

Factionalism and US Foreign Policy: A Social Psychological Model of Minority Influence¹

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Scholars have examined the influence of intraparty factionalism on government stability and policy development in democratic systems for some time, yet factionalism in major political parties in the United States remains understudied. This article draws on scholarship on minority influence from social psychology, as well as studies of party polarization and coalitions in comparative politics, to explore the impact of factionalism in the US Congress on support for foreign policy initiatives. It proposes a novel framework to examine the longitudinal impact of the Freedom Caucus or Tea Party in the Republican Party on foreign policy initiatives championed by the majority. It conducts a plausibility probe of the model linking factionalism, minority influence strategies, and delays in establishment progress on foreign policy through case studies of comprehensive immigration policy reform debates and Trade Promotion Authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The paper concludes that factions that demonstrate persistence and consistency in support of minority positions do appear to influence the scope and direction of foreign policy commitments, votes on major legislation, and nonvotes over time. It also offers suggestions for future study of more contingent and multilinear models of foreign policy processes in comparative perspective.

Just five years after John Boehner (R-OH) led Republicans to an overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives by touting the “Pledge to America,” a governing agenda focused on creating jobs, cutting spending, and reforming Congress, he announced his resignation from his post as Speaker of the House in the face of extraordinary policy demands from the new Tea Party faction (later known as the Freedom Caucus). The rise and fall of the Speaker were emblematic of new pressures from minority actors within US political parties who are determined to

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force change. These dynamics have affected domestic policy development—witness the bitter debate over the “repeal and replace” plan for the Affordable Care Act in 2017—and they have carried over to the foreign policy arena. Factions in Congress also have challenged US responses to the Syrian civil war, support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and national security surveillance policies.

This study draws on insights from social psychology and comparative politics to examine the process by which party factionalism can impact the modern US foreign policy process. Inspired by social psychology studies of how consistent minority support for an alternative viewpoint can influence majority views (Moscovici, Lage, and Naffrechoux 1969; Kaarbo 2008), this paper proposes a novel framework to study the impact of factions on policy development. Because factions typically do not have the numbers or votes to make direct legislative policy, this study explores how they employ indirect, nonlegislative tactics to challenge initiatives. By integrating ideas from other subfields and disciplines, this study offers new ways to think about how groups that seem too small to “win” in the traditional sense may still have an impact on the foreign policy process.

This article begins with a survey of literature from political science and social psychology examining factionalism and minority influence on political parties and coalition-building in Congress. Next, we develop hypotheses that address factional attributes, minority group strategies, and their projected foreign policy impact. We then conduct a plausibility probe of the intraparty factionalism model of foreign policy development. Case studies focus on foreign policy debates inside the Republican Party in Congress from 2010 to 2015, including struggles over comprehensive immigration policy reform and trade promotion authority. Evidence from the cases suggests that factions can effectively shape, stall, or even stop foreign policy initiatives supported by the majority.

Party Factionalism

Intraparty factionalism generates a great deal of attention in comparative politics and the study of parliamentary systems. Zariski defines factions as “any intra-party combination, clique, or grouping whose members share common identity or purpose, and are organized to act collectively—as a distinct bloc within a party—to achieve their goals” (1960:33). In works on factionalism in Britain, Canada, Italy, and Japan, Boucek observes, “Political parties are not monolithic structures but collective entities in which competition, divided opinions and dissent create internal pressure” (2009, 455; 2012). Factionalism is especially puzzling because it defies the common logic of organization that party unity is essential to electoral success. A number of studies thus characterize the phenomenon as the outcome of institutional arrangements and electoral laws (Giannetti and Benoit 2009; Saalfeld 2009), rather than recognize factions as agents of policy development or change.

However, comparative studies of factionalism are not unified on the ideal unit or level of analysis. Some works focus on aggregate measures of party unity (Cox and McCubbins 2005) and the power of majorities in gatekeeping proposals, which may, in turn, bias how one measures the power of various factions. Others point out analytical distinctions between party cohesion, party discipline, and party unity (Hazan 2000; Stecker 2013). Simply relying on high profile votes may not capture individual entrepreneurship employing nonlegislative tactics, as “a great deal of factional activity occurs before any votes” DiSalvo (2012, 32). Additional studies in comparative politics examine typologies of intraparty groups with different attributes, including organization, stability, function and role, and their projected impacts on political outcomes (Boucek 2009; Belloni and Beller 1978). Other work identifies fascinating links between factionalism, party government, and Cabinet durability in parliamentary regimes (Köllner and Basedau 2005; Kohno 1992).

Studies of similar dynamics in the United States tend to focus on interparty relations and their manifestations in executive-legislative struggles (Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Milner and Tingley 2015) or on state politics rather than national parties (Key 1949; Reiter 1998; 1980). Indeed, Reiter calls factionalism “one of the most widely discussed but under-theorized aspects of party politics” (2004, 251). In more recent work, Koger, Masket, and Noel use social network methods to characterize the place of factions within larger information-sharing clusters, which they term “expanded party networks,” that also include interest groups, consultants, and segments of the media (2010).

That said, several scholars have begun to examine factions as agents of change in domestic and foreign policies. For example, DiSalvo builds on the work of Reiter and others to advance a more rigorous study of factionalism and institutional change (2009, 29). He argues that beneath party labels are “factions that have conflicting goals, incentives, and resources” who work to try “to control the policymaking process” (2010:269). They are actors who promote legitimate discourse on policy options. DiSalvo defines a faction as “a party subunit that has 1) the ideological consistency; 2) the organizational capacity; and 3) the temporal durability to 4) undertake significant actions to shift a party’s agenda priorities along the Left-Right spectrum” (2010, 271). They also may provide a valuable social function, helping to provide identity and impetus for innovation “informally by altering folkways and norms under the existing procedural rules” (2009, 31). DiSalvo is more cautious regarding the impact of the potential size of factions. Factions, he argues, seek to maximize their influence by “developing new organizations and communications networks . . . by designing, honing, and refining measures . . . [a]ppealing to attentive publics” (2009, 36). DiSalvo argues that factions then act through means of both “informal decentralization” (working within the party to change its agenda) and “formal decentralization” (working within the chamber go dilute authority of majority leaders), with the goal to gain “veto power” or to shape policies to their liking (2009, 42). These strategies speak to questions such as how unified or divided parties and legislative majorities are at any given time, as well as the cohesion of the party factions. Finally, recent works have begun to offer descriptive links between factionalism and US foreign policy development (Mead 2017; Giannetti and Benoit 2009).

