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**U.S. Polarization in Congress: *The role of Congressional
Member Organizations in the House of Representatives***

Master's thesis

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Study programme: International Area Studies

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Year of the defence: 2018

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on May 11, 2018

Dominik Hodbod'

References

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Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to the current academic debate on contemporary polarization in the U.S. Congress. The paper provides a brief overview of the relevant existing literature and schools of thought on the issue. As part of the thought direction which steers away from defining roots and causes of polarization among the general public but rather sees them as issues of the political elite, this thesis highlights the need to focus on individual Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) in the House of Representatives and their connection to polarization. By applying an existing dataset accepted among political science scholars as the key tool for measuring polarization, the thesis seeks to affirm the presumed ideological differences among the individual CMOs (or caucuses). The main part of this thesis which adds value to further discussion is the case study of all roll call votes of the 114th House of Representatives examining voting cohesion of the studied caucuses. The aim of this study is to show to what extent the CMOs are in fact consistent voting blocs and how influential they can potentially be within the political elites in the House of Representatives and to what level they may be contributing to the contemporary polarization.

Abstrakt

Tato práce si klade za cíl přispět do diskuse o současné polarizaci v americkém kongresu. Práce nabízí stručný přehled o dosavadní literatuře a především existujícím teoriím a myšlenkovým směrům o daném fenoménu. Toto dílo se zaměřuje na směr, který příčiny a dopady polarizaci nehledá mezi elektorátem, nýbrž na úrovni politických elit v kongresu. Práce zdůrazňuje potřebu výzkumu na konkrétní jednotlivé politické uskupení (caucuses) vyskytující se v současném kongresu pro jejich spojitost s příčinami a možnými dopady fenoménu, jímž je polarizace. V práci jsou provedeny dvě klíčové analýzy. V první řadě je na jednotlivá politická uskupení aplikován existující soubor dat kriticky široce uznán jako stěžejní východisko pro studium polarizace. Účelem je potvrdit různorodost ideologických postavení daných politických uskupení. Druhou analýzou, jež je stěžejní částí celé práce je examinační jednotlivě všech hlasování během 114. sněmovny reprezentantů v kongresu. Cílem této studie je určit úroveň hlasovací koherence jednotlivých uskupení a tím pádem určit sílu a vliv těchto skupin v rámci sněmovny. Síla jednotlivých skupin napoví, do jaké míry mohou být vlivné na dnešní polarizaci v americkém kongresu.

Keywords

Polarization, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives Congressional Member Organizations, Ideological scale, Voting cohesion, Freedom Caucus, Progressives, New Democrats, Republican Main Street Partnership

Klíčová slova

Polarizace, americký kongres, politická uskupení v kongresu, koherence hlasování, sněmovna reprezentantů, ideologická škála, Freedom Caucus, Progressives, New Democrats, Republican Main Street Partnership

Název práce

Polarizace USA v kongresu: Role stranických členských sdružení ve Sněmovně reprezentantů

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Introduction

Red and Blue, Liberal and Conservative, Democrat and Republican, all these pairs of terms have in recent years become absolute antonyms in the context of U.S. politics. *Polarization* has become the single word description of the current state of affairs in the political life of the United States. The two major parties have been finding it harder and harder to speak to each other and reach compromises, resulting at times in gridlock, sometimes even leading to a governmental shutdown. U.S. polarization has, therefore, rightfully gained significant attention among political scholars across the country.

The phenomenon is also the main theme of my thesis. In this paper, I elaborate on some of the major existing literature and theories which seek to explain the roots and causes of polarization. As part of the introduction, the literature review below contains the narrowing of my specific research topic through gradual processing of relevant pieces of scholarship and developing of research ideas. The extant theories and, in particular, the non-existing theories led me to set on the Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs), also known as caucuses (the two terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper) as the main focus of this study. The CMOs have not gained a significant amount of scholarly attention, especially in current times and in connection to polarization. For this reason, the key aim of this thesis is to offer new insights and offer discussion points for further research.

The main hypothesis is that some of the major caucuses, given their being voluntary groups of representatives, are aligned on an ideological basis. As such, they can wield influence on how the party in general votes and whether it moves more significantly to right/left or to the middle of the ideological liberal-conservative scale. The assumption is that in case the caucuses are strong consistent voting blocs which are also strongly ideologically based, they likely have a considerable impact on the current polarization levels within the House of Representatives. Both assumptions on ideology alignment as well as

voting cohesion are tested in this thesis. The goal for the outcomes of my analyses is not to irrefutably prove that the individual CMOs can be largely connected to polarization. The hope for the results is to open more discussion points and lay ground for further, more comprehensive, research on the Congressional Member Organizations and their role within contemporary polarized U.S. politics.

The thesis content consists of two key analyses. First, I look at the ideological positions of each of the relevant Congressional Member Organizations of the current 115th Congress. Second, I examine to what level the caucuses can be considered as significant forces within each of the major parties. The second analysis is the major part of this paper. It offers original research in its case study of the 114th Congress. In the case study I individually work with all the votes cast during the last Congress and as I analyze voting records of all the representatives, I convey compelling conclusions on CMOs connection to polarization. These results should be worth of deeper examination.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I give a brief overview of some of the major existing pieces of scholarship which helped develop my research and clearly specify my thesis topic. Having studied the academic works on U.S. polarization, I gradually came to my own research topic within the field. The extant theories and scholarly works below are a representative sample relevant for my research but cannot – by any measure – be interpreted as a full set of literature on the topic of polarization.

There is no overarching explanation of the causes and consequences of contemporary U.S. polarization but novices to the topic would be advised to read Thomas E. Mann's and Norman J. Ornstein's *It's even worse than it looks*¹ from 2012 as it portrays the current state

¹ Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's even worse than it looks* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

of affairs (which arguably is now even “even worse” than in 2012). For more interested readers, who would like to dwell deeper in the academic discussions, an omnibus work from 2015 *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization*², edited by James A. Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka, collates major academic works in the field (many of them discussed below).

I have identified two schools of thoughts in the extant literature on mass polarization in contemporary U.S. politics. One thought direction suggests that the American electorate is largely divided and thus *polarized*,³ whereas the second thinking argues the polarization has only happened on the level of political elites while the general public remains to a large extent *moderate*.⁴ There is hardly any disagreement on the fact that the national (and state-level) political parties are indeed widely ideologically distant to each other, in this respect the two school of thoughts are in fact very close to each other; the key interpretations vary in identifying the main polarizing force.⁵

One school of thought will say that the American *mass public* is now split in two ideological camps as it has taken two contrasting positions on public issues. The second school of thought will see the reasons behind polarization among the *partisan elites* which have departed from the middle and taken more extreme positions on either side of the scale (asymmetrically). To name a few, the first school of thought may be represented by Alan I. Abramovitz, Kyle L. Saunders Robert Y. Shapiro, or Joseph Bafumi⁶. The second school is

² James A. Thurber, Antoine Yoshinaka, eds., *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

³ Alan I. Abramovitz, *The Disappearing Center* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁴ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel Adams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of Polarized America 2nd edition* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

⁵ James A. Thurber, Antoine Yoshinaka, eds., *American Gridlock*, 7-9.

⁶ Alan I. Abramovitz, *The Disappearing Center* ; Alan I. Abramovitz and Kyle Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?”, *The Journal of Politics* 70, No. 2 (April 2008), 542-55. Accessed via JSTOR at:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381608080493>; Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro, “A New Partisan Voter”, *The Journal of Politics* 71, No. 1 (Jan 2009), 1-24. Accessed via JSTOR at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381608090014> .

represented by scholars such as Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, Jeremy C. Pope, or Matthew Levendusky.⁷

I do not mean to downplay the importance of other scholars' work in this field but I believe the academic debate between Alan I. Abramowitz and Morris P. Fiorina (currently both at Stanford University) will best serve as a simplified description of the two different existing schools of thought on public and elite polarization. Both professors have over the years quarreled in different forms of scholarly exchanges while regularly updating their data which served to reaffirm their arguments (both authors also contributed to the recent "omnibus" work on U.S. polarization *American Gridlock*⁸). The key arguments have over the years remained relevant and can be studied in two earlier influential pieces of academic literature: Abramowitz's *The Disappearing Center*⁹ from 2010 and Fiorina's *Culture War? The Myth of Polarized America* from 2005 (co-authored with S. Abrams and J. Pope)¹⁰.

In his piece, *The Disappearing Center*,¹¹ Alan I. Abramowitz suggests that the American public has been *polarized* and that such fact is reflected in the composition of the political elite. Abramowitz's work relies heavily on an analysis of various public opinion data, collected mainly from American National Election Study surveys.¹² These polls seek to place respondents on an ideological liberal-conservative scale. In his analysis, Abramowitz shows that there has been a decline in the share of moderate voters as the respondents

⁷ Fiorina et al., *Culture War?*; Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁸ Alan I. Abramowitz, "The New American Electorate: Partisan, Sorted, and Polarized", in *American Gridlock*, 19-44; Samuel J. Abrams and Morris P. Fiorina in *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization* eds. James A. Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86-112.

⁹ Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*.

¹⁰ Fiorina et al. *Culture War?*

¹¹ Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*.

¹² *American National Election Study (ANES)* is a research group surveying respondents across the nation with the aim of informing explanations of election outcomes by providing data that support rich hypothesis testing, maximize methodological excellence, measure many variables, and promote comparisons across people, contexts, and time. More details available at: <http://www.electionstudies.org/index.html>

nowadays identify themselves strongly on either side of the ideological scale rather than in the (disappearing) center. Such divergence among the electorate consequently results in election of more ideologically strict representatives on both sides, leaving little room in the middle of the scale, resulting in a higher polarization on the political level.¹³

In his book, Abramovitz notes the phenomena of *partisan-ideological polarization*.¹⁴ He describes the trend of public *polarization* along ideological lines and simultaneously along the lines of partisan identity. Even though he does not dive deeply into studying the reasons why the public has – presumably – sharply gone in two different ideological directions, Abramovitz comes to the conclusion that polarization has occurred among the mass electorate which has split into two camps according to their political convictions.¹⁵

Morris P. Fiorina approaches the phenomena from a different perspective. The main thesis of his 2005 book is that the general public is in fact – in contrast to popular thinking – *not polarized*. Throughout *Culture War*, the authors show that whereas the partisan elites have grown very distinct, the share of moderates and independents among the mass public has not actually diminished. Fiorina et al. recognize that the partisan-ideological polarization has become a reality, but they claim the polarization has occurred among the elite politicians and subsequently – particularly via the existing system of institutions – the constituents have become much better *sorted* with either of the two parties.¹⁶

The authors of *Culture War* also highlight the key distinction between *closely* and *deeply* divided American public. They claim that the two terms have generally become confused. The authors state that while the American public is divided *closely*, it is not divided *deeply*. It is conventionally understood that close election could be a symptom of deeply

¹³ Abramovitz, *The Disappearing Center*, 37-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁶ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel Adams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War?*.

divided public as there is a large equal share of voters on either side of the specter and few voters in the middle. Fiorina et al. say that this does not necessarily have to be the case in the U.S. They argue that a tight election result could also be a consequence of an electorate where most of the people are in the middle and the rest equally on either side of the specter, which is the case in Fiorina's interpretation of national surveys.¹⁷

As I alluded to above, this intellectual debate has been present for years under different circumstances while the key arguments remained the same (some notable contributions of the last decade are briefly discussed below). Abramovitz has argued that the mass public is *polarized* into two ideological camps which leads to a stable identification with one of the two main political parties, meaning the partisan elite is as well polarized as a result. Fiorina has stood by the statement that the public is *not polarized* but better *sorted* into two partisan camps (Democrats vs. Republicans) as a result of *polarization* among the partisan elites.

