EXPLAINING VARIATION IN POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

James C. Garand
Louisiana State University

Stella M. Rouse
University of Maryland

Phillip J. Ardoin
Appalachian State University

Paper prepared for presentation at the American Politics Workshop, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, November 6, 2015.
EXPLAINING VARIATION IN POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

Abstract

Although numerous scholars have explored the linkage between constituency policy preferences and the roll-call behavior of legislators, little effort has been devoted to understanding variation in policy responsiveness. In this paper we posit a comprehensive theory of the effects of member and district characteristics on the linkage between constituency opinion and legislative policy responsiveness. We focus primarily on the effects of district diversity, which represents the degree to which legislative constituencies send clear signals to their representatives about their policy expectations. Using data on the U.S. House for the years 1981 to 2000, we find that legislator responsiveness is significantly stronger for House members representing diverse districts and whose constituents are politically sophisticated and engaged. Policy responsiveness is also diminished by seniority and chamber activities—more senior House members and those who sponsor more legislation are less responsive to their constituents. Our findings have important implications for how we perceive the representative-constituency relationship.
The concept of legislative representation and responsiveness has long captivated the interest of political scientists (Jewell, 1983; Eulau and Karps, 1977). Scholars have directed their attention at a wide range of manifestations of representation, including policy congruence between legislators and their constituents (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Fiorina, 1974; McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979; Glazer and Robbins, 1985; Clinton 2006; Tausanovich and Warshaw 2012), patterns of district attention and service responsiveness (Fiorina, 1989; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987; Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Fiorina, 1981; Johannes, 1984), the allocation of pork barrel and other general benefits to constituents (cf., Arnold, 1990; Stein and Bickers, 1994; Wilson, 1986), and the descriptive representation by legislators of the characteristics of the citizenry that elects members of the legislature (Lublin, 1997; Swain, 1993; Gertzog, 1984; Burrell, 1994; Mansbridge 1999; Rouse 2013).

At the core of much of the writing about legislative representation and representative democracy is the concept of policy congruence (also referred to as policy responsiveness), which we define as the degree to which legislators represent in their behavior the policy views of their constituents. According to classic views of normative democratic theory, in representative democracies legislators are expected to exhibit behavior that is, with relatively few exceptions, consistent with the policy views of their constituents (Pitkin, 1967). Given this, numerous scholars have focused attention on how legislators reflect in their roll-call votes the policy views of their constituents, and the effort to understand how the preferences of citizens are translated into roll-call behavior has spawned an extensive literature (cf., Miller and Stokes, 1963; McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979; Erikson, 1978; Kuklinski, 1977; Glaser and Robbins, 1985; Bishin 2000; Clinton 2006; Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2013).

One of the key areas of inquiry that has been somewhat underdeveloped in this literature involves explanations for variation in representative behavior across legislators and constituencies. In other words, why are some legislators responsive in their roll-call behavior to the policy views of their constituents, while others are less responsive? Why do some constituencies regularly elect responsive legislators, while
others consistently elect representatives who are less responsive? Some scholars have examined this question by exploring how several variables mediate the relationship between the policy views of legislators and the policy views of their constituents (Fiorina, 1974). In previous research scholars have found that various district conditions influence the degree to which legislative behavior reflects patterns of constituency opinion. Several variables have been found to mediate the relationship between roll-call behavior and constituency policy views: constituency education and political sophistication (Jackson and King, 1989), legislative role orientations (McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979), proximity to the next election (Ahuja, 1994; Thomas, 1985; Hibbing, 1984; Warshaw, 2013), electoral marginality (Fiorina, 1974; Sullivan and Uslaner, 1978; Kuklinski, 1977; Griffin, 2006), political ambition and future retirement plans (Herrick and Moore, 1993; Herrick, Moore, and Hibbing, 1994; Warshaw 2013), district ideological consistency (McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979; Bailey and Brady, 1998), and change in constituency characteristics brought on by redistricting (Glazer and Robbins, 1985).

Of course, legislators and legislative districts vary in a number of ways, and the potential for policy congruence is likely to vary as a function of these member and district-level characteristics. For instance, some legislative districts are more competitive and electorally volatile than others. In such districts, legislators are likely to perceive that they are vulnerable to subsequent electoral defeat, and hence are more likely to behave in a manner that is consistent with constituency preferences. Moreover, legislators representing districts with attentive, high-information electorates might be expected to adhere more closely to the views of their constituents, since to deviate from those views might result in a hostile reaction during subsequent elections by informed, politically-active constituents. On the other hand, legislators representing inattentive, low-information electorates are less likely to perceive that their roll-call votes will engender a response, since constituents in such districts are both less likely to hold strong positions and less likely to be aware of any discrepancies in their representatives' roll-call behavior.
Despite the considerable scholarly attention paid to the study of policy responsiveness, little has been done to develop and test a comprehensive theory of the effects of member and district characteristics on the linkage between constituency opinion and roll-call behavior. Moreover, those studies that have been conducted are often limited in scope insofar as they typically focus on the effects of only one or two variables on policy responsiveness. Subsequently it is difficult to draw comprehensive, generalizable inferences about the effects of variables that mediate the representative-constituency relationship. In this paper we explore more fully the mediated linkages between constituency opinion and legislative roll-call voting. Specifically, we describe the general configuration of a model of legislative responsiveness that suggests that legislators vary their responsiveness to constituency preferences as a function of (1) the quality, clarity, and consistency of policy signals emanating from their districts, (2) attributes of legislative constituencies that are associated with pressures placed on legislators to represent constituency preferences; and (3) the degree to which legislators prioritize Washington-based activity in the policy process over constituency-based activity. Using data on U.S. House members from the 1980s and 1990s, we explore the effects of a series of independent variables that are expected to mediate the relationship between constituency preferences and legislative roll-call voting. Although we test our model using data on U.S. House members from 1981 to 2000, we suggest that this model has broad applicability to a range of legislative settings.1