Social Psychology and Minority Impact

Contemporary research in social psychology also offers promising insights into processes by which intraparty factionalism, or majority-minority differences, may influence policy outcomes. For much of the twentieth century, the traditional “conformity thesis” held that dissident voices in groups tend to yield to the majority position even when it is incorrect (Allen 1965; Maass and Clark 1984; Milgram 1963). For instance, Asch (1956) demonstrated that individuals will even dismiss information from their own senses in favor of the position espoused by the majority. However, scholars (Moscovici, Lage, and Naffrechoux 1969; Moscovici and Nemeth 1974) counter traditional assumptions by showing how group members may exhibit deviance or nonconformity by attempting to persuade others to endorse alternative decisions. They identify a two-step model of minority influence, involving the inducement of conflict with the majority by challenging the majority ideal or norm and providing a consistent, alternative perspective.

Over time, numerous studies have reinforced the central premise of minority influence theory: consistent behavior by minorities will exert influence, whereas inconsistent behavior is likely to fail to bring about any change of the majority’s attitudes and perceptions (Tanford and Penrod 1984; Moscovici and Personaz 1980). There is scant attention in this literature to the actual size of the minority; rather, the focus is on qualities and postures that may help effect goals. In this context, consistency may help produce attitude changes through member attribution of

certainty and competence. Moscovici argues, “minorities can be especially effective when they remain adamant, refuse to compromise or negotiate, and provide a clear alternative view for the majority to adopt” (Moscovici 1980, 201). Additional work identifies scope conditions associated with minority influence. For example, studies find this to be most effective if alternative voices have enough time to present their position (Wachtler 1977) and argue in a firm but flexible manner (Mugny 1975). The key to success, Mugny and Pérez argue, is the “minority’s style of behavior,” including presenting an “illusion of immobility,” which “is instrumental to the instigation and management of conflict” (1991, 3). Rost Rublee (2008, 421) adds that potentially powerful minority influence mechanisms include persuasion and social conformity pressures.

Political scientists have begun to draw on the social psychology literature to argue that factionalism or minority-majority differences can impact foreign policy decision-making. Hagan et al. (2001) say interactions between minority and majority positions, or between government and opposition, can produce alternative outcomes including deadlock, compromise, and more serious policy inconsistencies. Kaarbo applies social psychology to coalition politics. She states (1996, 501) that social psychology “provides a lens to examine junior party strategies of influence in governing coalitions and the locus of decision-making authority”—to study underlying mechanisms linking institutional context to policymaking and policy choices. In a related work, Kaarbo asserts, “The psychological processes involved in group polarization, persuasion, and other influence strategies” play critical roles in shaping outcomes (2008, 57).

In summary, the literatures on factionalism and minority influence from social psychology help establish a foundation for exploring how factional members of Congress shape foreign policies through opposition and resistance. Key research questions for this study include: How have divisions in major parties impacted US foreign policy and to what extent? How have members of the Tea Party / Freedom Caucus tried to influence their party’s positions on foreign and national security policy? And, what are the implications of factionalism for foreign policy responses to contemporary global challenges?

Hypotheses and Research Design

This study examines the attributes and strategies of influence by factions as independent variables that may impact establishment Republican Party progress toward their preferred foreign policy outcomes (or non-outcomes). The project assumes agency for minority positions in broader political debates and emphasizes the vibrancy of political discourse. They may sometimes try to “veto” majority positions in an institutional sense, but they also have larger potential to influence party cohesion/unity and shape the foreign policy agenda through multiple pathways or means.

Attributes of Factions

Counter to the limited literature on factionalism in U.S. politics that treats it as a dependent variable, or the product of exogenous forces or “unusual” conditions (Key 1949; Reiter 1998; 1980; Sindler 1955), this study focuses on attributes of factions and their agency in policy processes. We adopt DiSalvo’s definition of faction as a party subunit with ideological consistency and temporal durability that undertakes significant actions to shift policy preferences. Factions may be majority or minority actors within their parties. Factions may be more or less cohesive and disciplined, and these dynamics often produce bifurcated cleavage structures within parties.²

²These characteristics relate to scholarly debate about the complex relationship between traditional parties and social movements in many democratic systems. Comparative political studies of party movements have identified factions

Recent studies have begun to examine the factionalism and foreign policy nexus (Peake, Krutz, and Hughes 2012; Mead 2017; 2011). In contrast to the theory of foreign policy entrepreneurship (Carter and Scott 2009; Marsh and Lantis 2016), which examines direct and indirect, legislative and nonlegislative pathways for individual members of Congress to attempt to shape policy outcomes, new attention to factionalism identifies group actors, their ideological foundations, and then extrapolates to potential impact on political party dynamics (Rathbun 2013; Dueck 2010). Notably, these works tend to focus less on the relative “size” of the factions than on their ideological impact. So long as they are ideologically cohesive and temporally durable, they are significant. For example, Mead (2017) describes the Jacksonian foundations of Tea Party ideology within the Republican Party, while Rathbun (2013) relates this to a more militant nationalist orientation with regards to foreign affairs. Such works provide rich accounts of the historical development of factions in U.S. political parties, and contribute to the first hypothesis of study:

If a cohesive faction emerges in a major party that challenges the establishment majority of the party on foreign policy, majority progress on policy passage is likely to be prevented or delayed.

