Faction Brands

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Abstract

Members of the U.S. Congress have created new, sub-partisan institutions to capture some influence in an increasingly polarized and competitive two-party system. However, scholars have only recently begun to empirically evaluate the impact of groups like the Blue Dog Coalition or the House Freedom Caucus. In this article, I show that faction affiliation alone can shift the way that political donors, activists, and leaders perceive a candidate's ideological position. These experimental results contribute to our understanding of how factions can accumulate valuable political resources and, ultimately, loosen the bonds of two-party government.[1]

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Introduction

Affiliation with the Republican or Democratic Party is both a necessity and a political liability for many congressional candidates. For example, California Republicans argued in the lead-up to the midterm elections that they must "downplay their toxic brand to survive" in an increasingly blue state (Kilgore 2022). At the same time, rural Democrats claimed to "fear extinction" because of their inability to differentiate from a more progressive, national policy reputation. As former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) explained, "the brand is so toxic that people who are Democrats, the ones left, aren't fighting for the party" (Peoples 2022). Each party's brand is an important – if contested – definition of their political coalition. Nevertheless, heterodox lawmakers often chafe against the constraints of an ill-fitting party label.

Put differently, party brands are imperfect but significant instruments of democratic representation. Every year, Americans rely upon party brands to make consequential political decisions (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). In an increasingly polarized political climate, the Republican or Democratic labels presented on a ballot serve as clear heuristics, reducing a complex political decision into a simple, dichotomous choice (Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Rahn, 1993). From this perspective, partisan labels are incredibly useful, but they also communicate a mere central tendency in the political behavior of partisans (Cox and McCubbins, 2007).[2]

Over the last few decades, political scientists have extensively applied the logic of brands to better understand the role of parties in democratic societies (Butler and Powell, 2014; Lupu, 2013; Grynaviski, 2010; Tomz and Sniderman, 2005). In many respects, the concept is a natural fit for political contexts. From a marketing perspective, brands are *definitions*;

[2] Ironically, the heuristic capacity of brands is most effectively used by citizens that need informational shortcuts the least (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001).

they are revelatory mechanisms that categorize and differentiate products from competing alternatives (Jones and Bonevac, 2013). Individual lawmakers may differ in meaningful and enduring ways from their party's generic reputation, but the ubiquity of the Democratic or Republican brand may lead representatives to be mislabeled at great electoral cost. This raises an important question of political representation and power in American politics. What can legislators, dissatisfied with the generic party brand, do to more clearly signal their ideological views?

In this article, I argue that party factions in the U.S. House of Representatives can use political sub-branding as a mechanism to capture valuable political resources and, ultimately, loosen the bonds of two-party government. Groups like the House Freedom Caucus and Blue Dog Coalition have developed highly organized institutions within their respective parties. Members of these factions have access to carefully cultivated information, selective fundraising opportunities, greater media attention, and staffing resources. They also agree to adhere to internal rules that bind members to one another in a way consistent with brand management strategies. In short, factions exist as a sort of submerged party system in the U.S. Congress, and understanding the path to faction influence is an important, relatively understudied topic in the literature on American political representation.

In the section that follows, I review recent findings in the study of political factions and the theoretical foundations for my understanding of a faction branding campaign. Next, I present two experiments designed to identify the causal impact of a faction brand on perceptions of candidate ideology. In the first of these examples, I test whether the *Blue Dog* label leads individuals to view an incumbent Democrat as more moderate than their co-partisans. In the second experiment, I evaluate whether the *Freedom Caucus* brand meaningfully signals ideological extremism to a new, national sample of verified local party

leaders, donors, and activists. Finally, I conclude and point to a few important next steps if we are to understand the role these groups will play in American democracy.

American Party Factions and the Logic of Party Brands

Research on American party factions begins with a common premise: intraparty, ideological organizations in the U.S. House wish to change their party. Faced with the constraints of a two-party system, lawmakers must reforge their party's political identity rather than abandon it in favor of a third-party alternative unlikely to succeed in a general election. Dissatisfied lawmakers thus create new factional institutions as "engines of change" that "attempt to shape the party's overall reputation" (DiSalvo 2012, 8). From this perspective, factions – like the conservative Freedom Caucus or centrist Blue Dog Coalition – compete to pull their respective parties closer to their ideological positions. Progressives wish the Democratic Party would shift decidedly to the left of the Clinton-era "third way" espoused by the New Democrats, and the centrists in the Republican Main Street Partnership set out to anchor their party to a more moderate position. Morgan Griffith (R-VA), a member of the conservative Freedom Caucus, neatly summarizes the point: "Our goal is to move the caucus and the conference to the right and to try to do what we can on policy. And that's where a lot of us start" (Beavers 2022).

Following prior research and firsthand accounts, I assume that factions wish to pull their party in the ideological direction of their members. But this assumption raises an important theoretical question: how, exactly, can factions alter their party's reputation? Put differently, what are the causal mechanisms that factions use to redefine their party?

Prior research has focused on public policymaking and faction institutional design. Given the disproportionate influence of party leaders in the House (Pearson 2015), factions must organize their groups to guard against defections and free-riding when they disagree

with co-partisans on meaningful policy initiatives. Factions succeed when they clarify their common policy objectives and increase the cost incurred by party leaders interested in co-opting potential dissidents (Bloch Rubin 2017). To underscore this point, Lauren Boebert (R-CO) recently explained the value of Freedom Caucus membership at a fundraiser for a fellow faction member in West Virginia: "Sometimes a $5,000 check from a lobbyist and a committee position seat from leadership gets people just to sit down and be quiet. But that's not how we operate in the Freedom Caucus" (Wilkins 2022).[3] By transforming individually pivotal lawmakers into a consolidated pivotal bloc, factions can move beyond short-term policy victories and attempt to redistribute power throughout their chamber through institutional and procedural reform initiatives (Baer 2017; Bloch Rubin 2017). In short, much of the existing research on factions in the House focuses on the relationship between the organizational characteristics of factions and policymaking outcomes (Baer 2017; Bloch Rubin 2017; Green 2019; Blum 2020; Bloch Rubin 2022; McGee 2021; Clarke 2020b; Clarke, Volden, and Wiseman 2022).

Most of these studies investigate a legislative, strategic approach to changing their party's reputation. This approach can be effective because factions that "punch above their weight" in legislative affairs may disproportionately impact their party's policy reputation. Factions that successfully advance their proposals through the gauntlet of veto points in the House can shift policy in their preferred direction on an incremental basis. Similarly, factions succeed if they can block policy that would pull the party away from their preferred location. By passing or obstructing targeted legislative priorities, factions can shift what it means to be a Republican or Democrat in the long run.

[3] The Freedom Caucus brand was discussed, in part, because of the extremely conservative subset of the American electorate in the audience. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) endorsed Alex Mooney (R-WV) by calling him a "professional RINO [Republican in Name Only] hunter" and fearless conservative that would help fire Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). Attendees at this rally were entered in a "Tavor X95 Rifle Gun Giveaway."

Alternatively, factions may pursue an electoral strategy. By electing like-minded candidates, factions can alter the distribution of policy preferences in their party. By replacing incumbents and filling open seats with like-minded partisans, factions can add a shock to their party's ideological distribution. Factions may also anchor their party to an ideological location by preserving like-minded incumbents through a robust political support networks. For example, reactionary Tea Party conservatives attempted to replace mainstream conservative voices in the Republican conference through primary election competition (Blum 2020). In a prior political era, liberal members of the Democratic Study Group provided targeted campaign assistance to candidates willing to break up the powerful, conservative bloc of Southerners in their party (Bloch Rubin 2017). Factions can thus redefine their party by carefully pursuing electoral opportunities in recurring election seasons.

Prior research – on both legislative and electoral approaches to influence – has also highlighted the importance of developing a unique political sub-brands. The ability to distribute selective benefits is critical if factions are to succeed in either legislative or electoral strategic efforts to remake their party (Bloch Rubin 2017), and factions can gain a significant advantage by appealing to niche markets of donors, activists, and journalists (Clarke 2020a). Put differently, factions can more effectively enhance their capacity to prevent legislative defection and support valued electoral candidates if they can amass an independent political war chest.[4]

Taken together, prior research has argued that factions wish to alleviate the problem of an ill-fitting party brand in a two-party system. In setting out to change their party's reputation, factions may work within the halls of Congress to alter the policy signals communicated to the electorate. Alternatively, they may change their party's ideological

[4] Recent work has formalized and expanded upon these theoretical claims while providing qualitative case studies to support the model in two policy domains (Pomirchy 2022).

distribution by changing the lawmakers that make up their party's ranks. In both legislative and electoral approaches, effective factions must be capable of distributing targeted benefits to their members, and researchers have argued that the development of a faction brand – a more precise signal of their party type – is thus a key mechanism in both the politics of resource capture and, ultimately, influence over the future of their political party.

Surprisingly, political scientists have not directly tested the impact of faction brands. There is, however, some indirect evidence that faction brands may matter. For example, Bloch Rubin (2017) interviewed staffers of the centrist Blue Dog Democrats, and they claimed that, "With increasingly partisan districts that are closely divided, we needed to distance ourselves from the liberal label" (p. 209). Blue Dog membership, from their perspective, "meant access to a more conservative label," and, as such, members would "take care to use the Blue Dog brand" because they believed it would "yield endorsements and financial contributions" (Bloch Rubin 2017, p.209). In other words, faction affiliates at least believed their brands mattered – even if they lacked causally identified evidence to support their hunch.

More recent work has also provided evidence that factions behave in a way at least consistent with a theory of political branding (Clarke 2020a). Formal Bayesian learning models presented by both Grynaviski (2010) and Lupu (2013) suggest that effective political brands require both divergence and unity. Put differently, any faction brand would need to signal an internally consistent message that is ideologically distinct from their co-partisans if they are to succeed in capturing valuable political resources. Building upon these theories, Clarke (2020a) found that faction members have a distinct, ideological voting record in the House, and joining a well-organized faction led to a shift in the ideological composition of a candidate's donor base – even after accounting for pre-membership differences with comparable lawmakers. These findings provide supportive evidence of a faction brand, but to

my knowledge, no study has directly tested if faction affiliation, on its own, changes the way in which individuals perceive a candidate's ideological position.