A GENERAL MODEL OF LEGISLATIVE POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

What explains variation in the responsiveness of legislators to the policy preferences of their constituents? What is necessary to motivate and enable legislators to translate constituency preferences into roll-call behavior? We contend that legislative responsiveness will vary as a function of characteristics of both legislators and their constituencies. Some legislators will have attributes that predispose them to high policy responsiveness, while for other legislators policy responsiveness will be less of a priority. Further, there will be some district contexts that promote high policy responsiveness, while in other
districts there is less pressure on legislators to align their roll call votes with the preferences of their constituents. Specifically, legislators will respond to constituency preferences in their roll-call behavior when (1) those signals are unambiguous and clearly articulated, (2) there is a credible threat that noncompliance with constituency preferences will have undesirable (primarily electoral) costs, and (3) legislators are relatively unencumbered by congressional policy-making and leadership activities and subsequently are able to devote sufficient time to constituency priorities.

In thinking theoretically about why some members are highly responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents while others are not, our starting point is Fenno’s (1978) discussion of the three goals that motivate legislators and their behavior: (1) reelection, (2) power and prestige in their legislative body; and (3) making good public policy. Obviously, reelection is an important part of the decision calculus for all but a small number of legislators who are planning to retire or who are not interested in reelection. Reelection pressures and electoral vulnerability should enhance legislators’ efforts to “toe the line” and follow the policy preferences of their constituents. This is the core argument made by proponents of the “marginality hypothesis” (Fiorina, 1974; Griffin, 2006). On the other hand, efforts by legislators to seek power and prestige in their legislative body or to make good public policy can take them away from the policy preferences of their constituents. While it is common for legislators to argue that their leadership and policy work in their legislative body provides a benefit to their constituents, it is also possible that prioritizing these other activities can mean less attention paid to constituency interests and can result in the charge that legislators are “out of touch” with those who elected them. Of course, whether intense leadership and policy activity depresses legislative policy responsiveness is an empirical question.

In more specific terms, our theoretical argument focuses on the capability of legislative constituencies to articulate in clear terms information about their policy preferences to their elected representatives, as well as the ability and willingness of legislators to acquire information about constituency preferences, prioritize constituency preferences over other legislative goals, and use their acquired legislative
experience to understand and translate constituency preferences into roll-call behavior. We speculate that policy responsiveness will be at its greatest (1) when constituencies are sufficiently homogenous to send clear signals about the policy positions that they expect their representatives to take, (2) when constituents are sufficiently knowledgeable about and engaged in politics to convey both clear and frequent policy signals and the possibility of electoral threat, (3) when marginal electoral outcomes convey to legislators the perception that they are vulnerable to subsequent electoral defeat, and (4) when legislators prioritize the preferences of their constituents in their decision making over other legislative goals such as power and prestige or good policy making.

Based on these arguments, we suggest that there are several variables that mediate the relationship between constituency preferences and legislative roll-call behavior. In Figure 1 we present a general description of our model. The relationship between constituency ideology and legislator roll-call ideology is at the core of our model of policy responsiveness. We also account for the direct effect of member party on roll-call ideology. We suggest that the relationship between constituency ideology and legislator roll-call ideology is mediated by district homogeneity, district electoral threat (as represented by both electoral marginality and the political engagement of constituents), and other legislator activities (reflecting the degree to which legislators focus on general public policy and leadership activities).

[Figure 1 here]

District Homogeneity

The centerpiece of our model of legislative responsiveness is the homogeneity of legislative constituencies. Simply, we hypothesize that legislators from homogeneous districts will be more responsive to their constituents than legislators from heterogeneous districts. The theoretical rationale underlying this hypothesis is simple. Arguably, homogeneous districts will have constituencies that have relatively cognate interests, at least in comparison to heterogeneous districts. When relatively homogeneous constituencies convey their interests to their elected representatives, those representatives
are more likely to receive relatively clear signals about what is expected of them. In essence, consistent constituency cues are at least partially a function of congruent interests. When constituencies are homogenous and send clear, consistent policy signals, the representational task of the legislator is made much easier, since there is relatively little confusion about what the constituency prefers. Confronted with relatively clear signals from their districts, legislators are hard pressed to deviate from the policy preferences of their constituents, lest they subject themselves to an enhanced threat of electoral defeat in subsequent elections.

