



BUILDING THE BLOC

Intraparty Organization
in the U.S. Congress

RUTH BLOCH RUBIN

"Congressionalists and scholars of American political development will hail this deeply researched study as a scholarly landmark. Writing confidently and vividly, Bloch Rubin demonstrates that, over time, the construction and maintenance of minoritarian blocs—in both houses—have fundamentally shaped the course of American history. Reading her path-breaking book will change how you think about Congress and its politically constitutive role in our regime."

Richard M. Valelly, *Swarthmore College*

"The emergence of an organized party faction in Congress often produces spectacular moments of high gamesmanship in which political careers are determined for better or worse. Behind those intra-party games is the painstaking labor of dedicated dissenters who create and manage those organized factions. Through her own painstaking research, Ruth Bloch Rubin has uncovered and analyzed their history, providing us with both a much deeper understanding of the genesis of political institutions and an illustration of how the eruption of factions has shaped and will continue to shape the trajectory of American politics."

Richard Bense, *Cornell University*

"With analytical verve, historical depth, and empirical richness, this wonderful book illuminates the origins, character, and effects of organizations within parties on political representation in our national legislature. By deploying an institutional imagination with an eye for what matters, *Building the Bloc* compellingly shows how the persistence of these structures has shaped the character of legislative content and productivity, and sheds fresh light on key debates about parties, pivots, and preferences."

Ira Katznelson, *Columbia University*

"This deeply researched book offers a fresh perspective on congressional organization and policy-making. Ruth Bloch Rubin traces the development of the progressive Republicans of the early 20th century, the Southern Bloc of the mid 20th century, the Democratic Study Group of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Blue Dogs, the Republican Study Committee, and the Freedom Caucus of recent decades. In the process, she illustrates how intraparty organization empowers pivotal actors who drive policymaking and Congress's institutional development."

Frances E. Lee, *University of Maryland*

Ruth Bloch Rubin is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. She received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, and was previously a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at Harvard University.

Cover illustration: Katie Mazikins

COVER DESIGNED BY HART MCLEOD LTD

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.cambridge.org

ISBN 978-1-316-64992-3



BLOCH
RUBIN

BUILDING
THE
BLOCH

CAMBRIDGE

Building the Bloc

Intraparty Organization in the U.S. Congress

RUTH BLOCH RUBIN

The University of Chicago



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316510421
DOI: 10.1017/9781108226967

© Ruth Bloch Rubin 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-316-51042-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-316-64992-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Building the Bloc

Throughout the past century, both centrist and hardline dissidents in Congress have developed formal organizations – groups like the Blue Dog Coalition and House Freedom Caucus – to secure policies opposed by their party leaders. When and why do these organizations form? How do they help to structure, and occasionally disrupt, the country's politics?

Traversing more than a century of American history, this book advances a new theory of congressional organization, arguing that party dissidents carefully construct intraparty blocs to shift the balance of power between party leaders and rank-and-file members. These organizations empower legislators of varying ideological stripes to achieve collective and coordinated action by providing selective incentives to cooperative members, transforming public-good policies into excludable accomplishments and helping members to institute rules and procedures to promote group decision making. Drawing on rich archival evidence and interview data, the book details the challenges dissident lawmakers encounter when they face off against party leaders and their efforts to organize in response. Eight case studies shed fresh light on landmark fights over rules reform, early twentieth-century economic struggles, midcentury battles over civil rights legislation and contemporary debates over national healthcare and fiscal policies.

Ruth Bloch Rubin is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. She received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, and was previously a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at Harvard University.

For my family

Acknowledgments

This book began as a dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley – a strikingly beautiful campus with an intellectual community that will forever have a place in my heart. At Berkeley, I benefited enormously from Eric Schickler’s thoughtful and attentive advising. Never one to dictate, but not without his opinions, Eric has always been willing to talk through arguments and analytic frames, returning thoughtful edits at record speed. He has also been an encyclopedic resource for secondary source materials. I owe an equal debt of gratitude to Rob Van Houweling. A dedicated mentor, Rob patiently helped me to develop this project from a response paper into a full-fledged dissertation and offered kind counsel when I doubted my bona fides as a Congress scholar. There can be little doubt that this study has been profoundly influenced by Paul Pierson, who graciously overlooked my interest in parties and pivots to serve on my dissertation committee. That this book is not twice as long is due to Paul’s sage directive to kill my archival darlings. Many other Berkeley faculty and graduate students offered encouragement and guidance along the way, including Jack Citrin, Bob Kagan, John Hanley, Adrienne Hosek, Morris and Daniela Levy, Chloe Thurston, Kim Twist and Stephen Goggin. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