I set out to directly evaluate this key causal mechanism. More specifically, I design two randomized controlled trials in which only the presence of the faction brand is varied. In so doing, I borrow the designs utilized in recent studies in party brands (Lupu 2013; Butler and Powell 2014). By randomly assigning a faction brand, I am able to more tightly compare the perception of a faction affiliate to a key counterfactual: the same legislator with the same political beliefs and no faction affiliation. Below I introduce and analyze the brands of two factions: one centrist, Democratic faction (the Blue Dog Coalition) and one non-centrist Republican faction (the House Freedom Caucus).

Evaluating the Blue Dog Brand

In the first of my two experiments, I evaluated the "Blue Dog" brand. The Blue Dog Coalition is a centrist Democratic faction in the House of Representatives. Formally, Blue Dogs announced their organization on February 14, 1995 at a press conference.[5] The Blue Dog Coalition is arguably the most impactful faction of the last thirty years, and they attribute their success, at least in part, to the cultivation of a distinct political reputation.

Blue Dogs have provided mixed explanations for their distinct moniker. In their founding press conference, the group's founders explained that their votes were not to be taken for granted by the Democratic Party; they contrasted their organization with the old "yellow-Dog Democrats, a dying breed of southern Democrat that would vote for a yellow dog

[5]The group's roots can apparently be traced back to the "Boll Weevils" in the Conservative Democratic Forum of the 1980s (Block Rubin 2017). As Bloch Rubin (2017, p. 191) explains, the boll weevil (insect) devastated cotton crop in the U.S. South, forcing a diversification for that industry's survival. The "Boll Weevil" (Democrat) symbolism was thus intended to drive home the need for ideological diversity within the Democratic Party. Put differently, even this proto-factional institution seemed to organize on the premise of dealing with an ill-fitting national brand.

over a Republican" (Bloch Rubin 2017, p. 201). The group has also consistently claimed that moderates felt they were "choked blue by the ideological extremes of both parties" (Blue Dog PAC). Finally, the group met in the office of founding member Billy Tauzin (D-LA), where a painting of a blue dog with yellow eyes in front of the U.S. Capitol hung on the walls; in documenting their history, the Blue Dogs quoted the artist of the painting as saying "a Blue Dog knows the way; a Blue Dog finds the truth" (Blue Dog Coalition 2020).

Over the last quarter century, Blue Dogs have aggressively pushed their brand before the media. For example, founding members sported "lapel pins depicting a blue hound dog surrounded by the title 'Blue Dog Conservative Democrat'" in their early press conferences (Bloch Rubin 2017, p.201). Members repeatedly reference the organization in the Congressional Record as they announced their faction-specific legislative agenda and publicly welcomed new members, which they referred to as "Blue Puppies" (Blue Dog Coalition 1999). Journalists proved (unsurprisingly) eager to write stories withcringe-worthy dog puns across their headlines (e.g., "The Blue Dogs Bark" (O'Conor and Thrush 2009)). Similarly, political cartoonists seemed unable to resist depictions of the group's role in legislative affairs. Members of the centrist faction made sure the Blue Dog brand was ubiquitous in political circles, and the attention that follwoed served to amplify their message and made the faction seem deeply influential.

The branding campaign appears to have worked, in part, because lawmakers set out to make their group distinctive and memorable. Blue Dogs hoped to convey a sense of independence – to offer a different *type* of Democrat to niche markets of wealthy, moderate, and politically engaged citizens – while retaining the benefits of membership in one of the two major parties. By their own account, successfully establishing the Blue Dog reputation also facilitated the recruitment of new, like-minded Democrats. As the co-chair of the Blue

Dog PAC (2011) put it, “candidates actively sought our endorsement. They know what the Blue Dog brand represents and wanted to share in it.”

As others have noted, the Blue Dogs were more than a mere name. In fact, the Coalition developed one of the most sophisticated faction institutions of all time. Blue Dogs have elected leadership positions, a carefully guarded whip system, paid staffers, a political action committee, and rules that cultivate faction unity and message consistency (Clarke 2020a). Members inducted into the organization benefit from confidential conversations with lawmakers that faced similar district pressures, and the group coordinates their efforts to secure valuable committee assignments as a means of amplifying the entire group’s legislative influence (Bloch Rubin 2017).

From the beginning, Blue Dogs adopted two key approaches to guard against free riders that, as one staffer put it, “were just there for the brand” (Bloch Rubin 2017, p. 206). First, Blue Dogs had membership caps and a rigorous vetting process to tightly control the consistency and distinctiveness of their collective messaging efforts. Second, the faction imposed meaningful and varied costs on lawmakers. Blue Dogs had to contribute thousands of dollars to election funds, share staffing resources, and attend required meeting, and they gave up significant political autonomy by agreeing to an internal rule binding all faction members together if two-thirds of Blue Dogs agreed upon a policy position (Bloch Rubin 2017).

In theory, Blue Dogs have also exercised brand discipline by consistently claiming a singular focus on fiscal responsibility, and many of their most notable policy priorities, such as PAYGO, reflected this interest. According to staffers, the narrow policy focus was in part a decision to protect a clear and consistent faction identity (Bloch Rubin 2017, p. 209). Nevertheless, a focus on fiscal issues allowed the group to wade into virtually any policy skirmish, and as early as their first press release, the faction set out to address a broader

policy platofrm including “tax reform, budget reform, Congressional reform, welfare reform, regulatory reform and property rights, national security, health reform, and crime control” (Blue Dog Coalition 1995). In sum, the Blue Dog imagery, institutions, and issue agenda were all carefully selected to allow faction affiliates to position themselves more clearly to the ideological right of their co-partisans. While we lack causal evidence of an effective branch to date, there are many reasons to believe that the logic of faction brands would succeed for Blue Dog Democrats.

Experimental Design

In the first of my two experiments, I set out to evaluate the causal impact of the Blue Dog brand on perceptions of candidate ideology. This study took place from November 19-24, 2014 after contracting with Survey Sampling International (SSI). Unlike other convenience samples (e.g., MTurk), SSI provides a national panel and permits demographic quotas to be set as they target respondents in various online communities. It is worth noting that this experiment was conducted at a time when the Blue Dog Coalition was firmly established in the political memory of donors, activists, and party leaders. The moderate faction was, according to journalists, central to policy skirmishes throughout the first term of the Obama administration. From climate change to health care policy, journalists closely followed the statements of Blue Dog lawmakers, even as their numbers rapidly dwindled in subsequent election cycles.

Respondents in the Blue Dog study were randomized into a control (n=334) and treatment group (n=307). Individuals were then asked to view a screenshot of an organization's website with information about Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-OR).[6] I

[6] Rep. Schrader is, in fact, a co-chair of the Blue Dog Coalition. While conducting background research, I was able to share the results of the experiment with a Blue Dog affiliate.

minimized any possible deception throughout the design of the experiment. The candidate, imagery, and baseline text all had authentic connections to the Blue Dog Coalition. For example, the design of the treatment condition began with a real screenshot featuring Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) on a Blue Dog Coalition website, and elsewhere, Rep. Schrader has overtly acknowledged the importance of the faction brand in a press release announcing his election to a faction leadership position:

> *I look forward to continuing to **build the Blue Dog brand** by working with both Democrats and Republicans to find the most commonsense solutions to restoring our nation's fiscal health and encouraging economic opportunities here at home* (Blue Dog Coalition 2012, emphasis added).

In both treatment and control conditions, the website identified Schrader as a Democrat from Oregon and a fiscal conservative eager to work on moderate commonsense solutions such as deficit reduction and job creation.

The image differs in *only* one respect: the control group views Schrader as a Democrat featured on the House Democrats web page, while respondents in the treatment condition viewed Schrader as a Blue Dog Democrat on the Blue Dog Coalition web page. A Blue Dog Coalition web page was used as the original template and the text was maintained whenever possible.[7] In short, the two conditions display fiscally conservative versions of a (real) incumbent Democrat that differ only in emphasis on party brand and or faction brand.

After viewing the treatment image, respondents were asked to choose a point along a 0 to 100 scale, where higher values indicate greater conservatism. Respondents selected a location on the scale that best represents the views of [1] Republicans in Congress, [2] Rep. Kurt Schrader, and [3] Democrats in Congress.[8] This group of sliders was executed across three

[7] The Blue Dog image, as displayed, was also genuinely used by members of the organization at the time of the experiment. They have since cleaned up and improved their logo.
[8] The design of the outcome measure followed directly from Butler and Powell's (2014) use of sliders with the ends labeled as ``liberal'' or "conservative" in their study of party brands. The appendix provides an example of the survey instrument.

policy areas: taxes and government spending, defense, and immigration. To measure my primary outcome variable, I took the average of these three sliders to construct a measure of general ideological perception. If faction brands effectively shift individual perceptions of candidate ideology that individuals randomly assigned to receive the Blue Dog treatment would perceive Congressman Schrader as *more* conservative than those assigned to the control group.

As one final exploratory analysis, I consider how the faction brand might also impact perceptions of party loyalty. More specifically, respondents were asked to estimate what percentage of the time Rep. Schrader votes with his political party based on the information provided. Individuals completing the survey were asked to select a point on a scale that runs from 0 (Never) to 100 (Always).

Results

Figure 1 presents the full distribution of responses to our primary outcome of interest – the average ideology of Rep. Schrader (D-OR) – broken out by treatment condition. Respondents assigned to the Blue Dog brand treatment condition are indicated by the blue shaded density plot. Those assigned to the control condition are represented by the dark grey density plot.

