

Summer 6-3-2011

Reconsidering the Benefits of Minority Cohesion: The Difference Between Relative and Absolute Cohesion in the U.S. House of Representatives

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RECONSIDERING THE BENEFITS OF MINORITY COHESION
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE COHESION IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

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Draft: June 3, 2011

Abstract

Cohesion has long been a topic of interest for those studying minorities in the U.S. Congress. Generally, it is thought that cohesion gives minorities an advantage in legislative bargaining, which ultimately helps them influence the legislative process. However, this only assumes absolute not relative cohesion. When minorities work more with each other they are less able to work with those outside their group. This makes legislative influence more difficult for minorities. By examining sponsorship-cosponsorship networks from the 97th-103rd Congresses, I show that cohesion actually hurts the ability of minorities to influence the legislative process. This affect is felt differently for minority “leaders” and “followers,” suggesting that cohesion benefits some more than others.

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1 Introduction

Scholars have long noted that minorities tend to be more cohesive as compared to other groups (Levy and Stoudinger, 1976; Gile and Jones, 1995; Pinney and Serra, 1999, 2002; Rocca and Sanchez, 2008; Singh, 1998; Swain, 1993). Generally, it is thought that this gives minorities an advantage because group solidarity “enhances the political stature and bargaining leverage of groups, allowing them to win concessions on public policy issues of concern to members. . .” (Pinney and Serra, 1999, 584). However, this only considers the absolute not relative gains groups can achieve by becoming cohesive. When groups devote time and effort to establishing ties within their group they do so at the expense of the time and effort they could be spending establishing ties outside their group. For groups in the majority the choice is rather simple. If you solidify your group members, then you can achieve whatever legislative end you desire. However, for groups in the minority, such as African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans, the choice is a bit more complicated. Not only do these groups need to ensure that group members vote as a cohesive unit, but they must also garner support outside of the group’s ranks in order to gain the votes needed to advance the group’s agenda. Thus, for minorities even though the absolute gains from group cohesion are obvious the relative gains are a bit more problematic.

2 Does Cohesion Matter?

Minorities need whites in order to pass legislation. Cohesion is one tool minorities can use to achieve this end. Fiellin (1962, 78,84) argues that cohesive groups generally provide (1) trustworthy information on bills and legislative politics; (2) cues for making voting decisions; (3) adaptive norms, perceptions and rationalizations; and (4) legislative bargaining power. Each of these functions help groups influence the legislative process. Specifically, Pinney and Serra (1999, 583) argue that “unity in roll-call voting enhances the impact of legislative groups to bargain within the policymaking process.” Similarly, Gile and Jones (1995, 625) argue that “bloc voting is a valued political asset that enhances the political stature, leverage, and coalition attractiveness of the unofficial group.” However, these benefits do not necessarily extend to minority groups.

First, there is a distinction between absolute and relative cohesion. In liberal international relations theory, an absolute gain is a gain which makes a “state better off regardless of the gain achieved by any other state,” while a relative gain is a gain which makes the state better off relative to the gains achieved by other states (Rousseau, 1999, 5). In terms of cohesion, absolute cohesion simply refers to the degree of in-group cohesion, while relative cohesion refers to the degree of in-group cohesion relative to the degree of out-group cohesion. While having a high level of absolute cohesion is generally beneficial, the same thing can not be said for relative cohesion. When individuals work more with those in their group as opposed to those who are not they forgo the ability to form out-group relationships. This has important consequences for a group member’s ability to be successful in Congress.

For minorities, relative cohesion prevents group members from being legislatively successful. First, since minority groups are smaller in number the information and cues they provide their members will be, by definition, narrowly focused. For example, minorities often focus their efforts on “black-interest legislation,” which Whitby (2002, 106) defines as legislation of policy, service, or symbolic nature which disproportionately has a “greater impact on African-Americans.” Often times these bills center on fighting “racism” and/or promoting “racial justice in the United States” (Platt, 2008, 2). If this is the case, then minority groups may only be able to provide “trustworthy information” and “cues for making voting decisions” on only a handful of bills. For some minorities this is all they need from their group, but for others this is not the case. The problem intensifies as minorities work more with each other as compared to others. Not only does this make the depth of the information at their disposal more limited, but the cues they provide become increasingly focused on bills which begin and end within the group. Over time this causes the network to “suffocate” (Beugelsdijk and Smulders, 2003, 4).