Upon leaving Berkeley, I had the privilege of spending two – in hindsight, very short – years as a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at Harvard University. With a level of compassion, patience and professionalism rivaled only by the length of the program’s name, site director Kathy Swartz helped me to carve out the time and resources to complete three additional case studies, draft the

necessary chapters, and revise my fledgling manuscript. I also owe a debt to Dan Carpenter, who generously read the manuscript in its entirety and provided constructive feedback. Much-needed amusement and general bucking-up was provided by Sarah Staszak, Adam Goldstein, and Adam Sacarny.

I would also like to thank Frances Lee, Justin Grimmer, Ira Katznelson, Rob Mickey, Wendy Schiller and participants in Berkeley's APD working group for reading drafts of various chapters and providing valuable suggestions on both theory and empirics. An enormous debt is owed to Richard Bense, whose kindness and generosity are rivaled only by the depth of his feedback on this and other projects. An equal debt is due to Rick Valelly, who pushed me to revisit the study's "so what?" and to think more carefully about the democratic costs – and not simply the benefits – of organized dissident groups in Congress. Special thanks, as well, to Shira Feldman, Jon Gould, Aurelia Chaudhury, and Naomi Gilens for their editorial assistance and to Sara Doskow at Cambridge University Press for securing reviews in record time and offering encouragement throughout the publication process. Derek Gottlieb produced a terrific index and Katie Mazikins did an exceptional job with the cover art.

Although the majority of this study has not previously appeared in print, material from chapter 2 appears in "Organizing for Insurgency: Intraparty Organization and the Development of the House Insurgency, 1908–1910," *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (2013): 86–110. I thank the journal's anonymous reviewers and editors for helping me to refine that narrative account, as well as the broader book project.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their good humor and unflagging support. Although my parents, Michele and Jeff, would probably have preferred I find a Roosevelt to write about, they nevertheless served as faithful research assistants and editors. A debt is also owed to my long-suffering brother, Ted, who survived many a family vacation to Valley Forge, Gettysburg and Sagamore Hill, only to have his sister study political history. I am equally grateful to Howard and Eleanor for their love – and for reminding me of our distant connection to Samuel Gompers – and, of course, to Elise, Sarah and Franklin for their constant levity and affection. Special thanks are also due to Helen for helping me to survive a record-breaking Massachusetts winter and welcoming me into her family.

The East Bay has many things to boast of: the weather, the hills, the farmers' markets, Steph Curry. But for me, it will always be the place I met

my husband. Gregory, I am grateful for every day we have had together, from our formative time in Oakland to our later years schlepping between Palo Alto, Cambridge and Chicago. This book is as much a result of your hard work as it is mine. Except the errors, of course, which – as in life – are entirely my own.

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>page viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>x</i>
1 Intraparty Organization in the U.S. Congress	1
2 Procedural Revolt and the House Insurgency, 1908–1910	29
3 The Senate Insurgency’s Quest for Economic Reform, 1909–1910	68
4 Securing Southern Solidarity, 1937–1956	112
5 The Decline of Southern Influence, 1957–1964	157
6 Making the Moderates Matter, 1994–2010	186
7 Coordinating Liberal Hardliners, 1957–1994	225
8 Organizing Conservative Revolutionaries, 1970–2015	261
9 Rethinking the Mischiefs of Faction	295
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>307</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>333</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>343</i>

Figures and Tables

FIGURES

1.1 Visualizing Free-Riding at the Median	page 10
---	---------

TABLES

1.1 Cases of Intraparty Organization in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries	3
2.1 Insurgent Membership by State Delegation, 1908–1909	39
2.2 Selected Results of the <i>Success Magazine</i> Survey, 1910	49
3.1 Senate Insurgent Membership and Committee Positions, 61st Congress	70
4.1 Southern Caucus Membership, 1937–1938	129
4.2 Southern Caucus Membership, 1948	140
4.3 Southern Delegations Membership, 1948	143
4.4 Members of the Southern Caucus, 1956	151
4.5 Support for Southern Manifesto by State Delegation, March 1956	154
5.1 Southern Delegations Membership, 1956–1957	166
5.2 Southern Caucus, 1963–1964	183
6.1 Members of the Conservative Democratic Forum by State Delegation, 1981	193
6.2 Blue Dog Coalition Membership, 1993–1994	198
6.3 Blue Dog Coalition Membership, 1994–1996	202
6.4 Blue Dog Membership by State Delegation, 2009–2010	213

