
Organizing for Insurgency: Intraparty Organization and the Development of the House Insurgency, 1908–1910

Ruth Bloch Rubin, *University of California, Berkeley*

A legislative “breakpoint,” the Cannon Revolt profoundly transformed congressional operation, spurring a series of reforms that ultimately led to the disintegration of traditional modes of partisan authority and the creation of new patterns of governance. In this article, I argue that the Cannon Revolt affords an opportunity to examine a crucial, but poorly understood, dynamic in congressional politics. Whereas spatial theories of Congress typically hold that legislators located at the floor median are decisive actors in chamber politics, the archival account presented here suggests that these legislators require the scaffolding of an intraparty organization to secure pivotal status. As I demonstrate, intraparty organization enabled a ragtag group of Republican reformers opposed to Cannon’s “czar rule” to draft and unite behind a common proposal for parliamentary reform, and to build the cross-party coalition that scholars agree was critical to its passage. In this account, the influence of the so-called “Insurgent” Republicans hinged on their collective capacity to hang together in sufficient numbers to hold the balance of power in the chamber—in effect, organizing all potentially pivotal votes into one bloc essential to sustaining the majority party coalition.

We are banded together for a single purpose and no other. Our sole aim as a body is to restore to the House of Representatives complete power of legislation in accordance with the will of a majority of its members. We are striving to destroy the system of autocratic control which has reached its climax under the present speaker.¹

— Resolution adopted by the Insurgent Bloc,
January 10, 1910

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1. John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 10, 1910, Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), John Mandt Nelson Papers, Box 10. Responding to a smear campaign orchestrated by the Taft Administration and Cannon’s allies in the legislature, the Insurgents issued this resolution to make clear to the public their political objectives and continued affiliation with the Republican Party.

“I present a matter made privileged by the Constitution!”² Rising from his seat, Rep. George W. Norris (R-NE) strode past his Republican colleagues to the well of the House floor. Handing the waiting clerk a sheaf of papers, Norris turned to Speaker Joseph Cannon (R-IL) and demanded that his proposal be recognized. Though House rules would normally have found the matter out of order, Norris cited Cannon’s ruling from the previous afternoon, stating that measures pertaining to the Constitution were granted privilege over regular House business.³ Given the Speaker’s recent ruling and the fact that his proposal concerned a matter explicitly discussed in the Constitution, Norris argued that the measure

2. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3291.

3. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3241–3250. On March 16, 1910, Census Committee chairman Rep. Edgar Crumpacker (R-IN) motioned that a measure calling for a new census be debated on the House floor. Though under House rules Crumpacker’s proposal was unlikely to be considered, as the measure had only recently been reported to the full chamber and many more bills should have received first consideration, the chairman hoped his loyalty to the Speaker would tip the scales in favor of his motion. As expected, Cannon ruled Representative Crumpacker’s request to be in order. The Speaker declared: “Taking of the census as to population [has] invariably been admitted as involving constitutional privilege, presenting a privilege higher than any rule of the House would give.”

superseded existing legislation scheduled for consideration. In the congressman's own words:

It was the hour for which I had been waiting patiently. I had in my pocket a resolution to change the rules of the House. Unknown to anyone, even to my closest insurgent colleagues, I had carried it for a long time, certain that in the flush of its power the Cannon machine would overreach itself. The paper upon which I had written my resolution had become so tattered it scarcely hung together. That was the best evidence of long waiting for the minute that had come, and the frequency with which I had studied it alone in my office.⁴

As the clerk prepared to read the resolution aloud to the chamber, Cannon granted that if the matter was in fact privileged by the Constitution, then Norris had a right to present it. Whispers became shouts as House members learned the resolution would strip the Speaker of his power to sit on and appoint legislators to the Committee on Rules, the primary means by which majority party leaders controlled floor activity and managed the chamber body.⁵ Realizing his perilous position, Cannon sought delay as he mustered Republican supporters to vote down the rules change. Over the next several days, the House debated the proposed resolution and Norris's right to introduce it, while the Speaker deliberated with his closest colleagues over the best course of action.⁶ Eventually, Cannon was forced to allow the Norris resolution to come to a vote, ever hopeful that the Republicans loyal to him would outnumber the cross-party coalition rallied against him. Ultimately, an amended version of the resolution passed, 191 to 156, ending the era of czar rule in the House.⁷

A legislative "breakpoint," the passage of the Norris resolution profoundly transformed congressional operation.⁸ Indeed, in an institution renowned for its continuity, the Cannon Revolt marks one of the

few times in American history where the structure of Congress substantially changed. Although the 1910 rebellion did not itself greatly compromise the majority party's control of House activity, it prompted a series of reforms that would lead to the gradual disintegration of traditional modes of partisan authority and the creation of new patterns of legislative governance.⁹ Moreover, because the Cannon Revolt's success hinged on cooperation between a small segment of the Republican Party and a unified Democratic minority, the episode stands as a testament to the transformative power of cross-party coalitions. At the level of mass politics, the successful pursuit of parliamentary reform illustrates the capacity of partisan and legislative institutions to respond to sectional pressures. For these reasons, scholars have rightfully pursued a rich understanding of this moment in congressional history.

Consistent with his own account, both historical and contemporary treatments of the Cannon Revolt tend to identify Norris as the central actor responsible for executing the rebellion.¹⁰ Although many of these works acknowledge the important role of the minority party in helping to build a procedural majority in favor of rules reform, scholars often take Democratic support for granted, paying little attention to the structural conditions internal to the Republican Party that facilitated Norris's success and assured the cooperation of House Democrats. Binder, for example, argues that it was Norris who "secured" the necessary Republican votes to form what she terms an "easily fostered" coalition with the minority party.¹¹ Likewise, Sheingate writes, "Beyond [his] opportunistic timing, Norris exploited the complex features of House rules . . . to move authority over the rules out of the hands of Speaker Cannon . . .

4. George W. Norris, *Fighting Liberal: The Autobiography of George W. Norris* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945), 113.

5. The resolution provided a new structure for the Committee on Rules, requiring that the committee be geographically and politically representative. The redesigned committee would consist of fifteen members, eight representing the majority party and seven the minority party, distributed throughout the country. The resolution denied the Speaker the right to sit on the committee and stripped him of the power to appoint House members to standing committees. Norris's proposed Committee on Rules would, among its new duties, appoint House members to other standing committees. Norris, *Fighting Liberal*, 115.

6. Kenneth W. Hechler, *Insurgency: Personalities and Politics of the Taft Era* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 70–71.

7. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3436. As discussed in the article's penultimate section, this amended resolution stripped Cannon of his seat on the Rules Committee, but allowed the Speaker to retain appointment power to other standing committees.

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

9. Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981): 416.

10. For example, see Charles R. Atkinson, *The Committee on Rules and the Overthrow of Speaker Cannon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911); Anne Firor Scott, "A Progressive Wind from the South," *Journal of Southern History* 29 (1963): 53–70; Charles O. Jones, "Joseph G. Cannon and Howard W. Smith: An Essay on the Limits of Leadership in the House of Representatives," *Journal of Politics* 30 (1968): 617–46; Sarah A. Binder, *Minority Rights, Majority Rule: Partisanship and the Development of Congress* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David Brady and David Epstein, "Intraparty Preferences, Heterogeneity, and the Origins of the Modern Congress: Progressive Reformers in the House and Senate, 1890–1920," *Journal of Law, Economics & Organization* 13 (1997): 26–49; Donald R. Wolfensberger, "The Motion to Recommit in the House: The Creation, Evisceration, and Restoration of a Minority Right," in *Party, Process, and Political Change*, ed. David Brady and Mathew D. McCubbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 271–95; Adam Sheingate, "Creativity and Constraint in the U.S. House of Representatives" in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency and Power*, ed. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–203.

11. Binder, *Minority Rights*, 134–35.

[and to] the House floor, where the power of a procedural majority held sway.”¹²

This article, by contrast, highlights the efforts of Norris’s Republican allies to construct an intraparty organization, and demonstrates how the development of such organizational capacity was essential to the successful prosecution of rules reform.¹³ As I demonstrate in the following pages, intraparty organization enabled a ragtag group of Republican dissidents to draft and unite behind a common rules reform proposal, and to build the cross-party coalition that scholars agree was critical to the legislation’s passage. From a developmental perspective, the structure and capacity of the so-called “Insurgency” expanded incrementally, as Republican reformers struggled to balance their strong sense of individualism and diverse convictions with the need for disciplined action and alliance with the minority party. After finding informal means of coordination insufficient to either hold members to a common objective, or draw Democratic support, the Insurgent reformers worked to institutionalize their presence—devising a series of mechanisms to foster consistent participation, cohesive strategy, and electoral and political security for individual reformers.

In tracing the development of Insurgent organization, I hope to persuade the reader that one cannot attribute the reformers’ success merely to the combined circumstances of Norris’s ingenuity and Democratic support for rules reform. First, as a matter of historical record, Norris’s strategic exploitation of Cannon’s ruling on constitutional privilege reflected a tactic proposed and considered by the Insurgent Committee on Procedure in 1909. Second, the resolution Norris offered on the floor of the House in March 1910 was nearly the same resolution the Insurgent bloc had drafted and passed in February 1909. Third, the procedural majority of Democrats and progressive Republicans in favor of rules reform was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the revolt to succeed. Indeed, archival materials indicate that Democratic participation was not inevitable. Rather, the cross-party coalition formed between the minority party and Republican dissidents resulted from the Insurgency’s hard-fought efforts to win the trust of Democratic leaders. In sum:

12. Sheingate, “Creativity and Constraint,” 197.

13. Intraparty organization refers to the formation of an internally bounded alliance between co-partisans, with an associated institutional apparatus to support and enforce that alliance. By internally bounded, I mean that such alliances are composed of an identifiable set of co-partisans selected on the basis of some criteria set forth explicitly or implicitly by the group. Although their design may vary, intraparty organizations are characterized by one or more of the following organizational features: members identify publicly with the group and meet together regularly, members provide or seek resources for the group, and members consent to be bound by a group position or strategy on one or more policy or procedural issues.

if the Republican reformers were to have seceded *en masse* from their party coalition at any point during the 60th (1907–1909) and 61st (1909–1911) Congresses, they would have comprised a bloc of votes sufficient to grant the Democrats majority status. However, organization would prove essential to assure the Insurgents’ collective defection and to construct a procedural majority in favor of rules reform.

In this article, I argue that Insurgent Republican intraparty organization furthered three objectives essential to challenging Speaker Cannon and reforming House rules. First, the organization enabled reformers to coordinate strategy amongst themselves, helping to resolve among Insurgents both ideological disputes over what aspects of rules reform would take first priority, as well as practical disagreements over how their policy goals would best be achieved. That is, intraparty organization offered a structural apparatus through which the dissidents could design, field-test, and ultimately promote their “common carrier” proposals.¹⁴

Second, intraparty organization provided the Insurgents with a variety of mechanisms to encourage continued collective action. By leveraging their connections with influential progressive newspaper and magazine editors, the reformers were able to reward loyal members, and rebuke—to devastating effect—those who rejoined the Speaker. Additionally, reformers deployed their intraparty organization to promote the electoral prospects of loyal Insurgents, rally constituent support for the group’s agenda, stoke animosity toward their opposition, and solicit and disburse campaign assistance to vulnerable members. Although individual Insurgents had long cooperated on an informal, *ad hoc* basis with members of their state delegations, this new electoral alliance operated at a scale and scope previously reached only by organized political parties.¹⁵ These activities helped reformers to offset and minimize the cost of their disloyalty and to increase the cost to Republican leaders of continuing to persecute them.

Third, by promoting group cohesion, intraparty organization helped to make the Insurgents a more credible partner for the Democratic opposition, as many minority members shared the reformers’ desire to limit Cannon’s authority, but doubted the strength of the Republican dissidents’ convictions. With limited prospects for success absent an organized

14. Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 14.

15. Indeed, the activities of the Insurgents would ultimately help to form the basis of the Progressive Party. Beginning in the summer of 1910, progressive members of the Insurgency in the House and Senate began to use the group’s electoral infrastructure and contacts with the press to organize a third-party challenge in the 1912 presidential election. Robert Collier to Robert La Follette and Victor Murdock, July 1, 1910, Library of Congress Manuscript Division (LOC), Robert La Follette Papers, Box 63.

bloc of Republican defectors, House Democrats were unwilling to pursue parliamentary reform aggressively—despite having pledged to prioritize changes to chamber rules in their 1908 party platform.¹⁶ In fact, many members of the minority party preferred to bide their time in anticipation of upcoming elections and allow Cannon to remain in office as a convenient symbol of Republican intransigence. However, as the Democratic leadership observed the Insurgents maintain unity in the face of considerable pressure from “Regular” Republicans, they came to believe that a viable coalition was indeed possible.

In many ways, the Cannon Revolt stands as a singular event in congressional history. However, in a nation governed by two heterogeneous parties, it is not uncommon for a faction of majority party legislators to find themselves at ideological odds with their party leadership, yet lacking in sufficient leverage to successfully bargain for more favorable policies. In this respect, the Cannon Revolt is but one case in a more regular pattern in American legislative politics. As I develop in the following section, and demonstrate through a detailed archival study of the Cannon Revolt, intraparty organization offers dissident majority party members one possible strategy to address this challenge.

1. ORGANIZING DISSENT: A THEORY OF INTRAPARTY ORGANIZATION

Through organization, dissident Republicans sought to construct a pivotal bloc out of a group of legislators whose individual views and actions clashed with those of their party leaders. In his seminal account of Cannon’s leadership, Charles Jones argues that the Insurgents “could always take their one bargaining advantage—the vote—and join the Democrats to curb the powers of the Speaker.”¹⁷ However, with a House body of several hundred members, any one Insurgent was unlikely to hold the vote that would tip the balance of power from a Republican majority opposing rules change to a cross-party coalition favoring parliamentary reform.¹⁸ In part, this was because Speaker Cannon and his allies had a range of opportunities and resources with which to secure the necessary number of votes without winning the support of any one dissident party member.

