

Mike Cowburn

Graduate School of North American Studies

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Education

Freie Universität Berlin Ph.D. Political Science 2019 – 2023

Dissertation: Party Factions and Partisan Polarization in U.S. Congressional Primaries: How Ideological and Factional Primaries Influence Candidate Positions

Committee: Christian Lammert, Sean M. Theriault, Max Steinhardt, Rachel M. Blum, and David Bosold

The thesis demonstrates changes in the dynamics of competition, offering evidence that between 2006 and 2020 ideological differences between candidates proximate to competing factions became the dominant narrative in congressional primary contests, first in the Republican and then in the Democratic Party. I consider causal mechanisms of this development and implications in terms of the selective and adaptative polarizing effects, empirically testing if primaries reward ideologically extreme candidates in the period. Taking a contest-centered approach, the thesis foregrounds the dynamics of and reasons for primary competitions to better understand the implications for candidate positioning. In doing so, the thesis demonstrates that trends of intra-party factionalism and ideological narratives during the congressional nomination process influence candidates' positions.

Freie Universität Berlin MA North American Studies 1.0 2017 – 2019

The MA study focused primarily within the discipline of political science, but also included courses in cultural studies and interdisciplinary classes. The thesis focused on the topic of polarization in the U.S. Congress and received the highest grade of 1.0.

University of Exeter BA Hons Politics 2:1 2005 – 2008

The BA program gave a broad introduction to the discipline of political science, the dissertation focused on media representations of the U.S. presidency and received a 1st class grade.

Research Interests

U.S. Politics, Political Parties, Congress, Primary Elections, Factions, Intra-Party, Ideology, Candidate Selection, Polarization.

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Cowburn, Mike and Michael T. Oswald. 2020. "Legislator Adoption of the Fake News Label: Ideological Differences in Republican Representative Use on Twitter." *The Forum* 18(3): 389–413. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2020-2015>

Book Chapters

Cowburn, Mike. 2022. "Experience Narratives and Populist Rhetoric in U.S. House Primaries" in Michael T. Oswald (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Populism*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80803-7_26

Cowburn, Mike. 2020. "The Transformation of the Congressional Primary" in Michael T. Oswald (ed.) *Mobilization, Representation and Responsiveness in The American Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24792-8_5

In Progress

Cowburn, Mike and Rebecca Kerr. "Inclusivity and Decentralisation of Candidate Selectorates: Factional Consequences for Centre-Left Parties in England, Germany, and the United States" [Revise & Resubmit, Under Review]

Cowburn, Mike and Marius Sältzer. "Partisan Communication in Two-Stage Elections: The Effect of Primaries on Intra-Campaign Positional Shifts in Congressional Elections" [Under Review]

Blum, Rachel M. and **Mike Cowburn**. "How Local Factions Pressure Parties: Activist Groups & Primary Contests in the Tea Party Era" [Under Review]

Mike Cowburn and Curd B. Knüpfer. "The Emerging Fault Line of Alternative: Intra-Party Division in Republican Representatives' Media Engagement" [Under Review]

Commentary & Analysis

Cowburn, Mike. 2020. "[Not Just the Presidency: Congressional Primaries 2020.](#)" Atlantische Akademie

Cowburn, Mike. 2020. "[Fostering Engagement in Primaries and Caucuses.](#)" APSA PoliticalScienceNow

Conference Presentations

09/2021 117th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), Seattle, WA
Paper: "The Effects of Primaries on Intra-Campaign Positions in Congressional Elections"

Paper: "Intra-Party Division and News Media Engagement Among Republican Legislators"

06/2021 11th Annual Meeting of the European Political Science Association (EPSA)¹

Paper: "Primary Roots of Partisan Polarization: The Effects of Primaries on Intra-Campaign Positional Shifts in Congressional Elections"

06/2021 Annual Conference of the German Association for American Studies (DGfA)¹

Paper: "Congressional Primaries in the 21st Century: Participation, Inequality, and Intra-Party Division"

04/2021 79th Annual Midwest Political Science Association Conference (MPSA)¹

Paper: "Partisan Communication in Two-Stage Elections: The Effect of Primaries on Intra-Campaign Positional Shifts in Congressional Elections"

03/2021 Political Studies Association Annual Conference (PSA)¹

Paper: "Inclusivity and Centralisation of Candidate Selectorates: Factional Consequences for Centre-Left Parties in Germany, England, and the United States"

01/2021 49th Annual Conference of the American Politics Group of the Political Studies Association (PSA)¹

Paper: "Legislator Adoption of the Fake News Label: Ideological Differences in Republican Representative Use on Twitter"