To explore this hypothesis, we examine the ideological links and affiliations among members of Congress with factions inside larger party organizations. We look for ideological alignments and membership in caucuses or groups on Capitol Hill. Factions are seen as vehicles for both identity and agency—they help to define and innovate on policy, as well as act as agents to challenge dominant ideas and reset policy agendas. They may be led by prominent policy-makers, but because the faction is more significant as a group those leadership positions may shift over time.

Issue Framing

Consistent with Moscovici’s description of a two-step model of minority influence, this study posits that factions may use issue framing and problem definition to induce conflict with the establishment by challenging the majority position, ideal, or norm. Existing scholarship recognizes the importance of issue framing in group decision-making settings, involving shaping the understanding of the issue at hand and redefining the situation (Lantis 2016; Beasley 1998). Redefinition refers to a process of domestic recalculation of values and commitments to a traditional interpretation of policy meanings. This process may be most transparent in democratic states through rhetorical means, where accountability and power-sharing necessitates the constructive exchange of ideas among leaders (Risse 2000). Frame theory also suggests elites have a unique opportunity to characterize phenomena through focused discourse. Gamson and Modigliani define a frame as a “central organizing idea or story line [in a communication]. . . it suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (1987, 243; Zald 1996). This contributes to the second hypothesis of study:

If a vocal faction challenges and redefines the frame of the problem in a foreign policy issue area, it is likely to prevent or delay majority progress on policy passage.

Here, we examine the adoption of alternative issue framing. Entman (1993, 53) argues that frames may be metaphors or symbols raised in political discourse to “help receivers of information define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.” Framing allows factions an opportunity to shape the

variously as insurgency parties (Schwartz 2010), or social movements that form within parties (or a “party in the street”; Heaney and Rojas 2015). Scholars still disagree about how best to characterize the Tea Party/Freedom Caucus (Skocpol & Williamson 2012; Van Dyke and Meyer 2014; Libby 2014). Schwartz argues “the Tea Party movement fits comfortably into the category of party movement, occurring in the form of an insurgency within an established party that can affect political outcomes” (2016:4).

discourse on controversial issues and effectively shape the meaning-in-use or popular understanding of certain issues (Mugny and Pérez 1991). Notably, Entman recognizes that redefinition can be a confrontational process: “Elites wage a war of frames because they know that if *their* frame becomes the dominant way of thinking about a particular problem, then the battle for public opinion has been won” (1993, 58).

Persuasion Through Policy Innovation and Consistency

Consistent with Moscovici’s description of a two-step model of minority influence, this study posits that party factions also try to persuade the establishment and opposition by promoting policy alternatives consistently. Rublee (2008, 421) describes persuasion as one of the primary mechanisms for social influence, which she defines as “behavior resulting from genuine transformation of preferences.” Persuasion can occur through innovation—or the constructive substitution of alternative issue frames and policy solutions. Building on issue framing, minority groups may offer alternative policy goals or outcomes that are more attainable. This contributes to the third hypothesis of study:

If a vocal faction offers innovative alternative policy solutions and is consistent in their support, it is likely to prevent or delay majority progress on policy passage.

Persuasion may occur through persistent efforts by factions to change policy preferences of the majority; it can also occur through strong opposition to progress by the majority. The social psychology literature is clear that provision of a stable alternative norm by the minority may produce successful redefinition or issue framing (Moscovici et al. 1985; Maass and Clark 1984). Over time, numerous studies have reinforced minority influence theory: consistent behavior by minorities will exert influence, whereas inconsistent behavior is likely to fail to bring about any change of the majority’s attitudes and perceptions (Tanford and Penrod 1984). Scholars argue that consistency is one key strategy in successful redefinition or issue framing by factions in group decision-making. To examine consistency, we look for evidence of strong oppositional stances by factions that are announced and reiterated. We also examine the duration of these challenges relative to the larger policy-making process: Does factional opposition wax or wane, for example, over time. This echoes the social psychology literature on minority viewpoints, including studies of the “illusion of immobility” as a negotiating tool and investigation of how minority groups that “firmly uphold their own deviant or marginal standpoint can have an impact on the belief systems and behavior patterns of other individuals” (Mugny and Pérez 1991, 2; Moscovici 1980; 1985).³

Research Design

This study explores the role of factions as catalysts for political change. We conduct a plausibility probe of the model to account for select episodes of factional challenges to establishment positions on U.S. foreign policy. The independent variables for this study are: (1) Attributes of Factions: this study examines the relative size and ideological cohesion of factions within larger party organizations; (2) Issue Framing: the minority inducement of conflict with the majority by challenging the majority position, ideal, or norm; (3) Persuasion through Innovation and Consistency: presentation of policy alternatives, or persuasion through innovation in the

³ Finally, it is important to note that these hypotheses represent an interpretation of events through the lens of studies of factions. It is possible that alternate explanations—both internal to the chamber and external to the United States—may influence legislative action, apart from the role of party factions.

constructive substitution of alternative issue frames and policy solutions, and the provision of consistent, stable alternative positions.

The dependent variable for study is the prevention or delay of establishment progress on policy passage. We mark the beginning of a period of policy consideration through high profile statements by establishment and the introduction of related legislation in one chamber of Congress, then examine the duration of deliberations from this initiation of intent to pass legislation to the ultimate outcome or non-outcome. A period of one week to one year between the introduction of an initiative and its passage or action will be coded as a “timely” passage of legislation, one to two years as a “delay,” and two or more years as “significant delay” of timely passage of legislation or government action. This scale is offered as a reasonable measure of factional importance and success, or recognition of failure to influence policy.