6.5	Blue Dogs Who Voted for the Affordable Care Act and Healthcare and Education Reconciliation Act, 2010	223
6.6	Blue Dogs Who Voted against the Affordable Care Act and Healthcare and Education Reconciliation Act, 2010	223
7.1	Liberal Steering Committee Membership, 1958–1959	234
7.2	DSG Membership by State Delegation, February 1960	242
8.1	Founding Members of the Republican Study Committee, 1970	266
8.2	Founding Members of the House Freedom Caucus, 2014	286

I

Intraparty Organization in the U.S. Congress

Here is a mushroom. Yesterday when you passed it was not there. It has come up as by magic. "Wonderful!" you exclaim. "Out of nothing this great growth in a night!" Wonderful indeed; and yet the growth has not been as sudden as you think. Yesterday nothing was in sight, but the earth was filled with the fibers of the mushroom plant. The puffball you see is only the blossom. The real plant is below. It was there all the time. It has simply shoved up the puffball when it got ready. Things were working in the mysterious underground all the time. This mushroom growth of a single night is the result of slow preparation. It is surprising because it comes into view so suddenly – that's all.

– Herbert Quick for *La Follette's Weekly Magazine*¹

In March 1910, a "little group of willful men" toppled one of the most powerful party leaders in congressional history.² For nearly a decade, Joseph Cannon, Speaker of the House of Representatives and leader of its Republican majority, had ruled the lower chamber with an iron fist. As Speaker and party leader, Cannon nimbly managed the Republican Conference, controlling appointments to House committees and regulating the legislative agenda to minimize sectional conflict between vying party factions. Throughout his tenure, Cannon labored to, in his own words, "bring forth the best results for the party."³

¹ Quick, "Draft: Here Is a Mushroom," enclosed in a letter from Fred MacKenzie to Robert La Follette, February 20, 1911, Box 68, Series B, Robert La Follette Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, DC (LOCMD).

² Kenneth W. Hechler, *Insurgency: Personalities and Politics of the Taft Era* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964), 223.

³ As quoted in Blair Bolles, *Tyrant from Illinois: Uncle Joe Cannon's Experiment with Personal Power* (New York: Norton & Company, 1951), 198.

But just what results were best for the Republican Party? Firmly allied with eastern finance-capital and industrial interests, Cannon spurned pleas for federal assistance from Republican farmers crippled by debt. Reform-minded Republicans, powerless to meet their constituents' demands for assistance, vowed to do away with the constellation of rules and procedures the Speaker had long used to control the congressional agenda. Against all odds, they succeeded. Catching Cannon and his allies off guard, the reformers forced the Speaker to relinquish his seat on the House Rules Committee, and with it, his primary means to control floor activity and the chamber body. Describing Cannon's defeat the following day, journalists declared the lawmakers' victory a "startling triumph," "surprising" and "sudden."⁴

In truth, however, the reformers' feat was neither surprising nor sudden – it was the result of painstaking preparation. Indeed, the story of "Uncle Joe's" defeat is instructive. Recognizing that they would need to counter the Speaker's institutional power base with an organizational scaffolding of their own, the dissidents joined ranks. Beginning in 1908, they formed a cadre of partisan insurgents committed to revising House rules, collaborating over the span of many months to plan their fight, determine the details of their proposed rules changes and orchestrate their offensive. The Speaker's defeat, in short, was the culmination of extensive dissident organization.

While scholars have since characterized the Cannon Revolt as a singular moment in American history, the episode is but one stitch in the fabric of factional politics.⁵ Indeed, a full century later, another band of Republican insurgents would succeed in ousting a Speaker they accused of "consolidat[ing] power and centraliz[ing] decision making," and of using House rules to "compel members to vote for legislation against their conscience."⁶ Like the reformers who toppled Cannon, these modern-day dissidents relied on organization to direct their anti-leadership campaign and effort to push the Republican Party further rightward. Requiring more than shared will alone, the congressmen would – like their forebears – rely on organization to prepare their attack, decide upon the details of their proposed reforms and coordinate their offensive.

⁴ "All Night Fight to Oust Cannon: Insurgents and Democrats Move Together," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1910, A1.

⁵ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

⁶ As quoted in Lauren French and Jake Sherman, "House Conservative Seeks Boehner's Ouster," *Politico*, July 29, 2015.