

The Fate of Moderate Party Factions

Stephen K. Medvic
Franklin & Marshall College

Paper prepared for the “Going to Extremes” Conference, The Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences, Dartmouth College, June 19-21, 2008.

The Fate of Moderate Party Factions

Is there a place for moderates in the Democratic or Republican Party? A sufficient answer to this question turns on our understanding of its two central terms, namely, “place” and “moderates.” To take the latter first, a “moderate” is one whose attitudes place him or her near the center of the ideological spectrum.¹ The term, then, concerns ideology (or, perhaps, policy preferences or values) and not partisanship. Though many moderates are likely to be Independents, many others affiliate with one of the two major parties.

The second term, and the more important one for this paper, is “place.” What does it mean for moderates to have a *place* in the parties? Herein, I take the term literally and, as such, examine institutional structures within the parties from which moderates might operate. In this paper, those structures are referred to as “factions” and the subject of the paper is moderate party factions.

Historically, ‘faction’ was synonymous with ‘party’ and neither term had positive connotations (Scarrow 2006, 16-17). As distinctions between factions and parties began to be drawn, however, it was factions that were left with a negative image. For instance, Edmund Burke, one of the first to distinguish between the two, viewed parties as vehicles for pursuing the national interest and factions as groups of men seeking self-interest

¹ The precise meaning of the term “moderate” will not be of interest in this paper. It should be noted, however, that there are at least two ways to conceptualize “moderates.” On the one hand, they could be individuals who generally split the difference between liberal and conservative positions on specific policies; that is, their preferred policy position is somewhere between the liberal and conservative positions. On the other hand, moderates may balance a set of liberal positions on some issues with conservative positions on others. Both ways of conceptualizing moderation leave aside the possibility that it is simply a valence term. In other words, moderation may describe one’s emotional attachment, or level of commitment, to one or another side in a political debate.

(Sartori 1976, 9). The relative lack of attention afforded factions by political scientists over the years may well be a vestige of these early treatments of the phenomenon as a corruption of the common good.

But factions deserve scholarly consideration. Indeed, they are commonly thought to be the driving force behind everything from party nominations and electoral support to policy initiatives and, ultimately, success in governing. Nonetheless, they do remain an understudied aspect of American politics. Beller and Belloni's (1978a) assessment of the place of factions and factionalism in the literature of thirty years ago could just as easily apply today – "Despite the frequent use of these words, the study of the politics of factionalism has not been highly developed" (3).

This paper, then, focuses on factions generally and on moderate factions specifically. One goal of the paper is simply to better understand what factions are. Ideally, one would also be able to operationalize 'faction' in such a way as to identify the factions in both parties without *a priori* assumptions about which ones exist. As a review of the literature on factions will make clear, however, this is much more easily said than done. Nevertheless, I will attempt to find organizational structures in the two parties that can be characterized as factions, according to the standard definition, and then to offer empirical evidence of their ideologies. Finally, I will briefly address the question of which party is more hospitable to moderates and will speculate on the fate of moderate factions in contemporary American politics.

Definitions of 'Faction'

Political activity is very often explained in terms of coalitions (Riker 1962). Whether it is an examination of campaign strategy or a discussion of the maneuvering necessary to win passage of legislation, analysts inevitably point to the coalitions that drive political processes. So central are coalitions to politics that the late political scientist Barbara Hinckley wrote, “politics in general may be justifiably defined as the process of coalition formation” (Hinckley 1981, v).

Among the most obvious sites of coalition activity are political parties (Polsby 1981, 156). Indeed, parties themselves have been described as “long coalitions” (Aldrich 1995, 34; see also Eldersveld 1964, 6-8). That is, parties endure over time as associations of separate groups that give their support to the broader organization (or party), both in elections and in public opinion polls between elections.²

Assuming, then, that a political party is a coalition of groups that offer their support to the coalition (in order, perhaps, to increase the likelihood of achieving their own goals), it would be useful to take a moment at the outset of this paper to understand the nature of such groups and their support. The groups themselves may be organized, as are interest groups or legislative caucuses, or they may be unorganized clusters of individuals, such as ethnic groups, who simply share an attitudinal or behavioral preference for one party over the other. Typically, when we refer to organized groups, we are referring to elite actors since activists undertake the initial organizing efforts as

² This is hardly meant to be a comprehensive definition. It omits, in particular, any reference to what political parties do, such as seeking “to elect government officeholders under a given label” (Epstein 1980, 9). However, the conceptualization of political parties employed herein does not conflict with more functional definitions.

well as most of the groups' pursuits once organized. Unorganized groups consist of non-elites, or segments of the mass electorate. Thus, in discussing the place of African-Americans in the Democratic Party coalition, we may have in mind either African-American voters or civil rights organizations (or both). Though this is an obvious point, it will be useful to keep the distinction in mind as we examine party factions more closely below.

The level of support that groups offer a particular party also distinguishes them. Thus, there are those whose support cannot be ensured or who lend their support tentatively. These groups may back a party in a given election, but may just as easily withdraw their support between elections or support another party at the next election. Voters who fit this category are routinely referred to as "swing voters" (Mayer 2008). Organized groups could theoretically act as "swing interests," but organizations tend to be quite committed to one party or the other.

