Performative Bipartisanship

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Abstract

Why has bipartisanship persisted in Congress despite rising partisan polarization? We argue that existing measures conflate sincere bipartisanship, in which legislators serve as original cosponsors of out-party bills and help build cross-party coalitions, with performative bipartisanship, a form of late-stage out-party cosponsorship that occurs only after others have absorbed the initial political costs of cooperation. We develop the concept of performative bipartisanship and theorize that legislators engage in it to resolve the tension between avoiding party retribution for working with the out party and the electoral need to campaign on bipartisan credentials. Using more than 2.4 million cosponsorship decisions on 147,669 bills introduced in the U.S. House and Senate from 1983 to 2024, we find that performative bipartisanship is most common among minority-party legislators, House members, and legislators considering bills in partisan issue areas, as well as among electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, and less experienced legislators. Finally, performative bipartisanship improves subsequent electoral performance among vulnerable legislators but reduces legislative effectiveness. These findings reshape how scholars conceptualize bipartisanship and demonstrate that polarization has not eliminated congressional bipartisanship; it has changed the form that bipartisan behavior takes.

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Few findings in the study of Congress are more puzzling than the apparent persistence of bipartisanship amid intense partisan polarization. Parties are more ideologically distinct, more internally unified, and more electorally competitive than at any point in recent history (Theriault 2008; Lee 2016; Pierson and Schickler 2024). Under these conditions, legislators should have strong incentives to avoid helping the opposing party govern. Yet prior research finds that bipartisanship has remained remarkably persistent over time (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020).[1] If partisan conflict has become the defining feature of contemporary American politics, why has bipartisanship in Congress remained so resilient?

We argue that this puzzle stems from how scholars have conceptualized and measured bipartisanship. Existing research generally treats all out-party cosponsorship decisions as equivalent expressions of bipartisan cooperation, regardless of when legislators choose to join legislation (e.g., Harbridge 2015; Rippere 2016; Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie 2018; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Amoroso 2025; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026).[2] This approach assumes that every act of cross-party cosponsorship reflects the same underlying political behavior. We argue instead that it conflates two fundamentally different forms of bipartisanship. Some legislators participate in the costly work of drafting legislation, negotiating across party lines, and building the initial bipartisan coalition around a bill. Others wait until that coalition has already formed and the political risks of cooperation have largely been absorbed before joining the bill themselves. Although both behaviors involve cross-party cosponsorship and, as a result, constitute forms of bipartisan behavior, they reflect fundamentally different political strategies and serve different purposes. We refer to this latter behavior as *performative bipartisanship*: a legislator's propensity to strategically delay offering cosponsorship on out-party bills to claim the symbolic benefits of bipartisan cooperation while minimizing the political costs of helping the opposing party govern.

[1] Harbridge (2015) finds that, between 1975 and 2005, bipartisanship in the House measured using all out-party cosponsorship decisions ranged from approximately 5% to 60%. We recalculate this measure through the 118th Congress in both the House and Senate and find that aggregate out-party cosponsorship declines by only 12 percentage points between 1983 and 2024. Both findings suggest that, relative to the dramatic increases in ideological polarization and party unity over the same period, bipartisan cosponsorship has not disappeared.

[2] Important exceptions include recent work that operationalizes bipartisanship using only original out-party cosponsorship decisions (Curry and Roberts 2023, 2025; Porter, Harden and Dobson 2025; Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson and Lollis 2026).

We develop a theory of performative bipartisanship and test it using a comprehensive dataset of more than 2.4 million cosponsorship decisions covering 147,669 bills introduced in the U.S. House and Senate between the 98th (1983) and 118th (2024) Congresses. We first introduce a new measure that distinguishes sincere from performative bipartisan behavior by incorporating both the timing of out-party cosponsorship and the stage of coalition formation at which legislators choose to join legislation. We then show that institutional and electoral incentives systematically shape performative bipartisanship. Legislators engage in more performative bipartisanship when they face the greatest partisan risks from sincere cooperation—when serving in the minority party, in the House, and on highly partisan legislation. They are also more likely to rely on performative bipartisanship when bipartisan credentials are electorally valuable, including when they are electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, or relatively inexperienced. Finally, we demonstrate that performative bipartisanship produces an important tradeoff: it improves future electoral performance among electorally vulnerable legislators but is associated with substantially lower legislative effectiveness in subsequent Congresses.

Our findings have important implications for how scholars understand bipartisanship, representation, and democratic governance. Most fundamentally, our findings challenge the conventional understanding of bipartisanship by questioning the longstanding practice of treating all out-party cosponsorship decisions as equivalent indicators of bipartisan cooperation (e.g., Harbridge 2015; Rippere 2016; Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie 2018; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Amoroso 2025; Lo, Olivella and Imai 2026; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). We argue that this approach conflates sincere coalition-building with performative cooperation, raising important questions about whether existing findings regarding the causes, consequences, and persistence of bipartisanship continue to hold once these behaviors are distinguished. When bipartisan behavior is disaggregated, a strikingly different pattern emerges: sincere bipartisan collaboration has declined sharply over the past four decades, particularly in the House, while performative bipartisanship has remained remarkably stable (see Figure 4).

More broadly, our theory suggests that increasing polarization does not simply reduce bipartisan behavior; it changes the type of bipartisanship legislators choose to engage in. As the political costs of helping the opposing party govern increase, legislators have stronger incentives to engage in performative cooperation rather than genuine coalition-building. In one sense, this pattern is encouraging because it suggests that legislators remain responsive to constituents' desire for bipartisan behavior. If they were not, they would likely abandon bipartisanship altogether. Yet our findings also point to a troubling consequence. If legislators increasingly prioritize symbolic bipartisan participation over the difficult work of building cross-party coalitions, democratic institutions may continue to appear bipartisan even as the collaborative relationships necessary for effective lawmaking deteriorate. The result is a Congress in which legislators are rewarded electorally for signaling cooperation while becoming less effective at governing—a tradeoff that may help explain why bipartisan behavior appears resilient even as the capacity for bipartisan lawmaking continues to erode.

Explaining The Persistence of Bipartisanship

Despite increasingly polarized parties and fierce and constant competition for majority control, bipartisan cooperation remains a persistent feature of congressional lawmaking (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020). Legislators continue to cosponsor out-party bills, bipartisan coalitions continue to form around legislative proposals, and many consequential laws ultimately receive support from both parties (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Ballard and Curry 2021, 2026; Dobson 2026). Much of this cooperation occurs through bill cosponsorship, where legislators can signal support for out-party proposals and participate in coalition-building before legislation reaches the floor (Harbridge 2015). Existing scholarship points to two primary reasons for this persistence: bipartisan cooperation facilitates governing and can benefit legislators electorally.

Bipartisanship remains important for governing because the institutional structure of Congress often 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 than those who engage in partisan conflict (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). Importantly, however, recent work finds that bipartisan *appeals* can increase constituent support and reduce perceptions of ideological extremity even when the underlying legislation receives little meaningful out-party support (Westwood 2022). Consequently, legislators have electoral incentives not only to cooperate across party lines, but also to cultivate the appearance of bipartisan cooperation.

However, these governing and electoral incentives operate alongside powerful partisan pressures against cooperation. Legislators are members of parties competing for majority control, and helping the opposing party govern through bipartisan cosponsorship can blur partisan distinctions, strengthen the other party's governing reputation, and weaken their own case for majority control (Lee 2009, 2016). We argue that, rather than eliminating bipartisanship, these competing incen-

tives should reshape *when* and *how* legislators engage in it. Out-party cosponsorship is particularly useful for reducing these cross pressures because legislators may join a bill at introduction or at any subsequent point in the legislative process. As a result, the timing of that cosponsorship decision can reveal whether legislators are helping construct a bipartisan coalition or joining only after the political risks of cooperation have declined.

The Politics of Strategic Cosponsorship Timing

Existing scholarship generally conceptualizes bipartisanship through out-party cosponsorship in one of two ways. Some studies treat all out-party cosponsorship decisions as equivalent expressions of bipartisan cooperation (e.g., Harbridge 2015; Rippere 2016; Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie 2018; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Amoroso 2025; Lo, Olivella and Imai 2026; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Other work focuses exclusively on original out-party cosponsors, treating only legislators who join a bill at introduction as bipartisan (Curry and Roberts 2023, 2025; Porter, Harden and Dobson 2025; Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson and Lollis 2026). Although the latter approach rightly emphasizes the importance of early coalition formation, it leaves unclear why legislators who eventually support an out-party bill (i.e., non-original out-party cosponsors) should be treated as equivalent to those who never support it. We argue that original and late out-party cosponsorship are both forms of bipartisanship, but they reflect distinct political strategies that existing research has largely conflated.

Following recent scholarship, we refer to original out-party cosponsorship as *sincere bipartisanship* (Curry and Roberts 2023, 2025; Porter, Harden and Dobson 2025; Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson and Lollis 2026). Legislators who engage in sincere bipartisanship help construct the bipartisan coalition that will ultimately support a bill. Original cosponsors are listed on the legislation at the time of introduction and are often involved in drafting, negotiation, and coalition formation, making original cosponsorship "akin to coauthorship on an academic paper" (Curry and Roberts 2025, p. 1544). Because these legislators commit before the bill's political prospects are known, they bear substantial uncertainty. At introduction, it remains unclear whether additional out-party legislators will join, whether party leaders will tolerate the effort, or whether

the bill will ultimately attract meaningful bipartisan support. Sincere bipartisanship can therefore advance policy goals, facilitate coalition formation, and signal a willingness to work across party lines, but it also exposes legislators to the political costs of publicly helping the opposing party govern.

Legislators can reduce these costs by delaying support until the uncertainty surrounding the bill has diminished and other legislators have already absorbed the initial costs of forming the bipartisan coalition. Legislative coalitions develop incrementally as legislators join bills under changing political and informational circumstances (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Schilling, Matthews and Kreitzer 2023). As a coalition grows, legislators receive information about the bill's viability, the willingness of other out-party members to support it, and the likelihood that party leaders will tolerate cross-party cooperation. Joining at this later stage allows legislators to support the bill and claim bipartisan credentials without assuming the same risks borne by those who initiated the coalition. We refer to this strategically delayed support as *performative bipartisanship*.

Importantly, performative bipartisanship remains a form of bipartisan collaboration. Although legislators strategically delay their support, they still choose to cosponsor out-party legislation rather than avoid the political costs of cooperation altogether. Supporting this interpretation, legislators who performatively cosponsor a bill subsequently vote for final passage in more than 90% of cases. Therefore, delayed out-party cosponsorship generally translates into meaningful cross-party support on final passage.[3] Because these final passage votes are broadly bipartisan, the coalition continues to provide the political cover that initially made delayed cosponsorship attractive. Therefore, the distinction between sincere and performative bipartisanship is not *whether* legislators cooperate across party lines, but *when* they choose to do so.

[3]We use roll-call records for final-passage votes in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 108th through the 118th Congresses. We restrict the analysis to this period because `congress.gov` reports legislators' Bioguide IDs only beginning with the 108th Congress. In earlier Congresses, voting records identify legislators by name strings rather than Bioguide IDs, the unique identifiers used in our data. We then calculate the percentage of performative bipartisan cosponsorship decisions for which the cosponsoring legislator subsequently voted in favor of final passage.

A Theory of Performative Bipartisanship

We argue that legislators engage in performative bipartisanship when the political costs of initiating bipartisan cooperation are high but the electoral benefits of appearing bipartisan remain. Under these conditions, legislators can reduce the partisan costs of working across the aisle by delaying out-party cosponsorship until after the initial bipartisan coalition has formed, while still publicly signaling a willingness to cooperate across party lines. Thus, performative bipartisanship reflects a strategic response to competing electoral and partisan incentives rather than an absence of bipartisan preferences. Conceptually, we define performative bipartisanship as strategically delayed out-party cosponsorship that occurs only after another out-party legislator has already joined the bill and a meaningful bipartisan coalition has begun to form.[4] Under these conditions, legislators can publicly claim bipartisan credentials without bearing the same political risks associated with helping construct the initial bipartisan coalition.