- 11/2020 Annual Meeting of the Political Science Section of the German Association for American Studies¹
Paper: "Republican Legislator Adoption of the Fake News Label"
- 09/2020 116th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA)¹
Paper: "Ideological Difference & Party Destabilization in Congressional Primary Contests"
- 08/2020 European Consortium for Political Research General Conference (ECPR)¹
Paper: "Intra-Party Ideological Disagreement in Congressional Nomination Processes"
- 07/2020 Early Career Network Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association¹
Paper: "The Rise of Ideology in U.S. Congressional Primaries"
- 06/2020 Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association (EPSA)¹
Paper: "Ideological Competition in U.S. Congressional Primaries"
- 06/2020 Annual Conference of the German Association for American Studies (DGfA)²
Paper: "Polarizing Primaries? Income Inequality & Congressional Candidate Selection"
- 04/2020 78th Annual Midwest Political Science Association Conference (MPSA)²
Paper: "From Personal to Ideological: The Transformation of the Congressional Primary"
Paper: "The Evolution of the Fake News Label: Ideology & Time in Congress as Determinants of Republican Representative Use on Twitter"
- 12/2019 British Association for American Studies Postgraduate Conference, British Library
Paper: "Communication in Congressional Primaries: The Rise of Ideology in Intra-Party Contests"
- 11/2019 Annual Meeting of the Political Science Section of the German Association for American Studies, Heidelberg University
Paper: "Democratic Re-Engagement? The Ideological Foundations of Growing Primary Participation"
- 06/2019 Threatened Democracies: Interdisciplinary Conference in North American Studies, University of Göttingen
Paper: "Fractured Parties and Factional Nominations"
- 06/2019 Intra-Party Politics in Times of Crisis: Party Congress Research Group Annual Meeting, University of Strathclyde
Paper: "Intra-Party Factionalism and Ideological Competition in US Congressional Primaries"
- 11/2018 Annual Meeting of the Political Science Section of the German Association for American Studies, Passau University
Paper: "Mediators of Faction: The Transformation of the Congressional Primary"

Invited Talks & Media

- 11/2021 "Right-Wing Alternative Media and Republican Party Social Media Engagement"
Social Media and Politics Podcast. Michael Bossetta. Episode 136.
<https://socialmediaandpolitics.org/right-wing-alternative-media-social-media-engagement-congress-republican-party-twitter/>

¹ Virtual conference due to COVID-19.

² Conference canceled due to COVID-19, proposal accepted, conference paper written and shared with panel.

- 11/2021 “Republican Party Factionalism as a Response to Racial & Economic Inequality”
Freie Universität Ringvorlesung Lecture Series, ‘What Stands Between Us and What Stands Before Us: Pasts, Presents and Future of (In)equality in the U.S.’, Berlin
- 04/2021 “Polarization, Congressional Primaries, and Fake News”
U.S. Studies Online, USSOcast Podcast, <https://usso.uk/usso-cast/>
- 03/2021 “The State of the Parties and Their Future Under the Biden Presidency”
Atlantische Akademie Teachers’ Seminar, The United States in 2021 and Beyond
- 11/2020 “US-Wahl 2020” (“US Election 2020”)
CouchFM Election Night TV & Radio Coverage, Berlin
- 11/2020 “Kongresswahl 2020”, Amerikawählt! Wahlabend 2020,
 (“Congressional Election 2020”, Atlantische Akademie Virtual Election Evening)
- 11/2020 “US Election System & Postal Voting”, interview with Fluter Magazine,
<https://fluter.de/us-wahlssystem-briefwahl-interview> [in German]
- 09/2020 “Ein Ausblick auf die Kongress-, Gouverneurs- und einzelstaatlichen Wahlen: Gelingt den Demokraten die Rückeroberung des Senats und weiterer Einzelstaaten?”
 (“A look ahead to the congressional, gubernatorial and state elections: will the Democrats succeed in retaking the Senate and other states?”)
America Decides: 2020 Election Series, Bonn University
- 06/2019 “Demokratie unter Beschuss? Donald Trump und der Populismus”, (“Democracy under Attack? Donald Trump and Populism”)
Tolerantes Brandenburg Series, Friedrich-Ludwig-Jahn-Gymnasium
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Other Training

- 08/2021 Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis
Courses: Advanced Quantitative Data Analysis
- 08/2021 Summer School of the ECPR Standing Group on Political Parties, Aarhus, Denmark
- 07/2021 Data Science Summer School, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin
Courses: Intro to R Programming, Data Visualization with R, Research Design & Causal Analysis with R
- 03/2021 ECPR Virtual Winter School in Methods and Techniques
Courses: The Statistics of Causal Inference
- 03/2021 Applied Statistics Workshop Series, NTNU Business School, Norwegian University of Science and Technology
- 07/2020 Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis
Courses: Applied Regression, Advanced Stata Programming
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Awards & Grants

- 09 – 12/2021 STIBET Doctorate Promotion of the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD)
three-month stipend (September to December 2021)
- 2021 American Political Science Association (APSA) Travel Grant
- 2021 Virginia Gray Graduate Research Grant from the APSA Political Organizations and Parties (POP) Section
- 2021 John Sullivan Award for Best Graduate Student Paper in the APSA Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior (EPOVB) Section

2019 – 2023 Freie Universität Berlin Graduate School of North American Studies (GSNAS) forty-month Doctoral Research Stipend (October 2019 to January 2023), including Annual Travel Grant

Teaching Experience

Freie Universität Berlin

Instructor

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| 32513 | U.S. Political Parties in a Partisan Era (MA) | Fall 2021 |
| 32503 | Polarization in U.S. Politics (BA) | Spring 2019 |

Tutorial Leader

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| 32000T | Understanding North America B—Political Science (BA) | Spring 2019 |
| 32000T | Understanding North America B—Political Science (BA) | Spring 2018 |

Professional Association Memberships

American Political Science Association (APSA)

Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA)

European Political Science Association (EPSA)

International Political Science Association (IPSA)

European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR)

Political Studies Association (PSA)

German Association for American Studies (DGfA/GAAS)

Miscellaneous

Software Stata, Microsoft Office, Zotero, R (Basic), LaTeX (Basic)

Languages English (native), German (B2)

Selected Non-Academic Employment

Account Director Ideal (www.ideal.co.uk) April 2010 – February 2017

Administrative Assistant Liberty (www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk) July 2008 – February 2009

References

Christian Lammert

Professor of North American Politics & Policy

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Sean M. Theriault

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