In 2008, in cooperation with Kyle Saunders, Abramovitz systemically challenged research in *Culture War?* with an article published in *The Journal of Politics: Is Polarization a Myth?*¹⁸. Abramovitz and Saunders questioned Fiorina's conclusions he drew from ANES (and exit polls) survey data and having analyzed the same data they stressed that polarization among the public had indeed occurred. They also highlighted the point (repeated later in *Disappearing Center* as well) that mainly the engaged electorate had polarized as well as increased in numbers (higher amount of politically active respondents). Abramovitz stated that it was the least politically active public who composed the still existing *center* (used by

¹⁷ Ibid,

¹⁸ Abramovitz, Saunders, *Is Polarization a Myth?*

Fiorina as evidence of missing polarization).¹⁹ The notion that the general public became more highly participating in public life is a key basis for Abramovitz's conclusions.²⁰

The same issue of *The Journal of Politics* published *Culture War?* authors' response to the above cited critique (which had been submitted for peer review earlier). Fiorina et al. questioned the statistical methods of Abramovitz and Saunders criticism. They argued the aggregation of data used had brought about misleading results.²¹ Reinforcing their stance on (missing) polarization among the general public, Fiorina et al. dismiss entirely Abramovitz's and Saunders' response to their book. *The Culture War?* authors noted that the increase in political activism had not actually happened (a key component for Abramovitz conclusions) as there had in fact been a rise only in "low cost activity such as talking about the election and wearing a button or displaying a bumper sticker."²² According to Fiorina et al., meaningful political participation and public engagement had not actually increased. The authors of this article further undermine the key basis for Abramovitz results by saying that he and Saunders failed to note *mobilization* as an alternative explanation for rise in the electorate's engagement (such explanation is more fitting to the second school of thought as the mobilizing efforts come from the – arguably – polarized elites).²³

The above exchange of the April 2008 issue of *The Journal of Politics* is just one example of such academic dispute in the past decade. There are several other instances when the two schools of thoughts on contemporary U.S. polarization conflicted. For interested readers, I will recommend the following: Journalist Bill Bishop's 2008 theory of *The Big*

¹⁹ Ibid., 553-4.

²⁰ Ibid., Abramovitz, *Disappearing Center*.

²¹ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, Jeremy C. Pope, "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings", *The Journal of Politics* 70, No. 2 (April 2008), 556-7.

²² Ibid., 559.

²³ Ibid., 559.

*Sort*²⁴; Bafumi's and Shapiro's elaboration on mass public polarization from 2009²⁵; Fiorina's criticism of the preeminent pundits on polarization after the 2012 election²⁶; Abramovitz's *The Atlantic* rebuttal to the latter²⁷; Fiorina's and Abrams's denunciation of *The Big Sort* theory²⁸; Pew Research Centre's 2014 extensive report on public polarization validating Abramovitz's arguments²⁹; and Fiorina's 2014 *The Washington Post* article criticizing the Pew report's interpretation of collected data³⁰.

Furthermore, within the discussion on mass polarization, a new trend of thinking has evolved around the so-called *affective polarization*.³¹ The concept was introduced by Stanford University's Shanto Iyengar et al. in 2012 offering an alternative explanation to the debate between Abramovitz (et al.) and Fiorina (et al.). The authors argue that affect and social aspects are better indicators of polarization than ideology.³² Rutgers University's Lilliana Mason's research from 2015 on social and issue polarization among the public is closely related to the concept of affective polarization and elaborates on Iyengar's (et al.) work³³. To address the alternate school of thought within the mass polarization debate,

²⁴ Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008).

²⁵ Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro, "A New Partisan Voter", *The Journal of Politics* 71, No. 1 (Jan 2009) 1-24.

²⁶ Morris P. Fiorina, "If I Could Hold a Seminar for Political Journalists", *The Forum* 10, No. 4 (2012), 2-10.

²⁷ Alan I. Abramovitz, "What If The Pundits Are Right? A Reply on Polarization and Sorting", *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/what-if-the-pundits-are-right-after-all-a-reply-on-polarization-and-sorting/273690/>.

²⁸ Samuel J. Abrams and Morris P. Fiorina, "The Big Sort That Wasn't: A Skeptical Reexamination", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45, No. 2 (April 2012), 203-10.

²⁹ Michael Dimock et al. *Political Polarization in the American Public: How increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life* (Pew Research Center, 2014). Available at: <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2014/06/6-12-2014-Political-Polarization-Release.pdf>.

³⁰ Morris P. Fiorina, "Americans have not become more politically polarized", *The Washington Post*. June 23, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/06/23/americans-have-not-become-more-politically-polarized/?utm_term=.1e17c144a63d.

³¹ Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, not Ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization", *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, No.3 (Fall 2012), 405-431.

³² *Ibid.*, 427.

³³ Lilliana Mason, "I Disrespectfully Agree": The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization", *American Journal of Political Science* 59, No. 1 (January 2015), 128-145.

Emory University's Steven W. Webster's and Abramovitz's 2017 study on affective polarization aims to revalidate the first school's arguments as the work argues that public polarization is based on fundamental *ideological* differences as well as *affective* dislike of the other party³⁴

Having examined some of the existing works and the analyses of the above mentioned two schools of thought allowed me to further develop the specific area of my own research in this thesis. I find more convincing the arguments of Fiorina and his colleagues in the debate of where the possible roots of polarization in fact are. Following Fiorina's arguments, I aimed to specify my research on the partisan elites rather than the general public and shifted my research focus purely on the national legislative body.

Sean M. Theriault – a professor from The University of Texas at Austin – is one of the prominent scholars on polarization in Congress. In *Party Polarization in Congress*³⁵, he analyzes the two schools of thoughts (as well as other angles) and collates the extant theories within his own model of integrated explanation for party polarization. In his book, he complains that the previous theories are widely read as: “mutually exclusive and unrelated to one another”.³⁶ With the aim of bringing forward a unified approach to explaining the roots of contemporary polarization in U.S. politics, the author looks in detail at four typical factors which he puts into conversation with each other: Redistricting, Extremism of Party Activism, Constituent Sorting, and Procedural Change.³⁷

Theriault does not provide a single explanation for the sources and roots of polarization but he insightfully highlights the connection between the respective suspected causes. Especially interesting is his analysis and suggestions for further research into the

³⁴ Steven W. Webster and Alan I. Abramovitz, “The Ideological Foundations of Affective Polarization in the U.S. Electorate” *American Politics Research* 45, No. 4, 621-47.

³⁵ Sean M. Theriault, *Party Polarization in Congress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

inner workings of Congress, focusing on different leadership roles and their influence within the governing body.³⁸ Theriault's invitation for advancing research on polarization by looking at the insides of Congress partially inspired the topic of this thesis.

Studying congressional polarization in any way would be impossible without first turning to the vast research of Keith T. Poole (University of Georgia) and Howard L. Rosenthal (currently of New York University). The two authors invented an original statistical method of measuring polarization in Congress, which has become widely accepted by political scientists across all U.S. universities. The method uses Nominal Three-Step Estimation (NOMINATE) and is a scaling procedure which shows legislators on a spatial map, representing how closely they stand compared to each other on an ideological scale.³⁹

Poole and Rosenthal developed the model between 1989 and 1992 and since then have been regularly updating and improving its data and methodologies to this day. For interested readers, the technical specifics behind their statistical methods can be found in Poole's *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting* from 2005.⁴⁰ As these are constantly being updated and perfected, it is best to visit *voteview.com*⁴¹ website which is run by UCLA's Jeffrey B. Lewis and is dedicated to the on-going congressional polarization research started over three decades ago by Poole and Rosenthal. The NOMINATE dataset publicly available at the project's website is instrumental for a part of my research.

As I had examined the existing literature and theories on contemporary polarization, I narrowed my focus on the polarization among the institutions of the political elite in Congress. The paper looks in detail at the role of caucuses and their effects on current

³⁸ Ibid., 130-9.

³⁹ Poole and Rosenthal have granted access to their research to the general public. All information on their project can be found at: <https://voteview.com>; "About the project ", accessed April 8, 2018, <https://voteview.com/about>;

⁴⁰ Keith T. Poole, *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴¹ "Search voteview.com", accessed April 8, 2018, <https://voteview.com/>.

Congressional polarization and by approximation polarization in general. As there is very little existing scholarship on caucuses, especially contemporary ones, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion with, to a considerable extent, unexamined perspective.

A notable exception is the work of Jennifer Victor from George Mason University. In her article from 2014, co-written by Stephen Haptonstahl, a data scientist of NPR, and Nils Ringe of University of Wisconsin, the authors also look at caucuses and their possible role in polarization. Whereas they do not consider the roots or causes of CMOs and polarization, they accept polarization as an inevitable fact and consider whether caucuses could be a platform for alleviation of polarization.⁴² This hypothesis is appealing and may be turn out to be consequential in such case it is proven that the caucuses are coherent forces (tested later in my case study).

Methodology

The used methodology for the purposes of this paper's research is considerably straightforward. Throughout the thesis I use comparative methods to assess relationships between different caucuses, caucuses and partisan leadership, or individual relationships among selected representatives. There are two key methods within this paper. Firstly, I use an existing dataset developed by American scholars and apply it to my selected sample of individuals. Results for the specific groups of individuals (in this case partisan caucuses) are then determined by average numbers of the concerned individuals.

Secondly, as part of the case study in this paper, I analyze a primary source of data: roll call votes during the 114th Congress. No complex statistical methods are involved here.

⁴² Jennifer Victor, Stephen Haptonstahl, Nils Ringe, "Can Caucuses Alleviate Polarization in the U.S. Congress?", (Paper prepared for the 2014 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 27- 31, 2014.)

Every vote (1,321) is analyzed individually for each of the members (in total 555,616 records).⁴³ The method for this analysis is described in more detail in the case study below.

For the first analysis, data from the 115th Congress are used, meaning from January 2017 onwards. As the NOMINATE data which changes weekly is key for the first method, it needs to be stated here that I use the records downloaded on March 24, 2018.⁴⁴ For the second analysis, which is the key added value of this work, I focus on the years 2015 and 2016 of the 114th Congress.

⁴³ Note: Formulas in MS excel spreadsheets were used for such analysis. The MASTER analysis spreadsheet is uploaded to SIS.

⁴⁴ Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2017). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>; Data downloaded from <https://voteview.com/congress/house> at March 24, 2018.

1. Caucuses' position on the liberal-conservative ideological scale

To be able to assess the role of the Congressional Member Organizations in the polarization debate, it needs to be first determined whether they are in fact aligned with the ideological premises these groups proclaim. Such alignment can be discovered by applying the above mentioned NOMINATE dataset. This dataset is widely accepted among political scholars as the valid measurement of ideological positions of individual representatives.

Before dwelling into the application of the NOMINATE data, it needs to be explained which caucuses were selected for this study. As there are hundreds of individual CMOs in the Congress, research on all of those would be very far-reaching and substantially beyond the scope of this thesis. Such research would also be most likely inconsequential as there are only few caucuses which can be relevant for the polarization debate. Vast majority of caucuses consists of single-issue groups with often very limited scope. These can be such groups as American Sikh Congressional Caucus, Cement Caucus, Congressional Bourbon Caucus, Cranberry Caucus, Hospitality Caucus or even a Congressional Czech Caucus. These are just a very few examples of the CMOs that exist in the Congress. Given the high level of specialization of such caucuses, they can hardly be considered for a study of polarization where ideology is a key factor to consider.

For this reason, I selected only four major partisan caucuses which can be defined by their ideological stances, which are of significant size, and of, presumably, consequence in the House of Representatives. The four major caucuses are supplemented also with a brief study of three additional smaller caucuses. I chose to look at the House Freedom Caucus, presumably the most conservative caucus, Republican Main Street Partnership, likely more moderate CMO of the GOP, the New Democrats, possibly counterpart on the Democratic side to the Republican Main Street Partnership, and finally Congressional Progressive

Caucus, the seemingly most liberal of the caucuses. These are supplemented with more brief study of House Liberty Caucus, Blue Dog Democrats, and Bipartisan Working Group.