Our theory identifies the institutional conditions under which legislators engage in performative bipartisanship, the member-level characteristics that make legislators more likely to do so, and its electoral and governing consequences. We argue that legislators should be most likely to engage in performative bipartisanship when the risks of party retribution are greatest: when they are in the minority party, serve in the House, and cosponsor out-party legislation in partisan issue areas. We also argue that legislators with the strongest incentives to cultivate bipartisan reputations—those who are electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, and relatively inexperienced—should be especially likely to engage in performative bipartisanship. Because legislators engage in performative bipartisanship to cultivate bipartisan reputations among constituents, we expect the strategy to improve their vote share in the subsequent election, particularly among electorally vulnerable legislators. At the same time, however, performative bipartisanship prioritizes claiming bipartisan credentials over investing in the coalition-building and cross-party relationships that facilitate effective lawmaking. Consequently, legislators who rely more heavily on this strategy should be less

[4] In our empirical analysis, we operationalize this behavior 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.

effective lawmakers in subsequent terms.

If performative bipartisanship allows legislators to claim bipartisan credentials while minimizing the risks of party retribution, minority-party legislators should be especially likely to engage in it. Minority parties face strong disincentives to collaborate on majority-party legislation because sincere bipartisanship can be politically costly (Lee 2016). Working with the majority may help the governing party claim legislative success, blur partisan distinctions, and weaken the minority party's argument that voters should return it to power (Baker 2015; Lee 2016). At the same time, individual minority-party legislators may still have strong electoral incentives to appear bipartisan because doing so allows them to present themselves as productive lawmakers capable of delivering for their constituents (Mayhew 1974; Harden 2016). Indeed, survey evidence suggests that voters are especially supportive of bipartisan cooperation when their representative serves in the minority party (Harbridge, Malhotra and Harrison 2014). Therefore, performative bipartisanship provides minority-party legislators with a strategy for satisfying constituent demand for bipartisan engagement while limiting the party costs associated with helping the majority govern.

> ***H1 (Minority Party Incentives):*** Minority-party legislators should engage in more performative bipartisanship than majority-party legislators.

Second, if performative bipartisanship is most attractive when the risks of party retribution are greatest, representatives should engage in it more frequently than senators. Majority control is generally more precarious in the House than in the Senate because all House seats are contested every two years, making partisan competition more immediate and majority status more volatile. Consequently, representatives face stronger incentives to avoid helping the opposing party claim governing success and to maintain clear partisan distinctions. At the same time, shorter electoral horizons make House members more accountable to constituents and heighten incentives to demonstrate productivity, responsiveness, and a willingness to work across party lines. These competing pressures make performative bipartisanship especially attractive in the House because it allows legislators to cultivate bipartisan reputations while minimizing the party costs associated

with initiating bipartisan cooperation.

H2 (Chamber Differences): Representatives in the House should engage in more performative bipartisanship than Senators.

Finally, if performative bipartisanship emerges when the risks of party retribution are greatest, legislators should be more likely to engage in it in highly partisan issue areas than in issues on which the parties are less clearly divided. Partisan issue areas are precisely the contexts in which sincere bipartisan cooperation is most politically costly. When issues are central to party brands, helping the opposing party achieve policy success may blur partisan distinctions, undermine a party's governing message, and provide partisan rivals with legislative accomplishments to campaign on. At the same time, legislators may still benefit electorally from demonstrating a willingness to work across party lines, particularly on the issues that matter most to constituents. By delaying out-party cosponsorship until after a bipartisan coalition has already formed, legislators can claim the reputational benefits of bipartisan cooperation while reducing the political costs of helping the opposing party succeed on issues central to party competition.

H3 (Partisan Issue Areas): Legislators should engage in more performative bipartisanship in highly partisan issue areas than in less partisan issue areas.

Although institutional conditions shape the risks of party retribution for bipartisan cooperation, legislators also differ in the extent to which bipartisan credentials are electorally valuable. Some legislators have stronger incentives than others to cultivate reputations for moderation, productivity, and cross-party cooperation. Consequently, we expect performative bipartisanship to be especially attractive to legislators for whom bipartisan reputations are particularly valuable electorally: those who are electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, and less experienced.

First, electorally vulnerable legislators face competitive general elections, increasing the value of opportunities to claim credit for productive, bipartisan lawmaking relative to legislators in electorally safe districts. Because competitive elections require support beyond the party base, vulnerable legislators must appeal to independents and cross-pressured voters, who value bipartisan

cooperation (Trubowitz and Mellow 2005; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Wolak 2020). At the same time, these legislators remain subject to party pressure to avoid helping the opposing party govern. Indeed, because competitive seats are often pivotal to securing or retaining majority control, party leaders have particularly strong incentives to discourage sincere bipartisan cooperation among vulnerable members. Performative bipartisanship allows these legislators to reconcile these competing pressures by claiming bipartisan credentials that appeal to general-election voters while reducing the risks of party retaliation associated with sincere bipartisan collaboration.

H4 (Electoral Vulnerability): Electorally vulnerable legislators should engage in more performative bipartisanship than electorally secure legislators.

Second, ideological moderates should be especially likely to engage in performative bipartisanship because bipartisan reputations are central to their political identities. At first glance, one might expect ideological extremists to be especially performative because they face the greatest risks of party retribution for working across party lines. However, extremists also have the weakest electoral incentives to appear bipartisan. Their political success depends on maintaining strong partisan identities, making them more likely to avoid bipartisan cooperation altogether than to engage in it strategically. Moderates, in contrast, benefit electorally from cultivating reputations as pragmatic problem-solvers willing to work across party lines. They also, however, remain members of partisan teams and continue to face incentives to avoid helping the opposing party govern. Performative bipartisanship allows moderates to resolve this tension by cultivating bipartisan reputations while limiting the political costs of sincere cross-party collaboration.

H5 (Ideological Moderation): Ideological moderates should engage in more performative bipartisanship than ideological extremists.

Finally, newly elected legislators should be especially likely to engage in performative bipartisanship. Freshman legislators quickly recognize the electoral value of bipartisan credentials and often campaign on promises to work across party lines (Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Yet

they typically lack the relationships, trust, and institutional embeddedness necessary to participate in the difficult work of sincere bipartisan coalition-building (Porter, Harden and Dobson 2025). Original out-party cosponsorship often requires early involvement in developing legislation and relationships with bill sponsors, opportunities that are less available to newly elected members.

Less senior legislators also face greater uncertainty in their relationships with party leadership. Because they have not yet established records of party loyalty, their early legislative behavior is more likely to be interpreted as a signal of the type of legislator they will become. As a result, early out-party collaboration may be viewed as a stronger signal of party disloyalty for junior legislators than for more senior legislators, whose partisan reputations are already established. Performative bipartisanship allows inexperienced legislators to cultivate bipartisan reputations with voters, without appearing disloyal to their party.

H6 (Experience): Less senior legislators should engage in more performative bipartisanship than more senior legislators.

Finally, we expect legislators' propensity to engage in performative bipartisanship to carry important electoral and governing consequences. We argue that one reason legislators engage in performative bipartisanship is to satisfy constituent demand for bipartisan cooperation while avoiding the party costs associated with sincere collaboration. If this logic is correct, performative bipartisanship should not merely be more common among electorally vulnerable legislators—it should also improve their future electoral performance. Vulnerable legislators must appeal to independents and cross-pressured voters, who tend to value bipartisan cooperation (Harbridge, Malhotra and Harrison 2014; Trubowitz and Mellow 2005). By allowing legislators to claim bipartisan credentials while minimizing the political costs of helping the opposing party govern, performative bipartisanship should be especially effective for legislators seeking to broaden their electoral appeal. Consequently, we expect electorally vulnerable legislators who engage in performative bipartisanship to receive a higher vote share in their subsequent election than similarly vulnerable legislators who do not.

In contrast, we expect the electoral returns to performative bipartisanship to be minimal among electorally secure legislators. Because these legislators face little pressure to appeal beyond their partisan base, bipartisan credentials should provide few additional electoral benefits and may even impose modest costs among strong partisans who view cross-party cooperation unfavorably (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). Therefore, we expect the electoral benefits of performative bipartisanship to be concentrated among electorally vulnerable legislators.

> ***H7 (Electoral Consequences):*** Performative bipartisanship should be associated with increased vote share in a legislator's next election, and this association should be strongest among electorally vulnerable legislators.

Beyond its electoral consequences, we also expect performative bipartisanship to reduce legislators' ability to advance their policy agendas. Existing research has demonstrated a relationship between bipartisanship and effective lawmaking (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023). This is unsurprising given that our political system is defined by bicamerialism, separation of powers, and multiple veto points. In turn, bipartisan coalitions are often required to overcome these institutional obstacles, which improves legislators' ability to move their proposals through Congress (Krehbiel 1998; Brady and Volden 1998; Ryan 2020; Ballard and Curry 2021; Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023). These early collaborations also foster the relationships and reputations that make legislators more effective over time (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023; Maltzman and Shipan 2008).

When legislators choose to engage in performative bipartisanship, however, they prioritize claiming bipartisan credentials over investing in the coalition-building necessary for effective lawmaking. By joining bipartisan coalitions only after they have already formed, legislators avoid much of the difficult work of drafting legislation, negotiating across party lines, and recruiting early bipartisan support. Although this strategy may provide electoral advantages, it contributes little to relationship-building, trust, and collaborative reputations, which facilitate effective lawmaking. Consequently, legislators who rely more on performative bipartisanship forgo opportunities to build cross-party relationships that help them advance their own legislative agendas.

H8 (Governing Consequences): Legislators who frequently engage in performative bipartisanship should be less effective lawmakers in their next term.

Scope Conditions

Our theory is not intended to explain all delayed cosponsorship decisions, nor do we argue that performative bipartisanship characterizes every legislature. Rather, we expect the theory to apply most strongly in legislatures that satisfy four institutional conditions, all of which closely align with the modern U.S. Congress. First, majority control must be electorally meaningful and genuinely competitive, creating incentives for parties to deny one another governing successes and maintain distinct partisan brands. Although this condition characterizes the modern U.S. Congress, it is less applicable to many U.S. state legislatures, where one party often dominates legislative elections over extended periods (Dobson 2026). Second, ideological polarization must be sufficiently high that sincere bipartisan cooperation carries meaningful partisan costs. When parties are not sharply divided, legislators can often work across party lines without threatening their party's electoral brand or inviting retaliation from party leaders. Under these conditions, the strategic distinction between sincere and performative bipartisanship largely disappears because legislators can obtain bipartisan credentials without incurring substantial partisan costs.

Third, legislators must have incentives to cultivate personal reputations that extend beyond their party label, and constituents must value bipartisan cooperation. Because performative bipartisanship is fundamentally about claiming bipartisan credentials, our theory is most applicable in candidate-centered electoral systems where legislators communicate directly with voters and where bipartisan behavior (or appeals) is rewarded at the polls. Finally, legislators must have both the opportunity to cosponsor legislation and the discretion to determine when to do so. Where party leaders dictate legislative endorsements or legislative support is expressed only through final roll-call votes, opportunities for strategically timed bipartisan participation are substantially more limited.

Falsifiability of the Theory

There are alternative explanations for delayed out-party cosponsorship that deserve consideration. Most notably, our theory assumes that legislators strategically delay support to reduce the political costs of bipartisan cooperation while preserving its symbolic benefits. However, legislators may instead delay cosponsorship because they need more time to deliberate over a piece of legislation or because they are waiting for a bill to evolve to their preferred outcome. Indeed, gathering sufficient information to decide whether to support a bill and working through legislation that is technically or substantively complex are both time-intensive tasks, particularly in an overburdened Congress (LaPira, Drutman and Kosar 2020). Moreover, a bill's content is often subject to revision throughout the lawmaking process, and legislators may reasonably withhold their support until the bill becomes legislation they can support. If our measure conflates strategic delay with deliberation or legislators' responsiveness to bill evolution, our results should not hold under several additional tests.

If legislators are deliberative and are taking time to evaluate legislation, several implications of performative bipartisanship should hold. First, legislators with privileged access to information should engage in less performative bipartisanship because they have more immediate access to information. To test this expectation, we identify legislators who chair a committee, since 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, have a more direct communication channel with party leadership, and determine which evidence and witnesses come before the committee. If information acquisition explains delayed out-party cosponsorship, committee chairs should engage in less performative bipartisanship than their colleagues.

