

“We’re Ungovernable”: The Historical Origins of Republican Disunity in the U.S. House of Representatives

Matthew N. Green

The Catholic University of America

June 3, 2024

Abstract

House Republicans in the 118th Congress (2023-25) have repeatedly struggled to choose a Speaker, manage the legislative agenda, and pass substantive legislation. While the party’s small size, coupled with internal divisions, are the most immediate explanations, their struggles have deeper historical roots as well. Drawing from both research by other scholars and newly gathered data, I identify factors within and outside Congress that, over time, gradually eroded the House GOP’s ability to operate as an organizational, procedural, and policy cartel.

Prepared for presentation at the National Capital Area Political Science Association American Politics Workshop. For their ideas, suggestions, and comments, I thank Evelyn Fortier, Matthew Glassman, Joshua Huder, David Karol, Kristen Morrow, Wendy Schiller, Don Wolfensberger, participants at the 2024 Congress and History Conference, and the students in my Spring 2024 Graduate Introduction to Congress course at Catholic University. Special thanks to Lauren Blessing for inviting me to contribute an essay to Georgetown’s Government Affairs Institute newsletter, which became the basis for this article.

I am not a member of any organized political party. I'm a Democrat.

-- Will Rogers

Those who follow the current Congress would be forgiven for thinking that humorist Will Rogers was referring to the wrong party. Since the opening day of the House of Representatives in January 2023, the chamber's narrow GOP majority has labored to fulfil the basic requirements of a governing party in the House, such as selecting and keeping a Speaker, managing the legislative agenda, and approving substantive bills and amendments. Republican lawmakers have derided their own party as “ungovernable,” a “clown show,” and worse.¹ Lamented one, “I don't think the Lord Jesus himself could manage this group” (Sotomayor and Caldwell 2023). By the end of 2023, multiple news outlets pointed out that Congress had amassed a remarkably meager legislative record, and polls showed that Americans thought House Republicans were worse at passing legislation than Democrats (Karni 2023, Lesniewski and Kelly 2024, Monmouth University 2024).²

The most immediate reasons for House Republicans' chronic governing problems have been its small size and deep internal divisions, which increase the likelihood of dissent and grant just a few potential dissenters considerable leverage on highly partisan votes. Yet some of the same conditions were present in other, equally partisan congresses that were more productive and less troubled. For example, in the previous Congress, House Democrats had a tiny majority with a sizeable progressive faction, yet they had no trouble choosing Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) as Speaker and passing significant legislation (Huder 2023).³ This suggests that party size and party unity are, at best, necessary but not sufficient explanations for the challenges of the current (118th) House.

I argue that the origins of today's paralysis in the House are broader and more historical. The norms and incentives that allowed both parties – but particularly the Republican Conference

¹ See for example Ferris, Beavers, and Carney 2023, Ferris, Emma, Carney, and Adragna 2023, Kapur and Wong 2023, Zanona, Grayer, and Raju 2024, and Raju 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, and 2023d.

² For more detailed reviews of the unusually severe and frequent problems that Republicans had in the 118th Congress, see Binder 2023 and Glassman 2024a.

³ One important difference was that, in the previous Congress, Democrats had revised the chamber's rules governing the privileged resolution allowing for the removal of a Speaker, so that the resolution was only privileged if offered “by direction of a party caucus or conference” (Rule IX(3)). However, they still followed the standard process for selecting a Speaker, which requires the winner to receive an absolute majority of votes cast on the chamber floor -- a process that was effectively exploited by Republican party dissidents to delay the selection of speakers in the 118th Congress, but not by Democratic dissidents in the 117th Congress.

– to exercise so-called “cartel” authority over leadership selection, the floor agenda, and the passage of bills and amendments began to weaken in the 1990s and early 2000s. I identify a half-dozen major political developments over the past half-century that were most readily responsible.⁴ Interestingly, some of the same developments have also contributed to greater ideological distance between the parties and more partisan voting, the main facet of party polarization (e.g. Campbell 2016, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006, 3, Theriault 2008). It is this combination of greater interparty distance and declining intraparty unity, which some consider a second facet of polarization (e.g. Brady and Han 2006, 121; Lee 2016; Rohde 1991), that seems to be especially perilous for a governing party (Drutman 2023). Unfortunately, given the entrenched and durable nature of these developments, it will likely be difficult for the Conference to reassert itself as a strong governing party in the House, even with a larger majority, without more systemic changes to the broader political environment.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I briefly review evidence for the House Republican Party’s weakened cartel authority in the 118th Congress (through early 2024). After discussing the key ingredients necessary for a party to exercise authority in Congress, I use regression analysis to determine what factors made it more likely for individual Republican lawmakers to rebel on key votes that upheld the authority of their party. In the remainder of the paper, I discuss the historical forces that brought House Republicans to this point.

A couple of caveats are in order before proceeding. First, the historical origins of the GOP’s weakening cartel power are complex and interconnected, and I do not pretend to identify every possible cause.⁵ Rather, I focus on causal variables that I deem intermediate (i.e. not so distant in time that they lose their relevance) and both necessary and sufficient to explain that decline (Gaddis 2002, 94-102), and I attempt to tease out their independent effects.⁶ Second, my

⁴ Others have identified some of the same forces driving the GOP’s internal divisions. See e.g. Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, 299; Mason 2023; Nicholas and Wagenhoffer 2023; Smith 2023; Victor 2023; and Walter 2023.

⁵ Other possible explanations that are not examined here include: the role of individual entrepreneurs in undermining party authority (Draper 2022); pressure from state and local party organizations and activists (Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, and Cooperman 2010; Masket 2009; Miller and Schofield 2008; Skocpol and Williamson 2010, 182; Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz 1994); the rise of social media as a platform for individuals to encourage intraparty dissent; pressure from ideological interest groups like Americans for Tax Reform and Club for Growth (e.g. Balz and Brownstein 1996; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenerger, and Stokes 2018; Sinclair 2006, ch. 2; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 159, 173-174, ch. 3); and a tradition among House Republicans of deposing their leaders (Green and Harris 2019).

⁶ See also Skowronek and Orren 2004. Gaddis (following the guidance of Marc Bloch) also argues that any historical explanation should focus on causes that could have plausibly been avoided (i.e. counterfactuals).

argument should not be taken to imply that the weakened authority of the current House GOP was inevitable. As with other historical developments, contingency and the choices of individuals played an important role in determining outcomes. I claim only that certain longer term, historical factors increased the likelihood that the House Republican Party would face the struggles that it has.

The Problem: A Weakened Party Cartel

To function effectively, a majority party in Congress must exercise influence over three components of congressional decision-making: the rules and top leadership of the chamber (*organizational*), the legislative agenda (*procedural*), and the passage of desired bills and amendments (*policy*).⁷ When parties have a monopoly of influence, they constitute a “cartel” (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2006; Jenkins & Stewart 2013; see also Jones 1968 and Glassman and Silver 2023). There is some debate over how much cartel power congressional parties exercise in practice and whether procedural cartels in particular exercise positive as well as negative power (e.g. Schickler and Rich 1997, Smith 2007, 210-211). Nonetheless, it is a reasonable assumption that a, if not the, central objective of congressional parties, particularly in the House of Representatives, is to solve collective action problems by maximizing their influence over leader selection, chamber rules, the agenda, and policy outcomes (Aldrich 1995, 23-24).⁸

Throughout the 118th Congress, the House Republican Party repeatedly failed to meet this objective. Take first the selection of chamber leadership. Shortly after the 2022 elections, a motley crew of Republican rebels refused to back their party’s nominee for Speaker, Kevin McCarthy (CA). McCarthy was forced to make a series of deals with Republican malcontents,

⁷ Party influence over a fourth component of congressional decision-making, the nomination and election of desired candidates (*electoral*), is important but traditionally weaker than the other three (Green and Bee 2017). Though not the focus of this paper, there is evidence that the GOP has lost its ability to unify around electable candidates and support incumbents in primaries, as party leaders have shown little ability to prevent the Freedom Caucus and individual entrepreneurs from backing their own candidates (Fernandez and Fineout 2023, Gonzalez 2024, Raju and Zanona 2024). Democrats have also struggled, albeit with more success, to prevent liberal dissident members and outside groups from “playing in primaries” (Edmondson 2019a).

⁸ Jeffrey Jenkins and Charles Stewart argue that the establishment of the organizational cartel in the late 19th and early 20th century was a precondition for the extension of party power over other spheres of congressional decision-making (Jenkins and Stewart 2013, 242, 272). Lawmakers themselves recognize the central importance of these kinds of authority. “You can’t wield the power of the majority if you can’t pass procedural votes,” said one Republican after a rule was defeated on the floor (Beitsch and Schnell 2024).

including two that weakened the party’s organizational and procedural authority: restoring an older rule that allowed any one lawmaker to offer a privileged resolution declaring the speakership vacant, and appointing three GOP dissenters to the Rules Committee.⁹ In the process, it took fifteen ballots – the most cast in a Speaker election since the eve of the Civil War – before McCarthy was finally selected (Glassman 2023a).

Nine months later, in response to McCarthy’s decision to avoid a government shutdown by bringing to the floor a “clean” short-term spending bill – and passing it with the help of Democrats¹⁰ – Congressman Matt Gaetz (R-FL) used the restored rule to force a floor vote on whether to allow McCarthy to stay as Speaker. He and seven other Republicans joined a unanimous Democratic Party to oust McCarthy, the first time in history that a Speaker had been removed. The GOP Conference then spent three weeks trying and failing to coalesce around a replacement, paralyzing the House and generating a slew of negative headlines, before finally electing Conference Vice Chair Mike Johnson of Louisiana as Speaker (see Table 1).¹¹ Six months later, another Republican iconoclast, Marjorie Taylor-Greene (R-GA), threatened to remove Johnson using the same procedure, leading to speculation that he might face the same fate as McCarthy.

<Table 1 About Here>

House Republican leaders were also repeatedly rebuked in their efforts to exercise positive agenda control. Ordinarily, the majority party does so by directing the Rules Committee to craft special rules that govern the consideration of legislation that comes to the floor and ensuring they have majority support on the floor. By April 2024, the House had rejected seven such rules,¹² the most since the 93rd Congress (1973-75) and the first time in over a decade that

⁹ Emily Baer notes that most other demands by dissidents in early 2023 were not adopted (Baer 2023).

¹⁰ The bill (H.R. 5860) passed on September 30 by a vote of 335-91 (126-90 R, 209-1 D). It followed previous failed attempts to pass individual appropriations bills and a continuing resolution with conservative policy riders (Kapur, Vitali, Haake, Nobles, Wong and Kaplan 2023).

¹¹ For a useful summary of the deadlock over choosing a Speaker after McCarthy’s removal, see Glassman and Silver 2023. For examples of critical headlines, see Beavers, Carney, and Farris 2023, and Brooks and Schnell 2023a and 2023b. Incumbent Republicans also openly attacked each other or the party during the long vacancy in the speakership, further risking damage to the party brand; see e.g. Ferris, Emma, Carney, and Adragna 2023 and Raju 2023a.

¹² To be fair, Republicans were often able to resurrect the underlying bills (sometimes after revising them), and one could argue that these defeated rules simply represented normal levels of intraparty conflict that usually stay behind the scenes. Nonetheless, these failures endangered the party’s reputation for competence and authority (Green and Deatherage 2018).

any floor rule had been defeated on the floor (see Table 2) (Diaz and Tully-McManus 2024).¹³ The loss of floor rules was a particular sore spot for Republicans. Speaker McCarthy called dissenters on one rule vote that failed “individuals that just want to burn the whole place down,” while another Republican went on X (Twitter) after a different rule was rejected and wrote that his colleagues who killed it were “a bunch of self-righteous, windbag Jack Wagon-shills” (Greve 2023, Van Orden 2024).

<Table 2 About Here>

Finally, the House GOP had notable difficulties approving bills and amendments that were supported by a majority of the party. These “disappointment” votes (Jenkins and Monroe 2016) included an Agriculture appropriations bill, a short-term spending bill that would have averted a government shutdown in late September 2023, and surprise back-to-back failures in February 2024 of military aid to Israel and articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas (Alemany, Sotomayor, Caldwell, and Goodwin 2024, Edmondson 2024, Edmondson, Guo, and Husel 2023, Schnell and Folley 2023).¹⁴ Republican failures to pass measures on the floor went beyond a few bills, however. The rate of disappointment votes in a given Congress is usually very low; between 1955 and 2022, the average percent of majoritarian roll call votes in the House that were disappointments was less than 5%, and the highest rate was 8.9% (in the 92nd Congress (1971-73)). In contrast, by the end of February 2024, over a *quarter* of recorded votes in the 118th House (26.3%) were disappointment votes, most of them on amendments offered by conservative lawmakers.¹⁵

Other measures did pass with the votes of majority of the GOP but nonetheless needed Democratic votes to do so. They included a debt limit increase in May 2023 (as well as the rule for considering the increase; see prior footnote) and a “clean” continuing budget resolution to keep the government open in late September, passed after the aforementioned short-term

¹³ An eighth rule nearly failed after moderate Republicans initially voted against it (Reilly 2024). In addition, two rules required the last-minute votes of the minority party to pass: one allowing consideration of a debt limit increase in May 2023 (Broadwater 2023), and another bringing a foreign aid bill to the floor in April 2024. Though once not uncommon, such reliance on the minority party to pass rules became fairly rare starting in the early 2000s (Smith 2024).

¹⁴ Other major bills were pulled from the floor before they could be defeated (e.g. Ferris, Beavers, and Carney 2023; Folley 2023).

¹⁵ For more on the amendment strategies and opportunities of Republican conservatives, see Baer 2023 and Den Hartog and Nokken 2018. Measures supported by the majority party in the 118th Congress were also more likely than usual to lose by lopsided margins (i.e. at least 40 votes) (Bump 2023).

spending measure failed (Ferris and Carney 2023, Krawzak 2023).¹⁶ As Republican leaders found it harder to count on the loyalty of the three mavericks appointed to the Rules Committee by McCarthy, they increasingly resorted to bringing major bills to the floor via the suspension calendar, a process which circumvented the committee but required measures to receive a two-thirds vote to pass, thus depending on votes from Democrats (Nichols and Brufke 2024).