Second, in order for minority groups to influence the legislative process they must form voting blocs with out-group members. However, sometimes cohesion can make forming these relationships more difficult. Thompson, Peterson and Brodt (1996, 76) found in an experimental setting that “teams of nonfriends outperformed teams of friends in terms of reaching integrative agreements,” suggesting that in some instances “friendship among team members” is a disadvantage to forming intergroup consensus. For example, suppose two teams of university professors are asked to serve on a curriculum advisory committee (see Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 75). Team A consists of professors who have never

met each other, while Team B consists of professors who are friends with one another. Since the members of Team A have “no prior relationship the issues in the negotiation become a focal point” (Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 75). Conversely, a “primary concern” of Team B is “to maintain cohesion and agreement because disagreement” may threaten the Team’s relationship with one another (Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 75). For Team B this makes intergroup cooperation more difficult because they have the added concern of “sticking together and supporting each other” (Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 76). Conversely, intergroup cooperation is easier for Team A because they are only concerned with the issue at hand. This suggests that relative cohesion may actually hinder the ability of minorities to form allies outside of the group, making legislative influence more difficult.

For whites, the inverse is true. As whites become more cohesive group members are better able to achieve legislative success. First, groups in the majority have the benefit of having a depth of information and cues from which to draw from. White Members of Congress come from many different backgrounds. Some are urban, some are rural, some are liberal, and some are conservative. The same diversity often times does not exist within minority groups. This means that groups in the majority can provide information and cues on a wide number of issues. These benefits are only magnified as the group becomes relatively cohesive. The more white members work with each other the more trustworthy information becomes making it more reliable. Second, and perhaps more importantly, in order for majority groups to influence the legislative process all they have to do is form a voting bloc of in-group members. This gives them little need to work with minorities. As long as whites secure the support of group members they will be able to succeed in the legislature.

The challenges facing minority groups are distinctly different from those facing groups in the majority. It is time to incorporate these differences into the study of cohesion. Minority groups are not like political, ideological, or regional groups. In each of these instances Members of Congress must simply rally the members of their group in order to influence the legislative process. For minority groups, rallying group members is wasted effort. Minorities tend to come from similar districts, meaning that group members are already likely to vote for minority legislation regardless of whether minorities become cohesive. The same can not be said for whites. Here, minorities face an uphill battle, because often times white Members of Congress come from districts that are distinctly different from the districts repre-

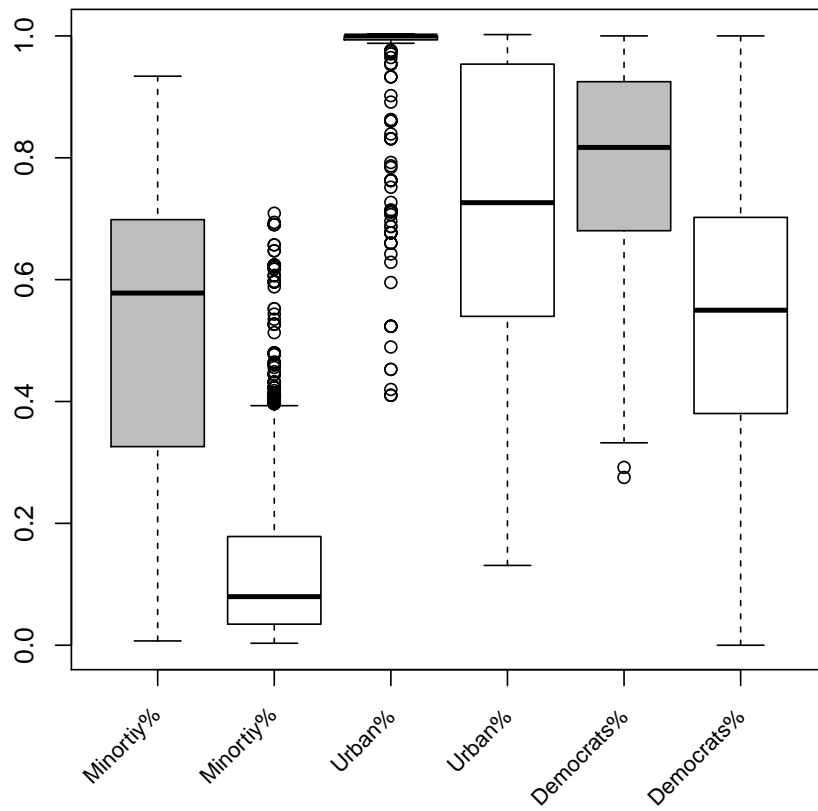


Figure 1: The Difference Between Districts Represented by Minorities and Whites

sented by minorities. These trends are shown in Figure 1. Here, grey boxes indicate districts represented by minorities. Not only are minorities more likely to come from districts with large minority, urban, and democratic populations, but in each instance the differences between districts represented by minorities and those represented by whites are statistically significant ($p \leq .05$)¹. Interpersonal connections are necessary to convince whites to vote for minority legislation, especially when that legislation supports minority interests (see Friedkin, 2004). Minorities need each other, but they also need whites. Whitby (2002, 94) argues that “the quality of representation for African Americans may well depend on the [Congressional Black Caucus] CBC’s cohesion.” I think this is a misguided strategy. Using cohesion as a bargaining tool only works if you are in the majority. When you are in the minority cooperation with outsiders becomes more important, meaning that cohesion may actually be counterproductive.