Both treatment conditions placed Rep. Kurt Schrader broadly toward the middle of the ideological spectrum, but there were some key differences in their responses. On average, respondents assigned to the control condition placed Rep. Schrader at around 48 (on a 100-point) scale. In other words, respondents viewed the legislator as left-of-center on a one-dimensional spectrum. By contrast, respondents assigned to the treatment condition placed the same lawmaker to the *right*-of-center, at around 54. The intent-to-treat (ITT) effect was 6.09 (p-value=0.0002) for individuals exposed to the Blue Dog brand – despite the fact

that respondents in the control condition viewed an otherwise identical informational vignette on the exact same lawmaker.[9] Taken together, this figure provides support for the claim that faction brands have a causal impact on perceptions of candidate ideology.[10]

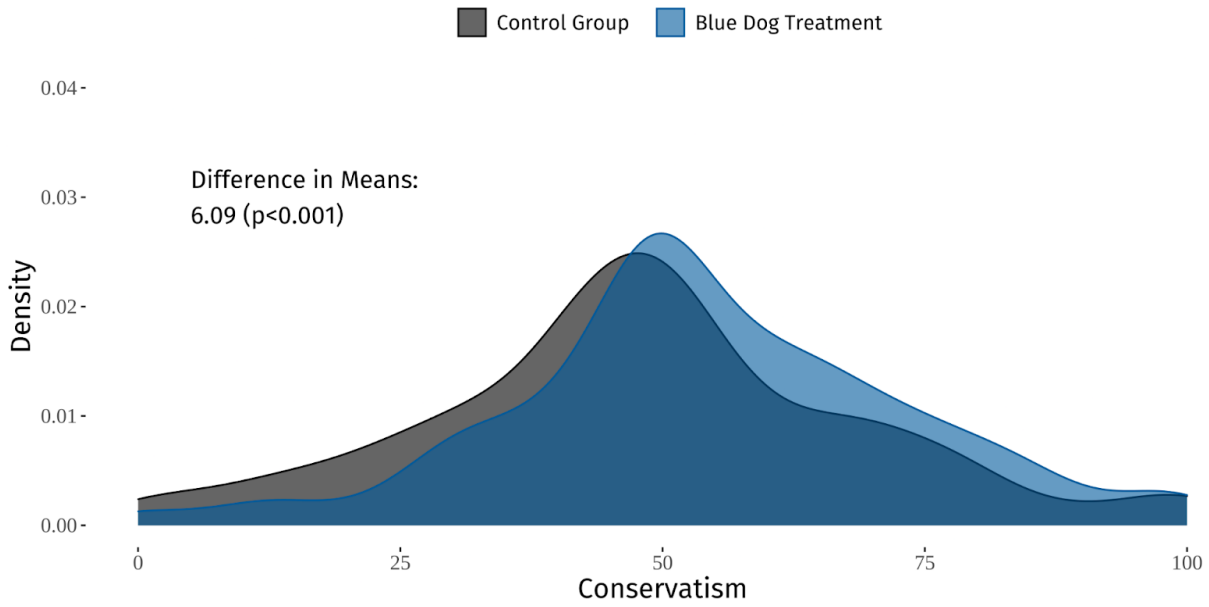

Figure 1. *Respondents in the Blue Dog treatment group thought Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) was significantly more conservative than the control group.*

Differences-in-means provide meaningful information about the average impact of the faction brand within this context, but analyzing the full distribution provides additional nuance to the finding. Towards this end, I conduct Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests to identify differences in the location and shape of the distribution of responses across treatment conditions. K-S tests evaluate the null hypothesis that responses are drawn from identical

[9] Technically, I am able to perform a subset analysis among political donors and volunteers using demographic questions at the end of the survey. Re-running the analysis with the 116 respondents that indicated their participation in these behaviors leads to a slightly larger intent-to-treat effect (7.6, $p<0.05$). However, relying upon this subset analysis raises questions of post-treatment bias in our analysis, so the focus of the manuscript remains on the full sample.

[10] Analyzing the constituent slider responses – rather than an average of these scores – reveals a similar finding. Respondents view the Blue Dog version of Kurt Schrader (D-OR) as about 6 points to the right of the control condition ($p<0.01$) for the individual tax, defense, and immigration policy responses.

distributions. Because K-S tests compare (empirical) cumulative distribution functions (CDFs), results are sensitive to both the shape and location of observations. K-S tests provide a p-value and a test statistic, where the test statistic indicates the maximum distance between the CDFs of the two samples. This statistic ranges from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates a higher likelihood that the two samples were drawn from distinct distributions.

The results for the K-S tests of the Blue Dog brand suggest that the empirical CDF of the treatment group (i.e., the blue line in Figure 2) is significantly lower than the control group (i.e., the dark grey line) as you move from low to high levels of conservatism. The maximum distance between the two distributions (0.18) is statistically significant ($p<0.01$), allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that these responses were drawn from the same distribution. These results are illustrated in Figure 2. Put simply, the Blue Dog respondents tend to cluster more heavily on the conservative side of the scale when compared to those respondents not exposed to the faction brand treatment.

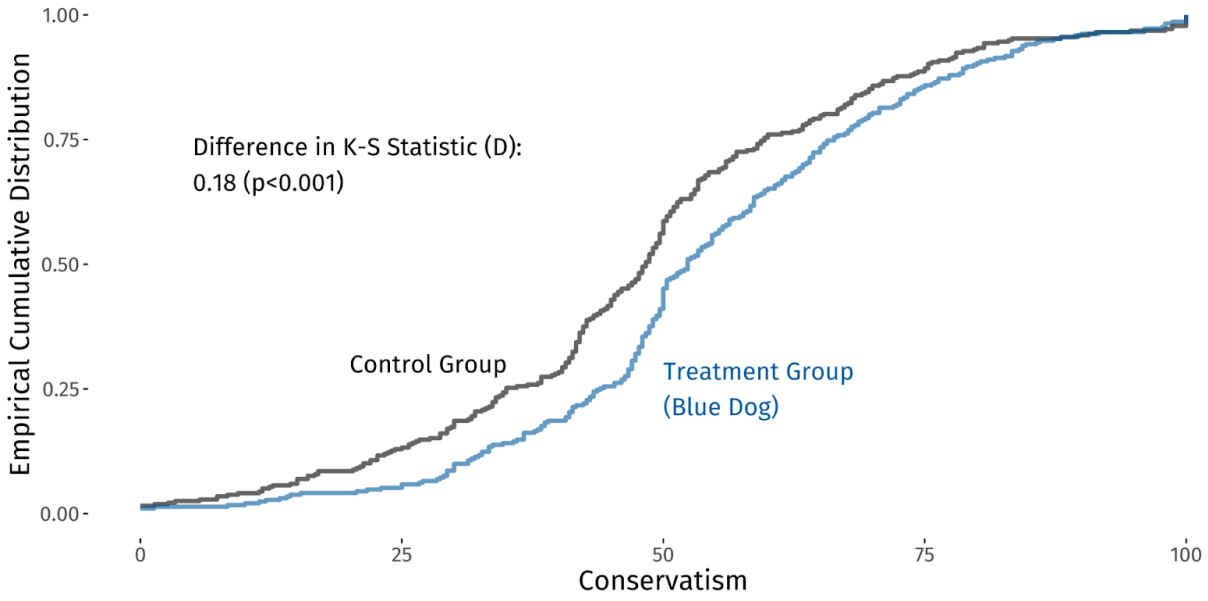

Figure 2. *The Blue Dog treatment group had a distinct distribution from the control group.*

Next, I consider the proportion of lawmakers that view Rep. Schrader as more conservative than other Democrats in Congress. Difference-in-proportion tests reveal that the faction brand meaningfully shifted perceptions of the candidate's relative ideology. Approximately 30% of respondents in the control condition viewed Schrader as more conservative than his co-partisans in Congress, but over 38% of those assigned to the Blue Dog coalition viewed Schrader as more conservative than other Democrats. This 8.8% difference is statistically significant ($p=0.019$). Put simply, exposure to the Blue Dog brand did not lead to a uniform, rightward shift in evaluating all Democrats. Instead, affiliation with the centrist faction meaningfully shifted perceptions of Schrader both compared to those in the control condition and relative to the treatment group's perception of other House Democrats.

Finally, I conduct an exploratory analysis of how faction brands can alter perceptions of party loyalty. When presented with the opportunity, respondents in the control condition estimated that Rep. Schrader voted with Democrats in Congress about 68.1% of the time they served in the House. By contrast, those assigned to the faction brand treatment condition estimated that *Blue Dog* Kurt Schrader voted with his party about 64.2% of the time. This difference in means (3.9) was statistically significant ($p=0.017$). Similar K-S tests reveal that the full distributions of responses meaningfully differ between the two treatment conditions. These results speak to the potential for faction brands – like other political heuristics – to distort the perception of political candidates. According to the CQ Almanac (2020), Rep. Schrader had one of the lowest party unity scores in the House; in fact, he was in the top 10 Democrats to vote against his party. Nevertheless, respondents actually overestimate the extent of Rep. Schrader's willingness to vote against the Democratic Party. In reality, the

congressman still voted with his co-partisans on an overwhelming majority of recorded floor votes.[11]

The findings from the Blue Dog study provide clear evidence that a faction brand can meaningfully affect the way their member's are perceived. In the next section, I turn to a non-centrist, conservative, Republican organization to further understand if faction brands can have a causal impact in American politics

Evaluating the Freedom Caucus Brand

In many respects, the conservative House Freedom Caucus is the conservative Republican response to the institutional success of Blue Dogs in the House. While Blue Dogs wished to anchor their party to a more centrist position, however, the Freedom Caucus was designed to pull the party to the far right of the ideological spectrum. Below I provide additional context for the experimental analysis of this extreme (i.e., non-centrist) faction brand.

On January 26, 2015, nine conservative lawmakers formally organized the House Freedom Caucus (HFC) to "advance an agenda of limited, constitutional government in Congress."[12] The faction formed, in part, as a splinter group of the Republican Study Committee – a large Republican faction that had no meaningful membership restrictions and was extremely close to party leadership. Founding Freedom Caucus members set out to create a more focused, ideologically selective, and politically aggressive organization than the existing alternatives within their party. Today, the Freedom Caucus is the most conservative faction in modern American politics (Clarke 2020a).

[11] The average party unity score for Democrats in the House was 95% in 2020. Rep. Schrader's score was 87.3%.

[12] According to the House Freedom Caucus (2015), the founding members included: Scott Garrett (R-NJ), Jim Jordan (R-OH), John Fleming (R-LA), Matt Salmon (R-AZ), Justin Amash (R-MI), Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-ID), Mick Mulvaney (R-SC), Ron DeSantis (R-FL), and Mark Meadows (R-NC).

In the years leading up to the organization of the House Freedom Caucus, conservative Republicans were increasingly dissatisfied with the popular, unregulated, faction brand provided by the Republican Study Committee (RSC). As Bloch Rubin (2017) explains, "the popularity of the [RSC's] brand, coupled with the group's weak barriers to entry, encouraged opportunistic GOP members, many of whom did not subscribe wholeheartedly to conservative principles, to join the group" (p. 285). Put differently, the dominant conservative faction of the day had allowed their brand to become diluted, and the lack of institutional mechanisms to control their brand allowed a new, insurgent conservative group to gain a foothold in American politics.