In more theoretical terms, Cox and McCubbins have argued that the range of tools at the disposal of majority party leaders—including the capacity to set

the chamber’s agenda and to punish dissident members—serves the interests of the majority party at large. In their view, members of the majority party agree to delegate agenda-setting powers and the authority to punish recalcitrant legislators to the leadership of the party. Party leaders, in turn, use these powers to further the preferences of a majority of the majority coalition, while preventing attempts to fracture the coalition with alternative proposals. Cox and McCubbins conclude that this sort of cooperation amounts to “cartelized” control of the chamber’s agenda and procedures, and predict that only those proposals favored by the leadership of the majority party are likely to come to a vote on the chamber floor.¹⁹

A prominent critic of party-cartel theory, Krehbiel has questioned the extent to which majority party leaders are able to control legislative proceedings and dictate the behavior of their membership. In his view, the floor median retains ultimate say over the chamber’s agenda. If dissatisfied by any given proposal put forward by the majority party, the majority party member at the floor median may choose to side with the opposition, thereby granting it control. Aware of this possibility, majority party leaders condition their proposals on the preferences of the median member, even when doing so leads to an outcome they do not prefer. For Krehbiel, the pivotal role of the floor median extends even to procedural considerations.²⁰ According to this model, a dissident member of the majority party located at the floor median can extract significant concessions from party leaders in exchange for her vote.

Striking a balance between these two models of congressional activity, Rohde argues that the power of party leaders waxes and wanes as the uniformity of members’ preferences change. When members strongly agree on the substance of their party’s agenda, they are more willing to delegate power to leaders who will promote that agenda. Conversely, when a party is internally divided over matters of policy, members prefer to retain as much individual power as possible.²¹ Further developing Rohde’s analysis, Schickler and Rich condition the relative influence of the floor median on the size and ideological homogeneity of the majority party. In their view, the majority party member at the floor median can exert maximum influence when she is included among a “sufficient number of party dissidents to constitute a permanent majority should [she] ally with the minority party.”²² With a slim majority, party

16. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, “Democratic Party Platform of 1908,” July 7, 1908, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29589> (date accessed: February 4, 2013).

17. Jones, “Joseph G. Cannon and Howard Smith,” 626.

18. Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party in Government in the U.S. House of Representatives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20–30.

19. Cox and McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda*, 31.

20. Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 165–72.

21. David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 35–37.

22. Eric Schickler and Andrew Rich, “Controlling the Floor: Parties as Procedural Coalitions in the House,” *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997): 1342.

leaders have limited incentive to punish the floor median should she defect on an individual vote, for fear they would lose her permanently to the opposition. It is only when party leaders control a sizable and unified majority that they can exert the sort of legislative control described in the party-cartel model. However, to the extent that majority party leaders can obtain members' cooperation by providing material inducements or threatening punishment, even the median voter is subject to some influence by majority party leaders.

In debating the nature of majority party control, all of the authors cited make similar assumptions about the floor median. Adopting a spatial logic, both Cox and McCubbins, and Krehbiel, conceptualize the floor median as a single actor. Schickler and Rich imply that the floor median is either one individual or a group of individuals at or near the median acting with single purpose; in their view, dissidents will choose to defect from the majority party *en masse* or not at all.

However, these assumptions do not always hold. As Schickler and Rich suggest, it is often the case that majority party leaders must contend with a collection of dissident members clustered at the floor median. In spatial terms, these members may be so closely concentrated that no one individual is necessarily pivotal to chamber outcomes in instances in which some but not all of these "median members" are required to maintain a majority coalition. When combined with the prospect of partisan carrots and sticks, this insight reveals a crucial collective-action dynamic.

Stated succinctly, when multiple members are concentrated at the floor median, each member has an incentive to let her peers do the work of defection and herself accept a side payment or simply avoid punishment in exchange for holding the party line. In this view, even though dissidents share a common interest in getting their majority leadership to compromise on a given policy or procedural matter, each individual legislator may be better able to maximize her personal gain through cooperation with party leaders, provided that sufficient numbers of her colleagues successfully defect and thereby pull the policy or procedural outcome toward the median.²³ In short, the optimal strategy for any individual is to "free ride" on the defection of others. Even when members share the same policy or procedural interest and are committed to bearing the burden of defection, they may have difficulty translating their broad agreement into a specific set of policy proposals or procedural tactics.²⁴ Party leaders can

exploit these weaknesses further, co-opting certain proposals as necessary to divide median members and maintain a floor majority.

To return to the Cannon Revolt: absent a guarantee that any individual Insurgent's vote would be pivotal to unseating the Speaker, the reformers were collectively at the mercy of Republican leaders. The influence of party dissidents like George Norris and his Insurgent colleagues hinged on their collective capacity to hang together in sufficient numbers to hold the balance of power in the chamber—in effect, organizing all potentially pivotal votes into one bloc essential to sustaining the majority party coalition. Having secured a pivotal role within the Republican coalition, the reformers could more credibly negotiate with Cannon and the Democratic leadership, and more freely defect from their party's ranks. Indeed, the intraparty organization developed by dissident Republicans provided them the requisite credibility to parley with Democratic leaders, and gave minority leaders the confidence that any resulting alliance would not erode in the face of majority party pressure.

Given the potential for division and disorder among co-partisan dissidents, organization is imperative to transform votes into substantive outcomes. As I demonstrate in the remainder of this article, intraparty organization helps legislators to commit to a common strategy and, in banding together on a course of unified action, limit the threat of partisan punishment. Intraparty organization also promotes members' electoral prospects, which, in turn, recommits individuals to the organization's cause. Finally, intraparty organization centralizes authority and decision making, such that dissident members can negotiate effectively with majority and minority party leaders and credibly redeem the terms of their agreements. In these ways, intraparty organization offers a powerful scaffolding from which dissident majority party members can achieve more desirable policy and procedural outcomes at the expense of their party leaders.

Despite its clear advantages, intraparty organization is not without significant cost. Like institution-building more generally, constructing and then maintaining this kind of organization requires a considerable outlay of time, creative energy, and material resources. Moreover, intraparty organization generates leverage by committing its members to adhere to the group's positions, once they are taken, thus constraining individual autonomy for the sake of organizational unity. In light of these costs, members of Congress are likely to rely on existing legislative institutions to effect their desired outcomes, where possible. Only when the costs of organization

23. In some instances, it may be sufficient to simply threaten defection until compromise is induced.

24. Cox and McCubbins allude to this dynamic, noting that "[p]otential defectors must *coordinate*, not just in the sense of jumping at the same time but also in the sense of negotiating, *before* actually defecting, with their prospective new partners over

the division of spoils." Cox and McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda*, 31, emphasis in the original.

are outweighed by its benefits will legislators pursue intraparty organization. As we shall see, the Republican reformers embraced intraparty organization only as a last resort. After having failed to achieve their desired policy goals through independent action, the reformers sought increasingly formalized modes of organization to achieve their collective aims.

Although intraparty organization enabled progressive reformers to assure themselves a pivotal position within Republican ranks, their relationship with the Democratic minority proved more complicated. On the one hand, without united Democratic support, the Insurgent bloc lacked sufficient votes to curb the Speaker's powers, making Democratic cooperation crucial to the reformers' success. On the other hand, without Republican defectors, the Democratic Party would remain in the minority, unable to redeem the pledge of its 1908 platform. Running counter to the Democrats' desire for rules reform was the belief held by many in the party that it would soon be in the majority; consequently, some "Democrats were not eager to destroy the sources of the [S]peaker's power."²⁵ Anticipating their rise to power, Democratic leaders weighed the benefits of redeeming their party pledge with the electoral advantage of Cannon's "utter unpopularity . . . throughout the country."²⁶ As I demonstrate, Democratic leaders strategically balanced these competing ambitions—actively leveraging their cross-party coalition with Insurgent members to extract key concessions favorable to the minority from Republican leaders, while simultaneously pressing the Republican dissidents to moderate their proposed rules changes in favor of majority rights.

In contrast to the view of House Democrats as "a strong minority party fighting to reinforce minority rights," the historical record makes clear that Democratic legislators viewed themselves as auxiliaries in the fight against Cannon, relying on the Insurgents to develop a successful floor strategy and initiate reform proposals.²⁷ Writing to Rep. Victor Murdock (R-KS) in November 1909, Rep. Richmond Hobson (D-AL) requested that the Insurgents notify him "if there is anything which you 'Progressives' have planned . . . in which the Democrats will be called upon to assist," explaining to Murdock that it was up to the Insurgents to dictate the terms of any engagement.²⁸ Although unified Democratic support, like Insurgent cohesion, was necessary to curb Cannon's authority, Democratic participation

in the revolt hinged on the Insurgents' own initiative. Unity within the Democratic caucus was far from assured, and would require aggressive efforts by minority leaders to solidify their ranks. These actions, in turn, depended on Democratic leaders' own confidence that the Insurgents would uphold the terms of cross-party cooperation.²⁹

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

In this article, I treat the Cannon Revolt as a case study to illustrate how attention to intraparty organization can improve our understanding of this major episode of legislative development. Although a case study research design limits our ability to generalize with certainty about the role of intraparty organization in the U.S. Congress, we can nevertheless derive analytic leverage "from a close knowledge of the case and context, which can directly contribute to more valid descriptive and causal inference," as Brady and Collier observe.³⁰ Here, I seek to convince the reader that the Cannon Revolt was unlikely to occur as it did without the establishment and development of Insurgent organization. I exploit the longitudinal variation within the case itself to maximize analytic traction and to help rule out alternative explanations. As we will see, the Republican dissidents initially sought to achieve rules reform independently; it was the failure of these efforts that led them to pursue greater collaboration. The reformers' inability to curb the powers of the Speaker through individual action strongly suggests that some type of organization was necessary to achieve the reformers' ends. Likewise, the Insurgents' subsequent decisions to work ever more closely indicates that their initial *de minimis* organization was insufficient. Given this within-case variation, it is reasonable to conclude that a strong, formal Insurgent organization was instrumental in changing House rules. Additionally, variation in the Democratic response to the Insurgency lends credence to the view that demonstrated dissident cohesion was a necessary condition for the formation of a cross-party coalition in favor of rules reform.

To trace the development of the Insurgent bloc as it formed in the House at the turn of the twentieth century, I exploit a diverse collection of archival evidence. Specifically, I draw on the personal papers of Insurgent legislators and Republican leaders in Congress and the White House, period newspapers and the papers of Progressive Era journalists, and materials published in the *Congressional Record* and

25. John D. Baker, "The Character of the Congressional Revolution of 1910," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 683.

26. Edward E. Higgins to William H. Taft, March 8, 1909, LOC, Victor Murdock Papers, Box 23.

27. Binder, *Minority Rights*, 135.

28. Richmond P. Hobson to Murdock, November 24, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22.

29. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 76.

30. Henry E. Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 12.

House Journal. To detail the substance and development of Insurgent strategy, I rely on the organization's internal records, including meeting minutes, proposed resolutions, and attendance logs. These materials were collated and maintained by Rep. John M. Nelson (R-WI), who was appointed by his colleagues to act as secretary for the Insurgent organization. Nelson's materials reveal no evident bias; his records are attentive to both the successes and limitations of the Insurgent organization. Though these records provide the best available account of the bloc's internal workings, including the thought processes and preferences of its membership, I also draw on Insurgent correspondence where possible to verify and contextualize the data.³¹

As the article unfolds, the reader will observe that the scope of the inquiry widens at certain stages to include nonlegislative actors, including members of the progressive-affiliated press and the Taft Administration. I introduce these actors for two reasons. First, Insurgent leaders regularly communicated with progressive editors to inflame public opinion against Cannon, and later to reward loyal reformers and punish those who deserted their cause. In other words, Insurgent leaders deployed the progressive press as a mechanism to encourage continued collective action.³² Likewise, the Insurgents sought Taft's endorsement of their reform efforts throughout their campaign, hopeful that the president would persuade Cannon to relinquish his powers gracefully. Perhaps more important, Cannon and his allies appealed to Taft both to counter the Insurgents'

31. Included in the Nelson papers are a series of transcribed interviews with the congressman conducted by Kenneth Hechler as part of the latter's research for *Insurgency: Personalities and Politics of the Taft Era*. Attentive to concerns of potential bias, these interviews are used primarily to contextualize the information provided by the bloc's meeting minutes.

32. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Insurgent members and their journalist colleagues is complex. The historical record reveals that House reformers often communicated with progressive Republican editors, and were largely successful in influencing news coverage of the Insurgent organization. The Insurgents' success notwithstanding, the newspaper editors were, for their part, independently committed to parliamentary reform. As a result, it is problematic to argue either that the Insurgents were *fully* responsible for the coverage they received, or that the coverage they received is an entirely independent variable that influenced the reformers' ultimate success. Nonetheless, correspondence among Insurgents and members of the press suggests that progressive publications were an important resource for Insurgent legislators, and that with the cooperation of sympathetic journalists, certain electoral and organizational objectives were advanced. See correspondence with the editors of *Collier's Magazine*, *The American Magazine*, and *Kansas City Star*. Collier to Murdock, March 10, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22; Collier to Murdock, March 19, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22; Richard Lloyd Jones to Murdock, May 13, 1910, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 28, Folder "F"; John S. Phillips to Murdock, March 15, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Phillips, John S."; Henry J. Haskell to Murdock, January 28, 1910, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 28, Folder "Haskell, Henry J."

mobilization and to defend the reputation of the Republican Party.³³ Second, in light of the critiques leveled at "institution by institution" accounts of American politics, broadening the narrative's focus to include nonlegislative actors permits a more comprehensive treatment of Insurgent organization and Republican mobilization to police irregularity in the party's ranks.³⁴

In the following section I briefly describe the political and economic conditions that precipitated Insurgent unrest and the reformers' revolt against Speaker Cannon. I then detail the development of the House Insurgent organization, paying particular attention to the reasons the Insurgents sought to collaborate and to the particular organizational mechanisms they implemented over time. Where appropriate, I further consider how House Democrats reacted to Insurgent activity. To conclude, I revisit the fateful series of events that led to Cannon's downfall, tracing out how the Insurgent bloc made George Norris's entrepreneurship and Democratic collaboration possible, and how the organization was later adapted to accommodate new progressive causes.