3 Data and Measures

I am primarily interested in whether relative cohesion helps minorities achieve legislative success. Our measure of relative cohesion is the Bock ratio (Bock and Husain, 1950) which is simply the in-group density over the out-group density. The Bock ratio is

$$\frac{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{N}_s} \sum_{j \in \mathcal{N}_s} x_{ij}}{g_s(g_s - 1)}, \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{N}_s} \sum_{j \notin \mathcal{N}_s} x_{ij}}{g_s(g - g_s)}$$

where in the numerator x_{ij} for $i \neq j$ equals 1 if the number of bill cosponsorships between group member i and group member j is greater than or equal to 1, and 0 otherwise. Similarly, in the denominator x_{ij} equals 1 if there are any bill cosponsorships between group member i and non-group member j and 0 otherwise. If the ratio is one, then in-group ties are as dense as out-group ties. If the ratio is greater than one, then the in-group ties are more dense than ties with members outside the group. If the ratio is less than one, then ties with out-group members dominate ties with in-group members. Thus, the greater the Bock ratio, the greater the level of relative cohesion.

¹For these tests I used a simple two-sample t -test where unequal variance was assumed.

Group cohesion is more likely to influence individuals who are well-connected to their group as compared to those who are not (see Friedkin, 2004, 418-420). Our measure of an individual's connectedness is the closeness ratio which is simply his/her in-group closeness over his/her out-group closeness. This measure captures the "social distance" of an individual to all other individuals in his/her group (Fowler, 2006, 265). The closeness ratio is (see Wasserman and Faust, 1994, 185)

$$\frac{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{N}_s} \frac{g_s - 1}{\sum_{j \in \mathcal{N}_s} d(i, j)}}{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{N}_s} \frac{g - 1}{\sum_{j \notin \mathcal{N}_s} d(i, j)}}, \quad (2)$$

where in the numerator $d(n_i, n_j)$ is the number of lines in the geodesic connecting group member i to group member j and $g_s - 1$ is the total number of group members minus 1. Similarly, in the denominator $d(n_i, n_j)$ is the number of lines in the geodesic connecting group member i to non-group member j and $g - 1$ is the total number of members minus 1. Here, a "geodesic" refers to "the shortest paths between two nodes" (Wasserman and Faust, 1994, 110). If the ratio is greater than one, then group member i is closer to his/her in-group as compared to his/her out-group. Conversely, if the ratio is less than one, then group member i is closer to his/her out-group as compared to his/her in-group. Thus, the greater the closeness ratio, the greater the level of connectedness.

The "most widely used measure of legislative influence is the number of successful floor amendments" (Fowler, 2006, 475). Fowler (2006, 475-576) and others (Sinclair, 1989; Smith, 1989; Weingast, 1991; Hall, 1992) use this measure instead of the number of bills passed because amendments are more direct reflections of the sponsor's intent, which gives us a better measure of the "direct influence one has on the legislative process." Given that, I used the number of amendments passed as the primary dependent variable. This variable ranges between 0 and 21 for minorities and 0 to 50 for whites. This suggests a Poisson regression may be appropriate. However, this assumes the mean and variance of the dependent variable are equal. After examining the data and the estimated dispersion parameter² I con-

²Specifically, I plotted the model's fitted values against the actual number of amendments passed minus the fitted values, squared. This showed that the mean was not equal to the estimated variance. Additionally, I took the squared sum of the Pearson residuals over the model's residuals degrees of freedom. Faraway (2006, Section 3.1) argues this provides an approximation of the model's dispersion. If this is equal to 0, then a Poisson regression would be appropriate. Here, I obtained a value of 4.54 which is well in excess of 0. This suggests a Poisson regression is not appropriate in this instance.

cluded this assumption did not hold in this instance. Given that, I used a negative binomial regression which estimates an additional dispersion parameter (θ), allowing the mean and variance to differ.

I computed these measures for each member of the U.S. House who served from the 97th Congress to the 103rd Congress using Fowler (2006)'s cosponsorship data³. The minority groups I considered were Asians, African-Americans, and Latinos⁴. A binary variable was created indicating whether the Member of Congress was a minority, using whites as the baseline. Outside of this I collected data on each member's ideology, seniority and whether he/she was a member of the majority party⁵. This gives us Model 1 which is shown here

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Amendments Passed}_i &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Minority}_i & (3) \\
 &+ \beta_2 \text{Closeness Ratio}_i \\
 &+ \beta_3 \text{Bock Ratio}_i \\
 &+ \beta_4 \text{Ideology}_i \\
 &+ \beta_5 \text{Seniority}_i \\
 &+ \beta_6 \text{Majority Party}_i \\
 &+ \beta_7 \text{Minority}_i \times \text{Closeness Ratio}_i \\
 &+ \beta_8 \text{Minority}_i \times \text{Bock Ratio}_i \\
 &+ \beta_9 \text{Closeness Ratio}_i \times \text{Bock Ratio}_i \\
 &+ \beta_{10} \text{Minority}_i \times \text{Closeness Ratio}_i \times \text{Bock Ratio}_i
 \end{aligned}$$