Majority party Republicans were not completely without influence, nor were they always divided. The party passed the chamber's rules unanimously, albeit after negotiations between McCarthy and party dissenters, and not one Republican voted for Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries (NY) in any of the floor votes for Speaker. The GOP voted unanimously in April 2023 to pass a resolution undoing police reforms adopted in the District of Columbia, which eventually became law, and it passed a major border security bill in May 2023 with no help from Democrats (Brooks 2023). It also had success in approving symbolic partisan measures, including censures of three Democratic lawmakers and, on a second go-round, the impeachment articles against Secretary Mayorkas. Democrats, meanwhile, exercised typically low levels of positive influence over the agenda or policymaking: no rules were adopted over the objection of a majority of the GOP, and (as of February 2024) the percent of measures that were approved despite the opposition of a majority of the majority party (the so-called "roll" rate) was just 1.3%.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the degree to which the GOP was unable to exercise the same level of influence over the chamber as prior governing parties have was highly unusual. It kept the party from accomplishing much of substance and contributed to an unusually unproductive Congress: by the end of 2023, just 20 laws had been enacted, the fewest in decades (Solender 2023). It also damaged the party brand, cultivating an image of the Conference as incompetent and rife with

¹⁶ Such "assist" votes were relatively uncommon in the 118th Congress, making up just 3.5% of all majoritarian votes (through February 2024). But they were a sore spot for party dissidents, and it was passage of the "clean" funding bill that became the pretext for Gaetz's move to oust McCarthy.

¹⁷ This includes both majoritarian and super-majoritarian votes (e.g. veto overrides and measures on the suspension calendar) through early April (thus excluding the April 20, 2024 vote on a foreign aid bill, which passed 310-122 with over half of Republicans voting against it). Rolls are violations of what is colloquially known as the "Hastert Rule," a norm (not a rule) that the governing party should not bring anything to the floor opposed by a majority of its own members (Sinclair 2006, 182). Majority parties often go out of their way to avoid violating it: for example, on January 18, 2024, just before the vote closed on a continuing resolution bill, one Republican switched from "nay" to "yea" so that a majority of the party would be on the record in favor of the measure (C-SPAN 2024). A single roll is not itself fatal for a Speaker, but when violations of the Hastert Rule happen repeatedly, they may threaten their organizational authority (Glassman 2023b). Notably, Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) introduced a resolution to vacate the Speakership against Johnson as the House was narrowly passing a funding bill on March 22 to keep the government open with a majority of Republicans opposed (101-112) (Jimison and Edmondson 2024).

infighting. And it may explain the large number of Republicans who retired from the House, including the nearly half-dozen who apparently found the chamber so unappealing that they left before their terms were over, further shrinking their party's majority (Kane 2024).

The Limited Explanatory Power of Party Size and Homogeneity

Why has it been so difficult for the GOP to sustain majorities in support of speaker nominees, floor rules, and partisan legislation? One common explanation has been the unique circumstances of this Congress: namely, the internal ideological divisions and small size of the Republican Conference. The former has meant that GOP leaders have less warrant to exercise centralized power and more Republican lawmakers have divergent policy goals (Aldrich and Rohde 2001, Rohde 1991). The latter has made it easier for dissenters to overcome collective action problems (Olson 1965) and has given a smaller number of lawmakers disproportionate leverage over party leaders.¹⁸

There is certainly evidence that party size and homogeneity have mattered. Take first party size, an important if often neglected factor determining party influence (Smith 2007). After the 2022 election, Republicans had won 222 House seats, making the GOP the 4th smallest majority since the House reached its current size in 1913.¹⁹ The Conference's shrunken majority has created some significant challenges. Not only have a large number of floor votes been decided by narrow margins (see Figure 1), but the party's small size gave Kevin McCarthy little room for maneuver in his race for Speaker in January 2023, made it impossible for nominated speaker candidates after McCarthy's removal to survive more than a tiny number of defectors, and constrained the ability to both McCarthy and his successor Mike Johnson to build floor majorities for partisan rules, bills, amendments, and motions.

<Figure 1 About Here>

¹⁸ Binder (1997) also finds that the combined effect of party size and party unity helps determine whether rules will be adopted that benefit the majority or the minority party. Schickler and Rich (1997) note that parties are less able to discipline defectors on key procedural votes when it is small and divided, but they argue that under those conditions the defectors are likely to join the minority party to form a "permanent majority" (1341). Such has not been the case so far in the 118th Congress.

¹⁹ Other majorities that were the same size or smaller include the 65th (1917-19; 215R-214D, plus 6 third-party members), 72nd (1931-33; initially 218R-216D, plus one Farmer-Labor, before the deaths of Republican members gave Democrats the majority), 83rd (1953-55, 221R-213D, plus one independent), 107th (2001-3, 221R-212D, plus two independents who each caucused with one of the two main parties), and the 117th Congress (2021-23, 222D-212R).

Conventional metrics of ideological unity support the claim that the GOP is more internally divided. Figures 2 and 3 show the medians and standard deviations by party of first dimension NOMINATE scores, which estimate legislator preferences on a left-right scale using aggregate voting behavior, from the 92nd Congress (1971-72) through the first half of the 118th Congress (January 2023-January 2024). One sees that the two parties in the House are more distant in the 118th Congress than they have been in decades, in particular because of the strong rightward movement of the Republican Conference, a.k.a. “asymmetric polarization” (Mann and Ornstein 2012). However, while the Democratic Party has become more unified over time, the GOP’s unity has been relatively flat since 1997, and has even declined slightly since 2021 (see also Drutman 2023).

<Figures 2 and 3 About Here>

But party size and aggregate ideological unity can only explain so much. The GOP-led 107th House (2001-3), for example, also had a small (221 seat) majority and nearly the same degree of NOMINATE-measured ideological unity, yet the party had nowhere near the same difficulties exercising influence that House Republicans have had in the 118th. Nor is it clear why *ideological* differences within the majority party, which are nothing new to Congress, would motivate lawmakers to go to such extremes as to remove a speaker or repeatedly reject floor rules.

Consider also that threats to the party cartel began to emerge years before the recent increase in the GOP’s heterogeneity. For example, defections in Speaker selection started appearing among both Democrats and Republicans starting in the mid-1990s (see Figure 4). One may argue that these votes were exercises in position-taking, not real threats to the party’s organizational authority, since in no case did they result in the failure of the governing party to anoint their nominee as Speaker (Jenkins and Stewart 2013, 305).²⁰ Nonetheless, they

²⁰ Another argument against considering these defections as evidence of weakening party authority is that the dissenters on votes for Speaker refused to vote for a candidate from the opposite party, and thus, like the last multi-round ballot for Speaker in 1923, the dissensions happened “within the confines of the organizational cartel” (Jenkins and Stewart 2013, 305). One counterargument is that the party loyalty of dissenters nonetheless prevented, or at least put at serious risk, the selection of the party’s nominee for Speaker. Steve Smith writes that only a small number of Republicans have dissented and that the “norms underpinning cartel-like behavior remain well established among the vast majority of Republicans” (Smith 2023). However, by the end of the first session of the 118th Congress, 57 Republicans – over a quarter of the House GOP – had refused at least once to vote for their party’s nominee for Speaker on the floor (or, in the case of nominee Tom Emmer (MN), threatened to do so in a subsequent Conference vote). This degree of disregard for the norm of party loyalty on Speaker votes has not been seen in the House since the 19th century.

represented a remarkable shift in behavior when compared to the previous half-century, when such defections were virtually unheard of. That they happened with increasing regularity meant that what was once considered aberrant behavior was becoming a norm, putting greater pressure on party leaders to keep their troops in line on the selection for Speaker and, arguably, setting the stage for the far more serious and destabilizing speaker votes of 2023.

<Figure 4 About Here>

If anything, these data understate the degree to which members of the governing party were willing to violate the organizational cartel well before the 118th Congress. In 1997, for example, nearly a dozen Republicans entered into serious discussions with GOP leaders about using the privileged resolution to vacate the chair and remove then-Speaker Newt Gingrich, but the idea was squelched when word of the coup attempt leaked. And after the 2018 elections, 27 Democrats announced that they would vote against Pelosi for speaker on the floor, more than enough to deny her the post; only after days of intense negotiations did Pelosi whittle the number down enough to get elected (Green and Crouch 2022, Green and Harris 2020).²¹

In short, while the small size of the GOP may have made it easier for rebels to successfully challenge their party's authority, and the Republican Party is ideologically less unified than in the past, these factors are, at best, necessary but not sufficient to explain the decay of the party's cartel authority.

Incentives, Leaders, and Norms

What, then, accounts for House Republicans' willingness to defy their party's cartel authority? Before looking at specific explanations, it is worth reviewing three elements of congressional politics that determine the ability and likelihood of a political party to establish and maintain such authority: *incentives*, *leadership*, and *norms*.

A variety of *incentives* encourage members of Congress to delegate authority to their party and obey that authority. The opportunity to get one's desired policy passed in the chamber (i.e. a policy incentive) motivates lawmakers with shared ideological preferences to support their leaders' ability to set the agenda and pass legislation (Aldrich and Rohde 2001, Rohde 1991).

²¹ Speakers before the mid-1990s sometimes faced the potential of intraparty rebellions, including requests that they retire or resign, but they never manifested themselves as a refusal to vote for the party's nominee for Speaker on the floor. For examples, see Farrell 2001, 557; Green and Crouch 2022, 29-30; O'Neill 1987, 284; and Pear 1992.

Electoral incentives may also encourage party loyalty if votes or campaign resources accrue to cartel loyalists, or if lawmakers believe that allowing the party to make collective decisions protects their party's reputation and "increases their prospects for winning desired outcomes" (Aldrich 1995, 24; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Smith 2007, 128-129). A desire for internal influence can also drive support for greater party authority, since lawmakers who have influence within the party, such as those occupying leadership positions, benefit from (and are thus motivated to maintain) that authority.

Party leaders play a critical role in incentivizing party loyalty, including loyalty to the party cartel (Carey 2007). The votes of potential defectors can be bought by leaders in exchange for powerful committee assignments, funding for district projects, campaign donations, or other desirable benefits. Conversely, incumbents who already possess such benefits may be credibly threatened with losing them should they defy their party, and carrying out those threats allows the party cartel to establish a vital "reputation for toughness" (Cox and McCubbins 1994).²² Leaders are especially helpful in negotiating agreements with intraparty factions whose members may be tempted to oppose the party's authority.²³ Such agreements can evolve into informal practices that cement the support of factions. For instance, through much of the 20th century, House Democrats kept their northern and southern wings satisfied by following the "Austin-Boston" practice of selecting a Speaker from one region while the party's second in command came from the other region, and by following a leadership ladder to ensure the Speakership would rotate between them (Champagne et al. 2009; Jenkins & Stewart 2013, 292-293).²⁴

Finally, party authority is maintained not only by incentives and the efforts of leaders but also by *norms*. Norms are an important factor in regularizing lawmaker behavior, helping them act collectively, and shaping their preferences and identities (Alexander 2021, 3-6; Azari and Smith 2012). If lawmakers internalize obedience to the party's cartel authority – supporting special rules even if they disagree with the underlying bill, or voting for their party's Speaker

²² Such was the case in the establishment of the organizational cartel in the House. See Jenkins and Stewart 2013, pp. 244, 248, 250-251, 255, 259, 263-264, 265, 267, and 269. Republicans in the 118th Congress acknowledged the importance of incentives. Tom McClintock (R-CA), for example, told a reporter after the seventh time a rule was defeated on the House floor that to prevent future defections, "you reestablish the principle and then levy sanctions against those who would violate that principle" (Sotomayor 2024). See also Tran 2024.

²³ Nineteenth century Republican Speakers often used this tactic to build organizational majorities (Jenkins and Stewart 2013).

²⁴ The party's strong southern wing was also given disproportionate agenda-setting and policy-making influence through committee chairmanships, which they earned by dint of their seniority (which, by party practice, determined chairmanships).

nominee on the floor regardless of their personal preference – leaders do not have to rebuild the cartel every two years and expend valuable benefits to maintain it. For this reason, party leaders often seek to develop and enforce such norms (Green and Bee 2017). While the propensity to accept and follow social norms will vary by individual lawmakers, norms of loyalty are more likely to be instilled in those who have spent significant time in legislative politics or who have served in legislative leadership positions in the past.

Until recently, such norms helped keep partisans united on organizational and procedural matters; as Eric Schickler and Andrew Rich noted in the 1990s, even lawmakers in small and divided parties were unlikely to rebel against their party on personnel matters because doing so would be an act of “open disrespect for public symbols of the party” (Schickler and Rich 1997, 1342). By the 118th Congress, however, it was clear that norms of party loyalty had lost much of their force. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) complained during the long battle to replace Kevin McCarthy as Speaker that certain lawmakers were “not going to abide by the rules of the Conference or *the norms of congressional behavior*” (C-SPAN 2023, emphasis added). Tom Cole (R-OK) blamed repeated defections on floor rules on a refusal to follow norms of behavior, and that defections in votes for Speaker demonstrated a failure of some to follow “the way the game is played” (Lizza 2024).²⁵

Testing Motivations for Party Disloyalty in the 118th Congress

Incentives and norms require the active participation and acceptance of both party leaders (who negotiate agreements with defectors and actively enforce norms of loyalty) and the rank-and-file (who must be willing to enter those agreements and follow those norms). Considering for a moment the latter question – why rank-and-file House Republicans would be willing to violate the cartel power of their party in the current Congress – I conducted a series of logit regression analyses testing several variables hypothesized in previous research on party power in Congress for why a lawmaker would dissent against their party’s organizational and procedural cartel authority. The underlying hypotheses include:

²⁵ Both Gallagher and Cole blamed the decay of norms on a long period of neglect of, or disrespect for, the institution of Congress, to the point that lawmakers no longer felt loyalty to it. For other examples of lawmakers noting norms or a lack of “team play” in the 118th Congress, see Ferris, Emma, Carney and Adragna 2023.

* *Ideology*. Internal party divisions are often ideological in nature; ideology has been shown to predict votes against the organizational carte; and conservatives in particular have been found to be less likely to support their congressional party (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012; Green and Harris 2019). I test this hypothesis with first dimension NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Some have also suggested that a second, orthogonal set of preferences has recently emerged that captures commitment to establishment politics (Voteview 2015). To estimate the effect of this distinct set of preferences, I also include second dimension NOMINATE scores.²⁶

* *Reelection*. Given the declining popularity of political parties in American politics, more vulnerable lawmakers may believe that dissenting from their parties will win them favor from voters (Carson, Koger, Lebo, and Young 2010). This possibility is tested by including measures of the percent of primary vote and (two-party) general election vote received in 2022.

* *Constituency preferences*. The preferences of constituents – in particular, their partisan preferences – may influence policy loyalty; prior studies have found that constituency partisanship can influence legislator vote choice on party-wide matters (Bailey, Mummolo, and Noel 2012; Carson, Crespin, and Madonna 2014; Lindstädt and Vander Wielen 2014). I test this with the percent of two-party vote received by Donald Trump in each lawmaker’s district in 2020.