This study conducts a plausibility probe for the purpose of testing hypotheses and building theory regarding the role of factions as minority actors in foreign policy decision-making processes (Eckstein 1975; George and Bennett 2005). Levy (2008, 6) describes the value of plausibility probes to “allow the researcher to sharpen a hypotheses or theory,” or “to refine the operationalization or measurement of key variables.” The goal of the study is to highlight new insights into how partisanship and politics can influence decisions involving critical areas of foreign policy.⁴ Case studies attempt to trace the mechanisms and processes of policy development, with a special focus on congressional entrepreneurship strategies and outcomes (Ragin 2014; George and Bennett 2005). Theoretically relevant, standard questions regarding policy engagement and activism are applied to the cases in order to standardize data collection (George and McKeown 1985; Kaarbo and Beasley 1999).

This subject area presents an exciting potential universe of cases that could be applied to study hypotheses, including relations between majority and minority factions within U.S. political parties over time, as well as factionalism in democratic regimes around the world.⁵ The value of cases is that they allow us to “convert descriptive explanations of particular outcomes to analytic explanations based on variables” (Levy 2008, 2). Case studies selected for this project focus on foreign policy debates in the Republican Party in Congress from 2011 to 2015, including struggles over comprehensive immigration policy reform and trade promotion authority to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal. These cases help illustrate the plausibility of the model of factionalism. As Gerring and Cojocar (2015, 3) argue, the exploration of several in depth case studies, integrating diverse styles of (observational) evidence, can potentially “shed light on a broader population, which it represents in an imperfect manner.” Case selection criteria included reflecting on variation in the research design, selecting cases with enough data to address the question of interest, cases that help draw significant comparisons, and representativeness (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Cases chosen for this study also highlight significant, contemporary foreign policy and national security policy debates that generated substantial political crosswinds, media attention, and public interest.

Immigration Reform

In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, a Republican National Committee (RNC) study of the party’s campaign failures found that Hispanic voters largely

⁴We also acknowledge that there are alternative possible explanations for the failure or delay of policy actions in these cases. For example, studies have examined the significant of bureaucratic actors in contemporary foreign policy development for example. Additional possible explanations include the impact of international environmental factors, public opinion, or strategic opportunities (Milner and Tingley 2015). These explanations may offer interesting additional layers of richness to process narratives, but are beyond the scope of this study.

⁵There could also be instances of minority influence in quasi-democratic countries or even states where multiple autonomous actors share governance.

avored Democratic candidates. The RNC recommended the party embrace immigration policy reform and try to improve its appeal to America's growing Hispanic population. GOP leaders were quick to catch onto this new sense of urgency. Just days after the election, Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) called immigration reform "an important issue that I think ought to be dealt with" and said he was confident of a deal with the White House (Steinhauer 2012). After winning reelection, President Obama also promised a vigorous push for immigration policy changes in his 2013 State of the Union. The stage seemed set for bipartisan progress on immigration reform.

However, while the White House and GOP leadership were ostensibly on the same page on the issue, the conservative Tea Party faction grew increasingly oppositional. Throughout 2013, the GOP became more divided on votes, including federal funding legislation (a.k.a., the "fiscal cliff"), Hurricane Sandy relief, and the farm bill. Given these conditions, immigration reform could prove to be the toughest test of the GOP's fractious party unity. The Senate did advance an immigration reform bill in June 2013 that established a thirteen-year pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants, increased security along the border, required a mandatory workplace verification system for employers, and included a new visa program for lesser-skilled workers. Yet, while the bill was lauded by Senate leaders and the White House, it soon became a political orphan in the more deeply divided House of Representatives: no high-profile lawmaker in the House was willing to support it. Republican opponents threatened that Boehner would lose his speakership if he brought an immigration bill to the floor with insufficient party support. The Speaker flatly refused to take up the Senate legislation or any immigration bill that did not have the support of a majority of the House GOP. Boehner's hesitation seemed to empower more conservative members who were staunchly opposed to immigration reform, creating a bottleneck in Congress in which no action was taken on immigration reform for more than a year.

Factional Attributes

The Tea Party faction of the Republican Party rose to the national stage in 2010 as part of a wave of frustration with the Affordable Care Act and populist challenges to government. The faction was made up both of a grassroots social movement and candidates for high political office who campaigned on Tea Party principles. They championed fiscal and social conservatism by proposing a libertarian goal of a leaner government (Richardson 2014; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Tea Party challenges represented a somewhat ideologically cohesive and defined group during the immigration policy debates, and members were vocal champions of principles they held dear. Indeed, some have suggested the party was experiencing a "civil war" over control of the party's foreign policy agenda following the Republican takeover over the House in 2010 (Drezner 2014; Miller 2013).

The Tea Party Caucus (TPC) was officially founded in 2010 as a caucus made up primarily of Republicans in the United States House of Representatives. Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN) was its first chair. The modern Tea Party movement did not appear out of whole cloth, though; rather, it reflected deeper schisms in the ideological unity of the Republican Party. As Mead (2011, 27) argues, "Supporters have hailed [the Tea Party] as a return to core American values," while opponents have seen it "as a racist, reactionary, and ultimately futile protest against the emerging reality of a multicultural, multiracial United States and a new era of government activism." Regarding foreign affairs, the movement reflected strains of both Jacksonian populist energy and foreign policy engagement and Jeffersonian isolationism (Rathbun 2013; Mead 2011).

During the immigration policy debates in 2013–2014, there were forty-eight members of the Tea Party Caucus in the House (Ragusa and Gaspar 2016). They

expressed a measure of ideological cohesion in their support of increased conservative principles. Drawing on data from the 2010 National Election Survey, [Abromowitz \(2011\)](#) said Tea Party members demonstrated views “well to the right of the median general election voter” ([Abramowitz 2011](#), 6). More broadly, Tea Party differences with establishment Republicans were also emblematic of a period of extreme partisanship and polarization in Washington politics ([Martin 2013](#)). Studies show party members deeply divided over issues like the role of the government in the economy and social issues. [Poole \(2014, 1\)](#) argues polarization of the major political parties in the United States is at its highest rate in history. Indeed, ideological divisions have become acute, with implications for representatives’ behavior and voting patterns ([Lee 2009](#)). Given the significant size of the faction and, when cohesive, the ability to potentially veto majority faction initiatives, this group had opportunities to pursue both formal and informal decentralization strategies—to promote a policy shift to the right within the Republican Party and to seek new opportunities for leadership through committee structure and rules changes.