3. PRECIPITATING UNREST

In his early years as Speaker, Cannon's drive to centralize party leadership and consolidate it in House institutions met with little resistance from the chamber's Republican and Democratic membership. Using the same tools vested in the speakership that others had used to expand the power of that office, Cannon extended his control over committee and floor activity.³⁵ Coupled with his strategic post as chairman of the Committee on the Rules, Cannon could fully regulate the flow of legislation, debate, and amendment—blocking those bills he opposed, while expediting the passage of those he favored. As Schickler argues, these changes initially proved advantageous to Republican representatives, assuaging party

33. Taft's personal correspondence corroborates this view of history, suggesting that the president was reluctant to intervene in the congressional contest and did so only as a result of appeals by Republican and Insurgent leaders. Taft to William Allen White, March 12, 1909, LOC, William Allen White Papers, Box 2; Archibald W. Butt, *Taft and Roosevelt: The Intimate Letters of Archie Butt, Military Aide* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930), 5–8.

34. Paul Pierson, "The Costs of Marginalization: Qualitative Methods in the Study of American Politics," *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007): 145–69.

35. Following a pattern of congressional leadership pioneered by former Speaker Thomas Reed (R-ME), Cannon placed members of Congress loyal to him in committee chairmanships and packed supporters into key committees, sometimes displacing more senior, independent Republicans. He also tightened the rules of recognition on the floor, refusing to grant recognition to members who had not explained their intentions to him in advance. Randall Strahan, *Leading Representatives: The Agency of Leaders in the Politics and Development of the U.S. House* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

infighting by preventing consideration of divisive legislation. Likewise, House Democrats and Republicans collectively benefitted from the chamber's increased clout in intra- and interbranch negotiations.³⁶

Regrettably for Cannon, his pursuit of legislative and partisan control ultimately ran afoul of the agrarian crisis smoldering in the western regions of the country. In the years following the Civil War, the railroads' penetration into western territories, and innovations in agricultural science and machinery, encouraged farmers in the region to devote more of their resources and land to agricultural production.³⁷ Newly settled in the region, Union veterans were the backbone of farm expansion, supplying the human capital necessary to cultivate greater acreage.³⁸ To afford the machinery that would make it possible to grow and harvest crops sufficient for railroads to transport to meet eastern demand, farmers required additional financial capital. To acquire such capital they mortgaged their land, which often resulted in permanent debt, as well as enmity toward the eastern companies that supplied farmers with mortgages.³⁹ Agrarian debt was compounded by the appreciation of the dollar's purchasing power as crop prices fell.⁴⁰ At the same time, farmers faced exorbitant prices on machinery and equipment because these industries were protected by a series of domestic tariffs. Farmers' limited access to banks drove up interest rates, further exacerbating the plight of the debtor.⁴¹

Faced with the loss of property and savings, rural communities demanded relief from their state and national governments. At the state level, politicians—foremost among them, then-Governor Robert La Follette (R-WI)—responded by wresting political control of the region from railroad and

corporate interests.⁴² At the national level, William Jennings Bryan and his populist Democrats, along with progressive Republicans, pressed for further regulation of the railroads, conservation of natural resources, the establishment of postal savings banks, more equitable taxation, and direct democracy.⁴³ Cannon, however, refused to accommodate the restive constituencies agitating for nationwide economic and political reform. Firmly allied with eastern finance capital and industrial interests, the Speaker found the reformers' agenda of government activism unacceptable. Unwilling to alter the status quo or yield to Republicans who advocated principles that ran counter to strict party regularity, Cannon used the tools of his office to rebuff efforts to pass reform legislation. However, “[b]y constricting the opportunities for individual members . . . to shape House decision making, Cannon created an explosive situation where members were willing to attack the House to effect change.”⁴⁴ Indeed, without the institutional means to meet their constituents' demands for assistance, Republican reformers trained their sights on the chamber's parliamentary rules and procedures.⁴⁵

4. THE LIMITS OF INDEPENDENT ACTION AND INFORMAL ORGANIZATION

The first attacks against Cannon's command of House proceedings were levied by individual Republican dissidents. These sporadic strikes met with little success. Relying on his control of the “right to recognition” and the House Rules Committee, Cannon easily diffused their protests. Having failed to achieve reform independently, the dissidents attempted to work

36. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 70.

37. The vast majority of Insurgent members of Congress hailed from the mid and far West: California, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin. A minority of Insurgents represented districts in the mid-Atlantic and New England: Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, and West Virginia.

38. Many Union soldiers took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 to move westward at the close of the Civil War. As veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic, they were confirmed Lincoln Republicans, proclaiming “Vote the way you shot!” Their increased presence in western states assured Republicans control of the region. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 17.

39. Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865–1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

40. Overproduction of agricultural commodities, once encouraged by advocates of western settlement, led to falling prices. Claire Strom, “James J. Hill: Empire Builder as Farmer,” *Minnesota History Magazine* 54 (1995): 242–53.

41. For more on the economic circumstances that rooted the political movements of the time, see Richard F. Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State 1877–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

42. According to Nelson, “Bob La Follette was the moving force behind this great fight to reform the rules of the House of Representatives, insofar as it is possible to single out one man who provided the inspiration for a great deal of the movement. It must of course be recognized that no one individual had control over the progress of the movement, nor was any one individual responsible for the crystallization of the discontent in the first rules revolution of March of 1910, yet La Follette provided much of the impetus.” Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1.

43. While populist Democrats were often more radical in their demands than progressive Republicans, both movements called for similar reforms—with the exception of currency reform. As the journalist William Allen White described the difference between the two groups: “The Insurgents caught the Populists swimming and stole all of their clothing except the frayed underdrawers of free silver.” Hechler, *Insurgency*, 21–22.

44. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 71.

45. The western progressive Republicans were joined by a handful of representatives who, by some accounts, believed parliamentary reform would either ease the passage of their favored legislation—as was the case for Rep. George A. Pearre (R-MD) and Rep. Charles Fowler (R-NJ)—or promote “good government” more broadly, as articulated by Rep. Augustus Gardner (R-MA). Blair Bolles, *Tyrant from Illinois: Uncle Joe Cannon's Experiment with Personal Power* (New York: Norton & Company, 1951), 174–75.

more collaboratively, first by circulating a petition and later through private correspondence and impromptu gatherings on the House floor. In both instances, the reformers sought to move beyond a consensus that changes to House rules were necessary, but found that their limited organization was insufficient to effectively coordinate and prioritize members' preferences and, in turn, to develop a shared plan of action.

Over the course of the first session of the 60th Congress, calls for parliamentary reform were made by those legislators who later became the mainstays of the Insurgent organization.⁴⁶ Frustrated by Cannon's steadfast refusal to entertain western legislators' private appeals for programmatic relief in their home states, progressive Republicans Nelson and Murdock repeatedly spoke out against "the immense power concentrated in the Speakership."⁴⁷ Though their speeches garnered considerable favor from President Theodore Roosevelt, reform-minded representatives and senators of both parties, and members of the press, they cost both men politically.⁴⁸ Never content to turn a blind eye to the "slings and arrows" of parliamentary reform or a breach in party regularity, Cannon "vowed

46. In the period prior to Joseph Cannon's tenure as Speaker there was no lack of objections to House rules. In 1902, for example, Rep. Francis Cushman (R-WA) railed against the chamber's repressive legislative calendar, arguing that House rules enabled party leaders to push through at least some legislation by arbitrary procedure for partisan or personal benefit. "The Calendar!" he cried, "That is a misnomer. It ought to be called a cemetery. For therein lie the whitening bones of legislative hopes." However, scholars generally characterize the speeches leveled against House rules prior to the Insurgency as disorganized and polemic. Insurgent speeches, by contrast, were typically dispassionate and analytic. *Congressional Record*, 57th Congress, 1st Sess., 1902, 35, 4320.

47. In most instances, Nelson and Murdock were granted recognition to make their speeches during floor debate on appropriations bills, where it was House custom for members "to speak on any subject under the sun." Nelson explained that the custom for wide recognition when considering appropriations legislation on the floor acted "as a device to give the members a chance to make speeches for home consumption, and to ease up the tension caused by the powers that be, giving [members] no chance to speak on bills that [were] really under consideration." Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 12.

48. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 13. Roosevelt's relationship with the Insurgents varied considerably over time. Early in his first term, Roosevelt vowed to work with Cannon to push through the Republican agenda. In doing so, he achieved a momentary detente with the House leader. When it became clear that Cannon was intent on obstructing the progressive legislation Roosevelt had made the linchpin of his *own* agenda, the president's relationship with the Speaker cooled. By late 1907, Roosevelt sought to straddle the cleavage between growing public opposition to Cannon in the West and the need to maintain a cohesive Republican majority for President-elect William Howard Taft. While he would later be a vigorous proponent of the Insurgent cause, as an elected official Roosevelt proved largely diffident to the organization—refusing, at one point, even to make introductions to Taft on the group's behalf.

vengeance."⁴⁹ From Cannon's perspective, it was a relatively simple and routine matter to punish individual dissenters. The Speaker shunted Nelson to dead committees and threatened Murdock through the Kansas Republican machine.⁵⁰ Although both men objected to Cannon's actions, neither could muster an effective response to lessen or counter his penalty's toll.⁵¹

More important, reformers Nelson and Murdock were ill-equipped to overcome the peculiar procedural features of the House that effectively precluded rules reform. Parliamentary reformers faced at least three different procedural obstacles. First, the Speaker controlled the right to recognition, severely constraining a legislator's opportunity to mount a protest on the House floor. Second, if the Speaker were to grant recognition and a legislator were to introduce an amendment to reform House rules, the Committee on Rules—packed with members loyal to the Speaker—would have jurisdiction and thus the ability to bury the proposal.⁵² Third, were the Committee on Rules to report the resolution to the floor (a very improbable scenario), a single legislator would be unlikely to have the capacity to forge the cross-party coalition necessary to win passage. As historian and former member of Congress Kenneth Hechler observes, Nelson and Murdock would come to see that the "reason the Insurgents needed to throw up a connected series of breastworks was their failure to achieve any results through haphazard individual effort."⁵³

In March 1908, mindful that the institutional environment necessitated some measure of coordination, Nelson circulated a petition calling "for a change in some of the rules" among like-minded Republicans.⁵⁴ The purpose of the petition was twofold. First, the reformers needed a politically

49. Nelson recounted: "I found out that this speech was sent to Uncle Joe Cannon by an obliging enemy. He only laughed and said that everybody took a knock at the rules, but just the same he never forgave me for it, as I found out afterwards." Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes - Part Two," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10.

50. As Nelson explained, "The Cannon crowd vowed vengeance and I got no favorable committee assignments. I was placed upon the Election Committee, No. 2, the Committee on Arts and Expositions, and the dead Committee on Pacific Railroads." Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes - Part Two," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10; *Congressional Record*, 60th Congress, 1st Sess., 1907, 42, 426–429; Murdock to White, December 9, 1909, LOC, White Papers, Box 2.

51. Cannon's determination to exact retribution should not be taken as an indication that the reformers posed a credible threat to the speakership. The institutional impediments to rules reform made it incredibly unlikely that the men would achieve their objective.

52. James S. Sherman to Col. H.L. Swords, February 6, 1909, New York Public Library Rare Books and Manuscript Division (NYPL), James Schoolcraft Sherman Papers, Box 17, File "1909 Feb, 6–7."

53. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 194.

54. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers Box 10, p. 13–14.

sensitive means to identify potential colleagues with whom to collaborate. Though some, like Norris, approached Nelson and Murdock following their speeches in the House, others sympathetic to the cause were cautious to express their support. Second, the early Insurgents sought to commit fellow reformers to action; the petition would act as a contract among members to press for substantive change. For Nelson, “[T]his was the beginning . . . of the [I]nsurgent movement.”⁵⁵

In fact, it would prove to be a slow start. Without a clear sense of what “change in some of the rules” entailed, and lacking a plan to guide the reformers’ efforts or a means to enforce the petitioners’ pact to prioritize the matter, other concerns took precedence. In western states, surging populist sentiment forecast a strong Democratic year, with Bryan leading the ticket. With the 1908 presidential election in full swing, members of the Republican Party—Insurgent and “Regular” alike—were pressed into service on party nominee Taft’s behalf.

The results of the 1908 election gave the Insurgents much to celebrate. The GOP maintained its majority in the House (219–172) and progressive Republican losses were few. Swept into office by the tide of western opinion inimical to Cannon’s rule, a new cohort of legislators swelled the Insurgents’ ranks. As shown in Table 1, although the majority of Insurgents hailed from midwestern states—seven from Iowa, five from Kansas, four each from Nebraska and Minnesota, three from Ohio, and nine from Wisconsin—roughly a third of the membership drew from eastern and western delegations, including Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, California and Washington.⁵⁶ Were the thirty-odd Insurgents to join with House Democrats, the Republican leadership would lose control of the chamber, making parliamentary reform possible.⁵⁷ However, building a cross-party coalition would require a level of organization and commitment to

55. Sitting behind Nelson just after he had delivered his speech for parliamentary reform, Norris leaned forward and promised the congressman: “John, I’ll be with you on that.” Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 2.

56. Though sectional divisions would rankle the Progressive Party a short decade later, there is little archival evidence to suggest that a single state delegation dominated Insurgent proceedings in the House. Indeed, while the Wisconsin delegation boasted the largest state membership, leadership positions were not distributed in a way that favored that delegation in particular. The Wisconsin delegation’s principal influence came insofar as members from Wisconsin typically supported more radical reform measures, and voted cohesively in their favor. However, Wisconsin members’ capacity to dominate the substance of Insurgent proposals was limited by the reticence of some eastern reformers—whom the Insurgent leadership was unwilling to alienate.

57. At the time, the House numbered 391 members. Because a majority in the House required 196 members, twenty-four Insurgents would need to cooperate with the opposition to overpower Cannon’s regime.