The four major caucuses were selected as they meet the condition of considerable size (see membership below) as well as the condition of being based on ideology with general agenda rather than a single issue. Another crucial factor was a low junction of memberships across the caucuses. As the key method of this thesis was comparing the caucuses against each other, it was essential that the individual members did not in large numbers belong to several of the selected caucuses, especially to the other major one within the respective party. There is not a single representative out of the 75 Republican Main Street Partnership members who would also belong to the Freedom Caucus. On the Democratic side, out of the 67 New Democrats, 9 members also belong among the Progressives, which is a larger junction than on the GOP end, but still low enough to meet the afore mentioned condition. The higher cohesion among Democrats compared to Republicans which may become apparent from this statistic is discussed with much more thorough analysis below in the major part of this thesis: case study. Before I turn there, a look at the membership lists of each of the caucuses is warranted.

1.1. House Freedom Caucus

Started by Jim Jordan, a conservative Republican from Ohio, the House Freedom Caucus emerged in 2015 as a counterforce to the main stream Republicans. They came to be known to the public mostly because of their stringent opposition to Planned Parenthood funding and especially for their role in preventing Kevin McCarthy, the Majority Leader in the House, to become the House Speaker after John Boehner's retirement in 2015.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Pew Research, "What is the House Freedom Caucus, and who's in it?" accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/>.

The caucus consists of hardline conservatives whose goal is to push the party to vote according to the core conservative values. Therefore, the assumption is that the caucus position on the ideological liberal-conservative scale would be far on the right. As the caucus presents itself as a contrasting force to the governing wing of the GOP, it stands to reason that their dependence on the party leadership would be low.⁴⁶

Currently, the following House Representatives from the Republican Party are identified as members of the Freedom Caucus: Justin Amash (MI), Brian Babin (TX), Rod Blum (IA), David A. Brat (VA), Jim Bridenstine (OK), Mo Brooks (AL), Kenneth Robert Buck (CO), Scott Desjarlais (TN), Jeff Duncan (SC), Trent Franks (AZ), Thomas Alexander Garrett Jr. (VA), Paul Gosar (AZ), Morgan H. Griffith (VA), Andy Harris (MD), Jody B. Hice (GA), Jim Jordan (OH), Raúl Labrador (ID), Mark Meadows (NC), Alex X. Mooney (WV), Gary James Palmer (AL), Stevan Pearce (NM), Scott Perry (PA), Bill Posey (FL), Mark Sanford (SC), David Schweikert (AZ), Randy Weber (TX).⁴⁷

As the case study of this thesis – discussed later – focuses on the 114th Congress, it is also important to note here the caucus members who are no longer in Congress currently (115th) or who for various reasons have left the caucus. Some Republicans no longer belonging to this CMO played part in the caucus during Obama’s last term in office and for this reason they need to be a part of my case study.

After the November election of 2016, the following Freedom caucus members were not reelected into office: Curt Clawson (FL), John Fleming (LA), Tim Huelskamp (KS), Cynthia M. Lummis (WY). Furthermore, Mick Mulvaney (SC) – one of the prominent

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mic, “Who’s in the House Freedom Caucus? Here’s a list of Republicans in the group”, accessed April 14, 2018. <https://mic.com/articles/172235/who-s-in-the-house-freedom-caucus-here-s-a-list-of-republicans-in-the-group#.weZ0PMBJ1>; Pew Research, “What is the House Freedom Caucus, and who’s in it?” accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/>.

members of the caucus – became Donald Trump’s pick for heading the Office of Management and Budget: a role for which Mulvaney left the House of Representatives in February 2017.⁴⁸ In addition, Keith Rothfus (PA), Barry D. Loudermilk (GA), and Ted Poe (TX) split from the caucus during Congress’s current term.⁴⁹

1.2. Republican Main Street Partnership

Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP) has a long history in the U.S. Congress. The coalition was founded in 1997 with: “the goal of strengthening the governing wing of the Republican Party”.⁵⁰ The group positions itself as the moderating force within the GOP. As proclaimed on the group’s official website: “Main Street’s members are solutions-oriented fiscal realists and defenders of national security, advancing positive policies that can command bipartisan support”.⁵¹ The assumption is that, as a presumably moderating force, the RMSP would be placed closer to the middle of the ideological scale on the Republican side.

The caucus is led by Rodney Davis from Illinois and the full membership list for the current Congress is listed: Thomas C. MacArthur (NJ), John Katko (NY), Carlos Curbelo (FL), Frank A. LoBiondo (NJ), Elise M. Stefanik (NY), Brian K. Fitzpatrick (PA), David G. Reichert (WA), Daniel M. Donovan, Jr. (NY), Charles W. Dent (PA), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL), John J. Faso (NY), David G. Valadao, (CA), David Joyce (OH), Mike Bost (IL), Peter

⁴⁸ “OMB”, accessed April 14, 2018 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>.

⁴⁹ Politico, “Rep. Poe explains why he split from the House Freedom Caucus”, accessed April 14, 2018 <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/03/why-ted-poe-quit-house-freedom-caucus-236532>; Political Insider, “Barry Loudermilk quietly leaves the House Freedom Caucus”, accessed April 14, 2018 <https://politics.myajc.com/blog/politics/barry-loudermilk-quietly-leaves-the-house-freedom-caucus/WFJ2dkEShrj8RAaeCod7L/>; Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, “Congressman Keith Rothfus seeks input constituents”, accessed April 14, 2018 <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-local/2017/03/22/Congressman-Keith-Rothfus-seeks-input-constituents-Obamacare-ACA/stories/201703220191>.

⁵⁰ RMSP, “About”, accessed April 14, 2018. <https://republicanmainstreet.org/about/history/#>.

⁵¹ RMSP, “Mission”, accessed April 14, 2018. <https://republicanmainstreet.org/about/mission/>.

T. King (NY), Michael R. Turner (OH), Adam Kinzinger (IL), Barbara J. Comstock (VA), Mario Diaz-Balart (FL), David McKinley (WV), Rodney P. Frelinghuysen (NJ), Michael K. Simpson (ID), Rodney David (IL), Thomas W. Reed II (NY), Steve Stivers (OH), Jeff Fortenberry (NE), Jeff Denham (CA), Evan H. Jenkins (WV), Mike Kelly (WV), Leonard Lance (NJ), Martha McSally (AZ), Frederick S. Upton (MI), Greg Walden (OR), Brian J. Mast (FL) Lloyd K. Smucker (PA), Ken Calvert (CA), Lee M. Zeldin (NY), John H. Rutherford (FL), Chris Collins (NY), Bruce Lee Poliquin (ME), Daniel M. Newhouse (WA), David A. Trott (MI), Bill Shuster (PA), Susan Brooks (IN), Jaime H. Beutler (WA), Paul Cook (CA), Jim Renacci (OH), Larry Buchson (IN), William B. Hurd (TX), John Moolenaar (MI), Steve Knight (CA), Erik Paulsen (MN), Mimi Walters (CA), Bill Johnson (OH), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), Thomas Earl Emmer II (MN), Donald J. Bacon (NE), David Young (IA), Bob Gibbs (OH), Scott W. Taylor (VA), John R. Curtis (UT), Karen Handel (GA), Mike Coffman (CO), Sean Duffy (WI), Michael Gallagher (WI), Lynn Jenkins (KS), Roger W. Marshall (KS), Kevin Yoder (KS), Mia Love (UT), Tom Rica (SC), Bill Huizenga (MI).

1.3. New Democrat Coalition

The New Democrat Coalition (New Democrats) is a group of moderate Democrats who seek to: “bridge the partisan gap between left and right”.⁵² Main parts of the caucus’s agenda focus on ease of doing business, middle class prosperity which is connected to social security, and the need for bipartisanship.⁵³ The caucus is currently chaired by Jim Himes

⁵² New Democrat Coalition, “About Us” accessed April 22, 2018 <https://newdemocratcoalition-himes.house.gov/about>.

⁵³ New Democrat Coalition, “Our Agenda”, accessed April 24, 2018. <https://newdemocratcoalition-himes.house.gov/about-us/our-agenda>.

from Connecticut. As a group aiming to move beyond partisanship, it is assumed that they would be placed near the middle of the ideological scale.

The full membership list of the caucus here: Pete Aguilar (CA), Ami Bera (CA), Don Beyer (VA), Lisa B. Rochester (DE), Brendan Boyle (PA), Anthony Brown (MD), Julia Brownley (CA), Cheri Bustos (IL), Salud Carbajal (CA), Tony Cárdenas (CA), André Carson (IN), Joaquin Castro (TX), Gerry Connolly (VA), Jim Cooper (TN), Lou Correa (CA), Jim Costa (CA), Joe Courtney (CT), Charlie Crist (FL), Henry Cuellar (TX), Susan Davis (CA), John Delaney (MD), Suzan DelBene (WA), Val Demings (FL), Eliot Engel (NY), Elizabeth Esty (CT), Bill Foster (IL), Vicente Gonzalez (TX), Josh Gottheimer (NJ), Colleen Hanabusa (HI), Denny Heck (WA), Jim Himes (CT), Bill Keating (MA), Derek Kilmer (WA), Ron Kind (WI), Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL), Ann McLane Kuster (NH), Rick Larsen (WA), Brenda Lawrence (MI), Al Lawson (FL), Sean P. Maloney (NY), A. Donald McEachin (VA), Gregory Meeks (NY), Seth Moulton (MA), Stephanie Murphy (FL), Donald Norcross (NJ), Tom O'Halleran (AZ), Beto O'Rourke (TX), Ed Perlmutter (CO), Scott Peters (CA), Jared Polis (CO), Mike Quigley (IL), Kathleen Rice (NY), Cedric Richmond (LA), Raul Ruiz (CA), Adam Schiff (CA), Brad Schneider (IL), Kurt Schrader (OR), David Scott (GA), Terri Sewell (AL), Kyrsten Sinema (AZ), Adam Smith (WA), Darren Soto (FL), Tom Suozzi (NY), Norma Torres (CA), Juan Vargas (CA), Marc Veasey (TX), and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL).

1.4. Congressional Progressive Caucus

Congressional Progressive Caucus is the presumably most liberal of the studied caucuses and possible of all caucuses in general. It aims to promote the progressive principles as outlined in their core agenda of four key values: “Fighting for economic justice and security for all; Protecting and preserving our civil rights and liberties; Promoting global peace and

security; and Advancing environmental protection and energy independence”.⁵⁴ Among the public, the caucus may be most popular for its lone senator Bernie Sanders. As for the purposes of the study, only the House of Representatives members are relevant, the membership is listed below.

Members of the Progressive Caucus are: Pramila Jayapal (WA), Barbara Lee (CA), Maxine Waters (CA), Adriano J. Espallat (NY), Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ), Jimmy Gomez (CA), Yvette Diane Clarke (NY), John R. Lewis (GA), Marcia L. Fudge (OH), Michael E. Capuano (MA), Karen Bass (CA), Nydia M. Velázquez (NY), James P. McGovern (MA), Gwen Moore (WI), Mark J. Desaulnier (CA), Bennie Thompson (MS), Jerrold L. Nadler (NY), Linda T. Sánchez (CA), Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA), Katherine M. Clark (MA), José E. Serrano (NY), Judy Chu (CA), Danny K. Davis (IL), Luis V. Gutiérrez (IL), Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX), William Lacy Clay, Jr. (MO), Hakeem Jeffries (NY), Frederica Wilson (FL), Alma Adams (NC), Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA), Hank Johnson (GA), Dwight Evans (PA), Sheila Jackson Lee (TX), Grace Flores Napolitano (CA), Alan Lowenthal (CA), Brenda L. Lawrence (MI), Elijah E. Cummings (MD), Jared Huffman (CA), Peter Anthony Defazio (OR), André Carson (IN), Joseph P. Kennedy III (MA), Chellie Pingree (ME), Donald Norcross (NJ), Debbie Dingell (MI), Rosa L. DeLauro (CT), Peter Welch (VT), Lois Frankel (FL), Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ), Lloyd Alton Doggett II (TX), Stephen Cohen (TN), Zoe Lofgren (CA), Suzanne Bonamici (OR), Donald Sternoff Beyer, Jr. (VA), Carolyn Boshier Maloney (NY), John Yarmuth (KY), Richard Michael Nolan (MN), Ruben Jesus Kihuen (NV), Ted Lieu (CA), Darren Michael (FL), Valdez Butler

⁵⁴ Congressional Progressive Caucus, “What is CPC?”, accessed April 29, 2018. <https://cpc-grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=74§iontree=2,74>.