Like the Blue Dogs, the Freedom Caucus created factional institutions that were well-suited to the development and preservation of a new political brand. The conservative faction limited its initial organization to 40 invitation-only members, and they quickly established a governing board with formal rules, procedures, strict confidentiality terms, and required meetings for all members (Bloch Rubin 2017). Freedom Caucus members also approved an internally binding rule that required complete faction unity when 80% of the group was in agreement on a policy position, and according to interviews with key staffers, the Freedom Caucus had mechanisms established to remove lawmakers from their ranks if they refused to contribute to a unified messaging strategy (Clarke 2017a).[13] Members were also required to pay into a tiered dues system, and faction funds would be distributed in a way that facilitated a more cohesive messaging strategy in the House (Clarke 2017a). The HFC also developed their own internal whip system, complete with a custom-made mobile app that allowed for instantaneous communication among faction members (Green 2019).

[13] Like the organization's secrecy, the effectiveness of the 80% rule may be overstated. As Green (2019) points out, Freedom Caucus members were given more than one "free passes" before punitive actions would be taken.

The Freedom Caucus quickly garnered a reputation as an incendiary, obstructionist bloc. They have been labeled as "bomb-throwing ideologues," the "veto caucus," and a "group of rejectionists" by co-partisans in the House (Sherman 2015, Wallis 2016).[14] Former Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) claimed the Freedom Caucus "want total chaos. Tear it all down and start over. That's where their mindset is" (Alberta 2017). Later, the former Speaker would link the "legislative terrorism" of Freedom Caucus Republicans in Congress to the "actual terrorism" of the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021 (Axios 2021). In a very short period of time, the Freedom Caucus had firmly established itself as the extreme wing of the Republican Party.

The political branding campaign of the Freedom Caucus suggested a deliberate attempt to provide a new, sub-partisan heuristic from their very first days as an organization. The group issued around 100 press releases within two years of forming, and each release included a professionally designed logo and a description of the faction's collective purpose. Prominent faction members began to appear regularly on conservative talk shows and news outlets as spokespersons for the conservative bloc. On March 7, 2019, the Freedom Caucus even started their own (duly branded) podcast; Jody Hice (R-GA) – a former pastor and talk radio show host – launched "The Freedom Caucus Podcast" featuring "Freedom Caucus members, as well as congressional allies and grassroots leaders, for policy discussions on debates of the day and upcoming legislative initiatives" (House Freedom Caucus 2019).

Anecdotally, the Freedom Caucus brand seems to have taken hold in American political discourse. From Facebook to Fox News, members of the conservative faction set out to make the Freedom Caucus brand ubiquitous in highly engaged political circles throughout the United States. According to Clarke (2017a), over 2,500 news articles mentioned the

[14] Perhaps most famously, the Freedom Caucus has been credited with the overthrow of former Speaker John Boehner in their inaugural year. Unsurprisingly, the former Republican leader did not think highly of the group.

Freedom Caucus in their first congressional term, and many of these mentions were clustered around intense periods of intraparty conflict. The Freedom Caucus was even briefly the subject of targeted, public threats from former President Donald Trump (Clarke 2017b). Nevertheless, the Freedom Caucus received disproportionate time with the president in the White House (Clarke and Jenkins 2017), and several Freedom Caucus founders would go on to serve as key members of the Trump administration (e.g., Mark Meadows, Mick Mulvaney). Political journalists have continuously followed the Freedom Caucus positions, key players, and internal disagreements as they set out to understand Republican power dynamics, and throughout this coverage, media coverage evaluated what each Freedom Caucus disagreeent might mean for "their political brand" (Beavers 2022). Like the Blue Dog Coalition, branding seemed to be at the heart of the faction's path to political influence.

Experimental Design

In my second experiment, I evaluate the impact of the Freedom Caucus brand on perceptions of candidate ideology. In so doing, I set out to recruit a new, custom sample that more closely aligns with theoretical population of interest to many factions: political donors, activists, and other Americans in a position to provide valuable political resources for their cause. Unfortunately, no such convenience sample exists. Consequently, I spent several months with a team of undergraduate researchers collecting a new contact list of 43,651 survey respondents throughout the United States.

In contrast to many convenience samples, I offered no financial incentives to potential respondents. Respondents in my survey did not, to my knowledge, have extensive experience completing political science surveys for monetary compensation. While I expected a particularly low response rate (e.g., single-digit percentages), I argue that concerns around

the distinct nature of responders are outweighed by the improved external validity of other key attributes in our sample (e.g., a verified record of political donations).

As Table 1 indicates, my sample combined several key sub-groups in a position to support the efforts of a legislative faction. First, I invited several thousand verified political donors. Despite a wealth of public information on political donors disclosed by the Federal Election Committee (FEC), legal restrictions typically preclude individuals from using those lists to populate survey experiments.[15] I was, however, able to secure an extensive list of progressive donor email addresses from CallTimeAI (a progressive campaign tech organization). More specifically, the authors contracted with CallTimeAI to provide a *random sample* of their list of Democratic political donors. The vast majority of our contact list was thus a verified and representative sample of left-leaning donors used by real-world, progressive campaigns. CallTimeAI donors made up 31,440 contacts in our initial, potential sample list. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate a comparable list of Republican donors, which significantly affected the partisan balance of our sample and plausibly limits the potential effect size we might uncover in the investigation of a conservative, Republican faction brand.

Next, I included a list of local party leaders from both parties in every county in the United States. To collect these lists, I worked with a team of undergraduate research assistants to hand-code a vast quantity of publicly available contact information. In total, we collected a list of 5,678 Democratic Party leaders and 4,239 Republican Party leaders. While donors directly finance the political operations of legislative factions, party leaders – who are invariably political donors as well – play a critical role in candidate recruitment and the

[15] For examples of impermissible use of FEC data, please see the list of advisory opinions (AO) on their website: https://www.fec.gov/updates/sale-or-use-contributor-information/

distribution of influence through political communities in every corner of the United States (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2022).

Finally, my team hand-coded an additional list of party activists with strong connections to the major party organizations outside of Congress: two federated organizations in partisan politics. The National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW) was founded in 1938 as an affiliate of the Republican National Committee. Today, however, the NFRW is a sprawling, independent, decentralized activist organization with close ties to GOP politics in localities nationwide.[16] The National Federation of Democratic Women (NFDW), by contrast, was formed several decades later to prepare Democratic women for additional positions within the Democratic Party establishment.[17] In contrast to their Republican counterparts, the NFDW actually remains formally affiliated with the Democratic National Committee. In total, we collected contact information on 556 members of the NFDW and 1,738 members of the NFRW. These activist lists included members from both statewide and local chapters within each group's extensive federated organizations.

Collectively, I distributed a survey invitation to tens of thousands of party leaders, donors, and political activists in Fall 2021. Each potential respondent was invited to participate in the non-partisan "American Political Leadership Survey," which had the stated goal of learning from "local political leaders, political donors, and other prominent members of the two major parties." It is worth noting that the survey took place several years after the House Freedom Caucus established their organization. In other words, the respondents exposed to the Freedom Caucus treatment did so well after the overthrow of Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and pitched conflict over health policy and other Republican political priorities.

[16] See https://www.nfrw.org/history for more details on the NFRW.
[17] See https://www.nfdw.com/history for more details on the NFDW.

The final sample for the Freedom Caucus study included 1,154 survey respondents. The response rate, as expected, was very low; only 2.64% of all potential respondents took the survey. Table 1 shows the response rate for each respective sub-sample. Democratic Party leaders were clearly the most responsive to our survey invitation. While I would obviously prefer to have collected a more balanced and responsive set of respondents, I was willing to accept the possibility of such low response rates to guarantee that *every* respondent in the survey was a verified member of the political populations of interest to this study.

	Invited	Accepted Invitation	Response Rate
Democratic Party Leaders	5,678	513	9.03%
Republican Party Leaders	4,239	206	4.86%
National Federation of Democratic Women	556	40	7.19%
National Federation of Republican Women	1,738	67	3.86%
Verified Democratic Donors	31,440	328	1.04%
Total	43,651	1,154	2.64%

Table 1. *The American Political Leadership Survey Sub-Samples and Response Rates*

Because faction brands, I argue, target niche markets of political activists (donors, partisan elites, etc.), I was pleased that our sample was extraordinarily engaged in the political process over the last two years. Over 95% of our respondents indicated that they had voted, and about 92% of our sample had recently donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization. Nearly 77% of respondents had recently volunteered or worked on a campaign, 83% had put up a political sign (e.g., lawn sign, bumper sticker), and 79% of the sample had attended a local political meeting (such as a school board or city council meeting). In short, the sample collected for this study more closely resembles what I argue to be the target market for faction branding in congressional politics.

Our survey also included respondents from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, Texas and Pennsylvania were the most heavily represented states in the

sample, while Hawaii had the fewest respondents of any state or territory. Figure 3, below, shows the geographic distribution of our sample.