Indeed, most interest groups and many voters offer on-going support to a particular party. Collectively, these core supporters are referred to as the "base" of the party; they can be counted on to "predictably and loyally" support their party (Kilgore 2008). Of course, any group within the base can abandon the party at any time, but only the most severe disagreements provoke such defections.

At what point, however, do groups within a party become 'factions'? Surprisingly, this question has not been addressed in the literature to the degree that one might expect. Nevertheless, some scholars have recognized the importance of factions for understanding parties generally. And most of the conceptual definitions of 'faction' that do exist share one very important element in common, as we will see.

For V.O. Key, Jr. (1949), a faction is “any combination, clique or groups of voters and political leaders who unite at a particular time in support of a candidate” (16, n.1). This rather narrow definition was fashioned for the purpose of Key’s analysis of one-party politics in the mid-20th Century American south. According to Key (1958), factions emerge in the absence of inter-party competition (318). Thus, in one-party states, “factions... play the role assigned elsewhere to political parties” (1949, 298). The factional systems that develop as a result “in reality seem to be party systems within the dominant party” (1958, 320). The implication is that factions are less relevant (or, perhaps, non-existent) when two-party competition is robust.

Others, however, have recognized the important role played by factions even (or especially) in multiparty systems. Duverger ([1951] 1954) suggested that “restricted” (or non-totalitarian) parties “are composed of members whose ideas and points of view are not absolutely identical in all their details” (120). Though individuals are free to maintain their own unique combination of views, there are also collective, or communal, differences within parties; that is, “there are factions and wings more or less organized” that “take on a fairly distinct doctrinal tone” (120). Thus, Duverger seems to take the presence of factions (again, in non-totalitarian parties) for granted.

Zariski (1960), expanding upon Key’s definition, maintained that a faction is “any intra-party combination, clique, or grouping whose members share a sense of common identity and common purpose and are organized to act collectively – as a distinct bloc within the party – to achieve their goals” (33). There are, Zariski explained, three requirements that must be met if a faction is to exist: there must be a sense of *commonality* among faction members, including shared “characteristics, interests, and

aspirations;” a certain level of *coordination*, or “formalized interaction and joint consultation;” and *persistence* over a “minimum time-span,” which may be as short as a campaign or a fight over a piece of legislation (34; emphasis mine).

Both Duverger and Zariski make passing reference to organization as an element of factions. Some scholars, however, make this a defining characteristic of a faction. Richard Rose (1964), for instance, reserved the term ‘faction’ for groups of legislators “who seek to further a broad range of policies through consciously organized political activity” (37). A ‘tendency,’ on the other hand, is a set of attitudes, based on a “more or less coherent political ideology,” that happens to be shared by individuals (37). The difference between a faction and a tendency, according to Rose, is that the former is “self-consciously organized as a body, with a measure of discipline and cohesion thus resulting” (37). And though Rose applied his terms to parliamentary parties in Britain, others, including Angelo Panebianco (1988, 38-9), apply the organized/unorganized dichotomy to all intra-party groups.

After reviewing competing conceptions of the term “faction” and settling on a “flexible and relative” definition, Beller and Belloni (1978b) identified three “modal types of factions” (419): factional cliques or tendencies; personal/clientelist factions; and institutionalized factions (419-20). The first of these are unorganized groups of like-minded individuals. Because voters in the United States who share certain tendencies are unorganized, the cleavages in the electorate that many political scientists study fall into this category (see, for example, Manza and Brooks 1999a). Many of the party machines that have existed throughout American history exemplify the second type of faction identified by Beller and Belloni. Here, there is “true organization, in the specialized form

of the unique, personally recruited and maintained bond of leader and follower” (420). Finally, institutionalized factions are those that are highly organized and for which the primary motivation of the organization is not centered on a personality but on common interests (whether ideological or material; 427).

This review of the literature suggests that the critical element, conceptually, in defining the term ‘faction’ is a relatively high degree of organization. Without organization, a sub-group within a party may reflect a ‘tendency,’ but regardless of how committed it might be to the party, it would not constitute a faction. The value of organization to a faction is that it provides a structure from which to operate. That is, resources can more easily be mobilized when a group of like-minded individuals is organized. The result is a greater level of influence within the party than a group would otherwise be able to exert.

Identifying Factions

If factions have been somewhat neglected by political party scholars generally, they have been virtually ignored by scholars interested in American political parties. As Nicol Rae (1998) argues, “American party factions have proven to be elusive, and thus resistant to analysis” (41). This is primarily “because of the highly fluid and decentralized nature of American parties” (Ibid). Citing Rose, Rae contends “it is evident that the loose and porous nature of American parties has prevented party factions from developing the levels of organization, discipline, and durability characteristic of party factions in other Western democracies” (Ibid.). Others, however, have found that it is

precisely the decentralized nature of American parties that make them less coherent, and thus more factionalized, than parties in most of the rest of the world's competitive democracies (Janda 1980a, 354).