Likewise, legislators should require less time to gather information about technically simple legislation than highly complex bills. To test this expectation, we construct a measure of legislative complexity based on statutory embeddedness—the density of legal-cross-references to the U.S. Code, Public Laws, and the Statutes at Large within a bill's text. If delayed out-party cosponsorship primarily reflects information acquisition, performative bipartisanship should be more common on

highly complex legislation than on relatively simple bills.

Next, legislators should require less time to evaluate identical legislation that is reintroduced. Using `congress.gov`'s related-bills designation, we identify bills linked to previously introduced, identical legislation. Unlike our first two tests, which capture access to information and the amount of information legislators must process, identical bills measure prior familiarity with the policy itself. If delayed out-party cosponsorship primarily reflects the time needed to understand legislation, legislators should engage in less performative bipartisanship on bills with previously introduced, identical counterparts, since the legislators have already been exposed to the information.

Finally, to evaluate whether legislators withhold cosponsorship until a bill evolves, we identify whether a bill received one or more offered amendments, as the amendment process provides a particularly important opportunity for substantive revision. Under the bill-evolution account, performative bipartisanship should increase when a bill is open to alteration.

The results of our robustness analyses are inconsistent with both the deliberative and bill-evolution counterarguments. Contrary to what an information-acquisition explanation would predict, committee chairs—who possess the most privileged and immediate access to information—engage in significantly *more* performative bipartisanship than their colleagues (Appendix Table 6). Likewise, performative bipartisanship is less common on highly complex and statutorily embedded bills (Appendix Table 6). Finally, performative bipartisanship does not vary with prior exposure to identical bills, suggesting that prior familiarity with the underlying policy does not explain delayed out-party cosponsorship (Appendix Table 6). And again, whether a bill received an offered amendment is not significantly associated with performative bipartisanship, net of the total number of amendments offered (Appendix Table 7). Across four different tests, the results consistently reject the deliberative and bill-evolution accounts.

Measuring Performative Bipartisanship

We define performative bipartisanship as a property of *offering* out-party cosponsorship, not *attracting* it. Offering refers to an out-party legislator's decision to cosponsor another member's

bill, whereas attracting refers to a bill sponsor's ability to recruit out-party cosponsors. We focus exclusively on offering because only the cosponsoring legislator controls the strategic timing central to our theory. Bill sponsors cannot determine when other legislators choose to join; they can only receive that support. Therefore, performative bipartisanship is a property of the cosponsoring legislator's decision rather than of the bill or its sponsor. We conceptualize performative bipartisanship as consisting of two dimensions: delayed timing and entry into an already-established bipartisan coalition.

The first component is temporal: a legislator's cosponsorship is classified as performative if they wait 30 or more days after a bill's introduction before joining an out-party bill. This threshold is designed to differentiate legislators who cosponsor out-party bills much earlier in the legislative process—indicating that they were involved in the negotiation, drafting, and introduction of the bipartisan legislation—from those who join later. Legislators who cosponsor a bill after 30 days were likely not involved in the difficult bipartisan work of formulating and introducing the bill when the political cost and uncertainty around the legislation were highest, but want to be later associated with the bipartisan legislation.

The remaining two components capture coalition composition: the extent to which the costs of bipartisanship have already been reduced by other out-partisans joining the bill. First, to be classified as performative, a legislator cannot be the first out-party member to join. Waiting until another member of one's party has already crossed party lines indicates that a colleague has already absorbed the initial reputational and political costs of bipartisan participation. Second, we require that at least 20 percent of the bill's final coalition has already formed before the legislator joins, thereby reducing the political costs of associating oneself with bipartisan legislation by leveraging a large, potentially viable coalition that has already formed on the bill. Consequently, a cosponsorship decision is classified as performative bipartisanship only if it satisfies all three conditions simultaneously: the legislator joins an out-party bill at least 30 days after introduction, is not the first out-party legislator to do so, and joins only after at least 20 percent of the bill's eventual coalition has already formed.

Each component captures a distinct aspect of performative bipartisanship, and no single criterion adequately identifies the concept on its own. Considered independently, each criterion classifies a substantially larger share of out-party cosponsorship decisions as performative than does the joint measure: 64 percent of decisions are made by a legislator who is not the first out-party cosponsor, 53 percent occur at least 30 days after bill introduction, and 56 percent occur after at least 20 percent of the bill's eventual coalition has formed, compared to just 45 percent when all three conditions are required simultaneously. The criteria also provide distinct information. Among decisions satisfying the 30-day threshold, only 14 percent fail to meet the other two criteria, indicating that timing is most closely aligned with the composite measure. In comparison, 29 percent of non-first out-party cosponsorship decisions and 20 percent of decisions meeting the coalition-share threshold fail to satisfy the remaining criteria. Together, these patterns demonstrate that jointly requiring all three conditions produces a more conservative, theoretically grounded measure than any individual component alone.

To construct a measure of performative bipartisanship, we used the `congress.gov` API to collect all cosponsorship decisions associated with the 147,669 non-resolution bills that received at least one cosponsor and were introduced in the House or Senate between the 98th and 118th Congresses. We collected information on each bill, its sponsor, the bill's sponsorship date, every cosponsor, and the date of each cosponsorship decision. We also scraped the Congressional Research Service's (CRS) policy area classification for each bill. Each row in this data frame represents a legislator's cosponsorship decision, meaning there are multiple observations per bill. In total, our cosponsorship data frame includes 2,486,089 cosponsorship decisions.

We create an indicator of out-party cosponsorship decisions, coded 1 if the sponsor's and cosponsor's party identification differ, 0 otherwise.[5] Among out-party cosponsorship decisions, we then create indicators for the three primary components of our measure: whether 30 days had elapsed between bill sponsorship and the cosponsorship decision, whether the legislator was not

[5]We recoded all legislators who identified as Libertarian or Independent as the party with which they caucused (Democrat or Republican). There are 13 party switchers in our data frame; we retain the party with which they caucused for the longest during a term.

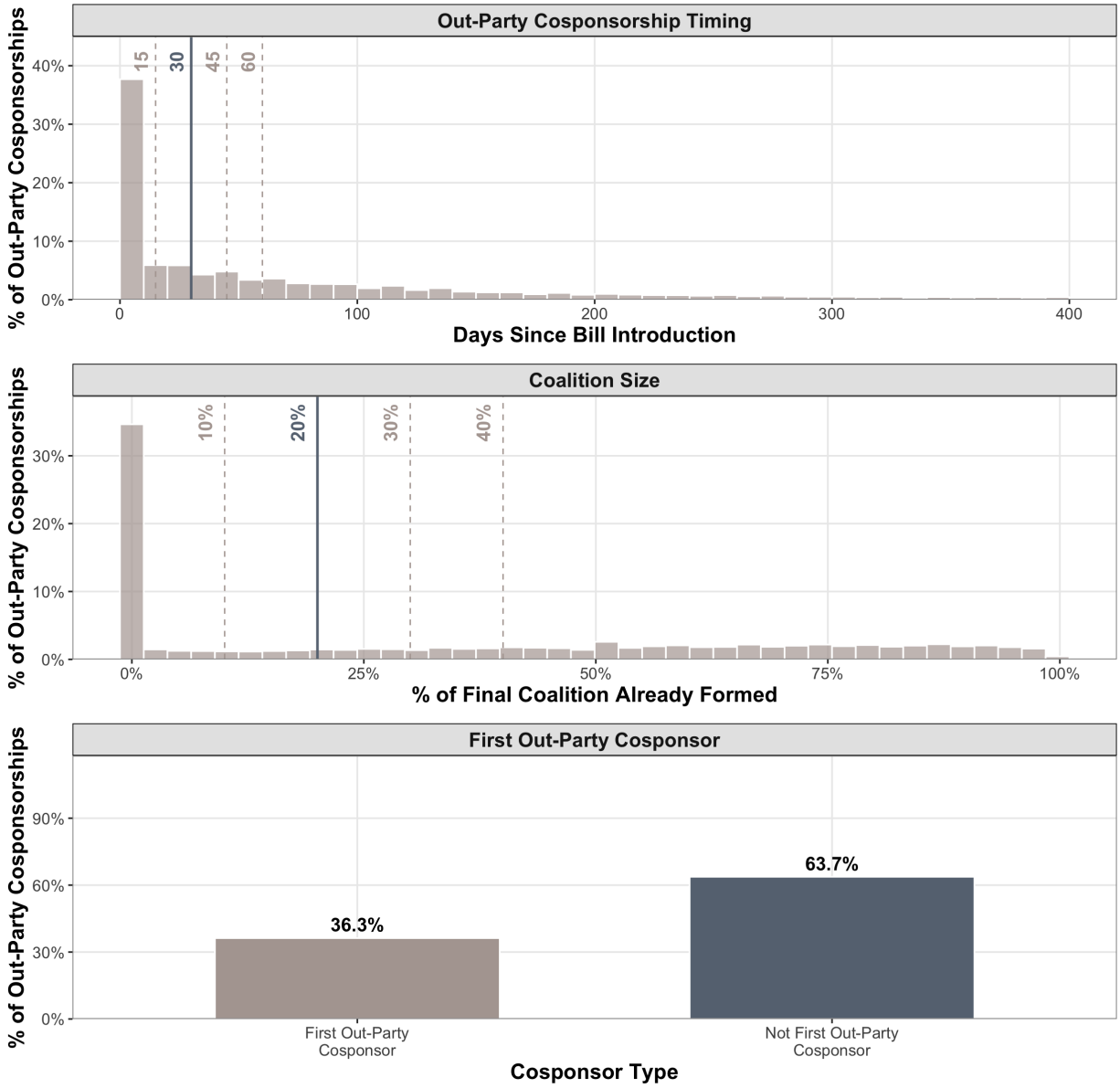
the first out-partisan to cosponsor the bill, and whether at least 20 percent of the final bill coalition had already formed before the cosponsorship decision.

Figure 1 displays the distribution of each component of the measure. Across all three panels, most out-party cosponsorship occurs early in the legislative process, before another out-party legislator joins the bill and before a substantial bipartisan coalition forms. These patterns are consistent with sincere bipartisanship (Dobson and Lollis 2026). In contrast, later cosponsorship decisions that occur after another out-party legislator has joined and a visible bipartisan coalition has emerged are more consistent with performative bipartisanship. Solid vertical lines (dark) indicate our selected thresholds (30 days and 20 percent coalition formation), while dashed lines (light) denote alternative thresholds examined in subsequent robustness analyses.

Because no single threshold can perfectly identify the point at which the political costs of bipartisan cooperation have meaningfully declined, we examine a range of plausible alternatives to demonstrate that a particular operationalization does not drive our findings. To assess whether our measure is sensitive to the specific thresholds we select, we recalculate performative bipartisanship using a range of alternative cutoffs for each component: 15, 45, and 60 days for the timing threshold; 10, 30, and 40 percent for the coalition-share threshold; and a version that includes, rather than excludes, first out-party cosponsors. Figure 2 shows that classification is highly stable across these alternatives: for every threshold we test, at least 90 percent of out-party cosponsorship decisions receive the same classification as under our primary measure, with reclassification concentrated among a small share of decisions near the relevant cutoff. As a result, we adopt more conservative thresholds in our primary analyses to ensure that cosponsorship decisions classified as performative occur only after the political costs of bipartisan cooperation have meaningfully declined.[6] Finally, we create a binary indicator of performative bipartisanship, coded 1 if all three conditions are satisfied and 0 otherwise. Using this definition, 11.5 percent (286,215) of all out-party cosponsorship decisions are classified as performative.

[6]Figure A.1 demonstrates that, regardless of threshold specification, performative bipartisanship remains negatively associated with sincere bipartisanship. Figure A.2 shows that our substantive findings are robust across alternative threshold specifications.

