Risky Business: The Strategic Timing of Bipartisanship in Congress

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Abstract

Why has bipartisanship persisted in Congress despite rising partisan polarization? Existing approaches largely treat bipartisanship as a question of *whether* legislators cooperate across party lines, overlooking a consequential dimension of that cooperation: *when* it occurs. We argue that legislators strategically time cross party support to manage the competing costs and benefits of bipartisan participation. Original out-party cosponsors join legislation at introduction, often help develop the bill, and are among the first members of the opposing party to cross the aisle. In doing so, they bear the greatest political risks of bipartisan participation. Other legislators can reduce those risks by waiting until coalition growth provides political cover and legislative developments signal greater viability, while still claiming bipartisan credit for eventually joining. We call this behavior *strategically delayed bipartisanship*. Drawing on elite interviews with members of Congress and their staff and more than 2.4 million cosponsorship decisions across 147,669 House and Senate bills from 1983 to 2024, we develop a new measure that distinguishes strategically delayed from original bipartisan participation. Strategic delay is most common when the partisan costs of crossing the aisle are highest: among minority-party members, in the House, and on more partisan issues. It is also more common among electorally vulnerable and ideologically moderate legislators, for whom a bipartisan reputation should be electorally valuable. Among vulnerable legislators, strategic delay is associated with stronger subsequent electoral performance. However, legislators who engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship subsequently attract fewer original out-party cosponsors for their own bills and exhibit lower legislative effectiveness. Therefore, we reconceptualize bipartisanship as a dynamic, strategic choice about *when* legislators cross party lines, showing how legislators can capture the electoral rewards of bipartisanship while avoiding many of the political risks of leading bipartisan cooperation.

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Few developments in the contemporary Congress are more puzzling than the persistence of bipartisanship amid intense partisan polarization. Over recent decades, the parties have become increasingly ideologically distinct, internally unified, and electorally competitive (Theriault 2008; Lee 2016; Pierson and Schickler 2024). Under these conditions, legislators should have strong incentives to avoid helping the opposing party govern. Yet existing research largely finds that bipartisanship has remained remarkably persistent (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020). If partisan conflict has become a defining feature of contemporary American politics, why has bipartisanship in Congress remained so resilient?

We argue that part of the answer lies not simply in *whether* legislators cooperate across party lines, but in *when* they choose to do so. Cross-party cooperation can advance legislation, build legislative relationships, and cultivate electorally valuable bipartisan reputations, but helping the opposing party can also expose legislators to substantial partisan costs. Crucially, these risks and rewards change as legislation develops and coalitions form. As a result, legislators can reduce the costs of cross-party cooperation by delaying their support until the political environment surrounding a proposal becomes more favorable, while preserving many of the benefits of eventually joining. Existing approaches to defining and measuring bipartisanship obscure this strategic use of timing. Measures that treat all out-party cosponsorship decisions as equivalent collapse early and later participation (e.g., Harbridge 2015; Rippere 2016; Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie 2018; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Amoroso 2025; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026), while measures based exclusively on original out-party cosponsorship omit later participation altogether (Curry and Roberts 2023, 2025; Porter, Harden and Dobson 2025; Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson and Lollis 2026).

Original and delayed out-party cosponsorship represent distinct forms of bipartisan participation. Some legislators participate in the costly work of developing legislation, negotiating across party lines, and building the initial bipartisan coalition around a bill. We refer to this behavior as *original bipartisanship*. One House member explained that original cosponsors are often involved

before a bill is fully written and typically get "[to] be a part of this process, of the text."[1] Existing scholarship similarly describes original cosponsorship as "akin to coauthorship on an academic paper" (Curry and Roberts 2025, p. 1544).

Other legislators ultimately support out-party legislation but delay their cosponsorship until the political and legislative environment surrounding a proposal becomes more favorable. Our interviews with members of Congress and their staff identify three reasons this delay can be strategically attractive. As existing coalitions grow, legislators gain political cover for crossing party lines. As bills advance, signals of legislative viability reduce uncertainty about the consequences of joining. And because legislators can still claim bipartisan credit after joining later, delay need not eliminate the reputational benefits of cooperation. One Republican House member recalled that, even when he supported an out-party bill, his staff sometimes advised him to wait rather than become the first—or even the second or third—Republican to join. As he summarized the calculation: "There is safety in numbers."[2] We refer to this behavior as *strategically delayed bipartisanship*.

We test this argument using more than 2.4 million cosponsorship decisions across 147,669 bills introduced in the U.S. House and Senate between the 98th (1983) and 118th (2024) Congresses. We introduce a new measure that distinguishes original from strategically delayed bipartisanship by incorporating both the timing of out-party cosponsorship and the extent of coalition formation when legislators join. Duration models demonstrate that strategically delayed cosponsorship becomes more likely as existing out-party coalitions grow and is disproportionately concentrated on bills that demonstrate legislative viability, matching the political-cover and viability mechanisms identified in our interviews. The substantive analyses support our theoretical expectations. Legislators engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship when the partisan risks of cross-party cooperation are greater—when serving in the minority party, in the House, and on highly partisan legislation. They also rely more heavily on strategic delay when bipartisan credentials should be especially electorally valuable: when they are electorally vulnerable and ideologically moderate. Among vulnerable legislators, strategic delay is associated with improved subsequent electoral

[1] *INT002*
[2] *INT002*

performance. But legislators who rely more heavily on delayed support subsequently attract less original out-party support for their own legislation and exhibit lower legislative effectiveness.

Treating *timing* as part of the strategic choice to cooperate across party lines changes how we understand the persistence of bipartisanship in Congress. It distinguishes legislators who undertake the politically costly work of building bipartisan coalitions from those who join once those coalitions become safer and more viable, and it reveals that the two forms of participation emerge under different political conditions and are associated with different electoral and governing outcomes. Most importantly, the persistence of bipartisanship documented in existing research masks a striking transformation in its form: original bipartisan coalition building has declined sharply over the past four decades, particularly in the House, while strategically delayed bipartisanship has slightly increased. Bipartisanship, in other words, has persisted even as legislators have become less willing to bear the risks of leading it. By revealing this distinction, we show how legislators can capture many of the political rewards of crossing party lines without assuming the greatest costs of initiating bipartisan coalitions—and why not all forms of bipartisanship contribute equally to effective governing.

Competing Incentives for Bipartisan Cooperation

The strategic importance of timing arises from the competing incentives legislators face when cooperating across party lines. Bipartisan cooperation can help legislators govern, build legislative relationships, and appeal to constituents, even as it exposes them to partisan pressures against helping the opposition. These competing incentives help explain why bipartisan cooperation remains a persistent feature of congressional lawmaking despite increasingly polarized parties and intense competition for majority control (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020). Bill cosponsorship provides an important venue for this cooperation, allowing legislators to signal support for out-party proposals and build coalitions before legislation reaches the floor (Harbridge 2015). Existing scholarship identifies two primary benefits of bipartisanship: it facilitates governing and can yield electoral rewards for legislators.

Bipartisanship remains important for governing because Congress's institutional structure of-

ten requires broad coalitions to enact policy. Bicameralism, shared powers, and multiple veto points create incentives for legislators to work across party lines despite partisan disagreement (Binder 2003; Krehbiel 1998; Mayhew 1991). Cross-party support can reduce resistance from pivotal actors, facilitate committee and floor action, and improve legislators' ability to advance their sponsored bills through the lawmaking process (Brady and Volden 1998; Ryan 2020; Ballard and Curry 2021; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023). Legislators who cultivate bipartisan relationships are consequently more effective lawmakers, while the broader coalitions they construct may also produce more durable policy (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Maltzman and Shipan 2008).

Legislators also have electoral incentives to appear bipartisan. Voters often express support for cross-party cooperation and may punish legislators they perceive as excessively partisan or ideologically extreme (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson, Koger, Lebo and Young 2010; Harbridge, Malhotra and Harrison 2014; Wolak 2020). Experimental evidence suggests that citizens have greater confidence in Congress when they perceive it as bipartisan and that independents and weak partisans are more supportive of legislators who cultivate bipartisan reputations (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Wolak 2020). Candidates appear to recognize these incentives: nearly half of first-time congressional candidates since 2013 have campaigned on promises of bipartisan lawmaking, and those who do so subsequently engage in more bipartisan behavior once in office (Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Moreover, bipartisan *appeals* can increase constituent support and reduce perceptions of ideological extremity even when the underlying legislation receives little meaningful out-party support, suggesting that voters may reward the *appearance* of bipartisanship even in the absence of substantial bipartisan cooperation (Westwood 2022). As a result, legislators have electoral incentives not only to cooperate across party lines, but also to cultivate reputations for doing so.

These governing and electoral benefits coexist with powerful partisan pressures against cooperation. Legislators belong to parties competing for majority control, and helping the opposing party govern through bipartisan cosponsorship can blur partisan distinctions, strengthen the oppo-

sition's governing reputation, and weaken their own party's case for majority control (Lee 2009, 2016). Therefore, bipartisanship creates a strategic tension for legislators: cross-party cooperation can help them make policy, build relationships, and appeal to constituents, but it also exposes them to political costs from party leaders, partisan constituencies, and electoral opponents. We argue that *timing* provides one way to navigate this tension because the risks and rewards of bipartisan participation change as legislation advances and coalitions form.

The Dynamic Risks and Rewards of Bipartisanship

The risks of bipartisan participation are especially acute at the outset of the legislative process. Becoming an original out-party cosponsor requires a legislator to extend public support to the opposing party before knowing how party leaders, constituents, or other political actors will respond and before the bill's political prospects are clear. Interviews with legislators and congressional staff make these distinctive risks explicit. One staffer explained, "I think you have to separate supporting something from wanting to be publicly associated with it at the moment it is introduced. Those are two different decisions. A legislator may support the underlying policy without being willing to put their name on it on day one."[3] The same staffer explained that party leaders can distinguish between eventually allowing a member to support out-party legislation and having that member help establish its bipartisan coalition at introduction.[4] Original out-party cosponsorship does more than register policy support: it requires legislators to help establish a bipartisan coalition when the political consequences of doing so remain especially uncertain.

Party leaders reinforce these risks. One House staffer explained that party leaders can view cross-party cooperation as conflicting with the party's interest in maintaining power and reported that parties can punish legislators through electoral challenges, fundraising pressure, and the removal of committee assignments.[5] Members describe these threats as credible. One House member recalled a party leader warning him, "I know how much you value that committee chair, that

[3] *INT006*
[4] *INT006*
[5] *INT001*

sub[committee] chair…" when attempting to maintain party unity.[6] A staffer similarly emphasized that such pressure need not be explicit: "Members know who controls the committees, who controls the floor, who controls leadership assignments, who gets resources, and who gets access. You don't necessarily have to explicitly threaten somebody. Members understand the hierarchy."[7] A Democratic House member likewise recalled leadership discouraging him from cosponsoring Republican legislation, particularly when doing so would help a Republican whom Democrats were attempting to defeat electorally.[8] By helping the opposing party establish a bipartisan coalition at introduction, original out-party cosponsors can expose themselves to meaningful partisan costs.

Yet some legislators accept these costs because engaging in original bipartisanship can also generate substantial rewards. One House staffer described the tension between party and constituency incentives: although party leaders may oppose cross-party cooperation, members value bipartisanship in their districts and can return home and tell constituents, "I convinced a member of the other party to see my perspective and support my position."[9] Original out-party cosponsorship can also provide benefits that later participation cannot fully reproduce. A Republican House member explained that original cosponsors are often recruited before legislation is fully written and typically get "[to] be a part of this process, of the text," including by requesting changes before joining.[10] A Democratic House member similarly emphasized the leadership and electoral value of joining early: "Rhetorically, an original cosponsor can go home and say I was the original Democrat on this bill, now there are 80, I was right!"[11] For legislators who sufficiently value these policy, leadership, and electoral benefits, the rewards of original bipartisan participation may outweigh its risks.

Other legislators can manage this tension by delaying their support until the political environment surrounding a proposal becomes more favorable. Our interviews identify three reasons delay

[6] *INT002*
[7] *INT006*
[8] *INT007*
[9] *INT001*
[10] *INT002*
[11] *INT007*

can alter this calculation. First, delay can provide *political cover*. Being among the first members of one's party to support an out-party bill makes a legislator especially visible for crossing party lines, whereas joining after other copartisans have signed on diffuses responsibility for making the proposal bipartisan. One Republican House member described precisely this calculation. Even when he supported an out-party proposal, his staff sometimes "would advise me to wait; to not be the first out-party member, or even the second or third Republican on a bill with a bunch of Democrats." His staff did so, he explained, to prevent him from being "politically blindsided" and to avoid negative reactions from constituents. He summarized the logic: "There is safety in numbers."[12] A Republican staffer described the same mechanism: "Once somebody credible goes first, it gives other people some political cover." As additional members cross party lines, he explained, "the nature of the bill changes" because it becomes harder to characterize the proposal as belonging exclusively to the opposing party once a bipartisan coalition has formed.[13] Therefore, coalition growth changes more than the numerical breadth of support for a bill: it reduces the political exposure associated with any one legislator crossing party lines.

Second, delay allows legislators to observe signals of *legislative viability*. At introduction, it is often unclear whether a bill will attract serious attention, advance through Congress, or ever become politically consequential. A staffer described how that uncertainty changes the meaning of bipartisan support: "There's a difference between supporting a bill when nobody knows what is going to happen and supporting a bill once leadership, the committee, and the relevant stakeholders have basically figured out that some version of this is going to move."[14] A House member described the same process from the legislator's perspective. "Sometimes when a bill is introduced, you don't know the salience of it," he explained. But once the bill reaches the Rules Committee, appears likely to reach the floor, and begins attracting constituent attention, "now is the time to put your name on it."[15]

Viability can change both the costs and benefits of participation. A staffer explained that lead-

[12] *INT002*
[13] *INT006*
[14] *INT006*
[15] *INT007*

ership's position toward cross-party support can itself change as a proposal becomes more likely to advance: once leadership decides that something is "useful or inevitable, the posture toward members can change."[16] Once a bill is likely to advance regardless of an individual legislator's support, withholding that support can do less to deny the opposing party a governing accomplishment. At the same time, joining legislation that is increasingly likely to advance creates a greater opportunity to contribute to policy that may actually become law. Signals of bill viability can, in turn, change both sides of the calculation by reducing uncertainty and the potential partisan costs of joining while increasing the potential governing benefits of bipartisan participation.

Third, legislators who join later can still obtain important *electoral credit*. Later cosponsors sacrifice some of the authorship and leadership credit associated with creating the bipartisan coalition, but they can still point to their participation as evidence of cross-party cooperation. One House party staffer made this distinction particularly starkly: "Members can't claim credit for writing a bill if they aren't original. So, the only purpose it serves to sign on later is re-election. If they didn't author any bills during a term, they could at least say they were on a bill with bipartisan support."[17] The staffer specifically identified the ability to tell voters how many out-party bills a member had cosponsored as one reason legislators might add their names later in the process.[18]

A Senate staffer provided additional evidence that later cosponsorship can be converted into public credit. Once the senator becomes a cosponsor, the office can repurpose the sponsor's public announcement, associate the senator with the bipartisan effort, and generate additional opportunities to publicize that participation as the bill advances.[19] Delayed bipartisanship need not reproduce all of the benefits of original cosponsorship to remain electorally valuable. Legislators can sacrifice some authorship and leadership credit while preserving the ability to demonstrate publicly that they worked across party lines.

Together, these mechanisms explain both why legislators may prefer not to join an out-party bill at introduction and why they may nevertheless have incentives to join later. Coalition growth

[16] *INT006*
[17] *INT001*
[18] *INT001*
[19] *INT009*

can reduce political exposure, legislative developments can make participation less uncertain and more consequential, and later support can still yield electoral credit. Support that is too costly or uncertain at introduction can become attractive later in the legislative process. This dynamic calculus underpins our theory of strategically delayed bipartisanship.[20]

A Theory of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

Prior research establishes that legislators make strategic choices not only about *whether* to take positions or cosponsor legislation, but also about *when* to do so. Legislators may delay position taking when political signals are uncertain or conflicting, while cosponsorship timing can reflect legislative signaling, electoral incentives, and cues from existing partisan and bipartisan coalitions (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold and Zorn 1997; Schilling, Matthews and Kreitzer 2023). We build on this insight by focusing on the distinctive strategic problem created by cross-party cooperation.

Building on our conversations with legislators and their staff, we conceptualize bipartisan support as a choice among at least three alternatives. Legislators can decline to support an out-party proposal altogether, avoiding the political costs of cross-party cooperation but forgoing its governing and electoral rewards. They can participate in *original bipartisanship*, helping construct the initial bipartisan coalition and gaining opportunities to shape policy, demonstrate legislative leadership, and claim credit for building cross-party support while assuming the political risks associated with visibly helping the opposing party at introduction. Or they can delay their support until the political environment surrounding the legislation becomes more favorable.[21] We argue that strategic delay should be most attractive when the partisan costs of original bipartisan participation are

[20]These interviews provide direct evidence about the decision-making processes underlying our argument. We also evaluate two observable implications of those processes systematically. In the Appendix section "Validating Components of SDBS: Political Cover and Legislative Viability," Cox proportional-hazards models examine whether strategically delayed cosponsorship becomes more likely as existing out-party coalitions grow and whether it is disproportionately concentrated on bills that demonstrate legislative viability through committee markup. These analyses test whether the political-cover and legislative-viability conditions identified in the interviews are also reflected systematically in congressional cosponsorship behavior.

[21]In our empirical analysis, we operationalize strategically delayed bipartisanship as out-party cosponsorship occurring at least 30 days after bill introduction, after another out-party legislator has already joined the legislation, and after at least 20 percent of the bill's eventual coalition has formed.

highest but legislators still have something to gain from eventually supporting the proposal.

Partisan Costs of Original Bipartisanship

The partisan costs of original bipartisanship originate in parties' collective competition for power but are borne by individual legislators. In the contemporary Congress, parties have incentives to deny the opposition bipartisan governing accomplishments, maintain clear partisan distinctions, and strengthen their own case for majority control (Lee 2009, 2016). Yet cross-party cooperation may still benefit an individual legislator by advancing preferred policy, maintaining legislative relationships, or appealing to constituents. These interests can diverge: behavior that benefits the individual member may disadvantage the party collectively.[22] Collective party interests enter individual legislators' calculus because leaders, partisan constituencies, organized interests, and electoral opponents can impose political consequences on members who provide the opposition with bipartisan support.[23] As one staffer explained, "You don't necessarily want to prevent members from doing things that are useful for them politically. But you also don't want members independently giving the other party bipartisan validation before you know what the broader strategy is. It can cut both ways."[24]

Strategically timing out-party cosponsorship allows legislators to manage this conflict. Original out-party cosponsors assume greater individual responsibility for providing the opposition with bipartisan validation because they help establish the cross-party coalition at introduction. Later joiners enter after another copartisan has already crossed the aisle and the proposal has already acquired a bipartisan identity, reducing both their marginal contribution to the collective partisan cost and their individual political exposure.[25] As one Senator summarized, "There's real risk in being first. As a practical matter, people are hesitant to cosponsor a bill if they think it's going to hurt them politically."[26] Strategic delay should consequently be most attractive where the partisan stakes of original bipartisan participation—and the individual costs of bearing them—are greatest.

[22] *INT001*; *INT006*
[23] *INT001*; *INT002*; *INT006*; *INT007*
[24] *INT006*
[25] *INT002*; *INT003*; *INT006*; *INT008*
[26] *INT003*

Three conditions should heighten these costs. First, *minority-party legislators* should have particularly strong incentives to delay. The minority party has a collective interest in contesting the majority's governing record and denying it bipartisan accomplishments that strengthen its case for continued control (Lee 2016). An original minority-party cosponsor directly helps the majority establish that its proposal commands cross-party support. Once other minority-party members have joined, however, the majority can already claim bipartisanship. An additional minority-party legislator contributes less to that collective partisan loss while still obtaining the individual benefits of participating.