Issue Framing

Among the coalition of Tea Party conservatives in the House who were staunchly opposed to any legislative path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, the duo of Representatives Steve King (R-IA) and Michele Bachmann (R-MN) emerged as vocal leaders. They challenged reform attempts by the White House and any conciliatory moves by Speaker Boehner. In fact, King had built his career on railing against immigration. In June of 2013, they, alongside other Tea Party members, held a rally against “amnesty” outside the Capitol. In fact, the use of “amnesty” and “open borders” as synonyms for flawed immigration reforms was one of the primary framing tactics used by Tea Party members to shape the debate. At a Conservative Political Action Conference meeting in March of 2014, Bachmann warned, “The last thing conservatives should do is help the president pass his number-one goal, and that’s amnesty” ([Costa 2014](#)). Tea Party conservatives also focused much of their opposition framing arguments on what they called the extensive social cost of Obama’s immigration policies. This represented a tactic to shift the debate around immigration reform. Bachmann said that amnesty would mean “millions of unskilled, illiterate, foreign nationals coming into the United States who can’t speak the English language” ([Costa 2014](#)).

Members of the faction painted the debate over immigration as further evidence that the Obama administration was overstepping its constitutional authority. The White House, they said, was a player that could not be trusted. They were angered by the administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that stopped the deportation of hundreds of thousands of undocumented young adults. After Congress failed to pass any reform legislation, in November 2014 Obama announced another executive action shielding up to five million immigrants from deportation who were the parents or children of either US citizens or legal residents. Conservative lawmakers were furious with the president and questioned his willingness to obey laws that would secure the border.

Persuasion: Policy Alternatives and Consistency

The main tactic that House conservatives employed on immigration reform was to convince establishment leaders that no substantive progress was possible. Tea Party members sought to oppose any legislation moving forward on the grounds that it could provide a vehicle to set up a conference committee and an eventual compromise with the Senate. “My position is, don’t bring anything to the floor,” said one caucus member of the House (“No Pressure on GOP to Tackle Immigration” 2013). As a result, Speaker Boehner tried to adopt a piecemeal approach to

immigration reform; this approach only opened up even more avenues for conservative opposition and policy alternatives.

During the debate over immigration reform in the summer of 2013, some conservatives in the House offered alternatives representing their positions on the issue. For example, in June, via a party-line vote, Republicans approved an amendment to the Homeland Security Appropriations bill, authored by King that would have prohibited implementation of DACA and forced the Obama administration to resume deportation of the DREAMers who immigrated to the United States as children. Democrats booed and shouted “shame” during the vote and Republican committee and leadership staff tried hard to convince King not to offer the amendment. But King and his allies pitched the amendment as upholding the rule of law (Dumain 2013). “If this position holds, no amnesty will reach the president’s desk,” said King in a celebratory statement after the vote (Milbank 2013).

Perhaps the clearest example of the Tea Party faction rising up to challenge the establishment’s immigration reform priorities and assert their own agenda came during the consideration of Boehner’s own border bill in July of 2014. It called for \$659 million in emergency funds to strengthen border security and speed up the process of new arrivals. However, Tea Party Republicans rejected the plan because it failed to limit Obama from acting on his own on immigration issues. House members were fearful that the White House would take further unilateral steps that would allow more undocumented immigrations to work in the United States. Conservatives also wanted to repeal or defund the DACA program as part of any border bill (Werner 2014); they wanted DACA gone and were furious Boehner would not allow it.

Consequently, Boehner and other GOP leaders had to abruptly pull the border bill from the House floor, just hours from scheduled adjournment for the summer, in order to address concerns by conservative factions. The Speaker was publicly chastened by these maneuvers. When he took the unusual step of delaying Congress’ summer recess, Tea Party members came back with a revised version that included more money for the National Guard and provisions making it easier to deport children back to Central America (Bash, Walsh, and Cohen 2014). Eventually, a separate vote on DACA was offered as a carrot to Tea Party members in exchange for their support on the border bill. The strategy worked and the updated version of the border bill passed the House on August 1, 2014, by a 223–189, resoundingly Republican vote. However, the Tea Party did not drop its opposition. That same day, after one of the most vitriolic floor debates in recent memory, members voted to end DACA by a tally of 216–192.

Conservative members of Congress who were opposed to immigration reform were extremely consistent in their presentation of minority positions. Bachmann and King were often the most important voices of dissent, but their leadership encouraged other lawmakers to challenge the majority and the party leadership. Representatives Labrador (R-ID), Gohmert (R-TX), Yoho (R-FL), and Brooks (R-AL) also made their voices heard during floor debates as well as in the media. Furthermore, they were persistent in their opposition to what they deemed amnesty and refused to compromise on a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

Outcome

Strong and consistent opposition from the Tea Party faction of the Republican Party served to stymie efforts by bipartisan groups to achieve any comprehensive immigration policy reforms. Opponents of reforms were effective through persuasion in delaying and prolonging debates, and they even seized the advantage when Speaker Boehner attempted to take a piecemeal approach to reforms. Tea Party members threatened to unify in opposition to any form of legislation. Legislators who challenged immigration reform, such as Representatives Bachmann and King,

were highly consistent in their messages, and the Tea Party advanced amendments that would curtail any significant liberalization of policy or “amnesty” for undocumented immigrants. The minority faction appeared to effectively persuade the establishment Republican leadership that aligning interests with a bipartisan coalition (i.e., joining with the Democrats to pass legislation) would be against the interests of the party and the country. The faction was able to block progress on comprehensive immigration reform from the time it was introduced by the president in January 2013, and legislation was brought forth in the Senate in June 2013, to the present. This stalling of progress for at least four years represented a profound success for opponents of policy reform. With dogged persistence, they effectively blocked any major change in immigration policy.