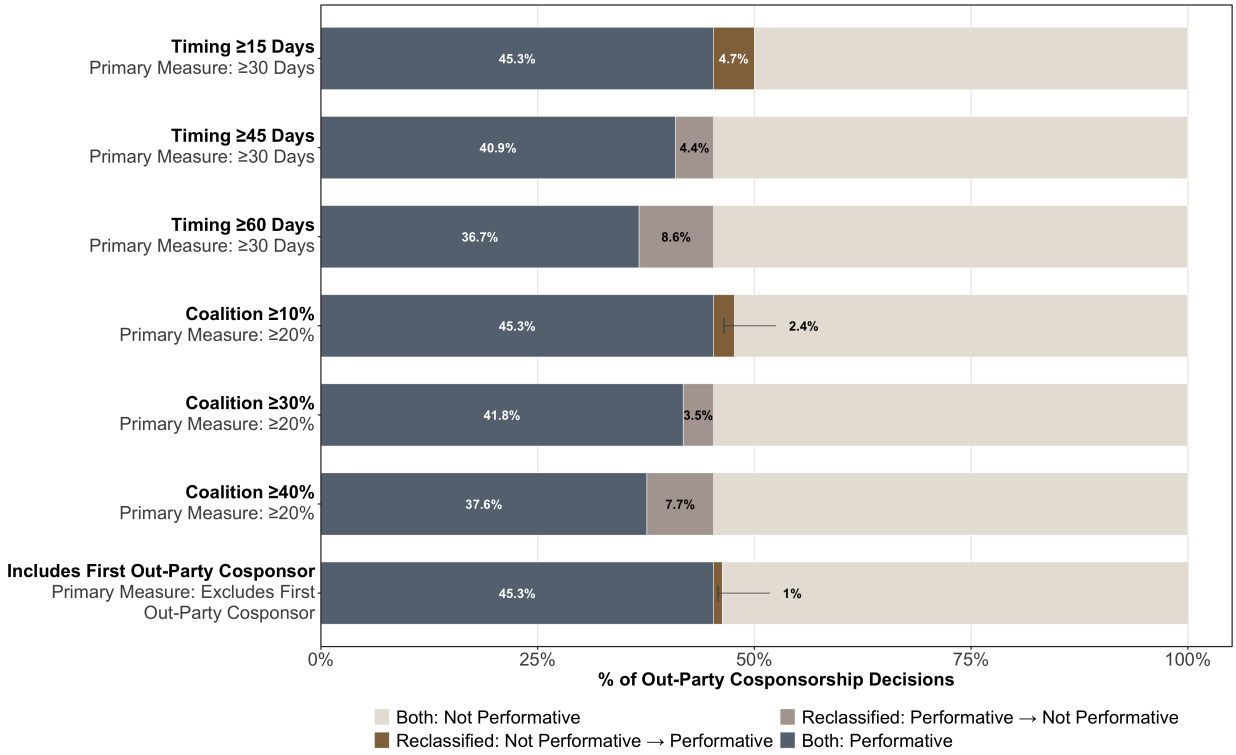
Figure 1: Components of Measure



Note: This figure shows the three components of performative bipartisanship: timing (days since introduction, x-axis truncated at 400 for readability; actual range extends to 725), coalition size (% of final coalition already formed), and whether the cosponsor was the first out-party member to cosponsor the out-party bill. Solid black lines represent our selected thresholds (30 days, 20% coalition size, and not being the first out-party cosponsor); dashed gray lines represent alternative thresholds used in robustness checks.

To construct our primary dependent variable, **Performative Bipartisanship Score (PBS)**, we aggregate our binary measure from the cosponsor level to the member-term level by dividing the total number of performative cosponsorship decisions by the total number of out-party cosponsorship decisions. After doing so, our data set includes 11,545 unique legislator-term observations.

Figure 2: Assessing Sensitivity of PBS to Thresholds



Note: Each row compares classification under an alternative threshold to classification under our primary measure of performative bipartisanship (timing ≥30 days, coalition ≥20% formed, excludes first out-party cosponsor), holding the other two components fixed. Dark blue and tan segments show decisions classified consistently as performative or not performative, respectively, under both the primary and alternative measure; gold and mauve segments show decisions whose classification changes. Reclassification is concentrated near the relevant threshold and never exceeds 10% of out-party cosponsorship decisions.

The average PBS is 0.46, ranging from 0.08 to 0.89. Equation 1 formalizes the construction of our measure.

Formally, let $P_{i,b,t}$ denote the binary performative bipartisanship indicator for legislator i's decision to cosponsor bill b in term t, and let $O_{i,b,t}$ denote whether a cosponsorship decision was offered to the out-party. Aggregating across all bills legislator i cosponsored during term t, our dependent variable, PBS, is given by:

$$\text{PBS}_{i,t} = \frac{\text{\# of Performative Out-Party Cosponsorships Offered}_{i,t}}{\text{\# of Out-Party Cosponsorships Offered}_{i,t}} = \frac{\sum_b P_{i,b,t}}{\sum_b O_{i,b,t}} \tag{1}$$

where i indexes legislators, t indexes terms, and b indexes the bills legislator i cosponsored in term t. The numerator sums the performative cosponsorship decisions legislator i made in term t, while

the denominator sums all the legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions in the same term. As a result, PBS is the proportion of all out-party cosponsorship decisions that are performative.[7]

One concern is that PBS may be disproportionately influenced by legislators who rarely offer out-party cosponsorship. Consider a legislator who offers only a single out-party cosponsorship in a given term and happens to meet all three conditions of our measure: under the raw score, this legislator would have a PBS of 1.0. In contrast, a legislator who makes 100 out-party cosponsorship decisions and satisfies our performative criteria on 40 of them offers a far more reliable signal of performative bipartisanship, even though the resulting proportion is lower (i.e., 0.4). Put simply, raw scores based on only a few out-party cosponsorship decisions are inherently noisier and less precise than those based on many. To address this, we apply a Bayesian shrinkage estimator to account for low levels of cosponsorship activity (Dobson and Lollis 2026).[8] We use the shrunk PBS as the primary dependent variable.[10]

Finally, to assess whether performative bipartisanship captures a distinct form of legislative behavior or simply measures sincere bipartisanship with additional noise, we estimate a bivariate regression of sincere bipartisanship on performative bipartisanship. Following Dobson and Lollis (2026), we measure sincere bipartisanship as the proportion of original out-party cosponsorships offered divided by all cosponsorships offered. If performative bipartisanship reflected the same underlying willingness to cooperate across party lines, the two measures should be positively correlated. Instead, Figure 3 reveals a strong negative association ($\beta = -0.530$, p = 0.00): legislators

[7] $\text{PBS}_{i,t}$ is undefined (i.e., NA) for legislator-terms in which a legislator made no out-party cosponsorships. It is very rare for a legislator not to cosponsor an out-party bill in a term. In our data, only 0.36% of all legislator-term observations (42 legislator-term observations) did not cosponsor an out-party bill and, as a result, have an NA value for PBS.

[8] We define the prior target, μ, as the mean performative bipartisanship level within the same term and chamber. We then compute a precision weight, $w = n/(n+k)$, where n is the number of out-party cosponsorship decisions made by the legislator in that term and chamber and k is a fixed hyperparameter set to 10.[9] The shrunk estimate $\hat{\theta}$ is: $\hat{\theta} = w \cdot \theta_{\text{obs}} + (1-w) \cdot \mu$, where θ_{obs} is the legislator's raw PBS. Legislators with many out-party cosponsorships thus receive weights close to 1 and retain scores near their observed values. In contrast, legislators with few cosponsorships are pulled more strongly toward the chamber-term baseline. Because low out-party cosponsorship activity is uncommon—only 3.5% of legislators offered 10 or fewer out-party cosponsorships per term, and the average legislator cosponsored 55 out-party bills per term—we expect the shrunk score to be highly correlated with our original score. Indeed, the correlation coefficient of the shrunk and raw performative bipartisanship measures is 0.95, indicating that adjustments are concentrated almost entirely among the small share of legislators with the fewest out-party cosponsorship decisions.

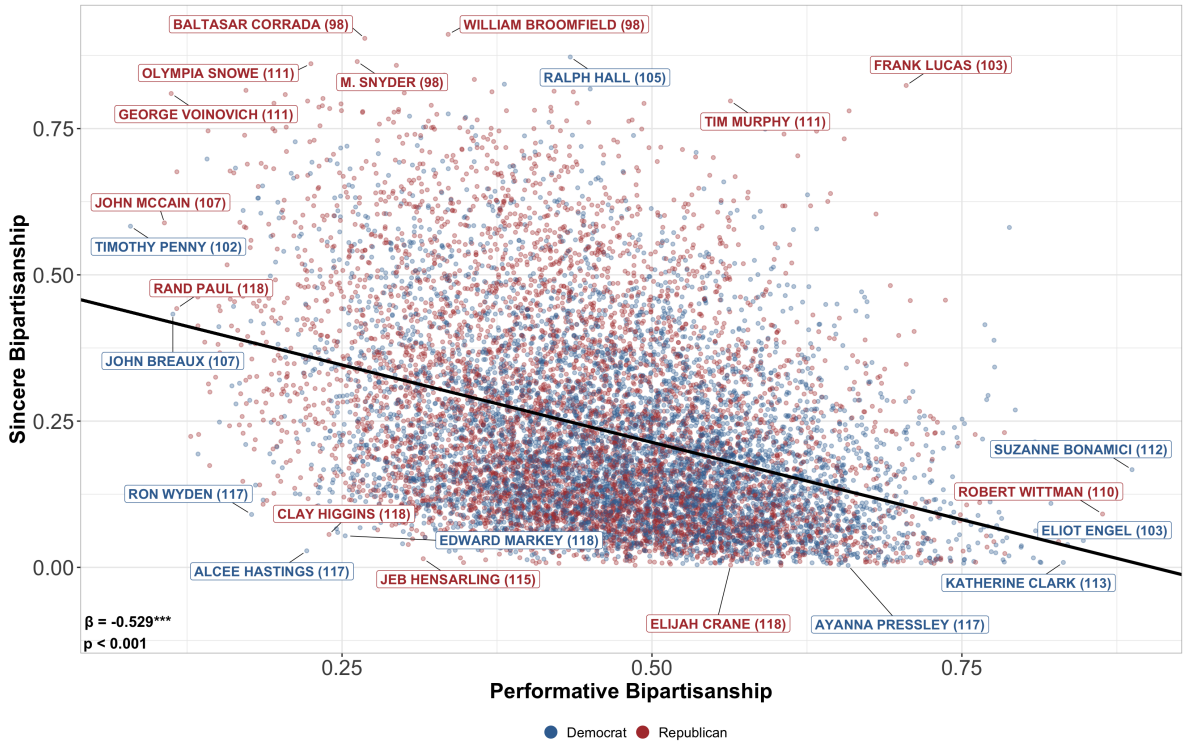
[10] Model results are substantively unchanged when estimated with the raw PBS.

who frequently engage in sincere bipartisanship are systematically less likely to engage in performative bipartisanship, and vice versa. This pattern indicates that performative bipartisanship is not simply delayed sincere bipartisanship but rather a distinct strategic approach to cross-party collaboration, in which legislators substitute early coalition-building for later participation in coalitions established by others.

The plotted legislator names further support the measure's face validity. Legislators historically associated with sincere bipartisanship—including Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Arlen Specter (R/D-PA), and John McCain (R-AZ)—cluster in the upper-left region of the figure, scoring high on sincere bipartisanship and low on performative bipartisanship. In contrast, legislators in the lower-right region—high in performative but low in sincere bipartisanship—closely fit our theoretical expectations. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) in the 112th Congress and Robert Wittman (R-VA) in the 110th were freshman House members serving in the minority party. Both also entered Congress through special elections, which often create unusually uncertain electoral environments and may have heightened their perceived vulnerability. Together, these characteristics placed Bonamici and Wittman in precisely the structural position our theory identifies as most conducive to performative bipartisanship: institutionally inexperienced House members serving in the minority under potentially vulnerable electoral circumstances.

Finally, the presence of legislators who engage in neither sincere nor performative bipartisanship (bottom left quadrant) demonstrates that performative bipartisanship is not simply the absence of sincere bipartisanship. Rather, the absence of bipartisan behavior is captured independently, and the legislators occupying this region are precisely those we would expect to reject bipartisan cooperation altogether. For example, this group includes Clay Higgins (R-LA), a member of the House Freedom Caucus representing a solidly Republican Louisiana district, and Ed Markey (D-MA), a longtime progressive representing one of the nation's most reliably Democratic states. Both hold electorally safe seats and have built national reputations on ideological consistency rather than cross-party appeal. As a result, neither legislator faces meaningful cross-pressures to balance party loyalty with bipartisan engagement. Their constituencies place little electoral value on bipartisan

Figure 3: Negative Association Between Sincere and Performative Bipartisanship



Note: Each point represents a legislator-congress observation, plotted by sincere bipartisanship (proportion of original out-party cosponsorships offered) and performative bipartisanship (PBS). Points are colored by party (blue = Democrat, red = Republican); the black line shows the bivariate regression slope, with model statistics provided in the bottom left corner of the graph.

cooperation, reducing incentives to engage in either sincere or performative bipartisanship. This correspondence between the measure's empirical structure and legislators' well-established reputations provides additional evidence that performative bipartisanship captures a distinct form of legislative behavior rather than simply the absence of bipartisan cooperation.