³For the cosponsorship data go to: <http://jhfwolwer.ucsd.edu/cosponsorship.htm> (Accessed on June 2, 2010)

⁴For the Asian-American roster go to: <http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/97-398.pdf> (Accessed on June 2, 2010). For the African American roster go to: <http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/RL30378.pdf> (Accessed on June 2, 2010). For the Latino-American roster go to: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/congress/chron.html> (Accessed on June 2, 2010)

⁵For the nominate data go to: <http://www.voteview.com/dwnomin.htm> (Accessed on May 26, 2011). For the party identification and seniority data go to: <http://jhfwolwer.ucsd.edu/cosponsorship.htm> (Accessed on May 26, 2011).

There are several parameters of interest. First, β_2 assesses whether whites who are well-connected to their group are better able to influence the legislature. I expect this parameter to be positive, suggesting that whites who are heavily tied to their group are able to draw on the group's resources in order to be legislatively successful. Second, β_3 determines whether relative cohesion helps whites be successful in the legislature. I expect this parameter to be positive, suggesting that whites benefit when their group works together. Third, β_7 determines whether the direct effect of the closeness ratio is different for minorities as opposed to whites. I expect this parameter to be insignificant, suggesting that well-connected group members tend to be legislatively productive, regardless of whether they are in the minority or majority. Fourth, β_8 tests whether relative cohesion helps minorities achieve legislative success, more so than their white counterparts. I expect this parameter to be negative, suggesting that relative cohesion hurts the ability of minorities to influence the legislature. Fifth, β_9 assesses whether individuals who are well-connected to relatively cohesive groups are more likely to be influential in the legislature. I expect this to be positive, suggesting that the benefits of relative cohesion are magnified for central group members. Finally, β_{10} assesses whether the interactive effect of the **Closeness Ratio** and **Bock Ratio** is different for minorities as compared to whites. This is our primary parameter of interest since it assesses whether well-connected members of minority groups are affected differently by relative cohesion as compared to similar whites. I expect this parameter to be negative, suggesting that relative cohesion prevents minorities from influencing the legislature, especially for the most important group members.

4 Results

Minority groups face challenges that whites do not. Many minorities enter the legislature after years of discrimination which prevented minorities from participating in the political process. In response, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was formed in order to represent the interests of the black community as a whole. Members of the CBC “were petitioned daily by citizens living hundreds of miles” from their districts asking for their assistance (Barnett, 1975, 35). This caused many in the CBC to view themselves as “Congressmen at large for 20 million Black people” (Barnett, 1975, 36). CBC cohesion

naturally formed during this time. CBC members spent considerable time and effort forming “group strategies,” which they thought would help them in upcoming “conventions and elections” (Barnett, 1975, 37). However, this fervor ultimately lead to infighting, and slowly but surely, the CBC now longer spoke with a “united voice for Black America” (Barnett, 1975, 38). While individual caucus members were influential during this time “the caucus as a whole was ineffective and floundering” (Barnett, 1975, 43). Many felt that cohesion was the answer. The results presented in Table 1 challenge this supposition.

Table 1: Negative Binomial Regression Testing the Affect of Relative Cohesion on Legislative Influence (Dependent Variable is the Number of Amendments Passed)

	Model 1
Intercept	-0.43 (0.43)
Minority	4.27* (1.95)
Closeness Ratio	0.02* (0.01)
Bock Ratio	0.05 (0.4)
Ideology	0.33 (0.18)
Seniority	0.06* (0.01)
Majority Party	0.39* (0.11)
Minority \times Closeness Ratio	-0.05* (0.02)
Minority \times Bock Ratio	-4.03* (1.87)
Closeness Ratio \times Bock Ratio	-0.02 (0.01)
Minority \times Closeness Ratio \times Bock Ratio	0.05* (0.02)
N	3076
θ	0.64
AIC	9743.56

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

First, minorities in general seem to be significantly more likely to pass amendments ($p \leq .05$). One reason for this is that over time minorities have expanded their legislative focus. For example, in the beginning the CBC produced legislative agendas which were “conglomerations of unpassable legislative

proposals woven together by press release rhetoric,” which were consequently “soon forgotten” (Barnett, 1975, 43). However, in the 94th Congress the CBC remodeled their legislative agenda in order to “increase the possibilities that a portion of the agenda would be passed” (Barnett, 1975, 43). Many inside and outside of the CBC resisted these efforts because they replaced idealism with pragmatism. This response was only natural given the “responsibilities” of minority groups. Often times minority groups are expected to be champions of minority interests, but these interests are, by definition, in the *minority*. This means that working for minority interests actually prevents minorities from being influential. Minority groups must balance these responsibilities with the realities of the legislature. Becoming cohesive puts pressure on minorities to work on behalf of the group instead of themselves, which prevents group members from influencing the legislative process.