Table 1. Insurgent Membership by State Delegation

Everis A. Hayes (R-CA)	Andrew J. Volstead (R-MN)
Duncan E. McKinlay (R-CA)*	Edmund H. Hinshaw (R-NE)
Gilbert N. Haugen (R-IA)	Moses P. Kinkaid (R-NE)
William P. Hepburn (R-IA)	George W. Norris (R-NE)
Elbert H. Hubbard (R-IA)	Ernest M. Pollard (R-NE)*
James W. Good (R-IA)	Charles N. Fowler (R-NJ)
Nathan E. Kendall (R-IA)	Herbert Parsons (R-NY)*
Charles E. Pickett (R-IA)	Asle J. Gronna (R-ND)
Frank P. Woods (R-IA)	David A. Hollingsworth (R-OH)
Daniel R. Anthony (R-KS)*	Leonard P. Howland (R-OH)*
Philip P. Campbell (R-KS)*	Adna R. Johnson (R-OH)
Edmond H. Madison (R-KS)	David J. Foster (R-VT)
Victor Murdock (R-KS)	Miles Poindexter (R-WA)
Charles F. Scott (R-KS)*	William J. Cary (R-WI)
Augustus P. Gardner (R-MA)	Henry Allen Cooper (R-WI)
William C. Lovering (R-MA)	James H. Davidson (R-WI)
George A. Pearre (R-MD)*	John J. Esch (R-WI)
Charles E. Townsend (R-MI)*	Arthur W. Kopp (R-WI)
James C. McLaughlin (R-MI)*	Gustav Küstermann (R-WI)
Charles R. Davis (R-MN)	Irvine L. Lenroot (R-WI)
Charles A. Lindbergh (R-MN)	Elmer A. Morse (R-WI)
Halvor Steenerson (R-MN)	John M. Nelson (R-WI)

* These ten Insurgents were identified as having “cold feet” in the bloc’s February whip count and winter attendance logs. Of the ten congressmen, seven left the Insurgent organization (Scott, Anthony, Campbell, McLaughlin, Pearre, McKinlay, and Foster). *Source:* Nelson, “Attendance Records” and “Vote on Resolution of Feb. 9 & 10,” WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

cooperation the Insurgents lacked. Indeed, the loose federation generated by Nelson’s petition was insufficient to compel adherence to any common plan or strategy.⁵⁸

Writing several decades after the Cannon Revolt, Norris recalled “that the single objective which brought these men together was the taking from the Speaker of the vast, brutal power which the rules of the House gave him.”⁵⁹ Though the Insurgents agreed on the necessity of parliamentary reform, they remained deeply divided over its prospective substance. In letters and impromptu conversations on the floor of the House, members entertained a variety of strategies they hoped would best achieve legislative accord.⁶⁰ Rep. Miles Poindexter (R-WA) and Rep. Charles Fowler (R-NJ) argued that removing the Speaker from his seat on the Committee on Rules would be sufficient to end the House

58. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 45; Miles Poindexter to Norman Hapgood, November 17, 1908, University of Washington Libraries and Special Collections (UWSC), Miles Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder “Special Correspondence H.”

59. Norris, *Fighting Liberal*, 108.

60. Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 2.

dictatorship. Among those who believed autocratic committee assignments to be the source of legislative discord, Rep. William Hepburn (R-IA) suggested the Speaker be allowed to fill no more than one-third of each committee's seats. Others argued this proposal would unduly restrict the majority party, suggesting instead that the Speaker appoint no more than three-fifths of all seats. Norris, for his part, proposed that the Speaker be stripped of the power of appointment altogether. Still others viewed restrictions on recognition as the source of Cannon's authority; some proposed changes to the legislative calendar, such that weekly committees were given the opportunity to introduce legislation on the floor.⁶¹ Rules to discharge legislation from committees—in the form of petitions or other procedures—were favored as alternatives.⁶²

Nor could the Insurgents reach agreement on more practical matters of political strategy, as evidenced by their initial haphazard efforts to challenge Cannon for the speakership. Indeed, upon returning to Washington in November 1908, many Insurgents worked at cross-purposes, promoting a crowd of names to oppose Cannon, rather than throwing their combined support behind a consensus candidate.⁶³ Correspondence among Insurgents reveals a host of competing ambitions, as individuals sought to solicit support for themselves or regional allies.⁶⁴ With the opposition to his rule deeply divided, Cannon had little to fear.⁶⁵ For the Insurgents, the

61. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 45.

62. Norris, *Fighting Liberal*, 135; "Hepburn May Contest," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 1908, p.1; Poindexter to Theodore Burton, November 10, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "A Special Correspondence." See also Poindexter to W. H. W. Rees, November 24, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "Correspondence P and Q."

63. One might think that the Insurgents believed Cannon would be reelected and that, consequently, there would be little value in devoting resources to a unified campaign. However, Insurgent correspondence suggests otherwise; letters reveal that members believed speed of entry into the race was the primary variable in determining a rival candidate's success. Poindexter to Hapgood, November 17, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "Special Correspondence H."

64. While Fowler flooded the mail with pleas for support in his bid for the speakership, western Insurgents busily mobilized around local candidates. Fowler to Poindexter, November 6, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "Special Correspondence A"; Poindexter to Fowler, November 14, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "Special Correspondence A"; William Ewart Humphrey to Poindexter, December 7, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8, Folder "Special Correspondence A."

65. With the Insurgents divided, Cannon sought to clinch his control of the speakership for another term by persuading the White House to remain neutral on the matter. Cannon had some reason to fear that either President Roosevelt or President-elect Taft would intervene on the progressive Republicans' behalf, as the Speaker had proved a liability in the West. Dispatching his close confidant, Vice President-elect James Sherman, to speak with Taft and Roosevelt, Cannon convinced the White House that interfering in the battle over House rules would derail the party's capacity to implement its legislative agenda. Unbeknownst to the

lesson of their initial campaign was clear: absent organizational mechanisms to translate members' broad commitment to rules reform into an agreed-upon and actionable plan, their efforts were unlikely to succeed.

5. THE SEEDS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Cognizant that prolonged internal wrangling would jeopardize their cause, Nelson called a formal meeting to devise a cohesive strategy for the bloc.⁶⁶ As Nelson recounted, "All those Republicans whom we believed favored a change of the rule [were invited to attend] . . . We found that they numbered about thirty-five."⁶⁷ In this meeting, and throughout the winter of 1908–9, the Insurgents worked to establish rules of procedure and a committee structure to facilitate the group's decision making. The Insurgents were particularly concerned that their most radical members would balk at compromising with the bloc's more moderate rules reformers and, instead, set out on their own. Accordingly, they implemented several mechanisms to bind these and other members to the organization without resorting to explicit coercion. Hoping to redirect the energies of radical dissidents into the organization itself, the Insurgents appointed them to various leadership positions within the group. To discourage defection more generally and promote consistency in debate, they relied on official note taking to record the statements made in conference by Insurgent members as a means for holding them accountable in private, and, if necessary, in public. Determined to widen public support for rules reform among the electorate, the Insurgents carefully cultivated relationships with sympathetic newspaper and magazine editors. As we shall see, these efforts would later prove crucial to the success of the organization; in the summer and fall of 1909, the reformers relied heavily on their relationship with the press to reward legislators loyal to the Insurgency and to punish those who defected from its ranks.

Persuading those amenable to rules reform to broach the issue without the sanction of the Republican caucus proved difficult. Potential Insurgents

Insurgents, Taft withdrew his support of their budding cause. Shortly after the 1908 election, Poindexter wrote to President-elect Taft, urging him to consider supporting the bid of a progressive Republican to replace Cannon as Speaker. Taft did not respond. See Hechler, *Insurgency*, 44; Poindexter to Taft, November 10, 1908, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 8.

66. As Hechler observes, "Political strategy should have dictated a firm cohesion as the prime necessity of the Insurgents, but they failed to come to any agreement and thus lost much of their bargaining power." Hechler, *Insurgency*, 45.

67. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 14. Other accounts, including that of Hechler, hold that the group numbered no more than twenty-five.

feared the consequences of open participation in a group that sought to defy the Speaker, well aware that Cannon had dealt harshly with party dissidents in the past.⁶⁸ Answering this set of concerns represented a key organizational challenge for the Insurgency. A solution presented itself when, after some discussion, Hepburn volunteered to host the Insurgent meetings in his committee room. Though a “dyed-in-the-wool machine man on other issues,” Hepburn believed strongly in the importance of parliamentary reform and the decentralization of power away from the Speaker.⁶⁹ Hepburn’s party orthodoxy on other matters reassured would-be participants that their involvement in the rules reform effort would not damage their Republican credentials. Moreover, as an established figure in the Republican hierarchy, the congressman’s presence offered cover for Insurgents apprehensive about Cannon’s possible response.⁷⁰

Meeting in Hepburn’s committee room in early December 1908, the Insurgents agreed that the first step must be to define the scope and nature of the parliamentary reforms they would collectively pursue. To this end, the group elected a regionally and politically diverse subcommittee, led by Hepburn, to identify and prioritize the possible changes to House rules.⁷¹ The following week the Insurgents reconvened to hear the subcommittee’s report. The subcommittee identified House committee assignments and the legislative calendar as initial targets for reform. First, the subcommittee proposed that the House appoint a committee of nine members who would be charged with making assignments to standing committees.⁷² Second, to ensure that

68. One local Kansas politician counseled Murdock against breaking with Cannon, even for the sake of pleasing his constituents: “As you will have ‘Uncle Joe’ on your neck up there—stay with him, we will protect your rear.” J. A. Burnette to Murdock, December 23, 1908, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 21, Folder “B.” However, for some would-be Insurgents, Cannon’s penchant for punishment motivated their membership. Nelson explained, “I won Gussie Gardner over to our side in the fight on the Rules, by pointing out to him the injustices which Cannon had done to him personally, in the way of removing him from his committee chairmanship.” Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 5.

69. According to Nelson, “In many caucuses, Hepburn would arise and read the riot act to Uncle Joe, but when the vote was taken and afterward, Hepburn would inevitably submit to the party steamroller and remain regular.” Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, John Mandt Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 3.

70. According to Murdock, “It was only through the use of the headquarters of Hepburn, a dyed-in-the-wool machine man on other issues, that most . . . consented to attend.” Hechler, *Insurgency*, 195.

71. The committee consisted of Rep. William Hepburn (R-IA), Rep. Charles Townsend (R-MI), Rep. Henry Cooper (R-WI), Rep. Everis Hayes (R-CA), and Rep. David Foster (R-VT).

72. The text of the Insurgent proposal: “The House shall elect at the commencement of each Congress the following standing committees . . . The House shall select a committee of nine members whose duty it shall be to nominate to the House the

legislation flowed freely from committees to the House floor, they recommended that two free days be allocated each week during which the Speaker would be required to call upon each committee to report out legislation.⁷³ By instituting these “calendar days,” the reformers hoped to increase floor access, particularly for less powerful committees.

In subsequent meetings in January 1909, the Insurgents debated the merits of the subcommittee’s report and the substance of its proposals. Although the group agreed on the importance of reforming committee assignment procedure, members divided over how drastic the changes should be. Hard-line reformers like Norris insisted that the Speaker be explicitly stripped of his power to assign committee seats, whereas others believed party leaders ought to work together with a proposed new House-appointed “Committee on Committees.” Ultimately, the bloc agreed with Norris, voting 18–5 in support of completely divesting the Speaker of appointment authority.

In an effort to address what some western Insurgents believed to be the outsized influence of eastern industrial and finance capital interests within the Republican coalition, the reformers decided to make geographical representation an explicit part of their agenda. To this end, the Insurgents proposed that when appointing members to the Committee on Rules, each legislator’s regional affiliation be taken into account. Concerned that the Speaker might continue to exert influence in this domain, Norris sought to imbue regional delegations with the authority to directly elect one representative apiece, proposing to the Insurgents “that the Committee on Rules should be elected by the membership of the House from geographical divisions.”⁷⁴ In the end, the group decided that the Committee on Rules, with a mechanism in place to ensure that its membership would be regionally representative, would also assume the duties of the proposed “Committee on Committees” and assign committee

proper number of Representatives and delegates to constitute the above committees.” Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” December 16, 1908, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1.

73. The text of the Insurgent proposal: “On each Tuesday and Thursday, the Speaker shall call the committees . . . and such call shall not be omitted unless by a vote on the day the House shall consent to such omission.” Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” December 16, 1908, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1–2.

74. In the Insurgents’ final resolution, voted on in February 1909, the proposed Committee on Rules and Committees would consist of fifteen members: nine majority members, six minority members. By contrast, the Norris Resolution offered on the House floor in March 1910 called for eight majority members and seven minority members to be appointed to the proposed Committee on Rules and Committees. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 18, 1909, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1–2. Meeting minutes suggest that no further action was taken on the Norris proposal at this time. Nelson, “February 4th Resolution,” February 4, 1909, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 3.

seats.⁷⁵ Unlike concern over the role of the Speaker, which divided the Insurgents, prioritizing geographical representation proved to be an appealing and popular notion, as members from all states stood to benefit from a procedural guarantee of regional interests.⁷⁶

Over the course of these winter meetings, the Insurgents developed a series of internal organizational procedures. For expediency's sake, the group agreed to formally adopt the basic structure of the typical congressional conference. Committees would be created to manage discrete tasks, reporting their progress at regularly held member-wide meetings.⁷⁷ Attendees would follow basic rules of parliamentary order, and one individual would act as chair to settle disputes and keep matters germane. Though the duty of chair would rotate among members, Nelson was appointed permanent secretary of the House Insurgency. As secretary, Nelson was responsible for calling meetings, arranging meeting space, keeping detailed meeting minutes, and occasionally acting as whip for the group.

These organizational choices promoted two critical objectives. In part, these duties facilitated group efficiency: with logistics accounted for, members could focus on the substantive business at hand. But these same features also furthered collective action. As Nelson explained:

[I] kept very complete minutes of all of the meetings; Murdock once objected to this while I was reading the minutes, but I realized that only by recording every motion and speech could all of the members of our group be tied together and kept from drifting back. Another technique was to give certain people committee chairmanships to maintain their interest; thus Murdock was made Chairman of the Publicity Committee.⁷⁸

75. Nelson, "Meeting Minutes," January 26, 1909, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1–2. Members debated whether the Committee on Rules ought to be the same committee that was tasked with assigning committee positions, and whether members on either committee could simultaneously sit on a standing committee. In a series of close votes, it was decided that the Committee on Rules would also assign committee seats, but that membership on the proposed "Committee on Rules and Committees" would not preclude legislators from sitting on other standing committees.