Second, strategically delayed bipartisanship should be more common in the *House*. Two-year terms and more centralized party organization more tightly connect individual members' behavior to the continuous partisan contest for chamber control. These conditions increase the salience of whether individual legislators help the opposition claim bipartisan governing success. A House staffer similarly described cosponsorship timing as especially consequential around elections and characterized the chamber, in the aggregate, as continuously facing electoral pressure because of two-year terms and staggered primary calendars.[27] Senators face partisan pressures as well, but longer electoral horizons and a less centralized chamber provide greater space for individual relationships and cross-party bargaining.

Third, strategic delay should increase on *highly partisan issues*. Original out-party support is less consequential when legislation does not implicate clear partisan divisions. On issues central to party conflict, in contrast, an original out-party cosponsor can weaken the party's effort to maintain a distinctive position and provide the opposition with especially valuable bipartisan validation.[28] Party leaders, partisan constituencies, and electoral opponents should also have stronger reasons to notice cross-party defections on these issues. Minority status, serving in the House, and cosponsoring legislation on partisan issues therefore identify different circumstances in which helping construct an out-party coalition carries greater collective partisan costs and greater individual political exposure.

[27] *INT001*
[28] *INT001*

H1 (Partisan Costs): Strategically delayed bipartisanship should be more common where the partisan costs of original bipartisan participation are higher: (a) among minority-party legislators, (b) in the House, and (c) on highly partisan issues.

Electoral Rewards of Bipartisan Participation

High partisan costs alone cannot explain strategically delayed bipartisanship. Legislators facing costly cross-party cooperation could simply avoid out-party legislation altogether. Delay becomes attractive when legislators also have something to gain from ultimately participating. In particular, later cosponsorship lets legislators preserve an individually valuable bipartisan reputation after others have borne more of the costs of establishing the coalition.[29]

These electoral rewards should be especially valuable to *electorally vulnerable legislators*. Competitive general elections increase the need to appeal beyond legislators' partisan base and create incentives to cultivate personal reputations for independence, pragmatism, and cross-party cooperation (Trubowitz and Mellow 2005; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Wolak 2020). A Democratic House member described how constituency context changes this calculation: "If you are in a seat where the primary is the only threat, you want Republicans to be happy with you as a Republican. Where I wanted Republicans to be happy with me as a Democrat. So that is a different calculation when cosponsoring."[30] For vulnerable legislators, refusing all out-party legislation sacrifices a potentially useful electoral signal, while joining at introduction requires greater exposure to partisan costs.

Ideological moderates should face a similar incentive. Moderates have more to gain from reputations for pragmatism and cross-party cooperation than ideological extremists, whose political identities are more closely tied to clear partisan positions. Importantly, this prediction concerns the *timing* of bipartisan participation rather than simply a greater propensity for moderates to support out-party proposals. An extremist for whom bipartisanship carries substantial costs but few rewards may simply avoid the out-party bill. Moderates have more reason to preserve the benefits of eventual participation even when they prefer not to assume the risks of helping construct the

[29] *INT001*; *INT006*; *INT007*; *INT009*
[30] *INT007*

coalition at introduction. Consequently, electoral vulnerability and ideological moderation should identify legislators for whom strategically delayed bipartisanship is especially attractive.

H2 (Electoral Rewards): Strategically delayed bipartisanship should be more common among legislators for whom bipartisan reputations are especially electorally valuable: (a) electorally vulnerable legislators and (b) ideological moderates.

Electoral Consequences

If legislators strategically delay in part because later bipartisanship preserves the electoral value of bipartisan credentials, strategic delay should be associated with improved subsequent electoral performance. Later cosponsors cannot claim the same authorship or leadership credit as original coalition builders. However, they can still publicize their participation and present themselves as willing to work across party lines.[31]

A House member described how this electoral value can change over time: "You may be more interested in signing onto bills as a late cosponsor as [an] election approaches. It isn't necessarily changing your mind, it is just now you need to cosponsor this bill for your constituency and the specific political dynamics of the election."[32] This logic illustrates how later cosponsorship can provide electoral value without reflecting a change in the legislator's underlying policy preferences.

These benefits should be largest among vulnerable legislators, for whom cross-party credentials are most useful in appealing beyond the partisan base. This prediction is distinct from H2: H2 predicts who should have the strongest incentives to delay, while the following hypothesis evaluates whether the anticipated electoral reward is associated with subsequent electoral performance.

H3 (Electoral Consequences): Strategically delayed bipartisanship should be associated with increased vote share in a legislator's subsequent election, with the strongest association among electorally vulnerable legislators.

[31] *INT001*; *INT007*; *INT009*
[32] *INT007*

Governing Consequences

Strategically delayed bipartisanship may also carry governing costs because effective lawmaking depends in part on legislators' ability to attract bipartisan support for their own proposals. Members of Congress who attract more out-party cosponsors are substantially more successful at advancing their bills, and one path to securing that support is reciprocity: legislators who cosponsor across party lines are more likely to attract out-party cosponsors to their own legislation (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023).

Our argument suggests that the *timing* of this reciprocal support matters. Original out-party cosponsors provide especially valuable support because they help establish a bill's bipartisan coalition and make subsequent recruitment easier.[33] As one staffer explained, "If I'm trying to get a Republican onto a Democratic bill, I'm thinking about what that Republican's involvement is going to mean. If I get the right Republican first, that can make the next five conversations much easier."[34] Legislators who consistently wait until others have built the initial bipartisan coalition provide less of this valuable early support. When they later introduce their own bills, out-party colleagues should, in turn, be less likely to reciprocate by joining at introduction. Legislators who consistently rely on strategic delay should attract fewer original out-party cosponsors, weakening their ability to assemble bipartisan coalitions around their own legislation.

> ***H4a (Original Bipartisan Attraction):*** Legislators who engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship should subsequently attract less original bipartisan support for their own sponsored legislation.

The reduced ability to attract original bipartisan support should, in turn, have downstream consequences for effective lawmaking. Original out-party support provides a foundation for assembling the broader cross-party coalitions needed to advance legislation. Because members of Congress who attract greater out-party support are more successful at moving their bills through the legislative process (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023), members who consistently

[33] *INT001*; *INT002*; *INT006*
[34] *INT006*

rely on strategically delayed bipartisanship should ultimately be less effective at advancing their own legislative agendas.

> ***H4b (Legislative Effectiveness):*** Legislators who engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship should exhibit lower legislative effectiveness in the subsequent Congress.

Scope Conditions

Our argument should be most applicable where four conditions coincide: parties compete meaningfully for institutional control, cross-party cooperation carries partisan costs, legislators benefit individually from bipartisan reputations, and members have discretion over whether and when to provide legislative support. Together, these conditions create both the incentive and the opportunity for strategic delay: legislators can face political costs for helping the opposition, retain individual benefits from eventually participating, and use timing to navigate the tradeoff. Where these conditions are absent, the distinction between original and strategically delayed bipartisanship should matter less.

Measuring Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

Testing our argument requires identifying out-party cosponsorship decisions that are consistent with strategic delay. The motivations underlying any individual cosponsorship decision are not directly observable, so we do not assume that every legislator who joins an out-party bill later in the legislative process strategically chose to wait. Instead, we use the decision-making processes identified in our interviews to define an observable pattern that distinguishes relatively early participation from support that arrives only after meaningful time has passed and the coalition surrounding a proposal has begun to develop. Based on our conversations with legislators and their staff, we conceptualize strategically delayed bipartisanship along two dimensions—meaningful temporal delay and entry into an already-developing bipartisan coalition—and operationalize these dimensions using three observable criteria.[35]

[35]Legislators do not exercise perfect control over the precise date on which a cosponsorship is formally recorded. In the House, additional cosponsors are submitted to the Clerk through procedures requiring action by the bill's spon-

The first captures *timing*.[36] Original cosponsorship is tied to the introduction of legislation and often reflects participation that begins even earlier: legislators and staff describe original cosponsorship as carrying distinctive policy, leadership, and electoral value, including opportunities to participate in drafting and help establish the bipartisan coalition from the outset.[37] Strategically delayed bipartisanship, however, is not simply cosponsorship that occurs after the day of introduction. Our interviews suggest that the conditions making delay strategically valuable develop over time: other legislators must join before meaningful political cover emerges, while signals of legislative viability become clearer as members observe leadership positions, committee activity, stakeholder engagement, and a bill's prospects for advancement.[38] As a result, we require at least 30 days to have elapsed between bill introduction and cosponsorship, allowing the political and legislative environment surrounding the proposal time to develop. The 30-day threshold is not intended to identify a precise point at which strategic delay begins; rather, it distinguishes meaningful delay from cosponsorship occurring shortly after introduction. We examine alternative thresholds of 15, 45, and 60 days below. Delayed timing alone, however, does not establish strategic delay. A legislator may join later for reasons unrelated to the changing political environment around a bill, so we combine timing with two measures of the coalition in place when the legislator joins.

The second criterion captures whether another member of the legislator's party has already crossed party lines. To be classified as strategically delayed, another out-party legislator must already have cosponsored the bill. The first out-party cosponsor occupies a distinctive political

sor; in the Senate, cosponsors added after introduction require unanimous consent and may be submitted through the cloakroom. See the Congressional Research Service's *Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of House Bills* and *Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of Senate Measures*. Offices may also batch administrative submissions, creating modest differences between when a legislator decides to cosponsor and when that decision is formally recorded. Our argument concerns meaningful differences in the timing of bipartisan support rather than day-to-day variation in recorded dates; the 30-day threshold and alternative-threshold analyses are designed in part to avoid placing substantive weight on such small timing differences.

[36]We define strategically delayed bipartisanship as a property of *offering* out-party cosponsorship rather than *attracting* it. Offering refers to an out-party legislator's decision to cosponsor another member's bill, whereas attracting refers to a sponsor's ability to recruit out-party support. Our theory centers on offering because the cosponsoring legislator controls whether and when to join an out-party bill; sponsors may solicit support but cannot determine when another legislator chooses to provide it. SDBS therefore captures the timing and coalition context of the cosponsoring legislator's decision.

[37]*INT001*; *INT002*; *INT003*; *INT007*; *INT009*.

[38]*INT002*; *INT003*; *INT005*; *INT006*; *INT007*; *INT008*.

position because that legislator helps transform a proposal sponsored by one party into a bipartisan coalition. Our interviews repeatedly distinguish this first-mover burden from joining after another copartisan has crossed the aisle: respondents described reluctance to be the first out-party member on a bill and emphasized that another legislator going first can provide political cover for those who follow.[39] Once another out-party legislator has joined, subsequent legislators no longer bear the same individual burden of establishing the bill's bipartisan character. This criterion captures the political-cover mechanism identified in our interviews, and is consistent with prior evidence that legislators respond to the partisan and bipartisan composition of existing cosponsor coalitions (Schilling, Matthews and Kreitzer 2023).

The third criterion captures the stage of coalition formation at which the legislator enters. We require that at least 20 percent of the bill's eventual cosponsor coalition has already formed before the legislator joins. This criterion reflects our interview evidence that political cover depends not simply on whether someone else has joined, but also on the breadth of the coalition that has developed: respondents described larger or more established coalitions as making subsequent participation less politically exposed.[40] The criterion distinguishes legislators who enter near the beginning of coalition construction from those who join a coalition that is already meaningfully underway. Importantly, this is an *ex post* measure of the stage at which a legislator entered the coalition; we do not assume that legislators know the bill's eventual coalition size when deciding whether to cosponsor. Scaling the coalition at the time of entry by its eventual size provides a common benchmark for comparing bills that ultimately attract very different numbers of cosponsors.

Each criterion captures a different observable implication of strategically delayed bipartisanship, and no single criterion is sufficient. Timing alone may capture ordinary administrative or informational delay. Requiring a prior out-party cosponsor alone would classify a legislator who joins immediately after another out-party member as strategically delayed even when virtually no time has passed. Coalition development alone could identify a rapidly forming coalition in which a substantial share of eventual cosponsors joins almost immediately after introduction. We

[39] *INT002*; *INT003*; *INT006*; *INT008*.
[40] *INT003*; *INT006*; *INT008*.

therefore classify an out-party cosponsorship decision as strategically delayed only when all three conditions occur simultaneously: the legislator joins at least 30 days after introduction, another out-party legislator has already joined, and at least 20 percent of the bill's eventual coalition has already formed.[41]

To construct the measure, we use the `congress.gov` API to collect all cosponsorship decisions for all 147,669 non-resolution bills introduced in the House or Senate between the 98th and 118th Congresses that received at least one cosponsor. We collect each bill's sponsor and introduction date, the identity of each cosponsor and the date on which each cosponsorship was recorded, and the Congressional Research Service (CRS) policy area assigned to the bill. Each observation represents a legislator's decision to cosponsor a particular bill, producing a total of 2,486,089 cosponsorship decisions.

We first code a cosponsorship decision as out-party when the sponsor and cosponsor belong to different parties.[42] Among out-party decisions, we then code whether each of the three conditions described above is satisfied. We classify a cosponsorship decision as strategically delayed only when all three are present. Under our primary specification, 286,215 decisions meet these criteria, representing 11.5 percent of all cosponsorship decisions in our data.

Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship Score

Our theoretical expectations concern legislators' propensity to rely on strategically delayed rather than earlier forms of out-party support. Therefore, we aggregate the decision-level indicator to the legislator-term level. The **Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship Score (SDBS)** is the pro-

[41] Considered independently, each criterion identifies a substantially larger share of out-party cosponsorship decisions than the joint measure. Sixty-four percent of out-party cosponsorship decisions occur after another out-party legislator has already joined, 53 percent occur at least 30 days after introduction, and 56 percent occur after at least 20 percent of the eventual coalition has formed. In comparison, 45 percent satisfy all three conditions simultaneously. The criteria also provide distinct information. Among decisions satisfying the 30-day threshold, 14 percent fail to meet at least one of the other two criteria; among decisions that are not the first out-party cosponsorship, 29 percent fail to satisfy the remaining criteria; and among decisions occurring after 20 percent of the eventual coalition has formed, 20 percent fail to satisfy the other two requirements. Requiring all three conditions therefore produces a more conservative measure that identifies late participation occurring specifically after other legislators have begun to establish the coalition.

[42] We recode legislators who identify as Libertarian or Independent as the party with which they caucus. For the 13 legislators who switch parties during our period, we use the party with which they caucused for the longest portion of the congressional term.

portion of a legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions in a congressional term that satisfy all three criteria for strategic delay.[43] This produces 11,545 legislator-term observations. The average SDBS is 0.46, ranging from 0.08 to 0.89.

Formally, let $D_{i,b,t}$ denote whether legislator i's decision to cosponsor bill b in term t is classified as strategically delayed, and let $O_{i,b,t}$ denote whether that cosponsorship is offered to an out-party bill. Then:

$$\text{SDBS}_{i,t} = \frac{\text{\# of Strategically Delayed Out-Party Cosponsorships}_{i,t}}{\text{\# of Out-Party Cosponsorships}_{i,t}} = \frac{\sum_b D_{i,b,t}}{\sum_b O_{i,b,t}}. \tag{1}$$

SDBS thus captures the share of a legislator's cross-party cosponsorship activity that takes the strategically delayed form.[44]

Because proportions based on very few out-party cosponsorship decisions provide noisier estimates of legislators' underlying behavior, we apply a Bayesian shrinkage estimator (Dobson and Lollis 2026). The estimator pulls scores based on relatively few decisions toward the chamber-term mean while leaving scores based on substantial cosponsorship activity largely unchanged.[45] We use the shrunk SDBS in our primary analyses.

Validating Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

We evaluate the validity of SDBS in several ways. First, because no single threshold identifies an exact point at which a later cosponsorship becomes strategically delayed, we examine whether classification depends on our particular cutoffs. We recalculate the decision-level indicator using alternative timing thresholds of 15, 45, and 60 days; coalition-formation thresholds of 10, 30, and

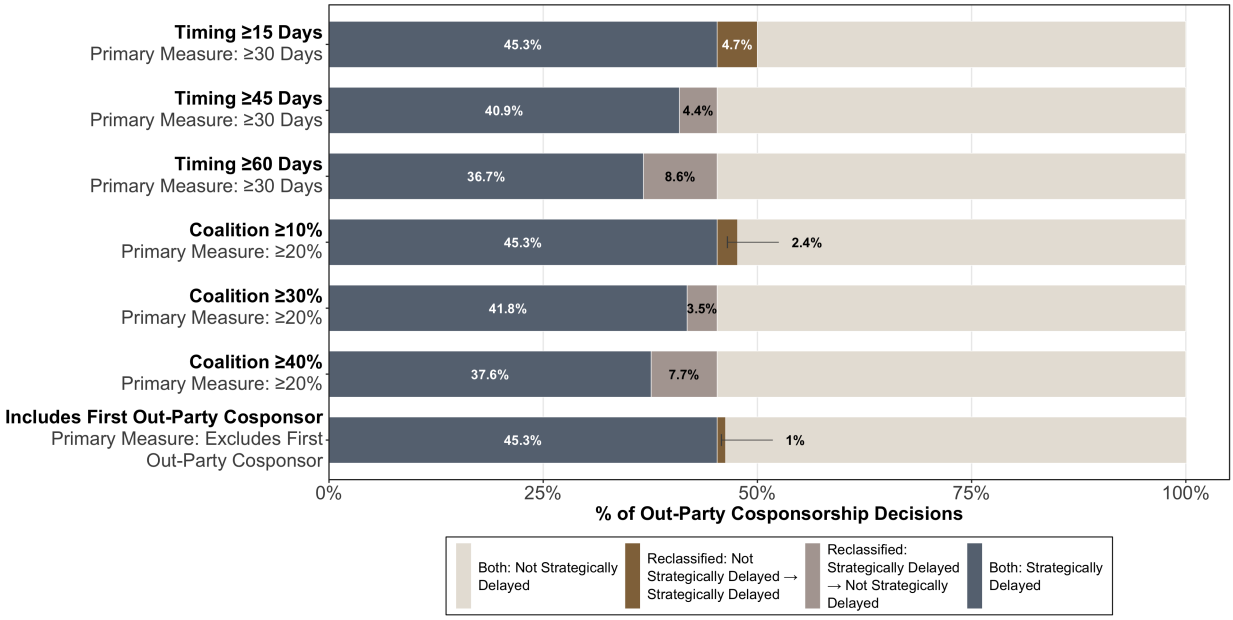
[43] We use out-party cosponsorship decisions as the denominator because our theory concerns the timing of bipartisan participation conditional on crossing party lines. Including same-party cosponsorships would conflate legislators' propensity to engage in bipartisanship with their propensity to delay once they do so.

[44] $\text{SDBS}_{i,t}$ is undefined for legislator-terms in which a legislator offers no out-party cosponsorships. This is uncommon: only 0.36% of legislator-term observations (42 observations) fall into this category.

[45] We define the prior target, μ, as the mean SDBS within the same chamber and term and compute the precision weight $w = n/(n+k)$, where n is the number of out-party cosponsorship decisions and $k = 10$. The shrunk estimate is $\hat{\theta} = w\theta_{\text{obs}} + (1-w)\mu$. Only 3.5% of legislators offer 10 or fewer out-party cosponsorships in a term, while the average legislator offers 55. The correlation between the raw and shrunk scores is 0.95. Results are substantively unchanged when $k = 5$ or $k = 15$ and when models are estimated using the unshrunk score.

40 percent; and a specification that does not require another out-party legislator to have joined first. Figure 1 shows that classification is highly stable across these alternatives: under every specification, at least 90 percent of out-party cosponsorship decisions receive the same classification as under our primary measure, with differences concentrated among decisions close to the relevant threshold.[46]

Figure 1: Sensitivity of SDBS to Alternative Thresholds



Note: Each row compares classification under an alternative threshold with classification under our primary measure of strategically delayed bipartisanship (timing $\geq$30 days, coalition formation $\geq$20%, and excludes the first out-party cosponsor), holding the other two components fixed. Reclassification is concentrated near the relevant threshold and never exceeds 10% of out-party cosponsorship decisions.