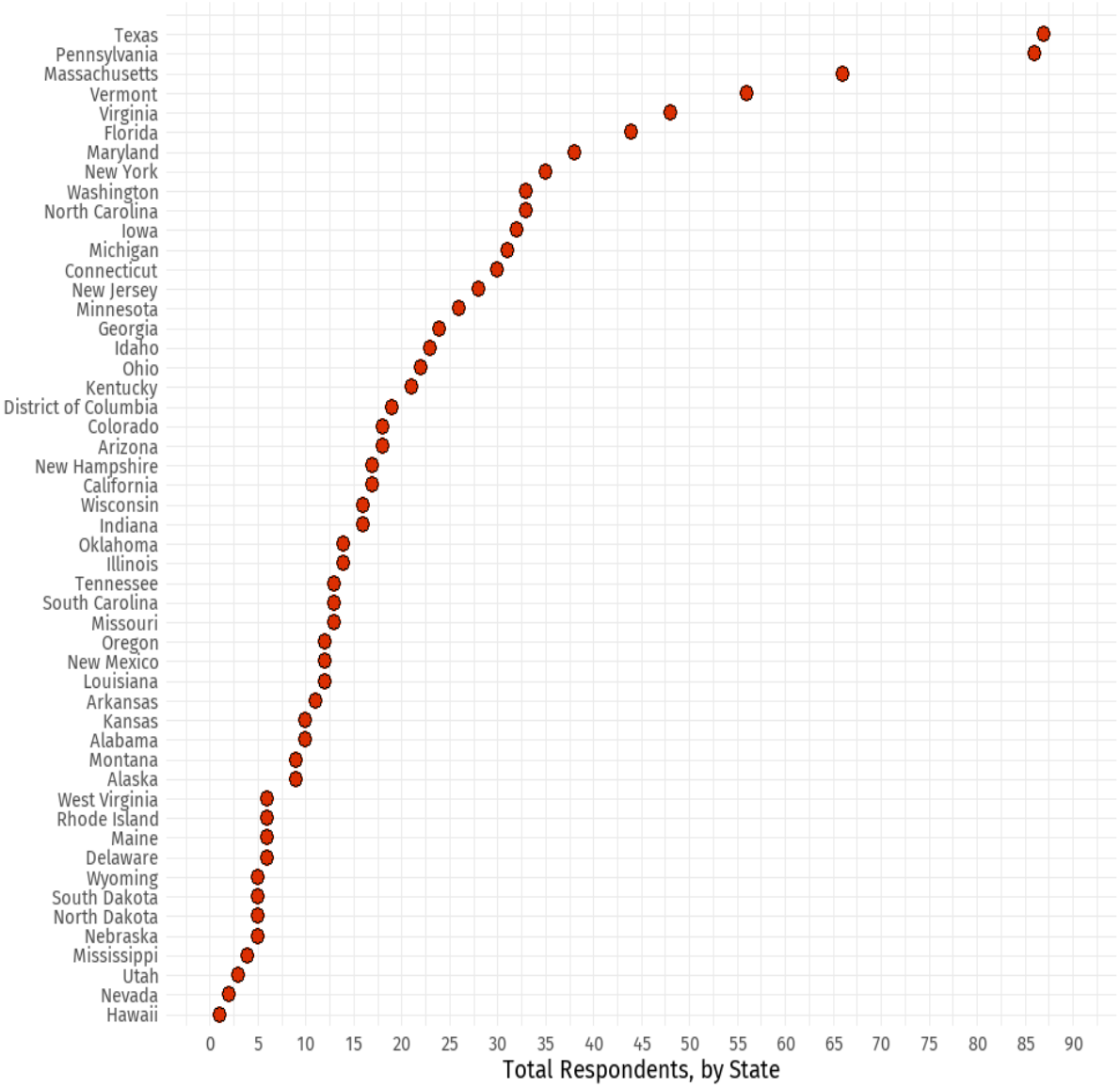

Figure 3. *Geographic variation in the sample used for the Freedom Caucus study*

The sample for the Freedom Caucus brand experiment included slightly more men than women (47% identified as women and around 1% indicated another gender identity). A clear majority (87%) of the respondents in the study are white, and the sample was also

highly educated, with more than 8 out of every 10 respondents in possession of a college degree.

As previously noted, the sample clearly skewed towards the Democratic side of the aisle. Our sample was composed of 76% Democrats (881) and 24% Republicans (273). Importantly, I utilize an ex-ante measure of partisan identification by pre-coding the values for this variable based on their relevant sub-sample. This was done by simultaneously sending identical surveys to each of the five previously described sub-samples,[18] creating an indicator variable for their partisanship within each set of results, and then combining all sub-samples into a full sample for our analysis. Coding an ex-ante measure of partisanship allows us to avoid both unintended pre-treatment priming effects that might occur if we ask a partisanship question at the start of the survey and post-treatment bias if we rely upon data collected at the end of the survey (Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018; Schiff, Montagnes, and Peskowitz 2022).

My treatment and outcome measurement approach largely follows the decisions made in the Blue Dog brand experiment. Respondents were introduced to a composite press release that relied upon information taken from real-world statements from an incumbent member of the House Freedom Caucus: Byron Donalds (R-FL).[19] The Freedom Caucus treatment condition emphasized Donalds' membership in the conservative faction (e.g., "House Freedom Caucus Welcomes Rep. Byron Donalds") and included the logo of the House Freedom Caucus. Respondents in the control condition, by contrast, received a press release that emphasized Rep. Donalds' affiliation with the Republican Party (e.g., "House Republican Conference Welcomes Rep. Byron Donalds") and included a House Republicans logo, instead.

[18] Democratic donors, local Democratic Party leaders, local Republican Party leaders, members of the National Federation of Democratic Women, and members of the National Federation of Republican Women.
[19] See: https://www.housefreedomfund.com/post/214/fl-19-byron-donalds-for-congress

In both conditions, Rep. Donalds was introduced as a Republican with "an impressive record of fighting for conservative principles." Only minimal deception was utilized to create concise and comparable vignettes for respondents to review, and the disclosure statement at the end of the survey provided links to the source documents used in the creation of these composite press releases.

After reviewing this information, respondents were asked to estimate the conservatism of Byron Donalds, a typical Democrat in Congress, and a typical Republican in Congress on a 0 to 100 sliding scale. This measure provided the primary outcome variable of interest: perception of candidate ideology. I expected that respondents randomly assigned to receive information that included the Freedom Caucus faction brand would rate the incumbent lawmaker as significantly more conservative. Put differently, a Freedom Caucus version of Byron Donalds (R-FL) would be viewed as relatively extreme, while the exact same lawmaker without a faction affiliation would be viewed as less conservative.

Next, I considered the link between perceptions of candidate ideology and expressed willingness to support a political candidate. More specifically, I asked respondents to imagine that Byron Donalds' campaign asked for their support. Then, I ask how likely they would be to donate to or volunteer for his campaign. Respondents were given the option to indicate their willingness to support Rep. Donalds on a five-point scale: "definitely yes", "probably yes", "might or might not", "probably not", or "definitely not."

Given theories of resource capture in the literature on American party factions, I anticipated that highly engaged Republicans would be more likely to offer potential support when exposed to the Freedom Caucus brand. I measured "potential support" with a binary indicator that takes the value of 1 if the respondent selected "might or might not", "probably yes", or "definitely yes" for the question on volunteering or donations. All other respondents were coded as 0.

On the other hand, I expected that Democrats would be more likely to strongly oppose Rep. Donalds in the presence of the faction brand. “Strong opposition” was measured with a binary indicator for any respondent that selected “definitely not” on both the volunteering and donations questions. All other respondents were coded as 0.

Before reviewing the results of the Freedom Caucus experimental analysis, I explore two descriptive questions included at the end of the survey to gauge how familiar respondents were with the Freedom Caucus label and how favorably they viewed the group.

Descriptive Results

The study included a pair of descriptive questions intended to explore the extent to which the Freedom Caucus brand has permeated among political donors, activists, and party leaders outside of our treatment condition. To avoid obvious post-treatment bias concerns, I exclusively reviewed the responses offered by those assigned to the control condition.

To evaluate familiarity with the Freedom Caucus brand, I asked a question based upon a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017). More specifically, I asked respondents, “How much, if anything, have you heard or read about a group of Republicans in the House of Representatives known as the Freedom Caucus?” Respondents could then indicate that they knew “A lot,” “A little,” or “Nothing at all.”

Results from this question suggest that the Freedom Caucus is a well-known organization among political donors, activists, and party leaders. Over 96% of our responses indicated at least some familiarity with the group, and a majority (58.8%) of respondents indicated that they knew a lot about the conservative faction. This stands in contrast to the Pew sample of the general public in 2017, where they found that only one-in-five Americans could say that they had heard a lot about the group. Republicans in our sample were even more likely to express familiarity with the group; in fact, they were 24 times as likely to

indicate “a lot” of familiarity with the Freedom Caucus than they were to say that they knew nothing at all about the group.

Next, I evaluated how favorably respondents viewed the House Freedom Caucus if they were at all familiar with the group. Here, again, I adopted language used in the Pew (2017) survey by asking, “What is your overall opinion of the Freedom Caucus?” and presenting several response options (“Very favorable”, “Mostly favorable”, “Mostly unfavorable”, or “Very unfavorable”).

In general, respondents had a very unfavorable view of the Freedom Caucus. However, this pattern is overwhelmingly driven by the partisan composition of my sample. Around 76% of Democrats familiar with the House Freedom Caucus indicated that they had a very unfavorable opinion with the faction, and almost no Democratic respondent had a favorable view of the group. By contrast, over 88% of Republican respondents had a mostly or very favorable view of the House Freedom Caucus. Despite this overwhelming pattern, most Republicans did not seem to be dedicated Freedom Caucus loyalists. In fact, only 38% of Republicans familiar with the HFC expressed strong, positive views towards the organization, suggesting that their appeal is limited to a niche within the Republican Party.

Experimental Results

Figure 4 presents the full distribution of ideological estimates for Rep. Donalds (R-FL), broken out by Freedom Caucus treatment and control conditions. The red density plot indicates the response by all individuals exposed to Freedom Caucus branding, while the dark grey density plot provides the distribution of responses for individuals in the control condition.

Respondents in both groups broadly identified Rep. Byron Donalds as a very conservative lawmaker, but the Freedom Caucus group placed the lawmaker significantly to

the right of those in the control condition. On average, respondents placed Freedom Caucus member Byron Donalds (R-FL) at around 85 on a 100-point scale of conservatism. By contrast, respondents in the control condition placed him, on average, at a 81. This difference (4.09) is statistically significant even at very high thresholds to reject the null hypothesis ($p<0.0001$). The results from this analysis provide straightforward evidence for the claim that the Freedom Caucus brand leads individuals – in this case, a verified sample of donors, activists, and party leaders – to shift their perceptions of a candidate's conservative credentials.