Trade Policy Authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement

Free trade agreements (FTAs) represented a significant part of the Obama administration’s foreign policy agenda. Having won the passage of FTAs with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea in 2011, the White House shifted its focus to completing two large trade deals during its final term in office: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The first step to passing both trade deals was the approval of Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), also known as “fast track” legislation, which helps to expedite consideration of the pacts on Capitol Hill. With the Republican Party generally in support of FTAs, conservative factions within the GOP found themselves challenging the majority position during this debate.

President Obama first publicly requested that Congress reauthorize TPA in 2013, and House and Senate leaders obliged by introducing the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Relations Act (H.R. 3830/S. 1900) in early 2014, legislation that included TPA. However, in this case the Obama administration faced opposition from both the left and right. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) was firmly against TPA amid pressure from organized labor groups and Democrats helped block any momentum throughout 2014. It was not until 2015, after the midterm elections had switched control of the chamber to Republicans, that TPA appeared to have enough support to at least get off the ground in Congress. Meanwhile, the Obama administration was backed by Republican Congressional leadership in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Speaker Boehner, and Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee Paul Ryan (R-WI). Ryan led the campaign for approval in the House. In the end, more than two years passed from President Obama’s first public request to TPA being signed into law.

Factional Attributes

The Tea Party remained a unifying factional identity for some in the House of Representatives from 2010 through the 2014 midterm elections, but the movement appeared to fray somewhat as the caucus lost some support and membership over time. A mix of factors was behind this evolution, including the challenge of linking the broader social movement that supported Tea Party principles with representation in government and the cooptation of some principles by the broader Republican Party. This was further complicated by the fact that the Tea Party movement produced (or attracted) a variety of “leaders,” from Representative Bachmann to former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin and isolationist Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), potentially muddling factional principles (Narula, Jacobs, and Ohikuare 2013). In short, the Tea Party as a movement clearly faced difficulties with translation of its principles in governance. Popular anger and frustration with “big government” had not disappeared (witness the results of the 2016 presidential election), but the way these ideas were interpreted and channeled seemed to evolve over time.

Clearly, shifting dynamics were at work. Some scholars debate how much ideological cohesion there really was in the early Tea Party movement when it came to foreign affairs. The movement included supporters of the Jacksonian traditions of strong support for the military and international engagement, who backed an internationalist agenda and strong military. It also included Jeffersonian neo-isolationists, who eschewed international entanglements (Baker 2010; Rogin 2010). In a more systematic study of these dynamics, Rathbun (2013) found a measure of cohesion in the Tea Party in support of “militant internationalism” that reflects the Jacksonian tradition. Another important shifting dynamic was the relationship between the Tea Party and the establishment Republicans. What was once a principled challenge to establishment positions in the early years that sometimes persuaded majority Republicans to shift policies to the right through informal decentralization strategies, became more confrontational in 2015. A smaller group of hardline conservatives were ready to challenge Boehner’s leadership, including questioning his true commitment to the Pledge to America planks such as ending the Affordable Care Act, reducing financial regulations, and cutting big government. In January 2015, Boehner’s bid for the House Speakership was openly opposed by twenty-five conservative Republicans (Lizza 2015).

A week after the Speaker vote, nine conservative members of the House of Representatives founded the House Freedom Caucus. Unlike the Tea Party, the Freedom Caucus was created as an invitation-only group that supported specific measures and conservative legislation (Sherman 2015). The rise of the Freedom Caucus reflected a new, more confrontational reality. Members of the House Freedom Caucus are among the most ideologically conservative House Republicans, including its founders, Representatives Jim Jordan (R-OH), Mark Meadows (R-NC), and Scott Perry (R-PA). The group quickly grew to include at least thirty-five members of the House and represented a more ideologically unified faction than the Tea Party. Where possible, Freedom Caucus members were determined to vote as a bloc on issues. This had the effect of reducing the size of possible Republican majorities, and procedures in the House dictate stronger thresholds for the conduct of most business. Finally, experts suggest that defining features of the Freedom Caucus included a strong commitment to strict constitutional interpretations, the promotion of states’ rights, and challenges to Republican Party leadership (Lizza 2015).

Issue Framing

Throughout the nearly two years of TPA’s consideration, conservatives were somewhat effective in efforts to redefine the debate over fast track legislation. The main counterframing by Tea Party / Freedom Caucus members was that TPA represented “executive overstretch”—it would cede too much authority to President Obama, something conservative groups had been complaining about throughout his time in office. Republicans consistently railed at the president’s exercise of his executive authority, often disparaging him as a power-hungry “emperor” who ignored Congress on issues such as immigration, climate change, and relations with Cuba (Nakamura 2015). The authority and constitutional powers argument was heavily used throughout the debate over the TPA. “If the president won’t abide by the Constitution, what gives you any confidence he’ll abide by TPP?” asked Representative Gary Palmer (R-AL) (Weisman 2015). Tea Party / Freedom Caucus members framed the debate as part of longstanding grievances against the Obama White House as well as international agreements in general. One called the TPA vote “a referendum on giving the President more authority; this was a referendum on voting for something we can’t see, we can’t verify; and this was a referendum on a huge, giant document” (Congressional Record 2015, H4338).

These efforts to shape the understanding of TPA by extreme conservative factions were also accompanied by complaints about TPP and free trade itself. Challengers

decried the lack of transparency and accountability included in such a major free trade pact. And, as with any free trade deal, Democrats and conservative Republicans sought to redefine TPP as a deal that would hurt American workers or take away jobs. Meanwhile, other House members argued that free trade agreements like the TPP would undermine US sovereignty. In particular, there was a fear that the United States was handing over power to the World Trade Organization (WTO) or creating other global governance bodies.