Table 1 shows that minorities who work more with each other as compared to working more with those outside of their group are significantly less likely to influence the legislative process ($p \leq .05$). For example, in the beginning the CBC had no “formal ties with any other unofficial group in the House,” even though many of its members were part of the Democratic Study Group (DSG) (Barnett, 1975, 45-46). This level of cohesion prevented CBC members from influencing the legislature. It was only when CBC members began lobbying “their network of colleagues in the DSG” that they became influential. It was this “union” with outside groups which helped the CBC achieve things like better committee assignments (Barnett, 1975, 46). This logic is counter to what others have proposed (e.g. Gile and Jones, 1995; Pinney and Serra, 1999; Whitby, 2002). Minorities must expand not contract the number of ties they have outside of their group. Cohesion hurts their ability to achieve this end.

This argument applies equally to well-connected minorities. Table 1 shows that minorities who are well-connected with their group are less likely to pass amendments. Here, we must think more broadly about the nature of cohesion. Cohesion is not only a group-level concept, but also applies to individuals. Just as a group can become more or less relatively cohesion, so too can individuals. Minorities who work more with their group as opposed to others isolate themselves from the legislature as a whole. While this may form long lasting friendships, eventually these same friendships will cause group members to forgo difficult choices which are necessary in order to be legislatively successful. Friends and nonfriends alike can become cohesive, but they do so in different ways. To friends cohesion is “relationship focused”,

while to nonfriends cohesion is “information focused” (Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 76). This means that friends see cohesion as “sticking together and supporting each other,” while nonfriends see cohesion as “agreement on the issues and understanding of the situation” (Thompson, Peterson and Brodt, 1996, 76). In Congress the later is more important than the former. When minorities work more within their group they form relationships which prevent them from having the needed flexibility in order to make pragmatic bargains outside of the group.

However, relative cohesion is not always detrimental to minorities. Table 1 shows that well-connected minorities in relatively cohesive groups actually pass more amendments. This suggests that some minorities are able to capitalize on the group’s resources. In Figure 2 I plotted the predicted number of amendments passed with varying levels of the *Closeness Ratio* and *Bock Ratio*. The first row of Figure 2 are the predicted values for minority groups which have more out-group ties as compared to in-group ties. Here, as minorities become more connected to their group they are predicted to pass fewer amendments. Conversely, in the second row, where minority groups have more in-group ties than out-group ties, the inverse is true. Here, as minorities become more connected to their group they are predicted to pass more amendments. By far the highest predicted number of amendments passed corresponds with minorities who are not very connected to groups with low levels of relative cohesion. Overall this suggests that if you are in a cohesive group it is better to be well-connected, where the inverse is true if you are in a group which is not. However, in general it is better to be in a group which is not cohesive.

This supports what has already been outlined above. For minorities cohesion is a detriment to group success. For some these affects are less as compared to others, but in general the trend is the same for all. The CBC saw similar problems. At the beginning, the CBC was “rooted in an ideology in which the national black community was viewed as an at least partially autonomous, holistic entity, a coherent social subsystem represented politically by the CBC” (Barnett, 1975, 48). However, the contradiction between the “demands of a collective ideology” and the “pressures of the highly fragmented politics of individuals members” meant that the CBC had to redefine itself (Barnett, 1975, 48). Instead of working more with each other the CBC began to work more with those outside the group. This shows the problems associated with being a minority legislator. While on face cohesion may be beneficial to