Demings (FL), Lisa Blunt Rochester (DE), Carol Shea-Porter (NH), Adam Smith (WA), Tulsi Gabbard (HI), Jared Polis (CO), Dave Loebsack (IA).⁵⁵

1.5. Blue Dog Coalition

The Blue Dog Coalition is a caucus with a long tradition of a more moderate ideological background. The caucus was established in 1995 to: “represent the commonsense, moderate voice of the Democratic Party, appealing to mainstream American values. The Blue Dogs are leaders in Congress who are committed to pursuing fiscally-responsible policies, ensuring a strong national defense, and transcending party lines to do what’s best for the American people.”⁵⁶ With this presumed agenda, the assumption is that Blue Dog Democrats would find themselves near to the other moderate Democratic caucus, the New Democrat Coalition toward the middle of the ideological scale. Due to its relative low membership, the caucus is not studied only marginally in this paper.

Members of the Blue Dog Democrats are: Michael Thompson (CA), Vicente Gonzales, Jr. (TX), Filemon Vela (TX), David Scott (GA), Sanford Dixon Bishop, Jr. (GA), Jose Luis Correa (CA), Daniel Lipinski (IL), Henry Cuellar (TX), Charlie J. Crist (FL), Kurt Schrader (OR), Jim Costa (CA), Brad Schneider (IL), Thomas C. O’Halloran (AZ), James Hayes Shofner Cooper (TN), Stephanie Murphy (FL), Collin Clark Peterson (MN), Josh S. Gottheimer (NJ), Kyrsten Sinema (AZ).⁵⁷

1.6. House Liberty Caucus

The House Liberty caucus (HLC) was founded by Justin Amash, a Republican of Michigan and is currently still led by him. The CMOs core value is libertarianism. Amash has typically

⁵⁵ CPC, “Caucus Members”, accessed April 15, 2018 <https://cpc-grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=71§iontree=2,71>.

⁵⁶ Blue Dog PAC, “About the Blue Dog PAC”, accessed April 28, 2018 <http://bluedogdems.com/>.

⁵⁷ “About the Blue Dog PAC”, accessed April 15, 2018 <http://bluedogdems.com/>.

been a fierce opponent of bills that would increase the national debt or enlarge in any way the role of government in individuals' lives. Amash sought to put this group together as an intra-party force contrasting to the main stream Republicans.⁵⁸

Analyzing the NOMINATE data for this caucus can show further interesting results on the ideological positions of the partisan CMOs. As the presumed caucus's purpose is similar to that of the Freedom Caucus, the assumption is that these two caucuses will be placed near each other on the ideological liberal-conservative scale. This assumption is especially likely to be true considering the high junction of memberships between the two caucuses. Amash himself is also a member of the Freedom Caucus as well as other 6 members of HLC (out of 13 identified in total).⁵⁹

The remaining identified members are: Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), Vicky Hartzler (MO), Morgan H. Griffith (VA), Michael C. Burgess (TX), Paul Gosar (AZ), Mark Meadows (NC), Thomas Massie (KT), Jim Jordan (OH), Raúl L. Labrador, (ID), Jeff Duncan (SC), Tom McClintock (CA), and Tom Graves (GA).⁶⁰

1.7. Bipartisan Working Group

The Bipartisan Working Group was founded in 2011 by Jim Renacci, a Republican and John Carney, a Democrat with the promise of bringing both parties together. The chairmen of the group have insisted on its members' serious approach to their membership which is capped at 26 representatives with a conditional even split between the two parties. The group meets

⁵⁸ National Journal, "Conservatives form their own caucus because the RSC isn't hard-core enough", accessed April 3, 2018. http://www.ciclt.net/sn/pol/poc_detail.aspx?P_ID=&ClientCode=masc&LegComID=24116; Twitter, "House Liberty Caucus", accessed April 3, 2018. <https://twitter.com/libertycaucus?lang=cs>.

⁵⁹ "House Liberty Caucus", accessed April 3, 2018. http://www.ciclt.net/sn/pol/poc_detail.aspx?P_ID=&ClientCode=masc&LegComID=24116.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

every week to discuss the possibilities of legislative co-sponsorships and other areas of collaboration across the partisan aisle.⁶¹

Currently, the caucus is led by Jim Renacci and Derek Kilmer, a Democrat from Washington. Kilmer took over the co-chair position at the beginning of the current Congress from his partisan colleague John Carney who moved on from Congress to serve as the governor of his state Delaware.⁶²

The other members of the caucus from the Republican Party are: Mark E. Amodei (NV), Lou Barletta (PA), Andy Barr IV (KY), Susan Brooks (IN), Larry Buchson (IN), Barbara J. Comstock (VA), Rodney Davis (IL), David Joyce (OH), Mike Kelly (PA), Patrick Meehan (PA), David G. Valadao (CA), Daniel A. Webster (FL).⁶³

The Democrat membership list consists of: Cheri Bustos (IL), John Delaney (MD), Dan Kildee (MI), Sean Patrick Maloney (NY), Seth Moulton (MA), Scott Peters (CA), Mike Quigley (IL), Kathleen M. Rice (NY), Terri Sewell (AL), Marc Veasey (TX), and Peter Welch (VT).⁶⁴

The Bipartisan Working Group would presumably find itself in the middle of the ideological scale, if the individual members vote according to the ideological premise of the group. As the scope of this thesis does not cover a deep examination of the individual voting records for this caucus, a further research is recommended.

⁶¹ Roll call, "Bipartisan Working Group's Elusive Target", accessed April 21, 2018

<http://www.rollcall.com/news/home/congress-bipartisan-working-group>.

⁶² Renacci.gov, "Bipartisan Working Group Announces Kilmer as New Co-Chair", accessed April 21, 2018

<https://renacci.house.gov/index.cfm/2017/1/bipartisan-working-group-announces-kilmer-as-new-co-chair>.

⁶³ Roll call, "Bipartisan Working Group's Elusive Target", accessed April 21, 2018

<http://www.rollcall.com/news/home/congress-bipartisan-working-group>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.,;

Note: This thesis recognizes that the provided list of Democrats is short of one member. The existing sources have not revealed the replacement for John Carney in the 115th Congress. For the purposes of the case study below, the list includes John Carney as it is focused on the 114th Congress.

2. CMOs mean NOMINATE scores

The mean NOMINATE score is an accurate measure of a caucus's ideological position on the liberal-conservative scale. Compared to each other, the mean NOMINATE scores of the respective Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) are precisely placed according to their presumed ideological position. For the purpose of easier navigation, the results of the NOMINATE analysis are depicted below within the text of this chapter (see Chart 1 and Table 1). The score for the caucus with the most liberal agenda (Progressives) is fittingly the leftmost on the ideological scale. Vice versa, the presumably most conservative caucus (Freedom caucus) is placed most to the right (see Chart 1).

The other analyzed caucuses are as well positioned in line with the ideological beliefs they publicly claim to stand for. The New Democrats who claim to seek: “to bridge the gap between left and right by challenging outmoded partisan approaches to governing”⁶⁵ indeed place closer to the middle of the scale than their party in general (mean NOMINATE score). The coalitions' aim to reach beyond partisanship and look more to the middle is supported by the NOMINATE dataset. In particular in comparison with the other major Democratic CMO (Progressives) and the entire Democratic House representation. The gap between Progressives' and New Democrats' mean NOMINATE scores is considerable (see Table 1).

The third Democratic caucus studied in this paper, Blue Dog Democrats, also indeed take the hypothesized position on the ideological scale. As the group's ideological *raison d'être* is “to work to end the divisive and toxic nature of politics today”⁶⁶, it is in fact fitting that their mean NOMINATE score is the highest (the most conservative) and closest to the

⁶⁵ New Democrat Coalition, “About Us” accessed April 22, 2018 <https://newdemocratcoalition-himes.house.gov/about>.

⁶⁶ Blue Dog Dems, “About the Blue Dog PAC” accessed April 22, 2018 <http://bluedogdems.com/>.

middle out of the selected Democratic CMOs. The narrower membership list also helps to steer the individuals' votes in line with the caucus's targets. The average NOMINATE score of the Blue Dog Democrats is then more reliably aligned with their presumed ideological position which is close to the middle.

On the Republican side, the respective caucuses' positions on the scale are as well true to the assumptions. As noted above, the conservative hardliners grouped in the Freedom Caucus on average have the highest NOMINATE score out of the studied CMOs. The caucus's position is far from the entire Republican Party and especially far from the middle of the scale. It is also interesting to note the difference in distance from the center between the Freedom Caucus and its presumed counterpart on the left (Progressives). As the conservative hardliners are much farther to the right from the middle than the staunch liberals are to the left, this analysis supports the prevailing theory that the elite polarization has occurred disproportionately. Furthermore, the analysis results point to a possible causal relation between the aligned caucus voting (particularly on the right side of the political spectre) and general polarization in the House of Representatives.⁶⁷

The House Liberty Caucus led by Justin Amash was founded on similar principles as the Freedom Caucus; many Liberty Caucus members belong to Freedom Caucus as well, including Amash himself. Therefore, the analysis unsurprisingly reveals that both caucuses are located very close to each other on the ideological scale. The average NOMINATE score of the HLC members is also very high and far on the right side of the liberal-conservative scale. The NOMINATE dataset confirms the hypothesis in the case of this CMO as well.

⁶⁷ Note: Similar conclusions were previously made by Pew Research Centre in its study of the Freedom Caucus in 2015. See: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/>.

The remaining examined purely Republican caucus, Republican Main Street Partnership, claims to be the “governing wing of the Republican Party”⁶⁸ and that its goal in governing is to: “move beyond partisan, political rhetoric”.⁶⁹ The caucus publicly positions itself more to the middle as it highlights bipartisanship.⁷⁰ Therefore, the logical presumption is that its members would vote more liberally than the members of the Freedom or Liberty caucuses. Using the mean NOMINATE scores, it becomes apparent that the difference between RMSP and the two conservative caucuses is indeed substantial. The RMSP mean score is considerably closer to the average of the entire chamber (including all the Democratic votes), than it is to the Freedom Caucus. Such discrepancy particularly between these two caucuses strengthens the idea of a divided Republican Party nowadays.