Regardless of the relative level of factionalism in U.S. parties, it is commonly believed that factions do exist within those parties. Even Rae (1998) acknowledges that U.S. factions “resemble the general type closely enough to merit the designation ‘faction’” (42). But how, exactly, are we to identify those factions? As Kenneth Janda (1980b) put it, “The main fact in assessing factionalism is, of course, determining the sheer *existence* of a faction” (120).

Making that determination, it turns out, is far more difficult than one might expect. Ordinarily, we would operationalize the term ‘faction’ in order to identify factions in the two parties. But an operational definition of the term ‘faction’ is virtually nonexistent. The International Comparative Political Parties (ICPP) Project, established in 1967, sought (among many other things) to measure party “coherence” by using six variables, four of which were types of factionalism (Janda 1970, 110-111). Ideological factionalism was said to exist when a party “is divided into labeled factions, of approximately equal strength, that favor different ideological orientations” (110). Precisely what it meant for a faction to be “labeled,” how similar in strength factions had to be in order to be considered “equal,” and how one might recognize the ideological orientation of factions was not made clear.

In addition to ideological factionalism, the ICPP Project also accounted for issue, leadership, and strategic or tactical factionalism (111). For all four types of factionalism, a 7-point scale was employed (Janda 1980b, 120); Box 1 reproduces the scale for

{Box 1 here}

ideological factionalism. To code for these variables, analysts reviewed literature on political parties in 53 countries. Analysts applied “quality control” to the coding process by producing “adequacy-confidence” ratings for each variable and by asking country-specific experts to review their results (Ibid, 13-18). This rigorous measurement of various aspects of political parties surely enhanced the data’s reliability. But it must be noted that the analysts were dealing primarily with descriptive literature. Thus, they relied on impressions, however well-informed, of those observing parties in the various countries.

This, then, is the difficulty in identifying party factions – we are left to rely upon *a priori* assumptions about which factions already exist as part of a party’s coalition. Religious conservatives and business interests are said to be critical elements within the Republican Party; labor and various identity or single-issue groups are central to the Democratic Party’s coalition. But do these elements actually constitute factions? Are they the only factions in the parties? How would we identify others? Along what lines are factions drawn in the parties?

One solution to this problem is to study voting cleavages or coalitions based in the electorate. The work of John Petrocik (1981; 1987; 2007) and of Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks (1999a; 1999b) takes this approach (see also Beck 2003 and Pew Research Center 2005, among many others). But while such cleavages are central to understanding the parties’ popular bases of support, they are not factions according to the commonly held definition (as summarized earlier).

An alternative is to look to elite organizations to find factional divisions within the two parties. Such organizations may include interest groups or legislative (e.g., congressional) caucuses. The factions themselves, however, can take a variety of forms, as Janda's work suggests. To reiterate, the ICPP project recognized ideological, issue, leadership, and strategic or tactical factionalism.

Rae has argued that factions in the United States have been either clientelistic or ideological (1994, 6-26). Clientelistic factions "are oriented toward particular constituencies or regional interests and seek to maximize some material gain for their adherents" (Rae 1998, 42). Ideological factions, on the other hand, are based on disagreements over the party's policy orientations and are usually divided according to doctrinaire and pragmatic approaches. According to Rae, factional politics in the United States has been primarily ideological since the New Deal era (Ibid.).

In this paper, we are concerned only with ideological factions, since the factional grouping of primary interest is moderates. But to examine such factions, we must focus on elite organizations. This focus is not meant to suggest that voters are unrelated to factional politics. Indeed, some sub-sets of voters are closely linked to factions. Unfortunately, such connections are not always discernable. Furthermore, it is not always clear just how such factions linking voters to elites are to be classified in terms of their ideology. For instance, organized labor is obviously part of the Democratic Party's coalition. But the extent to which labor constitutes a faction within the party, the link between labor voters and labor leaders, and the precise ideological location of "labor" are anything but obvious.

Contemporary American Factions

Nelson Polsby offered a typology of party factions at the beginning of what we may now call the Reagan Era. He identified two factions in the Republican Party and three in the Democratic Party. Republicans, according to Polsby (1981), continued at that time to be divided between two wings – Main Street and Wall Street – that had “always” existed (160). Main Street Republicans “were thought to embody homely American virtues of self-reliance and frugality, and therefore to oppose entanglements abroad and big government at home” (161). As traditionalists, this faction was generally thought to be the more conservative of the two groups. Wall Street Republicans, on the other hand, were modernists who were concerned primarily with policies that encouraged economic development.

In the Democratic Party, factional politics were based on internationalism, the welfare state, and civil rights. The “New Left” within the party was anti-interventionist, pro-affirmative action and somewhat ambivalent about welfare. Traditionalist Democrats had close ties to organized labor, were committed Cold Warriors, defenders of the welfare state and were indifferent or somewhat opposed to affirmative action. Finally, the Wallaceites, or what we might call conservative Democrats, opposed civil rights, disliked welfare and were stridently anti-Soviet (165).