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 unit of analysis in models testing H1, H2, and H4–H8 is the legislator-term: each row represents one legislator's PBS during a single two-year Congress. This structure yields 11,545 unique legislator-term observations. The unit of analysis in models testing H3 is the member–congress–topic. To test this hypothesis, we transform our wide data frame into long

format where each row represents a legislator, policy area, and term. This data frame format yields 403,620 observations.[11]

Additional Variables

Our primary dependent variable across models testing H1–H6 is **PBS**. Among institutional predictors, our independent variables include **Minority Party** and **House**. **Minority Party** is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the legislator's party did not hold a chamber majority during a term, and 0 otherwise. **House** is a binary indicator equal to 1 for members of the U.S. House and 0 for Senators. To test H3, we recalculate PBS within each issue area. We then create a binary indicator, **Partisan Issue Area**, which is coded 1 if the policy area is designated as partisan and 0 otherwise.[12] 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 were informed by similar classifications of partisan issue areas in extant literature (Lee 2009; Harbridge 2015); however, we also estimate two additional specifications: a narrow definition of partisan issue areas (n = 5) and a broad definition (n = 14). The results are consistent, demonstrating that our measure of partisan issue areas is not sensitive to the inclusion or exclusion of marginally partisan issues (see Appendix Figure 3).[13]

For individual-level predictors of performative bipartisanship, we use **Electoral Vulnerability**, 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.[14] **Ideological Extremity** is mea-

[11] Each row in the data frame is identified by a member-congress-topic. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) assigns each bill to one of 34 policy areas. Among all bills in our data, 22 bills 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 the CRS discontinued the categories Commemorations (after the 110th Congress) and Private Legislation (after the 113th Congress). We retain these bills in the dataset.

[12] Notably, every legislator does not have a PBS for each policy area. If a legislator did not cosponsor an out-party bill in a particular policy area, a PBS within that issue area cannot be calculated, and is thus 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 PBS 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).

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

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

sured as the absolute value of the legislator's DW-NOMINATE first-dimension score in the prior term, which rescales the original measure (ranging from -1 to 1) to a measure ranging from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater ideological extremity regardless of ideological direction. **Seniority** is measured as the number of two-year terms a legislator served before the term of observation.[15]

Because H7 and H8 test the consequences of performative bipartisanship, **PBS** is the primary independent variable in both models. The dependent variable for H7, **Next-Election Vote Share**, captures a legislator's vote share in their next general election ($t + 1$). For H8, the dependent variable is **Next-Term Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES)**. This measure represents a leading version of LES, a composite measure of a legislator's ability to advance their sponsored legislation through the lawmaking process (Volden and Wiseman 2014).

Model Estimation & Identification

Our identification strategy uses a combination of member- and term-level fixed effects and controls within ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. Wherever a predictor of interest varies *within* a legislator over time (e.g., minority status, partisan issue area, electoral vulnerability, and seniority), we estimate panel models with member- and term-fixed effects. This absorbs all time-invariant legislator characteristics—including any stable disposition toward performative behavior—and identifies each effect from within-legislator and within-term change. This is the strongest form of identification because it rules out two distinct sources of confounding simultaneously: member fixed effects absorb any time-invariant legislator trait that might independently drive both the predictor and PBS (e.g., disposition toward bipartisanship, district electoral environment, etc.), while term fixed effects absorb any shock common to all legislators in a given Congress (e.g., rising ideological polarization). What remains is variation specific to a given legislator in a given term—the variation our theory predicts should affect PBS (i.e., minority party status, electoral vulnerability, etc.).

[15] Seniority represents two-year periods even for Senators, so that seniority is measured on the same scale across chambers (Volden and Wiseman 2014).

In models where a predictor is largely or entirely time-invariant within the panel (a member's chamber assignment and their ideological extremity), we instead estimate a between-legislator model with theoretically motivated member-level controls.[16] Because the between-legislator design for chamber cannot rule out the possibility that some unobserved, time-invariant legislator trait explains both a legislator's chamber and their PBS, we validate it against a within-legislator design restricted to the small subset of legislators who switch chambers during our panel (n = 106 unique legislators). Because chamber is no longer time-invariant for these legislators, this subsample allows us to estimate its effect with member fixed effects intact. Consistent results across the between-legislator and switcher-only specifications would suggest that the between-legislator estimate is not simply an artifact of unobserved legislator heterogeneity correlated with chamber.

The only model that omits term fixed effects is the experience-based model, which uses seniority as the primary independent variable. Because seniority is mechanically determined by term, including both would likely leave seniority's effect unidentified. As a result, we omit term fixed effects in this model and instead rely on theoretically motivated time-variant controls.[17]

In models testing H7 and H8, performative bipartisanship is the primary independent variable, and we include both legislator and term fixed effects. For H7, the dependent variable is the legislator's vote share in their next election. We interact performative bipartisanship with electoral vulnerability in this model. For H8, the dependent variable is the legislator's legislative effectiveness score in the subsequent term, rather than the term in which PBS is measured, to ensure the predictor temporally precedes the outcome and to guard against reverse causality. In doing so, we ensure that low effectiveness in a given term does not, in itself, drive a legislator toward more performative bipartisanship.

In every model, we control for sincere bipartisanship, measured as the proportion of a legislator's original cosponsorships that are offered to out-party bills. We do so to identify the effect

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

[17]These controls include chamber, minority-party status, Democrat, vote share, vote share squared, DW-NOMINATE, leadership status, power committee membership, committee chair, subcommittee chair, and seniority squared.

of our predictors on performative bipartisanship, net of legislators' overall propensity to engage in bipartisan behavior. For example, if we modeled the relationship between minority party status and a legislator's PBS without controlling for sincere bipartisanship, it would be unclear whether minority party legislators are less likely to engage in bipartisanship generally or less likely to engage in performative bipartisanship specifically.[18] 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

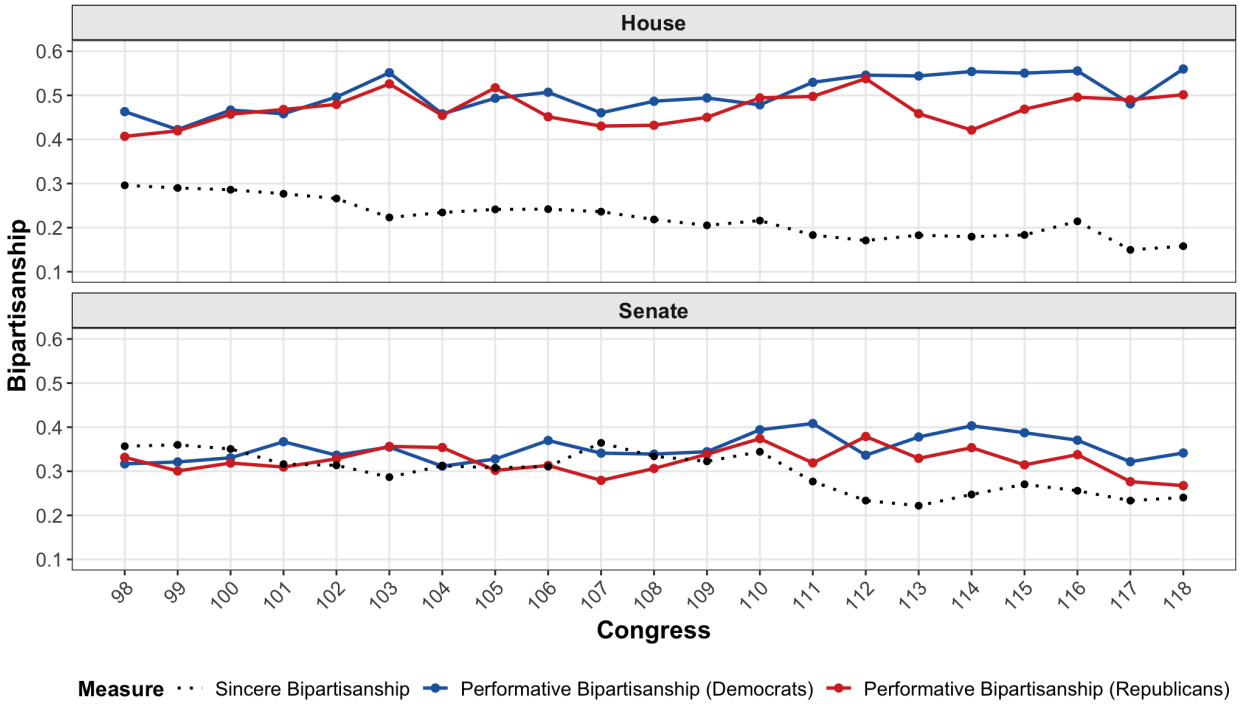
Figure 4 plots the average PBS by party within each chamber over time, alongside the chamber-level average of sincere bipartisanship. Performative bipartisanship remains relatively stable across Congresses and differs little between Democrats and Republicans. Across the time period, the average PBS is 0.45, varying only modestly from a minimum of 0.41 (99th Congress) to a maximum of 0.51 (112th Congress). Consistent with our expectations, the minority party generally exhibits higher levels of performative bipartisanship than the majority party, although there are a handful of exceptions. Also, as expected, legislators in the House exhibit higher levels of performative bipartisanship than their counterparts in the Senate.

In contrast, sincere bipartisanship declines over our time series in both chambers, with the decline steeper in the House (from approximately 0.30 to 0.17) than in the Senate (from approxi-

[18]Because sincere and performative bipartisanship are both derived from legislators' out-party cosponsorship behavior, one might worry that controlling for sincere bipartisanship absorbs meaningful variation in performative bipartisanship. However, the two measures capture distinct quantities. Sincere bipartisanship is measured as the proportion of original cosponsorships of out-party bills, whereas performative bipartisanship captures legislators' propensity to offer delayed support for out-party bills. Although the measures share a conceptual domain, they are not mathematical complements because they use different denominators and need not move in inverse proportion. Nevertheless, to ensure our findings do not depend on conditioning on sincere bipartisanship, we re-estimate every model without this control. Results are substantively unchanged except for H5 and H8. We suspect these exceptions arise because ideological extremity and legislative effectiveness are independently associated with sincere bipartisanship (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023). Therefore, omitting the control introduces omitted-variable bias. Mediation analyses reported in "Mediation Analysis of Sincere Bipartisanship" section of the appendix support this interpretation by showing that the effects of ideological extremity and legislative effectiveness operate substantially through sincere bipartisanship.

mately 0.35 to 0.25). This pattern differs markedly from prior research, which generally concludes that out-party cosponsorship in Congress has remained remarkably stable over time (Harbridge 2015; Curry and Lee 2020; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Figure 4 suggests that the apparent persistence of out-party collaboration in Congress may be an artifact of conflating sincere and performative bipartisanship: while sincere bipartisan cooperation has declined sharply—particularly in the House—performative bipartisanship has remained comparatively stable.

Figure 4: Performative and Sincere Bipartisanship by Chamber Over Time



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

Modeling

Table 1 reports estimates of the institutional predictors of performative bipartisanship. We expect legislators in the minority party and those serving in the House to engage in more performative bipartisanship. We also expect legislators to engage in more performative bipartisanship when cosponsoring legislation in an issue area that is designated as partisan. Across all four specifications, **PBS** is the dependent variable. Consistent with H1, the coefficient on **Minority**

in Column 1 indicates that 8.3 percentage points more of a legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions are performative when the legislator is in the minority rather than the majority party. This effect is identified by including member fixed effects, meaning that the same legislator makes more performative cosponsorship decisions as they move from the majority to the minority party. Substantively, the effect is large: moving from majority to minority status is associated with an increase in performative bipartisanship equal to roughly one-tenth of the measure's full range (0.08 to 0.89).