⁶⁸ Republican Main Street, “About”, accessed April 22, 2018 <https://republicanmainstreet.org/about/>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

CMOs Mean NOMINATE scores	
Progressives	-0,462
New Democrats	-0,302
Blue Dog Democrats	-0,223
Bipartisan Working Group (BWG)	0,015
Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP)	0,359
House Liberty Caucus (HLC)	0,636
Freedom Caucus	0,671
Republican Party	0,490
Democratic Party	-0,392
House mean	0,100
House median	0,277

Table 1: CMOS NOMINATE scores (table)

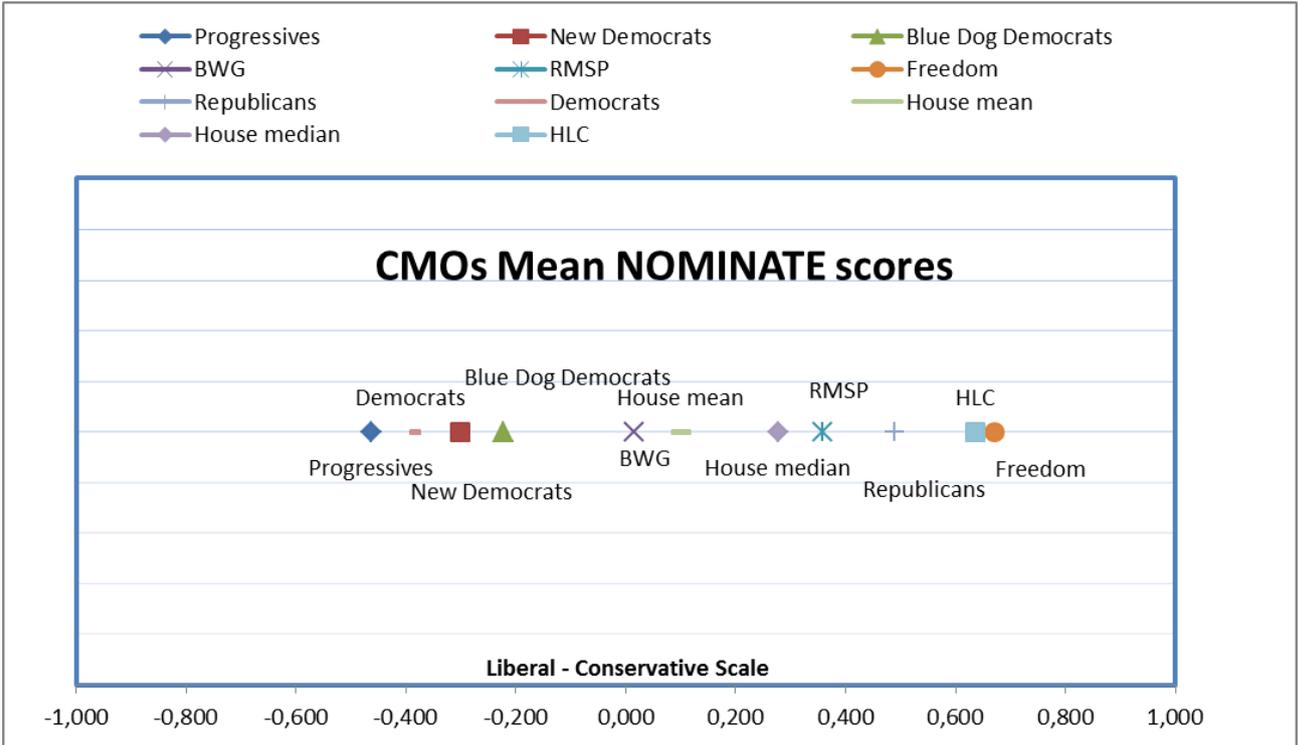


Chart no. 1: CMOs Mean NOMINATE scores (graph)

3. Case Study: Voting cohesion of selected caucuses in the 114th Congress

The above analysis, using Poole's and Rosenthal's NOMINATE dataset, shows that the individual Democratic and Republican representatives on average vote in line with the assumed ideological bases of the respective studied caucuses they belong to. Whereas this is a strong evidence that the caucus members are positioned on the ideological scale accordingly with the caucuses' policy and ideological stances, it is not a sufficient proof that the individual politicians' voting is connected to their CMO membership. The NOMINATE analysis demonstrates that the studied caucus members individually vote in line with the ideological presuppositions of the respective caucuses. What remains to be seen is whether the caucuses as groups vote consistently together and if they can be considered as influential forces within the parties and with a possibly significant impact on pulling the parties apart, in other words *polarizing* the contemporary U.S. politics.

In order to assess whether the studied caucuses can be major intra-party forces, I analyzed the individual CMOs members' voting records. The results allowed to more clearly determine whether of the caucuses constitute reliably consistent voting blocs, or on the contrary groups of politicians with similar ideological background (as shown with NOMINATE data), yet without a convincing connection in terms of aligned voting as factions. The aim of my analysis was to evaluate what may be called as *voting cohesion* of the selected caucuses.

The scope of this paper does not allow for a large-scale research spanning several historical congressional sessions. Thus, the most recent Congress which already ended is used here as a case study. The results of the analysis of the 114th Congress are relevant for the contemporary politics and as such are indicative of the caucuses' impact on the current state of U.S. political polarization. Therefore, the roll call votes of the two sessions between

the years 2015 and 2016 of the House of Representatives are the basis set of data for this case study. The individual roll call votes are available at the official website of the House Clerk (clerk.house.gov).⁷¹

In my analysis, I looked at every individual vote of each of the House representatives during the 114th Congress and assessed to what extent the voting records among individual members of the selected CMOs were coherent along the caucus lines. To evaluate whether a single member of a caucus voted in line with the respective CMO, his or her voting alignment with the caucus leader was studied. The caucus leaders' roll call votes were key statistics for this analysis to which each of the individual representatives voting records were compared. The alignment (or voting cohesion) of individual members of the CMO is measured in this paper by the percentage of how many times a certain member casted the same vote as the respective caucus leader. In a way, what is measured here, is the level of *discipline* the caucus chair commands with the respective individual members of the CMO.

After every individual member's voting alignment with the respective caucus chair had been calculated, the average of these results was quantified to assess the caucus voting alignment as a group. While the average percentage of voting cohesion with the CMO leader among the caucus's members is an indicative result on its own, it is not as convincing as when it is put in contrast to a controlling analysis.

A key controlling measure was performed by evaluating individual caucus members' voting alignment with the caucus leader of the other significant studied CMO within the respective party. As seen, in the case of both parties, the two major studied caucuses are considerably distant to each other on the ideological liberal-conservative scale. Therefore, the assumption is that a caucus's members should be likelier to vote in line with the caucus's

⁷¹ U.S House of Representatives Roll Call Votes 114th Congress – 1st Session (2015). Available at: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2015/index.asp>; U.S House of Representatives Roll Call Votes 114th Congress – 2nd 6Session (2016). Available at: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2016/index.asp>.

leader than with the leader of the other partisan CMO. The level to which this assumption is true for each of the studied caucuses is a reliable indicator of the particular CMO's voting cohesion.

To that end, for each of the caucuses, the average percentage numbers were compared between individual members' cohesion with the caucus chair and with the leader of the ideologically more distant caucus (within the same party). Furthermore, looking more closely at each of the individual caucus members and comparing their voting alignment levels between their caucus leader and the other partisan caucus chair provided additional relevant results, telling of the respective caucuses' consistency and strength.

Moreover, the individual members of the respective caucuses were tested for voting cohesion with their party leaders. Evaluating the caucuses' members voting alignment with the respective party leadership brought about further revealing information on the caucuses' consistency and possible role in the polarization of contemporary politics. Four key party leaders need to be mentioned here as they were used throughout the analysis. On the Republican side, voting records of the Majority Leader and the Majority Whip during the 114th Congress were analyzed. Voting cohesion of the studied Republicans with Kevin McCarthy and Steve Scalise is therefore a consequential part of the analysis. Conversely, on the Democratic side, the Minority Leader's and Minority Whip's roll call votes were scrutinized. Thus, the voting alignment between caucuses and Nancy Pelosi or Steny Hoyer adds more valuable insight.

3.1. Limitations

Before dwelling into the roll call vote analysis and its results, some limitations to the selected methodology need to be addressed. First, a rather obvious limitation, is that the individual members' voting records are tested for alignment with only the caucus leader (or other leaders). A more comprehensive research which would analyze individual members' voting records and compare among themselves in each of the hundreds of instances would be welcome. However, the scope of this thesis does not by far allow for such far-reaching examination. For this reason, the study tests the voting alignment of individual caucus members with single leading representatives of a caucus or a party.

While this approach is not as complex (although still significantly thorough), the voting alignment levels with a caucus or party leader is markedly telling of the caucus consistency. In case the ideology and agenda of a caucus is not sufficiently represented by a caucus leader, the caucus as a group is unlikely to be a strong and consistent bloc. In case the caucus chair does represent the caucus' position adequately, the individual members' voting alignment is a convincing evidence of the CMO's coherency.

Second limitation considers the roll call votes. As the bulk of the analysis revolves around several key representatives (partisan and caucus leaders), their voting records are essential. Throughout the analysis, voting cohesion is evaluated and expressed as a percentage number. As the individual caucus or partisan leaders voted on a different number of occasions, comparing between the percentage results may be distorted. The leader who cast fewer votes in total is likely to have a higher percentage of shared votes with other individuals than a leader who cast more votes in total. However, the samples of analyzed votes (at minimum 1,203 out of total 1,321 for Pelosi) are large enough to justify the percentage numbers as levels of *likelihood* of voting alignment. With such large sums, it is safe to assume that in case Pelosi turned out to vote for the other roughly hundred votes, she

would still vote along the same lines and the cohesion with the other representatives would remain on the same levels. Therefore, even though the actual percentages may be slightly distorted due to different basic numbers of total votes of each leader, they amply represent the levels of voting cohesion.

Furthermore, the case study is limited to only four of the caucuses examined above. In the case study, I analyzed the Congressional Progressive Caucus, the New Democrat Coalition on the Democratic side, and the Freedom Caucus and the Republican Main Street Partnership on the Republican side. For both parties, these are the two major caucuses on either side of the spectrum. As seen on the ideological scale above, the Progressives are the most liberal, the New Democrats are moderate on the left side of the scale, the RMSP are moderate on the right, and the Freedom is the farthest of all on the conservative end. The Blue Dog Democrats were snubbed in this analysis due to their much smaller size compared to New Democrats. The House Liberty Caucus was not studied here as its membership is small and less stable than at the Freedom Caucus. The Bipartisan Working Group merits further research in other areas than voting cohesion as the results are very low across the two parties, a brief example: the two BWG leaders, Carney and Renacci voted together in less than 30% of the votes.

3.2. Republican Congressional Member Organizations

3.2.1. House Freedom Caucus

First part of the roll call vote analysis focuses on the Freedom Caucus and it aims to show the level of “alignment” of the caucus members votes with the caucus leader’s voting. Individual votes of Jim Jordan, Chair of the Freedom Caucus during the 114th Congress are the primary set of data for this specific analysis. Throughout the duration of the studied Congress, Jordan participated on 1302 roll call votes out of total of 1321 (identified as relevant for the study).

On average, the 36 individual caucus members voted the same way as Jim Jordan in 90.5% of the chair’s votes. As one of the metrics for comparison among the caucuses, I also applied the threshold of 90% of members voting together. While this is not based on any preexisting statistics or literature, if applied in each instance, it should bring about at least basic insights into the caucuses’ voting cohesion. At least 33 (over 90%) representatives from the Freedom caucus voted in line with Jordan in 995 instances; that is 76.4% of all Jordan’s votes.

It is also of interest to point out an outlier among the individual representatives who belong to the caucus. Ted Poe voted alongside Jim Jordan in “only” 78% of Jordan’s votes. As the difference in Poe’s case is 12.5 percentage points compared to the caucus mean percentage of “coherent voting”, this shows a significant discrepancy with the other individual members of the CMO. As mentioned above, Ted Poe is no longer a member of the Freedom Caucus. This case study, among other things, can justify Poe’s departure from the group being a result of a longer trend of disagreements (in terms of voting, at least).

As a controlling tool, the analysis tested the individual members’ voting alignment with leaders of other factions within the party which are, supposedly, ideologically different from the CMO. In the case of the Freedom Caucus, the opposite group within the party is

the Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP). Therefore, as a controlling measure, it is of value to analyze the Freedom Caucus members voting in line with Rodney Davis, RMSP chair.

The Freedom Caucus representatives have during the 114th Congress voted on average alongside Rodney Davis in 81% of his votes. This amounts to a difference of 9.5 percentage points compared to the voting coherence with Jim Jordan. Such result itself may serve as a convincing argument for the claim that the Freedom Caucus members in fact vote steadily on the opposite end of the more moderate wing of the Republican wing.