Second, we examine whether the behavior captured by SDBS occurs under the political and legislative conditions that our interview respondents identify as making delayed participation more attractive. Because both coalition growth and delayed cosponsorship naturally occur as bills age, a simple association between the two could mechanically reflect the passage of time rather than political cover. To address this, we estimate Cox proportional-hazards models that explicitly condition on elapsed time since bill introduction. The Cox specification leaves the baseline hazard as an unrestricted function of time, so the political-cover estimate is identified by comparing legislators who remain at risk at the same point in a bill's life, while the size of the existing out-party coalition

[46]Figure A2 examines the relationship between original and strategically delayed bipartisanship under each specification, while Figure A3 demonstrates that the substantive results are robust to these alternative thresholds.

is updated over time in start–stop form. In other words, the model asks whether legislators are more likely to join when more out-party members have already crossed the aisle *holding constant how long the bill has existed*, rather than conflating coalition growth with simple bill aging. Each additional prior out-party cosponsor is associated with a 2.9 percent increase in the instantaneous hazard of a strategically delayed join ($HR = 1.029$, $p < .001$); across a coalition ranging from zero to 40 prior out-party cosponsors, this corresponds to approximately a 3.1-fold increase in the hazard. Strategically delayed participation is also concentrated on bills that demonstrate legislative viability: at comparable durations since introduction, bills that receive a committee markup have a 16.8 percent higher hazard of attracting a strategically delayed cosponsor than bills that are never marked up ($HR = 1.168$, $p < .001$). A randomization-based placebo test further shows that this viability relationship is not typical of arbitrary bill-level classifications with the same prevalence. Across 250 placebo assignments, none produces a hazard ratio as large as the observed markup association. Together, these analyses provide population-level evidence that SDBS varies systematically with the political-cover and legislative-viability conditions that congressional actors identify as making strategic delay more attractive.[47]

Finally, we assess whether SDBS identifies a form of bipartisan participation distinct from *original bipartisanship*. Following Dobson and Lollis (2026), we measure original bipartisanship as the proportion of a legislator's original cosponsorships offered to out-party bills.[48] If both measures simply captured a common propensity for cross-party cooperation, legislators who score highly on one should generally score highly on the other. Instead, Figure 2 reveals a strong negative association ($\beta = -0.530$, $p < 0.001$): legislators who engage more frequently in original bipartisanship rely systematically less on strategically delayed bipartisanship, and vice versa. This

[47]Full model specifications, predicted cumulative-incidence plots, and the randomization-based placebo test are reported in the Appendix section "Validating Components of SDBS: Political Cover and Legislative Viability." The markup analysis is a bill-level validation test rather than an estimate of the causal effect of receiving a markup: it establishes that strategically delayed participation is concentrated on bills that demonstrate institutional viability.

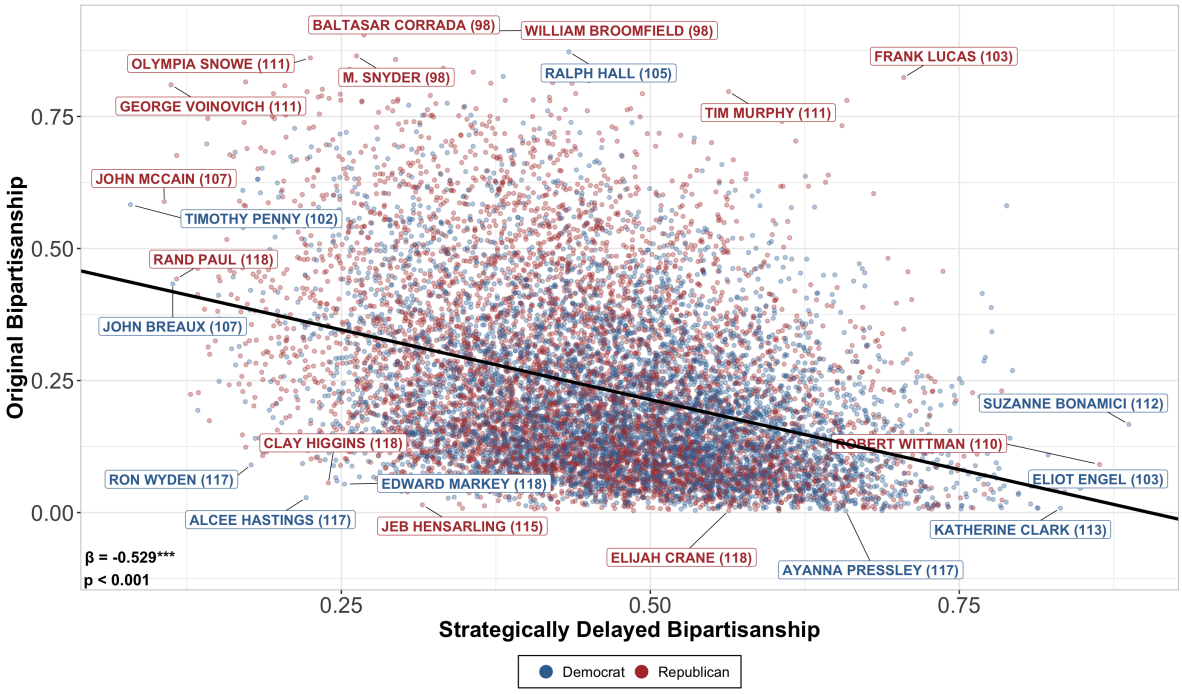
[48]The two measures condition on different theoretically relevant choice sets. Original bipartisanship is the share of a legislator's original cosponsorships directed to out-party bills and therefore captures the propensity to engage in cross-party coalition building at introduction. SDBS is the share of a legislator's out-party cosponsorships that are strategically delayed and captures the propensity to delay conditional on providing cross-party support. The measures are therefore not complements, do not share a common denominator, and one is not mechanically determined by the other.

pattern is consistent with our distinction between legislators who help construct bipartisan coalitions at introduction and those who more often join them later.

The placement of recognizable legislators provides additional face validity. Senators long associated with bipartisan cooperation—including Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Arlen Specter (R/D-PA), and John McCain (R-AZ)—cluster in the upper-left region of Figure 2, with high original bipartisanship and low strategic delay. The opposite region also includes legislators whose circumstances match the incentives identified by our theory. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) in the 112th Congress and Robert Wittman (R-VA) in the 110th served as minority-party House members, while Bonamici entered Congress with 53.8 percent of the vote. Eli Crane (R-AZ) in the 118th entered Congress with 53.9 percent despite serving in the majority. All occupy the lower-right region, characterized by high strategic delay and low original bipartisanship. Equally as important, the bottom-left region contains legislators who engage relatively little in either form, demonstrating that strategic delay is not simply the absence of original bipartisanship. Clay Higgins (R-LA), a House Freedom Caucus member from a strongly Republican district, and Ed Markey (D-MA), a longtime progressive from reliably Democratic Massachusetts, both appear in this region. Together, these cases show that the empirical structure of the two measures corresponds to recognizable differences in legislators' political circumstances and reputations, providing additional evidence that SDBS captures a distinct form of bipartisan participation rather than merely the absence of original bipartisan cooperation.

Taken together, these analyses provide complementary evidence for the measurement strategy. SDBS requires the joint presence of delayed timing and entry into an already-developing bipartisan coalition, is highly stable across alternative operationalizations, corresponds to the dynamic changes in political cover and legislative viability identified in our interviews, and captures behavior empirically distinct from original bipartisan coalition-building. We use this measure below to test when legislators are most likely to rely on strategically delayed bipartisanship and what consequences follow from doing so.

Figure 2: Original and Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship Are Negatively Related



Note: Each point represents a legislator-congress observation, plotted by original bipartisanship (proportion of original cosponsorships offered to out-party bills) and strategically delayed bipartisanship (SDBS). The line displays the bivariate regression relationship.

Research Design

Sample and Unit of Analysis

Our sample spans the 98th through the 118th Congress (1983–2024) and includes both the House and the Senate. The primary unit of analysis is the legislator-term: each observation represents one legislator's SDBS during a single two-year Congress. This structure yields 11,545 unique legislator-term observations and is used to test the minority-party and chamber components of H1, both components of H2, and the electoral and governing consequences in H3 and H4. To test whether strategic delay varies across partisan and nonpartisan issue areas (H1), we recalculate SDBS at the member–congress–topic level, where each observation represents a legislator's out-party cosponsorship behavior within a CRS policy area during a single Congress.[49]

[49]The Congressional Research Service (CRS) assigns each bill to one of 34 policy areas. Among all bills in our data, 22 lacked a policy area on the website itself and are coded as NA. Over time, the number of policy areas declined from 34 to 32 because CRS discontinued the categories Commemorations after the 110th Congress and Private Legislation after the 113th Congress. We retain these bills in the dataset.

Additional Variables

Our primary dependent variable in models testing H1 and H2 is **SDBS**, the proportion of a legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions that satisfy our three criteria for strategic delay. For the institutional components of H1, our primary independent variables are **Minority Party**, **House**, and **Partisan Issue Area**. **Minority Party** is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the legislator's party did not hold the majority in their chamber during the term and 0 otherwise. **House** is a binary indicator equal to 1 for members of the U.S. House and 0 for Senators. For the partisan issue areas test, we recalculate SDBS separately within each CRS policy area and create a binary indicator, **Partisan Issue Area**, coded 1 if the policy area is designated as partisan and 0 otherwise.[50] We operationalize partisan issue areas as Education, Labor and Employment, Environmental Protection, Health, Immigration, Social Welfare, Taxation, and Civil Rights and Liberties/Minority Issues. These categories are informed by similar classifications in prior research (Lee 2009; Harbridge 2015); however, we also estimate specifications using narrower and broader definitions of partisan issue areas; the substantive results are unchanged (see Appendix Figure A7).[51]

To test H2, we examine two characteristics that capture when the electoral rewards of bipartisan participation should be especially valuable. **Electoral Vulnerability** is measured as the percentile rank of the legislator's vote share in their most recent general election, reverse-coded so that higher values indicate greater vulnerability.[52] **Ideological Extremity** is measured as the absolute value of the legislator's DW-NOMINATE first-dimension score in the prior term. The resulting measure ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater ideological extremity regardless of ideological direction. Because H2 predicts greater strategic delay among ideological moderates, we

[50] A legislator does not necessarily have an SDBS for every policy area. If a legislator did not cosponsor an out-party bill in a particular policy area, SDBS cannot be calculated for that legislator–term–topic and is therefore reported as `NA`. Across all 34 policy areas, the average percentage missing is 55 percent. Most missing observations are concentrated in Private Legislation, Social Sciences and History, Native Americans, and Sports and Recreation (80.4–96.9 percent missingness). The policy areas with the most out-party cosponsorship activity, and thus the least SDBS missingness, include Armed Forces and National Security, Taxation, Health, Government Operations and Politics, and Crime and Law Enforcement (missingness rates of 10.4 to 25.1 percent).

[51] After classifying issue areas as partisan and nonpartisan for our primary specification, missingness is relatively balanced: nonpartisan issue areas have 58.6 percent missingness and partisan issue areas have 42.4 percent missingness.

[52] Constructed as $\text{votepct\_vuln} = 1 - \text{percent\_rank}(\text{votepct})$.

expect a negative relationship between ideological extremity and SDBS.

H3 and H4 shift SDBS from the dependent variable to the primary independent variable. To test the electoral consequences of strategic delay (H3), **Next-Election Vote Share** measures the legislator's vote share in their next general election. We interact SDBS with electoral vulnerability because the theory predicts that the electoral returns to strategically delayed bipartisanship should be largest among vulnerable legislators. To test H4a, **Next-Congress Original Bipartisan Attraction** captures the original out-party support a legislator attracts to their own sponsored legislation in the subsequent Congress. To test H4b, **Next-Congress Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES)** measures the legislator's ability to advance sponsored legislation through the lawmaking process in the subsequent Congress (Volden and Wiseman 2014).

Model Estimation & Identification

Our primary models use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with combinations of legislator and Congress fixed effects appropriate to the source of variation in each predictor. Wherever the predictor of interest varies within a legislator over time—including minority-party status, partisan issue context, and electoral vulnerability—we include legislator and Congress fixed effects. Legislator fixed effects absorb all stable characteristics of individual members, including any time-invariant propensity to engage in strategically delayed bipartisanship, while Congress fixed effects absorb shocks common to legislators serving in the same term. These specifications identify associations from changes in the same legislator's political circumstances over time or, for the issue-area analysis, from variation in the same legislator's behavior across issue contexts within Congresses.

A legislator's chamber assignment is largely time-invariant, so our primary chamber specification instead uses a between-legislator design with theoretically motivated member-level controls.[53] Because this design cannot rule out the possibility that an unobserved, stable legislator characteristic is associated with both chamber service and SDBS, we validate the result using the subset of legislators who switch chambers during our panel. For these legislators, chamber varies within

[53]These controls include Democrat, female, vote share (and vote share squared), seniority (and seniority squared), DW-NOMINATE, minority-party status, Latino, Black, majority leader, minority leader, power committee membership, committee chair, subcommittee chair, and prior state legislative experience.

member, allowing us to retain legislator fixed effects. Consistent findings across the full-sample and chamber-switcher specifications provide evidence that the chamber relationship is not simply attributable to stable differences between the kinds of legislators who serve in the House and Senate. Similarly, ideological extremity changes relatively little within legislators over time, so the H2b specification relies primarily on between-legislator variation and includes theoretically motivated member-level controls. We lag DW-NOMINATE by one Congress so that the ideological measure temporally precedes the SDBS observation and is not mechanically influenced by roll-call behavior occurring during the same term.

For H3 and H4, SDBS is the primary independent variable, and all models include legislator and Congress fixed effects. The H3 model predicts next-election vote share as a function of SDBS, electoral vulnerability, and their interaction, while controlling for the legislator's most recent general-election vote share. The interaction allows the electoral association of strategically delayed bipartisanship to vary across the observed range of vulnerability, as predicted by the theory. H4a models original out-party support attracted in the subsequent Congress, while H4b models legislative effectiveness in the subsequent Congress. Measuring both outcomes at $t+1$ ensures that SDBS temporally precedes the governing outcomes and reduces concerns that contemporaneous coalition-building or legislative effectiveness itself determines the form of bipartisan support a legislator provides.

Across our primary specifications, we control for **Original Bipartisanship Offered**, measured as the proportion of a legislator's original cosponsorships that are offered to out-party bills. This allows us to distinguish the correlates and consequences of strategically delayed participation from legislators' propensity to participate in bipartisan coalition building at introduction. The distinction is important because the two measures capture different forms of cross-party participation: original bipartisanship measures willingness to help establish bipartisan coalitions from the outset, whereas SDBS measures reliance on delay conditional on providing out-party support.[54] Therefore, we

[54] Although both measures draw on cosponsorship behavior, they condition on different choice sets and are not algebraic complements or deterministic functions of one another. Original bipartisanship is the proportion of all *original* cosponsorships directed to out-party bills, whereas SDBS is the proportion of all *out-party* cosponsorships that satisfy the criteria for strategic delay. Thus, conditioning on original bipartisanship does not mechanically determine a

interpret coefficients on SDBS as relationships with strategic delay net of legislators' propensity for original bipartisan coalition building. Across all model specifications, standard errors are clustered by legislator to account for serial correlation in repeated observations of the same member across terms.

Results

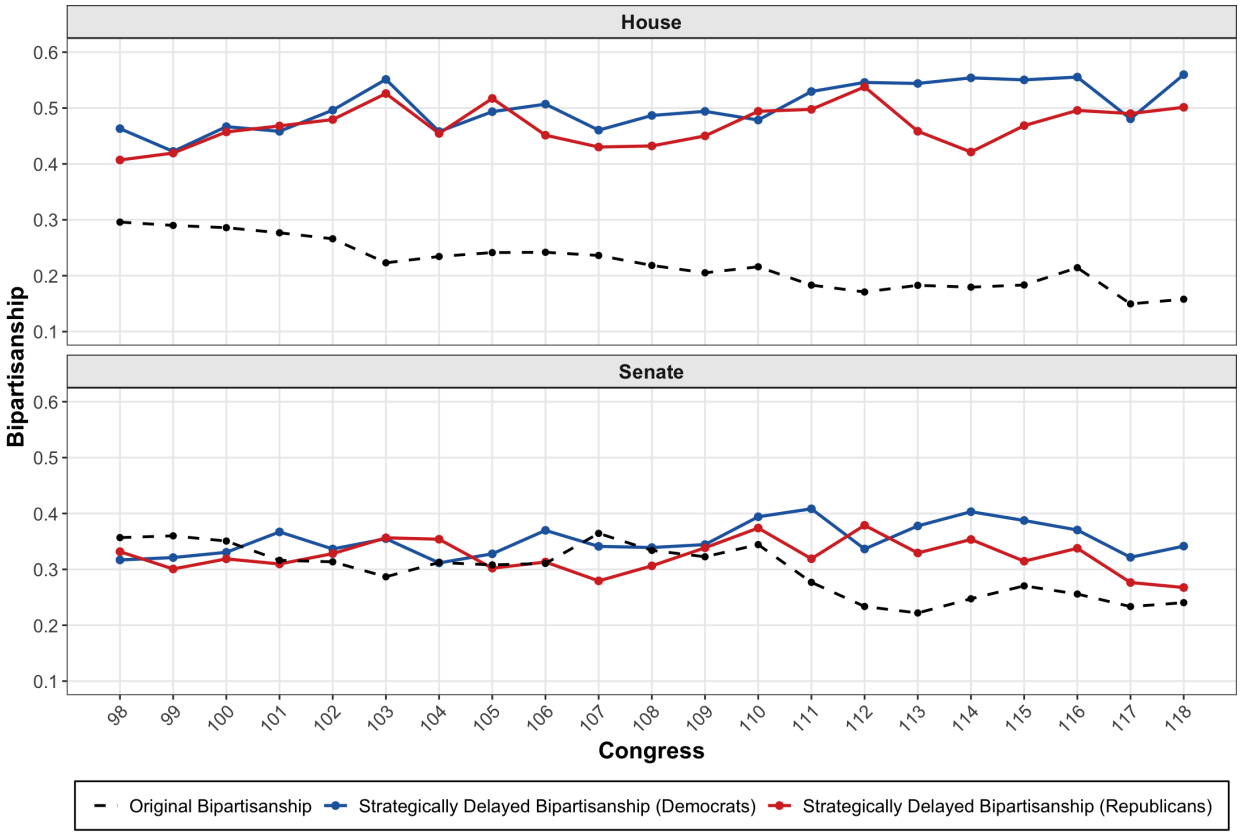
Descriptive

Figure 3 plots average SDBS by party within each chamber over time, alongside the chamber-level average of original bipartisanship. Strategically delayed bipartisanship increases modestly across our time series, with the increase most apparent in the House, and differs relatively little between Democrats and Republicans. Across the time period, average SDBS is 0.45, varying from a minimum of 0.41 in the 99th Congress to a maximum of 0.51 in the 112th Congress. Consistent with our expectations, the minority party generally exhibits higher levels of strategically delayed bipartisanship than the majority party, although there are a handful of exceptions. House members also consistently exhibit higher levels of strategically delayed bipartisanship than Senators.

Original bipartisanship follows a markedly different trajectory. It declines over the time series in both chambers, with a substantially steeper decline in the House (from approximately 0.30 to 0.17) than in the Senate (from approximately 0.35 to 0.25). This pattern suggests that prior conclusions about the persistence of bipartisanship may partly reflect the aggregation of distinct forms of cross-party cooperation (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Figure 3 demonstrates why distinguishing the timing of bipartisan participation matters: while original bipartisan coalition-building has declined sharply—particularly in the House—strategically delayed bipartisanship has increased modestly. Therefore, what appears in aggregate to be persistent bipartisanship may conceal a substantial shift away from early coalition-building and toward later, strategically delayed participation.

legislator's SDBS: legislators with the same propensity for original bipartisan coalition building can differ substantially in how they time their remaining out-party support, and legislators with the same SDBS can differ in how frequently they provide original out-party support.