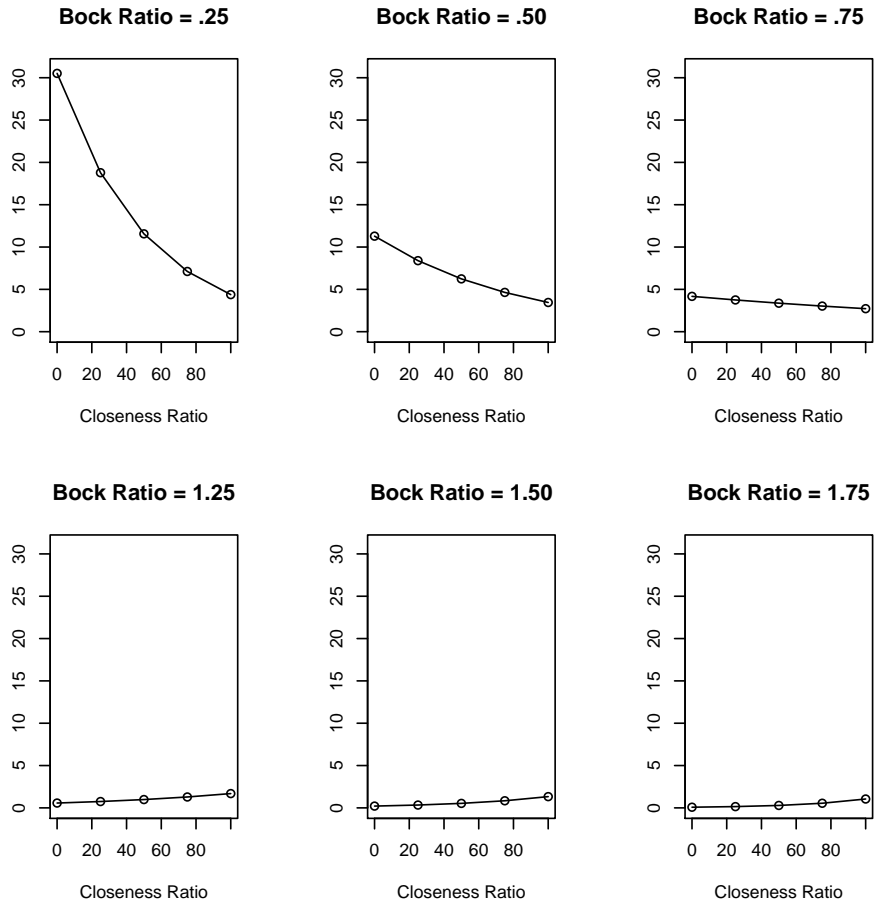


Figure 2: Predicted Number of Amendments Passed by Minority Representatives for Various Levels of the Bock and Closeness Ratios

groups, these benefits do not translate well to minorities. In the context of the CBC, “black legislators are in a double bind. Caught between pressures to represent blacks collectively as a holistic unit and constraints dictated by their individual political circumstances, they can neither act solely as a unit nor solely as individuals” (Barnett, 1975, 50). For minority groups to be successful they must form relationships with whites. This requires less cohesion and more cooperation.

5 Who Benefits from Cohesion?

What is apparent is that not all minorities are created equally. Within minority groups there are leaders and followers. For example, the current CBC chairman Emanuel Cleaver is probably better able to benefit from the group’s cohesion as compared to other minorities. While the rank-and-file members of a group may understand how groups can provide “trustworthy information,” “voting cues,” and “norms,” they have little knowledge of how group cohesion can be used in “legislative bargaining,” because often times the rank-and-file are not included in intergroup negotiations. “As representatives of the group in negotiations concerning legislation, committee assignments, and so forth, the leaders of the delegation are made aware of the potential contribution of group unity to the achievement of desired ends” (Fiellin, 1962, 85). This allows group leaders to use the cohesion of the group “for their own success as well as the promotion of the interests of rank-and-file members, the group, the constituencies and interest groups” (Fiellin, 1962, 86). This power means that group leaders are better able to use the group’s cohesion to acquire “influence” in the House (Fiellin, 1962, 85). However, do group leaders use this influence more “for their own success” or more for the success of “rank-and-file members” of the group?

To answer this question we must first determine whether minority group “leaders” in fact have different interests as compared to other minorities. In Figure 3 I show the percentage of minority “leaders” serving on each committee minus the percentage of other minority committee members. Here, I defined minority group “leaders” as minorities who were in the top quartile of the closeness ratio. Insignificant ($p > .05$) differences are colored gray⁶. If minority group “leaders” tend to serve on different

⁶For these tests I used a simple two-sided proportions test.