* *Factional affiliation*. The House Freedom Caucus, formed in early 2015, quickly established itself as conservative faction that was willing to challenge the organizational and procedural cartel authority of the GOP in order to shift its strategy and agenda (Binder 2023, Bloch Rubin 2017, Glassman and Silver 2023, Green 2019). I include a variable measuring whether a Republican is a member of the Freedom Caucus to determine the effect of the Caucus on votes to support the party’s cartel authority.²⁷

* *Internal influence*. Since a member of Congress may be incentivized to support their party’s authority if they are in (and presumably wish to keep) a position of power within

²⁶ Drutman (2023) points out the second dimension NOMINATE explains a small and shrinking percentage of floor votes in the House. However, it may still matter when explaining votes related to the party cartel, which are infrequent.

²⁷ The Caucus does not publish an official list of members; membership was estimated by the author from press accounts and lawmakers’ own websites and press releases.

the party. I include measures of whether a lawmaker serves in a formal party leadership post or as a committee chair.

* *Partisan identity*. Finally, a lawmaker may support their party organization because they follow norms of loyalty. I test several characteristics that may be related to adherence to such norms, including seniority, prior experience serving in party leadership in a state legislature, and whether a lawmaker has a “maverick”-type personality (Feulner 1983, 39; Green 2016, Green and Harris 2019).²⁸

Table 3 shows the results of testing these hypotheses on the likelihood of defying the GOP’s organizational authority, i.e. voting against the party’s nominee for Speaker in January 2023. (21 Republicans voted for another named candidate or voted present at least once.) Tables 4 and 5 show the results when testing the hypotheses for Republican defections against the procedural cartel, namely the seven special rules that failed between January 2023 and April 2024.²⁹ Table 4 excludes primary vote, since not all Republicans had primaries in 2022 (or they were elected in jungle primaries).³⁰

<Tables 3, 4, and 5 About Here>

Several findings stand out. First, ideological conservatism (as estimated with first dimension NOMINATE scores) is statistically significant in explaining dissension from votes for speaker McCarthy and from votes on some special rules, but not as many as one would expect if conservatism alone motivated lawmakers to dissent from the procedural cartel.³¹ However, orthogonal preferences (i.e. second dimension NOMINATE scores) are statistically significant for both the January speaker votes and, at least marginally so, for every rule vote. This suggests that anti-establishment leanings have been at least as important, if not more so, in motivating

²⁸ Following Green (2017), I measured a rebellious tendency using the 2023 *Almanac of American Politics*, coding lawmakers whose descriptions included the terms “maverick,” “independent(-minded),” or showing “independence” from the GOP. I do not test the role of personality more broadly, which one study found may influence one’s degree of party loyalty, particularly those in the majority party who are “open” (less loyal) and “agreeable” (more loyal) (Ramey, Klingler, and Hollibaugh 2017, 139). Nor do I test whether policy preferences on spending influenced votes against Jim Jordan as Speaker nominee (Glassman and Silver 2023).

²⁹ The votes of three lawmakers were recoded from no to yes votes, because their no votes were cast in order to retain the option of offering motions to reconsider the votes at a later time: Steve Scalise (LA) (the rule for H.Res. 463), Tom Cole (the rule for H.Res. 712), and Blake Moore (MO) (the rule for H.Res. 947).

³⁰ The model for H.Res. 712 could not be estimated when including primary vote.

³¹ An alternative interpretation of first dimension NOMINATE scores is that they measure party loyalty, not ideology (Lee 2009, 70). NOMINATE is also less accurate in capturing ideology when party identification is not congruent with ideological differences, such as when a party’s ideological references are changing, as may be the case with the GOP (Barber and Pope 2019, Caughey and Schickler 2016).

lawmakers to violate party cartel authority. It is also consistent with the claim of political scientist Brian Alexander that traditional left-right “ideology is not determinant of” nonconformity (Alexander 2021, 88).

Second, Freedom Caucus membership independently contributes to the likelihood of violating both the organizational and, in many instances, the procedural cartel. In most of the regression models, the variable is either statistically significant ($p < 0.1$ or less) and negative or perfectly predicts opposition to the party and, as a perfectly separated variable, was omitted (Albert and Anderson 1984). This suggests that Caucus members were uniquely motivated to violate their party’s authority, the Caucus provided the capacity for would-be dissenters to organize against the GOP, or both.

Third, influence-related variables are strongly associated with dissent from the party cartel. On all votes, committee chairs and party leaders voted unanimously with the party, so those variables were omitted. Fourth, constituency preferences and concerns with electoral safety were only occasionally associated with the likelihood of voting against the party on organizational or procedural matters. More Republican districts were positively associated with support for the organizational cartel, but only for one rule vote. The variables measuring the vote received in one’s 2022 primary or general election were almost never statistically significant.

Finally, norm-related characteristics were also rarely associated with dissent. The term-in-office variable was positive and at least weakly significant in the votes for Speaker in January 2023 and for two rules votes in the 118th Congress. However, neither prior defeat of a House incumbent nor a tendency towards maverick behavior was significant in the votes for Speaker, and in rules votes those variables were sometimes perfectly correlated with support *for* a special rule, contrary to expectation. While norm commitment might still have mattered, it is not correlated with characteristics associated with that commitment.

These findings pinpoint the specific factors that encouraged disloyalty in the 118th Congress, but their explanatory value is limited in at least two ways. First, they do not allow for testing of potentially significant influences that are harder to measure. Lawmakers may possess a generalized fear of losing their primary that is uncorrelated with how they fared in their last primary election, for instance. The actions of party leaders to incentivize cartel loyalty are also unaccounted for. Second, they do not explain the historical origins of these factors. This seems

especially important insofar as House Republicans have had trouble maintaining unified support for party authority for the organizational cartel in particular, as noted previously.

To address these limitations, in the remainder of the paper I identify historical developments – four outside of Congress and two within it – that weakened the cartel power of both parties, but especially that of the House Republican Party. Some of them directly undermined norms of loyalty to the GOP’s organizational authority; others created internal divisions within the party or incentivized disloyalty more generally, which manifested itself as a refusal to support the party’s cartel power; and others took away key tools available to party leaders to enforce discipline.³² Table 6 provides a summary of these developments and the causal mechanism that led each of them to weaken the House GOP’s cartel authority. I then briefly discuss the extent to which Donald Trump’s election and presidency contributed to the decline of the House GOP’s authority.

<Table 6 About Here>

Developments Outside of Congress

Four historical developments outside of Congress have undercut the House GOP’s cartel authority: (1) an increasingly ideological Republican voter base disdainful of political compromise; (2) a dominant conservative media environment that began fueling Republican voters’ anti-compromise views and encouraging GOP lawmakers to dissent from their parties; (3) the growth of competitive Republican primaries, resulting in the election of more rebellious lawmakers and motivating incumbents to disdain party loyalty; and (4) an increasingly unregulated campaign finance system that encourages confrontation with one’s own party. Each of these developments was necessary for motivating intraparty conflict because they connected tied the main resources that ambitious office-seekers seek – votes, media attention, and campaign funds – to resistance to the party cartel. As will be seen, some of these same forces have also driven the two parties further apart and contributed to political polarization (see Table 6).³³

³² One could argue that the problems facing House Republicans go back even further in history and have shaped the Republican Party at large, not just Congress, threatening its ability to survive as a “long coalition” (Aldrich 1995, Schwartz 1989). See e.g. Hetherington and Weiler 2009, Kabaservice 2012, Richardson 2014, Rosenfeld 2018, White 2015, and White 2024. However, following my general approach to identifying historical causes (see above), most factors that I identify emerged twenty to thirty years before the 118th Congress.

³³ For example, Hacker and Pierson (2005) argued that the Republican Party had effectively moved public policy to the right, thereby contributing to polarization, because of a combination of a rightward shift in the party’s voter base, the heightened importance of primaries, and an influential conservative news media, along with pressure from

1. *An ideological, anti-compromise Republican voter base.* There is abundant evidence that since the 1970s, American voters, particularly those who are politically engaged, have self-sorted into partisan camps, become more ideologically extreme, and have less warmth towards those from the opposite party or ideological predisposition.³⁴ These developments are associated with, and may have contributed to, increased polarization in Congress (e.g. Aldrich and Rohde 2001, Theriault 2008). However, two important characteristics of Republican voters in particular created an electoral incentive for GOP lawmakers to disdain, rather than embrace, loyalty to their own party.

First, Republicans are held together by shared ideology to a much greater extent than Democrats, who tend to be more pluralistic and outcome-oriented (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). The ideological nature of the GOP has become more dominant over time. In 1972, 21.3% of Democrats and 22.8% of Republicans described themselves as ideological or extremely ideological; by 2020, 36.4% of Democrats fit this description, while over half of Republicans (53.6%) did.³⁵ Another study from the early 2000s found that GOP activists have become more extreme than Democrats have (Hacker and Pierson 2005, 27).

While one might expect that shared beliefs would create strong unifying partisan bonds, an ideology-centered party is at particular risk of internal division if the party's organization, its elected membership, and its leadership are perceived by partisans as unfaithful to the party's ideological tenets. This perception is likely to sharpen when the party has control of one or more branches of government, and the absolutist nature of ideology invariably comes up against the more pragmatic needs of a governing party. Such was especially the case after 1994, when Republicans became competitive in House as well as Senate and presidential elections, and in the early 2000s, when Republicans had unified control of the national government for the first time since 1958. The need for compromise being greater during divided party government, the perceived gap between beliefs and outcomes is likely heightened even further in those circumstances (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 298-299).

conservative interest group leaders and wealthy elites and the party's effective use of campaign funds and procedural tactics to bring about desired voting outcomes.

³⁴ The literature documenting voter polarization and identifying possible causes is vast. See e.g. Abramowitz 2011, Bishop 2009, Campbell 2016, Carmines and Stimson 1989, Hare and Poole 2014, Hetherington and Weiler 2009, Levendusky 2009, Mason 2018, McCarthy, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006, Theriault 2008, and Zingher 2022.

³⁵ American National Election Survey, VCF0803, https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=ideological_extremity, accessed January 5, 2024.

Second, Republican voters have traditionally had more hostile attitudes to ideological opponents than have Democrats. For example, according to National Election Studies data, Republicans are usually less warm towards ideological “out-groups” (i.e. liberals) than Democrats are towards conservatives.³⁶ Relatedly, conservative Republicans have been less amenable to compromise since at least the mid-1980s (Newport 2017, Wolf, Strachan, and Shea 2012).³⁷ One study found that GOP primary voters become less supportive of their Republican representatives when they pursue legislative compromises with the other party (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Young 2020, 46-47, 101-102).

This hostility to ideological opponents incentivizes elected Republican officials to avoid working with Democrats, and it may thus fuel polarization in Congress. Yet it does not guarantee increased unity within the GOP. Indeed, it may even do the opposite. Ambitious politicians may be encouraged to run against incumbent Republicans in primaries, labelling them as insufficiently conservative, ideologically impure, or effectively liberal (“Republicans in Name Only,” or RINOs).³⁸ And while voter dislike for compromise is usually framed as, or assumed to mean, compromise between parties, it could just as easily refer to compromise *within* the GOP, thus hindering the ability of lawmakers within the party to remain unified via compromise without facing blowback from Republican voters.

These twin facets of the Republican electorate manifested themselves in the early 2010s as the ideologically conservative but anti-GOP “Tea Party” electoral movement. Many Tea Party members were conservatives who refused to identify as Republicans and perceived the movement as distinct from the Party.³⁹ They were also disproportionately more likely than non-Tea Party Republicans to believe that their party’s leaders in Congress had been too compromising with Democrats (Pew Research Center 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 27). As political scientists Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson put it, Tea Party activists “go

³⁶ https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=affective_polarization_idelogues

³⁷ There are a number of possible explanations for this dislike of compromise; see e.g. Glaser and Berry 2018. For a contrary view of voter disdain for compromise, see Tyson 2019 and Wolak 2020.

³⁸ See e.g. Miller and Schofield 2008. Conservative media also helped popularize the term “RINO” as an epithet against Republicans deemed insufficiently conservative or unwilling to fight hard enough for conservative principles (e.g. Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 119). The acronym appears to have been invented in the 1990s, but the full phrase can be found in the news media at least as far back as the 1880s (Popik 2009, “The New-York Senators” 1881). Some Republicans have also begun favoring the term “uniparty” to criticize their own party as being indistinguishable from the other, thereby differentiating themselves as “true” conservatives (Kapur and Smith 2024).

³⁹ Entrepreneurs who sought to lead the Tea Party movement like Dick Armey also emphasized the anti-establishment nature of the movement (e.g. Armey and Kibbe 2010).

nuclear’ when GOP officeholders take any steps toward moderation and negotiation” (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 156). Probably not coincidentally, the rise of the Tea Party coincided with a decline in Republican voters’ warmth towards their own party (Figure 5).⁴⁰

<Figure 5 About Here>

Though relatively few Republicans participated in the movement, those who did were more likely to participate in primaries and they were credited with a 2010 election wave that brought the GOP control of the House (Pew Research Center 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 158; Tyson 2013). And the movement had an impact on the behavior of lawmakers. One study found that, controlling for other factors, state legislators whose constituents had more favorable views of the Tea Party were more likely to oppose compromise bills (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020, 78-79). In the U.S. House, freshmen Republicans elected in 2010 were more conservative than the Republicans they replaced and often had a “take-no-prisoners” approach to legislating that contributed to fights with the Obama White House, culminating in a government shutdown and a near default on the U.S. debt (Mann and Ornstein 2012).

Democrats were not the only target of Tea Party Republicans. As an intraparty “programmatic” insurgent faction, the Tea Party sought to change the GOP from within (Blum 2020). According to former Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), Republicans newly elected in 2010 supported the more disruptive “kooks” in the Conference and “had me in their sights from day one” (Boehner 2021, 20-21, 135; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 170). A sizeable number of Republican incumbents joined the Tea Party Caucus, and some entrepreneurial Republicans used their affiliation with the movement to flout their party’s leadership, including Caucus leader Michele Bachmann (R-MN).

The Tea Party movement had largely dissipated by the mid-2010s, but Republican voters’ embrace of ideology and dislike of compromise remained, as did a number of GOP lawmakers who had been elected in the 2010 wave and kept their anti-party ways. Three members of the class of 2010 were among the nine original founders of the House Freedom Caucus in early 2015, the faction that would regularly challenge the party’s cartel authority (see below).⁴¹

⁴⁰ As Figure 5 shows, that declining preference for the GOP among Republican voters rebounded in 2020, possibly reflecting their broad support for President Donald Trump. Survey data from Gallup also shows that, from 2005 to 2021, voters self-identified as Republican have been a lower percentage of voters than those self-identifying as Democrat (Jones 2024).