Figure 3: Original and Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship by Chamber Over Time



Note: Solid lines represent the mean strategically delayed bipartisanship score (SDBS) for each chamber-congress, shown separately by party (blue = Democrat, red = Republican). The dotted black line represents mean original bipartisanship by chamber-congress.

Modeling

Table 1 reports estimates of the institutional conditions under which strategically delayed bipartisanship should be most common. We expect strategic delay to increase when the partisan costs of original bipartisan participation are higher: among minority-party legislators, in the House, and when legislators cosponsor bills in partisan issue areas. Across all four specifications, **SDBS** is the dependent variable. Consistent with H1a, the coefficient on **Minority** in Column 1 indicates that 8.3 percentage points more of a legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions are strategically delayed when the legislator serves in the minority rather than the majority party. Because the model includes member fixed effects, this relationship is identified from changes in the same legislator's behavior as they move between majority- and minority-party status. Substantively, moving from

the majority to the minority is associated with an increase in SDBS equal to roughly one-tenth of the measure's full observed range (0.08 to 0.89).

Consistent with H1b, House members also engage in substantially more strategically delayed bipartisanship than Senators. We find support for this expectation across two identification strategies. Column 2 estimates a between-legislator model with a broad set of member-level covariates. The coefficient on **House** indicates that House members exhibit SDBS values approximately 13 percentage points higher than Senators, a difference equal to roughly one-sixth of the measure's observed range. Because chamber is largely time-invariant within legislators, Column 3 provides an additional test restricted to members who served in both chambers during our panel. This specification retains member fixed effects and, as a result, identifies the relationship from changes in the same legislator's behavior after moving between chambers. The coefficient on **House** remains positive and statistically significant, though smaller in magnitude, providing additional evidence that strategic delay is more common in the House than in the Senate.

Finally, consistent with H1c, legislators engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship when cosponsoring legislation in partisan issue areas. The coefficient on **Partisan Issue Area** in Column 4 indicates that the same legislator's SDBS is 3.5 percentage points higher for out-party cosponsorship decisions in partisan issue areas than in nonpartisan issue areas. Although smaller in magnitude than the relationships with minority-party status and chamber, this estimate is identified from variation in the same legislator's behavior across partisan and nonpartisan policy areas within Congresses.

Collectively, the results in Table 1 support H1: strategically delayed bipartisanship is more common among minority-party legislators, in the House, and on legislation in partisan issue areas—three settings in which our theory predicts that helping establish an out-party coalition at introduction carries greater partisan costs. Original bipartisanship is also negatively associated with SDBS across all four specifications, reinforcing the distinction between legislators who help construct bipartisan coalitions from the outset and those who more frequently join after those coalitions have begun to form.

Table 1: Institutional Predictors of SDBS

	DV: SDBS			
	Minority (H1a)	**Chamber: Full Sample (H1b)**	**Chamber: Switchers (H1b)**	**Partisan Issue Area (H1c)**
	1	2	3	4
Minority	**0.083*****	0.075***		
	(0.003)	(0.003)		
House		**0.130*****	**0.088*****	
		(0.004)	(0.009)	
Partisan Issue Area				**0.035*****
				(0.001)
Original Bipartisanship	-0.380^{***}	-0.306^{***}	-0.233^{***}	-0.122^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.025)	(0.006)
Congress FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✗	✓	✓
Member-Level Controls	✗	✓	✗	✗
Observations	11,479	11,141	1,135	181,912
R^2	0.649	0.493	0.599	0.137

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 2 is a between-legislator design with member-level controls; Column 3 restricts to legislators who switched chambers during the panel.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Next, Table 2 examines whether strategically delayed bipartisanship is more common among legislators for whom bipartisan reputations should be especially electorally valuable. Consistent with H2, we expect greater strategic delay among electorally vulnerable and ideologically moderate legislators. Across both specifications, **SDBS** is the dependent variable. Consistent with H2a, the coefficient on **Electoral Vulnerability** in Column 1 indicates that legislators engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship as their electoral vulnerability increases. Because the model includes member and Congress fixed effects, this relationship is identified from changes in the same legislator's behavior as their electoral circumstances change across elections. Substantively, moving from the safest to the most vulnerable position observed in the sample is associated with an increase in SDBS of roughly 3.1 percentage points. Across the interquartile range of electoral vulnerability, SDBS increases by approximately 1.7 percentage points.

Consistent with H2b, the coefficient on **Ideological Extremity** in Column 2 is negative and highly significant, indicating that ideologically moderate legislators engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship than their more ideologically extreme colleagues. Substantively, moving

from the most moderate to the most ideologically extreme position observed in the sample is associated with an 11.6 percentage-point decline in SDBS. This relationship is sizable and comparable in magnitude to the institutional relationships reported in Table 1.

Taken together, the results in Table 2 support our electoral-rewards argument. Legislators engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship when they are electorally vulnerable and ideologically moderate—the two circumstances in which our theory predicts that the electoral value of maintaining a bipartisan reputation should be greatest. These findings complement the institutional results in Table 1: strategic delay is most common when the partisan costs of original bipartisan participation are high and when legislators have stronger incentives to preserve the individual electoral rewards of eventually cooperating across party lines.

Table 2: Individual Predictors of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

	DV: SDBS	
	Electoral Vulnerability (H2a)	**Ideological Moderation (H2b)**
	1	2
Electoral Vulnerability	**0.031*****	
	(0.005)	
Ideological Extremity (Lagged)		**−0.116*****
		(0.011)
Original Bipartisanship	−0.162***	−0.375***
	(0.008)	(0.010)
Congress FE	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✗
Member-Level Controls	✗	✓
Observations	11,183	9,236
R^2	0.612	0.483

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 1 is a within-legislator design with member and Congress fixed effects. Column 2 is a between-legislator design with theoretically motivated member-level controls; ideological extremity is measured using the absolute value of the legislator's lagged first-dimension DW-NOMINATE score.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

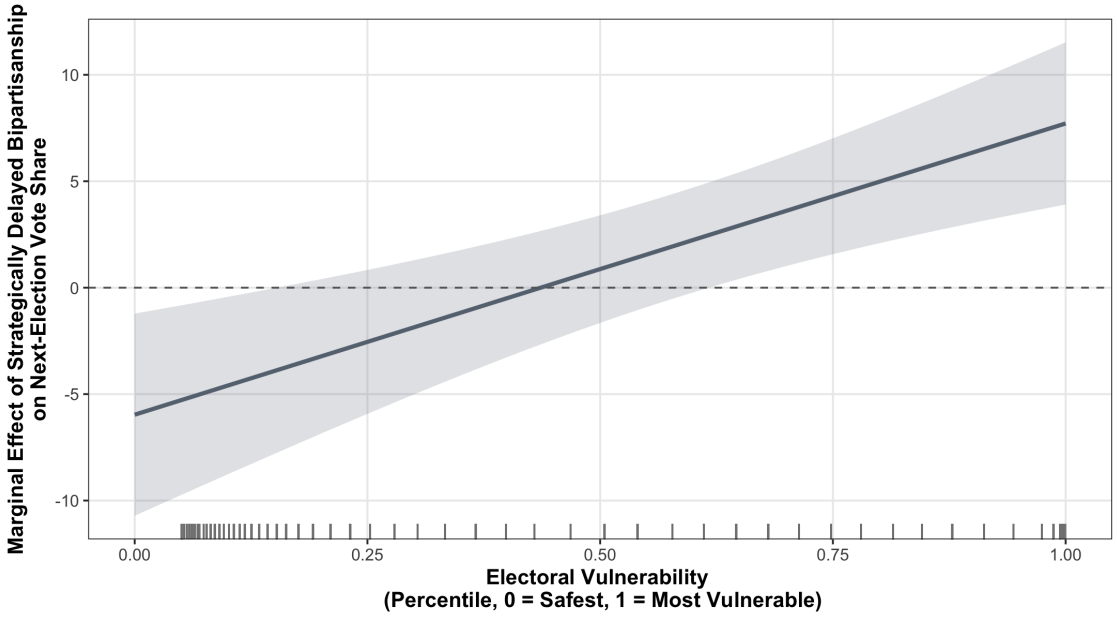
Finally, Table 3 examines the electoral and governing consequences of strategically delayed bipartisanship. H3 predicts that strategic delay should be associated with improved subsequent

electoral performance, particularly among electorally vulnerable legislators. H4a and H4b examine the governing consequences: legislators who rely more heavily on strategically delayed bipartisanship should subsequently attract less original out-party support for their own legislation and, in turn, exhibit lower legislative effectiveness.

Column 1 models next-election vote share as a function of **SDBS**, electoral vulnerability, and their interaction, while controlling for the legislator's most recent general-election vote share and original bipartisan support offered. Consistent with H3, the coefficient on the interaction between **SDBS** and **Electoral Vulnerability** is positive and highly significant, indicating that the electoral returns associated with strategically delayed bipartisanship increase as legislators become more electorally vulnerable.

Figure 4 illustrates this interaction by plotting the marginal effect of strategically delayed bipartisanship (y-axis) across the observed range of electoral vulnerability (x-axis). Among the most electorally safe legislators, strategically delayed bipartisanship has no statistically distinguishable association with subsequent vote share. As electoral vulnerability increases, however, the electoral association becomes steadily more positive and is statistically distinguishable from zero among the most vulnerable legislators. Importantly, these estimates at the upper end of the vulnerability scale are not extrapolations beyond the data: as the rug plot demonstrates, our panel contains legislator-term observations with vulnerability scores approaching one. Among these most electorally vulnerable legislators, moving from the lowest observed level of SDBS (0.08) to the highest (0.89) is associated with an approximately 6 percentage-point increase in next-election vote share. Thus, the interaction captures meaningful changes in the electoral returns to strategically delayed bipartisanship across electoral circumstances that are actually observed in our sample. Taken together, these findings complement the results for H2a: the legislators who rely more heavily on strategically delayed bipartisanship as their electoral vulnerability increases are also those for whom the strategy is most strongly associated with improved subsequent electoral performance.

Figure 4: Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship Is Associated With Increased Next-Election Vote Share Among Electorally Vulnerable Legislators



Note: This figure plots the marginal effect of strategically delayed bipartisanship on a legislator's vote share in the next election across the full range of electoral vulnerability, derived from the interaction model estimated in Column 1 of Table 3. Vulnerability is measured as the percentile rank of a legislator's vote share in the most recent general election, reverse-coded so that 0 indicates the safest legislators and 1 indicates the most vulnerable. The shaded region represents 95% confidence intervals. The rug plot along the x-axis shows the distribution of vulnerability scores in the panel.

Columns 2 and 3 examine the governing consequences of strategically delayed bipartisanship and the mechanism linking strategic delay to legislative effectiveness. H4a predicts that legislators who rely more heavily on strategically delayed support should subsequently attract less original bipartisan support for their own legislation. Consistent with this expectation, the coefficient on **SDBS** in Column 2 is negative and highly significant. Legislators who engage in more strategically delayed bipartisanship subsequently attract less original out-party support for their own sponsored legislation, even after accounting for the original bipartisan support they themselves offer. This result is consistent with our argument that legislators who repeatedly wait for others to establish bipartisan coalitions provide less of the early cross-party support that can help build reciprocal legislative relationships.

Column 3 examines the downstream relationship with legislative effectiveness. Consistent with H4b, the coefficient on **SDBS** is negative and statistically significant, indicating that legislators

who rely more heavily on strategically delayed bipartisanship are less effective lawmakers in the subsequent Congress, even after controlling for their current legislative effectiveness and original bipartisan support offered. Substantively, moving from the minimum observed level of SDBS to the maximum is associated with a decline of approximately 0.37 points in LES. This corresponds to roughly one-third of the interquartile range of legislative effectiveness and would move a legislator at the 75th percentile of effectiveness to approximately the 66th percentile.

To benchmark the magnitude of this relationship, we estimate an alternative specification that includes a broad set of legislator characteristics traditionally associated with legislative effectiveness (see Appendix Table 5). The estimated relationship between SDBS and subsequent effectiveness is virtually identical in that specification ($\beta = -0.436,\ p = 0.001$). The legislative-effectiveness penalty associated with moving from the lowest to the highest observed SDBS is approximately equivalent to the effectiveness gains associated with eight additional terms of congressional service. It is also roughly equivalent in magnitude to the effectiveness advantage associated with serving as a committee chair and approximately half the size of the advantage associated with majority-party status. Taken together, Table 3 reveals an electoral-governing tradeoff: strategically delayed bipartisanship is associated with improved electoral performance among vulnerable legislators, but heavier reliance on the strategy is also followed by less original bipartisan support for legislators' own proposals and lower legislative effectiveness.

Table 3: Electoral and Governing Consequences of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

	Next-Election Vote Share (H3)	Next-Congress Original Bipartisan Attraction (H4a)	Next-Congress Legislative Effectiveness (H4b)
SDBS × Vulnerability	**13.681*****		
	(3.555)		
SDBS	−5.967*	**−0.079*****	**−0.814*****
	(2.422)	**(0.014)**	**(0.164)**
Electoral Vulnerability (Percentile)	−26.612***		
	(2.061)		
Vote Share in Previous Election	−0.274***		
	(0.038)		
Original Bipartisanship Offered	5.033***	0.018	−1.764***
	(1.017)	(0.011)	(0.187)
Congress FE	✓	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✓	✓
Observations	9,156	8,896	9,440
R^2	0.603	0.595	0.405

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 1 estimates the association between SDBS and next-election vote share conditional on electoral vulnerability, controlling for previous vote share and original bipartisan support offered. Column 2 estimates the association between SDBS and original bipartisan support attracted in the subsequent Congress. Column 3 estimates the association between SDBS and legislative effectiveness in the subsequent Congress. Columns 2 and 3 control for original bipartisan support offered. Congress and member fixed effects are included in all models. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Assessing Alternative Explanations

Our interviews make clear that strategic considerations are not the only reasons legislators may join out-party legislation later rather than at introduction. Legislators and congressional staff identified several other processes that can generate delay, including the time required to acquire and evaluate information, changes in a bill's substantive content, ordinary staff workload and internal office processing, and differences in when legislators first learn about legislation through committee and staff relationships.[55] As a result, we do not assume that every decision classified by SDBS reflects conscious strategic delay. Instead, we ask whether these alternative explanations can systematically account for the patterns identified in our primary analyses. We evaluate three accounts—deliberation, bill evolution, and relational information access—through a series of additional tests reported in the appendix.

First, under a *deliberation account*, legislators delay because they require time to acquire and evaluate information before deciding whether to support a bill. This may occur because legislators themselves need time to learn about the legislation or because overloaded staff do not immediately bring a cosponsorship opportunity to the member's attention. We test three implications of this

[55]INT004; INT005; INT007; INT008; INT009.

explanation. Committee chairs, who possess privileged access to legislative information, should engage in less strategically delayed bipartisanship; strategic delay should be more common on technically complex legislation that requires greater information processing; and it should be less common when legislators have previously been exposed to the same underlying policy through an earlier related bill. None of these expectations receives support. Committee chairs engage in significantly *more* strategically delayed bipartisanship than their colleagues, strategic delay decreases as statutory complexity increases, and prior exposure to related legislation has no statistically distinguishable association with strategic delay (Appendix Table A6). These patterns are inconsistent with deliberation and information acquisition as systematic explanations for the behavior captured by SDBS.

Second, a *bill-evolution account* suggests that legislators delay because they are waiting to see whether a proposal changes into a form they can support. To test this explanation, we examine whether strategic delay is more common on bills that receive an opportunity for substantive revision through the amendment process. Controlling for the total volume of amendment activity, whether a bill receives any offered amendment is not significantly associated with strategically delayed bipartisanship (Appendix Table A7). This null relationship is inconsistent with the expectation that legislators systematically delay out-party cosponsorship while waiting for bill content to evolve. Instead, the evidence is more consistent with our argument that legislators respond to signals of a bill's viability rather than waiting to see whether its substantive content changes.

Finally, a *relational account* suggests that differences in cosponsorship timing arise because institutional proximity to a bill's sponsor determines how quickly legislators learn about the proposal. In particular, legislators who share committee assignments interact more frequently and may therefore learn about bills sponsored by their committee colleagues earlier than other members. We test this explanation by restricting the sample to out-party cosponsorship decisions in which the sponsor and cosponsor share at least one committee assignment and recomputing SDBS using only these committee-tied decisions. If unequal information access through institutional relationships explains our primary findings, the relationships identified above should substantially weaken or

disappear when this informational advantage is held relatively constant. Instead, the relationships between strategic delay and minority-party status, chamber, partisan issue areas, electoral vulnerability, and ideological moderation retain the same direction and are of comparable magnitude in the committee-tied sample (Appendix Figure A9). This pattern is inconsistent with unequal access to sponsors as an explanation for our primary results.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reconceptualize congressional bipartisanship by treating *timing* as part of legislators' strategic choice to cooperate across party lines. We distinguish *original bipartisanship*, in which legislators help establish cross-party coalitions at introduction, from *strategically delayed bipartisanship*, in which legislators join after the political environment surrounding a proposal has become more favorable. Informed by elite interviews with legislators and congressional staff, our theory explains strategic delay as a response to competing partisan and individual incentives: helping the opposition establish bipartisan support can impose collective costs on a legislator's party and individual political costs on the member, even when that member still values the policy, relational, or electoral benefits of eventual cooperation. Using more than 2.4 million cosponsorship decisions on 147,669 bills introduced in the House and Senate between 1983 and 2024, we find that strategically delayed bipartisanship is most common where the partisan costs of original cooperation are greatest—among minority-party legislators, in the House, and on highly partisan issues—and among legislators for whom bipartisan reputations are especially electorally valuable, including electorally vulnerable members and ideological moderates.

Distinguishing original from strategically delayed bipartisanship changes how we interpret the persistence of cross-party cooperation. Conventional measures that aggregate out-party cosponsorship can make bipartisanship appear resilient even as the form that cooperation takes changes substantially. Over the past four decades, original bipartisan coalition-building has declined sharply, particularly in the House, while strategically delayed bipartisanship has slightly increased. The persistence of congressional bipartisanship thus partly reflects a shift away from helping construct cross-party coalitions and toward joining those coalitions after others have borne more of the ini-

tial political costs. This distinction also creates reason to revisit established findings about the causes and consequences of bipartisanship: characteristics and incentives associated with greater cross-party cooperation may have different relationships with helping build bipartisan coalitions and joining them later.

The distinction also reveals an important tradeoff between the individual rewards and governing contributions of bipartisan participation. Strategically delayed bipartisanship is associated with improved subsequent electoral performance among vulnerable legislators, consistent with our argument that later participation can preserve electorally valuable bipartisan credentials. Yet legislators who rely more heavily on strategically delayed support subsequently attract less *original* bipartisan support for their own legislation. We find no corresponding relationship with the strategically delayed support they subsequently attract, suggesting that the deficit is concentrated in legislators' ability to recruit out-party colleagues willing to join from the outset. Legislators who rely more heavily on strategic delay also exhibit lower legislative effectiveness in the subsequent Congress. Taken together, these patterns suggest that legislators can preserve many of the individual political rewards of bipartisan participation while investing less in the early cross-party coalition-building associated with attracting original bipartisan support and advancing their own legislative agendas.

The broader implication is that partisan conflict can transform cooperation without eliminating it. By distinguishing original from strategically delayed bipartisanship, our framework provides a new lens for studying cross-party cooperation. This distinction creates leverage not only for explaining patterns that conventional measures of bipartisanship obscure, but also for revisiting established findings about who works across party lines and what bipartisan behavior accomplishes. Relationships between bipartisanship and legislators' electoral incentives, political characteristics, partisan environments, and legislative effectiveness can now be decomposed into questions about who helps construct bipartisan coalitions and who joins them only after they have formed. The same framework opens new questions about how sponsors recruit cross-party partners, how party leaders manage the timing of cooperation, how legislators communicate early and later support

to constituents, and whether similar strategic sequencing characterizes other forms of legislative behavior. More broadly, treating cooperation as a dynamic choice shifts attention from whether bipartisanship survives partisan conflict to how that conflict reshapes *when*, *how*, and *by whom* cross-party cooperation occurs.