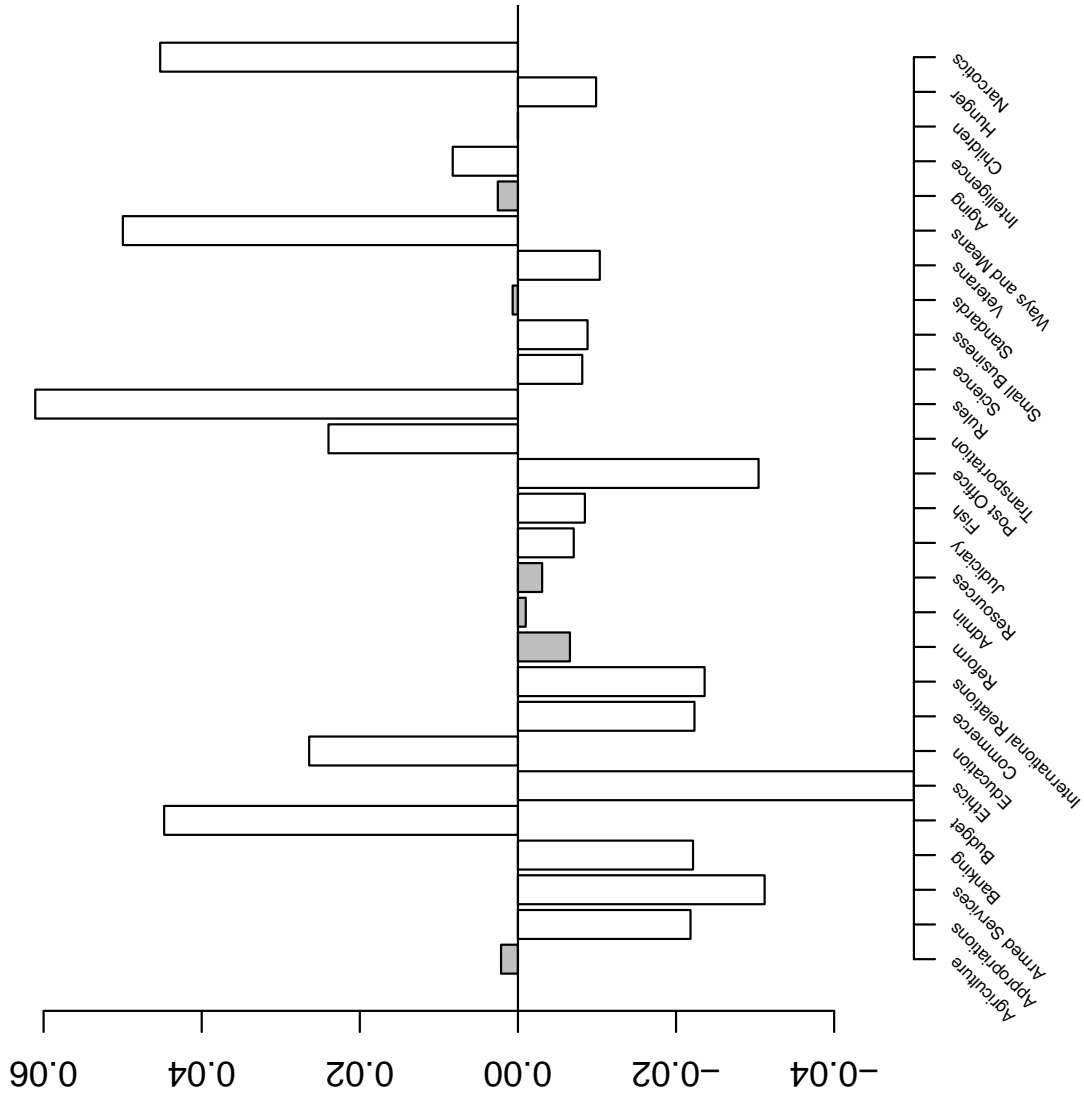


Figure 3: Difference Between the Committee Memberships of Minority "Leaders" and "Followers"

committees as minority group “followers,” then it provides some evidence that minority group “leaders” have different interests as compared to other minorities. As you can see in Figure 3 minority “leaders” tend to serve on more prestigious committees, such as the committee on the Budget, Education, Rules, and Ways and Means. Conversely, minority “followers” tend to serve on less prestigious committees, such as the committee on the Post Office. However, some variation exists. For example, minority “leaders” frequently serve on the Narcotics and Transportation committees while minority “followers” frequently serve on the Armed Services and Ethics committees. On all but six committees, these differences are statistically significant at the .05 level, suggesting that the interests of minority “leaders” do not necessarily coincide with the interests of other minorities.

Next, we must determine whether minority group “leaders” advance their own interests more than the interests of “the rank-and-file.” In Figure 4 I show for each topic category the percentage of bills offered by minority “leaders” minus the percentage of bills offered by other minorities. Again, insignificant ($p > .05$) differences are colored gray. If minority group “leaders” tend to offer different bills than minority group “followers,” then it provides some evidence that minority group “leaders” work more for their own interests as compared to the interests of other minorities. As you can see in Figure 4 minority “leaders” tend to offer more bills dealing with economics, health, education, transportation, social welfare, housing, defense, and science. Conversely, minority “followers” tend to offer more bills dealing with civil rights, agriculture, labor, the environment, energy, crime, banking, foreign trade, foreign affairs, government, and public lands. However, in all but five instances, these difference are not statistically significant at the .05 level, suggesting that even though minority “leaders” tend to have different interests as compared to minority “followers” they generally offer bills on similar topics.

Minority cohesion benefits some minorities more than others. For the most part it seems as though minority “leaders” advance the interests of the group, but sometimes they do not. For example, one of the reasons why the CBC was successful in the beginning was because of the “negotiations conducted with the House leadership by Charles Rangel, the CBC chairman” (Barnett, 1975, 46), but this does not mean that Charles Rangel always worked on behalf of the CBC. However, even in those instances, Charles Rangel was still the CBC chairman, meaning he obtained some residual benefits from the cohesion of the CBC. For rank-and-file minorities they may contribute to the group’s cohesion, but