Conversely, we also assert that heterogeneous constituencies are likely to convey much more conflictual and diverse signals to their representatives. When legislative districts are populated by diverse populations with varying interests, the signals transmitted to legislators become more complex and difficult to interpret. The cacophony of policy signals emanating from diverse district electorates leaves legislators with few tangible constituency cues upon which to base roll-call decisions.

Given this, we hypothesize that legislators from homogeneous districts will be more responsive to their constituents than legislators from heterogeneous districts. This means the linkage between constituency opinion and legislative roll-call behavior should be stronger for legislators representing homogenous districts; in heterogeneous (or diverse) districts, the linkage should be weakened by the inconsistent and conflictual signals received by legislators.

**Electoral Threat**

As noted, reelection is a major goal for legislators (Fenno, 1978). Without reelection, legislators cannot accomplish other goals, and self-preservation is a strong motivator for behavior. We suggest that legislators who consider themselves to be vulnerable will be more likely to connect their roll-call behavior to the policy preferences of their constituency. There are two components underlying electoral threat.

**Electoral safety.** Among the variables deemed as mediating the relationship between constituency preferences and legislative roll-call behavior, the margins by which incumbents win reelection has undoubtedly received the most attention in the literature. Attention to electoral margins has particularly
focused on efforts to test variations on what has become known as the marginality hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that members from electorally "marginal" districts will exhibit higher levels of responsiveness to the policy preferences of their constituents than members representing "safe" districts, since the former are deemed as more vulnerable to the "rational Gods of vengeance and reward" that inhabit their districts. Given this, the threat of electoral defeat represented by small winning election margins is hypothesized to be strongly related to the likelihood that legislators will exhibit responsive behavior in their roll-call voting.

The theoretical underpinnings of this hypothesis seem to be quite reasonable. It is perhaps a truism that reelection is the dominant goal pursued by legislators (Fenno, 1973; Mayhew, 1974). Simply, voters have the opportunity to deny reelection to their representatives. In theory, this power prompts legislators to provide their constituents with goods (e.g., congruent policy behavior, constituency service, pork-barrel projects, etc.) that mollify constituents' concerns and increase the likelihood that voters will return them to office. The collective control that elections give voters over their representatives is regarded by democratic theorists as guaranteeing a high level of legislative responsiveness to constituency interests.

Of course, not all constituencies subject legislators to the same level of electoral threat. Incumbents who win election by large margins are likely to be relatively insulated from subsequent electoral defeat, and hence less obliged to follow the policy views of their constituents. Conversely, close election margins might be a collective signal to legislators that their policy performance is in question and/or under close scrutiny and that they should pay especially close attention to the policy views of their constituents when casting subsequent roll-call votes. Other legislators may be fortunate to represent districts with strong partisan attachments that almost always elect a representative of the same party, and these partisan attachments may insulate incumbents representing the dominant party from electoral defeat except in the rarest of circumstances. For a Democratic (Republican) legislator in a highly Democratic (Republican) district, the threat of electoral defeat may not be very tangible.
Constituency Political Engagement. One variable that should be related to how legislators translate constituency policy preferences into roll-call behavior is the level of political engagement characterizing a given constituency. We suggest that constituencies with high levels of political engagement, as reflected by high levels of education, political participation and involvement, and political knowledge and sophistication, are more likely to be aware of the policy positions taken by their representatives, to convey unequivocally to their representatives their policy expectation, and to hold their representatives accountable for their actions. On the other hand, in those districts in which citizens are characterized as having low levels of political engagement, legislators are less constrained in their policy behavior, since citizens are less likely to be aware of roll-call behavior in the first place, to hold strong policy views on many issues, and to participate on election day and punish legislators for failing to follow constituency preferences. In essence, in low-engagement districts legislators can act with relative impunity, since it is less likely that there will be adverse consequences associated with their actions.

The hypothesized effect of political engagement is based on previous research on both mass political behavior and legislative politics. First, the extensive literature on mass political engagement shows that citizens vary considerably in their levels of political sophistication, political knowledge, and participation in the political system. These variables are highly interconnected with each other, but seem to be preceded causally by individuals' level of education. Simply, highly educated individuals exhibit higher levels of political sophistication (Converse, 1964) and political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1991; Bennett and Bennett, 1993; Holbrook and Garand, 1996), and are generally more likely to participate in voting and other forms of political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). These are the very citizens one would expect to hold definable positions on important policy issues, to make some effort to learn about the policy positions taken by their representatives, and to hold their representatives accountable at the polls. Given this, it is not implausible to suggest that legislators who represent districts with a high proportion of well-educated—and, presumably, politically
engaged—voters will be more responsive to constituency policy preferences than those legislators who represent districts comprised largely of less-well educated citizens.