76. Eastern Insurgents had perhaps the most to lose from a more equitable regional distribution of power in the House, as the region tended to dominate House proceedings. Nelson's meeting minutes, however, reveal that this group of reformers believed that the status quo favored stand-pat eastern interests and limited their own access to the chamber's most powerful offices. Nelson, "Meeting Minutes," January 26, 1909, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1–2. See also Hechler, *Insurgency*, 41–42.

77. The Insurgents eventually formed a Committee on Procedure, a Committee on Publicity, a Committee on Recruitment, and a Steering or Executive Committee to direct the group's strategy.

78. Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 7. See also Hechler, *Insurgency*, 196.

Nelson's account makes clear that Insurgent leaders were concerned about two potential sources of defection from their ranks. On the one hand, some Insurgent members might be persuaded to return to Cannon's fold, unwilling or unable to bear the costs of achieving rules reform. To prevent these members from "drifting back," the Insurgent leadership kept careful records of their debate proceedings, so that any individuals who might consider abandoning the cause could be reminded of their initial commitment to reform. On the other hand, the Insurgent leaders initially feared the defection of members who were deeply committed to a specific vision of rules reform and unwilling to compromise to ensure group cohesion.⁷⁹ To prevent these individuals from abandoning the Insurgent cause, the bloc's leadership sought to deepen their investment in the organization, as well as the cause—offering them leadership positions "to maintain their interest," and provide an outlet for their entrepreneurial proclivities.⁸⁰

Though anxious to unify their bloc, the Insurgents nevertheless sought to preserve a meaningful degree of autonomy for individual members. Attentive to the potential contradictions of modeling the Insurgent bloc on the centralized authority of the Republican machine, the group tried to reflect in its organizational design a critique of the party structure it was seeking to reform. Indeed, as Hechler argues, in designing the bloc's administrative arrangements, the Insurgents were keenly aware that "centralizing power and authority in one leader . . . would be aping the very organization that they were fighting in the House."⁸¹ Although majority votes were deemed acceptable during internal debates over the substantive details of the Insurgents' proposed resolution, the majority would not be permitted to dictate how individual members would vote if the resolution were to reach the chamber floor.

The Insurgents also declined to implement organizational mechanisms that would empower the group's leadership to enforce collective behavior.⁸²

79. Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 7–8.

80. More broadly, the Insurgents' attention to matters of organization as a means of structuring consistent participation, ideological cohesion, and common strategy suggests a sort of institutional isomorphism between parties and their constitutive intraparty organizations. Indeed, the Insurgents' use of these party-like mechanisms to keep group members invested in their collective objective is striking. Whereas it is probably not the case that intraparty organizations are simply "nascent parties within parties, seeking to pour new wine into old bottles," the fact that Insurgent organizers looked to their party coalition for structural inspiration suggests a strong affinity between the two phenomena. James W. Ceaser, "Political Parties—Declining, Stabilizing, or Resurging?" in *The New American Political System*, 2nd ed., ed. Anthony King (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1990), 90–91.

81. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 195.

82. Murdock to White, August 1, 1910, LOC, White Papers, Box 4.

Rather, the Insurgents hoped that knowledge that unity was the bloc's singular point of leverage would be sufficient to motivate consensus and cooperation.⁸³ Indeed, in the months preceding the opening of the 61st Congress in March 1909, the Insurgents carefully screened members of the incoming congressional class to ensure that new recruits would not threaten the group's hard-won consensus. Representing western, midwestern, and eastern interests, respectively, Rep. Everis A. Hayes (R-CA), Murdock, and Rep. George Pearre (R-MD) distributed literature on rules reform to newly elected Republican members of Congress, and corresponded individually with interested legislators to assess their "sympathy with [Insurgent] principles . . . and [their] support of this movement." In so doing, the Insurgents were able to incorporate those new members who supported the substance of the organization's desired reforms.⁸⁴

During this period, the Insurgents met frequently to develop a strategy for winning passage of their parliamentary reforms. As Rep. Ernest Pollard (R-NE) reported from the Committee on Procedure, they had not yet found a way to bring up the proposed rules changes for consideration *with* the Speaker's consent. However, Pollard suggested it might be possible to offer "amendments to some proposed rule of the Committee on Rules, and then vot[e] to over-turn the decision of the Speaker" that the rules amendments were out of order. Pollard believed that forcing a vote against the Speaker on a ruling at any time in the congressional session might be used to secure certain concessions from the majority leadership. After considerable discussion of Pollard's idea, the Insurgents agreed that "it would be unwise to do anything revolutionary."⁸⁵ Better to wait for the opening of the new Congress in March 1909, when the rules would once again come up for adoption. Though the evidence is only suggestive, one may wonder whether Norris recalled Pollard's proposal when, a year later, he offered his own resolution on the House floor with the aim of overthrowing the Speaker.⁸⁶

83. Nelson, "Meeting Minutes," January 10, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 3.

84. Poindexter to Murdock, February 20, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Poindexter, Miles"; William P. Sheffield to Murdock, February 16, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Sheffield, William Paine"; Irving L. Lenroot to Murdock, February 16, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Lenroot, I. L."

85. Nelson, "Meeting Minutes," February 8, 1909, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

86. In contrast to Pollard, Norris recognized that Cannon's ruling on constitutional privilege provided an opening to bring his resolution to the floor. However, in Norris's view, the critical factor was giving the House the chance to overturn the Speaker, thus devolving decision-making authority to the chamber body. "The entire membership knew with equal sureness that Mr. Cannon would sustain that point of order [against Norris's right

Though the majority of the Insurgents' formal conferences were devoted to debating the substance and logistics of procedural change, a subsection of the group coordinated with their colleagues in the Senate to rally public opinion in favor of reform measures.⁸⁷ Throughout the Insurgent campaign, reformers with strong ties to popular progressive Republican newspapers and magazines worked together with sympathetic journalists outside the halls of Congress to "spread sentiment against the present House rules" and to dispel allegations made against the bloc by "stand-pat" newspapers.⁸⁸

For their part, progressive newspapers and magazines routinely commissioned Insurgent members to write articles describing their activities in Congress and explaining the rationale behind their reform efforts.⁸⁹ They also encouraged their readership to write to Cannon, imploring the Speaker to acquiesce to the Insurgent cause. These efforts culminated in a campaign by *Success Magazine*, a widely read national publication during this period, to document public support for rules reform and opposition to the present Speakership. *Success Magazine* mailed ballots to 22,500 of its subscribers, asking recipients to vote on proposed rules reform measures and to evaluate Cannon's and Taft's performances in office.⁹⁰

to propose his resolution], and that I would appeal at once. It was then up to the House to decide whether my resolution was in order, and whether the House desired to consider it." Norris, *Fighting Liberal*, 115–16.

87. Although the House Insurgents received little counsel from their Senate counterparts on most aspects of their reform efforts, there is strong archival evidence that the two organizations coordinated on matters of press. La Follette and Murdock corresponded frequently to share news reports, material to be printed, and "story pitches." Even early on in the Insurgent campaign, the two chamber organizations worked closely together; in October 1908, La Follette wrote to Murdock urging the congressman to run Insurgent editorials previously printed in *La Follette Magazine* in Kansas newspapers. F.W. Mackenzie to Murdock, October 22, 1908, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 21, Folder "M."

88. Charles F. Scott to Alex Butts, November 14, 1908, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 21, Folder "S"; Lawrence F. Abbott to Murdoch, March 13, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Abbott, Lawrence F."; Collier to Murdock, March 10, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Collier, Robert J." Both Murdoch and La Follette, who had left his post as governor of Wisconsin in January 1906 to serve the state as a senator, edited such publications.

89. Haskell to Murdock, December 20, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Haskell, Henry J."

90. The text of the *Success Magazine* ballot: "Please mail this ballot to SUCCESS MAGAZINE immediately . . . Answers to the questions below will be regarded by SUCCESS MAGAZINE as absolutely confidential as regards authorship. (1.) With what political party are you in general sympathy? (2.) For what Presidential candidate did you vote in November, 1908? (3.) Do you now believe that your vote was wisely cast? (4.) Are you satisfied with the first nine months [*sic*] experience in the administration of President Taft? (5.) Do you approve the position of Senator Aldrich in the recent tariff legislation? (6.) Do you approve the position of Speaker Cannon in the recent tariff legislation? (7.) Do you approve the position of President Taft in the recent tariff legislation? (8.) Is it your

Table 2. Selected Results of the *Success Magazine* Survey

Question	Republican Respondents		Democratic Respondents	
Do you approve the position of Speaker Cannon in the recent tariff legislation?	Yes: 7% (490)	No: 93% (6,485)	Yes: 2% (40)	No: 98% (2,447)
	Total votes cast: 6,975		Total votes cast: 2,487	
Is it your desire that President Taft should support and cooperate with Senator Aldrich and Speaker Cannon in the general public policies which they represent?	Yes: 10% (689)	No: 90% (6,293)		
	Total votes cast: 6,982			
Are you satisfied with the first nine months' experience in the administration of President Taft?	Yes: 55% (3,092)	No: 44% (2,490)	Yes: 20% (500)	No: 80% (2,053)
	Total votes cast: 5,582		Total votes cast: 2,553	

Question	Insurgent District	Stand-Pat District	"Cold Feet" District	Democratic District
Do you approve the position of your Representative in Congress in the Speakership contest last spring?	Yes: 90% (550)	Yes: 14% (33)	Yes: 15% (22)	Yes: 31% (10)
	No: 10% (62)	No: 86% (199)	No: 85% (121)	No: 69% (22)
	Total votes cast: 612	Total votes cast: 232	Total votes cast: 143	Total votes cast: 32
Would you vote for your Representative of Congress if there should be another election this month provided that he were opposed by a reputable man of the opposite party?	Yes: 93% (191)	Yes: 23% (157)		
	No: 7% (14)	No: 77% (522)		
	Total votes cast: 205	Total votes cast: 679		

Blank cells indicate cases where the data were not tabulated by the editors of *Success*.
 Source: "Is President Taft Leader or Follower in His Party?" *Success Magazine*, January 1910, pp. 31–32.

Readers were asked to return the completed ballots to the magazine at their own expense. The magazine received an astonishing number of completed ballots—more than 18,000—along with hundreds of letters from readers articulating their views on parliamentary procedure, Speaker Cannon, and the Taft administration.

After compiling the results of its informal public opinion poll, *Success* consulted with Insurgent

desire that President Taft should support and co-operate with Senator Aldrich and Speaker Cannon in the general public policies which they represent? (9.) Do you desire that he should oppose them? (10.) Who is your Representative in Congress? (11.) To what political party does he belong? (12.) Did he support Joseph G. Cannon for Speaker of the House, and in the fight on the rules at the beginning of the special session? (13.) Do you approve his position in the Speakership contest? (14.) Would you vote for him if there should be another election this month, provided that he were opposed by a reputable man of the opposite party? (15.) Is it your desire that he support the administration and policies of Speaker Cannon, or would you prefer that he oppose them?" Readers were asked to record their name, state, and city or town on the ballot. "Questions to *Success Magazine* Members of Auxiliary Editorial Board," 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23, Folder "Success Magazine."

members "on the question of getting the largest possible influence on the figures by method of presentation to Congress."⁹¹ Ultimately, in addition to publishing the results of the survey in their magazine, the editors of *Success* decided to provide a copy to every member of Congress and to the White House (as summarized in Table 2).⁹² At a time when intercontinental correspondence was costly and modern public opinion polling did not yet exist, *Success Magazine's* national campaign was a very impressive achievement. Moreover, the effort provides evidence for the unique partnership between congressional reformers and progressive members of the press.

At the close of February 1909, the Insurgents worked to finalize the resolution they would present at the opening of the new Congress the following week. After months of revision, the final resolution denied the Speaker membership on any standing or conference committee, and expanded the size and scope of the Committee on Rules to accommodate

91. Higgins to Murdock, December 3, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23, Folder "Success Magazine."

92. "Is President Taft Leader or Follower in His Party?" *Success Magazine*, January 1910, p. 31.

greater political and geographical representation.⁹³ Members of the newly designated Committee on Rules and Committees would be selected by representatives grouped together into geographical regions, such that each region would select one legislator to join the Committee. Thus constituted, the Committee would appoint House members to all other standing committees. Additional provisions specified the details of the revised legislative calendar.⁹⁴ With only a few modifications, this resolution—drafted, debated, and passed by the Insurgents in 1909—would be submitted to the House by Norris one year later.⁹⁵

6. COLD FEET: A SETBACK FOR THE INSURGENCY

Up to this point, the Insurgents had managed to balance the need for coordination and consensus with the preservation of individual opinion. The crucial vote to adopt the Insurgent resolution upset this hard-won equilibrium; Nelson's written whip count for the resolution reveals a growing reticence within a significant fraction of the Insurgent membership. To the surprise of Insurgent leaders, the individuals balking at the reform proposal were not the group's most radical dissidents—whose strident views had long been feared as an obstacle to compromise—but rather the bloc's moderate membership. Scribbling "cold foot" next to eleven names, Nelson identified a contingent of Insurgents who believed the proposed reforms to be overly broad and extreme.⁹⁶ Though the Insurgents had successfully kept their radical members in line, the group's internal vote revealed a new fracture. The reformers would have to find new institutional tools to manage this unexpected challenge.

The reticence of "cold foot" Insurgents discouraged the bloc's leaders. Why were members abandoning their commitment to parliamentary reform now that the resolution was finally drafted? Had the Insurgent leaders ignored seeds of discord sown months before, and were only now seeing them bear fruit? Nelson believed that the Insurgents had long harbored a subset of members ultimately indifferent to rules reform, but he had also assumed they would not have remained with the bloc for so long had they intended to defect. For his part, Murdock

blamed the Regular Republicans, arguing that Cannon had coerced more vulnerable Insurgents—legislators with sizable stand-pat constituencies, pending legislation before the House, or patronage requests for which Cannon's favor would be necessary—to return to the party's Old Guard.⁹⁷ In the end, twenty-nine Insurgents joined in signing the resolution, eight of the ten "cold foot" members voted for a resolution pertaining only to the legislative calendar, and seven then seceded from the group.⁹⁸ With its membership thus diminished, the Insurgents' successful pursuit of rules reform now depended on every member of the Democratic minority voting in favor of the measure.⁹⁹

The divisive internal vote proved to be a critical moment of realization for Insurgent leaders. For Nelson and his colleagues, it was a reminder that mere agreement on the group's broad goal of parliamentary reform would not be sufficient to secure the measure's passage. By design, the organization was ill prepared to enforce discipline or voting regularity in its ranks. Unwilling to compromise individual autonomy by implementing a binding majority vote, the Insurgents insisted that collective action be assured without coercive measures. Despite this, Nelson and fellow members of the Steering Committee concluded that they needed new ways to incentivize cohesion and prevent future eleventh-hour defections.¹⁰⁰

For others, the vote underscored the continued power of the party leadership and the corresponding weakness of the Insurgent organization to defend itself from the Speaker's incursion. Murdock, for one, recognized that Cannon could continue to weaken the organization by siphoning off individual members or small groups of members over time. Rep. Henry Allen Cooper (R-WI) shared Murdock's concern, and believed that the Democratic leadership would not view the bloc as a credible ally for this precise reason.¹⁰¹ And, without the support of the Democratic minority, the Insurgents' revision of House rules would be impossible to achieve.