⁴¹ The three members were Justin Amash (MI), Raúl Labrador (ID), and Mick Mulvaney (SC).

2. *A dominant conservative media ecosystem encouraging intraparty conflict.*

Conservative media first developed as a political force in the mid-20th century, but the modern incarnation of the “conservative media complex” dates to the 1980s, particularly with the spread of talk radio (Balz and Brownstein 1996, 164-167; Hemmer 2016, esp. p. 260; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 123). Radio host Rush Limbaugh, who “instinctively spoke the language of conservative populism,” became a huge force in GOP politics, with tens of millions of weekly listeners by the 1990s who tilted heavily Republican. He was joined by Fox News, founded in 1996, which became the most watched of any cable news outlet in less than a decade (Balz and Brownstein 1996, 167-169, quote p. 169; Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 44-48, 92).

Skepticism of mainstream news media has long been a feature of conservative thinking, and as Republicans’ distrust of conventional sources of news grew – fueled in part by the rhetoric of Limbaugh and others – they became more reliant on right-leaning sources of news than Democrats did on liberal sources (Jamieson and Cappella 2008; Ladd 2011).⁴² From 1998 to 2008, the percent of Republicans who regularly watched Fox News more than doubled, from 14% to 36%, while the percent of Democrats who regularly watched MSNBC, the closest left-leaning equivalent, only grew from 10% to 18% (Pew Research Center 2009; see also Elving 2013, 168). Limbaugh was soon supplemented by a plethora of conservative talking heads, including Glenn Beck, Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, and Bill O’Reilly.

By the 2010s, conservative media had become an ecosystem distinct from the rest of the media world. Republicans were not only watching ideologically slanted news programs in greater numbers than their Democratic counterparts, but they were also sharing conservative news sources on social media far more often than Democrats were sharing information from liberal news sources (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018).⁴³ A survey in 2020 found that 60% of Republicans and Republican leaners relied on Fox for political news, but just 33% of Democrats drew on the network for news about politics, and while majorities of Democrats and Democratic leaners trusted five sources of political news about equally, Fox News was the only source that

⁴² Evidence of the partisan lean of conservative, as well as liberal, news sources is abundant (e.g. Baum and Groeling 2008).

⁴³ For more on the broader conservative media ecosystem and its relationship with think tanks and other conservative institutions, see Meagher 2012. This conservative media complex has been supplemented in recent years by conservative podcasters like Charlie Kirk and Steve Bannon, as well as entrepreneurial lawmakers like Matt Gaetz (Lyons 2020, Wirtschafter 2023). Not all conservative media outlets are identical in their agenda or style; see e.g. Mort 2013.

more than half of Republicans and Republican leaners identified as trustworthy (Gramlich 2020).⁴⁴ The content provided by conservative media news and commentators was not just favorable to Republicans; it also primed viewers to think about politics as an “us vs. them” phenomenon, with “liberals” and “cultural elites” regularly portrayed as the enemy (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 59-66, 72-74).

A number of studies have shown that exposure to conservative media, including talk radio and Fox News, shapes viewers’ policy preferences, sense of political efficacy, and vote choice. Matthew Levendusky, for example, found that regular consumption of information from partisan media further polarizes the preferences of same-party activists, makes them less open to bipartisan compromise, and increases the likelihood that they will vote for their party’s candidate in general elections (Levendusky 2013). Skocpol and Williamson argue that Fox News served as an “orchestrator” of the Tea Party movement, building interest in its rallies and events before they happened, and one study uncovered a relationship between support for Tea Party aligned Republican congressional candidates and accessibility to Fox News (Li and Martin 2021, Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 132).⁴⁵

This increasing reliance on, and exposure to, conservative media by Republican voters has been cited by many as an important, if not central, cause of increased polarization, encouraging both elected Republicans and their constituents to move further to the right (e.g. Jamieson and Cappella 2008, Mann and Ornstein 2012, Stroud 2010, but see Prior 2013). In addition, it may have also played a divisive role within the GOP. As Republican lawmakers shifted in conservative direction, conservative media outlets – realizing that conflict and disagreement is good for ratings – began looking for ways to criticize Republicans in power for being insufficiently conservative (Rosenwald 2019). The result was media-administered “purity tests” of elected Republicans that fostered internecine battles over conservative identity and party strategy.

Rush Limbaugh did not hesitate to criticize Republican presidents and presidential candidates whom he saw as insufficiently conservative, but conservative radio more broadly

⁴⁴ The five sources were CNN, PBS, ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News. The reasons for Republican preference for ideological sources of information more than Democrats are unclear, but studies have found Republicans tend to prefer absolutism over ambiguity (e.g. Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway 2003, Vraga 2014).

⁴⁵ See also Barker 2002, Jamieson and Cappella 2008, and Martin and Yurukoglu 2017. For a summary of other literature making this argument, see Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, ch. 4.

began shifting in the mid-2000s from pragmatically endorsing Republican candidates against Democrats regardless of ideology to openly championing the defeat of moderate Republicans in primaries (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 106-7, 114; Rosenwald 2019, 76, ch. 15). Talk radio started featuring members of Congress who openly criticized their Republican colleagues for failing to be aggressive enough on behalf of conservative policy (Rosenwald 2019, 220). One study found that, in 2011, Republican talking heads on radio and TV praised congressional Republicans who pushed the Obama White House for more spending cuts but criticized those who were open to raising revenues to reach a bipartisan deal (Levendusky 2013, 41). Fox News touted the Tea Party “as *a challenge to the Republican establishment* that would also boost the GOP” (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 136, emphasis added).

If Republican members of Congress did not believe that conservative media was influential, its impact might have been limited. But it is clear from their actions that they did. When Rush Limbaugh’s star rose, Republican leaders in Congress “lavished special attention” on him (Balz and Brownstein 1996, 183-187, 189, quote p. 185). He and other talk radio hosts were credited with pressuring the Democratic-led 103rd Congress to temporarily abandon a major crime bill and pass legislation that excluded home schoolers from having to provide federal certification. They were also given credit for helping the GOP win control of the House in 1994 and pass most of the Contract with America the following year (Balz and Brownstein 1996, 190, 194-195, 199; Jamieson and Cappella 2008, 46). Fox News also influenced congressional behavior: one study found that lawmakers in conservative districts were more likely to vote with the GOP on party votes after Fox News became available in their district (Arceneaux, Johnson, Lindstädt, and Vander Wielen 2016). Ambitious junior Republicans in Congress like Michele Bachmann could use Fox News as a platform to heighten their own political profile and fulfill their political ambitions (Elving 2013, 167).

As conservative media emphasized the ideology purity of elected officials over their ability to compromise, lawmakers responded. Incumbent Republican members of Congress who touted bipartisan deals or spoke on behalf of GOP leaders on Limbaugh’s show in the early 2000s received so much criticism that they quickly walked it back (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 172; Levendusky 2013, 152). Lawmakers heard from constituents who seemed to value legislative victories less than, as one political operative put it, “being a fighter. Being on talk

radio and Fox” (Draper 2022, 166-167).⁴⁶ A 2017 survey of state lawmakers found that three-fifths believed that ideological cable news sources depicted compromise negatively (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020, 81).

All of this can be tied to the growing inability of House Republican leaders to enforce internal discipline on matters of party authority.⁴⁷ When Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC), a regular thorn in the side of GOP leaders, was removed from a chairmanship for voting against a rule on a trade bill, he used conservative media outlets to gin up support for his cause, and he was given the chairmanship back (Rosenwald 2019, 222-224). Then-Speaker John Boehner later complained that rebels in his party could count on conservative media personalities to give them a platform with which to undermine his authority (Boehner 2021, 21-22; see also pp. 219-220). Republican lawmakers and staff grumbled that the rightwing media ecosystem made their jobs harder by continually attacking so-called “establishment Republicans” (Calmes 2015). Though membership in the Freedom Caucus is officially secret, most of its members openly tout their affiliation and, as Matt Glassman and Nate Silver note, might “*prefer* to be at odds with the leadership” because it positions them as “true” conservatives (Glassman and Silver 2023).

In the 118th Congress, the conservative media did not shy from taking positions on intraparty disputes and otherwise encouraging Republican to fight amongst each other in the name of ideological purity and to demonstrate true commitment to push back against Democrats. Commentators like Lou Dobbs criticized Speaker McCarthy and urged his removal; once McCarthy was removed, they attacked some of the party’s initial nominees for Speaker while threatening Republicans who would not support their preferred candidate, Jim Jordan of Ohio (Dobbs 2023).⁴⁸ During the three-week period when the House lacked a Speaker, Austin Scott

⁴⁶ This, along with the imperative to raise campaign funds from base supporters, may help explain the apparent rise of more angry, grievance-driven “performative partisan politics” (Glassman 2024b) and “hysterical stunt governing” (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 177) as a legislative style. Some such lawmakers resemble what Paul Light called the “medieval warrior” lawmaker for whom “the goal is nothing short of total victory – no compromise, no prisoners” (Light 1991, 238-240). The lament from GOP conservatives that their leaders did not push hard enough for policy victories was certainly common in the 118th Congress. See e.g. Herb, Raju, Zanova, Fox, and Grayer 2023. It should be noted that, in general, lawmakers can gain more electoral benefits from position-taking than from producing legislative outcomes (Mayhew 1974, 132).

⁴⁷ More generally, increased media attention to particular issues debated in Congress may make it harder for leaders to build coalitions and legislate (Lovett 2021).

⁴⁸ Trump advisor-turned-podcaster Steve Bannon would later call for the removal of McCarthy’s eventual successor, Speaker Mike Johnson (Burra 2024).

(R-GA) complained that some of his colleagues “like to go on the TV and are not necessarily negotiating for anything other than TV time,” which “makes us look like a bunch of idiots” (Raju 2023a).⁴⁹ Meanwhile, in the Senate, James Lankford (R-OK) revealed that an unnamed conservative commentator had threatened to “destroy” him if he helped Biden’s reelection by pursuing bipartisan immigration legislation (Alemany, Sotomayor, Caldwell, and Goodwin 2024).

3. *More primary competition from conservative candidates.* As competition for control of Congress has become fiercer since the 1980s and 1990s, each party has had less incentive to compromise with the other to pass legislation, lest they give enough credit to their partisan opponents to help them win a majority of seats in the next election (Lee 2016). Because the number of House seats that are competitive between the parties has been declining over time – by 2022, just 8% of House races had been decided by a 5% margin or less (FairVote 2022) – both parties direct the bulk of their resources on winning and holding the remaining congressional seats that are actually competitive. It has also contributed to the election of more ideologically extreme lawmakers in each party, since there is no longer a need in many districts to nominate more viable (i.e. more moderate) candidates to win independent voters (Carson, Crespin, Finocchiaro, and Rohde 2007). This disincentive to compromise with the other party, coupled with the election of more extreme lawmakers, has contributed to increased polarization in Congress.

This does not mean that congressional seats are any less safe, however. Instead, competition has increased in party primaries. In 2010, for example, newly elected lawmakers faced an average number of 5.2 candidates in their first primary; ten years later, that average had grown to 7.3 candidates (Raleigh 2022). The same trend occurred for House incumbents too: those who ran for reelection against one or more primary challengers grew markedly starting in 2010, and by 2022 nearly 60% of House incumbents faced one or more challengers in their primaries (Ballotpedia 2023; Kamarck 2022, Kamarck and Podkul 2018).

⁴⁹ The media’s influence in the 118th Congress was not absolute. For example, after being nominated to be Speaker in October 2023, Jim Jordan’s allies both within and outside the House (including Fox commentator Sean Hannity) tried to use social media and other outlets to win over his detractors, and effort that proved mostly counterproductive; and Jordan failed to garner a majority on the floor multiple times before the party withdrew his nomination. See e.g. Carney, Ferris, and Beavers 2023, Demirjian 2023, Ellison and Sommer 2023, and Hannity 2023.

Increased competition has been more acute in safe districts and in those that lean Republican. Between 2010 and 2020, according to one study, seats that were rated solidly for one party over the other attracted 7.1 primary candidates, on average, versus 4.6 candidates for toss-up races, and more than half (54%) of first-time lawmakers between 2010 and 2020 who won in competitive primaries were Republicans (Raleigh 2022). Another study found that, while the number of competitive Democratic primaries peaked in 2018 but then dropped, the number of competitive Republican primaries has grown steadily since 2014, and by 2022 they outpaced Democratic primaries, 230 to 165 (Ballotpedia 2022).

This heightened competition in primaries has not markedly increased the number of incumbents who have lost their primary elections (Raleigh 2022). Lawmakers are a “cautious lot,” however, and like most people, they are subject to loss aversion (Arnold 1990, 61; Kahneman and Tversky 1979). The fear of losing in a primary, however remote, is likely to loom larger as the number of primary challengers grows and the average margin of victory declines. Even if primaries are winnable for most incumbents, at the very least they are a resource-draining “nuisance that incumbents would wish to avoid” (Boatright 2013, 216). The observation of Richard Fenno from over four decades ago is no less true today: “the primary constituency,” he wrote, “draws a special measure of a congressman’s attention” (Fenno 1978, 19; see also Crespín, Gold, and Rohde 2006).

Furthermore, lawmakers are not statisticians, and as David Mayhew noted, “nothing is more important in Capitol Hill politics than the shared conviction that election returns have proven a point” (Mayhew 1974, 71). As a result, even one high-profile, unexpected primary loss by an incumbent may encourage other lawmakers to adjust their political behavior so that they more closely follow the perceived dictates of primary voters (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020, 61). The unexpected primary losses of two high-profile incumbent party leaders to outsiders who were ideologically more extreme – House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA), who lost in 2014 to future Freedom Caucus member Dave Brat “in one of the most stunning primary election upsets in congressional history” (Martin 2014), and Democratic Caucus Chair Joe Crowley (D-NY), who lost his primary four years later to liberal upstart Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – further fueled the perception that ideologically extreme primary challengers were a growing threat.

How might incumbent Republican lawmakers respond to this increased competition and perceived decline in seat safety? To be sure, multiple studies have found little, if any, influence of primary challengers on incumbents' voting behavior (Boatright 2013, 141, 163-164, 172-173; but see Brady, Han, and Pope 2007). But incumbents may nonetheless change their behavior in other ways to mitigate the threat of primary loss (Kamarck and Wallner 2018). One obvious way to do so is to shift further to the extremes to forestall primary challengers (Bland 2014). This is especially so because the percent of primary challengers who run on a platform of challenging the incumbent for being insufficiently liberal or conservative, versus on specific issues, also began growing in the 1990s (Boatright 2013, 73-74, 86).⁵⁰ Those who choose not to adjust their political positions may still contribute to polarization; there is anecdotal evidence that incumbent Republicans hesitated to take stands against their more extreme colleagues, not to mention primary voters and the media, out of fear that they will lose their next primary if they did (e.g. Draper 2022, 105-6, 199).