To further this argument, more results of this controlling analysis are helpful. A closer look at the individual members' voting reveals more convincing evidence of staunch voting alignment among the Freedom Caucus members. When comparing each of the representatives' coherence of voting with Jordan and Davis, it becomes clear that the conservative hardliners indeed form a consistent voting bloc within a major political party. Compared to the members' voting coherence with Davis, the chair of the CMO, Jordan, "commands" a higher percentage of aligned voting with the caucus members in 100% of cases. Every single Freedom Caucus member has voted more often in line with Jordan than with Davis.

This analysis's results showcase the divisions within the Republican Party and point to two contrasting factions grouped together as different Congressional Member Organizations. It also shows that the Freedom Caucus members are indeed much more likely to vote with their leader (and by approximation with each other) than with a leader of an ideologically opposing caucus within the same political party.

While the above may itself be an appealing conclusion on Freedom Caucus voting cohesion, it is still useful to perform another controlling analysis: against the party leadership. The Republican Main Street Partnership considers itself the "governing wing" of

the Republican Conference in the House. However, its members do not constitute the actual House partisan leadership (with the notable exception of Cathy McMorris Rodgers). As shown above, RMSP leans more liberal than the Republican Party in general. The party leadership then represents a more conservative group. Therefore, testing the voting alignment of the presumably most conservative caucus (Freedom) against the Republican Party leaders should bring about relevant outcomes.

To this end, I analyzed Freedom Caucus members voting in line with Kevin McCarthy, the majority leader in the House. McCarthy has during the 114th Congress voted in 1305 occasions. On average, the individual Freedom Caucus members cast the same vote as the party leader in 87.9% of the votes. To compare, this result is smaller by 2.6 percentage points as opposed to Jim Jordan's votes and 6.9% percentage points higher than the caucus voting cohesion with Rodney Davis. Such comparison shows that the Freedom Caucus indeed votes more strongly together (with its chairman) than in line with the party leadership. This result also displays that the party leadership stands in the "middle" between the more moderate RMSP and the conservative hardliners known as the Freedom Caucus.

Looking at the caucus members individually, we can see that the voting alignment with Jim Jordan is higher than with McCarthy in 33 out of 36 cases. Whereas this result is not as persuasive as the 100% coherence in comparison with RMSP, it is still a very compelling evidence of voting consistency among the Freedom Caucus members as opposed to majority of House Republicans.

On an interesting side note, Keith Rothfus, one of the three members who voted during the 114th Congress more often with McCarthy than Jim Jordan has already left the caucus.⁷² Similarly to the case of Ted Poe, this analysis can also show that Rothfus's

⁷² Post Gazette, "Freedom Caucus may play role in alternate Obamacare repeal", accessed April 30, 2018. <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/nation/2017/01/06/Freedom-Caucus-may-play-role-in-alternate-Obamacare-repeal-timeline/stories/201701060089>.

departure from the group is to some extent justified by his voting record during the 114th Congress.

Regular followers of U.S. politics can probably point out that the Freedom Caucus came to be publicly known precisely because of their animosity toward Kevin McCarthy. In 2015, Jim Jordan and his group forced McCarthy out of the race for House Speakership. Very recent developments of 2018 fuel the conflict even further as it looks possible that Jim Jordan himself may directly face off with McCarthy for the position of House Speaker after Paul Ryan's announced retirement at the end of this term.⁷³

The caucus's role in development of U.S. politics and the struggle between Jordan and McCarthy will certainly be worthy of academic and popular attention. For the purposes of this case study, the perceived conflict between McCarthy and the Freedom Caucus is further addressed by an additional controlling analysis. In order to posit the outcomes of this study as evidence of voting alignment according to the presumed ideological principles of the caucus rather than on the basis of animosity toward a specific politician, I have also looked at the caucus members' voting alignment with another party leader, Steve Scalise, the majority Whip in the House.

Scalise participated on 1298 votes during the 114th Congress. On average, the alignment of Freedom Caucus members with Scalise reached 88.8%, which is 0.9 percentage points higher than in McCarthy's case and 1.7 percentage points lower than in the case of Jim Jordan. Individually, 30 out of 36 members have a higher percentage of voting cohesion with Jordan than with the Whip. These results indicate that the alignment with a different party leader is slightly higher than with McCarthy specifically. However, the data still

⁷³ USA Today, "Freedom Caucus' Jordan considering challenging McCarthy for speaker after Ryan retirement", accessed April 30, 2018 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/04/13/freedom-caucus-jordan-considering-challenging-mccarthy-speaker-after-ryan-retirement/514129002/>.

convincingly highlight that the Freedom Caucus stands strongly together in opposition to the contemporary Republican leadership.

The results of my analysis highlight the ideological differences within the Republican Party and strengthen the position that the Freedom Caucus as a Congressional Membership Organization is a largely independent and consistent voting bloc which, to a significant extent, stands in opposition to the moderate as well as leadership forces inside the GOP.

3.2.2. Republican Main Street Partnership

In the fall of 2017, the caucus was officially founded as a formal Congressional Member Organization by Rodney Davis. During the years 2015 and 2016 the caucus was not officially registered as a CMO, however it kept an official membership list and functioned as a caucus. Therefore, this case study which is focused on the 114th Congress is relevant, and its results may bring valuable discussion points to the study on caucuses and their role in contemporary political polarization.

Much like with the Freedom Caucus, my analysis assessed the level of voting consistency among the members of this CMO. The voting consistency was tested based on alignment of individual members' voting record with the caucus leader, Rodney Davis. The chair of the caucus voted in 1,300 cases out of 1,321 roll call votes. The average percentage of voting cohesion with Davis for the 63 individuals who belonged to the RMSP in the 114th Congress is 89.5%. As an entire bloc, all 64 members voted together in 144 cases, which is 11.1% of the caucus leaders' votes. Using the selected threshold of 90% as a measure of consistent group voting, at least 57 (out of 63) RMSP representatives voted in line with Davis in 974 instances, which is 74.9% of the chairman's total votes during the studied Congress.

The Republican Main Street Partnership analysis also needed a controlling tool. As the ideologically opposing caucus within the Republican Party is the afore mentioned

Freedom Caucus, the RMSP voting alignment with the leader was compared to the individuals' voting cohesion with Jim Jordan (Freedom Caucus chair). The average percentage of aligned voting with Jim Jordan for the RMSP members is 83.5%. As this number is 6.4 percentage points lower than the voting cohesion with the RMSP chair, the outcome of this particular controlling analysis suggests that the RMSP, as a moderate caucus of the party, truly stands on the opposite end to the hardline conservatives of the Republican side in the House of Representatives.

Furthermore, a closer look at the individual RMSP members' voting alignment confirms further that these two caucuses of the same party indeed steadily stand in opposition to each other. From the group of 63 RMSP members, 61 individuals (97%) voted more often with Rodney Davis than with Jim Jordan. These results support more strongly the above indicated findings on internal divisions within the Republican Party. The voting cohesion of the RMSP members (moderate GOP caucus) is much stronger with the caucus leader (and by extension among themselves) than with the leader of the conservative party caucus (Freedom Caucus). The same applies vice versa, as described above.

The Republican Main Street Partnership members' voting consistency can be further tested by comparing it to the voting cohesion with the party leadership. To that end, a controlling analysis was performed. I compared the voting alignment of RMSP members with Rodney Davis as opposed to their voting cohesion with the majority leader, Kevin McCarthy. McCarthy voted in 1,305 instances during the 114th Congress. Out of this number, on average, the 63 RMSP members voted in line with McCarthy on 89% of occasions. This result is noteworthy as it is a very slight difference, only 0.5 percentage points, compared to the voting cohesion with Rodney Davis. Such outcome suggests that while the RMSP members are clearly positioned as an aligned voting bloc compared to the

hardline conservatives, their cohesion is not nearly as strong when weighted against the consistency of votes with the party leadership.

Again, looking at individual members and their voting alignment can bring further insight. When compared to Kevin McCarthy, Rodney Davis as the caucus chair “commanded” a higher percentage of consistent voting with “only” 36 members of the CMO, the remaining 27 representatives were more likely to vote with the party leader rather than the caucus leader. This result reinforces the position that whereas the moderate caucus stands steadily together in opposition to the staunch conservatives, they do not form such a consistent voting bloc when compared to the party leadership.

To test this outcome a step further, in an analogous manner as with the Freedom Caucus analysis, the RMSP voting coherence was also analyzed in comparison to the House Majority Whip. Out of his 1298 votes, Scalise voted in line with individual RMSP members on average in 88% of the votes. Individually, 41 RMSP House politicians have a higher percentage of shared voting with the caucus leader, compared to remaining 22 who are more in line with the Whip. These results suggest that whereas there is a slight discrepancy between the voting coherence of RMSP members with the Majority Leader and the Majority Whip, the overall trend is maintained. This controlling measure confirms that the Republican Main Street Partnership as a caucus is less strongly coherent in comparison to the Republican leadership as opposed to comparing to the Freedom Caucus.

3.2.3. Summary of findings: Republican CMOs

As shown, putting the roll call vote analyses of the two caucuses of different ideological backgrounds against each other brings about valuable outcomes. We can see that both the moderate CMO as well as the conservative caucus are substantially likelier to vote in accordance with their respective leaders than with the leader of the ideologically opposing CMO. We can also see that in both cases, the individual caucuses' members were likelier to vote in accordance with their caucus leader rather than with the party leadership.

Such statements may seem to be expected if we accept the presumption that the Freedom Caucus is a consistent conservative voting bloc within the Republican Party and that the RMSPP is, on the contrary, a coherent moderate force inside the GOP. These were the basic assumptions at the outset of this research, which the case study seeks to affirm. Without a deeper look into the actual voting records of the individual caucuses' members, the presumptions can hardly be confirmed as the information on consistency among the caucuses would be missing.

Analyzing the individual roll call votes during the 114th Congress of all the respective House representatives allowed to confirm that the hardline conservatives known as the Freedom Caucus truly constitute a cohesive group with a reliably aligned voting record on the right side of the liberal-conservative scale. Similarly, the analysis validated that the Republican Main Street Partnership caucus is a consistent voting bloc leaning considerably more leftward on the ideological scale.

The comparisons of the caucuses' voting alignment with the party leadership also add further interesting discussion points to the polarization debate. As pointed out, when comparing the voting consistency of the caucuses with the caucuses' members alignment with party leadership, it becomes clear that the Freedom Caucus members are significantly more likely to be "loyal" to the caucus leader rather than to a partisan leader, either the

Majority Leader or the Whip. For Jordan's caucus, the members were likelier to vote with McCarthy in only 8% (3 representatives) and with Scalise in 17% (6 members) of the cases. In the case of RMSP, the numbers are 43% (27 members) and 35% (22 representatives), respectively.

These statistics on individual members' *allegiance* with their caucus compared to their party leadership indicate that, as a CMO, the conservative forces within the party are more coherent and as such, stronger than the moderates. Such outcome suggests that the Republican caucuses' influence is likelier to pull the party to the right than to the middle and potentially toward bipartisanship. Based on this analysis, the polarizing forces within the GOP are stronger than the moderating ones. Particularly this conclusion merits further research.

3.3. Democratic Congressional Member Organizations

3.3.1. Congressional Progressive Caucus

The most liberal caucus in the scope of this thesis, Congressional Progressive Caucus (Progressives), was also tested on the basis of its members' voting cohesion. As this CMO was co-chaired during the previous Congress by Keith Ellison and Raúl Grijalva (today co-chaired by Grijalva along with Mark Pocan), the roll call vote analysis is specific in considering double leadership. First, conclusions are drawn from an analysis of voting alignment with both leaders together. Second, results are interpreted from an analysis of voting coherence with only one of the leaders; this is especially important when comparing the voting cohesion to the caucus members' alignment with a different caucus or partisan leader.