But despite the divisions laid bare by the internal vote on their reform resolution, the Insurgents' coordination and resolve impressed the Democratic leadership. Initially concerned that the Insurgents would seek compromise with the Speaker, securing little for the minority party, the bloc's size and organization now persuaded the Democratic

93. The resolution created a "Committee on Rules and Committees to consist of fifteen members, nine of whom shall belong to the party having the largest representation in the House and six of whom shall belong to the party or parties having lesser representation in the House." Nelson, "Feb. 1909 Resolution, Annotated," WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

94. Nelson, "Feb. 1909 Resolution, Annotated," WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

95. Nelson to Hechler, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10.

96. Nelson, "Vote on Resolution of Feb. 9 & 10," WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

97. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 14.

98. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 46–47.

99. At the close of the 60th Congress, the bloc of twenty-nine Insurgents required the full Democratic minority (167 members) to break the Republican majority (223 members), 196 to 194.

100. Nelson to Hechler, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10.

101. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 48–49.

leadership that a profitable alliance could be formed with the remaining twenty-nine Insurgents.¹⁰² Together, the Insurgent bloc and the Democratic minority would constitute a chamber majority capable of enacting parliamentary reform. In the days before the start of the 61st Congress, Minority Leader James “Champ” Clark (D-MO) worked closely with the Insurgent Steering Committee—Nelson, Rep. Augustus Gardner (R-MA), and Rep. Edmond Madison (R-KS)—to decide upon a joint plan of action.¹⁰³ The legislators agreed to press for the adoption of the Insurgent resolution during the perfunctory adoption of House rules at the opening of the new Congress.¹⁰⁴ If the Insurgency remained unified and the cross-party coalition held, reform would be assured. If, instead, the Insurgents divided over the resolution on the floor, the Democrats made clear the consequence. Writing to Murdock, Clark’s clerk warned: “The Democrats will stand fast if the insurgents muster their forces . . . if the latter lose their courage and fail that day, there will be no use for them to get Democratic aid later on.”¹⁰⁵

7. FRACTURING THE CROSS-PARTY INITIATIVE FOR RULES REFORM

Before the coalition could act on its plan, however, the Republican Regulars surprised the House by proposing a resolution to establish a legislative calendar very similar to that favored by the eight “mild” Insurgents.¹⁰⁶ Just as the Regulars intended, the “Calendar Wednesday” proposal widened the breach between the militant Insurgents intent on stripping the Speaker of his power to appoint committees and the more moderate reformers who sought a more limited intervention. Drawing laughter on the House floor, Murdock characterized the resolution as “a Trojan Horse . . . and sticking out of the paunch of that horse I think I see several notable

102. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 76.

103. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 196. The historical record is unclear as to who initiated the cross-party coalition. According to Nelson, he and Gardner approached Clark through Rep. Albert Burlinson (D-TX), while Clark claims he reached out to the Insurgents first. Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 16.

104. Nelson explained the nature of the cross-party collaboration: “We only agreed to stand together on this issue and not on party policies generally.” Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 16.

105. Wallace D. Bassford to Higgins (and forwarded to Victor Murdock), March 9, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23, Folder “Success Magazine.”

106. The eight-man Insurgent resolution and the Regular Republicans’ proposal differed in two respects. One, the latter sought to make the calendar day for the call of legislation from committees Wednesday rather than Tuesday. Two, the Regulars wanted to allow the “Calendar Wednesday” to be set aside by a majority, rather than two-thirds, vote, as the Insurgents preferred.

cold feet.”¹⁰⁷ Though the Democrats and Insurgent leaders denounced the resolution, many members of both parties were hard pressed to oppose the Regulars’ proposal. The eight men who preferred limiting rules changes to the legislative calendar sided with the Republican machine, along with two other “cold foot” Insurgents identified by Nelson in his February whip count. Despite uniform Democratic opposition, the Insurgent bloc was too small in size to prevent the Regulars’ resolution from passing by a slim majority, 168–163.¹⁰⁸

Meeting in Hepburn’s committee room following the vote, the Insurgents agreed that they had much to learn from Cannon’s victory and the “cold foot” defections from their ranks. On the one hand, the episode made clear that the Insurgent organization could not withstand attrition by small concessions. Unless the Insurgents could find a way to prevent the majority leadership from picking off the group’s more moderate members, the bloc would cease to be pivotal. On the other hand, the slim majority of the recent vote suggested that the Insurgents’ cross-party alliance might be sufficient to break the Speaker’s hold on the House. Had the Insurgents prevented just three of their members from defecting, the Speaker’s majority would have fallen.¹⁰⁹

For students of congressional politics, this episode reveals at least two details of theoretical significance. First, Cannon’s careful pursuit of less radical reformers suggests that the Speaker considered some portion of the Insurgent membership to be critical to maintaining a Republican majority. In this view, the moderate reformers Cannon targeted were, as individuals, pivotal to the policy outcome. Had they not defected from the bloc, the entire Insurgent group would have been pivotal—the reformers’ unity would have assured Cannon’s defeat.

Second, Cannon’s tactical concession to fracture the Insurgent bloc speaks to the danger of co-optation for intraparty organizations. By incorporating a relatively innocuous part of the Insurgent agenda into Republican doctrine, the Speaker forced the bloc into a quandary: either the Insurgents could require those members who would have been satisfied with Cannon’s concession to stick with their more radical colleagues to secure a better outcome, or the organization could permit members to vote as they saw fit. In either event, Insurgent cohesion was likely to fray considerably, suggesting that

107. *Congressional Record*, 60th Congress, 2nd Sess., 1909, 43, 3570.

108. *Congressional Record*, 60th Congress, 2nd Sess., 1909, 43, 3572. It appears that the Democratic leadership determined that, as a matter of principle, the Insurgents could not be held accountable for dividing over the “concession resolution.” Democratic leaders were sympathetic toward the mild, less radical Insurgents, who, they believed, were bound to support any reform proposal, regardless of its origins.

109. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 49.

co-optation is an efficient strategy for party leaders looking to weaken intraparty organization. However, the Insurgent case also suggests that there are limits to the appeal of co-optation as a means of undermining intraparty organization. As the preferences of mild, less radical members of the intraparty organization diverge farther from those of party leaders, the larger the concession the party will need to offer to break these members' allegiance to the bloc. Additionally, to the extent that an intraparty organization's more radical members are able to keep more moderate concessions off the bloc's agenda, these members can reduce the potential risk of co-optation by party leaders.

Anxious to further fracture the nascent Insurgent-Democratic coalition before the House prepared to adopt new rules, Cannon petitioned President Taft for aid. The Speaker persuaded the president that the Insurgents' proposal for rules reform would destroy the machinery necessary to pass the upcoming tariff bill and other critical Republican legislation.¹¹⁰ Confronting the Insurgent leadership in a meeting at the White House, Taft condemned the bloc for "conniv[ing]" with Democrats "to overthrow the House Organization."¹¹¹ Though the Insurgents tried to assure the president that they had no intention of disrupting the passage of tariff legislation, Taft remained unconvinced.¹¹² Leaving the White House, Nelson described the group's newly formed consensus on Taft: "We realized then that he was against us."¹¹³ Even Democrats marveled at

110. Explaining his position to progressive Republican journalist and newspaper editor White, Taft wrote: "I have got to regard the Republican party as the instrumentality through which to try to accomplish something. When, therefore, certain Republicans decline to go into a caucus, and stand out 30 against 190, it would be the sacrifice of every interest I represent to side with the [I]nsurgents, however much sympathy I may feel with the principle in respect to the House rules that they seek to carry out. Very early in the campaign I thought of encouraging a movement to beat Cannon, but I found that he was so strongly entrenched [*sic*] with the membership of the House that that was impossible. I then tried to secure some modification of the rules, and I am not at all sure that if the [I]nsurgents remained in the caucus we might not do something of the sort, because there were a great many in the caucus who sympathize with the principle; but the difficulty which the thirty [I]nsurgents are going to find, in my judgment, is that Cannon will be able to control enough Democrats to defeat them on the vote, and then they will be left utterly in the hole." Taft to White, March 12, 1909, LOC, White Papers, Box 2.

111. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 18.

112. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 51–53. Whereas Roosevelt had encouraged the fractious progressive elements in the Republican Party, and resented Cannon's tariff policy, President Taft viewed the "test of Republicanism" as "compliance with the party platform." Cannon's expressed commitment to implement the Republican platform—as he professed to Taft: "I am willing to aid you to carry out the party's pledges"—merged the two leaders' interests. Butt, *Taft and Roosevelt*, 303.

113. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, John Mandt Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 18.

Taft's commitment to Cannon and the stand-pat faction of the Republican Party. As a clerk in Clark's office observed: "much pressure is being brought to bear by Cannon and his forces and by Taft, who has gone over bag and baggage to the reactionaries."¹¹⁴

Taft's opposition to the Insurgent bloc fortified Cannon and offered new means to discipline the party's dissenting faction. Indeed, in the days that followed their tense meeting with the president, the Insurgents found that "the whole administration was brought to bear against [them]." The White House threatened to withhold patronage, the Republican National Committee promised to mount primary challenges and limit campaign assistance, and senators from Insurgent states pressed their counterparts in the House to abandon the fight and rejoin the Speaker.¹¹⁵

To Cannon's and Taft's surprise, the Insurgent bloc proved remarkably resistant in the face of the administration's assault.¹¹⁶ In part, as we have seen, the Insurgents' solidarity can be attributed to the support and encouragement of the progressive press, which the reformers had carefully cultivated in the preceding months. The editors of *McClure's Magazine*, *Everybody's Magazine*, *American Magazine*, *The Outlook*, and *Collier's Weekly*—national publications with some of the widest circulations in the country—privately urged the bloc to continue fighting against "Cannonism."¹¹⁷ In print, they excoriated the Speaker and ran in-depth features on Insurgent members, extolling their efforts against Cannon and branding them American patriots. The close vote over the Regulars' legislative calendar resolution further bolstered the Insurgents' resolve to hold together.¹¹⁸ Despite their loss, the Insurgents

114. Bassford to Higgins (and forwarded to Murdock), March 9, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23, Folder "Success Magazine."

115. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 18–19.

116. As Nelson recounted: "Mr. Gardner, Mr. Madison, and myself agreed to stick to the fight but we wondered what the boys would do. One by one the boys dropped in or called up by telephone. I did not find one coward . . . there were no cold feet in the crowd." Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 20.

117. In a joint letter to the Insurgents, the editors stated that their readership exceeds five million Americans across the United States. "News Endorsement," 1909, Wisconsin Historical Society, John Mandt Nelson Papers, Box 10. Writing to Murdock, the editor of *American Magazine* promised: "Some of us periodical men are sending you a round robin of encouragement today by wire. All power to the elbows of you and your fellows in this fight." Phillips to Murdock, March 15, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 22, Folder "Phillips, John S."

118. It may be tempting to think that the Insurgents' greater cohesion is attributable to the group's improved ideological agreement—having lost more moderate members to the Regulars. However, the substance of debates recorded in meeting minutes suggests that "radical" members were not homogenous in their preferences for parliamentary reform. Moreover, there was strong disagreement among the remaining Insurgents over the extent to which the bloc should cooperate with the Democratic minority.

believed themselves well positioned to cast the deciding votes on rules reform.¹¹⁹

Cannon, however, had other plans. While the Insurgents looked forward to victory, the Speaker quietly negotiated a series of backroom deals with Democrats to forge a majority coalition opposed to significant changes in House rules.¹²⁰ The Speaker awarded tariff favors, promised top committee assignments, and agreed to a few minor rules changes that enhanced minority rights in order to secure sixteen Democratic votes against the Insurgent-Democratic resolution amending House procedure, and another seven defectors to enact Cannon's approved rules reform.¹²¹ Using distributive politics to build an alternative cross-party coalition, Cannon reallocated the pivotal votes from the Insurgents to this group of defecting Democrats.¹²²

On March 15, 1909, the Insurgent bloc and Democratic leadership readied for a close—but, they expected, ultimately victorious—fight to adopt new House rules. Their hopes were dashed, however, on the rocks of Cannon's new alliance. After defeating the motion to re-adopt the old rules as planned, Clark proposed a modified version of the Insurgent resolution and moved for a vote on the proposition.¹²³ Although the Insurgents voted as a bloc

in favor of Clark's resolution, the measure nevertheless failed, due to Democratic defection to the Cannon camp.¹²⁴ Following the failure of Clark's resolution, a Democratic defector introduced the rules proposal agreed to by the Speaker, which generally preserved the status quo but granted an extension of some minority rights.¹²⁵ During debate over the resolution, the Insurgents met repeatedly to “conference,” in a last-ditch effort to counter Democratic defections.¹²⁶ Insurgent efforts notwithstanding, Cannon's distributive coalition held together and the measure passed, 211–173, despite uniform opposition from the Insurgent bloc and a majority of Democrats.¹²⁷

Approaching the Insurgent group after the failed vote, Clark apologized to Nelson and the bloc's leadership: “You kept your word—you gave me one more vote than you promised, but I lost [the] Democrats.”¹²⁸

Frustrated by the defeat, the Insurgents nonetheless took heart that their organization remained united throughout the battle.¹²⁹ Had Cannon failed to reorient existing party coalitions to create a new set of pivotal votes, the Insurgents would have controlled the twenty-one votes necessary to maintain the Republican majority and sufficient to turn the balance of power over to the Democratic leadership. Perhaps more important, Clark and his House Democrats had learned that the reformers could deliver on the terms of a future alliance. The minority leader vowed that he would not fumble a second chance to achieve rules reform if one were provided by the Insurgents.¹³⁰

8. REGROUPING THE RANKS, REBUFFING THE REGULARS

Given the tight vote on their resolution, the Insurgents' task was clear: they had to continue to hold together in the face of Cannon's renewed efforts to fragment their organization, while granting Clark sufficient time to whip his coalition into line. With this in mind, the reformers redoubled their efforts to

Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 10, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

119. Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 22.