Legislative scholars have also speculated about these political engagement effects, but the empirical evidence for such effects is sparse. Fenno (1978) and Kingdon (1989) suggest that legislators will be more responsive if they represent politically-sophisticated districts. However, in their analysis on roll-call voting by House members on the 1978 Tax Reform Act, Jackson and King (1989) find that legislators representing highly-educated constituencies exhibit a *weaker* relationship between constituent interest and roll-call behavior. Although it is based on only one set of roll-call votes, this finding raises questions about what we would consider to be a sensible hypothesis concerning representative behavior. We suggest that a general, more-definitive test is in order.

**Seniority and Legislator Policy and Leadership Activity**

When new legislators begin their work in their respective legislative bodies, they are confronted with some serious decisions about how they are going to balance and prioritize their constituency and legislative work. At the initial stages of their legislative careers, they are likely to be relatively uncertain about their electoral prospects (and hence their long-term legislative futures), and they may perceive that they are vulnerable to the ebbs and flows characterizing electoral outcomes over time. Subsequently many relatively-junior members will prioritize constituency activities over other legislative activities as they try to solidify their electoral positions in their districts. This means that legislators will focus their efforts on casework, pork-barrel projects for their districts, and building a record of congruence between their roll-call behavior and the policy preferences of their constituents. On the other hand, as legislators progress in their careers, they are more likely to gain confidence in both their electoral prospects and legislative ability, and this permits them to branch out and break away from a primary focus on their constituency preferences. Moreover, as legislators gain solid footing over time they are more likely to redirect their attention to intra-chamber activities—i.e., serving in a leadership role, serving as a committee chair or
ranking minority member, sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation—that have the potential of taking time away from purely constituency-related activities. The result can be an attenuation of the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior, either because (1) members are paying less attention and hence lose touch with the preferences of their constituents, or (2) these other legislative activities come with their own set of pressures that lead legislators to support policy positions that are not necessarily compatible with the preferences of their constituents. On the latter point, legislators who are committee leaders or party leaders may need to support specific policy positions for the good of the party, even though those positions may not be entirely consistent with the policies preferred by their constituents.

**Seniority.** The expected effect of seniority and legislative experience on the responsiveness of legislators to the policy views of their constituents is the subject of some debate. On one hand, one might argue that more senior members are relatively insulated from electoral pressure, since senior members have won reelection repeatedly and tend to be elected by larger margins than their more junior colleagues (Alford and Hibbing, 1981). Since senior members are less likely to be threatened with subsequent electoral defeat, so the argument goes, they need not respond to constituency preferences as vigorously as their junior (and, presumably, more vulnerable) counterparts. Moreover, legislative scholars recognize that there is a career life cycle in most legislatures, including the U.S. Congress, that usually results in a change in roles as legislators' careers progress. Junior members are usually kept busy "learning the ropes" and consolidating electoral support in their districts. As members gain seniority, they often begin to prioritize intra-chamber activities, and the result is that constituency interests are given a lower priority. Because of their electoral success, senior members may begin to perceive themselves as insulated from electoral challenge and, subsequently, perceive that they can take controversial positions without much chance of electoral consequences. Further, to fulfill their chamber obligations senior members of Congress may spend more time in Washington and, conversely, less time in their districts. Time spent in
Washington is time not spent in their districts, and this may result in a breakdown in communication to the extent that members lose touch with the “pulse” of their district. The end result is that many senior members may be less responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents than junior members as they become more detached from the districts that they represent.

On the other hand, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect senior members to be more responsive to constituency preferences than junior members. First, more senior members have, by virtue of their years of service, gained substantially more electoral and legislative experience than their junior colleagues. This means that they have learned more about the general temperament of their constituency, how to best interact with their constituents to maximize electoral benefit and policy leverage, and how to use the legislative process to benefit their constituents and improve their prospects for reelection. Most importantly for the present discussion, it is certainly the case that policy congruence and responsiveness carry electoral advantages for incumbents. Legislators who exhibit roll-call behavior that is compatible with the policy preferences of their constituents have usually gone quite a distance toward removing one possible weapon from the arsenal of potential challengers. We suggest the possibility that senior members are more likely than junior members to have learned those advantages, and hence, are more likely to know how to respond to the policy preferences of their constituents.

There is at least one other, related process that could result in a positive effect of seniority on the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior. If policy responsiveness indeed has an electoral payoff, then legislators who consistently exhibit high levels of responsiveness to constituency preferences in their roll-call voting will have a higher probability of being reelected than those who fail to respond as well to constituency preferences. As time goes on within a given cohort, the unresponsive legislators will drop out due to electoral defeat, voluntary retirement, or strategic retirement related to an anticipated electoral defeat. Those legislators who are consistently responsive to their constituents, on the other hand, are expected to have a greater reelection rate and exhibit a higher probability of
becoming a senior member. Here again, legislators' policy responsiveness at early stages in their careers is reinforced by the favorable reelection signals sent to them by their constituents, and the result is that these senior legislators will exhibit higher levels of policy congruence and responsiveness than their less senior colleagues who have not benefitted from the reinforcing electoral behavior of their constituents.