Persuasion: Policy Alternatives and Consistency

On top of trying to redefine popular views on TPA, Tea Party / Freedom Caucus members opposed to fast track also attempted to influence the legislative outcome. This debate appeared to offer much less in terms of persuasion, though, than in pure confrontation and resistance. That is, Freedom Caucus members argued in 2015 that a vote in favor of the TPA was a concession to the Obama administration. They made it clear to the Republican leadership and the White House that they saw very little chance to support the agreement. Rather than offering a persuasive alternative, most Freedom Caucus members chose instead to try to block the deal as it gathered momentum during the first half of 2015.

While a clear policy alternative to TPA was never put forth, opponents did issue several demands. Jim Jordan (R-OH), cochairman of the conservative House Freedom Caucus at the time, said conservatives wanted to see several things happen before they would consider further discussions on trade: First, the Freedom Caucus sought a guarantee that there would be no vote to extend the Export-Import Bank's charter beyond its expiration, calling it a deplorable instrument for government intervention in economic transactions and a form of corporate welfare that favors large well-connected businesses. Second, Jordan asked for the elimination of the TAA workers assistance component to TPA, which they saw as an unnecessary union-friendly waste of money. Third, they sought a provision that lawmakers outside of the Ways and Means Committee get equal power in rejecting trade deals. Jordan and his caucus wanted to rein in the power of Ryan's mostly protrade committee to make final decisions on trade legislation in order to possibly shut down fast-track in the future. In the end, these attempts at persuasion failed, and supporters of TPA claimed that they had overreached by striving for such extreme linkages (Gehrke 2015).

While the conservative factions advanced a number of policy demands to TPA, they were only somewhat consistent in their efforts. They also lacked a coherent, single voice. For example, following the retirement of Michele Bachmann, Representative Tim Huelskamp (R-KS) was put in charge of rebooting the Tea Party Caucus and its opposition to free trade. In a bitter twist, Huelskamp actually ended up supporting the TPA after sitting in on a classified briefing on details of the proposed trade deal. He said he was convinced that "it promotes markets, promotes less government . . . the safeguards are there, the protections are there . . . So, I am a yes" (Wong 2015). Huelskamp's defection was representative of the broader conservative approach to TPA, which notably did not include an illusion of immobility. To some extent, this was also a function of the fact that the movement reconstituted as the Freedom Caucus was only just then gaining support in the House. Beyond a core group of conservatives who formed the Caucus, it was still building support through an invitation-only process. Some members in the House (including several that would later avow support for the Freedom Caucus) labeled themselves as undecided or only "leaning no" in the weeks leading up to the vote. The inconsistency or split among conservatives was seen as a good omen for the GOP leadership, who would not be able to move the bill if there was a united Tea Party opposition in the House. "Every week, we're starting to move in the right direction and pick up a lot of these members we normally don't get for big initiatives," said one GOP aide.

“Even if there is opposition from the Tea Party / Freedom Caucus side, it has been relatively muted” (Wong 2015).

With Huelskamp and much of the old Tea Party Caucus willing to compromise or be won over on TPA, the opposition fell to Jordan, Mulvaney, and their allies. They continually pushed Boehner and the GOP leadership to allow them to amend TPA. In the end, when Mulvaney’s efforts were refused, he whipped thirty-four votes against the bill. After the TPA debate was over, Jordan lamented about how difficult it was for his group to maintain their position in the face of an extremely determined GOP leadership. “I don’t know in my time in the majority that I’ve seen [the] leadership turn on the juice like they did, I mean they really wanted to get this done” (Ingraham 2015).

Outcome

President Obama secured Trade Promotion Authority in 2015 but not without confronting significant opposition from the Left and Right. House members combined the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015 (H.R. 1890/S. 995) with legislation extending Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), a bill that would help workers displaced by international trade accords. However, a challenge from Democrats and members Freedom Caucus to TAA forced a “division of the question,” allowing separate votes on each component. TPA passed by a vote of 219–211 with the support of Democrats and 191 Republicans, but separate passage of TAA was delayed by two weeks. The president finally signed both bills into law on June 29, 2015.

According to measurements for this study, even though TPA was passed into law, it encountered a significant delay. The initiative was first introduced by President Obama in 2013 but stalled on Capitol Hill through the midterm elections in 2014. It only received focused attention from congressional leaders in early 2015 and required six months more for the House leadership to establish a working majority. Finally, it is important to note that while the TPA established the negotiating foundation for the completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, presidential candidate Donald Trump adopted a strong populist antifree trade stance during the 2016 election campaign. On his first full day in the Oval Office, President Trump announced the United States was withdrawing its support for the deal.

Findings

This study demonstrates the activism of minority factions within modern day American political parties and their influence on foreign policy. Through direct and indirect approaches, these groups appear to have had an important voice in foreign affairs. The study supports the plausibility of all three hypotheses of the factional influence model regarding avenues of influence derived from social psychology. Evidence suggests that factionalism can influence the ability of establishment positions in the Republican Party to make progress toward their foreign policy goals in terms of foreign policy outcomes (or nonoutcomes).