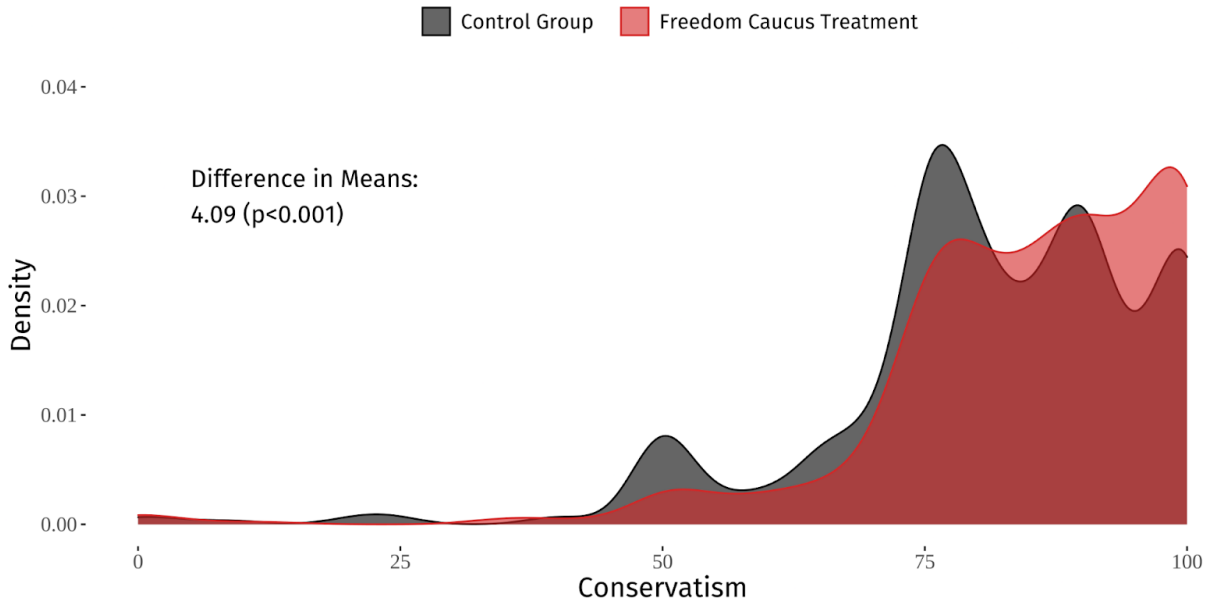

Figure 4. *Respondents in the Freedom Caucus treatment group thought Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL) was significantly more conservative than the control group.*

A closer analysis of the full differences between these two distributions reveals even more informative faction brand effects. Both the overlaid density plots (Figure 4) and empirical cumulative distribution plots (Figure 5) show that Byron Donalds is much more likely to be viewed as an extremist in the presence of the Freedom Caucus brand. Results from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests suggest that there is a meaningful ($D=0.14$) and statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) between the two distributions. Figure 5 shows this

difference visually with the red line indicating the CDF of the Freedom Caucus treatment condition, and the grey line indicating the same for the control condition. In other words, respondents that were introduced to Byron Donalds (R-FL) as a Freedom Caucus member were much more likely to cluster their estimates towards the maximum values of candidate conservatism.

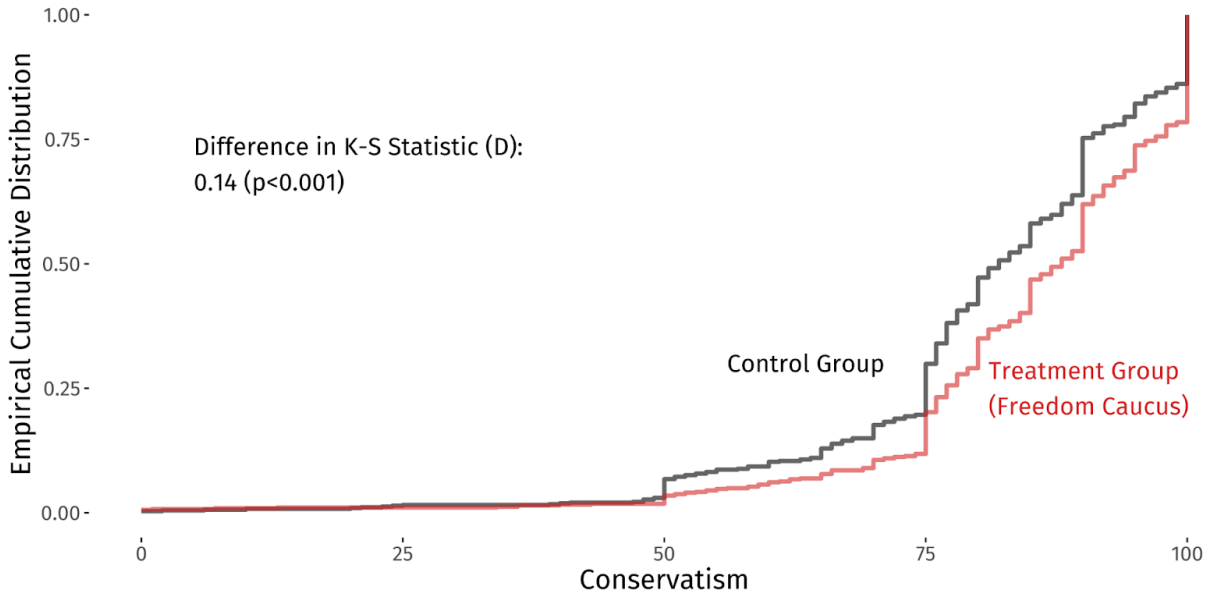

Figure 5. *The Freedom Caucus treatment group had a distinct distribution from the control group.*

To test this finding a bit more directly, I analyze the differences in the proportion of respondents from each group that placed Byron Donalds at the most extreme conservative position on the scale (100). In total, 232 individuals placed Rep. Donalds at this extreme location, amounting to 17.8% of the total sample. Upon closer inspection, however, these results are meaningfully driven by the presence of the Freedom Caucus brand. Around 22% of those assigned to the treatment condition placed Donalds at the conservative maximum, while only 14% of those in the control condition did the same. This difference – around 8 percentage points – was statistically significant ($p<0.001$). In short, the clear majority of those to perceive Rep. Donalds as an extreme conservative were assigned to the Freedom Caucus

treatment, and given our random assignment procedure, we can safely rule out that the difference between these two groups might be attributed to other factors (e.g., prior exposure to Rep. Donalds' voting record, baseline expectations about the Republican Party).

In order to appeal to niche markets of donors, factions must be able to differentiate themselves from other members of their party competing for scarce resources – not just a counterfactual version of themselves. To test this claim directly, I further evaluate how many respondents place Rep. Donalds to the right of other Republicans in Congress. On average, only 36.5% of respondents in the control condition indicated that Rep. Donalds was more conservative than his co-partisans. By contrast, a majority of respondents (50.1%) in the treatment condition believed that he was safely in the right-wing of the Republican Party. This difference (13.6 percentage points) is also statistically significant at high thresholds for rejecting the null hypothesis ($p<0.0001$).

Taken together, the results reviewed above provide consistent causal evidence that the Freedom Caucus brand changes the way that political donors, activists, and party leaders understand the ideology of legislators. By contrast, we find suggestive, but inconclusive, results when evaluating the way in which this brand translated into an expressed willingness to support a candidate. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of respondents that indicated they would be open to supporting Rep. Donalds were Republicans.[20] Similarly, Democrats made up the overwhelming majority of those that expressed strong opposition to Rep. Donalds.[21] In both cases, the interaction between the Freedom Caucus treatment condition and partisanship was in the expected direction. However, the results were very small and not statistically significant at any standard thresholds to reject the null hypothesis in both cases.

[20] More specifically, 227 of the 258 total responses selecting "definitely yes," "probably yes," or "might or might not" to either the question about donations or the inquiry about volunteering were Republicans.
[21] In this case, Democrats made up 841 of the 868 total responses selecting "definitely not" for both the questions about volunteering and donations.

The full table of these results are reported in the online appendix, but it is worth noting that this finding, which ran contrary to our expectations in the pre-analysis plan for this study, is inconsistent with prior research documenting the effect of faction affiliation on real-world donation patterns (Clarke 2020a). These conflicting findings suggests the need for new research that more directly tests the link between brand effects and resource capture in the field (i.e., beyond a survey of expressed preferences).

Finally, I explore the open-ended text offered by respondents immediately after answering my primary outcome questions. Individuals in both conditions were told that, "We'd love to hear any other thoughts you have about Byron Donalds. What is most or least appealing about him as a political candidate?" The question was included as a means of exploring if the Freedom Caucus brand was explicitly mentioned in their perceptions of the candidate.

Over 12% of all open-ended responses explicitly referenced the House Freedom Caucus in describing what they did or did not like about Rep. Donalds. Of these responses, few indicated a positive view of the conservative faction.[22] Those that did, noted the ideological signal that the Freedom Caucus brand provided. For example, one respondent noted that the most "appealing [characteristic is] that he is a member of the Freedom Caucus. This tells me that he is more conservative than most Republican congressman." Others plainly stated that they "like that he is joining the Freedom Caucus. We need all of our Republicans to be that conservative!"

[22] Again, these patterns should be taken in their appropriate context. The negative association with the Freedom Caucus is almost certainly a function of a relatively small share of Republican respondents in the sample.

On the other hand, 134 individuals pointed to Rep. Donalds' faction affiliation as an unappealing component of his candidacy.[23] For example, one respondent wrote, "He is a member of the Freedom Caucus, which stands for far right extremism in my view." Another noted that, "If he's welcomed by the House Freedom Caucus, he's likely an ultra-conservative Republican." Another respondent bluntly stated, "support from the House Freedom Caucus is the kiss of political death as far as I'm concerned." These patterns are not necessarily intended to stand as confirming evidence of the experimental results abovel; however, they do at least suggest that the Freedom Caucus brand is understood and is potentially costly to members that do not wish to be identified as a far-right lawmaker in the Republican Conference.[24]

Discussion

Reporters, pundits, and political operatives routinely point to the influence of legislative factions as they explain the distribution of political power in the U.S. Congress. Even as the ballots of the 2022 midterm elections continued to be counted, political observers began to speculate about how a narrow Republican majority might empower the far-right House Freedom Caucus in the next legislative session. As one participant in a post-election panel put it, "In a sense, we have three political parties in the House: the

[23] Perhaps owing to the timing of the survey, many of these responses further tied Donalds to anti-democratic positions more generally. For example, respondents noted that: "Byron Donalds is associated with the Freedom Caucus, a group that is undermining fundamental democratic values. I would not support anyone who associated with the Freedom Caucus." Others were more blunt, still: "he's an insurrectionist fascist Trump supporting ass."

[24] Some respondents had clearly detailed views on the faction, for example, one wrote: "Joining the Freedom Caucus is as much a partisan choice as it is a political; said differently, it has a reputation of leveraging political support through the outlandish and immature procedural chicanery of its members under the guise of conservative partisan principles. the delay tactics and voting records of the members do not align with what the group stands for; adhesion to this caucus *lowers* my estimation of Byron Donalds because I infer that the group's purpose - buffoonish obstructionism when a Democrat is president and hypocritical spinelessness when the same behavior would cost republican primary votes - is more about retaining elected office than effecting (sic) good governance."