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Risky Business: The Strategic Timing of Bipartisanship in Congress

Appendix

Contents

Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Dependent Variables				
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship	0.459	0.117	0.08 – 0.89	11,490
Next-Election Vote Share	67.209	12.930	39.00 – 100.00	9,309
Legislative Effectiveness (Current Term)	1.001	1.359	0.00 – 18.69	11,506
Legislative Effectiveness (Next Term)	1.069	1.420	0.00 – 18.69	9,467
Independent Variables				
Minority Party	0.450	0.498	0.00 – 1.00	11,532
House	0.815	0.389	0.00 – 1.00	11,532
Majority Party	0.550	0.498	0.00 – 1.00	11,532
Committee Chair	0.072	0.258	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
Subcommittee Chair	0.268	0.443	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
Power Committee Member	0.340	0.474	0.00 – 1.00	11,505
Majority Leader	0.027	0.163	0.00 – 1.00	11,505
Minority Leader	0.027	0.161	0.00 – 1.00	11,505
State Legislative Experience	0.484	0.500	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
Partisan Issue Area	0.229	0.420	0.00 – 1.00	403,620
Seniority	5.528	4.295	1.00 – 30.00	11,506
Vote Share (Previous Election)	65.987	12.941	23.00 – 100.00	11,214
Electoral Vulnerability	0.514	0.290	0.05 – 1.00	11,214
Ideological Extremity (Lagged)	0.385	0.152	0.00 – 0.94	9,370
DW-NOMINATE (First Dimension)	0.023	0.413	−0.82 – 0.94	11,391
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship	0.459	0.117	0.08 – 0.89	11,490
Original Bipartisanship	0.236	0.167	0.00 – 0.91	11,505
Democrat	0.520	0.500	0.00 – 1.00	11,532
Female	0.145	0.353	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
Latino	0.047	0.213	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
African American	0.076	0.265	0.00 – 1.00	11,506
Deliberation Account: Legislative Complexity (Cosponsorship-Decision Level)				
Legal Cross-Reference Density	2.919	4.554	0.00 – 94.40	553,900
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship (Decision)	0.460	0.498	0.00 – 1.00	554,099
Deliberation Account: Identical Bills (Cosponsorship-Decision Level)				
Not First Related Bill	0.002	0.047	0.00 – 1.00	632,120
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship (Decision)	0.453	0.498	0.00 – 1.00	632,120
Deliberation Account: Committee Jurisdiction (House Cosponsorship-Decision Level)				
Markup-Membership Match	0.302	0.459	0.00 – 1.00	50,792

Continued on next page

Table A1 continued from previous page

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship (Decision)	0.433	0.496	0.00 – 1.00	50,792
Bill-Evolution Account: Amendment Activity (Out-Party Cosponsorship-Decision Level)				
Amendment Offered	0.039	0.193	0.00 – 1.00	632,120
# Amendments Offered	0.318	6.991	0.00 – 1,298.00	632,120
Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship (Decision)	0.453	0.498	0.00 – 1.00	632,120
Relational Account: Committee Ties (Cosponsorship-Decision Level)				
Any Committee Tie	0.291	0.454	0.00 – 1.00	1,756,196
# Committee Ties	0.326	0.546	0.00 – 5.00	1,756,196
Relational/Viability Mechanisms: Coalition Growth (Legislator-Bill Risk-Spell Level, Split)				
Prior Out-Party Cosponsor Count	14.917	25.758	0.00 – 251.00	54,583,041
Minority Party	0.611	0.488	0.00 – 1.00	54,583,041
Seniority	5.530	4.293	1.00 – 30.00	54,583,041
Electoral Vulnerability	0.519	0.291	0.00 – 1.00	53,264,891
Strategically Delayed Join (Event)	0.005	0.072	0.00 – 1.00	54,583,041
Relational/Viability Mechanisms: Committee Markup (Legislator-Bill Risk-Spell Level, Unsplit)				
Ever Marked Up	0.115	0.319	0.00 – 1.00	23,251,287
Minority Party	0.559	0.496	0.00 – 1.00	23,251,287
Seniority	5.445	4.254	1.00 – 30.00	23,251,287
Electoral Vulnerability	0.524	0.289	0.00 – 1.00	22,750,103
Strategically Delayed Join (Event)	0.012	0.110	0.00 – 1.00	23,251,287

Note: The top two panels report descriptive statistics for the member-congress-level analysis sample used in the in-text models. The remaining panels report descriptive statistics for variables used in the alternative-mechanism tests reported in the appendix; units of analysis vary by test and are noted in each section header. Legislator-bill risk-spell descriptives are reported separately for the split (time-varying) and unsplit (time-invariant) analytic files used in the hazard-model mechanism tests, since *N* differs substantially between them. Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship appears twice in the Independent Variables panel, reflecting its use as an outcome in some models and as a predictor of downstream consequences in others.

Elite Interviews

Purpose and Research Design

To better understand how legislators and congressional staff evaluate the timing of out-party cosponsorship, we conducted semi-structured elite interviews with current and former members of Congress and congressional staff during the summer and fall of 2026. At the time of manuscript preparation, we had completed nine interviews; data collection remains ongoing. We do not interpret this cutoff as evidence of thematic saturation. Rather, the interviews are designed to provide evidence about decision-making processes and identify mechanisms that are difficult to observe directly in congressional records, while the population-level implications of those mechanisms are evaluated separately using the complete universe of cosponsorship decisions described in the main text.

The interviews serve three related purposes. First, they allow us to examine how legislators and their staffs understand the distinction between original and later out-party cosponsorship. Second, they provide direct evidence about the political, legislative, and electoral considerations that can make support unattractive at introduction but more attractive later. Third, they help identify observable implications that can subsequently be evaluated using congressional data. In particular, the interviews drew our attention to changes in political cover as bipartisan coalitions form, changes in the perceived viability of legislation, and the continued electoral value of bipartisan participation even when legislators join after introduction.

We do not treat the interview sample as representative of members of Congress or congressional staff, nor do we use the interviews to estimate the population prevalence of cosponsorship activity. The interview evidence instead provides leverage on the processes underlying individual cosponsorship decisions. Our quantitative analyses then assess whether the patterns implied by these accounts appear systematically across more than two million observed congressional cosponsorship decisions.

Sampling and Recruitment

We used a purposive sampling strategy supplemented by snowball and referral sampling. Our initial recruitment identified current and former legislators and congressional staff with direct experience making, advising, observing, recruiting, or communicating congressional cosponsorship decisions. We then asked respondents to recommend additional individuals with relevant institutional experience and expanded the sample through those referrals. Recruitment remains ongoing. Because respondents were purposively selected and subsequent recruitment partly followed professional referral networks rather than a defined

population sampling frame, we do not calculate a population response rate. The overwhelming majority of individuals approached for interviews agreed to participate.

Our sampling strategy deliberately sought variation in characteristics that could provide different perspectives on the incentives surrounding bipartisan cooperation. We recruited respondents with experience in both the House and Senate, Democratic and Republican institutional environments, different levels of congressional seniority, leadership and rank-and-file settings, and both member and staff roles. We also sought variation in gender and in the professional responsibilities of staff, including experience in personal offices, legislative and committee work, party and leadership organizations, coalition building, and communications. Some respondents who previously worked in Congress had subsequently moved to interest groups, academia, or other organizations. We selected these respondents because of their congressional experience rather than their employment at the time of the interview.

Table A2: Composition of Elite Interview Sample

Sample Characteristic	**Respondents**
Total Interviews Completed	9
Former Members of Congress	3
Congressional Staff	6
Former Congressional Staff	5
Current Congressional Staff	1
Respondents with House Experience	8
Respondents with Senate Experience	3
Respondents with Experience in Both Chambers	2
Republican Institutional Experience	5
Democratic Institutional Experience	3
Committee/Institutional Perspective Not Coded by Party	1

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive. Chamber experience records whether a respondent served as a legislator or congressional staff member in the relevant chamber. Partisan institutional experience refers to the party affiliation of former legislators or the partisan congressional environment in which staff served. We sought variation on additional characteristics, including gender, seniority, leadership experience, and staff responsibilities, but do not report respondent-level combinations of demographic and professional characteristics because doing so could facilitate deductive identification in this small elite population. Data collection is ongoing; this table describes the nine interviews included in the qualitative analysis reported in this manuscript.

Interview Procedure and Human Subjects Protections

No deception was used during recruitment or interviewing. Prospective participants received information about the project, its intended academic use, and its confidentiality protections by email before agreeing to participate. Consistent with the approved protocol, we did not collect signed consent forms because retaining participants' signatures would create direct identifiers and undermine the anonymity protections provided to respondents. Agreement by email served as documented consent to participate, and we reviewed the confidentiality procedures and obtained verbal consent again at the beginning of each interview.

Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary, that information from the interviews would be used only for academic research, and that their comments would not be attributed by name or through other directly identifying information. We explained that published material would identify respondents only through broad descriptors relevant to interpreting their institutional perspective, such as "former Republican House member," "former congressional staffer," or "current Republican Senate staffer." Each respondent was assigned an anonymous interview identifier (*INT001–INT009*), which is used throughout the manuscript and appendix. Respondents received no financial or other compensation for participating.

The principal foreseeable risk to respondents was deductive identification and the possibility of professional or reputational consequences from candid discussion of internal congressional decision making. We took several steps to minimize this risk. Interviews were not audio- or video-recorded; we did not retain signed consent forms; names and other directly identifying information are not reported in the manuscript; and we use only broad professional descriptors when attributing statements. We also report sample characteristics primarily in aggregate rather than publishing respondent-level combinations of party, chamber, position, demographic characteristics, and professional experience that could make individuals readily identifiable.

All interviews were conducted remotely over Zoom and generally lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. Both authors attended every interview. One author generally led the semi-structured questioning while the other took detailed contemporaneous notes, with both authors participating in follow-up questions when appropriate. The roles of lead interviewer and note-taker varied across interviews. Because the interviews were not recorded, the resulting materials are detailed contemporaneous interview notes rather than verbatim transcripts. Text presented in quotation marks in the manuscript is limited to language recorded contemporaneously in the notes as direct speech. Material captured only in summary form is paraphrased rather than

presented as a direct quotation. Both authors subsequently reviewed the interview notes during the coding and analysis process. We do not characterize the notes as complete verbatim transcripts of the conversations.

Interview Protocol

Interviews followed a semi-structured format. Respondents were asked a common set of questions concerning how legislators decide whether and when to cosponsor out-party legislation, while the wording, ordering, and follow-up probes were adapted to respondents' professional experience and answers. This structure allowed us to investigate a common decision process while taking advantage of differences in respondents' institutional vantage points. Former members were asked primarily about their own cosponsorship decisions and experiences recruiting legislative partners, while staff were asked about the processes they observed within congressional offices, committees, party organizations, and communications operations.

Whenever possible, we first asked respondents open-ended questions about the cosponsorship process before introducing specific explanations for delayed support. We also asked respondents to reconstruct particular instances in which a legislator supported an out-party proposal but did not join at introduction, focusing first on the sequence of events and on what changed between introduction and the eventual cosponsorship decision. Only after respondents described the sequence did we use more targeted probes concerning possible explanations such as changes in the coalition, party signals, legislative viability, information acquisition, or electoral considerations.

When respondents had difficulty recalling a specific episode, we sometimes used legislative examples identified in the congressional cosponsorship records before the interview as recall prompts. These examples allowed us to ask respondents about documented differences in the timing of support while retaining the semi-structured character of the interview. Respondent-specific questions were also used when an individual's institutional experience provided distinctive leverage on a particular part of the process. Communications staff, for example, received additional questions about the public presentation of bipartisan activity; committee staff were asked about signals of legislative viability; staff with party or leadership experience were asked about collective party considerations; and former legislators were asked about their own electoral and policy calculations. The principal modules of the protocol addressed:

Interview Protocol: Principal Modules

Legislative Process

1. How legislators and their staffs receive and evaluate cosponsorship requests
2. The practical and political distinction between original and later out-party cosponsorship
3. Specific instances in which a legislator ultimately supported an out-party bill but did not join at introduction
4. Whether delays reflected information acquisition, changes in bill content, internal office procedures, political considerations, or other factors

Coalition and Partisan Context

5. How the size, composition, and identity of members in the existing coalition affected willingness to join
6. The role of party leaders and partisan pressures in decisions about whether and when to provide cross-party support
7. Whether signals of legislative viability—including committee activity, leadership involvement, stakeholder negotiations, and the prospect of floor action—altered the attractiveness of joining

Electoral and Strategic Considerations

8. How electoral circumstances and constituency incentives affected the value and timing of bipartisan participation
9. Whether and how original and later bipartisan participation could be communicated publicly to constituents
10. From the sponsor's perspective, how offices recruited original out-party cosponsors and evaluated the value of particular legislators joining early

Because the interviews were semi-structured, not every respondent received every question or identical follow-up probes. The common protocol and representative wording of its questions are reproduced below.

Analysis and Coding

Our qualitative analysis combined theory-informed and inductive elements. The interview protocols included questions motivated by our initial expectations about the political costs and benefits of original versus later cosponsorship, including the possible roles of party pressure, the existing coalition, legislative information, and electoral incentives. At the same time, questions were deliberately open-ended and the semi-structured format allowed respondents to identify considerations, mechanisms, and alternative explanations not contained in our initial expectations.

Following the interviews included in the analysis, both authors reviewed the contemporaneous notes, identified recurring themes relevant to the argument, and jointly adjudicated whether each respondent provided affirmative evidence for each theme. We coded a theme as present only when a respondent explicitly endorsed, described, or provided an example of the underlying mechanism. The presence of an interviewer question or probe was not sufficient to code the respondent as supporting that mechanism. Similarly, failure to code a theme as present does not imply that the respondent rejected it. Because interviews were semi-structured, respondents differed in the subjects they discussed and the follow-up questions they received.

We also retained and evaluated accounts that offered non-strategic explanations for delayed cosponsorship. Respondents identified information acquisition, internal office processing, staff workload, changing bill content, and simple administrative delay as possible explanations for some later cosponsorship decisions. Rather than treating these accounts as inconsistent with the interview evidence, we use them to distinguish the political mechanism developed in the paper from alternative processes that can also generate delayed support. The alternative-explanation analyses reported elsewhere in the appendix examine whether the empirical patterns captured by our measure are systematically consistent with these accounts. Table A3 reports the six recurring themes used in the main analysis and the coding rule applied to each. The percentages describe the breadth of support for a theme within our purposively selected sample and should not be interpreted as estimates of the prevalence of these views among members of Congress or congressional staff.

Table A3: Coding of Themes Identified in Elite Interviews

Theme	Coding Rule	Respondents
Greater Risk of Original Cosponsorship	Respondent explicitly describes original or early out-party cosponsorship as carrying greater political, electoral, or reputational risk than joining later.	**67% (6/9)**
Partisan Risks	Respondent identifies party leaders, collective party interests, partisan constituencies, organized interests, or electoral opponents as a source of costs associated with cross-party support.	**67% (6/9)**
Rewards of Original Cosponsorship	Respondent identifies policy influence, coalition-building, legislative leadership, authorship credit, or electoral benefits that can accompany original participation.	**56% (5/9)**
Legislative Viability	Respondent describes information about a bill's prospects—including committee action, leadership involvement, stakeholder agreement, floor consideration, or likelihood of enactment—as changing the attractiveness or timing of support.	**56% (5/9)**
Political Cover from Coalition Growth	Respondent describes another copartisan joining first, the identity of existing cosponsors, or growth in the coalition as making subsequent out-party support politically easier or less risky.	**44% (4/9)**
Electoral Credit from Later Support	Respondent indicates that legislators who join after introduction can still communicate bipartisan participation or receive electoral credit for supporting cross-party legislation.	**44% (4/9)**

Note: A theme is coded as present only when the respondent explicitly endorses, describes, or provides an example of the underlying mechanism. Interviewer prompts alone are not coded as evidence. Absence of a code should not be interpreted as disagreement. Because the interviews were semi-structured, not every respondent received identical follow-up questions. Percentages describe only the completed purposive interview sample and are not population estimates.

Relationship Between the Interviews and Quantitative Analyses

The qualitative and quantitative evidence play distinct but complementary roles in our research design. The interviews provide direct evidence about congressional actors' decision processes and identify how the political environment surrounding a bill can change after introduction. In particular, respondents repeatedly described coalition growth as providing political cover, changes in legislative viability as altering both the risks and benefits of participation, and later cosponsorship as preserving some of the electoral value of bipartisan support.

The statistical analyses do not treat these interview accounts themselves as population-level evidence. Instead, we derive observable implications from the mechanisms identified in the interviews and evaluate those implications using congressional behavioral data. In the appendix section "Validating Components of SDBS: Political Cover and Legislative Viability," duration models examine whether the probability that an out-party legislator joins a bill changes as copartisans enter the coalition and following observable signals of increased legislative viability. The primary analyses in the manuscript separately examine the institutional, electoral, and governing implications derived from the theory. This division of labor allows the interviews to provide leverage on otherwise difficult-to-observe decision processes while the congressional data establish whether their observable implications generalize beyond the interviewed respondents.

Confidentiality and Data Availability

The raw interview notes, recruitment correspondence, and other respondent-level materials will not be made publicly available. Participants agreed to take part under not-for-attribution protections, and the notes contain detailed professional, institutional, and legislative information that could permit deductive identification even if names and direct identifiers were removed. We instead maximize transparency about the interview research design without releasing confidential respondent materials. This appendix reports the sampling and recruitment strategy, sample composition, interview procedures, consent and confidentiality practices, analytical approach, coding definitions, and the common interview protocol. The anonymous interview identifiers used in the manuscript are retained only to allow readers to determine when evidence comes from the same or different respondents; they are not linked publicly to respondent identities.

The complete quantitative data and code necessary to reproduce the statistical analyses are addressed separately in the manuscript's data-availability materials.

Core Interview Guide

The following questions reproduce the common structure of the semi-structured interviews. Exact wording and follow-up questions varied according to respondents' professional experiences and answers. Respondent-specific legislative examples were sometimes used as recall prompts after respondents were first given an opportunity to answer more generally.

1. **Cosponsorship Decision Process.** When you became aware of a bill sponsored by a member of the other party that you might consider cosponsoring, what typically happened between first learning about the bill and deciding whether—and when—to add your name?

- Who was usually involved in that decision?
- Were there circumstances in which you supported the substance of a bill but were not yet ready to cosponsor it?
- What generally determined whether you joined immediately rather than days or weeks later?

2. **Original Versus Later Cosponsorship.** In your experience, what was the practical or political difference between being an original out-party cosponsor and adding your name after a bill had already been introduced?

    - Did joining at introduction send a different signal than joining later?
    - Would the sponsor, party leaders, other members, interest groups, or constituents interpret the two actions differently?
    - What might make a legislator willing to join an out-party bill later but not at introduction?

3. **Reconstructing a Timing Decision.** Can you recall a specific instance in which you or an office you observed supported an out-party bill but did not join it at introduction? Walk us through what happened from the point at which the office first became aware of or interested in the proposal until the eventual decision to cosponsor it.

    - Why did the legislator join when they did rather than earlier?
    - What had changed by that point?
    - If nothing about the bill itself had changed, what had changed around the bill?

4. **Information, Bill Development, and Administrative Delay.** When an office was interested in an out-party bill but had not yet cosponsored it, what kinds of information might it have been waiting for?

    - Could delays reflect additional policy information or changes to the bill?
    - Could internal office procedures, staff workload, or the time required to brief the member produce later cosponsorship?
    - If the bill remained essentially unchanged, what else might make the office more comfortable joining later?

5. **The Existing Coalition.** How much did the legislators who had already joined a bill affect whether and when another out-party member was willing to cosponsor it?