**Legislative activity and institutional positions.** Extensive intra-chamber activity—including being a party leader or committee leader, as well as engaging in bill sponsorship and cosponsorship—can take its toll on policy responsiveness and weaken the linkage between constituency preferences and legislative roll-call behavior. First, we suggest that members will become less responsive to constituency policy preferences as they move into a variety of institutional roles that are both time consuming and take them away from constituency work. There is only so much time in the day, and legislators cannot do a good job at satisfying all of the demands that they have on that time. Legislators are expected to develop priorities and find an appropriate balance between constituency and legislative concerns. However, as they move into leadership roles, many legislators begin to shift their priorities away from their constituents and toward associated legislative activities, and this can diminish the connection between legislators and their constituents. In particular, party leaders and committee leaders have extensive time commitments that prevent them from giving their constituents the attention they expect, and being in these positions can lead legislators to shape their behaviors to coincide more with chamber expectations than with constituency expectations. It is important to consider the degree to which legislators’ roll-call behavior become less connected to constituency preferences when they move into institutional legislative roles.

Sponsorship and cosponsorship can be thought of as part of the set of entrepreneurial activities that members of Congress undertake to further their policy, representational, and personal agendas. Legislators who sponsor a large number of bills are agreeing to take on a substantial time and resource
commitment; hence it is likely that members who sponsor many bills are giving legislative activity a relatively higher priority than those who sponsor a small number of bills. Thus, we speculate that those with high sponsorship workloads will be less likely to link constituency policy preferences with their roll-call behavior. Cosponsorship activity need not require a similar commitment of time and energy as sponsorship activity, but it is possible that legislators with heavy cosponsorship activity will also prioritize legislative activity over constituency activity. We suggest that the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior will be somewhat weaker among those with high cosponsorship activity.

**DATA AND METHODS**

In order to explore the determinants of legislative policy responsiveness, it is necessary to have measures of legislative roll-call behavior, constituency policy preferences, and several mediating variables that interact with constituency policy preferences. We utilize data from the U.S. House for the years 1981 to 2000 to test our hypotheses about the systematic effects of our mediating variables on the relationship between constituency ideology and roll-call behavior. In this section we discuss the operationalization of our dependent, independent, and mediating variables. A brief description of each of these variables is also found in Appendix 1, and descriptive statistics for these variables are reported in Appendix 2.

**Roll-Call Ideology**

The dependent variable in our analysis is the roll-call ideology of U.S. House members. Many scholars rely on the voting scores assigned to legislators by various ideological groups, such as the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) or the American Conservative Union (ACU). However, the measurement of roll-call ideology using these voting scores has spawned a fair amount of controversy over the years (see, e.g., Snyder 1992). As an alternative, we rely on measures of roll-call ideology that are based on Poole and Rosenthal's (1991, 1997) spatial analysis of roll-call voting from 1789 to 1985, with the data updated through 2012 (Voteview, 2014). Poole and Rosenthal utilize a dimensional scaling technique that yields a dominant single dimension for roll-call votes that is applicable since 1789. Based on this analysis, each
member of Congress from 1789 to the present is assigned a score on this dimension. These scores are commonly referred to as DW-Nominate scores because they are obtained using what is known as the Dynamic, Weighted Nominal Three-Step Estimation technique. According to Poole and Rosenthal, this single dimension can be viewed as a party loyalty dimension, insofar as it separates Democrats and Republicans; however, because the partisan cleavages that separate Democratic and Republican members of Congress are based largely on ideological differences, these scores are widely interpreted as a liberal-conservative dimension (Poole and Rosenthal, 1991, 1997; Lublin, 1997). These scores range from -1.00 (liberal) through 0 (moderate) to +1.00 (conservative).

Constituency Ideology

The measurement of constituency ideology has been a major concern of scholars interested in studying legislative representation. In previous research legislative scholars have struggled to measure the ideological dispositions of legislative constituencies. Scholars have utilized demographic variables (such as income, education, racial composition), small-sample estimates of public opinion (e.g., Miller and Stokes, 1963), presidential election results (LeoGrande and Jeydel, 1997), “bottom-up” simulated opinion based on the extension of estimates from individual-level models to the aggregate district level (Erikson, 1978), and referenda voting (McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979). Ultimately, these measures of constituency opinion have proven to be less satisfying than what could be obtained if large-sample estimates of opinion were available across all districts. Large-sample estimates of district ideology are only of more recent vintage and are available only after 2000 (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2013).

We rely here on measures of congressional district ideology developed by Ardoin and Garand (2003), who use a “top-down” simulation to estimate the ideological makeup of congressional districts. Ardoin and Garand start with estimates of state-level ideology first developed by Wright, Erikson, and McIver (1985) and Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993), who utilized data from the CBS News / New York Times surveys to create large-sample estimates of state ideology for the periods from 1976 to 1982 and later updated into
the early 2000s. This is done by aggregating respondents across multiple surveys to create samples for each state that are sufficiently large to permit reasonable estimates of state political characteristics. Wright et al. and Erikson et al. employ respondents’ ideological self-reports to create a measure of mass ideological conservatism for each state that is applicable to the time period covered by the surveys. Erikson et al. code respondents as liberal, moderate, and conservative, and they measure mass ideological orientation for each state as the mean ideology score for respondents residing in each state over the time period in question.