Democrats, the Republicans, and the Freedom Caucus" (Corrigan 2022). Organized, intraparty factions have captured the attention of many close observers of American politics because they lead us to rethink – for better or for worse – what is possible in a two-party system of government.

In this article, I have set out to understand *how* factions might gain political influence without abandoning their major party affiliations. Following prior research on intraparty factions, party organizations, and political marketing, I set out to investigate a key causal mechanism on the path to faction power. More specifically, I evaluated the claim often offered by faction affiliates themselves: that the faction brand matters.

Towards this aim, I found that faction brands have a causal effect on the way that political donors, party leaders, and activists perceive the ideological position of faction affiliates. Knowing that a lawmaker is in the Blue Dog Coalition or the Freedom Caucus leads to large and statistically significant shifts in the perception of that incumbent's conservative credentials. Faction affiliation leads individuals to understand representatives as significantly distinct from their co-partisans in a way consistent with prior research on legislative factions in the U.S. House.

These findings also present opportunities to advance our understanding of factions in several important ways beyond the scope of this research. For example, new work might apply the approach taken here to field experiments – in coordination with faction organizations – to solicit real-world political donations or favorable media attention. Additional research might also extend the external validity of the claims presented in this article by evaluating the brands of new, state legislative factions (e.g., the Texas Freedom Caucus) that appear to be designed to benefit from national faction brands. The prominence of federal and state-level factions is unlikely to abate any time soon, and new research can help the public understand which claims of political importance are credible.

In conclusion, factions promise an opportunity to loosen the bonds of two-party government by offering well-resourced Americans with a more specific vision for what the party could be. However, it is worth remembering that strong factions risk undermining the health and stability of the national legislature. This point seems more salient than ever, as investigative reporting appears to make significant connections between the organized efforts of the House Freedom Caucus and the tragic events of January 6, 2021 (Benner, et. al. 2021). Understanding *how* these groups might obtain real political power is thus a vital question for those committed to the study of American democracy.

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Online Appendix A: Blue Dog Experiment Instrument

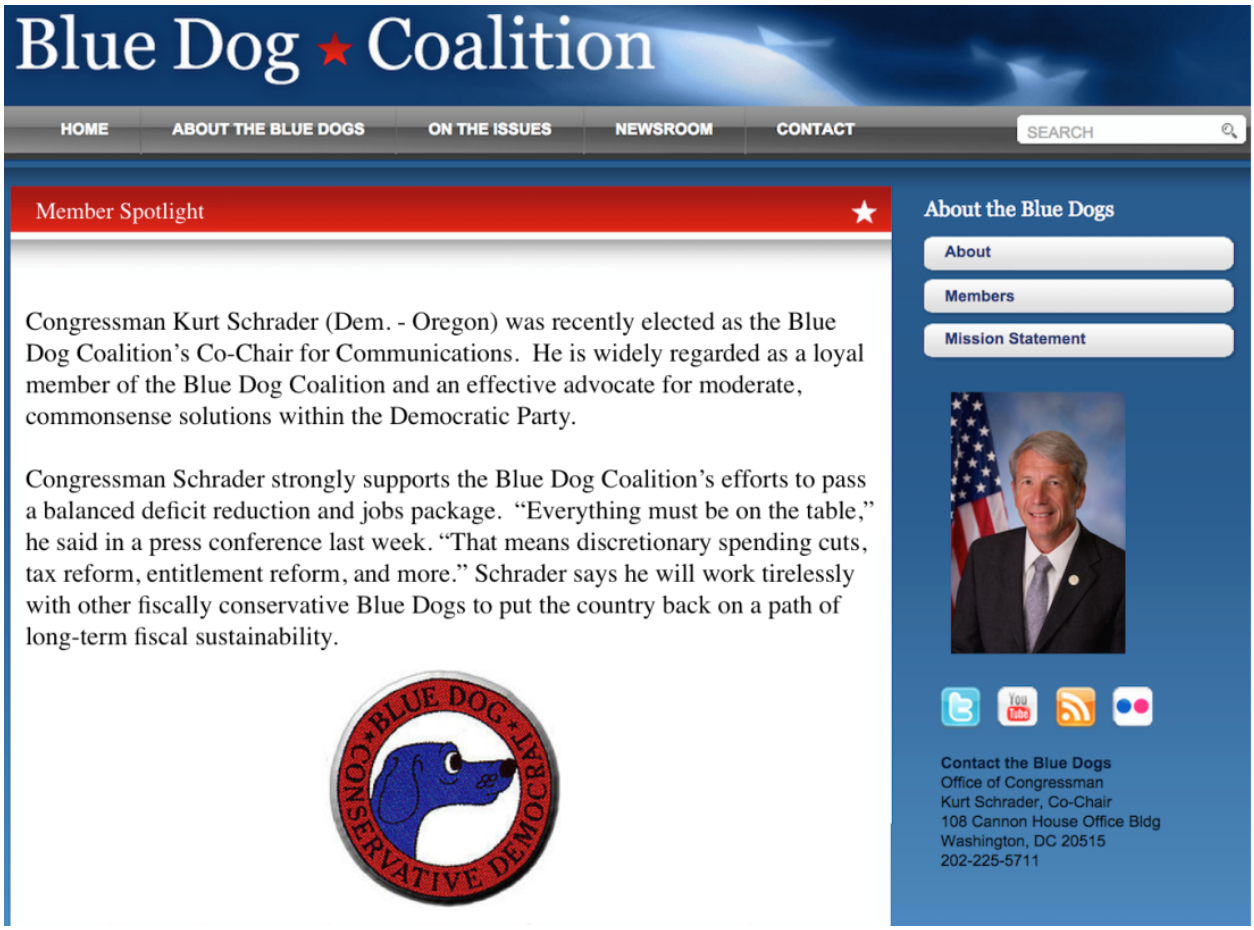

Figure A1. *The Blue Dog treatment.*

Figure A2. *The control condition for the Blue Dog study.*

Figure A3. *Example of the ideology slider for the Blue Dog study. The dependant variable was the averaged of the estimates across three policy dimensions (taxes, defense, immigration).*

Online Appendix B: Freedom Caucus Experiment Instrument

House Republicans

House Republican Conference Welcomes Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL)

House Republican Conference — March 1, 2021

To secure America's future, we need principled leaders who will stand up to liberals. That's why we're so excited that **Byron Donalds** (R-FL) now represents Florida's 19th District in Congress.

Byron Donalds (R-FL)

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Byron is the product of a single-parent household. His mother made big sacrifices to give him opportunities as a kid and that desire to serve future generations now drives him.

Byron attended Florida State University and graduated with degrees in finance and marketing. He has worked in the finance, insurance, and banking industries, and was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2016. During his time in the state legislature, he has built an impressive record of fighting for conservative principles – a record that will be continued in Washington.

Welcome Byron Donalds to the House Republican Conference!

Figure B1. *The Freedom Caucus treatment.*

Figure B2. *The control condition for the Blue Dog study.*

House Freedom Caucus Welcomes Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL)

House Freedom Caucus— March 1, 2021

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Welcome Byron Donalds to the House Freedom Caucus!

