
| | Direct | 67.7 | 58.7 | +1.05 | 59.1 | 57.9 | +0.18 |
| | IOOS | 67.7 | 55.0 | +1.47 | 58.8 | 60.7 | −0.29 |
| | Total | 67.7 | 52.9 | +1.85 | 58.8 | 57.7 | +0.16 |

*Note:* SMDs use standard deviations pooled across all cohorts in the immediate pre-treatment period for stability, as within-cohort SDs are unreliable with 3–5 treated units. T means vary slightly across outcomes for 118th Cohort, because outlier removal is slightly different for different outcomes (the same treated unit may be an outlier on one financial outcome but not the other).

Table SI.5: Aggregate ATTs With and Without the Freshman Cohort

| | Shared Corp | Shared Donors | Shared Orgs | Direct Party $ | IOOS | Total $ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *114th Congress (Boehner), including 114th cohort* | | | | | | |
| ATT (log) | −0.464 | −0.363 | −0.447 | −1.394 | +0.014 | −0.104 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 20 | 17 | 19 | 20 | 23 | 22 |
| *114th Congress (Boehner), excluding 114th cohort* | | | | | | |
| ATT (log) | −0.515 | −0.324 | −0.506 | −1.702 | +0.037 | −0.110 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 17 | 14 | 16 | 17 | 20 | 19 |
| *118th Congress (McCarthy), including 118th cohort* | | | | | | |
| ATT (log) | −0.837 | −0.193 | −0.350 | −0.490 | +0.008 | −0.347 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 14 | 16 | 10 | 16 | 18 | 17 |
| *118th Congress (McCarthy), excluding 118th cohort* | | | | | | |
| ATT (log) | −0.660 | −0.148 | −0.401 | −0.514 | −0.169 | −0.293 |
| $n_{\text{treated}}$ | 10 | 12 | 7 | 11 | 14 | 13 |

*Note:* Same estimation procedure as main-text Tables 5 and 6, reported here with and without the freshman cohort (114th and 118th Congress entrants, respectively). Weights are recomputed over remaining cohorts in the "excluding" rows.

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