In order to simulate House district ideology, Ardoin and Garand (2003) model state ideology as a function of a variety of state-level variables (i.e., Democratic presidential vote, home ownership, blue collar population, urban population, and south region), each of which has an analogous variable measured at the House district level. They then use the estimates from the state-level model to simulate district-level ideology by substituting the values on these variables for each House district into the model estimated using state-level data, and the resulting predicted values represent valid and reliable estimates of House district ideology. For instance, Ardoin and Garand find that their simulated measure of House district ideology is strongly and consistently associated with roll-call ideology during the 1980s and 1990s.

**Party**

The roll-call conservatism of U.S. House members is clearly a function of partisanship. In general, Republican House members will stake out more conservative positions than Democratic House members. To control for these effects, we measure the party of each House member; this variable is coded 1 for Republican House members, and 0 for Democrats.

**Mediating and Control Variables**

**District population diversity.** Numerous scholars have attempted to measure the demographic heterogeneity of state populations (Greenburg, 1956; Amemiya, 1963; Rhodes, Reiss, and Dudley, 1965; Lieberson, 1965). Sullivan (1973), adopting Lieberson’s (1965) measure of population diversity, was a
forerunner among political scientists in his efforts to measure state diversity. Sullivan utilized data on education, income, occupation, home ownership, ethnicity, and religion to create a general measure of diversity. Other scholars have updated Sullivan's diversity index, with minor modification, for the 1970s (Bond, 1983) and the 1980s (Morgan and Wilson, 1990).

More recently, Koetzle (1997) has constructed an improved measure of political diversity. Using demographic data gathered for each House district, Koetzle constructs a diversity measure by taking deviations from the mean values of four demographic variables (i.e., percentage black, percentage urban, percentage of high school graduates, and median family income) for each apportionment period. Homogeneous liberal districts are those with a higher proportion of minority and urban voters and relatively lower levels of income, education, and whites, while homogeneous conservative districts are the reverse. Koetzle defines those districts with a mix of these characteristics as politically diverse. This method of calculating the demographic diversity of districts allows for the creation of a continuous measure of political diversity that recognizes the differential ideological (partisan) effect of various demographic variables. This is an important component not captured by the Sullivan Index, which only measures absolute demographic differences. Taking the signed average deviation from the median values allows Koetzle to create a continuous measure of political diversity. Large negative values represent districts that are conservative or pro-Republican in demographic composition, large positive values represent districts that are liberal or pro-Democratic in demographic composition, and values near zero represent politically diverse districts. These values are then transformed to create a scale in which the greater the value, the greater the diversity of the district. As noted, we hypothesize that legislative responsiveness to constituency preferences will be lower in diverse states than in homogenous states.

**Constituency political sophistication and engagement.** The concepts of political sophistication and political engagement have many empirical referents, including political knowledge, voter turnout, and other forms of political participation. Sophisticated, engaged citizens are those who pay attention to and
understand politics, participate in a variety of political activities (including voting), and are likely to cast votes beyond using just a party heuristic and based more on a matching of their policy preferences and the roll-call behavior of their representatives. At the core of these concepts is education. Highly-educated citizens have the capability and inclination to understand the political world, participate in elections, lobby their elected officials, and reward and punish incumbents based on their behavior in office. In order to capture these effects, we measure the political sophistication and engagement of state electorates as the proportion of the district population with at least some college, a college degree, or a post-graduate degree. We speculate that House members representing well-educated electorates will be more responsive to their constituents than those representing low-education constituencies.

**Electoral safety.** Because policy responsiveness may be at least partially a function of electoral threat, it is necessary to include a measure of electoral marginality in our models. House members who won their previous bid for reelection by a close margin are generally deemed as vulnerable to subsequent electoral defeat, and these members are likely to be discouraged by the perception of electoral threat from straying very far from the policy preferences of their constituents. On the other hand, those winning by substantial margins might perceive themselves as relatively unbeatable; we would expect these House members to exhibit roll-call behavior that deviates, at least on occasion, from constituency preferences. In order to explore these effects, we measure electoral marginality as the proportion of the vote received by the House member in the previous election. We suggest that the greater the winning election margin the less responsive House members will be to their constituents' policy views.

**Seniority.** As noted, the effects of seniority on policy responsiveness could take one of two forms. On one hand, members with higher seniority may be more likely to prioritize Washington activities and direct less attention toward the preferences of their constituents. Hence seniority may depress the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior. On the other hand, it is possible that senior House members know their constituents better than their junior counterparts and are able to learn
through experience how to best represent the policy preferences of their constituents. Under this scenario, senior members should be more responsive to the preferences of their constituents. In order to capture this effect, we measure seniority as the number of consecutive years served by each House member.