The first hypothesis for this study focused on attributes of factions and their potential for influence of policy-making processes. Factions were present and active in debates over immigration reform and trade policy. There were small variations in terms of membership and ideological cohesion, though, that appeared significant. In the case of the Tea Party / Freedom Caucus active during the immigration policy debate, the faction was sizable and members appeared fairly cohesive in terms of their ideological resistance to liberalized policies. The TPA case developed somewhat differently. As the Tea Party waned, the Freedom Caucus was founded in 2015 with nine members. It slowly grew into a more cohesive and focused voting bloc, but its development was concurrent with a strong press by the

leadership for fast track. By the time of the TPA vote in the summer of 2015, the Freedom Caucus mustered three-dozen votes against TPA. But this was not enough to block passage when the Speaker formed a “strange bedfellows” coalition of establishment Republicans and Democrats to see it through to law. Linked to the dependent variable of study, a strong and cohesive Tea Party faction blocked immigration reform, while a smaller (but arguably more cohesive) Freedom Caucus could not simultaneously block TPA and reboot support for conservative principles. In other words, both cases suggest that the attributes of factions were important to significant delay of policy progress, but this impact was felt in different ways.⁶

The second hypothesis for this study focused on issue framing and problem definition to induce conflict with the establishment by challenging the majority position, ideal, or norm. Both case studies suggest that factions attempted to redefine the frames of problems and prevent or delay majority progress on passage. For instance, in the case of comprehensive immigration reform, Tea Party challengers launched attacks against the administration claiming that it was trying to provide amnesty for undocumented workers and that it preferred an open borders arrangement with Mexico. DACA became a focal point of controversy, suggesting that children of illegal immigrants should be given special legal treatment by the United States. The TPA debate became a controversy over American sovereignty as well as executive overreach by the Obama administration. In both case studies, factions were successful at influencing foreign policy and shaping the procedures by which these issues were addressed.

The results for the third hypothesis of the study addressing policy alternatives, persuasion, and consistency are mixed. The reality in these case studies showed that factions that opposed majority positions were often hard-pressed to offer constructive alternatives. The very nature of their opposition to the mainstream policy focus meant that they were unlikely to support a deal that was anything similar in substantive terms. In the case of immigration reform, for example, Tea Party legislators attempted to block major initiatives and had to work with the Speaker on smaller, piecemeal issues throughout the two years of deliberation. Yet, they were fairly consistent in their opposition. However, in the case of TPA, the faction was clearly in transition and had difficulty speaking with a single voice; opponents found themselves overreaching in attempts at issue linkage.

There is also fascinating synergy between the various attributes and strategies at work here, reminiscent of insights from social psychology. For example, from 2010 to 2014, the Tea Party was a key player in the Republican drive to take over the majority in the House. Roughly forty House members had campaigned directly on Tea Party principles, and they made their presence known in the early years on Capitol Hill. Leaders tapped into their social movement base to rally against the Affordable Care Act and other “big government” initiatives. They offered persuasive arguments to fellow Republicans on why not to act on some legislation and were very effective in framing issues they opposed in a negative light. This presented formidable challenges to establishment Republicans, roadblocks that prevented progressive legislation and planted the seeds for Speaker Boehner’s resignation in 2015. At the same time, the movement appeared to lose some ideological cohesion in this period, paving the way for a new Freedom Caucus to emerge. This new group scrambled to oppose the TPA even as it was assembling, and members could only practice negative issue framing and try to demonstrate consistent opposition.

⁶ In addition to basic attributes of factions, this study also may have detected the residual influence of how politically divided the chamber is at any given time. This is an important potential additional layer of explanation, but beyond the scope of the study.

Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates how factions are engaged in foreign policy processes and how they can often steer debates within their caucuses. Attributes of factions appear significant, including membership and ideological cohesion. Successful strategies include issue framing and redefinition—arguments that certain policies are unacceptable because they threaten broader concerns—and consistency of minority influence in presentation of opposing views. Whereas conventional wisdom assumes that divisions between and within parties may lead to legislative gridlock, this study has shown that factions may be important in more nuanced policy processes.

These results suggest implications for theories of minority influence. The study reinforces arguments that foreign policy is conditioned by “a variety of social and psychological factors that influence the process” (Kaarbo 2008, 57). It speaks to literature from comparative political analyses and highlights ways these dynamics may be present in the United States. This is especially relevant for studies of US politics, where it is expected that scholars attend more to interparty divisions than factionalism. The general political cultural aversion to factionalism belies the reality, demonstrated in the 2016 presidential election cycle, that intraparty divisions may be quite significant (Peake 2016; 2002). Counter to works that treat factions as dependent variables, this study also underscores the importance of agency models of foreign policy change. Factional leaders appear to play especially important roles in shaping foreign policy. In addition, this study both draws a great deal from, and offers contributions to, the literature on social psychology. Consistency of minority positions and issue framing may impact processes or mechanisms of foreign policy change. Furthermore, scope conditions—such as factions are most effective if alternative voices have enough time to present their position and argue in a firm but flexible manner—are well illustrated in these cases.

Both case studies demonstrated how factional resistance effectively slowed, or even stopped, progress on foreign policy development. This clearly underscores the importance of broader measures of influence in democratic systems. More nuanced measures of policies should include longitudinal study of their initiation, development, and road through competitive policy processes. This contrasts with traditional measures of “success” in US national politics studies seen in roll-call voting outcomes or cases of landmark policy developments. Factions, along with other actors and conditions, have been shown to impact the development of foreign policy initiatives, shaping their content as well as prospectus for successful passage. The interaction of these factors, such as how significant factions may become in relation to midterm and presidential election cycles and lame-duck sessions of Congress, are interesting themes for further research on factions and foreign policy in the United States. A larger set of cases would allow for more systematic application of the hypotheses and further direct and indirect insights regarding dynamics of factionalism in legislatures.

More broadly, this study has underscored the need for more theory development to fill a gap in the literature on factionalism and foreign policy in comparative perspective. As Bell and Shaw argue, “Modern political theory has not caught up with the fragmented nature of political parties . . . Party actions cannot be understood if these internal conflicts are ignored and the nature of internal alliances and coalitions has to be understood to make any sense of party behavior” (1994, 1). Further study can help deepen our understanding of complex foreign policy-making processes. Factions themselves may learn important lessons about strategies and conditions that can make them more influential in the process. For example, issue redefinition and consistency appear to empower minority actors in the United States, but they must also offer constructive alternatives to major policy initiatives to overcome an image of factions as disruptors rather than strategic actors. Meanwhile, further

study of factions hard at work in influencing political dynamics and foreign policy in democratic systems around the world may allow us to construct even more sophisticated models of how multidimensional ideological divisions impact international cooperation and conflict.

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