As expected, House members also engage in more performative bipartisanship than their Senate colleagues (H2). We find support for this expectation across two identification strategies. In Column 2, we specify a model without member fixed effects, but with a variety of member-level covariates. The coefficient on **House** indicates that members of the lower chamber engage in performative bipartisanship at a rate 13 percentage points higher than those in the upper chamber. This effect is large in magnitude, accounting for roughly a sixth of the variable's total range. To ensure that the absence of member-level fixed effects is not driving our findings, Column 3 restricts the sample to legislators in our panel who served in both chambers over the time series, enabling us to identify the association from the same member as they move chambers. The coefficient on **House** remains positive and statistically significant (though smaller in magnitude), further demonstrating that House members engage in more performative bipartisanship than Senators.

Finally, legislators are also more performative on partisan bills than on nonpartisan bills (H3). The coefficient on **Partisan Issue Area** indicates that the same legislator makes 3.5 percentage points more performative cosponsorship decisions when a bill falls within a partisan issue area than when it falls within a nonpartisan issue area. This association is smaller in magnitude than the coefficients on party status and chamber, but is identified entirely from a single legislator's behavior across partisan and nonpartisan issue areas in the same term.

Collectively, the results in Table 1 support our institutional hypotheses: minority party status, serving in the House, and cosponsoring legislation in partisan issue areas are all associated with higher levels of performative bipartisanship. It is also worth noting that sincere bipartisanship

is negatively associated with performative bipartisanship across all specifications, further confirming that the two are distinct forms of bipartisan behavior, even after accounting for relevant confounders like party status and chamber.

Table 1: Institutional Predictors of Performative Bipartisanship

	DV: PBS			
	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)
Sincere 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

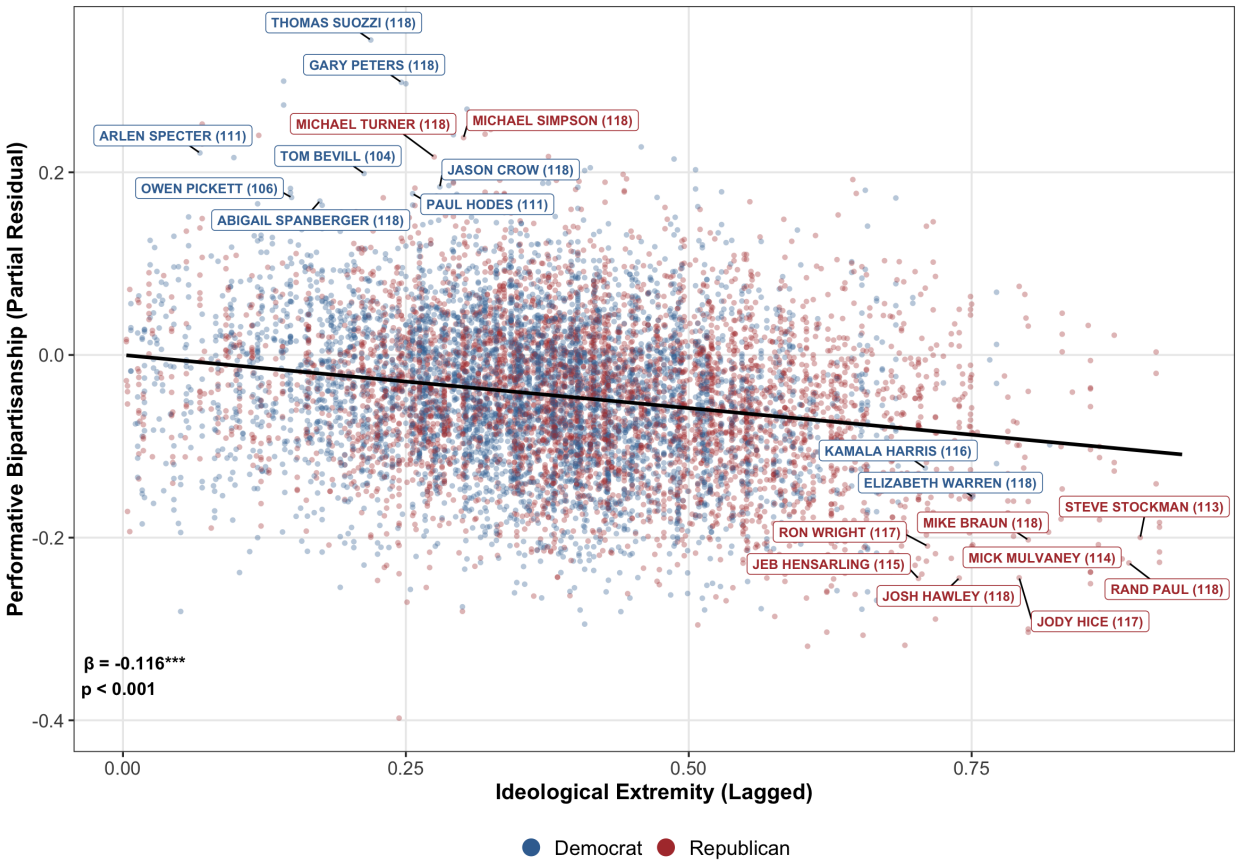
Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 2 is a between-legislator design with member-level controls; Column 3 restricts to legislators who switched chambers during the panel.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Next, Table 2 reports the association between individual-level characteristics and performative bipartisanship. We expect electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, and less senior legislators to engage in more performative bipartisanship. Across all three specifications, PBS is the dependent variable. Consistent with H4, the coefficient on **Electoral Vulnerability** in Column 1 indicates that legislators become more performative as their electoral vulnerability increases. This effect is identified using member- and term-fixed effects, meaning that the same legislator engages in more performative bipartisanship as their electoral margin narrows from one election to the next. Substantively, a legislator moving from the safest seat in our sample to the most competitive one is predicted to increase their performative bipartisanship by roughly 3.1 percentage points. Across the interquartile range of electoral vulnerability observed in the data (from the 25th to the 75th

percentile), performative bipartisanship is predicted to increase by approximately 1.7 percentage points.

As expected, the coefficient on **Ideological Extremity** in Column 2 is negative and highly significant, indicating that ideologically moderate legislators engage in more performative bipartisanship than their more extreme colleagues (H5). Substantively, the most moderate legislator in our sample engages in 11.6 percentage points more performative bipartisanship than the most ideologically extreme legislator—a sizable difference that rivals the largest institutional effects reported in Table 1. To illustrate the magnitude of this relationship, Figure 5 plots the fitted association from the model whose slope corresponds to the reported coefficient ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.001$). Each dot represents a legislator-term observation shown in the figure's background, colored by party. The y-axis reports the partial residualized value of performative bipartisanship, while the x-axis measures ideological extremity. The figure shows a clear negative relationship: legislators with more extreme ideological positions (e.g., Kamala Harris (D-CA), Josh Hawley (R-MO), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)) engage in substantially less performative bipartisanship than more moderate legislators such as Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) and Gary Peters (D-MI).

Figure 5: Performative Bipartisanship is Negatively Associated with Ideological Extremity



Note: This figure plots the partial residual of performative bipartisanship on ideological extremity (lagged), based on the fully specified model reported in Column 2 of Table 2. Positive values indicate a legislator engaged in more performative bipartisanship than their covariate profile alone would predict, and negative values indicate less. The black line is the fitted regression line reported by the coefficient on ideological extremity in Table 2 (Column 2) ($\beta = -0.116$, $p < 0.001$). Each point represents a legislator's most recent observed term in the panel.

Finally, the coefficient on **Seniority** in Column 3 indicates that as a legislator gains experience within the legislature over time, they become less performative (H6). This effect is identified using member fixed effects, meaning it captures how the same legislator's behavior evolves across their own tenure rather than differences between junior and senior legislators. Substantively, each additional term served predicts a decline of 1 percentage point in PBS across a legislator's first 20 years in office. This association corresponds to a cumulative decline of roughly 10 percentage points, which is nearly one-fifth of the PBS mean.[19] Collectively, the results presented in Table

[19]Notably, the relationship between seniority and performative bipartisanship appears to be nonlinear. Although the positive and statistically significant coefficient on **Seniority Squared** suggests that very senior legislators engage in more performative bipartisanship, the substantive effect is limited. Based on the estimated relationship, performative

2 and Figure 5 indicate that electorally vulnerable, moderate, and less experienced legislators are most likely to engage in performative bipartisanship.

Table 2: Individual Predictors of Performative Bipartisanship

	DV: PBS		
	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)
Sincere Bipartisanship	−0.162***	−0.375***	−0.358***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Congress FE	✓	✓	✗
Member FE	✓	✗	✓
Congress-Level Controls	✗	✗	✓
Member-Level Controls	✗	✓	✗
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 sincere bipartisanship, since ideological extremity is independently associated with reduced cross-party engagement across all forms of legislative behavior (see main text for justification).
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

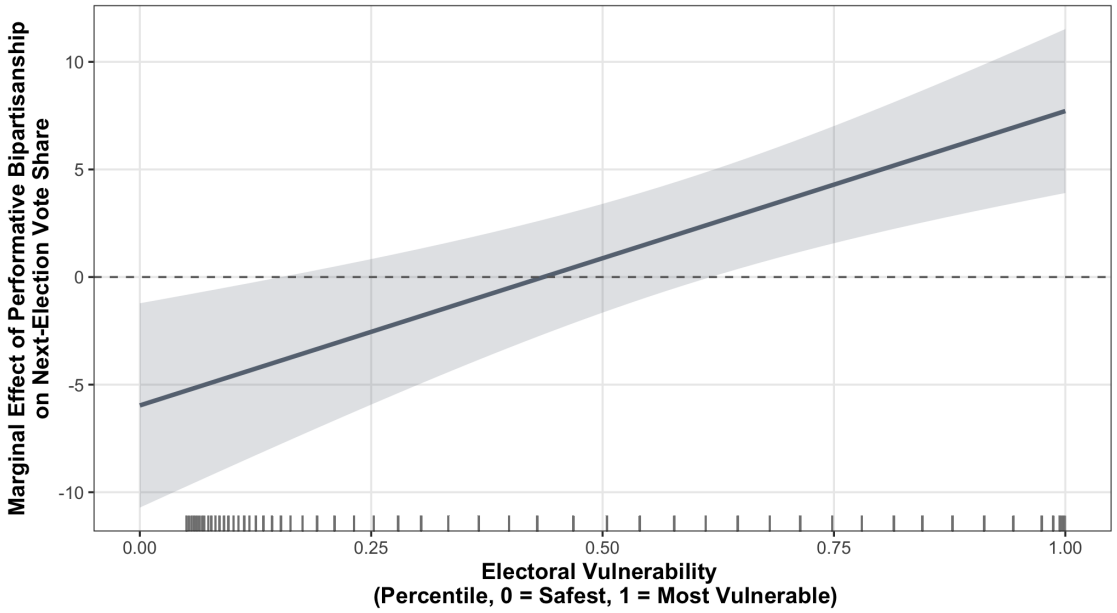
Finally, Table 3 tests the consequences of performative bipartisanship for legislators' electoral outcomes and ability to govern. We expect performative bipartisanship to improve legislators' electoral prospects when they are electorally vulnerable (H7), but to undermine their legislative effectiveness (H8). Column 1 models next-election vote share as a function of performative bipartisanship, electoral vulnerability, and their interaction, while controlling for their most recent general election vote share and sincere bipartisanship. As expected, the coefficient on the interaction between **PBS** and **Electoral Vulnerability** is positive and highly significant, indicating that

bipartisanship begins to increase only after approximately 28 years of service. Because just 7.6 percent of legislators in our sample served longer than 28 years, this pattern characterizes only a small subset of exceptionally senior members rather than a systematic relationship across Congress.

the electoral returns to performative bipartisanship increase as legislators become more electorally vulnerable.

Figure 6 illustrates this interaction by plotting the marginal effect of performative bipartisanship (y-axis) across the observed range of electoral vulnerability (x-axis). Among the most electorally safe legislators, performative bipartisanship has no statistically distinguishable association with subsequent vote share. As electoral vulnerability increases, however, the electoral returns to performative bipartisanship increase steadily. Among the most electorally vulnerable legislators, moving from the lowest observed level of performative bipartisanship (0.08) to the highest (0.89) is predicted to increase next-election vote share by approximately 6 percentage points. Taken together, these findings suggest that electorally vulnerable legislators engage in more performative bipartisanship for good reason (H4): it becomes increasingly electorally valuable in their next election for them to do so (H6).