In addition to incumbent Republicans shifting rightward, greater competitiveness in primaries increases the likelihood that new lawmakers are elected who are more ideologically extreme than those they replaced. Research has found that more ideologically extreme districts see more candidates running in House primaries (Porter 2023), possibly because the districts are perceived as easier to win in general elections (Lazarus 2005), and candidates who are further to the extreme are more likely to win a primary election, particularly in closed primaries (King, Orlando, and Sparks 2016). Moderate state lawmakers, particularly Republicans, have accordingly been less willing to run for Congress (Thomsen 2014; see also Thomsen 2017). First-past-the-post primaries in safe districts may further advantage more conservative candidates because they can command a small but indivisible following among “base” primary voters who deliver them pluralities of the vote in multi-candidate primaries.⁵¹ Tellingly, there is a relationship between ideology (as estimated with first dimension NOMINATE scores) and the number of candidates an incumbent faced in their first primary, suggesting that primaries with more candidates tend to elect more conservative lawmakers (see Table 7) (see also Porter 2023).

⁵⁰ One study also found that, in general, incumbents (in the Senate) received greater electoral support for being congruous with the views of constituents, not for actual policy outcomes (Jones 2011).

⁵¹ This may help predict anti-party attitudes as well. It may be more than coincidental that several of the Republicans who cast key votes against the GOP in the 118th Congress were initially elected in primaries with under 50% of the vote, including Matt Gaetz, Andy Biggs (MD), Eli Crane (AZ), Matt Rosendale (MT), and Ken Buck (CO).

<Table 7 About Here>

All of this may contribute to greater polarization and less cooperation between the parties, but it may also encourage incumbents to be less loyal to their party. To be sure, in the earlier regression analyses, primary margins in 2022 were seldom statistically significant in explaining dissension from key cartel votes in the 118th Congress. But lawmakers may not wait for a close primary election to adjust their behavior; they may preemptively decide that the best way to win (or, even better, prevent) close primaries in the future is not to be more conservative, but to appeal to Republican voters' opposition to compromise, and take a stronger stand against not only Democrats but against Republican leaders as well. According to one study, lawmakers perceive primary voters as more opposed to compromise than general election voters (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020, 69), and as David Mayhew observed, "there is no reason to expect large primary electorates to honor party loyalty" (Mayhew 1974, 25). This phenomenon may be more common in GOP primaries, and not just because of their greater competitiveness; while Democrats who are primaried are usually more ideologically moderate, many incumbent Republicans are primaried even if they are more conservative than their districts (Boatright 2013, 81-84). The result, as political scientist Robert Boatright wrote, is that "some Republicans may wonder just what they have to do in order to represent their districts while avoiding being branded as traitors to the cause" (Boatright 2013, 101).

Furthermore, an increase in competitiveness in Republican primaries may make it more likely that party defiance, not ideological conservatism, becomes the litmus test of candidates in primaries. If incumbents move further to the right to forestall primary challengers, those challengers may seek to distinguish themselves by changing the terms of debate (Schattschneider 1960). One of the easiest is to emphasize an insider-outsider distinction, where "insider" becomes a substitute for following norms of party loyalty. If those challengers are elected, they may feel obligated to follow through on their promise to defy norms of congressional party loyalty.

More competitive primaries, particularly in periods of heightened political polarization, also increase the likelihood that amateur lawmakers with no prior political experience – and who are less likely to be wedded to legislative norms as a result – will get elected (Buisseret and Van Weelden 2020). Republican elites, who are more likely to endorse norms of party loyalty, do support more moderate candidates in elections, but they coordinate less in safe districts and in

open seat primaries, giving outsiders a greater chance at election in those races (Hassell 2018a, 159, 187-188; Hassell 2023; see also Hassell 2018b). Indeed, freshmen Republicans in the House since the mid-2000s have been increasingly likely to be novice politicians, more so than Democrats. Furthermore, prior experience no longer has a statistically significant and positive effect on the likelihood of winning a Republican primary as it once did, while it still does for Democratic primaries (Porter and Treul 2023).

Republican primaries in 2010 were an early opportunity for more conservative and anti-establishment outsiders to get elected to Congress. Tea Party activists, often with the help of South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint and former VP candidate Sarah Palin, endorsed many Republican candidates in open Senate primaries “to thwart a moderate Republican while promoting a more conservative alternative.” Tea Party groups did the same in nearly 150 House primaries, with most of those candidates winning the primary and a third winning the general election (Bullock 2012, 211, 217-218).

By the 118th Congress, elections had changed the composition of the Republican Conference to make it more junior, an issue insofar as younger lawmakers were less willing to vote on behalf of the party cartel. Not only was the average term in service slightly lower for Republicans than Democrats (7 years vs. 8 years), but less than a quarter of Republicans (16.3%) had served in 2009, the last time both parties voted unanimously for their speaker nominee, while for Democrats the percentage was notably higher (29.2%). Interestingly, the median second dimension NOMINATE score for Republicans, which had begun increasing after the 1992 elections, declined slightly after the 2022 elections.

4. A decentralized, public conflict-driven campaign fundraising environment. The American system of financing congressional election campaigns has traditionally been relatively open and unregulated, especially when compared to other democracies. However, as political parties have become a less important source of campaign funds, individual candidates have looked elsewhere for funding, creating an opening for those who would incentivize behavior that runs contrary to the objectives of a congressional party.

The most commonly-understood such incentive is for lawmakers to move further to the ideological extremes. As former NRCC Chair Tom Davis (R-VA) put it, “The twin punches of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law and the Citizens United court decision have restricted what candidates and political parties can raise, and opened the floodgates for political

money to flow away from the Republican and Democratic parties - a centering force in American politics - to interest groups, often on the extremes” (Davis 2011; see also Mann and Ornstein 2012, 67).

Research supports this claim. Studies have shown that both House incumbents and primary challengers are more dependent upon national donors to their campaigns than they once were (Boatright 2013, 129, 137, 213; Canes-Wrone and Miller 2022), and conservative interest groups have gotten more involved in funding congressional campaigns both directly and indirectly (e.g. Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016). This can affect election results. One analysis found that, in general elections, challengers who were more ideologically extreme did better than one would expect, likely because they are able to raise more campaign funds than moderate challengers (Stone and Simas 2010). Another showed that lawmakers with prior experience are less likely to outraise their primary opponents than they once did, which puts them at a growing disadvantage in primary elections (Porter and Treul 2023).⁵²

In addition, the proportion of campaign funding that comes from individuals has grown since the late 1990s (Albert 2017). This in turn has encouraged incumbents and challengers to find ways to galvanize partisan supporters to give to their campaigns. One way is to avoid compromise and emphasize policy absolutism (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020, 61-63). Another is to exhibit more partisan confrontational behavior. After Joe Wilson (R-SC) yelled “Yyou lie!” at President Barack Obama during a 2009 speech before Congress, Wilson quickly raised nearly \$3 million, mostly from small donors outside of his state (Allen 2009). By the early 2020s, lawmakers like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Elise Stefanik (R-NY) found that they could raise more money if they were publicly provocative towards Democrats and used “overheated language” in their missives to donors (Draper 2022, 161-162, 169).⁵³

This might have exacerbated party polarization in the House, but as Republican voters became more skeptical of their own party, entrepreneurs like Greene found that they could generate attention – and more donations – by also openly defying the Republican Conference.

⁵² The rise of so-called “dark money” from ideological groups in 2020 and 2022 may have further fueled the election of more ideologically extreme lawmakers from both ends of the spectrum (Massoglia 2023, Massoglia and Evers-Hillstrom 2021).

⁵³ In the 2021-22 cycle, her first term in Congress, Greene was the 6th most successful fundraiser among Republicans, raising over \$12.5 million dollars, and the 12th most successful in the entire House, just above fellow party skeptic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/fundraising-totals?cycle=2022&type=HA&view=topraise>, accessed April 21, 2024.

Two notable intraparty critics who defied norms of party loyalty, Jim Jordan and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), were among the most prolific fundraisers of the House, suggesting that refusing to cooperate with one's party could be highly profitable.⁵⁴ The connection between intra-party revolt and fundraising success was made explicit during the debate over whether to remove Speaker Kevin McCarthy in October 2023, when Garret Graves (R-LA) showed that Matt Gaetz's campaign had issued a fundraising solicitation based on his effort to oust McCarthy (Saavedra 2023). Though other Republicans complained that Gaetz sought to raise funds by contrasting himself from his "RINO" colleagues, it paid off well: he, along with many of the Republicans who voted to remove McCarthy, saw sizeable increases in their fundraising totals (Montellaro 2024, Suter 2023).⁵⁵ As an aide to another long-time Republican rebel, Paul Gosar (AZ), put it, "if you have the right social-media profile, then *you can fundraise* and become a mini national superstar" (Draper 2022, 234, emphasis added).

Within the House: Weak Leaders and Strong Intraparty Factions

Two important factors within the House further contributed to the weakening of the GOP's cartel authority. The first was the emergence of an intraparty organization, the House Freedom Caucus, which embraced aggressive, norm-breaking tactics to move the Republican Conference further right. It provided the necessary condition to make cartel defiance coordinated and credible. The second was a preponderance of leaders who, while maintaining substantial formal authority,⁵⁶ were unable or unwilling to use that authority to maintain discipline and enforce norms of party loyalty, as is usually necessary for such norms to be maintained.

5. *Assertive intra-party organizations.* American political parties have long been "catch-all" entities focused on building broad coalitions to maximize votes, which makes them susceptible to internal factionalism (DiSalvo 2012; Kirchheimer 1966). This is certainly true in

⁵⁴ In Ocasio-Cortez's first term (2019-20), during which she frequently and publicly clashed with Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Ocasio-Cortez raised \$20.6 million dollars, an astounding amount for a freshman and second only to the Speaker herself. <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/fundraising-totals?cycle=2020&type=HA&view=topraise>, accessed April 23, 2024.

⁵⁵ As of April 2024, Gaetz and Greene had each raised over \$4 million dollars in campaign funds in the 2023-24 election cycle, making them the 11th and 12th most successful fundraisers among House Republicans and above the 90th percentile of all House members. <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/fundraising-totals?cycle=2024&type=HA&view=topraise>, accessed April 21, 2024.

⁵⁶ One could argue that this substantial authority also created the conditions for resistance to the party's organizational authority, since the stakes for choosing a Speaker are higher when the Speaker has substantial influence over the legislative agenda and party strategy.

Congress, where both parties have a lengthy history of intra-party factions that use their size and organizational capacity to influence outcomes (Bloch Rubin 2017). The conventional wisdom is that factions from the ideological center of Congress are the greatest threat to a party's authority, since they can credibly join the other party to build a new cross-party coalition (e.g. Jenkins and Stewart 2013, 318). In theory, however, a faction from the far wing of a party is also capable of undermining its party's cartel power, and may do so if it expects to reap electoral or influence-related gains in return, or if it is so far on the edge of the ideological spectrum that it sees its own party's agenda as observationally equivalent to the status quo (Green 2020, 11-13; Kirkland and Slapin 2018).

Prior to the 1970s, the conventional wisdom was that right-leaning lawmakers were less inclined to organize than liberals, and when they did form intra-party organizations the groups were primarily social in nature (Feulner 1983, 37).⁵⁷ That changed in 1973, when conservative Republicans, following the lead of the left-leaning Democratic Study Group (DSG), founded the Republican Study Committee (RSC) to challenge President Richard Nixon's perceived move to the left. The group successfully organized other Republicans to take more conservative positions, even if it meant voting against their leaders on procedural votes, and at times it successfully convinced the White House, Republican Senators, or party leaders to take their position on legislation (e.g. Bloch Rubin 2017, Feulner 1983, 5, 84, 93).⁵⁸

Though conflict between the RSC and party leaders was relatively low-key and short-lived (e.g. Feulner 1983, 131, 167), the group had nonetheless introduced a model of action that future conservative Republicans would follow: establish a formal, organized faction outside the leadership structure that was collectively willing to defy norms of obedience to party leaders in order to move the party rightward. As RSC biographer Edwin Feulner put it, "the RSC was not in the business of compromise and consensus" (Feulner 1983, 133).

In 1985, Newt Gingrich and like-minded activists created the Conservative Opportunity Society (COS) to help the GOP become the majority party, in part by pushing Conference leaders to be more confrontational with House Democrats. Unlike the RSC, it was more focused on

⁵⁷ The reasons for this are unclear. One possibility may be that the GOP has traditionally been less patronage-driven than the Democratic party; Reiter (2004) argues that parties less focused on patronage will see an increase in differences along ideological or strategic lines.

⁵⁸ Shortly before forming the RSC, some House conservatives had already used such tactics (e.g. Feulner 1983, 46-48, 53).

garnering media attention, often by using unorthodox tactics on the House floor. Its members, particularly Gingrich, also possessed a greater willingness to criticize Conference leaders on strategy and policy and to tout their ideological bona fides, breaking the rule followed by the RSC that “in order to be effective, do not antagonize the established powers by wearing your ideology on your sleeve” (Feulner 1983, 117). The group helped make the Conference more combative towards Democrats, and several of its members – most notably, Gingrich – eventually joined the party’s leadership (Green and Crouch 2022).

Other COS-like intraparty organizations have appeared periodically in the GOP Conference,⁵⁹ but the most recent and significant has been the House Freedom Caucus, formed in January 2015 by a group of conservatives frustrated with interparty legislative compromises made by Speaker John Boehner. What made the Caucus unusual compared to its predecessors was the adoption of a binding rule, forcing all members to vote as a unit if two-thirds of the group concurred. More importantly, its members were not merely open to resisting their party’s leadership but also willing to undermine their party’s procedural authority in order to maximize political leverage – and indeed, would only admit members willing to vote against special rules. As a result, it credibly – and often successfully – threatened to vote with Democrats against special rules if those rules did not allow them to offer amendments or if the underlying bill did not reflect their policy preferences (Green 2019).⁶⁰

The group also became associated with breaking the long-held norm of supporting the organizational authority of one’s party mid-Congress. In 2015, Freedom Caucus chair Mark Meadows introduced a resolution to declare the speakership vacant – the first time since 1910 and only the second time in House history – signaling that it was no longer taboo for members of the majority party to employ the resolution. When Boehner abruptly quit Congress, the Caucus’ reputation for power grew. By the end of 2016, it had established sufficient potency and credibility to make its threat-making ability substantial (Green 2019). Founding member Mick Mulvaney explained to President-elect Donald Trump that the Caucus “took the form of a conservative group,” but “at the core, the Freedom Caucus is anti-establishment” (Isgur 2021).