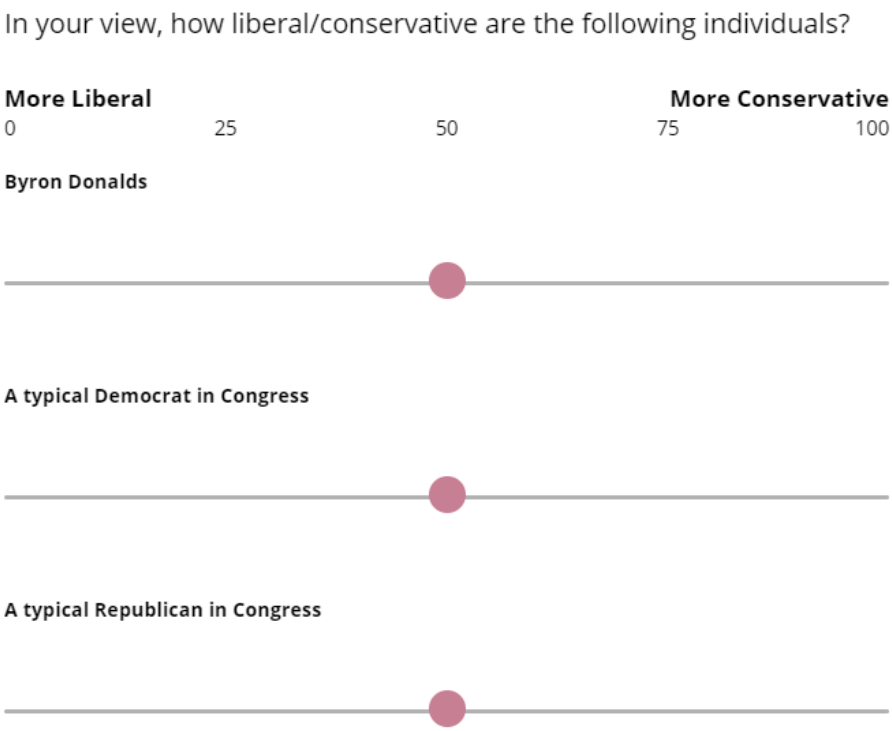

Figure B3. *The ideology slider used in the Freedom Caucus study.*

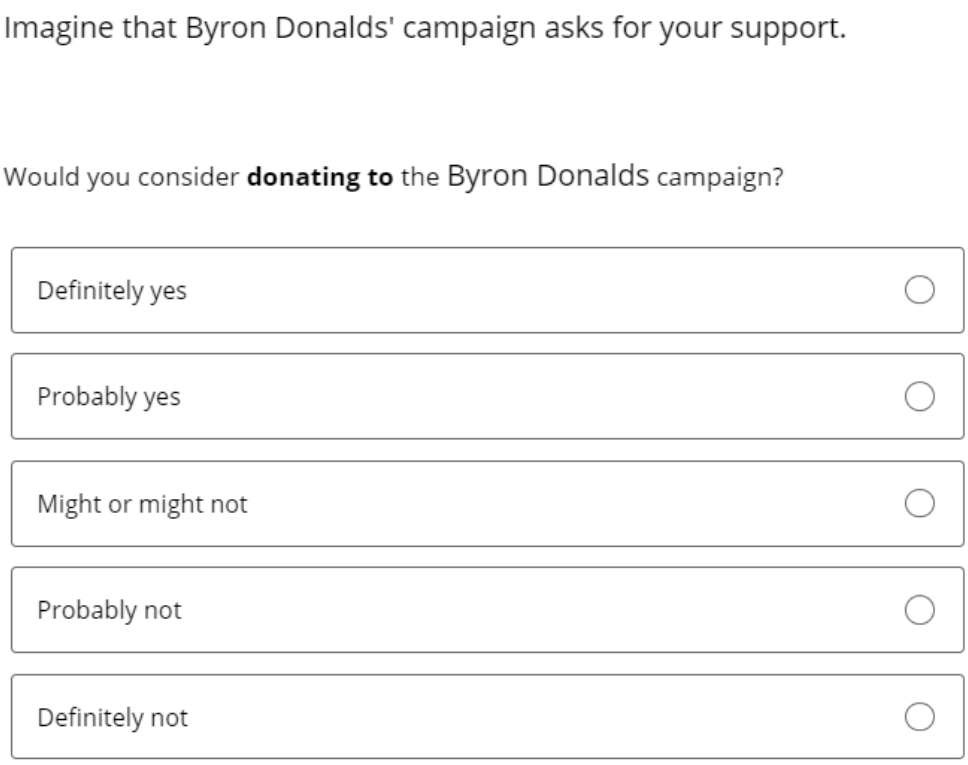

Figure B4. *Donation support question, used in composite measures of support and opposition.*

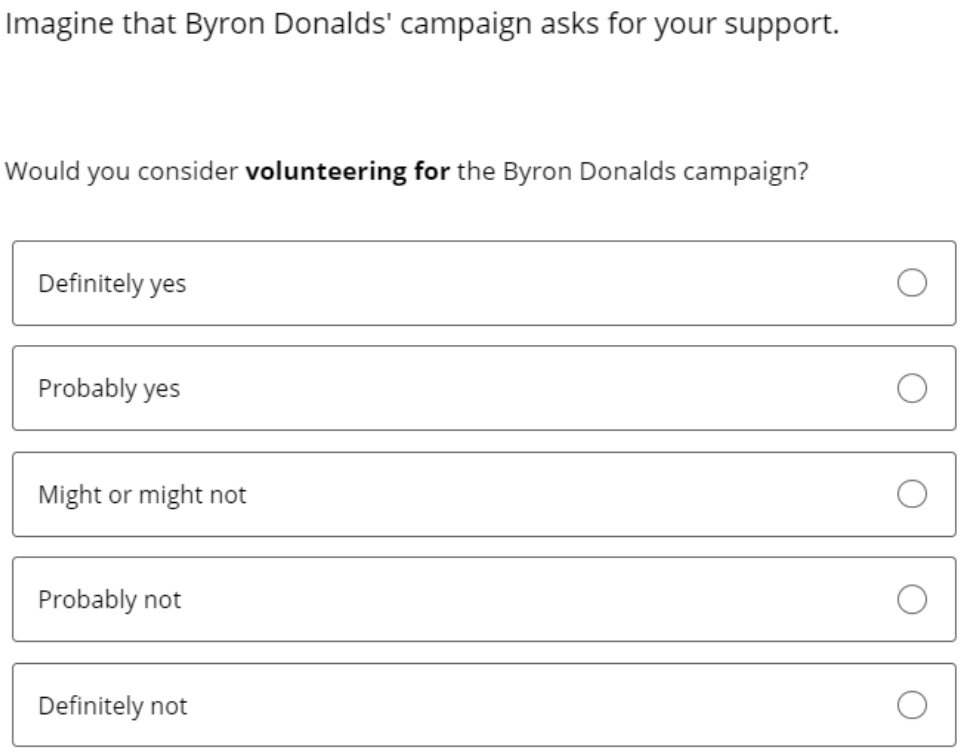

Figure B5. *Volunteer support question, used in composite measures of support and opposition.*

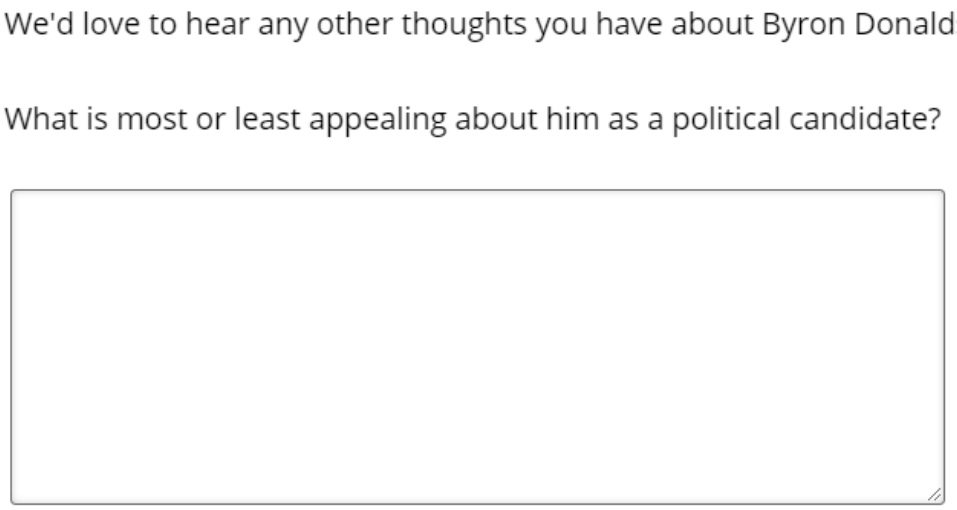

Figure B6. *Open-ended question included in Freedom Caucus study.*

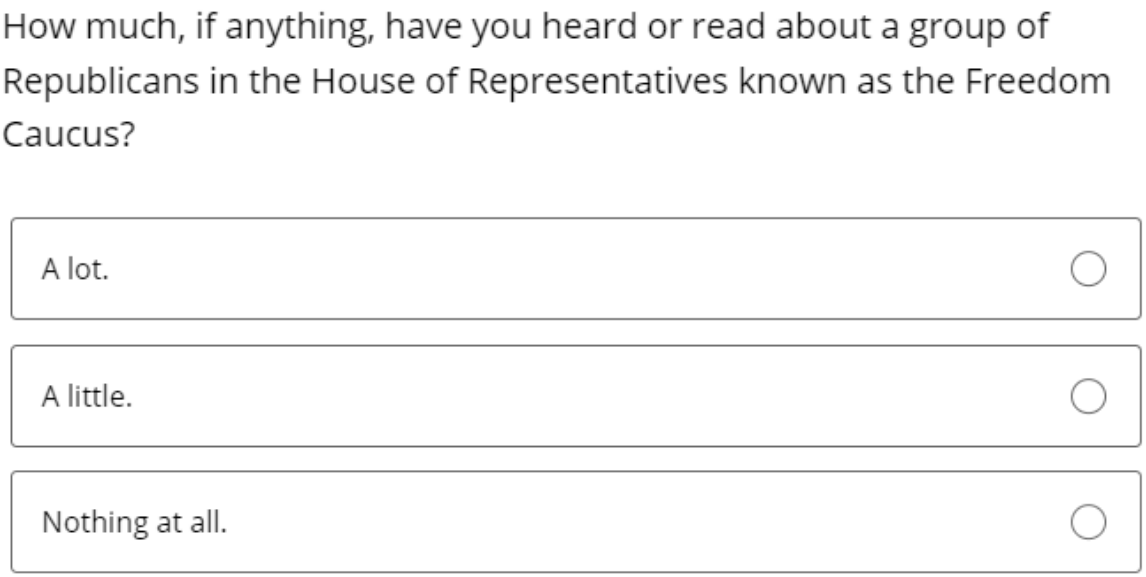

Figure B7. *Descriptive question included at the end of the survey. Only the control group responses were used in our assessment of Freedom Caucus familiarity and favorability.*

Online Appendix C: Tabular Results

	Average Ideology (0, 100)	
Blue Dog Treatment	6.09***	
	(1.64)	
Freedom Caucus Treatment		4.09***
		(0.87)
Constant	48.32***	80.87***
	(1.14)	(0.62)
Observations	607	1,303
R^2	0.02	0.02
Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.02

Note: Linear probability models, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Higher average ideology values indicate greater perceived conservatism.

Table C1. *Primary experimental results from Blue Dog and Freedom Caucus studies.*

	More Conservative Than Typical Democrat (0,1)	Loyal to Democratic Party (0, 100)
Blue Dog Treatment	0.09*	-3.93*
	(0.04)	(1.63)
Constant	0.30***	68.10***
	(0.03)	(1.13)
Observations	641	629
R^2	0.01	0.01
Adjusted R^2	0.01	0.01

Note: Linear probability models, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table C2. *Additional tests of the Blue Dog ITT.*

	More Conservative Than Typical Republican (0,1)	Most Extreme Conservative Position (0, 1)
Freedom Caucus Treatment	0.14***	0.08***
	(0.03)	(0.02)
Constant	0.37***	0.14***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Observations	1,303	1,303
R^2	0.02	0.01
Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.01

Note: Linear probability models, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table C3. *Additional tests of the Freedom Caucus ITT.*

	Potential Support	Strong Opposition
Republican	0.64***	
	(0.03)	
Democrat		0.79***
		(0.03)
Freedom Caucus Treatment	-0.004	-0.003
	(0.02)	(0.03)
Treatment X Republican	0.05	
	(0.04)	
Treatment X Democrat		0.01
		(0.04)
Constant	0.03**	0.09***
	(0.01)	(0.03)
Observations	1,275	1,268
R^2	0.52	0.55
Adjusted R^2	0.52	0.55

*Note: Linear probability models, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

Table C4. *Results from interaction models evaluating partisanship and expressed support/opposition to Byron Donalds. Potential support is a dichotomous measure – respondents are coded as 1 if they indicated "definitely yes", "probably yes", or "might or might not" for either the donations or volunteering questions. All other respondents are coded as 0. Strong opposition is also a dichotomous measure – respondents are coded as 1 if they indicated "Definitely not" for both the question on donations and the question on volunteering. All other respondents are coded as 0.*