    - Did it matter whether another member of the legislator's party had already joined?
    - Did the number or identity of existing out-party cosponsors matter?
    - Could another legislator "going first" make it easier for others to follow?
    - Was there ever a point at which the coalition became large or bipartisan enough that the calculation changed?

6. **Party Leadership and Partisan Incentives.** Did party leaders provide pressure, advice, or signals concerning whether or when members should cosponsor legislation sponsored by the opposing party?

    - Could leadership be comfortable with a member eventually supporting a bill but prefer that the member not help make it bipartisan at introduction?
    - Were there circumstances in which being an original out-party cosponsor carried greater partisan risk than joining later?
    - How, if at all, were these pressures communicated?

7. **Legislative Viability.** Did changes in a bill's legislative prospects affect whether or when legislators were willing to cosponsor it?

    - Did committee action, negotiations, amendments, leadership involvement, or potential floor consideration matter?
    - Did the likelihood that the legislation would actually advance or become law change the calculation?
    - Could a bill becoming more viable make cross-party support easier even if the underlying policy had not changed?

8. **Institutional and Electoral Context.** How did a member's political circumstances affect decisions about when to provide out-party support?

    - Did majority versus minority status matter?

- Did the calculation differ between the House and Senate?
- Did electoral vulnerability, primary elections, district or state preferences, or ideological position affect the willingness to join early?

9. **Constituents and Bipartisan Credit.** How valuable was it for a legislator to be able to demonstrate publicly that they worked across party lines?

    - Could a legislator who joined a bill after introduction still receive meaningful credit for bipartisan participation?
    - Was original cosponsorship easier or more valuable to communicate publicly than later support?
    - Did communications strategies surrounding bipartisan activity vary with electoral circumstances?

10. **Building Bipartisanship from the Sponsor's Perspective.** When a legislator sponsored a bill and wanted support from the other party, how did the office approach recruiting cross-party cosponsors?

    - How valuable was it to secure out-party support before introduction?
    - Did the identity of the first out-party cosponsor matter?
    - Could attracting one particular legislator early make it easier to recruit additional members of that party?
    - Did original cosponsors participate differently in drafting, negotiation, or coalition-building than legislators who joined later?

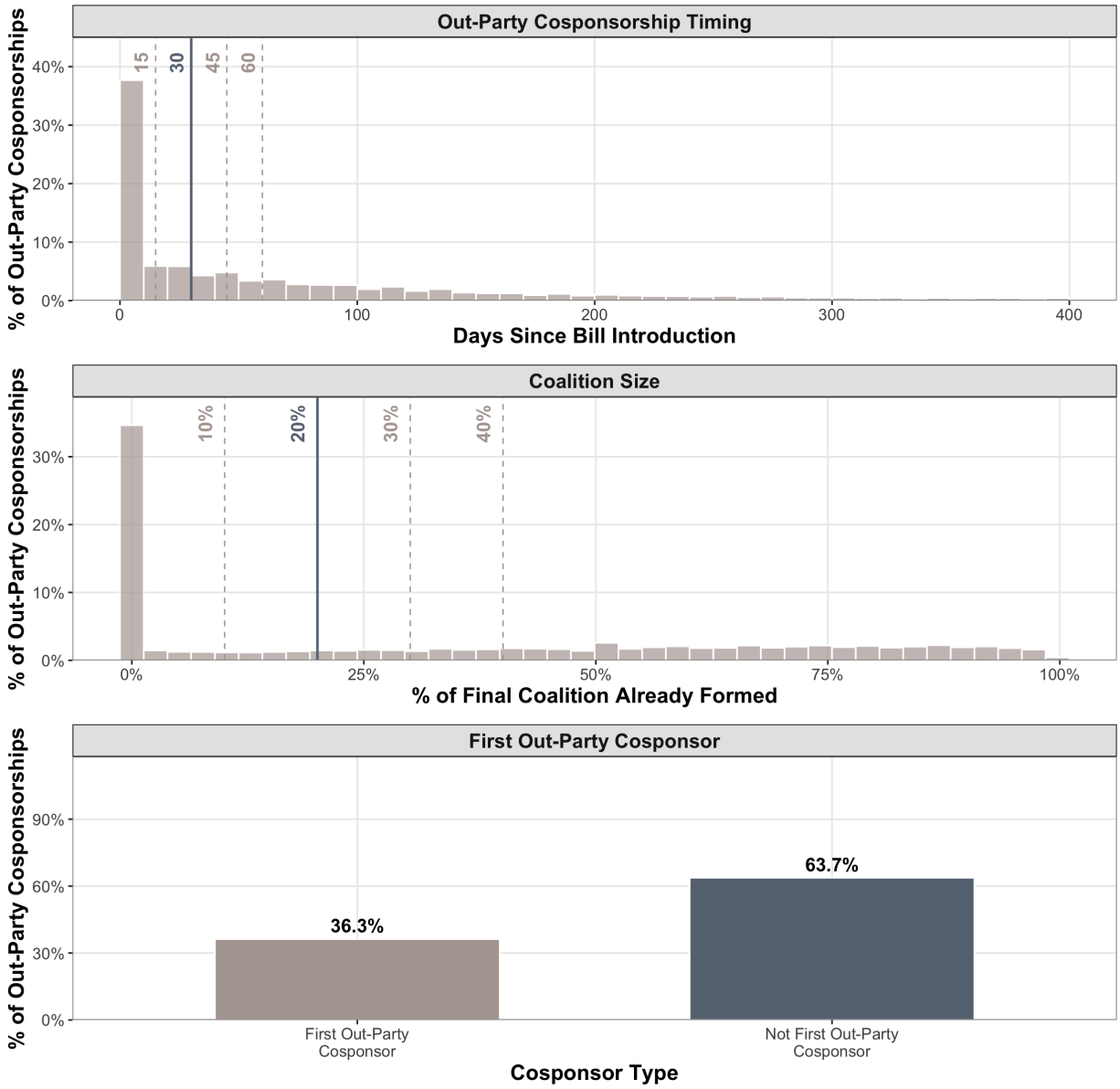
11. **Referrals.** Who else has experience with these decisions and would be especially useful for us to speak with?

    - Are there former members, legislative directors, chiefs of staff, committee staff, communications staff, or party staff who had particular experience with bipartisan coalition-building or cosponsorship decisions?

Measurement Validation

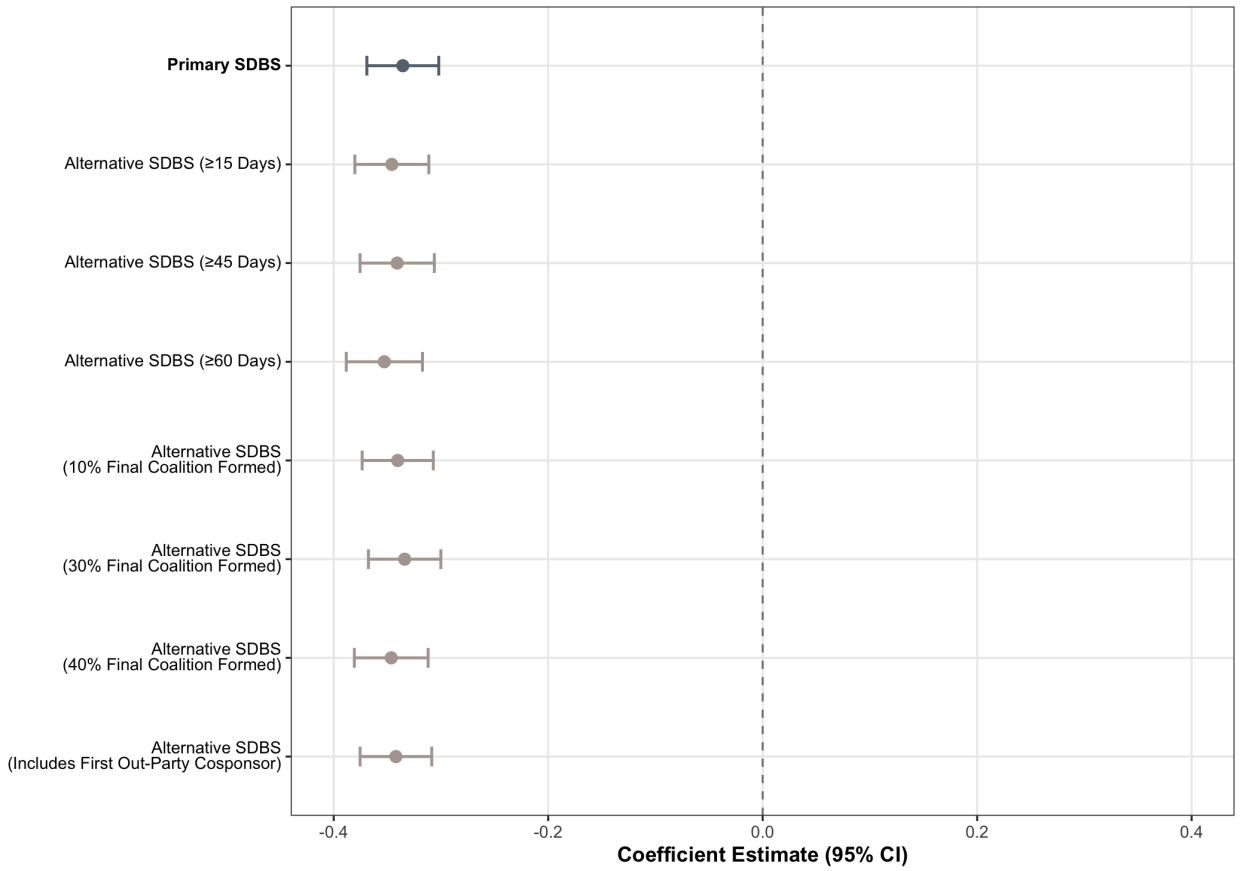
Figure A1 plots the distribution of each component of SDBS across all out-party cosponsorship decisions in our sample: the number of days elapsed since a bill's introduction, the share of a bill's eventual coalition already formed at the time of cosponsorship, and whether the cosponsor was the first out-party legislator to join. Solid lines mark our primary thresholds (30 days; 20 percent coalition formed); dashed lines mark the alternative thresholds evaluated in Figures A2 and A3 below (15, 45, and 60 days; 10, 30, and 40 percent coalition formed). The distributions are heavily concentrated near their lower bounds: the large majority of out-party cosponsorship decisions occur within days of a bill's introduction and before any meaningful coalition has formed, consistent with sincere, original participation rather than strategic delay. Decisions meeting our primary thresholds – joining after 30 days, after at least 20 percent of the eventual coalition has formed, and after another out-party legislator has already joined – occupy a comparatively small share of the right tail of these distributions. This concentration pattern also clarifies why the threshold-sensitivity results reported in Figure 1 in the main text are stable: because classification-relevant decisions cluster near the primary cutoffs rather than the alternative cutoffs tested, moving the threshold modestly in either direction reclassifies only a small share of decisions.

Figure A1: Distribution of the Components of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship



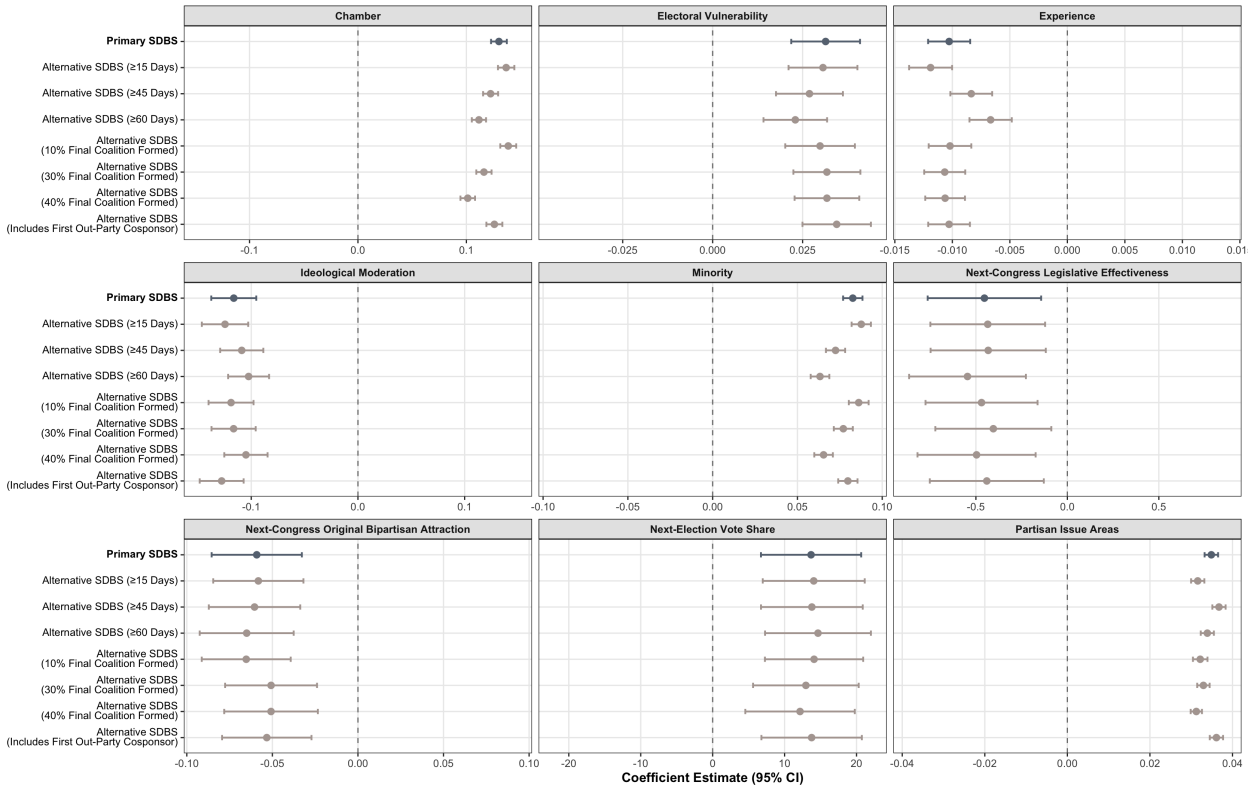
Note: Distribution of the three components underlying SDBS classification, across all out-party cosponsorship decisions. *Top*: days elapsed since bill introduction (truncated at 400 days for readability). *Middle*: percentage of the bill's eventual coalition already formed at the time of cosponsorship. *Bottom*: whether the cosponsor was the first out-party legislator to join the bill. Solid lines mark the primary SDBS thresholds (30 days; 20% coalition formed); dashed lines mark the alternative thresholds evaluated in Figures A2 and A3.

Figure A2: Negative Association Between Original and Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship is Robust to Alternative Thresholds



Note: Coefficient estimates from a bivariate model regressing original bipartisanship on strategically delayed bipartisanship, estimated once under the primary SDBS classification (bold) and under each of seven alternative threshold specifications (grey), holding the other two components fixed. Standard errors clustered by legislator; error bars show 95% CIs.

Figure A3: Primary Results are Robust to Alternative Thresholds



Note: Each panel plots coefficient estimates for H1 – H7 under the primary SDBS classification (bold) and seven alternative threshold specifications (grey), holding the other two components fixed. H3 uses the topic-level sample; all others use the member-congress level sample. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. All models include full controls and standard errors clustered by legislator; H1 - H6 include congress fixed effects.

Validating Components of SDBS: Political Cover and Legislative Viability

Our measurement strategy identifies cosponsorship decisions that are *consistent with* strategically delayed bipartisanship, but the timing of a decision alone cannot reveal why a legislator waited. This creates an important validation question: does the behavior classified by our measure occur under the political and legislative conditions that legislators and congressional staff identify as making delayed participation more attractive? The interviews highlight two especially clear and observable implications. First, legislators describe *political cover*: crossing the aisle becomes less individually risky after other members of one's party have already done so. Second, they describe *legislative viability*: support can become more attractive once a proposal demonstrates that it is receiving serious institutional consideration and may advance. If our measure captures the strategic process described by respondents, strategically delayed cosponsorship should become more likely as out-party coalitions grow and should be disproportionately concentrated on bills that demonstrate legislative viability.

These tests provide a different form of validation from the threshold-sensitivity analyses reported elsewhere in the appendix. Threshold tests establish that classification is not an artifact of choosing a particular days-elapsed or coalition-formation cutoff. The analyses below instead examine whether decisions classified as strategically delayed exhibit the *behavioral relationships implied by the decision process that motivates the measure*. Evidence that strategic-delay events systematically occur as political cover increases and on bills that demonstrate viability would therefore connect our observable measure to the mechanisms identified independently in the interviews.

Duration Models of Political Cover and Legislative Viability

Testing these implications requires accounting explicitly for time. This is especially important because both coalition development and strategically delayed cosponsorship occur as bills age. A simple comparison between later cosponsorship and coalition size could therefore produce a positive association mechanically: older bills have had more time both to accumulate cosponsors and to generate delayed joins. We address this problem using Cox proportional-hazards models (Cox 1972), treating strategically delayed cosponsorship as a time-to-event outcome. For each bill, potential out-party cosponsors enter the risk set once they reach the temporal window in which a strategically delayed decision can occur. A strategically delayed out-party cosponsorship constitutes the event; legislators who do not experience such an event are censored. We represent the data in start–stop form, allowing characteristics of the bill's political environment to change

over its life. The Cox model estimates

$$h_{ib}(t) = h_0(t) \exp\left[\beta Z_{ib}(t) + \mathbf{X}_{it}\gamma\right], \tag{1}$$

where $h_{ib}(t)$ is the instantaneous hazard that legislator i strategically joins bill b at time t, $h_0(t)$ is the unspecified baseline hazard, $Z_{ib}(t)$ captures the mechanism of interest, and $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ includes minority-party status, seniority, and electoral vulnerability. Standard errors are clustered by bill because legislators considering the same proposal do not make independent decisions.

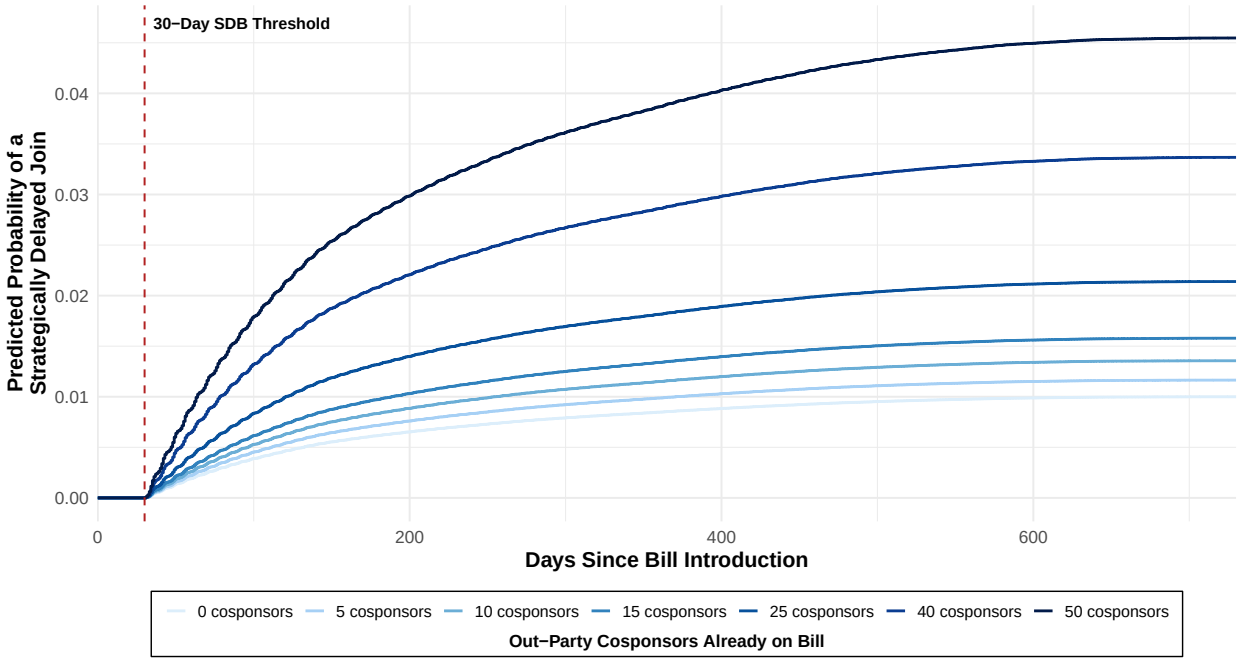
The duration framework is substantively important for the validation exercise. The Cox model leaves the baseline hazard as an unrestricted function of elapsed time, so the estimated relationship between a mechanism and strategic joining is not generated simply by the fact that both change as more days pass after introduction. At a given event time, the model compares legislators who strategically join with legislators who remain at risk at that same duration. Thus, the political-cover model asks whether larger existing out-party coalitions are associated with a greater probability of strategic joining *conditional on how long the bill has already existed*, rather than conflating coalition growth with the passage of time.