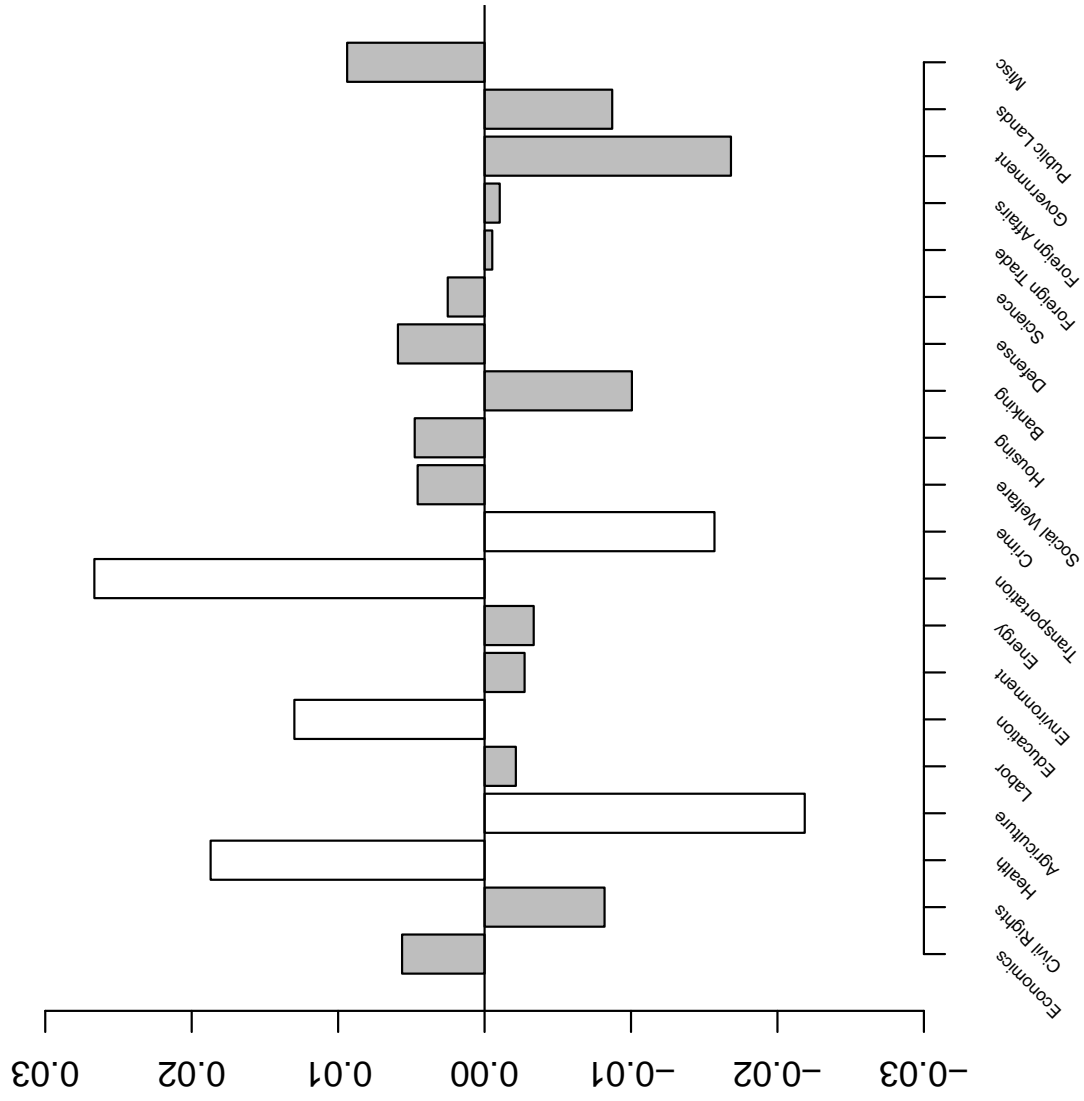


Figure 4: Difference Between the Topics of the Bills Offered by Minority "Leaders" and "Followers"

they can not speak on behalf of the group, meaning the residual benefits of cohesion can never realized. Only group “leaders” represent the group during intergroup negotiations which increases their power and prestige in the legislature. This increases their influence, but not necessarily the influence of others. This is why when previous scholars suggest that cohesion helps group members influence the legislative process this is true for some but not others.

6 Conclusion

Many in political science see cohesion as a something of a cure all. If minority groups become cohesive then they become successful. However, I have shown that cohesion can sometimes be fool’s gold. When minorities work more with each other they do so at the expense of working with those outside their group. The question then becomes should minority groups become relatively cohesive? This study shows that the answer is not a simple yes or no. As long as race “remains a powerful ascriptive category, subject to provocative and emotional politicization, collective action through racial legislative caucuses remains a plausible strategy” (Barnett, 1975, 50). However, minority groups must find a balance between working with each other and those in the majority. This is easier said than done. Minorities feel obligated to work with one another because of the responsibility they feel towards minority populations, but this responsibility is more of a burden than a benefit. Thus, while “racial legislative caucuses will be feature of the near future,” their viability depends on their ability to advance minority interests while expanding the size and scope of their support network (Barnett, 1975, 50). Cooperation not cohesion is needed to achieve this end.

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