⁵⁹ For example, after the 1994 elections a number of Republicans formed the Conservative Action Team (CATS).

⁶⁰ Prior to the Freedom Caucus, individual or unorganized groups of Republicans entertained voting against floor rules in protest against party leadership. For example, some sophomore Republican dissidents voted against a bill in early 1997 to protest against Gingrich, and in 2013, two future founders of the Freedom Caucus publicly threatened to vote against rules out of protest against the party’s agenda (Green and Crouch 2023, Hooper 2013).

During the Trump presidency the Freedom Caucus continued to challenge norms of deference to party leadership. Most notably, in 2017, Caucus members joined Democrats to reject a rule for considering a substitute for the Affordable Care Act (Green 2019). After being excoriated by Trump for doing so, the Caucus began aligning itself more closely with the White House, often going behind the back of its own party's leaders in the process. For example, Caucus members successfully lobbied Trump to demand lower corporate tax rates in the GOP's major tax bill, oppose a Republican immigration bill, threaten to veto a spending bill as leverage for funding a wall on the Mexican border, and later build that wall using executive authority (Segers 2019; Sherman and Palmer 2019, 159-162, 267, 372-390; see also Draper 2022, 68).

In the 118th Congress, Republican leaders acknowledged the influence of the Caucus, but their efforts to tame or channel it met limited success. Before the Congress met, Kevin McCarthy had developed alliances with the two most prominent members of the Caucus, Jim Jordan and Marjorie Taylor Greene. Nonetheless, as already shown, Caucus members were more likely to vote against his candidacy for Speaker in January. Appointing two members of the Freedom Caucus to the Rules Committee, plus other Caucus members to prominent committees like Appropriations (Baer 2023), may have helped keep the group in line, but in September 2023 its members voted unilaterally against two key floor rules, forcing the Speaker to pass a "clean" funding bill that would doom his speakership. After taking his place as Speaker, Mike Johnson immediately met with the Caucus and invited representatives of the group to weekly leadership meetings (Sotomayor and Caldwell 2023), but many of its members again proved to be troublesome opponents of floor rules as well as major funding bills (Schnell 2024b).

By contrast, while House Democrats have had their share of intraparty organizations that try to shift the party further to the left, such as the Democratic Study Group and the Progressive Caucus, these groups have refrained from adopting as a standing tactic opposing their party on loyalty votes. As Speaker, Nancy Pelosi did face some resistance from a handful of individual lawmakers, including the so-called "Squad" of liberal Democrats and its highest profile member, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez of New York. Yet rarely have these dissidents gone as far as the Freedom Caucus in openly opposing party leaders or challenging their party's authority.

6. *Weak party leadership.* While congressional leaders are constrained by the preferences and goals of the party that chooses them (Sinclair 1995), they also have some degree of autonomy (Green 2010, Strahan 2007), and as noted above, they play a key role in establishing

and enforcing party authority by inculcating particular norms of behavior and using sticks and carrots strategically to encourage loyalty. The ability of leaders of both parties in the House has varied over time and by issue, but in general, Republican leaders have usually had more trouble at doing so than Democrats.

Nancy Pelosi, who led the Democrats in both the majority and the minority from 2003 until 2022, used a variety of tactics to enforce discipline and to build and maintain her (and, by extension, her party's) authority. Punishment was one such tactic: her trademark approach was to use public signals of displeasure coupled with private sanctions that were often difficult to trace to her (Green 2008). But Pelosi used other techniques as well. For instance, she bought votes by encouraging the Rules Committee to use procedure creatively in order to shield lawmakers from tough votes or combine disparate proposals together, a tactic that Joshua Huder terms "centralized logrolling" (Huder 2023, 147).

These and other tactics helped establish an "us versus them team culture" within the Democratic Caucus that would make it easier for its members to act as a unit (Huder 2023, Sinclair 2006). She was aided by her second in command, Steny Hoyer (MD), who nurtured a "psychology of consensus" within the party so that Democratic lawmakers would "get up in the morning and think, 'I want to be with the team'" (Green and Bee 2017).⁶¹ As a result, by the early 2000s, political scientist Barbara Sinclair noted that even "norms [of loyalty] concerning more substantive decisions" like passing bills and amendments were "beginning to change" (Sinclair 2006, 177).

Most GOP leaders, by contrast, have shown far less savvy or boldness in exercising leadership on behalf of their party. One can tell a plausible "weak leadership" story about three of the five Republican speakers who served between 1995 and 2024:⁶²

* At first, Speaker Newt Gingrich led a remarkably productive chamber, helped by the momentum of the 1994 election victories and a pre-set legislative agenda embodied in the

⁶¹ After months of verbal sparring between then-Speaker Pelosi and Ocasio-Cortez (and her then-chief of staff), Pelosi met privately with Ocasio-Cortez in mid-2019 to resolve their differences. By one account, Ocasio-Cortez – who acknowledged that her effort to remove incumbent Democrats in primaries had given her a "scarlet letter" in the party – began tempering her legislative style, and her chief of staff soon resigned (Edmondson 2019b). Ocasio-Cortez would later remark that other House Democrats treated her better after Pelosi stepped down as party leader (Metzger 2023, Page 2021).

⁶² Though it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of Speaker Mike Johnson, there is some initial evidence that he, too, has made decisions that weakened his party's cartel authority. Following a series of embarrassing losses on the House floor in February 2024, for example, Congressman Ralph Norman (R-SC) told a reporter, "as bad as Pelosi was, she knew her votes before they took place" (Raju 2024).

Contract with America. But Gingrich's failure to overcome President Bill Clinton's opposition to steep budget cuts with government shutdowns damaged his reputation, and he nearly lost the election for Speaker in 1997. More leadership missteps led to an attempted coup six months later, and – facing an all-but-certain defeat in the next election for Speaker – Gingrich resigned from the House.⁶³

* Speaker John Boehner often had difficulty corralling the more cantankerous, junior members of his party. His decision to eliminate earmarks robbed him of a potent benefit he could dole out in exchange for votes, and he did not challenge the assertion of rebel Republicans that they could circumvent his authority by going public (Boehner 2021, 22). Boehner developed a reputation as unwilling to sanction dissenters (Kane and Farenthold 2013); when he did, some saw their punishments revoked while others were disciplined in ways that backfired.⁶⁴ Despite credible promises that he could survive an effort by members of the Freedom Caucus Chair Mark Meadows to remove him with a resolution to vacate the chair, Boehner opted instead to resign, further empowering the Caucus and giving teeth to a removal procedure which had not been tried in over a century. Boehner himself later admitted that he found power distasteful and lacked Pelosi's "killer instinct."⁶⁵

* After an aborted effort to succeed Boehner in 2015, Kevin McCarthy was elected the party's top leader in 2018 and was in line to become Speaker when Republicans won the House in 2022. To win the speakership, however, he traded away some of his party's organizational and procedural authority (see above) and electoral authority (by committing the party to avoid taking positions in open primaries). His alliances with several influential conservatives in the Conference were not enough to maintain party-wide unity on key rule votes.⁶⁶ His repeated antagonizing of Democrats, whose support

⁶³ See e.g. Green and Crouch 2022, 36, 80, 117-18, 135-136, 147, 162-163, and Strahan 2007.

⁶⁴ Examples include: removing four Republicans from their committees for disloyalty shortly before the 2013 vote for Speaker, which cost him needed votes in what would be a very close speakership race (Strong 2012); kicking two Republicans off the Rules Committee shortly after that vote, which did little to increase party unity; and reversing the removal of Mark Meadows from a subcommittee chairmanship in June 2015 (see above). See also Strong 2013.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Alberta 2017, Boehner 2021, Draper 2012, Green and Bee 2017, Kane 2013, and Viebeck 2015. I have previously described Boehner as a "Rayburn Speaker in a Gingrich House" (Green 2015).

⁶⁶ By contrast, as late as 2017, recalled Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), Rules Committee chairman Pete Sessions (R-TX) would warn other Republicans, "vote against the rules, I'll kick your ass" (Diaz and Tully-McManus 2024).

he would need to survive a vacate vote, coupled with his dare to conservatives to file a privileged resolution to vacate the chair, would prove to be his undoing.⁶⁷

To be sure, Democratic Party leaders have also made strategic errors and suffered from defections on important party votes, including votes for Speaker (see Figure 4).⁶⁸ And not all Republican leaders since 1995 have been weak.⁶⁹ One should also not overstate the ease with which party leaders can instill discipline. Punishment in particular is rare and often fails to work, often “creat[ing] a martyr” (Green and Bee 2017, 46-47; Lizza 2015). And for whatever reason, House Republicans have found that a commonly effective approach – resolving internal differences before they manifest themselves publicly – has not worked well for them (Green and Bee 2017, 50; see e.g. Caldwell and Sotomayor 2024). As one Congressman explained during the 118th Congress, “[Speaker] Mike [Johnson] has got to jump through all kinds of hoops to survive this circus that he’s dealing with” (Beavers 2023).

Nonetheless, the contrast in leadership style and effectiveness between the two parties is arguably a necessary piece of the puzzle. Put simply, Republican Speakers have been less willing to act in ways that effectively maintain the party’s “reputation for toughness,” with a corrosive effect on norms of cartel loyalty. As Congressman Mike Gallagher explained when asked why his party was unable to coalesce around a Speaker, “Well, Pelosi ruled with an iron fist. People feared her. The Republican Party’s a little bit different” (Gallagher 2023).

The Role of Donald Trump

⁶⁷ See e.g. Ferris and Carney 2023, Kapur, Vitali, Haake, Robles, Wong and Kaplan 2023, Nazzaro 2023, and Schnell 2023. The dare came after the short-term “clean” spending bill that avoided a government shutdown passed on the suspension calendar on September 30 with majorities of both parties (D 209-1, R 126-90).

⁶⁸ For example, Democratic leaders (likely by then-DCCC Chair Rahm Emanuel) decided in 2007 to allow for defections on motions to recommit, which, as one Republican put it, “was a huge procedural mistake” because it made it possible for Republicans to offer poison pill amendments to Democratic bills that could pass on the floor (Green 2015, 175). Another example: though not Speaker at the time, Nancy Pelosi decided at the last minute to oppose fast track authority legislation in 2015 requested by President Obama after failing to win enough Democratic support for the measure, which generated news stories about a rift between Pelosi and Obama and disarray among Democrats (Allen 2015; French, Sherman, and Bresnahan 2015).

⁶⁹ Though the conventional wisdom is that Dennis Hastert (R-IL) was a weak speaker, he was willing to use his authority to shape policy outcomes, and he was aided by Majority Whip (and later Leader) Tom Delay, one of the most effective whips in modern House history (e.g. Green 2010, Theriault 2008, ch 7). Among other disciplinary moves, party leaders removed Chris Smith (R-NJ) from his committee chairmanship in 2005 because he was deemed insufficiently loyal to party leaders (Pershing 2005). One could also argue that Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) was better able to constrain party rebels, if not overcome their resistance entirely.

While it is tempting to blame the election of Donald Trump for the House GOP's troubles, Trump exacerbated, but did not cause, its decline in cartel authority. As a quintessential party outsider, Trump's 2016 election empowered the anti-establishment wing of the GOP, particularly the Freedom Caucus. He frequently criticized GOP leaders in Congress and sometimes took positions that ran counter to theirs. His pioneering use of social media also gave him significant influence over lawmakers who feared his ability to rile up Republican primary voters, allowing him to play the entrepreneurial role of what R. Douglas Arnold called an "instigator," galvanizing inattentive publics against lawmakers who vote the wrong way (Arnold 1990, 70). Republican voters' ideological, anti-compromise tendencies had been on the rise well before Trump's election, however, and they had been primed by years of conservative media coverage to endorse an anti-party outsider for president. As president, Trump's sway over Congress was less than it seemed; he was often led by others, including the Freedom Caucus (see above) and commentators on FOX News, and congressional leaders adroitly limited his influence behind the scenes (Glassman 2019, Nelson 2018, Wattles 2018). Nor was he an innovator of GOP defiance, and his brash, partisan rhetorical style had already been popularized among the Republican base by Tea Party-aligned Republicans in Congress (Gervais and Morris 2018, 168-177).

Trump *was* good at creating the impression that he, not House GOP leaders, was leading Congress and the party. After losing reelection in 2020, his apparent command of Republican voters convinced Kevin McCarthy to embrace the president following the January 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol, a decision that helped persuade Democrats that McCarthy was too untrustworthy to support as Speaker (Wehner 2023). Trump continued to try playing kingmaker, endorsing congressional candidates in primaries,⁷⁰ backing (or, more often, rejecting) candidates in the battles over the Speakership in January and October of 2023, and voicing last-minute opposition to an immigration bill, military funding for Ukraine, and the reauthorization of an intelligence program in the 118th Congress. Trump's desired outcomes did not always happen, but when they did – even if it was due to other causes – he (and often the press) quickly gave Trump credit for the outcome, which further bolstered the impression that Republican leaders in

⁷⁰ Candidates who were endorsed by Trump, or who mentioned Trump on their campaign website, were associated with a higher win rate in 2022 primaries. However, many of those candidates would go on to lose their general election (Kamarck 2022).

Congress were weak, as did party leaders' decision to openly consult with Trump on legislative and electoral strategy (Beavers and Mutnick 2024).

Conclusion

As Jeff Jenkins and Charles Stewart wrote in their history of speakership elections, “The organizational cartel was not automatic. It had to be built” (Jenkins and Stewart 2013). Over the past several decades, we have witnessed that what can be built can also be dismantled, or at least have its foundations weakened. Gradually, through a combination of internal and external factors, a growing number of congressional Republicans became more anti-party as well as more conservative, and the House Republican Party’s cartel authority began to erode. By 2024 it was in poor shape indeed.

Will this trend continue, or will the House Republican Party find a way to reassert its cartel authority? There are some signs that the party may be able to do so. Conservative PACs have been supporting Republicans facing Freedom Caucus-supported candidates in primaries (Bowman and Schwartz 2024). More Republicans appear to be aware of the collective costs to the party’s reputation that come from poor internal discipline and the negative press attention given to some of the more outrageous ideas and tactics of dissidents in the party (Draper 2022, 225; Papp 2023; Raju 2023b). One GOP dissident noted for criticizing his colleagues, Chip Roy (TX), admitted that “a lot of people [in my district] are saying ‘Hey, we want you guys to be united’” (Karni and Jimison 2024). There is even evidence that Fox News may be losing its dominance over viewers (Farhi 2024).