Some years later, Nicol Rae (1998) traced the changes in party factions by identifying factions in the 1946-1952 period as well as those in the 1990s. In the earlier period, Rae found two factions in the Republican Party that correspond to those found by Polsby. Rae called them “Stalwarts” (Polsby’s “Main Street Republicans”) and

“Liberals” (Polsby’s “Wall Street Republicans”) (48). In the Democratic Party, Rae described four factions. “Radicals” were the precursors to the New Left; they opposed the Cold War, favored civil rights and supported social democratic policies. “Liberals” were in agreement with the Radicals about everything but the Cold War. “Regulars” supported the Cold War and government programs but were less enthusiastic about (though not opposed to) civil rights. Finally, “southerners” preferred limited government, opposed civil rights and communism (45).

By the 1990s, it was the Republicans who had developed four factions, according to Rae. “Traditional Republicans” were culturally conservative, favored small government and were unilateralists in foreign policy. “Supply-side Libertarians” enthusiastically favored small government and, especially, tax cuts, were culturally moderate and were multilateralists in foreign affairs. The “Religious Right” consisted of those who were culturally conservative, favored a “values-based diplomacy” and generally supported what they considered family-friendly public policies. Finally, “Populist Conservatives” were protectionist and isolationist, nationalistic, and culturally conservative, (64).

Democratic Party factions had been reduced to two by the 1990s. The “Neoliberals” were culturally liberal, multilateralist in foreign policy and relatively moderate economically (e.g., they favored free trade and balanced budgets). “Radical Minorities” were also multilateralist in foreign policy but were culturally radical (rather than merely liberal) and favored government programs and protectionism (65).

For each of the factions Rae described, he identified its “party power base.” With respect to the factions of the 1990s, Rae suggested the power bases listed in Table 1.

{ Table 1 here }

Some of these power bases are primary voters; others are elected officials like governors; still others are institutions like Congress or the media. Because few of the power bases Rae identified can be considered organized in any way, the validity of the factions he named can be questioned.

For our purposes, an additional complication is that the ideological make-up of Rae's factions is unclear. Populist Conservatives are undoubtedly conservative on cultural issues, but take what are considered liberal positions on some economic issues. Supply-siders are economically conservative but are either socially liberal (or moderate) or are simply uninterested in social issues. And what to make of foreign policy? Democratic factions may, at first glance, appear as moderate (Neoliberals) and liberal or leftist (Radical Minorities). But, at least as of the 1990s, distinctions on foreign policy were hard to draw and both were left of center on cultural issues (though how far left was thought to distinguish the two groups). It appears, then, that the real difference was economic. But is that enough to label one faction "moderate" and the other "liberal"?

These attempts to characterize factional politics in American parties are useful, but are ultimately unsatisfactory if we apply the standard definition of faction found in the literature. What is required is an examination of organized groups that can be considered factions. In order to qualify for inclusion, then, a group must be organized and must have an identifiable ideological perspective.

So where might we find such groups? One type of organization that has the potential to function as a faction is the think tank. Think tanks, of course, are often defined by their ideology. The mission of the Heritage Foundation, for example, "is to

formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”³ On the left, the Center for American Progress describes its values and ideals as “progressive.”⁴ But while a think tank’s ideological perspective creates an affinity for one of the two major parties, think tanks rarely affiliate with political parties.

Like think tanks, many lobbying organizations advocate from general ideological points of view. Thus, the American Conservative Union (ACU) states that its “purpose is to communicate and advance the goals and principles of conservatism through one multi-issue, umbrella organization...”⁵ Similarly, but from the opposite end of the spectrum, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) claims to be “America's most experienced independent liberal lobbying organization.”⁶

Few such advocacy groups, however, explicitly link themselves to a political party. Interestingly, one that does is a moderate organization. The Ripon Society “is a Republican public policy advocacy organization representing all Americans through moderate, progressive policy formation that uphold traditional common sense Republican principles...”⁷

On the Democratic side, the Progressive Policy Institute, which is associated with the centrist Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), was founded on

the belief that America is ill-served by an obsolete left-right debate that is out of

³ <http://www.heritage.org/about/> (accessed May 20, 2008).

⁴ <http://www.americanprogress.org/aboutus> (accessed May 20, 2008).

⁵ <http://www.conservative.org/about/default.asp> (accessed May 19, 2008).

⁶ <http://www.adaction.org/pages/about.php> (accessed May 19, 2008).

⁷ <http://www.riponsociety.org/mission.htm> (accessed May 19, 2008).

step with the powerful forces re-shaping our society and economy. The Institute advocates a philosophy that adapts the progressive tradition in American politics to the realities of the Information Age and points to a "third way" beyond the liberal impulse to defend the bureaucratic status quo and the conservative bid to simply dismantle government.⁸

There is no mention on its website of its affiliation with the Democratic Party, but the connections are not hard to find. Another “progressive think tank and advocacy organization” with implicit ties to the Democratic Party is NDN (formerly the New Democrat Network).⁹ Though its founder had been associated with the DLC, NDN began to focus on a “new governing agenda, new media and technology and new demography” during the 2004 presidential election.¹⁰ The governing agenda it supports may be moderate, but the emphasis on new media and technology (and, to some extent, the new demography) is non-ideological.