Keith Ellison and Raúl Grijalva voted together during the 114th Congress on 1,107 occasions. The assumption being that when the two leaders voted the same way, a reliably coherent caucus would, to a significant extent, vote accordingly as well. Out of the 1,107 votes, the individual Progressives voted with their two leaders on average in 93.2% of cases. The threshold of at least 90% of members (56) voting together was reached in 936 instances, which is 84.6% of the co-chairs' shared votes. These numbers are considerably high; which indicates that the Progressives may be a cohesive CMO.

However, the limitations of analyzing individual members' voting alignment with two leaders need to be addressed. The set of the caucus co-chairs' shared votes is already a "filtered" sample. The two politicians, supposedly, share similar ideology. Thus, the set of votes they share is by default ideologically "colored" and, therefore, more likely to be in line with the caucus members' positions as well. The percentage expression of voting alignment of the Progressives' representatives with the 1,107 leaders' shared votes is a good indication

of the caucus cohesion on its own but cannot be sufficiently controlled by measuring comparison to leaders of another caucus (or a partisan leader).

In order to adequately measure this CMO's voting cohesion, it is required to analyze the individual representatives' voting coherence with only one of the leaders whose results can then be compared to different leading politicians of the Democratic Party. Since Keith Ellison voted 1,263 times as opposed to Grijalva's 1,190, his voting record constitutes a more representative sample. For this reason, the further roll call data analysis was concentrated on the Progressives' cohesion of voting with Ellison. During the 114th Congress, the average level of voting alignment with Ellison for the individual members of the Progressive caucus was 91.3%.⁷⁴ The threshold of at least 90% of members voting together was attained in 80.1% instances. While these numbers are (logically) lower than in the case of alignment with both caucus leaders, they remain considerably high and signal that Progressive caucus may really be a consistent voting bloc within the Democratic Party.

To further evaluate this conclusion, a controlling measure needs to be described here. As part of the analysis, similarly to the examination of Republican caucuses, I compared the voting coherence of the Progressives with their caucus chair to the alignment of votes with the leader of New Democrats, a moderate, more conservatively leaning caucus of the Democratic Party. Ron Kind was the chair of the New Democrats in the 114th Congress (today replaced by Jim Himes) during which he voted on 1,253 occasions. The Progressives on average shared the same vote as Kind in 87% of cases, which is 4.3 percentage points less than the average voting alignment with the caucus leader, Ellison.

Again, a closer look at the individual representatives adds further insight into the study of the caucus's voting coherence. Out of the 62 members, every single representative

⁷⁴ Note: the list of studied members here numbers 62 as it excludes Raúl Grijalva, the co-chair. The study measures coherence of voting of the "ordinary" members of the caucus.

is more likely to vote in line with Keith Ellison than with Ron Kind. Particularly considering the large size of the caucus, such voting allegiance is a convincing evidence of significant voting cohesion among the caucus members. Therefore, the Progressives can justifiably be viewed as a consistent liberal leaning group of House representatives which stands in contrast to a more moderate caucus, New Democrats. Such outcome of this analysis would suggest that, like the GOP, the Democratic Party is also internally divided along the lines of caucuses' membership.

The Progressives' voting coherence was further examined in contrast to voting alignment with the party leadership. As in the case of the Republican caucuses, such controlling measure increases the analysis's validity and raises additional points for discussion. The 62 members of the Progressive Caucus voted in line with Nancy Pelosi, the Minority Leader, on average in 91.7% of her votes. This result is slightly higher than the voting alignment of Progressives with the caucus leader (by 0.4 percentage points). The difference is negligible, and it can hardly be a compelling evidence of Pelosi's stronger influence among the Progressives as opposed to Ellison. However, as the difference is small, the analysis shows that the Progressives vote in line with Pelosi as well as Ellison.

To support this claim, a comparing analysis of the Progressives' voting alignment with Steny Hoyer, the Minority Whip, was also performed. The individual members of the Progressive Caucus vote in line with Hoyer on average on 1,152 occasions, which is 90.5% of the Whip's votes (1,273) during the 114th Congress. The ratio of voter alignment in Hoyer's case is slightly lower (by 0.8 percentage points) than the Progressives' voting coherence with the caucus chair. While this outcome indicates that the Progressives are likelier to vote with Ellison than with Hoyer, the percentage gap is also marginal, thus it can be reliably claimed that the Progressives vote consistently together but not substantially out of line from the party leadership.

More revealing conclusions can be inferred from a closer look at the individuals Progressives' voting coherence with the examined leaders. Comparing voting coherence between Ellison and Hoyer, 45 out of 62 Progressives were likelier to vote with the caucus leader. Interestingly enough, when comparing between Ellison and Pelosi, only 22 members were more likely to vote in line with Ellison whereas the remaining 40 Progressives were more aligned with Pelosi. It is apparent that there is a significant difference between the two party leaders in the cohesion of voting with representatives of the Progressive Caucus. Such fact becomes even more evident when comparing the two directly: out of the 62 examined Progressives of the last Congress, 58 were likelier to vote in line with Pelosi and only 4 with Hoyer.

Such discrepancy in Pelosi's and Hoyer's voting alignment with Progressive members warrants further explanation. The NOMINATE dataset can be of help here. During the 114th Congress, Nancy Pelosi's NOMINATE score was -0.491, which placed her as the 29th most liberal representative of the House.⁷⁵ Therefore, her ideological score as measured by the NOMINATE data suggests that she would comfortably fit among the more liberal members of the caucus. It would then stand to reason that the Progressives vote in line with her as they are ideologically close. As shown, the individual Progressives indeed reliably vote in line with Pelosi, which in fact can be interpreted as a sign of strong voting consistency of the caucus. The high level of voting alignment with both Ellison and Pelosi shows that the CMO is a strong bloc voting consistently along the caucus ideological lines.

To compare, Hoyer's NOMINATE score -0.379 during the 114th Congress was notably higher than Pelosi's and as such, it placed him significantly farther to the right (115th

⁷⁵ Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2017). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>.

most liberal).⁷⁶ Therefore, the Progressives' higher alignment with Pelosi compared to their coherency with Hoyer meets the assumption of a strongly liberal and coherently voting group of Democrats.

3.3.2. New Democrat Coalition

The roll call votes of the representatives of the more moderate caucus within the Democratic Party, New Democrats, were also examined in detail. Similarly, the results of this analysis unveil valuable information in the study of Congressional Member Organizations. The caucus leader during the 114th Congress, Ron Kind, as already stated above, cast a vote in the examined period 1,253 times. The individual members of the New Democrats shared the same vote on average in 86.3% of Kind's votes. At least 90% of the caucus (44 members) voted together along with Kind on 779 occasions, which is 62.2% of the caucus chairman's voting.

At first sight, these numbers on their own appear high and potentially to be a sign of voting coherence. However, when compared with the Progressive caucus, the voting alignment seems significantly lower. Further controlling measures need to be considered. In reverse of the analysis of the Progressives, the individual New Democrats' voting records were tested for alignment with Keith Ellison. Out of 1,263 Ellison's votes, the New Democrats voted on average with the Progressives' leader in 86.9% of instances. Brief comparison is of note here.

This result suggests that the individual members of the New Democrats were during the last Congress in fact to some extent more likely to vote in line with Keith Ellison than with the New Democrats' chairman. The difference of 0.6 percentage points in favor of Ellison numerically is not a significant gap. However, as the basic assumption is that the two

⁷⁶ Ibid.

caucuses are distant to each other on the ideological liberal-conservative scale (and as seen with NOMINATE data, they are), the closeness of the New Democrats' voting coherence to the leader of the Progressives (and by approximation to the caucus) indicates that the moderate Democratic CMO may not be very reliable in its voting consistency, compared to other wings of the Democratic Party.

Looking at the individual members of the New Democrats, we can see that 29 out of 49 representatives share a higher percentage of voting coherence with Ellison rather than with the New Democrats' chair. Only 20 members of the caucus are more aligned in voting with the CMO leader than with the leader of the ideologically more distant caucus (Progressives). These results reinforce the claim that New Democrats may not be very convincingly coherent as a voting bloc.

Further controlling measures are of value. First, to ensure that the data is not distorted with regards to Ron Kind as a specific person, voting alignment of the New Democrats was tested with another leader of the caucus, Jim Himes. Himes was a leading figure of the CMO during the last Congress and he serves as the chairman today in the 115th Congress. Second, the voting coherence of the New Democrats needed to be also evaluated in comparison to the Democratic party leaders, not only compared to the liberal Progressives.

Jim Himes participated on 1,309 votes in the measured period. Out of this number, the average percentage of shared voting with the individual members of the New Democrat caucus is 87.4%. While this number is higher than the result of voting alignment with Kind, the difference (1.1 percentage points) is not substantial. It is also only slightly higher (by 0.5 percentage points) than the voting coherence of New Democrats with Ellison. Therefore, even when the statistics of members' alignment with the current leader of the caucus are used, it is evident that the New Democrats are nearly as likely to vote with the caucus chair as with the leader of the ideologically contrasting CMO within the same party.

Furthermore, the individual results of the members' votes confirm the low level of cohesion of the caucus voting as compared to the Progressives. The number of the New Democrat Coalition members who were likelier to vote with Himes is larger (29) than of those members who inclined with their voting more in line with Ellison (20). Even though these are stronger numbers than in the case of voting alignment with Ron Kind, the difference between Himes and Ellison remains too small to consider the New Democrats to be a coherent voting bloc, especially in comparison to the liberal Progressives. To express the discrepancy in voting cohesion of individuals in percentages, only 41% of New Democrats were likelier to vote with Ron Kind than Ellison. In the case of Jim Himes, 59% of the New Democrat members were more aligned with him than with the Progressives' chair.

The above results strongly indicate that, particularly compared to the Progressives, the New Democrats are far from being an independent consistent voting bloc. As the Progressives and New Democrats are positioned far from each other on the ideological scale, it would stand to reason that if they were consistently voting along the caucus lines, the moderates should be substantially likelier to vote in line with their own, presumed, leader rather than the chairman of the more liberal caucus. Such statement cannot be claimed about the New Democrat Coalition. As the analysis unveils, the New Democrat individuals are not likelier (sufficiently) to vote accordingly with their own caucus leadership rather than with the Progressives who are positioned much farther to the left of the ideological scale.

While the above comparison of different roll call vote analyses should suffice to convincingly assert that the New Democrat Coalition does not constitute a coherent Congressional Member Organization, a further controlling measure can also be implemented. Comparison of voting alignment between the caucus and partisan leaders, similarly to the above analyses, brings further insight.

As I already showed above, the New Democrats were likelier to vote in line with their current chairman, Jim Himes than with Ron Kind. For this reason, interpretation of results from a comparing analysis of voting alignment with Himes as opposed to the party leadership is sufficient. The New Democrats were during the last Congress voting in line with Nancy Pelosi, the Minority Leader, in 88% of her votes (1,203 in total). Such level of voting alignment is slightly higher (by 0.6 percentage points) than in the case of Jim Himes. Individually, 33 out of 49 members (67%) were likelier to vote accordingly with Pelosi than with Himes.

To control for these outcomes even further, a comparing analysis between New Democrats alignment with Himes and Steny Hoyer, the Minority Whip, was performed. The New Democrats were on average voting in line with the Whip in 88.2% of Hoyer's votes, which is the highest measured result for this caucus. Individually, 34 New Democrats (69%) were likelier to be in line with Hoyer than with Himes. Much like the voting alignment with Pelosi, Hoyer's voting coherence with the New Democrats proves that this caucus's members are substantially more likely to vote along the partisan rather than caucus lines. It is also of note that Jim Himes himself voted in line with Pelosi in 92.7% of her votes and in 91.4% of Hoyer's votes; significant percentage in both cases.