Political Cover. The first test evaluates the political-cover mechanism identified in the interviews. Respondents repeatedly explained that legislators are especially exposed when they are among the first members of their party to cross the aisle and that additional copartisans can create "safety in numbers." If this mechanism is reflected systematically in the behavior captured by SDBS, the instantaneous probability of a strategically delayed join should rise as the existing out-party coalition grows. We operationalize political cover using **Prior Out-Party Cosponsor Count**, a time-varying measure of the number of out-party legislators who have already joined the bill at each point in its life. Because this quantity is updated as the coalition changes, the model uses the full start–stop risk-set structure rather than assigning each bill a single coalition size. The model contains 53,264,891 legislator–bill–time intervals and 279,094 strategically delayed events.

The results strongly support the political-cover implication. Each additional prior out-party cosponsor is associated with a 2.87 percent increase in the instantaneous hazard of a strategically delayed join (HR = 1.029, 95% CI: 1.028–1.030, $p < .001$), net of minority-party status, seniority, and electoral vulnerability. Although the effect of a single additional cosponsor is modest, political cover accumulates as the coalition grows. For example, the estimated hazard is approximately 3.1 times as large when 40 out-party legislators have already joined as when none have joined, holding the remaining covariates constant. Figure A4

illustrates this compounding relationship by plotting the predicted cumulative probability of a strategically delayed join across different levels of prior out-party support.

Figure A4: Coalition Growth and Strategically Delayed Cosponsorship



Note: Predicted cumulative probability of a strategically delayed join by days since bill introduction.

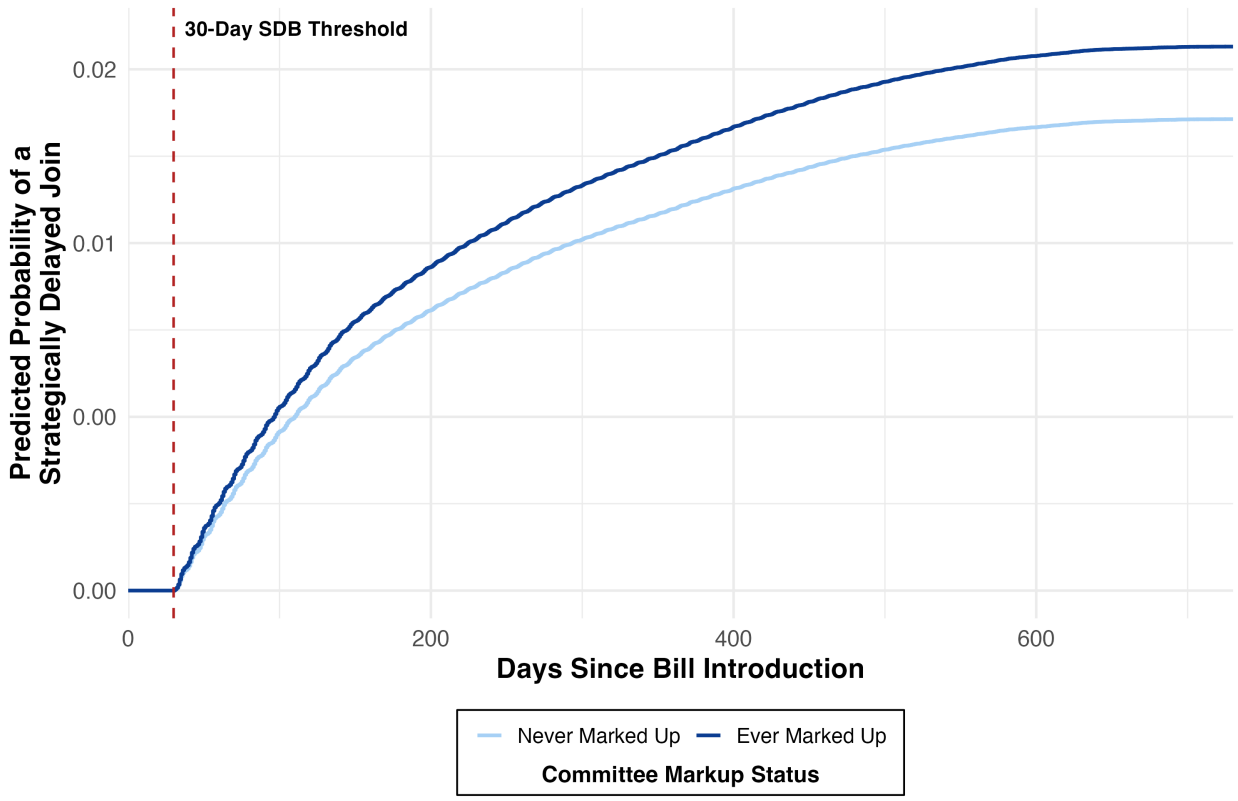
This pattern is precisely what the political-cover account implies. SDBS does not merely identify decisions that happen late in a bill's life. Conditional on elapsed time, legislators become progressively more likely to make a strategically delayed join as more members of the out party have already absorbed the first-mover costs of crossing the aisle.

Legislative Viability. The second test evaluates the legislative-viability mechanism. Interview respondents described uncertainty about a proposal's prospects as an important feature of the decision at introduction and identified committee activity, leadership attention, and movement toward floor consideration as signals that a bill had become more consequential. We therefore ask whether strategically delayed joins are disproportionately concentrated on legislation that demonstrates meaningful institutional viability. We use committee markup as an observable indicator of viability. **Ever Marked Up** equals one for bills that receive a committee markup during their legislative life and zero for bills that never do. Committee markup is useful for this validation exercise because it distinguishes legislation that receives consequential committee consid-

eration from the much larger population of introduced bills that never reaches that stage. Importantly, this specification should be interpreted as a *bill-level viability test*: because **Ever Marked Up** records whether a bill demonstrates this level of viability during its life, the model tests whether strategically delayed participation is more common on bills that prove institutionally viable. It does not, by itself, identify a causal before-and-after effect of the markup event.

The results again comport with the interview-based expectation. Bills that receive a committee markup have a 16.8 percent higher instantaneous hazard of attracting a strategically delayed out-party cosponsor than bills that are never marked up ($HR = 1.168$, 95% CI: 1.092–1.249, $p < .001$), controlling for minority-party status, seniority, and electoral vulnerability. Figure A5 plots the corresponding cumulative incidence curves. At comparable durations since introduction, bills that demonstrate viability through the committee process are systematically more likely to attract strategically delayed participation than bills that never receive a markup.

Figure A5: Committee Markup and Strategically Delayed Cosponsorship



Note: Predicted cumulative probability of a strategically delayed join by days since bill introduction for bills that are ever marked up and bills that are never marked up.

As with the political-cover analysis, the duration framework is important for interpretation. Bills that eventually receive a markup may simply remain active for longer than bills that disappear quickly from the agenda. The Cox model does not compare their raw totals of delayed cosponsors. Instead, the markup coefficient captures differences in the instantaneous hazard of strategic joining conditional on elapsed time and continued exposure to the risk of a join. The result is therefore not an artifact of viable bills simply having more calendar time in which to attract cosponsors.

Randomization-Based Placebo Test

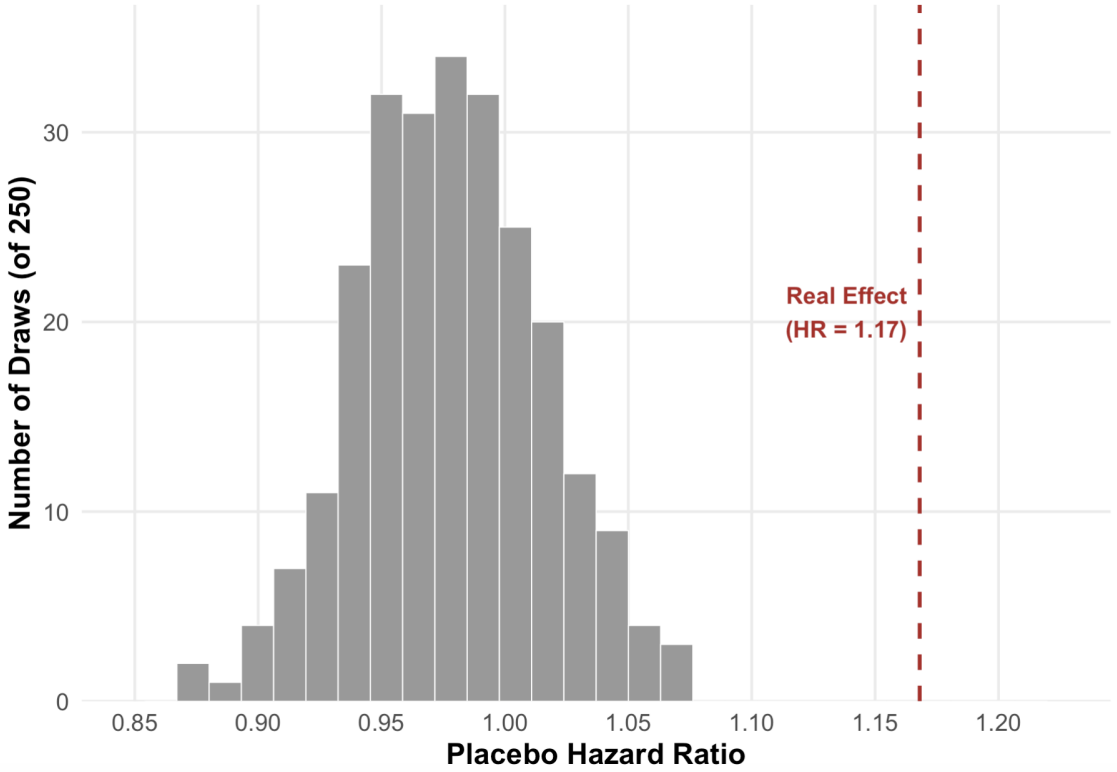
The committee-markup model establishes that bills demonstrating legislative viability are substantially more likely to attract strategically delayed cosponsors. However, that result alone leaves an additional concern. Because committee markup is a relatively uncommon bill-level characteristic and the duration models contain millions of legislator–bill–time observations, even modest differences between two groups of bills can be estimated with considerable precision. A statistically significant hazard ratio therefore does not by itself establish that the observed markup association is unusually large or specific to a substantively meaningful signal of legislative viability. It remains possible that similarly sized but arbitrary groups of bills would also produce nontrivial hazard differences under the same model structure.

We address this concern with a randomization-based placebo test. The purpose of the exercise is not to provide a second estimate of the markup effect, but to construct an empirical reference distribution for the magnitude of association that would arise if "viability" status were assigned arbitrarily rather than attached to an actual feature of the legislative process. In each iteration, we randomly designate the same number of bills as placebo-markup bills as receive the real markup designation and re-estimate the identical Cox model. We repeat this procedure 250 times. Because each placebo assignment preserves the prevalence of the real treatment while severing its connection to actual legislative viability, the resulting distribution shows how large a hazard ratio the model produces simply from randomly partitioning bills into groups of the same relative size.

The placebo estimates are tightly concentrated around the null. In each of the 250 iterations, we randomly select 12,847 bills from the 133,509 bills that never received an actual committee markup, matching the number of bills in the sample that did receive a markup. These randomly selected bills are coded as having received a placebo markup, while all remaining bills—including the bills that actually received a markup—are coded as untreated for that iteration. We then re-estimate the same Cox model and record the hazard ratio associated with the placebo indicator. This procedure therefore produces 250 hazard ratios representing the association we would observe if a bill-level "viability" signal of exactly the same prevalence as actual markup were assigned arbitrarily among bills that never demonstrated that form of legislative viability. Across the 250 random assignments, the mean placebo hazard ratio is 0.978, and the central 95 percent of placebo estimates ranges from 0.907 to 1.053. By contrast, the observed hazard ratio for actual committee markup is 1.168, well outside this distribution. None of the 250 placebo assignments produces a

hazard ratio as large as the observed markup association.[1]

Figure A6: Distribution of Hazard Ratios Across 250 Randomized Draws



Note: Histogram displays hazard ratios from 250 randomized placebo draws, each estimated using the same Cox proportional hazards specification as the primary markup model. In each iteration, 12,847 bills are randomly drawn from the 133,509 bills that never received an actual committee markup and coded as receiving a placebo markup; all remaining bills, including those with an actual markup, are coded as untreated. The dashed vertical line marks the hazard ratio for actual committee markup (HR = 1.17) from the primary model. The mean placebo hazard ratio is 0.978, with a central 95 percent range of 0.907 to 1.053; none of the 250 placebo draws produces a hazard ratio as large as the observed markup effect (Monte Carlo $p \approx .004$).

This comparison provides information that the markup model alone cannot. The primary model shows that markup status predicts a higher hazard of strategically delayed participation; the placebo test shows that an association of this magnitude does not routinely emerge when the same model is applied to arbitrary bill-level classifications with the same prevalence. The result therefore helps rule out the possibility that the markup finding is merely a consequence of the large risk-set structure or the imbalance between marked-up and non-marked-up bills. The placebo test does not eliminate all limitations of the observational markup design. Bills that receive committee markups may differ systematically from bills that do not in ways that are themselves related to cosponsorship behavior, so the analysis should not be interpreted as identifying

[1]The raw empirical exceedance rate is 0/250. Using the conventional finite-simulation correction, $(r+1)/(B+1)$, yields a Monte Carlo p-value of approximately .004.

a causal effect of markup. Rather, the placebo exercise strengthens the validation claim we make here: strategically delayed participation is concentrated on the specific class of bills that demonstrate meaningful legislative viability, and the magnitude of that relationship is substantially larger than what the same model produces under arbitrary bill-level classifications.

Implications for Measurement Validity

Taken together, these analyses provide population-level evidence for the decision process underlying SDBS. The interviews identify changes in political cover and legislative viability as reasons that support judged too costly or uncertain at introduction can become more attractive later. The duration models then recover both relationships in congressional behavior: the hazard of a strategically delayed join increases substantially as out-party support accumulates, and bills that demonstrate institutional viability through committee markup are more likely to attract strategically delayed participation. Critically, these relationships are estimated in a framework that explicitly models elapsed time rather than treating later observations as inherently more strategic.

These findings do not imply that every decision classified by SDBS reflects conscious strategic calculation, nor do the duration models identify the causal effect of political cover or legislative viability on any individual legislator's decision. That is not the purpose of the validation exercise. Instead, they establish that the aggregate behavior captured by the measure varies systematically with the conditions that congressional actors themselves identify as making strategic delay attractive. Combined with the threshold-sensitivity analyses and the distinction between original and strategically delayed bipartisanship reported in the main text, this correspondence substantially strengthens the construct validity of SDBS: the measure does not simply identify cosponsors who happen to join late, but isolates a pattern of delayed bipartisan participation that emerges under the changing political and legislative conditions predicted by our theory.

In-Text Models

Table A4: Institutional Predictors of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

	DV: SDBS			
	Minority (H1)	**Chamber: Full Sample (H2)**	**Chamber: Switchers (H2)**	**Partisan Issue Area (H3)**
	1	2	3	4
Minority	**0.083*****	0.075***		
	(0.003)	(0.003)		
House		**0.130*****	**0.088*****	
		(0.004)	(0.009)	
Partisan Issue Area				**0.035*****
				(0.001)
Original Bipartisanship	−0.380***	−0.306***	−0.233***	−0.122***
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.025)	(0.006)
Democrat		−0.007		
		(0.007)		
Female		0.001		
		(0.003)		
Vote Share in Previous Election		−0.003***		
		(0.001)		
Voter Share in Previous Election^2		0.000***		
		(0.000)		
Seniority		−0.012***		
		(0.001)		
Seniority^2		0.000***		
		(0.000)		
DW-Nominate (First Dim.)		−0.036***		
		(0.010)		
Latino		0.006		
		(0.006)		
Black		−0.009		
		(0.005)		
Majority Leader		0.004		
		(0.005)		
Minority Leader		−0.017**		
		(0.006)		
Power Committee		0.003		
		(0.003)		
Committee Chair		0.013**		
		(0.004)		
Subcommittee Chair		0.001		
		(0.003)		
State Legislator		−0.002		
		(0.003)		
Congress FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✗	✓	✓
Observations	11,479	11,141	1,135	181,912
R^2	0.649	0.493	0.599	0.137

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 2 is a between-legislator design with member-level controls; Column 3 restricts to legislators who switched chambers during the panel.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

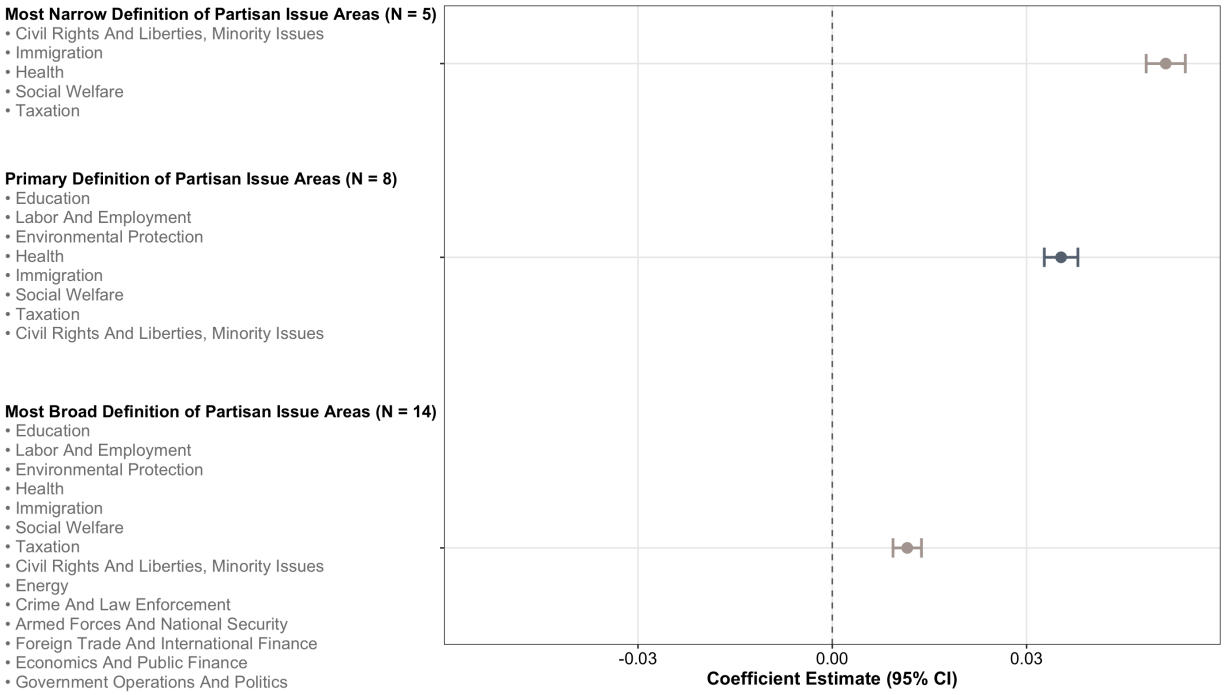
Table A5: Individual Predictors of Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship

	DV: SDBS		
	Electoral Vulnerability (H4)	**Ideological Moderation (H5)**	**Experience (H6)**
	1	2	3
Electoral Vulnerability	**0.031*****		
	(0.005)		
Ideological Extremity (Lagged)		**−0.116*****	
		(0.011)	
Seniority		−0.006***	**−0.010*****
		(0.001)	(0.001)
Seniority (Squared)		0.000**	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Original Bipartisanship	−0.162***	−0.375***	−0.358***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.011)
House		0.125***	0.125***
		(0.004)	(0.007)
Minority		0.090***	0.079***
		(0.003)	(0.003)
Democrat		−0.005	0.013
		(0.008)	(0.021)
Female		−0.001	
		(0.004)	
Vote Share in Previous Election		−0.001	−0.005***
		(0.001)	(0.001)
Voter Share in Previous Election^2		0.000	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
DW-Nominate (First Dim.)		−0.014	
		(0.010)	
Latino		0.007	
		(0.006)	
Black		0.003	
		(0.005)	
Majority Leader		0.008	0.006
		(0.005)	(0.007)
Minority Leader		−0.018**	−0.012*
		(0.006)	(0.006)
Power Committee		0.004	−0.008*
		(0.003)	(0.004)
Committee Chair		0.011**	0.011**
		(0.004)	(0.004)
Subcommittee Chair		0.003	0.001
		(0.003)	(0.003)
State Legislator		−0.002	
		(0.003)	
Congress FE	✓	✓	✗
Member FE	✓	✗	✓
Observations	11,183	9,236	11,179
R^2	0.612	0.483	0.644

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Columns 1 and 3 are within-legislator designs (member fixed effects); Column 2 is a between-legislator design controlling for original bipartisanship, since ideological extremity is independently associated with reduced cross-party engagement across all forms of legislative behavior (see main text for justification).
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Robustness of In-Text Models

Figure A7: Robustness to Alternative Classifications of Partisan Issue Areas



Note: Points represent coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals from three separate regressions models, each using an alternative operationalization of partisan issue area (y-axis). Each model conditions on original bipartisanship and is estimated with member and congress fixed effects.