However, any expectation that the Republican Conference will soon reunify as a strong party cartel should be tempered by other indications that the same forces undermining GOP unity are still quite strong. So far this year, several anti-establishment outsiders have won GOP primaries in open seats. Some Republican party loyalists have faced significant primary challengers and, while winning, did so with lower-than-usual percentages after being attacked for challenging the Freedom Caucus or other conservative upstarts or for otherwise demonstrating less conservative credentials.⁷¹ And if Fox News becomes less influential, it may be because it is

⁷¹ They included Mike Bost (IL), Dan Crenshaw (TX), Tony Gonzalez (TX), and Steve Womack (AR). Redistricting in Alabama forced two other incumbents to face each other, where Freedom Caucus member Barry Moore came out the winner over Jerry Carl (Mutnick and Fernandez 2024).

supplanted by new conservative media outlets that collectively put the same pressure on Republican lawmakers to be more “pure.”

If history is any guide, House Republicans may have to follow the same path that their 19th century predecessors did in building the organizational cartel, realizing that internal defections risked giving power to the minority party, and dissidents in particular realizing that supporting a strong party cartel yields greater benefits for them (Jenkins and Stewart 2013). But it will require entrepreneurs outside of Congress as well as within it to bring about change. As political scientist Seth Masket observed, “the creation of disciplined parties inside the legislature requires the presence and engagement of activist groups outside it” (Masket 2009, 188).

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Table 1. Key Events in the Selection/Removal of a Speaker, 118th Congress (through January 2024)

Event	Date(s)	Vote(s)	Outcome	Comments
Selection of Kevin McCarthy as Speaker	11/15/22, 1/3/23- 1/7/23	* Nominated by Conference (188-31) * Selected by House after 15 votes (between 4 and 21 GOP defectors) * Final vote: 216-212 (6 vote present)	McCarthy selected	Largest number of ballots to elect a Speaker since 1859-1860
Removal of McCarthy as Speaker	10/3/23	* Privileged resolution to declare speakership vacant passes (216-210, 8 GOP defectors)	McCarthy removed	First time a Speaker is removed via the resolution to vacate
Nomination of Steve Scalise as Speaker	10/11/23	* Nominated by Conference (113 Scalise, 99 Jordan)	Scalise withdraws	Only second time since 1919 that leadership ladder is abandoned by GOP in selecting Speaker [^]
Jim Jordan as candidate for Speaker	10/13/23	* Nominated by Conference (152-55) * No candidates selected after three floor votes (between 20 and 25 GOP defectors)	No candidate is selected	Conference votes 86-112 (5 present) to withdraw nomination
Nomination of Tom Emmer as Speaker	10/24/23	* Nominated by Conference vs. five other candidates (117 Emmer, 97 Johnson, 6 other/present)	Emmer withdraws	Emmer holds a “straw poll” after nomination; 26 Republicans refuse to support him ^{^^}
Selection of Mike Johnson as Speaker	10/24/23- 10/25/23	* Nominated by Conference vs. four other candidates (128 Johnson, 29 Donalds, 44 other/present) * Selected by House (219-208)	Johnson selected	No defections on vote for speaker in either party for first time since 2009

Note: “defector” on a floor vote includes those voting for other named candidates or voting present.

[^] The first instance was the selection of Paul Ryan (R-WI) to replace Speaker John Boehner in 2015. In 1919, Frederick Gillett (R-MA) was selected Speaker despite not having previously served as GOP floor leader.

^{^^} See Brooks and Schnell 2023b.

Table 2. Special Rules Rejected on House Floor, 118th Congress (through April 11, 2024)

Rule	Underlying Bill(s)	Date (Roll Call #)	Vote	Vote By Party	Issues Raised*
H.Res.463	REINS Act, gas stove regulation	6/6/23 (#248)	206-220	R: 206-12 D: 0-208	
H.Res.680	DOD Approps	9/19/23 (#398)	212-214	R: 212-5 D: 0-209	Insufficient cuts to FY24 appropriations in bill
H.Res.712	DOD Approps, gas exports, gun laws in NM	9/21/23 (#403)	212-216	R: 212-6 D: 0-210	Various (poor budget planning, funding for Ukraine)
H.Res.869	CJS Approps, Iran assets	11/15/23 (#660)	198-225	R: 198-19 D: 0-206	Insufficient cuts to FBI in bill, no amendments allowed to Iran bill, protest vs. earlier passage of “clean” CR
H.Res.947	Settlement payments, rules from NLRB and FHA	1/10/24 (#3)	203-216	R: 203-13 D: 0-203	Protest vs. budget deal with Democrats
H.Res.994	Reducing SALT tax	2/14/24 (#48)	195-225	R:195-18 D:0-207	
H.Res.1125	Reauthorizing FISA	4/10/24 (#108)	193-228	R:193-19 D:0-209	Insufficient privacy safeguards in bill

* Sources: CQ Roll Call 2023, Morgan and Warburton 2023, Schnell 2024a, Sotomayor 2024, Sotomayor, Caldwell, and Kane 2023.

Table 3. Explaining GOP Votes For Kevin McCarthy as Speaker Nominee (January 2023)

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
<i>1. Ideology</i>		
DW-NOMINATE (1 st dim)	-13.12* (5.70)	-12.09* (5.52)
DW-NOMINATE (2 nd dim)	5.23* (2.03)	5.06** (1.88)
<i>2. Reelection</i>		
% General Vote, 2022	-0.18 (2.83)	-0.12 (2.75)
% Primary Vote, 2022	--	-0.18 (1.99)
<i>3. Constituency</i>		
% District Vote for Trump, 2022	13.79^ (7.85)	16.98* (8.51)
<i>4. Factional Affiliation</i>		
Freedom Caucus Member	-1.56^ (0.86)	-1.55^ (0.93)
<i>5. Internal Influence</i>		
Party Leader	-- ¹	-- ¹
Committee Chair	-- ¹	-- ¹
<i>6. Partisan Identity</i>		
Term in Office	0.26^ (0.15)	0.26 (0.19)
Defeated Incumbent in 1 st Primary	0.56 (0.90)	0.87 (0.95)
Served as State Legislative Leader	-0.60 (0.89)	-0.45 (0.94)
Maverick	-0.68 (1.11)	-1.12 (1.21)
Constant	3.46 (4.08)	0.80 (3.69)
<i>N</i>	222	180
<i>Log Pseudo-Likelihood</i>	-25.13	-22.11
<i>Pseudo R²</i>	0.64	0.62

Calculated using robust standard errors.

^ p<1.0, * p<0.5, ** p<0.1

¹Omitted because variable predicts success perfectly.

Table 4: Explaining GOP Votes For Defeated House Rules, Excluding Primary Vote (Jan. 2023-Apr. 2024)

Variable	H.Res 463 (6/6/23)	H.Res 680 (9/19/23)	H.Res. 712 (9/21/23)	H.Res. 869 (11/15/23)	H.Res. 947 (1/10/24)	H.Res 994 (2/14/24)	H.Res. 1125 (4/10/24)
<i>1. Ideology</i>							
DW-NOMINATE (1 st dim)	-10.54 [^] (5.61)	-17.20* (8.54)	-3.20 (3.95)	2.03 (3.57)	-14.34 [^] (12.34)	-4.50 [^] (2.41)	-3.61 (4.19)
DW-NOMINATE (2 nd dim)	9.30** (3.09)	4.37** (1.28)	12.68 [^] (6.78)	5.60*** (1.55)	12.34*** (3.00)	3.13* (1.32)	10.35*** (2.52)
<i>2. Reelection</i>							
% General Vote, 2022	0.13 (4.60)	-1.20 (2.74)	13.72 (20.41)	-0.54 (3.03)	1.85 (10.07)	-0.08 (2.48)	-6.14* (2.44)
<i>3. Constituency</i>							
% District Vote for Trump, 2020	7.54 (10.08)	4.18 (9.10)	-20.65 (22.12)	10.65 (7.35)	-- ³	2.16 (5.89)	27.80* (11.59)
<i>4. Factional Affiliation</i>							
Freedom Caucus Member	0.18 (1.21)	-- ²	-- ²	-2.00* (0.90)	-- ²	0.14 (0.77)	-2.26* (0.97)
<i>5. Internal Influence</i>							
In Leadership	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹
Committee Chair	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹
<i>6. Partisan Identity</i>							
Term in Office	0.36 (0.27)	-0.22 (0.19)	0.58 (0.37)	0.37* (0.17)	0.09 (0.28)	0.22 [^] (0.13)	0.47 (0.29)
Defeated Incumbent in 1 st Primary	-1.39 (0.95)	-- ¹	-- ¹	-0.36 (0.80)	-- ¹	0.69 (1.46)	0.18 (1.01)
Served as State Legislative Leader	-0.44 (0.94)	-2.18 [^] (1.13)	-4.04* (2.63)	-0.56 (0.87)	-0.19 (1.03)	-0.64 (0.65)	1.13 (0.82)
Maverick	0.04 (2.37)	-- ¹	-- ¹	-0.81 (1.03)	0.66 (1.80)	-1.25 (0.91)	-1.63 (1.54)

Constant	7.89 [^] (4.24)	16.08 ^{**} (5.21)	13.54 [*] (5.25)	-3.98 (3.52)	14.74 [^] (8.40)	3.50 (2.46)	-5.91 (4.68)
<i>N</i>	218	217	218	217	216	212	211
<i>Log Pseudo-Likelihood</i>	-15.75	-11.59	-7.55	-36.07	-12.12	-44.19	-21.03
<i>Pseudo R²</i>	0.64	0.51	0.68	0.44	0.74	0.28	0.67

Logit regression using robust standard errors. [^] p<1.0, * p<0.5, ** p<0.1, *** p<0.001

¹Omitted because variable predicts success perfectly.

²Omitted because variable predicts failure perfectly.

³Model could not be determined when variable was included.

Table 5: Explaining GOP Votes For Defeated House Rules, Including Primary Vote (Jan. 2023-Apr. 2024)

Variable	H.Res 463 (6/6/23)	H.Res 680 (9/19/23)	H.Res. 869 (11/15/23)	H.Res. 947 (1/10/24)	H.Res 994 (2/14/24)	H.Res. 1125 (4/10/24)
<i>1. Ideology</i>						
DW-NOMINATE (1 st dim)	-11.80* (5.37)	-16.99** (4.93)	3.30 (3.99)	-10.06 (6.11)	-4.70^ (2.65)	-9.00^ (5.29)
DW-NOMINATE (2 nd dim)	15.05** (5.46)	7.34* (3.06)	6.42*** (1.67)	11.58*** (2.98)	3.05* (1.44)	12.31*** (3.06)
<i>2. Reelection</i>						
% General Vote, 2022	-5.15 (5.26)	-2.64 (3.11)	-0.16 (3.14)	1.87 (7.92)	-0.29 (2.31)	-4.77 (3.70)
% Primary Vote, 2022	-8.56^ (4.43)	-0.92 (1.59)	-0.26 (2.12)	2.19 (3.44)	1.19 (1.61)	0.29 (2.47)
<i>3. Constituency</i>						
% District Vote for Trump, 2020	20.75 (13.18)	12.31* (6.17)	9.18 (8.64)	-- ³	2.93 (6.48)	46.24* (20.51)
<i>4. Factional Affiliation</i>						
Freedom Caucus Member	1.15 (1.73)	-- ²	-1.88* (0.92)	-- ²	0.34 (0.89)	-1.44 (1.64)
<i>5. Internal Influence</i>						
In Leadership	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹
Committee Chair	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹	-- ¹
<i>6. Partisan Identity</i>						
Term in Office	0.66 (0.59)	-0.16 (0.23)	0.36^ (0.19)	0.06 (0.35)	0.12 (0.11)	0.61 (0.54)
Defeated Incumbent in 1 st Primary	-2.02^ (1.17)	-- ¹	-0.09 (0.99)	-- ²	-0.09 (1.20)	1.03 (1.20)
Served as State Legislative Leader	-0.08 (1.20)	-2.89 (1.81)	-0.96 (0.99)	-0.82 (1.46)	-0.80 (0.67)	0.53 (1.15)

Maverick	-0.31 (2.14)	-- ¹	-1.19 (1.20)	-0.00 (2.16)	-1.67 [^] (0.98)	-3.63 (2.24)
Constant	10.85 (7.27)	14.67* (5.76)	-3.61 (4.38)	10.20 [^] (5.75)	2.74 (2.81)	-13.77 [^] (7.77)
<i>N</i>	176	176	176	176	172	171
<i>Log Pseudo-Likelihood</i>	-9.06	-5.58	-27.62	-10.74	-37.47	-12.68
<i>Pseudo R²</i>	0.72	0.63	0.46	0.72	0.30	0.74

Logit regression using robust standard errors. [^] p<1.0, * p<0.5, ** p<0.1, *** p<0.001

¹Omitted because variable predicts success perfectly.

²Omitted because variable predicts failure perfectly.

Model for H.Res. 712 could not be determined.

Table 6. Factors Contributing to Weakening of House GOP Cartel Authority

Factor	Contributes to...	
	Greater Distance Between Parties	Less Unity Within House GOP
1. Republican Voters	More disdainful of compromise with ideological opponents	More ideological, more disdainful of compromise in general
2. Conservative Media (1990s-)	Greater sway with GOP voters; increases conservatism/anti-progressivism among viewers	Increasingly frames GOP as insider/RINO vs. “true” conservatives
3. Republican Primaries (2000s-)	Advantages conservative/non-compromising candidates; fear of losses moves incumbents rightward	Advantages amateur candidates unfamiliar with legislative norms; encourages candidates to distinguish themselves by positioning vs. their party
4. Campaign Fundraising (2000s-)	Empowers conservative interest groups, individual donors who value greater extremism	Encourages attention-grabbing conflict with one’s party
5. Intraparty House Factions (1970s-)	Push the GOP further rightward	Use confrontational tactics against party leaders; undermine party’s cartel authority
6. Weak Party Leaders in House (1990s-)	Prioritize party agenda and building majorities within GOP	Inability to maintain norms that foster unity, eliminate or weaken tools that enforce cartel authority

Table 7. Relationship Between GOP Incumbent NOMINATE Scores and Number of Candidates in Their First Primary

Variable	DV: 1st Dim NOMINATE	DV: 2nd Dim NOMINATE
# Candidates in First Primary	0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
District Partisanship (% Vote for Trump in 2020)	0.82*** (0.16)	0.11 (0.33)
<i>N</i>	174	174
<i>R</i> ²	0.27	0.30

Ordinary least squares regression using robust standard errors.