Think tanks and advocacy organizations do not overtly affiliate with a political party for several reasons. To begin with, as 501 (c) 3 or (c) 4 organizations, they are not allowed to engage in campaign activities. Furthermore, there is no need to explicitly acknowledge what is widely assumed – liberal organizations prefer the Democratic Party and conservative organizations prefer the Republican Party. Interestingly, the two or three moderate think tanks/advocacy organizations I have identified either openly declare their partisanship (i.e., the Ripon Society) or have some connection with a party through

⁸ http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=87&subsecID=205&contentID=896 (accessed May 28, 2008).

⁹ <http://www.ndn.org/about/> (accessed May 19, 2008).

¹⁰ Ibid.

their name (i.e., NDN) or the name of their affiliate organizations (i.e., the Progressive Policy Institute and the DLC).

Two additional centrist organizations consist primarily of elected officials at the local, state and national level. The DLC was established in 1985 as an “unofficial party organization” (Hale 1995, 215; 207). Today, the DLC considers itself “...an idea center, catalyst, and national voice for a reform movement that is reshaping American politics by moving it beyond the old left-right debate.”¹¹ On the Republican side, the Republican Leadership Council (RLC) “...advocates for the historic Republican principles of liberty, individual responsibility, and personal freedom... [but] allows for diverse opinions on social issues by its members.”¹²

Perhaps the most obvious place to find factions within the parties is in Congress. Recall that in his classic article on factions, Rose (1964) reserved the term ‘faction’ for groups of like-minded legislators. As he defined it, a faction is “a group of individuals based on representatives in Parliament who seek to further a broad range of policies through consciously organized political activity” (37). If ideological factions exist in the parties at all, we should expect to find them in Congress.

The Democrats currently have two congressional organizations that differentiate themselves from the party’s liberal orthodoxy and one that seeks to reinforce that orthodoxy. In the House of Representatives, the New Democrat Coalition is a recognized congressional member organization (or caucus) consisting of moderate Democrats while the Blue Dog Coalition is home to moderate and self-proclaimed conservative Democrats. The Congressional Progressive Caucus is a liberal organization within the

¹¹ http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ka.cfm?kaid=86 (May 19, 2008).

¹² <http://www.republican-leadership.com/aboutus> (May 19, 2008).

House (though it includes one member of the Senate). Centrist Republicans do not have an organization that is exclusively congressional, but there are members of the Republican Main Street Partnership in the House and Senate. No organized group of self-described conservatives exists for congressional Republicans.

One of the hallmarks of organization is leadership and the Democratic ideological organizations in the House have clearly identifiable leaders. The New Democrat Coalition has a Chair (currently Ellen Tauscher, CA-10) and four Vice-Chairs, while the Blue Dog Coalition has chairs for Administration, Policy, and Communication as well as a Whip. The Progressive Caucus has two co-chairs and six vice-chairs. The Republican Main Street Partnership has no congressional leadership, but does have a Board of Directors. Unlike the other ideological organizations discussed herein, however, the Main Street Partnership has state chapters (currently numbering 13).

We might ask whether membership in these organizations actually reveals distinct ideological perspectives or is largely symbolic. Because this paper is primarily interested in centrist organizations, Table 2 presents the 2007 mean *National Journal* liberal composite scores for each of the self-proclaimed moderate organizations in Congress – and for those who are not members of these organizations - in descending order from most liberal to most conservative.¹³ These scores reveal that, for the most part, these

{ Table 2 here }

groups are ideologically differentiated. The most liberal group is Democrats who are neither New Democrats nor Blue Dogs. The next most liberal group is New Democrats who are not also members of the Blue Dog Coalition; just behind them are all New

¹³ Data are from *National Journal*, “2007 Vote Ratings,” March 7, 2008, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/voteratings/> (accessed March 7, 2008).

Democrats, including those who are also Blue Dogs. Those Democrats who are only Blue Dogs are the most moderate Democrats and have a *National Journal* liberal composite score only slightly higher than the House median. Main Street Republicans, as we would expect, are considerably less conservative than their non-Main Street counterparts.

If we were to define “moderate” as having a score between 35 and 65 (as *National Journal* does), the Main Street Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats would both qualify as centrist organizations. New Democrats, however, would fall just to the left of the centrist range and New Democrats who are not also Blue Dogs would be considerably outside that range with a mean of 71.22. In fact, when Democratic members of the Progressive Caucus (who have a liberal composite score of 84.33, n=66) are isolated, the mean liberal composite score of the Democrats who are not members of any ideological faction (n=77) is 73.95, just over two points more liberal than the “New Democrat only” group.