**Participation in the legislative process.** We suggest that participation in the legislative process in Congress is very time consuming, and this means that those who are active in party and committee leadership positions and in sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation are less likely to prioritize constituency-based activities. The result is that those who prioritize Washington activities are less likely to be in a position to know their constituencies and translate constituency policy preferences into roll-call behavior. In order to capture these effects, we include several independent variables in our models. First, we consider the influence of party leadership; this variable is coded 1 for House members who are in party leadership positions, and 0 otherwise. We hypothesize that the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior will be weaker for party leaders than for other House members. Second, we suggest that committee leaders will be fully immersed in the congressional policy process and will hence prioritize Washington activity over constituency activity; we code this variable 1 for committee leaders (i.e., committee chairs or ranking minority leaders), and 0 otherwise. Third, sponsorship and cosponsorship activity should depress the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior. Members who are more active in introducing legislation (especially) or cosponsoring legislation (possibly) are less able to monitor the policy positions of their constituents, and hence they are less likely to translate constituency policy preferences into patterns of roll-call behavior.

**Modeling Representative Behavior**

We suggest that the ideological nature of roll-call voting by U.S. House members will vary systematically as a function of the ideological characteristics of House members' constituencies. In simple terms:
Roll-Call Conservatism = a + b₁(Party) + b₂(District ideology)  (Eq. 1)

If House members are responsive to the ideological views of their constituents, b₂ should be positive, indicating that House members representing districts with relatively conservative populations will exhibit relatively conservative roll-call behavior. Moreover, b₁ should also be positive, indicating that Republican House members are more conservative than Democratic House members.

Of course, we speculate that the linkage between constituency preferences and House members’ roll-call behavior is not that simple and that the relationship will be a function of several mediating variables that represent the effects of district diversity, electoral threat, and prioritizing Washington activities over constituency-based activities. We model these mediating effects through the use of a series of interaction variables; our full interaction model can be described as follows:

Roll-Call Conservatism = a + b₁(Party) + b₂(District ideology) +
   b₃(District diversity) + b₄(Diversity * District ideology) +
   b₅(College education) + b₆(Education * District ideology) +
   b₇(Electoral Safety) + b₈(Electoral safety * District ideology) +
   b₉(Seniority) + b₁₀(Seniority * District ideology) +
   b₁₁(Party leader) + b₁₂(Party leader * District ideology) +
   b₁₃(Committee leader) + b₁₄(Committee leader * District ideology) +
   b₁₅(Bill sponsorship) + b₁₆(Bill sponsorship * District ideology) +
   b₁₇(Bill cosponsorship) + b₁₈(Bill cosponsorship * District ideology)  (Eq. 2)

Specifically, we suggest that the relationship between constituency ideology and ideology expressed in roll-call voting will be stronger in relatively homogenous districts, but that the relationship will decline systematically as districts become more heterogeneous and diverse. In homogenous districts (i.e., those with low diversity), the relationship between district ideology and roll-call conservatism should be strong and positive, as reflected in a positive coefficient b₂. However, as districts become more diverse, signals
about constituency policy preferences should become more diffuse and discordant, and the relationship between constituency ideology and roll-call voting should weaken. Given this, we suggest that the coefficient $b_4$ should be negative, indicating a weakening of the relationship between constituency ideology and roll-call behavior in diverse districts.

The effects of other variables that mediate the relationship between constituency ideology and roll-call ideology can be represented through the coefficients for the other interaction variables. We suggest that policy responsiveness in House members’ roll-call behavior will be enhanced by a high level of political sophistication and engagement (i.e. college education); given this, we hypothesize that the coefficient $b_6$ will be positive. On the other hand, because we suggest that responsiveness in roll-call behavior will be diminished with higher incumbent electoral margins in the previous election, higher incumbent seniority, higher levels of bill sponsorship and bill cosponsorship, as well as among party and committee leaders, we hypothesize that coefficients $b_8, b_{10}, b_{12}, b_{14}, b_{16},$ and $b_{18}$ will be negative. Simply, House members will be less responsive to constituency policy preferences when they win election by safe margins, when they have high levels of seniority, when they are highly active in party and committee leadership roles, and when they are disproportionately active in sponsorship and cosponsorship activities.

**EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

In Table 1 we present the regression results for two models of roll-call conservatism among U.S. House members from 1981 to 2000. In Model (1) are reported the coefficients for a simple model of roll-call conservatism (including only member party and district ideology variables). In Model (2) we report the results for our comprehensive interaction model; these are the results upon which we will focus most of our discussion.

Our examination of the effects of mediating variables on the representational relationship begins with a basic additive model in which we depict the ideological nature of House roll-call voting as simply a function of state ideology and member party. The results of this analysis are presented in Model (1) of
Table 1, and we also display graphically the simple bivariate relationship between roll-call conservatism and district ideology in Figure 2. As expected, in the bivariate analysis the coefficient for state ideology is positive and statistically significant (b = 0.006, t = 42.95). Obviously, party also has a strong effect on roll-call ideology; Republicans are more than one-half of a point more conservative than Democrats (b = 0.632), and this difference is highly significant (t = 227.21, prob. < 0.001). But more importantly, these results confirm that, as district constituencies become more conservative, the roll call behavior of U.S. House members representing those districts becomes more conservative. Without controls for substantive variables other than member party, it would appear that House members are highly responsive to their constituents. This finding is not necessarily surprising, but it does provide a baseline against which one can compare responsiveness either among subsets of House members or across specific contexts thought to affect responsiveness.