120. Cannon negotiated deals with two separate factions of the Democratic Party. First, he promised tariff concessions on sugar and other commodities grown in southern delta regions—winning the support of representatives from South Carolina and Louisiana. Second, the Speaker struck a deal with Tammany Democrats, offering several important committee positions in exchange for the group's support.

121. Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 21–22. See also Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 76. According to *Success Magazine*, “Tariff changes were threatened against certain Southern Democrats as the price of their adherence to their party caucus. Valuable committee appointments and rich ‘perquisites’ were offered, and would have been instantly granted to any of the Insurgents or Democrats who would consent to leave his associates in the lurch . . . Threats of vengeance against those who held out were, of course, freely and vigorously made; the form which these threats took being, as a rule, the promised refusal of the Speaker to appoint a recalcitrant to any committee more important than that on Acoustics and Ventilation of the Capitol.” “The Fight Against Cannonism,” *Success Magazine*, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23, Folder “Success Magazine.”

122. Nelson recounted that a reporter covering the Speaker's negotiations with the Democrats told the Insurgents: “When [Cannon and his lieutenants] heard that you had eighteen men present they went into the air. They knew that there were enough who did not attend, being out of town, to make the twenty-four [the Insurgents] needed . . . It was the next day that the Speaker's forces began to work on the Democrats.” Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 20.

123. Clark's proposal called for an expanded Committee on Rules and deprived the Speaker of the power to appoint

committees, as the Insurgent resolution stipulated. By this time, the Insurgent resolution lacked a legislative calendar provision, as it had been passed in some form by the Regulars.

124. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 1st Sess., 1909, 44, 33–34.

125. The Cannon resolution provided for a motion to recommit for the minority party and required a two-thirds vote, rather than a majority vote, to set aside Calendar Wednesday. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 76.

126. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 197.

127. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 1st Sess., 1909, 44, 33.

128. Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 22.

129. Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 22.

130. Bolles, *Tyrant from Illinois*, 180; Nelson to Hechler, “Annotated Interview Notes,” February 13, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 22.

prevent defection from their ranks—abstaining from other divisive policy battles, leveraging their organization to promote the electoral fortunes of loyal Insurgent members, and deploying the press in a new, targeted way to deter disloyalty—in the hopes of holding the group together for the remainder of the 61st Congress.¹³¹

Believing the window for rules reform temporarily closed (at least until the opening of a new Congress), the Insurgents debated the merits of pursuing other progressive policy goals, in particular, tariff reform. Gardner, and more conservative members of the Insurgency, were in strong support of the tariff bill's swift passage, and encouraged the bloc to rally around Cannon's legislation. At the same time, "a few radical Insurgents wanted to use the threat of delaying the tariff as a club to force Taft to support the anti-Cannon movement," and urged the organization to refrain from supporting the House bill.¹³² Unwilling to risk fracturing the bloc over issues tangential to their primary cause, the bloc's Steering Committee advised that the Insurgent organization abstain from the tariff fight altogether. Following the Steering Committee's recommendation, the Insurgents agreed to keep their organization out of the tariff debate and to cease work on rules revision until the pending legislation safely passed.

Like their Insurgent counterparts, Republican Regulars had learned from their near-death experience. Troubled that his continued dominance over the chamber was due only to Democratic defections, the Speaker and his stand-pat allies persuaded Taft to join forces in punishing the party's dissidents, rather than merely reprimanding them for their disloyalty. The White House believed Cannon's growing unpopularity to be a liability, but the Speaker shrewdly exploited the president's growing insecurity that his predecessor, Roosevelt, would use the Insurgency as a platform to challenge Taft for the 1912 Republican nomination. If Taft were unable to quash the Insurgency and unite the Republican Party, Roosevelt would have all the more reason to return to national politics.¹³³ In consultation with the Speaker, Taft denied the Insurgents patronage appointments and funded primary challengers in dissident districts.¹³⁴ In the House, Cannon "cut off the heads of the [Insurgent] Republicans who had chairmanships," assigning one to "the worst committee in the House—the Committee on Ventilation and Acoustics."¹³⁵

131. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 63.

132. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 197.

133. Butt, *Taft and Roosevelt*, 256, 271-273.

134. "To Crush Insurgents," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1910, p. 1; "Without Quarter," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1910, p. II; Joseph Bristow to White, January 5, 1910, LOC, William Allen White Papers, Box 3.

135. Nelson to Hechler, "Annotated Interview Notes," February 13, 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, John Mandt Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 23.

Although scholars dispute the extent and efficacy of the Regulars' disciplinary strategy, the historical record leaves little doubt that the Insurgents both experienced and feared Republican retribution.¹³⁶ Correspondence among House Insurgents suggests that "some fellows were worried a great deal about patronage," while others felt "the old machine crowd . . . growing in activity."¹³⁷ Even the Insurgent leadership acknowledged "the risk of calling a meeting of the House Insurgents" when "[reformist] sentiment here [in Congress] is struggling against the fumes of Chloroform."¹³⁸ Insurgent Rep. William Cary (R-WI) confided to Poindexter: "We are going to be punished for our stand . . . the 'System' is working hard . . . and will spend plenty of money."¹³⁹ Floor speeches and news coverage from the period corroborate these accounts.¹⁴⁰

Faced with Cannon's aggressive counterattacks, the Insurgents' efforts to maintain their organization took on increased urgency. With an eye toward the upcoming primary elections of 1910, the Insurgents continued to use the progressive-affiliated press to stir up anti-Cannon sentiment in their districts. Reaching out to sympathetic members of the press, the Insurgents provided ammunition for the widespread denunciation of the Speaker and his "corrupt system."¹⁴¹ In so doing, they hoped not only to defend their own seats against primary challenges sponsored by the Republican machine, but also to make it increasingly untenable for Taft to support Cannon. These anti-Cannon jeremiads

136. See Keith Krehbiel and Alan Wiseman, "Joseph G. Cannon: Majoritarianism from Illinois," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26 (2001): 357-89; Eric D. Lawrence, Forrest Maltzman, and Paul J. Wahlbeck, "The Politics of Speaker Cannon's Committee Assignments," *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (2001): 551-62.

137. Nelson to Hechler, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5-7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10; Murdock to White, December 27, 1909, LOC, White Papers, Box 2.

138. Nelson explains that not every Insurgent faced the same kind or level of threat: "Not very much pressure was exerted on me personally, although Casson, Watson and Babcock [Republican whips] told me adroitly and in a nice, joshing way what the consequences of my bolting would be. The Regulars regarded men like Cooper and myself as definitely lost and not worth any amount of persuasion; they were interested in the weak fellows." Nelson to Hechler, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5-7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10; Murdock to White, December 9, 1909, LOC, White Papers, Box 2.

139. William J. Cary to Poindexter, October 21, 1909, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 9, Folder "C Special Correspondence."

140. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3320-23. Addressing the House, Cooper described the Insurgents' predicament: "If, in the House, a member votes against rules adopted by the caucus his political destiny is in the hands of the Speaker. He can be punished by the Speaker for voting against the rules adopted by a caucus . . . [the Speaker] can punish them, discredit them in the eyes of their constituents, lessen their influence on this floor, coerce them into doing his will."

141. Rufus Rockwell Wilson to Poindexter, October 7, 1909, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 9, Folder "W-Z Special Correspondence." See also Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 79.

afforded an additional benefit: in Nelson's words, the Insurgents could use "these powerful organs of public opinion . . . in bringing wayward members back into the [I]nsurgent ranks."¹⁴²

The shift in public sentiment occasioned by Insurgent maneuvering prompted some Republican Regulars to consider "whether it would not be more expedient to support the Insurgent fight against Cannon."¹⁴³ The Regulars hoped that, by dropping Cannon and thus appeasing the Insurgents, the party might present a more united front against Democrats in the 1910 elections. Public opinion was such that even Taft began to weigh the cost of his allegiance to the Speaker.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, the public relations campaign lessened the Regulars' capacity to criticize the Insurgents' efforts publicly, improved the bloc's ability to remain unified, and defrayed the political cost to individual reformers of rebellion.

To supplement the work of the press, the reformers initiated a collaborative campaign to defend Insurgent seats. Members routinely drafted letters of support and requested the same from their colleagues. These letters were then published in district news outlets and circulated more broadly within the community as evidence of a particular member's Insurgent bona fides.¹⁴⁵ Insurgent legislators also travelled regularly to their fellows' districts to give speeches and rally local elites to the anti-Cannon cause.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the reformers organized a wide-ranging campaign finance program, in which members donated surplus funds to colleagues identified by the Insurgent leadership as particularly in need of assistance.¹⁴⁷ With nearly unanimous participation from the bloc's twenty-odd members, the Insurgents' electoral collaboration represented an increasingly important aspect of their organization. It is important to note, however, that collaboration to defend Insurgent seats did not take place

independently of the group's broader efforts. Indeed, there is no evidence that these types of activities took place prior to the summer of 1909 or after the collapse of the Insurgent organization in the aftermath of its success.¹⁴⁸

As the Insurgent campaign moved into the fall of 1909, the group turned to the press with a new aim, distinct from its broader campaign to foster public opposition to Cannon. Here, the group focused on members "who were pledged to stand against Cannon and didn't," legislators like Rep. Charles Townsend (R-MI)—a "cold foot" defector who, having declared himself against Cannon and for "revision and liberalizing of House rules" in his 1908 election campaign, permanently abandoned the Insurgency after the Calendar Wednesday vote.¹⁴⁹ Insurgent leaders collaborated with friendly progressive editors to make clear to the public that "leading Insurgents felt that Mr. Townsend had virtually deserted their cause and gone over to the 'Cannonites' in the final 'show-down,'" and that "in voting he was neither with the [I]nsurgents nor with the [R]egulars—he just straddled."¹⁵⁰ The press attacks against Townsend were so fierce that he was forced to explain why, "at a critical stage of the contest in his own party to curtail the power of the speaker, [he] deserted to the speaker's forces," and to defend his actions in a series of interviews and editorials printed in locally circulating newspapers and magazines.¹⁵¹

148. The one exception to this generalization is that members of the Insurgency who joined the Progressive Party in 1912 continued to collaborate on electoral matters. As I argue elsewhere in this article, the Progressive Party itself can be seen as an outgrowth of Insurgent activity.

149. In 1908, Townsend declared: "What the country demands is a revision of rules . . . I am in favor of rules reform and shall do everything to accomplish that end." "Townsend Is Out for Senatorship," *The Independent*, December 3, 1908, University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library (BHL), Charles Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. See also Mark Sullivan to Murdock, March 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23; "Townsend of Michigan for Speaker," Arthur Capper, November 19, 1908, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

150. Higgins to C. H. Edgar, December 9, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23. "Townsend Did Not Gain Many Friends," *Big Rapids Pioneer*, March 19, 1909, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. Writing for the *Cedar Springs Liberal*, editor George A. Link declared: "Congressman Townsend has disappointed his friends by a painful lack of candor in his attitude Monday at the organization of the new House. He has been applauded by good citizens everywhere for his stand for freedom from the Cannon despotism, and his pitiful flop when it came to a showdown has amazed and shocked those citizens who place liberty and popular rights above party expediency." George A. Link, *Cedar Springs Liberal*, March 17, 1909, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

151. Townsend also called upon several Democratic congressmen to vouch for his Insurgent bona fides. "Stands By Townsend," in *The Daily News*, December 1909, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; "Indignant at Townsend's Foes," in *The Adrian Times*, December 1909, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; "Is Mr. Townsend a Progressive?" in *The Detroit Patriot*, December 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23; "Townsend Wins Another

142. Nelson to Hechler, "Miscellaneous Interviews," February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 8.

143. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 63–64. Atkinson, *The Committee on Rules*, 76–78.

144. Butt, *Taft and Roosevelt*, 222–23.

145. In a recent article, Miller and Squire note that some Insurgent participants in the Cannon Revolt were motivated principally by electoral concerns, rather than a strong commitment to the cause of rules reform. Their analysis comports with the account presented here—in short, that the electoral benefits of association with the Insurgent cause could be substantial given certain district characteristics. Susan Miller and Peverill Squire, "Who Rebelled? An Analysis of the Motivations of the Republicans Who Voted Against Speaker Cannon," *American Politics Research* 40 (2013): 387–416.

146. Poindexter to R.L. Farnsworth, October 3, 1909, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 9, Folder "F Special Correspondence"; Poindexter to Bartlett Sinclair, October 27, 1909, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 9, Folder "S Special Correspondence."

147. Asle J. Gronna to Poindexter, July 2, 1910, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 13; Poindexter to G. G. Ripley, February 25, 1910, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 11; Deed H. Meyer to Poindexter, July 13, 1910, UWSC, Poindexter Papers, Box 12.

In criticizing Townsend's actions, the Insurgents did not expect to draw the errant congressman back into their fold. Rather, the Insurgent leadership hoped to make an example of Townsend—to “start a backfire in his district”—and thus deter future defections by the bloc's remaining members.¹⁵² For those members still wavering on the fringes of the Insurgent organization, Nelson recounted that the Steering Committee “built fires underneath them through the newspapers in their districts, and induced certain of their constituents to bring pressure to bear upon them, and as a result they stayed with us.”¹⁵³ Combining the power of the press and shrewd electoral maneuvering, the Insurgents held their ground together throughout the summer and fall of 1909, demonstrating a continued resolve to implement rules reform both to their Republican antagonists and potential Democratic partners.