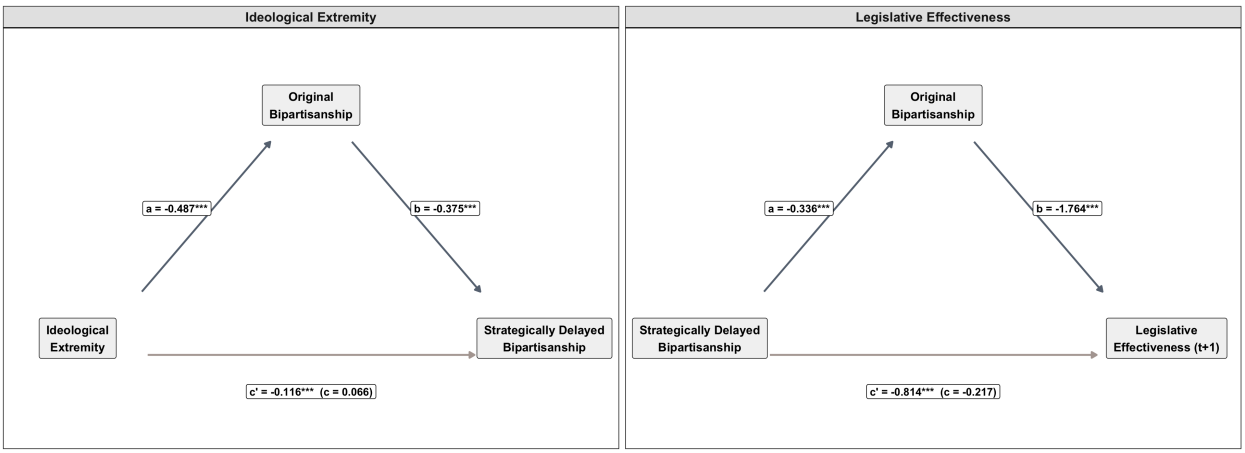
Mediation Analysis of Original Bipartisanship

Because strategically delayed bipartisanship and original bipartisanship capture distinct but related forms of cross-party participation, conditioning on original bipartisanship changes the substantive quantity being estimated. Original bipartisanship measures a legislator's propensity to direct their coalition-building activity at introduction across party lines, whereas SDBS measures reliance on delay conditional on providing out-party support. The two measures are neither algebraic complements nor deterministic functions of one another, but our theory suggests that legislators may nevertheless sort systematically between these forms of bipartisan participation. As a result, original bipartisanship may itself lie on the pathway connecting some of our predictors to strategic delay and connecting strategic delay to downstream governing outcomes. For ideological extremity, for example, more extreme legislators may engage in less original bipartisan coalition building, and that behavioral tendency may help account for their observed reliance on strategically delayed participation. For legislative effectiveness, strategic delay may be associated with reduced original bipartisan engagement, which can in turn weaken the cross-party relationships and coalition-building capacity associated with effective lawmaking. Models that condition on original bipartisanship therefore estimate the relationship with strategic delay *net of* this distinct form of early bipartisan participation, whereas models that omit it capture the combined relationship operating both directly and through original bipartisanship. We assess these pathways using a standard three-equation mediation design: a path-a model relating the predictor to original bipartisanship, a path-b/c' model relating the outcome to both the predictor and original bipartisanship, and a path-c model relating the outcome to the predictor alone, evaluating the indirect association ($a \times b$) with a Sobel test.

We find that original bipartisanship substantially mediates both relationships, though in opposite directions. For ideological extremity, extreme legislators engage in markedly less original bipartisanship ($a = -0.487$, $p < .001$), and original bipartisanship is itself negatively associated with strategically delayed bipartisanship, net of extremity ($b = -0.375$, $p < .001$). Because legislators appear to sort into one behavioral type or the other, this produces a positive indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.182$; Sobel $z = 22.94$, $p < .001$) that offsets extremity's true underlying negative relationship to strategically delayed bipartisanship: the unconditional, unmediated relationship is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero ($c = 0.066$, n.s.), while the direct effect, once original bipartisanship is held constant, is negative and highly significant ($c' = -0.116$, $p < .001$). For legislative effectiveness, strategically delayed bipartisanship similarly reduces original bipar-

tisanship ($a = -0.336$, $p < .001$), which is itself negatively associated with future legislative effectiveness in this specification, net of strategically delayed bipartisanship ($b = -1.764$, $p < .001$). The resulting indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.592$; Sobel $z = 8.49$, $p < .001$) is positive and masks part of strategically delayed bipartisanship's true negative relationship to effectiveness: the unconditional relationship is smaller in magnitude and not statistically significant ($c = -0.217$, $p = .184$), while the direct effect, once original bipartisanship is held constant, is negative, sizable, and highly significant ($c' = -0.814$, $p < .001$). Figure A8 presents both mediation models as path diagrams, with the indirect path through original bipartisanship shown in blue and the direct/total effect path shown in grey.

Figure A8: Mediation Path Diagrams



Note: Path diagrams for the ideological extremity and legislative effectiveness mediation models. a is the effect of the predictor on original bipartisanship; b is the effect of original bipartisanship on the outcome, net of the predictor; c' is the direct effect of the predictor on the outcome, net of original bipartisanship; c is the total, unconditional effect of the predictor excluding original bipartisanship as a control. All models include member and congress fixed effects, with standard errors clustered by legislator.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Assessing Alternative Mechanisms

There are alternative explanations for delayed out-party cosponsorship that deserve consideration. Our theory assumes that legislators strategically delay support to reduce the political costs of bipartisan cooperation while preserving its symbolic benefits. However, delayed cosponsorship may instead be explained by two other accounts: a deliberative account and a bill-evolution account. We test each in turn below.

The Deliberation Account

Under the deliberation account, legislators delay out-party cosponsorship because they require time to acquire and evaluate information about a bill before deciding whether to support it. We test this account in three ways: by examining whether legislators with the most privileged access to information—committee chairs—are less strategically delayed in their out-party cosponsorship, whether legislators are less strategically delayed on legally simple bills relative to legally complex ones, and whether legislators are less strategically delayed when cosponsoring a bill they have already been exposed to in an earlier, related form.

Committee Chair Test. Committee chairs possess the most immediate and extensive access to information among their colleagues: they control hearing schedules, receive the earliest briefings from committee staff, and determine which evidence and witnesses come before the committee. If delayed out-party cosponsorship reflects the time legislators need to gather and evaluate information, chairs should require less time to decide and should therefore engage in less strategically delayed bipartisanship than their non-chair colleagues. Using a data frame where the unit of analysis is the legislator-term, we regress SDBS on an indicator for committee chair status, controlling for original bipartisanship, seniority (and seniority squared), chamber, minority-party status, party, electoral vulnerability, leadership status, power committee membership, and subcommittee chair status, with member and congress fixed effects and standard errors clustered by legislator. Contrary to the information-acquisition account, committee chairs engage in significantly *more*, not less, strategically delayed bipartisanship than their colleagues ($\beta = 0.014$, $p < .001$).

Complexity Test. To test whether delayed out-party cosponsorship reflects the time legislators need to acquire information about complex legislation, we construct a measure of statutory embeddedness: the density of legal cross-references within each bill's text. For each bill, we use regular-expression matching to count citations to the U.S. Code, Public Laws, and the Statutes at Large. We sum these three citation types and create a proportional measure operationalized as legal cross-references per 1,000 words. Bills that reference more existing statutes require legislators to understand what current law says, how the bill would amend it,

and how it interacts with related provisions, and should therefore demand more time to evaluate under an information-acquisition account of delayed cosponsorship. Using a data frame where the unit of analysis is each out-party cosponsorship decision, we regress our strategically delayed bipartisanship indicator on legal cross-reference density, including congress, cosponsor, and policy-area fixed effects, with standard errors clustered on cosponsor. Contrary to the information-acquisition account, legal cross-reference density is negatively associated with strategically delayed bipartisanship ($\beta = -0.0017$, $p < .0001$). Legislators are *less* likely to engage in strategically delayed bipartisanship as bills become more statutorily embedded—the opposite of what a deliberation-based account of delay would predict.

Identical Bills Test. Legislators should require less time to evaluate legislation that has already been introduced in related or identical form in an earlier Congress, since they have already been exposed to the underlying policy content. Using `congress.gov`'s related-bills designation, we identify directed pairs of related bills ordered by introduction date, and construct an indicator, *Not First Related Bill*, coded 1 if a bill is the later-introduced member of a related-bill pair. Restricting the sample to out-party cosponsorship decisions, we regress our strategically delayed bipartisanship indicator on this indicator, including cosponsor, congress, and policy-area fixed effects, with standard errors clustered by cosponsor. We find no significant association between prior exposure to related legislation and strategically delayed bipartisanship ($\beta = -0.019$, cluster $s.e. = 0.013$, $p = .129$). This null result suggests that prior familiarity with a bill's underlying policy content does not explain delayed out-party cosponsorship, further undermining an information-acquisition account of delay.

Taken together, these three tests are jointly inconsistent with a deliberation-based account of delayed out-party cosponsorship. Legislators with the most privileged access to information engage in *more*, not less, strategically delayed bipartisanship; strategically delayed bipartisanship is lowest, not highest, on the most information-intensive bills; and prior exposure to a bill's substantive content has no detectable bearing on the decision to delay. None of these patterns is what an information-acquisition account of delay would predict.

Table A6: Assessing Alternative Mechanisms: Deliberation

	DV: SDBS		
	Committee Chair	Complexity	Identical Bill
Committee Chair	**0.014*****		
	(0.004)		
Legal Cross-Reference Density		**−0.0017*****	
		(0.0002)	
Not First Related Bill			**−0.019**
			(0.013)
Original Bipartisanship	−0.356***		
	(0.010)		
Seniority	−0.010***		
	(0.002)		
Seniority^2	0.000***		
	(0.000)		
House	0.120***		
	(0.010)		
Minority	0.082***		
	(0.003)		
Democrat	0.011		
	(0.022)		
Vote Share	−0.003***		
	(0.001)		
Vote Share^2	0.000***		
	(0.000)		
Majority Leader	0.009		
	(0.006)		
Minority Leader	−0.013*		
	(0.006)		
Power Committee	−0.008*		
	(0.003)		
Subcommittee Chair	0.002		
	(0.003)		
Congress FE	✓	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✓	✓
Policy Area FE	✗	✓	✓
Observations	11179	553900	632120
R^2	0.676	0.062	0.059

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 1 uses the legislator-term as the unit of analysis and tests whether committee chairs, who possess the most privileged access to information, are less strategically delayed; Columns 2 and 3 use the cosponsorship decision as the unit of analysis and test, respectively, whether strategically delayed bipartisanship is more common on legally complex bills and less common on bills with a previously introduced, related counterpart.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

The Bill-Evolution Account

Under the bill-evolution account, legislators delay out-party cosponsorship because they are waiting to see whether a bill's content will change into a form they can support, rather than strategically delaying to reduce the political costs of cooperation. If this account explains delayed cosponsorship, strategically delayed bipartisanship should be more common when a bill receives an opportunity to be altered, since legislators would have reason to wait and see whether the bill evolves before committing their support. We test this expectation using data on all amendments offered to bills in our sample, drawn from committee-action and amendment records for the 98th through 118th Congresses. For each bill, we construct an indicator, *Amendment Offered*, coded 1 if the bill received one or more offered amendments in its chamber of origin, and a count variable, *Number of Amendments Offered*, capturing the total number of amendments offered to the bill. In the model reported below, the unit of analysis is each out-party cosponsorship decision. We regress our strategically delayed bipartisanship indicator on both variables and include cosponsor, congress, and policy-area fixed effects, with standard errors clustered by cosponsor. Controlling for the total number of amendments offered, whether a bill received an amendment opportunity at all is not significantly associated with strategically delayed bipartisanship ($\beta = -0.007$, cluster $s.e. = 0.005$, $p = .154$). This null result is inconsistent with the bill-evolution account: if legislators were delaying cosponsorship to observe whether a bill's content would change, the mere opportunity for amendment should predict more strategically delayed behavior, not show no detectable association with it.

Table A7: Assessing Alternative Mechanisms: Bill-Evolution

	DV: Strategically Delayed Bipartisanship
	1
Amendment Offered	**−0.007**
	(0.005)
Number of Amendments Offered	-0.0004^{***}
	(0.0001)
Congress FE	✓
Member FE	✓
Policy Area FE	✓
Observations	632120
R^2	0.0595

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Unit of analysis is the out-party cosponsorship decision. *Amendment Offered* is an indicator coded 1 if the bill received one or more offered amendments in its chamber of origin; *Number of Amendments Offered* is a count of total amendments offered to the bill. The test of the bill-evolution account is the coefficient on *Amendment Offered*, estimated net of the total volume of amendment activity.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

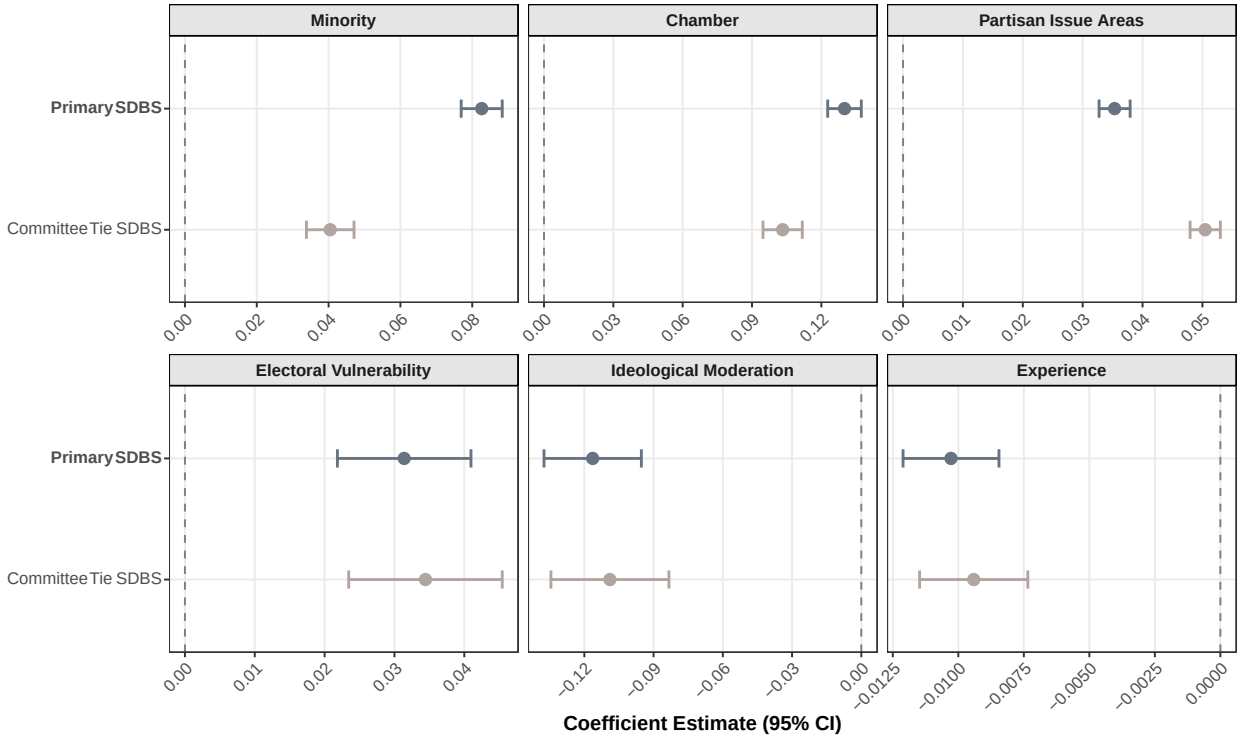
The Relational Account

Under the relational account, legislators delay out-party cosponsorship not for strategic reasons but because institutional proximity to a bill's sponsor determines how quickly they learn about the bill in the first place. Legislators who share a committee assignment with the sponsor may receive earlier notice of a bill's introduction than colleagues who do not, and this earlier awareness—rather than any calculation about the political costs and benefits of bipartisan cooperation—could account for cosponsorship decision timing. If this account explains our results, then the institutional and individual predictors of strategically delayed bipartisanship identified in the main text should be artifacts of unequal information access: among legislators who already share the sponsor's informational advantage, strategically delayed bipartisanship should no longer be predicted by minority status, chamber, electoral vulnerability, ideological moderation, or seniority, since the information-access channel this account attributes these patterns to would be held fixed across the entire sample.

We test this account by restricting the sample to cosponsorship decisions in which the cosponsor and sponsor shared at least one committee assignment in that Congress, and re-estimating each of our principal models on this committee-tied subsample. We identify shared committee assignments from committee membership records for the 103rd through 119th Congresses, matching sponsors and cosponsors on committee assignment within the same congressional term and chamber. Because strategically delayed bipartisanship is defined only for out-party cosponsorships, we recompute the empirical Bayes–shrunk strategically-delayed-bipartisanship measure using only out-party cosponsorships in which sponsor and cosponsor shared a committee tie, restricting both the numerator and the denominator to this subsample so the measure retains the same interpretation as in the main analysis.

Figure A9 compares the coefficient on each hypothesis's independent variable of interest in the primary model and the committee tie model. Across all six tests—minority status, chamber, partisan issue areas, electoral vulnerability, ideological moderation, and experience, the sign estimate is consistent across the primary and committee tie samples, and estimates are of comparable magnitude. This pattern is inconsistent with a purely relational account of strategically delayed out-party cosponsorship.

Figure A9: Assessing Alternative Mechanisms: Committee Ties



Note: Each panel compares the coefficient on the focal predictor for a given hypothesis, estimated on the primary sample (all cosponsorship decisions) versus the committee-tied subsample (cosponsorship decisions in which sponsor and cosponsor shared a committee assignment). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals; standard errors clustered by member.

References

Cox, David R. 1972. "Regression Models and Life-Tables." *Journal of the royal statistical society: Series B (methodological)* 34(2):187–202.