^ p<1.0, * p<0.5, ** p<0.1, *** p<0.001

Figure 1. Margins of Roll Call Votes in 115th – 118th Houses (2017-2024)

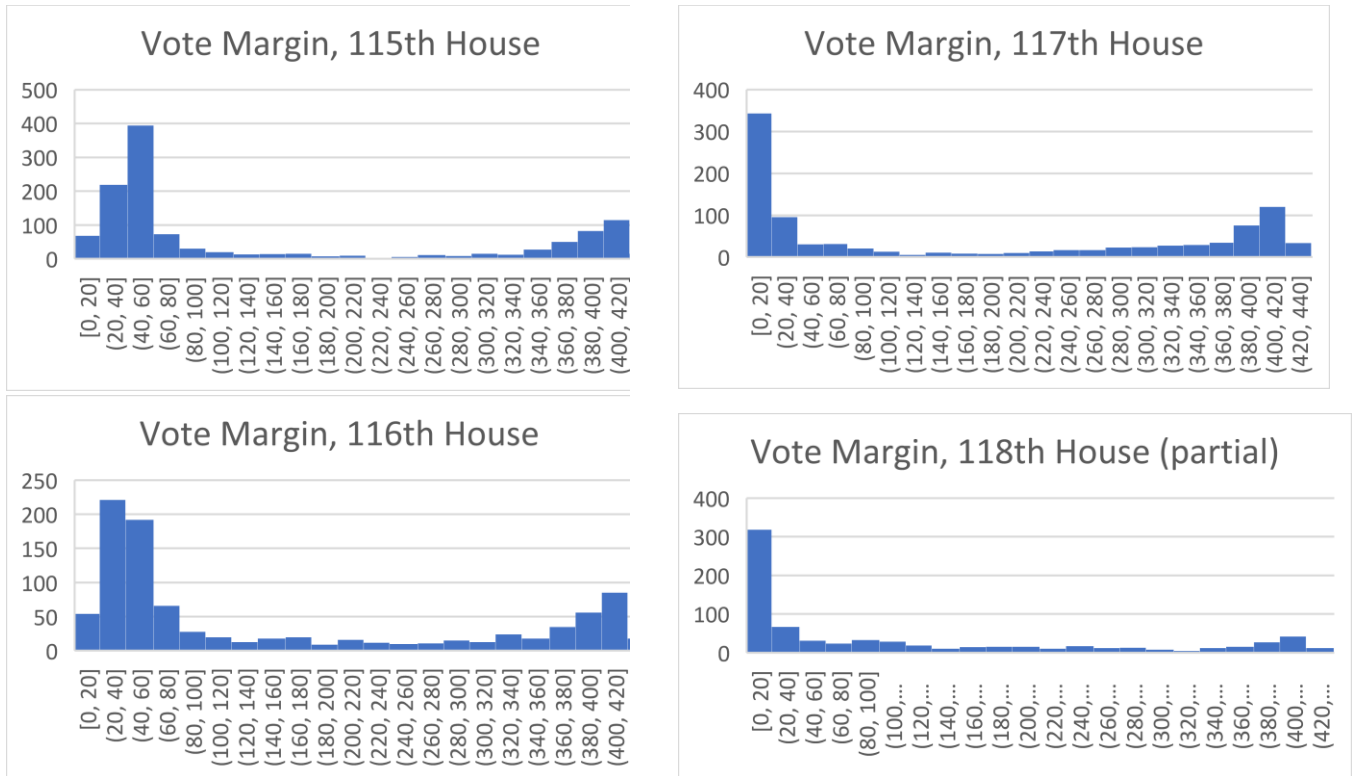


Figure 2. Median First Dimension NOMINATE Scores in U.S. House, 1971-2023

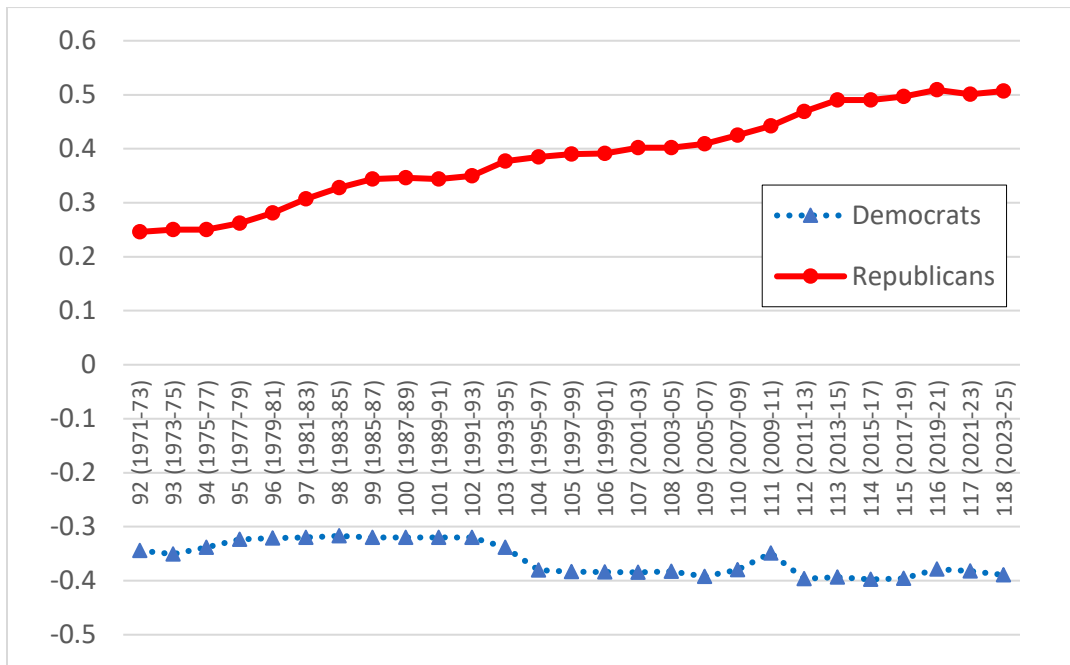


Figure 3. Standard Deviation of First Dimension NOMINATE Scores in U.S. House, 1971-2023

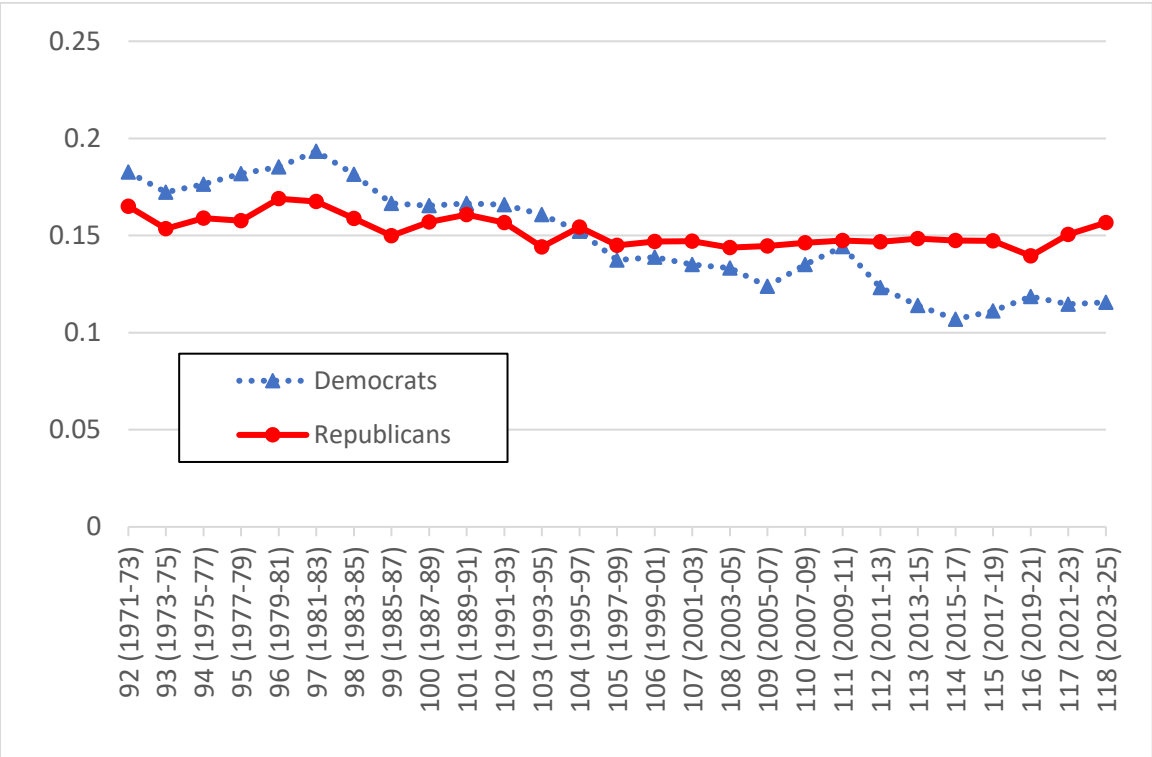
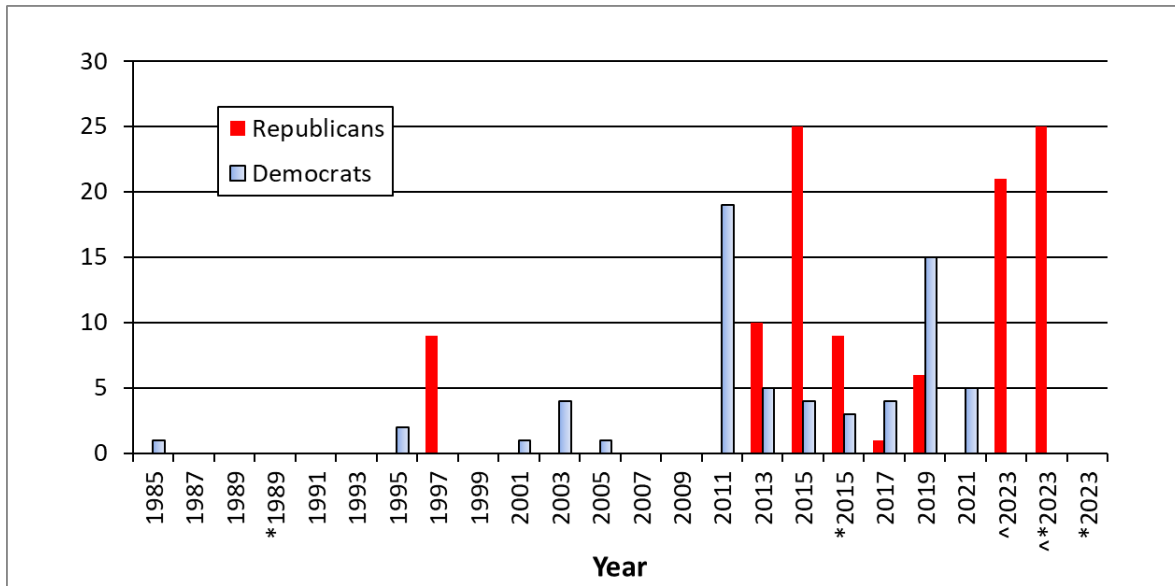


Figure 4. Number of Defections on Votes for Speaker of the House, 1985-2023

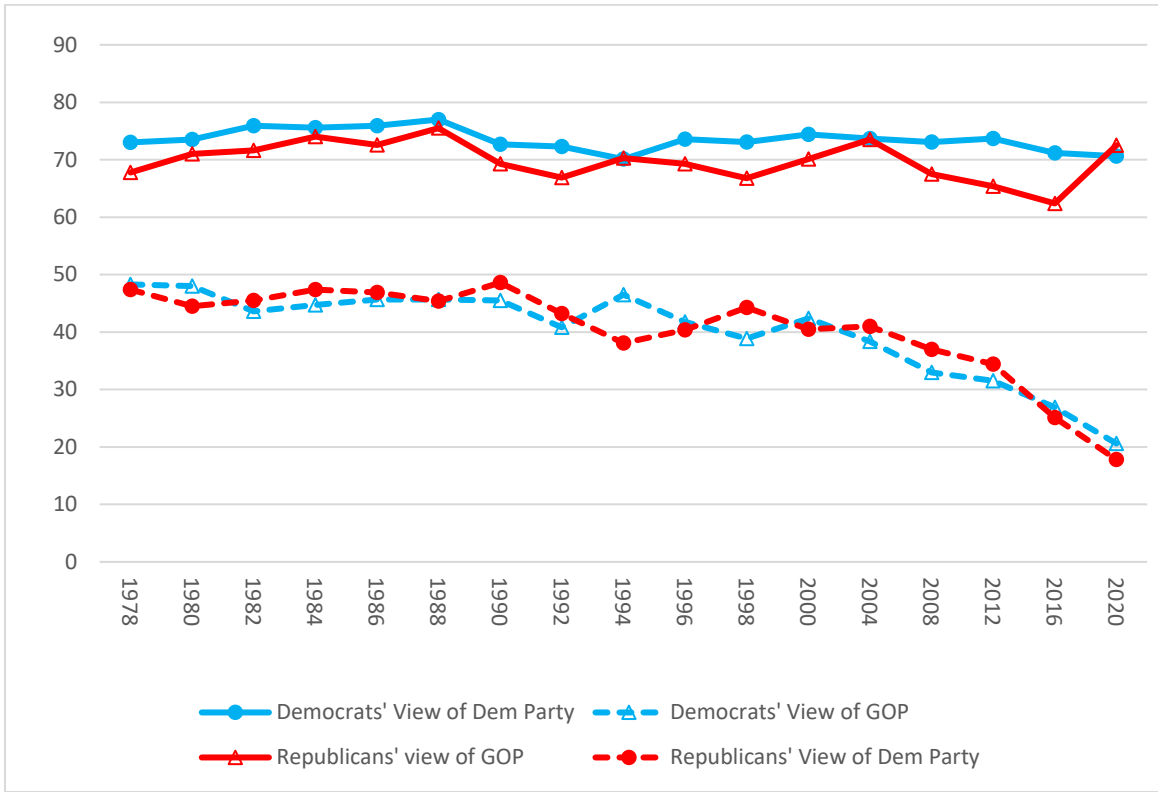


Includes lawmakers who voted "present" or for another named candidate besides their party's nominee. Party nominees' votes are excluded.

* Held in mid-session to replace vacancy

^ Number represents the largest number of defectors against the party's nominee in series of consecutive votes (Kevin McCarthy, January 2023 (15 ballots), and Jim Jordan, October 2023 (3 ballots)).

Figure 5. Average Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Each Party by Democrats and Republicans, 1978-2020



Source: American National Election Survey (https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=avg_ft_parties)