Figure 6: Performative Bipartisanship Is Associated With Increased Vote Share In Next Election Among Electorally Vulnerable Legislators



Note: This figure plots the marginal effect of performative 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 Model 3.1. Vulnerability is measured as the percentile rank of a legislator's vote share in the current 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.

Column 2 examines whether performative bipartisanship is associated with legislators' subsequent ability to govern. Consistent with H8, the coefficient on **PBS** is negative and statistically significant, indicating that legislators who rely more heavily on performative bipartisanship are less effective lawmakers in the subsequent Congress, even after controlling for their current legislative effectiveness and sincere bipartisanship. Substantively, moving from the minimum observed level of performative bipartisanship 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 association, we estimate an alternative specification that includes a broad set of legislator characteristics traditionally associated with legislative effectiveness (see Appendix Table 5). The estimated effect of performative bipartisanship is virtually identical in that specification ($\beta = -0.436$, $p = 0.001$). The legislative effectiveness penalty associated with moving from the least to the most performative legislator is approximately equivalent to forfeiting the legislative effectiveness gains associated with eight additional terms of congressional service. Moreover, this penalty is roughly equivalent to the effectiveness gains associated with serving as a committee chair and approximately half the size of the effectiveness advantage associated with majority-party status. Together, the results in Table 3 suggest that performative bipartisanship involves an important tradeoff. The behavior appears to generate electoral benefits for legislators facing competitive elections, but those benefits come at the cost of reduced legislative effectiveness.

Table 3: Electoral and Governing Consequences of Performative Bipartisanship

	DV: Next-Election Vote Share (H7)	DV: Next-Term Legislative Effectiveness (H8)
	1	2
Performative Bipartisanship	-5.967^{*}	$\mathbf{-0.454}^{**}$
	(2.422)	**(0.158)**
Performative Bipartisanship × Electoral Vulnerability	$\mathbf{13.681}^{***}$	
	(3.555)	
Electoral Vulnerability	-26.612^{***}	
	(2.061)	
Vote Share (to Win Current Term)	-0.274^{***}	
	(0.038)	
Legislative Effectiveness (Current Term)		0.271^{***}
		(0.034)
Sincere Bipartisanship	5.033^{***}	-0.865^{***}
	(1.017)	(0.143)
Congress FE	✓	✓
Member FE	✓	✓
Observations	9,156	9,433
R^2	0.603	0.441

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. Column 1 estimates the interaction between performative bipartisanship and electoral vulnerability (percentile-ranked, reverse-coded vote share) on next-election vote share, controlling for current vote share and sincere bipartisanship. Column 2 estimates the effect of performative bipartisanship on legislative effectiveness ($t+1$), controlling for current legislative effectiveness and sincere bipartisanship.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reconceptualize bipartisanship by emphasizing the role of strategic timing in legislators' out-party cosponsorship decisions. In doing so, we introduce the concept of performative bipartisanship: a distinct form of out-party cosponsorship in which legislators strategically delay supporting out-party bills to navigate competing pressures, avoiding party retribution for working across the aisle while cultivating electorally beneficial bipartisan credentials. 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 performative bipartisanship is most common when the partisan costs of sincere cooperation are greatest: among minority-party legislators, House members, and legislators cosponsoring bills in partisan issue areas. It is also more common among electorally vulnerable, ideologically moderate, and less experienced legislators, for whom bipartisan credentials are especially valuable. Finally, performative bipartisanship is associated with improved electoral performance among vulnerable legislators but reduced legislative effectiveness

in the subsequent Congress.

Distinguishing sincere from performative bipartisanship complicates several conclusions in the literature because many existing measures treat these distinct forms of cross-party cooperation as equivalent. First, bipartisanship appears to have persisted despite rising polarization only when sincere and performative behavior are combined (Harbridge 2015). Once they are separated, sincere bipartisan coalition-building declines substantially, while performative bipartisanship remains comparatively stable. Second, existing research links legislators' backgrounds and identities—including gender, race, and military experience—to bipartisan behavior (Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie 2018; Amoroso 2025), but it remains unclear whether these characteristics encourage early coalition-building or strategically delayed participation. Third, although legislators increasingly campaign on promises to work across party lines, existing research does not establish whether or when those promises translate into sincere or performative out-party cosponsorship (Case, Ommundsen and Porter 2025; Dobson, Volden and Wiseman 2026). Finally, bipartisanship does not unambiguously improve legislative effectiveness (Harbridge-Yong, Volden and Wiseman 2023). Whereas sincere cooperation may strengthen the relationships and coalitions necessary to advance legislation, our findings show that performative bipartisanship is associated with lower effectiveness in the subsequent Congress. Thus, although existing theories of the causes and consequences of bipartisanship often align with sincere bipartisanship, findings based on measures that conflate sincere and performative behavior may warrant reexamination once out-party cosponsorship timing is considered.

Our findings also highlight an important tension among bipartisanship, representation, and governance. Although bipartisanship is traditionally treated as a normative good, performative bipartisanship complicates that assumption. Performative bipartisanship is not the absence of cross-party cooperation: these legislators still support out-party bills, but they do so after others have borne the initial costs of building the bipartisan coalition. As a result, legislators who engage in this behavior remain responsive to constituent demand—indeed, that demand helps explain why they pursue bipartisan credentials at all—but they prioritize visible participation over the difficult work of initi-

ating cross-party collaboration. The result is a troubling electoral equilibrium in which legislators may be rewarded for signaling bipartisanship even as Congress's collective capacity for bipartisan governance deteriorates. Thus, Congress may retain the appearance of bipartisan cooperation even as the policymaking benefits commonly attributed to bipartisanship become increasingly scarce.

Although our analyses demonstrate that the tension between avoiding party retribution and cultivating bipartisan credentials helps explain when and why legislators engage in performative bipartisanship, as well as the electoral and governing consequences of that behavior, much remains to be explored. Future research should examine how legislators communicate delayed bipartisan support to constituents, whether voters recognize the distinction between early coalition-building and performative cosponsorship, and how bill sponsors and party leaders respond to legislators who join out-party bills at different stages. Additional work should consider whether performative bipartisanship extends beyond cosponsorship to other forms of legislative activity and whether similar strategies emerge in state legislatures or other candidate-centered political systems. By demonstrating that bipartisan behavior varies not only in its frequency but also in its timing and purpose, this paper more closely integrates the bipartisanship literature with scholarship on partisan polarization in Congress. In doing so, it provides a foundation for studying how legislators preserve the appearance of cooperation under conditions that increasingly discourage its most sincere form.

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Performative Bipartisanship

Appendix

Contents

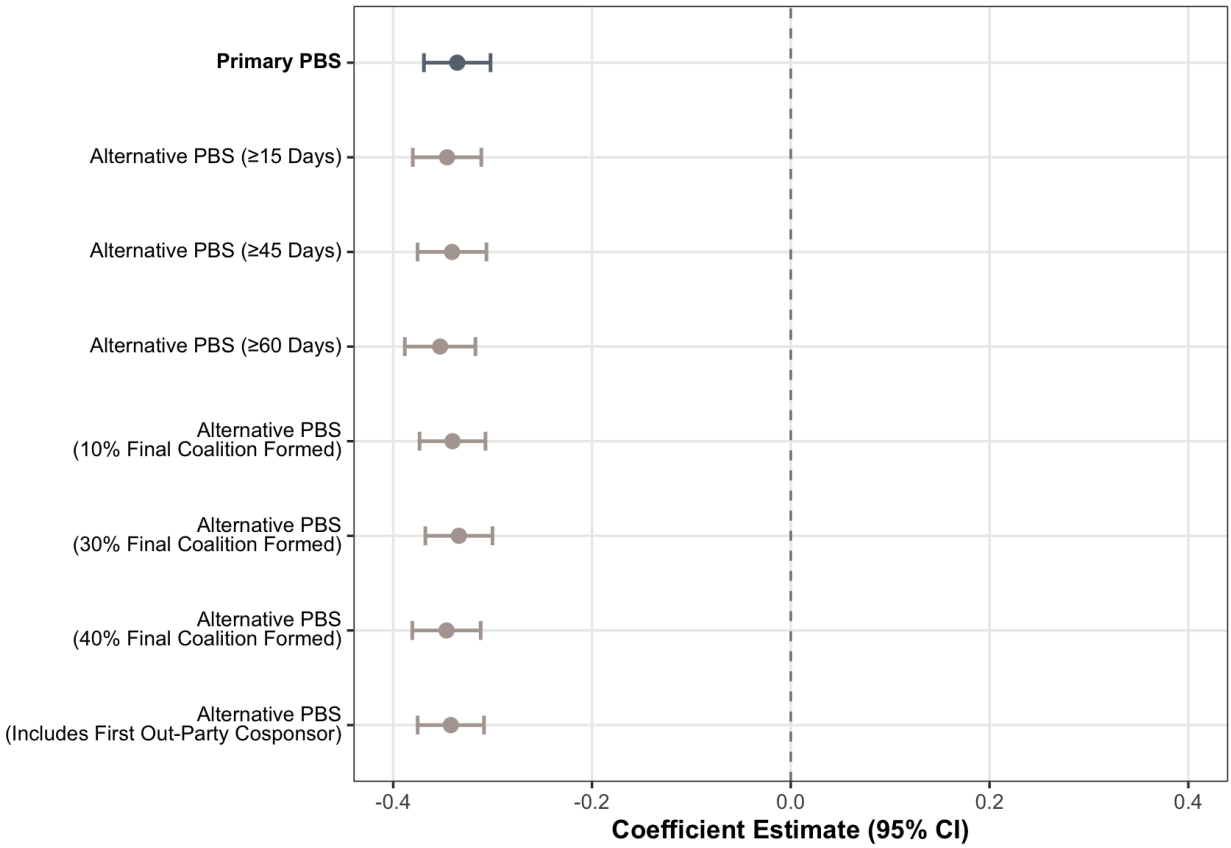
Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Dependent Variables				
Performative 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
Performative Bipartisanship	0.459	0.117	0.08 – 0.89	11,490
Sincere 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

