

Coordinating the Congress: Explaining Caucus Persistence in the U.S. House

Jennifer N. Victor (George Mason University)
Nils Ringe (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

*Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association,
August 29 - September 1 2013, Chicago, Illinois*

Objective

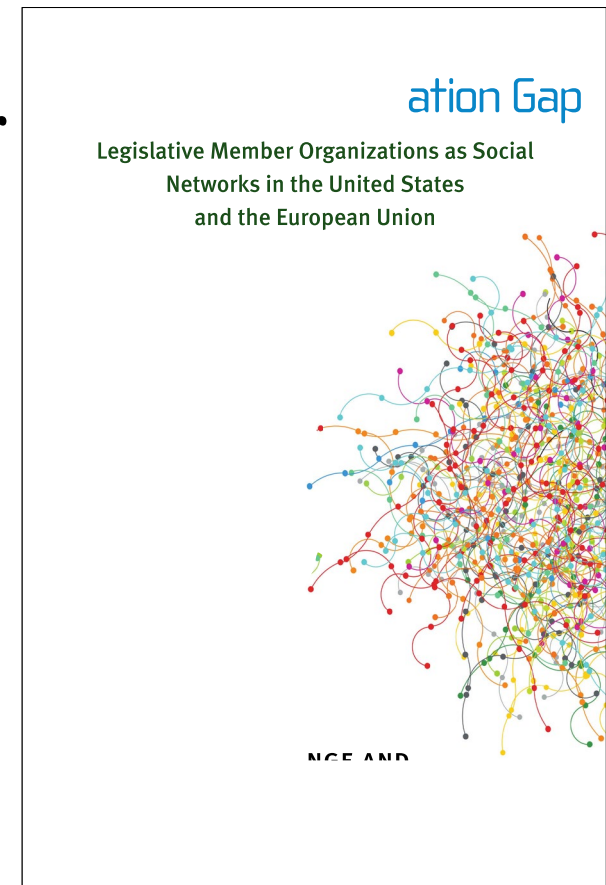
- Identify predictors of caucus persistence over time/across legislative terms.
- Make first use of new dataset of caucus membership (103rd-111th congresses).
 - First longitudinal analysis of evolution of caucus system in U.S. House.

Theory

- **Functionalist approach**
 - Caucuses should be more likely to persist if they successfully provide the benefits legislators expect to receive from joining caucuses and maintaining their membership.
- **Hypotheses derived from three key functions identified in previous research**
 - Information acquisition, diffusion, exchange.
 - Political coordination (e.g., agenda setting, search for compromise, and coalition building)
 - Representational/signaling (of policy priorities and preferences to constituents).

Hypotheses I: Information

- Caucus networks are composed of weak, bridging ties (Ringe and Victor 2013; see also Granovetter 1973, Burt 1992) that cut across party and committee lines.
- Allows for the efficient diffusion of policy and political information.
 - *Hypotheses: caucuses more likely to persist when they connect greater proportion of MCs who do not share the same party affiliation (H1) or committee assignments (H2).*



Hypotheses II: Coordination

- Caucuses allow for political coordination of outside the party and committee structure (e.g., Hammond, 1998).
- Benefits of coordination diffuse and indirect, difficult to observe (Ringe and Victor 2013).
- But: data on sponsorship and cosponsorship available.
- And: coordination most likely among caucus leaders.
 - *Hypotheses: caucuses more likely to persist when members more likely to sponsor (H3) and cosponsor legislation (H4), and when leaders do not share same party affiliation (H5).*

Multiplying Information and Coordination Benefits

- Caucus size = multiplier of information and coordination benefits.
 - Hypothesis: *positive relationship between caucus size and persistence (H6).*

Hypotheses III: Signaling

- Function of caucuses largely representational = allow legislators to signal preferences and priorities to constituents (e.g., Loomis 1981; Miler 2011).
- MCs join caucuses to cheaply signal support for issues constituents care about.
 - *Hypothesis: if legislators join caucuses for signaling purposes only, hypotheses H1-H6 should not hold(H7).*

Dependent variables

- Membership data from self-reported caucus membership in *Congressional Yellow Book*.
- Unit of analysis: caucus-congress
- DVs:
 - Short-term persistence (from on congress to next)
 - Medium-term persistence (at time t , the number of previous congresses—up to 9—in which caucus existed).

Independent variables

- Proportion of cross-party dyads in caucus (H1)
- Proportion of dyads in caucus with no common committees (H2)
- Sponsorship (H3)
- Cosponsorship (H4)
- Opposite party caucus leaders (H5)
- Caucus size (H6)
- Congress dummies.

Models

- Model 1: logit for *short-term caucus persistence* DV, including fixed effects for time (congress dummies), and robust standard errors clustered on caucuses.
- Model 2: poisson for *medium-term caucus persistence* DV.

Variable	Model 1 (short-term, logit)	Model 2 (medium-term, poisson)
Proportion of Opposite Party Dyads	-0.165 (0.235)	-0.136* (0.0778)
Proportion of Dyads with No Common Committees	-0.153 (0.255)	0.0937 (0.0996)
Sponsorship	-0.00285** (0.00125)	-0.000372** (0.000185)
Cosponsorship	0.00119*** (0.000238)	0.000119** (4.82e-05)
One leader from each party	0.533*** (0.193)	0.0280 (0.0487)
Total Membership of Caucus	0.0214 (0.0253)	0.00693** (0.00343)

Results

- Information
 - H1 and H2: not confirmed.
- Coordination:
 - H3 (sponsorship): not confirmed.
 - H4 (cosponsorship): confirmed
 - H5 (cross-party leaders): confirmed in short-term, not medium-term
- Signaling:
 - H7: not confirmed
- Caucus size:
 - H6: confirmed in medium-term, not short-term.

Conclusion

- Successful political coordination, esp. bill cosponsorship, makes caucuses persist both in the short- and medium-term.
- Bipartisan leadership contributes to short-term persistence.
- Caucus size contributes to medium-term persistence.
- We need to do more work.