In earlier work (Medvic 2007), I found some measures of ideology (namely, DW-NOMINATE scores and *National Journal* economic policy scores) to significantly predict membership in the House New Democrat Coalition but others (namely, ADA scores and *National Journal* social policy scores) not to have done so.¹⁴ Interestingly, it was also the case that members of Congress were significantly less likely to be New Democrats as their vote share in the previous election increased. Put another way, the

¹⁴ *National Journal* foreign policy scores also significantly predicted membership in the New Democrat Coalition, but did so in an unexpected way. The more *liberal* a member’s foreign policy score, the more *likely* he or she was to be a New Democrat. In the article, I speculate that this finding reflects an internationalist-isolationist split in the party at the time the data represents (i.e., the 106th Congress of 1999-2000; Medvic 2007, 603).

more vulnerable a member's seat, the more likely he or she was to be a New Democrat.¹⁵ That may simply mean that centrists (who would naturally become members of the New Democrat Coalition once elected) are more likely to win in marginal districts. But it could also mean that centrist organizations like the New Democrat Coalition provide members in swing districts with a plausible claim to ideological moderation and, as a result, they join to give themselves electoral cover.

Table 3 reports the results of logistic regression analysis of membership in the {Table 3 here} New Democrat Coalition, the Blue Dog Coalition, the Progressive Caucus, and the Republican Main Street Partnership. The results suggest that members' ideology significantly predicts their membership in each of the factional organizations. The more liberal a representative's *National Journal* score, the less likely he or she is to become a New Democrat or a Blue Dog but the more likely he or she is to become a Progressive Democrat or a Main Street Republican.

Electoral considerations also seem to have an influence for all groups except the Blue Dogs. The member's own share of the vote in the previous election predicts membership in the New Democrat Coalition; the lower the vote share, the more likely the member is to become a New Democrat. For Progressive and Main Street Republicans, President Bush's vote share in 2004 is the significant predictor. As Bush's share of the vote increased in a given district, the representative was less likely to be a Progressive Democrat or a Main Street Republican.

¹⁵ It should be noted that Seo and Theriault (2007) found vulnerability to be unrelated to whether or not members of Congress join the New Democrat Coalition and the Republican Main Street Partnership.

Clearly more analysis, using an expanded set of factors, needs to be done in order to determine which members are most likely to join ideological groups in Congress and to explain why they do so. But the preliminary analysis conducted here suggests, at a minimum, that there are discernable moderate factions, at least within Congress, in both parties. The next section of this paper directly addresses the question posed at the beginning of this paper; namely, is there a place for moderates in the Democratic or Republican Party?

A Place for Moderates?

The previous analysis suggests that there is a place for moderates in the two parties. But that does not mean there is an equal amount of space in those parties. Is either of the two parties more hospitable to moderates? Any number of crude measures might be used to answer this question, though no single measure can be relied upon in and of itself. Taken as a whole, however, these indicators may suggest an answer.

For instance, respondents to the 2004 American National Election Study find the Democratic Party to be more moderate than the Republican Party. The mean response to the question, “Where would you place the Democratic party on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?” was 4.09, while the mean response for the Republican Party was 6.68.¹⁶ That is, the Democratic Party is thought to be .91 points to the left of center while the Republican Party is 1.68 points to the right of center.

¹⁶ Variables 5260 and 5261 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems items in the post-election survey of the 2004 American National Election Study, Survey Documentation and Analysis, University of California, Berkeley, <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+nes2004p> (accessed June 2, 2008).

Of course, both parties fall within what might be considered a centrist range of 5.0 ± 1.84 points (or 3.16 to 6.84).¹⁷ But the Democratic Party is safely in the range while the Republican Party is barely within it. On the other hand, the mean left-right self-placement (v5271) for respondents was 5.83. Thus, the Republican Party is viewed as closer (+.85) to the average person than is the Democratic Party (-1.74).

The centrist organizations in the Democratic Party appear to be more established, or at least more recognized, than those in the Republican Party. A Lexis-Nexis search for references to the names of each of the centrist organizations reveals that the Democratic organizations received more mention during the past two years.¹⁸ Whereas the Republican Ripon Society was mentioned in 45 stories, the New Democrat Network appeared in 233.¹⁹ Furthermore, while 1188 references were made to the DLC, the RLC received only 61. And though Blue Dogs were mentioned 692 times, the Republican Main Street Partnership was mentioned only 179 times.²⁰ On the other hand, 1049 references were made to the American Conservative Union while only 271 were made to the liberal Americans for Democratic Action.

Within Congress, moderate organizations have more of a presence in the Democratic Party than in the Republican. The New Democrat Coalition and the Blue Dog Coalition both have congressional leadership structures, while the Main Street Republicans do not. And while 37 percent of House Democrats are either New

¹⁷ This assumes that the centrist range is one-third of the entire 11-point scale, or 3.67 points. Half of 3.67 is 1.84; thus the centrist range around the mid-point of 5.0 is 3.16 to 6.84.

¹⁸ LexisNexis Academic search of U.S. newspapers and wires for previous two years, conducted on June 2, 2008.

¹⁹ A search for “NDN and Democrat” turned up 143 mentions.

²⁰ The New Democrat Coalition garnered 181 mentions.