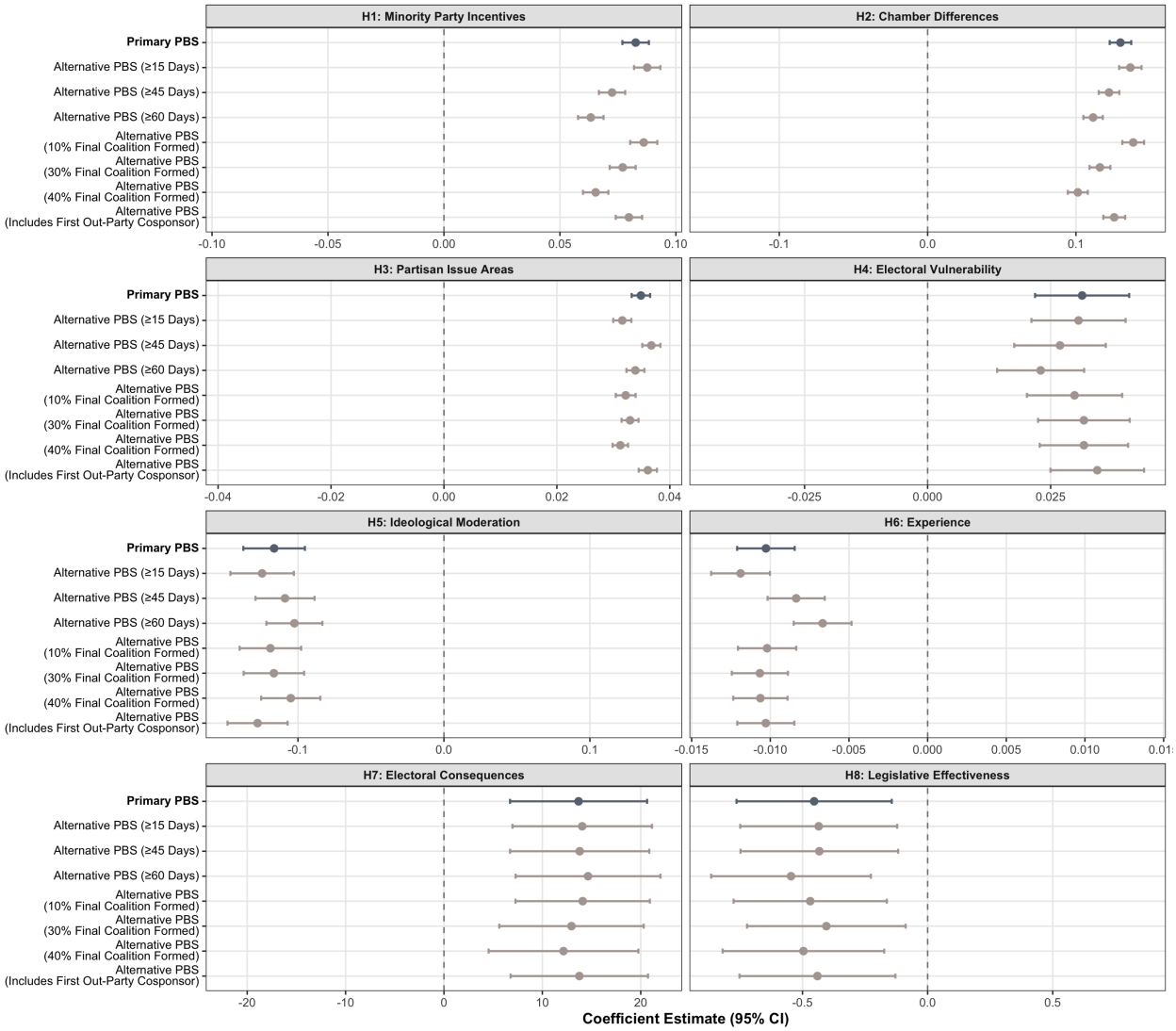
Measurement Validation

Figure A1: Negative Association Between Sincere and Performative Bipartisanship is Robust to Alternative Thresholds



Note: Coefficient estimates from a bivariate model regressing sincere bipartisanship on performative bipartisanship, estimated once under the primary PBS 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 A2: Primary Results are Robust to Alternative Thresholds



Note: Each panel plots coefficient estimates for H1 – H7 under the primary PBS 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.

In-Text Models

Table A2: Institutional Predictors of Performative Bipartisanship

	DV: PBS			
	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)
Sincere 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 A3: Individual Predictors of Performative Bipartisanship

	DV: PBS		
	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)
Sincere 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 sincere bipartisanship, since ideological extremity is independently associated with reduced cross-party engagement across all forms of legislative behavior (see main text for justification).
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

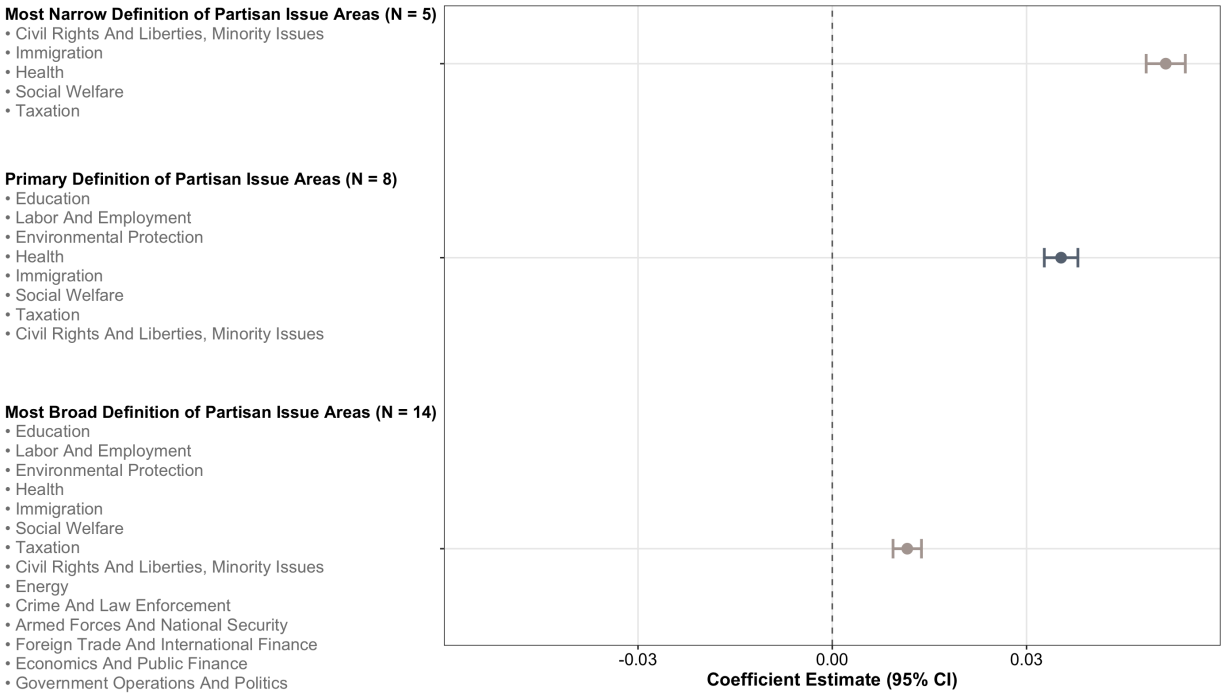
Robustness of In-Text Models

Table A5: Alternative Specification of In-Text Legislative Effectiveness Model

	DV: Next-Term Legislative Effectiveness
	1
Performative Bipartisanship	**−0.872*****
	(0.173)
Sincere Bipartisanship	−0.467**
	(0.169)
Seniority	0.088***
	(0.017)
Seniority^2	−0.001
	(0.001)
Senate	−0.174**
	(0.060)
Democrat	−0.398**
	(0.125)
Female	0.003
	(0.050)
Vote Share (Previous Election)	−0.021
	(0.012)
Vote Share (Previous Election)^2	0.000
	(0.000)
DW-Nominate (First Dim.)	−0.308*
	(0.150)
Latino	−0.013
	(0.102)
Power Committee	−0.298***
	(0.052)
Committee Chair	0.991***
	(0.136)
Subcommittee Chair	0.250***
	(0.062)
State Legislator	0.050
	(0.044)
Majority	0.188
	(0.139)
Majority Leader	−0.278**
	(0.098)
Minority Leader	−0.100
	(0.091)
Distance from Chamber Median	−0.015
	(0.224)
Distance from Majority Party	0.003
	(0.222)
Congress FE	✗
Member FE	✗
Observations	9,173
R^2	0.146

Note: Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses. This table reports an alternative specification of the legislative effectiveness model reported in Table 3 (H8), replacing member and congress fixed effects with a full set of individual-level and institutional covariates.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Figure A3: 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 sincere bipartisanship and is estimated with member and congress fixed effects.

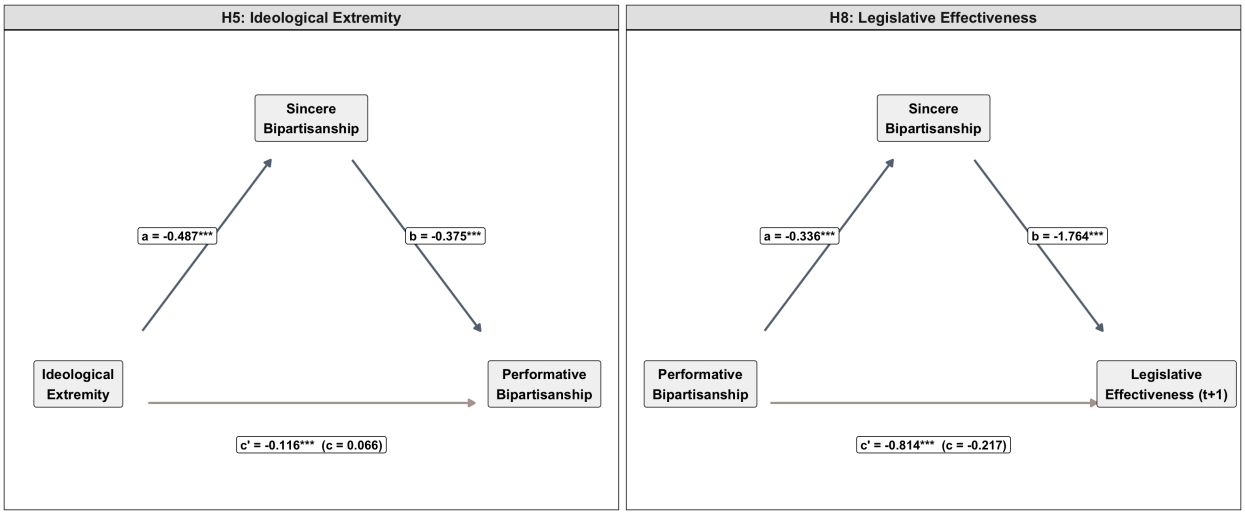
Mediation Analysis of Sincere Bipartisanship

Because performative and sincere bipartisanship are constructed from the same pool of a legislator's out-party cosponsorship decisions, conditioning on sincere bipartisanship could plausibly isolate the confound it is meant to target, or it could absorb part of the very behavioral shift we are trying to measure, since a decision classified as sincere is definitionally not classified as performative. Our findings are sensitive to the inclusion of this covariate in our tests of H5 and H8 and we argue it is exactly what we should expect if sincere bipartisanship is associated with the predictor and the outcome. Extreme legislators engage in sincere bipartisanship less often; because sincere and performative cosponsorship draw from the same finite pool of a legislator's out-party decisions, suppressed sincere engagement mechanically inflates the performative share of what remains, and this inflation is precisely what the sincere bipartisanship control removes. Performative bipartisanship, on the other hand, crowds out the sincere engagement that is itself associated with a legislator's subsequent effectiveness, so omitting the control understates the penalty incurred on legislators' LES when they engage in performative bipartisanship. We assess this logic directly with a standard three-equation mediation design: a path-a model regressing sincere bipartisanship on the predictor, a path-b/c' model regressing the outcome on both the predictor and sincere bipartisanship, and a path-c model regressing the outcome on the predictor alone, evaluating the indirect effect ($a \times b$) with a Sobel test.

We find that sincere bipartisanship substantially mediates both relationships, though in opposite directions. For ideological extremity (H5), extreme legislators engage in markedly less sincere bipartisanship ($a = -0.487$, $p < .001$), and sincere bipartisanship is itself negatively associated with performative 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 performative bipartisanship: the unconditional, unmediated relationship is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero ($c = 0.066$, n.s.), while the direct effect, once sincere bipartisanship is held constant, is negative and highly significant ($c' = -0.116$, $p < .001$). For legislative effectiveness (H8), performative bipartisanship similarly reduces sincere bipartisanship ($a = -0.336$, $p < .001$), which is itself negatively associated with future legislative effectiveness in this specification, net of performative 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 performative 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 sincere bipartisanship is held constant, is negative, sizable, and highly significant ($c' = -0.814$, $p < .001$). Figure A4 presents both mediation models as path diagrams, with the indirect path through sincere bipartisanship shown in blue and the direct/total effect path shown in grey.

Figure A4: Mediation Path Diagrams for H5 and H8



Note: Path diagrams for the ideological extremity (H5) and legislative effectiveness (H8) mediation models. a is the effect of the predictor on sincere bipartisanship; b is the effect of sincere bipartisanship on the outcome, net of the predictor; c' is the direct effect of the predictor on the outcome, net of sincere bipartisanship; c is the total, unconditional effect of the predictor excluding sincere 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 performative, whether legislators are less performative on legally simple bills relative to legally complex ones, and whether legislators are less performative 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 performative bipartisanship than their non-chair colleagues. Using a data frame where the unit of analysis is the legislator-term, we regress PBS on an indicator for committee chair status, controlling for sincere 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, performative 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 performative 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 performative bipartisanship ($\beta = -0.0017$, $p < .0001$). Legislators are *less* likely to engage in performative 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 performative 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 performative 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, performative bipartisanship; performative 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: PBS		
	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)
Sincere 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 performative; Columns 2 and 3 use the cosponsorship decision as the unit of analysis and test, respectively, whether performative 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, performative 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 performative 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 performative 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 performative behavior, not show no detectable association with it.

Table A7: Assessing Alternative Mechanisms: Bill-Evolution

	DV: Performative 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.
$^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.