Having withstood the Regulars' barrage, the Insurgents could now bring their coalition of pivotal votes to bear in the investigation of Taft's Secretary of the Interior, Richard Ballinger. In November 1909, a series of magazine reports were published alleging that Ballinger had engaged in illegal activities to permit and conceal the sale of land slated for conservation by the U.S. Forestry Service. In January 1910, the House voted to appoint a special committee to investigate the matter. On January 7, as the chamber debated a resolution authorizing the investigatory committee, Norris offered an amendment requiring that the House, rather than the Speaker, elect the proposed committee's members. The amendment carried, 149–146, with twenty-six Insurgents joining the Democrats to subdue Cannon's forces.¹⁵⁴ Meeting the next day, the Insurgents agreed that they would insist on the appointment of one of their own to the committee and would also refuse to allow Cannon's most loyal aides to be seated.¹⁵⁵ Eager to avoid a public battle, Taft assured the Insurgents that their views would receive full consideration. The bloc succeeded in getting an Insurgent appointed to the committee, and when the Regulars threatened to reject two of the Democratic nominees, the reformers forced a compromise.¹⁵⁶ The size and resilience of the Insurgent bloc privileged the group during negotiations with the president and the

Republican caucus, giving it, in Gardner's words, “the advantage of trading with the Regulars.”¹⁵⁷

Over the next several weeks, the Insurgents continued to meet to discuss the results of the investigatory committee and the prospect for future rules reform. Concerned that the public might confuse the progressive reformers' alliance with the Democrats and the group's involvement in the investigation with its primary, *Republican*, aim of parliamentary reform, the bloc agreed that all rules resolutions ought to be proposed by a Republican Insurgent. To make this distinction clear to the public, the Insurgents drafted a statement to be circulated in their districts explaining their “single purpose.”¹⁵⁸ The bloc also considered strategies to counter Taft's repeated charge that the Insurgents sought to delay progressive legislation with rules reform, debating how to “emphasize to the country that [they] were not obstructing . . . consideration [of such reform,] but endeavoring to bring [it] up.”¹⁵⁹ During discussion of rules reform, the Insurgents further debated the merits of expanding the Committee on Rules, but came to little agreement.¹⁶⁰ With “tacit agreement in our group that no resolution be sprung suddenly,” the Insurgents settled in for the long wait to the opening of the 62nd Congress.¹⁶¹

9. AN UNEXPECTED VICTORY

“The break came before we expected it.”¹⁶² On March 17, 1910, Norris submitted the resolution that would ultimately undo Cannon's control of the Rules Committee. By all accounts, Norris alone recognized that Cannon's ruling on constitutional privilege provided a window of opportunity to present the Insurgents' sought-after parliamentary reforms on the House floor. Indeed, the congressman's astute procedural move caught his fellow reformers unawares. The substance of his proposal, however, was quite familiar to them: the so-called “Norris Resolution” was an amended version of the internal resolution passed by the Insurgent organization in 1909, outlining the substance of the group's preferred rules changes.¹⁶³ Moreover, to secure passage of

Victory,” in *The Detroit News*, March 2, 1909, BHL, Townsend Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

152. Higgins to Murdock, December 8, 1909, LOC, Murdock Papers, Box 23.

153. Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 8.

154. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 404.

155. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 8, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10.

156. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 64–65.

157. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 8, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 2.

158. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 10, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 3.

159. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 31, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 2.

160. Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” January 8, 1910, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 1.

161. Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10.

162. Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 10.

163. The Congressman had amended the proposal to reflect the passage of components of the reformers' agenda that the Speaker had successfully co-opted. Specifically, Norris removed the provision establishing legislative calendar days.

“his” resolution, Norris relied crucially on the Insurgency’s hard-won alliance with the Democratic minority. In short, the congressman’s entrepreneurial efforts directly followed from the work and strategy of the Insurgent organization.

As soon as it became clear to the House that Norris had struck a critical blow for parliamentary reform by bringing to the floor the Insurgent resolution, the Republican leadership sought to parry the congressman’s procedural move. The Regulars objected, arguing that the proposal ought not to fall under the Speaker’s expanded notion of privilege. In the debate that followed, the Insurgents marshaled their forces to defend the resolution and Norris’s right to propose it. In an effort to secure Democratic support, Poindexter began the Insurgents’ line of defense with the argument that rules reform “is of greater importance for the minority than it is for the majority.”¹⁶⁴ To impress upon the House the necessity of limiting the Speaker’s power, Cooper called upon Murdock, Norris, and Fowler to describe the punishment Cannon meted out as a consequence of their rebellion.¹⁶⁵ Minority Leader Clark and his deputies endorsed the resolution and offered a litany of parliamentary precedents in support of Norris’s view of constitutional privilege. Without sufficient votes on the floor to defeat the Insurgent-Democratic coalition, the Regulars frantically deployed members to corral those colleagues absent from the chamber. In an effort to obstruct this mobilization, the Insurgents refused Republican demands for a recess, badgering the House Sergeant-at-Arms to bar legislators from leaving the chamber on the grounds that a quorum had to be maintained.¹⁶⁶

Unable to immediately muster sufficient numbers to assure their majority, the Regulars were forced to negotiate with the Insurgent bloc and Democratic leadership to reach a compromise. Initially, the Regulars proposed that the Rules Committee be expanded to allow the Speaker to retain his seat on the committee. Adamant that the Speaker relinquish control over House rules, the Insurgents refused the plan. In the hopes of luring remaining moderate reformers from the Insurgent ranks, the Regulars offered a “gentleman’s agreement” that the Speaker would not sit on the new committee. This potentially divisive offer was also rebuffed. The Regulars returned with an offer to further expand the proposed committee to fifteen legislators, so long as the Speaker would remain a member. Again, the Insurgents insisted that Cannon’s removal from the Committee on Rules was nonnegotiable.

Hamstrung by the Speaker’s command that under no circumstances should his deputies capitulate on his committee membership, the Regulars had little choice but to yield on everything else—agreeing to the entire Norris resolution, on the condition that Cannon remain on the Rules Committee. Pressing their advantage, the Insurgents leveraged their bloc of pivotal votes to win complete concession. If Cannon refused to relent, the Insurgents threatened, the bloc would give up negotiations and join the Democrats to pass the Norris resolution in its entirety. Summarizing the bargaining dynamic, one Regular lamented: “They didn’t offer us anything; I think we’ll be beaten.”¹⁶⁷ Unwilling to believe that some favorable compromise could not be reached, and ever hopeful that further delay would provide sufficient time to muster Republican supporters to vote down the rules change, Cannon insisted that negotiation continue.¹⁶⁸

Though in a strong position to bargain with the Regulars, the Insurgents were forced to modify the proposed resolution to meet Democratic demands. The minority leadership persuaded the bloc to strike the provision requiring that the Committee on Rules be geographically representative. They also persuaded the Insurgents to reduce the size of the proposed committee from fifteen to ten members, a suggestion previously made by the Regulars but rejected by the bloc. While the Democrats conceded that the Speaker must be barred from sitting on the newly constituted Rules Committee, they stipulated that the Speaker’s power to assign members to other standing committees remain intact. Though the Insurgents opposed these changes, the bloc had little choice but to accept the Democrats’ requests. For Norris, “The Democrats knew their votes meant victory . . . we could not win this fight without agreeing to the Democratic proposal . . . as bitter as the dose was, we must take it.”¹⁶⁹

In contrast to the Insurgents’ pivotal status within the Republican coalition, the group lacked sufficient leverage to dictate the terms of the resolution to House Democrats. Without the minority party’s votes, the Insurgents knew that parliamentary reform of any sort would be impossible to achieve. Similarly, the Democratic minority understood they would get little reform without the Insurgent bloc. However, the Democratic leadership saw an advantage in preserving “Cannonism” as a campaign issue and believed it possible to displace Republicans in the next election. Consequently, they were not entirely opposed to the status quo. Indeed, the Insurgents believed there was some likelihood that Clark would renege on the reformers’ cross-party alliance

164. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3296–97.

165. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3304.

166. Atkinson, *The Committee on Rules*, 106–7.

167. Hechler, *Insurgency*, 70–72.

168. Bolles, *Tyrant from Illinois*, 217.

169. Norris, *Fighting Liberal*, 117–18.

for just these reasons. In this view, the Insurgents' capacity to maintain their pivotal status, and obtain favorable policy outcomes, was crucially limited by the actions and incentives of the minority party.

Negotiations having deteriorated, Cannon accepted that he had little recourse but to rule that Norris's claim to constitutional privilege and his resolution were out of order. And as expected, Cannon's decision was overturned 182–163, with the Democrats and Insurgents voting solidly against the Speaker.¹⁷⁰ Then, voting on the amended resolution favored by the minority leadership, the House passed the rules change, 191–156, again with the Insurgent-Democratic coalition holding sway.¹⁷¹ As the last of the votes were tallied, the Insurgents congratulated themselves. Where haphazard individual effort had failed, intraparty organization had succeeded—empowering the Insurgent reformers to negotiate with leaders of both parties to extract policies more favorable than the status quo. Against all odds, they had successfully forged an alliance with the Democratic minority, overwhelmed the Republican machine, and forced concessions on rules reform.¹⁷²

Though the reformers' intraparty organization fragmented in the immediate aftermath of the Cannon Revolt, the bones of the Insurgency were resurrected a decade later to serve similar ends. At the close of the 67th Congress in December 1923, progressive Republicans once again mobilized in favor of rules reform and in opposition to their party's choice for the Speakership. Despite efforts by Republican leaders to dissipate their resistance, the reformers demonstrated remarkable unity, opposing the Speaker in nine ballots on the chamber floor and forcing House leaders to allow full debate on rules changes in return for their votes. As was the case during their fight against Cannon, the reformers' success can be attributed to their organizational efforts. Just as their colleagues had a decade prior, the reformers appointed a cadre of leaders to serve as the organization's vanguard and met regularly in conference to plan strategy and articulate the substance of their desired parliamentary changes. Perhaps not surprisingly, these efforts produced a similar political dynamic. Indeed, as Schickler

170. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3428.

171. *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1910, 45, 3436. Joining the Insurgents were a score of formerly stand-pat Republicans—legislators who had previously refrained from participating in the rules fight because of their unwillingness to break party bonds.

172. As Schickler argues, however, the substance and outcome of this reform effort reflected the competing interests of the Insurgent-Democratic coalition. Though the Insurgents succeeded in removing Cannon from the Rules Committee, Democratic interests precluded further reform of the sort the bloc had initially advocated. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 83.

argues, this “formal organization among the progressive Republicans enabled them to stay together through the long series of roll calls on the speakership, and to select leaders to negotiate a settlement.”¹⁷³ Adopting more theoretical terms, we can observe that this second Insurgency proved successful precisely because the dissidents—like their predecessors—found a way to coordinate their defection and discourage potential free-riding.

10. REVISITING THE SPEAKER'S FALL

Although the 1910 parliamentary reforms were more modest in scope and effect than their advocates had initially hoped, the Cannon Revolt was nonetheless an extraordinary episode in congressional development.¹⁷⁴ In the face of a seemingly intractable status quo, progressive members of the Republican Party devised an institutional arrangement powerful enough to overcome the Speaker's vast political machine and revise House rules. Between 1908 and 1910, the Insurgent reformers developed mechanisms to encourage consistent participation, cohesive strategy, and individual electoral and political security. In uniting members behind a common plan of action, the Insurgents were able to establish their sought-after alliance with the Democratic minority. Having secured cross-party cooperation, the reformers presided over a coalition sufficient to break the Speaker's hold on the House. Absent their organization, it is unlikely that individual reformers would have successfully drafted or passed new procedures to govern chamber activity.

Insurgent organization provides an excellent example of the strategic benefit and substantive influence of intraparty organization. And, as this account demonstrates, there is much to be gained from the study of intraparty dynamics. First, students of legislative politics have long highlighted the role of the majority party in driving congressional development, but little attention has been paid to the ways in which intraparty groups—like the House Insurgents—can durably reshape their political environment.

Second, the Insurgents' campaign to achieve rules reform makes clear that coordination and organization are not the purview solely of majority party leaders, but are also integral to the success of dissident blocs. Analyzing intraparty organization allows us to advance the debate over the power of “parties versus pivots” by incorporating a dynamic dimension. By focusing on the need for strategic action among potentially pivotal members of Congress, we can better understand when congressional pivots will be

173. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 106–7.

174. Nelson to Hechler, “Miscellaneous Interviews,” February 5–7, 1939, WHS, Nelson Papers, Box 10, p. 11; Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism*, 81.

able to fully exercise their authority over party leaders and when, by contrast, party leaders will be able to fully control their rank and file.

Third, the Insurgents' reliance on the Democratic minority to implement rules reform suggests that intraparty power is conditioned by an interparty dynamic. Specifically, the extent to which the Insurgents were pivotal was bounded by their ability to credibly threaten to work against the interests of their own party by defecting to the opposition. Simply put, a legislator is pivotal only if she can threaten to leave, and a legislator can only threaten to leave if she can credibly work with the other party. Drawing from the Insurgent case, had the Democratic leadership expressed hostility to reformers' aims, the bloc would have had difficulty persuading the Speaker that its threat to ally with the minority was credible. Consequently, in understanding the conditions under which legislators are likely to influence their party's agenda, we must account for each party's willingness to collaborate with its opposition's dissident membership.

Finally, an emphasis on intraparty politics reveals that political parties are not the only organizations that matter in Congress. In fact, the Insurgents' successful pursuit of parliamentary reform suggests that intraparty organization may be a critical means of securing responsiveness in both congressional *and* partisan institutions. In this respect, the Insurgency functioned as a "pseudo-party." Not only did the Insurgents secure rules reform, but they gave an early voice to the progressive elements of the national

electorate in Congress, working to institutionalize their presence within the confines of the American two-party system and laying the foundation for the formation of the Progressive Party.

APPENDIX: ARCHIVES CONSULTED

Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (BHL). Ann Arbor, MI.

Charles Townsend Papers

Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (LOC). Washington, DC.

Robert La Follette Papers

Victor Murdock Papers

William Howard Taft Papers

William Allen White Papers

New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscript Division (NYPL). New York, NY.

James Schoolcraft Sherman Papers

Special Collections Library, University of Washington (UWSC). Seattle, WA.

Miles Poindexter Papers

Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS). Madison, WI.

John Mandt Nelson Papers