Democrats or Blue Dogs, only 20 percent of Republicans are members of the Main Street Partnership.²¹

Finally, we might note that Democrats have had a fairly public debate about the role of centrists - or more precisely, centrism – in the party in recent years. The argument between the left and the center was fairly intense in the 1990s as the DLC rose to prominence during the Clinton presidency (Baer 2000). That argument continues to the present in one form or another (Bai 2007). The 2005 election for the Democratic National Committee chair, for example, reflected it (at least in part, though strategic and tactical considerations were of primary concern). More telling was the Democratic Hill committees' recruitment of centrist candidates to run for the House and Senate in 2006. That move produced great consternation among many liberal bloggers (see Bendavid 2007, 87-91). But the success of centrist House candidates like Heath Schuler in North Carolina and Harry Mitchell in Arizona, as well as moderate Senate candidates like Jim Webb in Virginia and Jon Tester Montana appear to have vindicated the centrist-friendly recruitment strategy.

Thus, while there is more factionalism in the Democratic Party – illustrated both by the aforementioned debate within the party and by the existence of the Progressive Caucus in addition to the two self-identified centrist organizations – than in the Republican Party, that very factionalism may well mean that moderates have more space among Democrats than among Republicans. Nevertheless, there are moderate

²¹ It should be acknowledged, however, that we had earlier raised some doubt about the centrist character of the New Democrats based on their mean *National Journal* liberal composite scores. Since 20.35 percent of Democrats are Blue Dogs, the number of Democrats and Republicans who are members of their undeniably centrist organizations in the House is, therefore, equal.

organizations in both parties. However, the strength of those organizations and their futures in the two parties is uncertain.

Conclusion – The Fate of Moderate Factions

Duverger ([1951] 1954) wrote that “the centre does not exist in politics: there may well be a Centre party but there is no centre tendency, no centre doctrine” (215). Because he believed in the “duality of tendencies,” Duverger thought that all political decisions required a choice between two alternatives. Thus, “Every Centre is divided against itself and remains separated into two halves, Left-Centre and Right-Centre. For the Centre is nothing more than the artificial grouping of the right wing of the Left and the left wing of the Right” (Ibid.). This is not, of course, to deny the existence of moderates. Indeed, Duverger argued, “inside all parties there are moderates and extremists, the conciliatory and the intransigent, the diplomatic and the doctrinaire; the pacific and the fire-eaters” (230).

Today, the incentives for ideological polarization at the elite level are intense. And the relatively low levels of political participation among moderates in the general public – whether as measured by volunteering for campaigns, contributing money to candidates, or even voting – give centrist voices less influence than their numbers may suggest they deserve. The result, of course, is that moderate factions suffer from a lack of resources – both in terms of money and energy – and struggle to compete with more ideological “pure” factions, which attract enthusiastic support.

In this paper, I have argued that there is a place for moderates in the two parties. That place may currently be larger in the Democratic Party, but centrists can find a home in both parties. And yet the extent to which such places will continue to exist in our ideologically charged age is unclear. As Duverger's comments above suggest, there may always be moderates in political parties, but the center of the ideological spectrum is not an easy space to occupy.

Box 1 – Ideological Factionalism Scale, International Comparative Political Parties (ICPP) Project

0 = Ideological concerns are not subject to public debate and disagreement among party leaders.

1 = Ideology is a matter of public debate and disagreement among party leaders but not enough to promote factional tendencies.

2 = Ideology is a matter of debate and disagreement, factional tendencies are present, but factions are not clearly distinguished in the sense of labeled groupings with identifiable membership.

3 = Ideological concerns have created a ‘small’ faction within the party, but the faction does not have a formal organization of its own.

4 = Ideological concerns have created a ‘small’ faction within the party with some formal organization of its own or have provoked a split after the beginning of the period.

5 = Ideological concerns have created a ‘large’ faction within the party – ‘large’ defined as about 25 percent of the membership or more – but the faction does not have a formal organization of its own.

6 = Ideological concerns have created a ‘large’ faction within the party with some formal organization of its own or have provoked a split after the beginning of the period.

Source: Janda (1980b, 120).

Table 1 – Rae’s Factional Power Bases

Party Factions	Party Power Base
<i>Republicans</i>	
Traditional Republicans	Congress; State and Local Parties
Supply-Side Libertarians	Northeastern Governors; National Media
Religious Right	State and Local Parties; Party Caucus Participants
Populist Conservatives	Presidential Primary Voters; “Flash” movements
<i>Democrats</i>	
Neoliberals	Presidential Primary Voters; Governors
Radical Minorities	Caucus Participants; Congress; State and Local Parties

Source: Rae (1998, 64-65).

Table 2 – 2007 Mean *National Journal* Liberal Composite Scores for Ideological Organizations in the U.S. House of Representatives

Faction	Mean <i>National Journal</i> Liberal Composite Score (with range)
Democrats (non-members) n=143	78.74 (52.7 – 95.0)
New Democrats only n=38	71.22 (50.5 – 94.0)
New Democrats n=58	67.01 (45.8 – 94.0)
Blue Dogs n=47	56.99 (43.5 – 77.8)
Blue Dogs only n=27	55.49 (43.5 – 76.7)
<i>House median</i>	50.75
Main Street Republicans n=40	36.77 (20.2 – 48.3)
Republicans (non-members) n=154	19.86 (6.7 – 44.5)

Source: *National Journal*, “2007 Vote Ratings,” March 7, 2008, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/voteratings/> (accessed March 7, 2008).