All the results described above can serve as a compelling evidence that the New Democrats are not a strongly coherent voting bloc, independent on the partisan leadership. While the caucus members are on average located more to the middle of the ideological scale, they do not form a significant moderating force within the party. If a further research into the New Democrat Coalition as a moderating force is conducted, my analysis results would strongly suggest that the voting alignment among the caucus members be considered. If the voting records of the 114th Congress can be of any guidance, they would hint that the

New Democrat Coalition as a CMO does not play a consequential part in the polarization of contemporary U.S. politics.

3.3.3. Summary of findings: Democratic CMOs comparison

The roll call vote analysis results show that the Progressives constitute a more consistent voting bloc than the New Democrats. Such result indicates that on the Democratic side, the liberal forces are stronger than the moderate ones. Whereas Ellison commanded voting cohesion with the individual Progressives on average in 91.3%, Ron Kind was aligned in voting with the New Democrats in “only” 86.3%. Using the example of Jim Himes as a leader of New Democrats, the number was 87.4%. In both cases, the differences in voting alignment is significant and can serve as compelling evidence that the Congressional Progressive Caucus is a stronger CMO than the New Democrat Coalition.

Such argument is further supported with closer examination of individuals’ voting alignment. Whereas none of the 62 individual Progressives were likelier to vote with Ron Kind or Jim Himes than with Keith Ellison, the number of “disloyal” caucus members was 29 out of 59 in case of the New Democrats (if Himes is considered the leader, the number is 20).

The caucuses’ relationship to the Democratic leadership can offer more interesting conclusions and discussion points for further research. On the Democratic end, the partisan leadership, presumably, wields substantial influence within the individual caucuses. In the case of New Democrats, the individual caucus members were more highly aligned with both the Minority Leader (88%) and the Minority Whip (88.2%) than with either Kind (86.3%) or Himes (87.4%). The leadership’s influence among the Progressives is also significant. The Progressives voted in line with Pelosi on average in 91.7% and with Hoyer in 90.5%

which is a substantial level of alignment, comparable to that of Ellison's, the caucus leader (91.3%).

These numbers strongly suggest that the Democratic party leaders are largely aligned with the Progressives and are also a major influence among the New Democrats. Taken together, the Democrats are a mostly cohesive party with the Progressive being the influential liberal force and the New Democrats substantially less impactful moderate arm.

3.4. Summary of findings: Democrats and Republicans

A brief comparison of the results for both parties helps highlight the major conclusions on the role the Congressional Member Organizations may play in the polarization debate. Within both parties, the two caucuses positioned farther on either ends of the ideological scale also form the stronger and more consistent voting bloc than either of the more moderate groups. Such result is a compelling evidence that the CMOs are likelier to have an impact as the *polarizing* forces pulling the two major parties farther apart from each other.

The voting alignment of the CMOs with the respective partisan leaders offers further valuable insight. The Freedom Caucus is substantially less aligned with the GOP leadership than its counterpart on the Democratic side, Congressional Progressive Caucus is aligned with the Democratic leadership. This means that the hardline conservatives are pulling the Republicans to the right more strongly than the liberals are pulling the Democrats to the left. Since the two caucuses are the more consistent and influential forces than the moderates on either side, this result substantially supports the argument that the polarization in recent years has occurred asymmetrically.

As shown, the gaps between the two caucuses, and between each of the caucuses and party leadership are larger on the Republican side than on the Democratic end. The New Democrats are more aligned with their partisan leadership than the RMSP is aligned with

the GOP leaders. Progressives vote in line with the Democratic party leaders substantially more often than the Freedom Caucus does (as stated above). Also, the New Democrats and Progressives are clearly more aligned together than the Freedom Caucus and RMSP are. These results convincingly confirm the assumption that the Republicans are more internally divided than Democrats (at least in the 114th Congress).

3.5. Additional findings

As extra to the above roll call vote analysis focused on CMOs, a simple look at the voting cohesion among the two partisan leaderships may provide more valuable observations. With the prevailing rhetoric of highly polarized countries, it would stand to reason that the voting cohesion between partisan leaders across parties is very low. Whereas such comparison is not exactly in the scope of the thesis, it can add more information for the polarization context in general. For this reason, it is useful to see the voting cohesion among the Majority and Minority leaders as well as the respective Whips.

Nancy Pelosi voted together with Kevin McCarthy in 297 cases, which is 22.5% of total votes during the Congress. Steny Hoyer voted in line with Steve Scalise on 323 occasions, that is 24.5%. These numbers strongly indicate that current elite representatives “bridge the gap” in less than a quarter of the time. A deeper research into these votes and their nature would reveal which types of legislation the two parties agree upon and where more room for bipartisanship may lie.

The very brief note of the Bipartisan Working Group voting alignment mentioned above is useful for comparison here. The two leaders, each from a different party, of the caucus voted together in less than 30% of their votes in total. As this number is notably higher than the level of alignment between the party leaders of both parties, the analysis suggests that the Bipartisan Working Group indeed functions as a group working across the

aisle. At the same time, however, the alignment is substantially lower than of any other measured voting relationship within either of the parties. Therefore, while the BWG may have a slight moderating effect and perhaps can be a bipartisan force, the cohesion of the parties is still much stronger when compared against each other.

As the last voting alignment level noted here in this paper, I chose to point out the possible least revealing one. Especially considering the results above, there should be no surprise that the leaders of the most ideologically “pure” caucuses on either side of the scale do not vote together often. Keith Ellison cast the same vote as Jim Jordan in 266 cases, that is 20.1% of total. Even though this is not an eye-opening result, it can serve as a reliable confirmation of the assumptions made on the respective caucuses’ voting.

4. Discussion

Several relevant discussion points were raised by the results of the conducted analyses throughout thesis. When studying the polarization phenomenon of contemporary U.S. politics, the results to a large extent indicate that there is a good reason for looking more deeply into the role individual Congressional Member Organizations play. The voting cohesion analysis has revealed that the more radical forces are significantly stronger and highly more coherent than the moderate groups. As such, the effect the CMOs have in today’s U.S. politics is rather *polarizing* than vice versa.

Particularly the influence the Freedom Caucus wields over today’s House of Representatives should be given thorough academic attention. As a strong and coherent caucus which is largely independent on the GOP leadership, the caucus pulls the party to the far-right and further away from the Democrats. Their counterpart, the Progressives, on the other side of the scale are as well a stable voting bloc, yet substantially more connected to the Democratic party leaders. Therefore, Freedom Caucus is very likely the single most

polarizing force in the contemporary politics on Capitol Hill. Scholars are invited to analyze the caucus in more detail.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus and its role in contemporary U.S. politics merit deeper research. Whereas it is not as polarizing a force as the Freedom Caucus, it is still a strong caucus located on the far-left side of the ideological scale. As such, it notably impacts the voting of the Democratic Party as a whole. As the CMO is largely aligned with the party leadership, the relationship between the caucus and the governing wing of the party should be looked at in further research.

An especially interesting analysis possibly bringing more valuable data to the polarization discussion would be that of the roots and causes of such alignment between Progressives and the Democratic leadership. Asking the question about the roots of such relationship sparks a series of other research questions which, supported by this thesis's conclusions, advocates a larger scale examination of the caucuses can unveil answers and possibly solutions to one of the most pressing issues of today's politics in the United States.

Have the Progressives made the governing wing of the party align itself with the liberal agenda? If so, will the Freedom Caucus have the same effect on the Republican Party? Should this happen, will the two parties be pulled apart even further? In such case, what will happen to the moderate forces in the middle? Will they be strong enough to survive within the political landscape of the years to come? As the moderates are considerably less consistent than the radicals, will the political elite center *disappear*? In such case, what will happen to the choices for the electorate? Will the moderate and independent American voters eventually be, by default, presented with two unacceptable choices? Can this, finally, lead to an emergence of a third major party?

These are, of course, hypothetical questions and the subsequence in this order is by far not guaranteed. However, they are still worth asking. Even though it would be highly far-

fetched to claim that the results of this analysis provide sufficient evidence for the presumed outcomes of the hypothetical questions, they do offer relevant grounds for validating these. As this would require a much larger study, this thesis did not adequately prove the causal effect of the CMOs on the polarization of today's politics. Yet, the analysis offers relevant conclusions and encourages further large-scale examination of the Congressional Member Organizations.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on one of the most current and largely noticed phenomena of today's politics in the United States of America: *polarization*. Having elaborated on the extant literature and theories on the issue, I identified a potentially significant piece of the puzzle which has not been given a sufficient attention in academia. The paper closed in on the role of the Congressional Member Organizations in polarization of the U.S. politics.

The key research of the thesis was two-fold. First, using the existing dataset NOMINATE which is widely embraced among scholars as valid measurement of polarization and applying it to the studied caucuses. Second, more extensively, analyzing every vote cast for each of the individual members of the studied caucuses during the 114th Congress.

The first NOMINATE analysis showed that the caucuses are very reliably placed on the ideological scale according to their presumed ideological bases. Out of the seven selected CMOs (four of which are major with further examination in the case study), all seven are positioned on the liberal-conservative scale per the ideological positions they proclaim or are presumed to stand for. This analysis, therefore, showed that the caucuses may be, given their positions on the scale, considered as polarizing or moderating. That is, of course, under

the assumption that the caucuses constitute consistent voting blocs and do not exist only on paper.

The second analysis focused especially on confirming that assumption. Selecting four major caucuses, I analyzed all the roll call votes throughout the 114th Congress and compared individual voting records among the members and their alignment with the caucus leadership. The results revealed compelling evidence that the more radical caucuses are the strongest and the most consistent voting blocs. The moderate CMOs do not nearly constitute such coherent groups. Furthermore, the results of the roll call vote analysis support the evidence that the Republican Party is more internally divided than the party of Democrats. Both selected caucuses of the GOP are much less aligned with the Republican leadership than the two studied CMOs on the Democratic side.

To conclude, the caucuses are much likelier polarizing than moderating forces in today's U.S. politics. The more radical CMOs, Progressives and Freedom Caucus are clearly positioned on the ideological scale with significant distance to each other as well as to the middle of the scale. As the analysis of voting alignment showed, these are the two most consistent groups by far and therefore have, among voting groups, the most substantial effect and role in the role polarization debate.

Resumé (Summary)

Práce se zaměřila na dnešní polarizaci v americkém Kongresu a obzvláště na roli, kterou jednotlivá politická uskupení známá jako “caucuses” hrají. V úvodu práce zmiňují několik různých existujících akademických pohledů na příčiny a dopady polarizace, mezi které se můj výzkum snaží přispět. V práci se přikláním k vysvětlení, že příčiny polarizace je nutné hledat na úrovni politických elit namísto voličstva. Práce zdůrazňuje, že je důležité v rámci diskuse o polarizaci v Kongresu třeba nahlížet na jednotlivé frakce, které v něm fungují.

Pro účely práce byly vybrány čtyři významná členská sdružení: Freedom Caucus, Republican Main Street Partnership, New Democrat Coalition a Congressional Progressive Caucus. Tato sdružení byla podrobena analýze s datasetem NOMINATE, který dokázal, že jednotlivá uskupení jsou skutečně od sebe vzdáleny na základě ideologického pozadí, které bylo hypotézováno před výzkumem.

Zásadní částí této diplomové práce je případová studie a analýza koherence hlasování jednotlivých sdružení ve sněmovně reprezentantů během 114. kongresu. Výsledky analýzy přesvědčivě ukazují, že několik výchozích předpokladů je podloženo hlasováním v daném kongresu. Nejsilnějšími sdruženími s nejvíce konzistentním hlasováním jsou ta sdružení, která se zároveň nachází na okrajích ideologické škály. Naopak více umírněné skupiny v rámci obou hlavních politických stran jsou znatelně méně soudržné. Tyto výsledky tedy ukazují, že členská politická sdružení mohou mít výrazný vliv na polarizaci v dnešním americkém kongresu.

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