Table 3 – Logistic Regression Results for Membership in Centrist Congressional Organizations

	New Democrats		Blue Dog Dems.		Progressive Dems.		Main St. Repubs.	
	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.
Bush vote in district	-.024	.024	.052	.040	-.088***	.024	-.141*	.060
Vote share previous election	-.044**	.016	-.010	.019	-.013	.017	.000	.050
<i>NJ</i> Liberal Composite score	-.043*	.018	-.117***	.032	.095***	.023	.169***	.032
Constant	6.115*	2.740	4.654	4.178	-4.036	2.722	1.933	3.092
% Correct	77.5		88.5		81.9		88.1	
Nagelkerke R ²	.15		.53		.50		.60	
N	227		227		227		193	

*** Significant at .001.

** Significant at .01.

* Significant at .05.

Bibliography

Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

Baer, Kenneth S. 2000. *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press).

Bai, Matt. 2007. *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics* (New York: The Penguin Press).

Beck, Paul Allen. 2003. "A Tale of Two Electorates: The Changing American Party Coalitions, 1952-2000," in *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, 4th ed., eds. John C. Green and Rick Farmer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).

Beller, Dennis C. and Frank P. Belloni. 1978a. "The Study of Factions," in *Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Frank P. Belloni and Dennis C. Beller (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio).

Beller, Dennis C. and Frank P. Belloni. 1978b. "Party and Faction: Modes of Political Competition," in *Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Frank P. Belloni and Dennis C. Beller (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio).

Bendavid, Naftali. 2007. *The Thumpin': How Rahm Emanuel and the Democrats Learned to Be Ruthless and Ended the Republican Revolution* (New York: Doubleday).

Duverger, Maurice. [1951] 1954. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: John Wiley & Sons).

Eldersveld, Samuel J. 1964. *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis* (Chicago: Rand McNally).

Epstein, Leon D. 1980. *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books).

Hale, Jon F. 1995. "The Making of the New Democrats." *Political Science Quarterly* 110: 207-32.

Hinckley, Barbara. 1981. *Coalitions and Politics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

Janda, Kenneth. 1970. *A Conceptual Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Political Parties* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications).

Janda, Kenneth. 1980a. "A Comparative Analysis of Party Organizations: U.S., Europe, and the World," in *The Party Symbol*, ed. William J. Crotty (San Francisco: Freeman).

Janda, Kenneth. 1980b. *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey* (New York: The Free Press).

Key, V.O., Jr. 1949. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Vintage Books).

Key, V.O., Jr. 1958. *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell).

Kilgore, Ed. 2008. "Are Swing Voters Worth the Trouble? Can Democrats Win With Base Mobilization Alone?" *The Democratic Strategist Roundtable*, http://www.thedemocraticstrategist.org/strategist/2008/02/are_swing_voters_worth_the_tro.php, February 18.

Manza, Jeff and Clem Brooks. 1999a. *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and U.S. Party Coalitions*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

Manza, Jeff and Clem Brooks. 1999b. "Group Size, Turnout, and Political Alignments and the Development of U.S. Party Coalitions, 1960-1992." *European Sociological Review* 15: 369-389.

Mayer, William G., ed. 2008. *The Swing Voter in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).

Medvic, Stephen K. 2007. "Old Democrats in New Clothing? An Ideological Analysis of a Democratic Party Faction," *Party Politics* 13: 587-609.

Panbianoo, Angelo. 1988. *Political Parties: Organization & Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Petrocik, John R. 1981. *Party Coalitions: Realignments and the Decline of the New Deal Party System* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Petrocik, John R. 1987. "Realignment: New Party Coalitions and the Nationalization of the South." *Journal of Politics* 49: 347-375.

Petrocik, John R. 2007. "Party Coalitions in the American Public: Morality Politics, Issue Agendas, and the 2004 Election," in *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, 5th ed., eds. John C. Green and Daniel J. Coffey (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).

Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. 2005. "Beyond Red vs. Blue: Republicans Divided About Role of Government – Democrats by Social and Personal

Values,” <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=943> (accessed May 13, 2008).

Polsby, Nelson W. 1981. “Coalition and Faction in American Politics: An Institutional View,” in *Party Coalitions in the 1980s*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies).

Rae, Nicol C. 1994. *Southern Democrats*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

Rae, Nicol C. 1998. “Party Factionalism: 1946-1996,” in Byron E. Shafer, ed. *Partisan Approaches to Postwar American Politics* (New York: Chatham House).

Riker, William H. 1962. *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Rose, Richard. 1964. “Parties, Factions, and Tendencies in Britain,” *Political Studies* 12: 33-46.

Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Scarrow, Susan E. 2006. “The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Modern Political Parties: The Unwanted Emergence of Party-Based Politics,” in *Handbook of Party Politics*, eds. Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

Seo, Jungkun and Sean M. Theriault. 2007. “Moderate Caucuses in a Polarized Congress.” Paper presented at the 2007 Midwest Political Science Association meeting, Chicago, April 12-15.

Zariski, Raphael. 1960. “Party Factions and Comparative Politics: Some Preliminary Observations,” *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 4: 27-51.