[Table 1 here]

[Figure 2 here]

**Effects of Constituency Diversity**

We begin our analysis of the effects of district diversity on legislative responsiveness by comparing the simple relationship between district constituency ideology and House roll-call behavior for homogenous and heterogeneous districts; the districts are differentiated based on whether they are above or below the median on the diversity variable. Our results for our simple models suggest that the relationship between constituency ideology and House roll-call voting is actually stronger for heterogenous districts (b = 0.010, t = 61.87) than homogeneous districts (b = 0.0065, t = 73.76), and the difference between the two coefficients is statistically significant (t = -8.18, prob. < 0.001). These results provide preliminary evidence that is contrary to the hypothesis that legislative responsiveness is stronger in districts with more homogenous constituencies.
While these crude bivariate measures of the relationship between constituency ideology and House roll-call behavior for homogenous and heterogeneous districts provide tentative disconfirmation for our hypotheses, more refined empirical analyses are necessary in order to provide a more definitive test of the constituency diversity hypothesis. In Model (2) of Table 1 we explore more precisely the effects of constituent ideology on the roll call behavior of U.S. House members and, most importantly for the present discussion, the mediating effects of district diversity on this relationship. The estimates reported in Model (2) are strongly incompatible with our diversity hypothesis. Controlling for the influence of other variables, we find that the effects of constituency ideology and its interaction with district diversity are strongly inconsistent with expectations. The coefficient for district ideology represents the effect of constituency ideology on roll-call behavior for House members representing homogenous states; this coefficient \( b = 0.002, t = 2.01 \) remains significant, indicating a positive relationship between constituency conservatism and roll-call conservatism for House members in homogenous districts. However, the coefficient for the interaction between district ideology and district diversity is both positive \( b = 0.003 \) and statistically significant \( t = 8.15, \text{prob.} < 0.001 \), indicating that House members' responsiveness to the ideological preferences of their constituents increases systematically as districts become more heterogeneous. Clearly, we find little empirical support for our constituency diversity hypothesis; to the contrary, House members are, surprisingly, more responsive to the mean ideological position of their constituencies when they represent diverse districts.
Effects of Constituency Political Sophistication and Engagement

Our results provide strong support for the hypothesis that policy congruence and responsiveness is stronger in politically engaged and sophisticated constituencies. In Models (2), the coefficient for the interaction between education and district ideology is in the expected positive direction and statistically significant ($b = 0.00003$, $t = 2.90$, prob. $< 0.01$).

These results suggest that the linkage between constituency conservatism and roll-call conservatism becomes stronger in those congressional districts characterized as having more highly-educated (and, presumably, politically sophisticated and active) electorates. This is in keeping with the theoretical arguments of Fenno (1978) and Kingdon (1989), both of whom suggest that the interaction of education and district ideology should be positive and statistically significant. These findings indicate that the relationship between constituents’ ideology and House roll-call behavior becomes stronger as House constituencies become more educated. This apparent relationship, we argue, is a result of the propensity of more sophisticated constituencies to convey clear policy signals to their elected representatives and to hold their House members accountable for their actions, as well as of the tendency of House members to respond to clear signals and threats of electoral accountability.

Effects of Electoral Margins

It is interesting to note that there is virtually no support in our analysis for the hypotheses regarding the interaction effects of electoral margin on the relationship between constituency ideology and roll-call behavior. To the contrary, in Model (2) the coefficient for the interaction of constituency ideology and incumbent vote is both in the unexpected positive direction but also achieves statistical significance in a two-tailed test ($b = 0.00002$, $t = 3.89$). Contrary to theoretical expectations that are well developed in the extant literature, these results suggest that the effect of electoral margin of victory is the opposite of those expectations. Simply, House members elected by narrow margins in their preceding election are actually less likely to exhibit a strong linkage between constituency policy preferences and their roll-call behavior. Such findings stand in contrast to the work of scholars who have claimed that legislators are more responsive to their constituents as electoral threat increases.
Effects of Seniority

As noted, there are two possible effects of seniority on the linkage between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior: (1) seniority could depress the relationship, since senior members may become out-of-touch with their constituents over the course of their careers as they focus more of their attention on extra-constituency activities; or (2) seniority could enhance the relationship, since senior members have more knowledge of the policy preferences of their constituencies borne out of their years of experience working with their constituents. Is there any evidence of either process in our data?

Our results provide rather strong support for the hypothesis that seniority attenuates the relationship between constituency policy preferences and House members’ roll-call behavior. The coefficient for the interaction variable for seniority and district ideology is both in the negative direction and statistically significant (b = -0.0001, t = -8.58, prob. < 0.001). This suggests that House members’ responsiveness to the policy preferences of their constituents decreases systematically as seniority increases. Freshman House members are very responsive, given the significant coefficient for the baseline district ideology variable, but senior members become significantly less likely to translate constituency preferences into their roll-call behavior than their more junior colleagues.

Effects of legislative leadership/party and policy activity

We also consider the possibility that House members who become more active in the work of the legislative chamber—i.e., those who take on party or committee leadership roles, or else who are active in sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation—are less responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents. Our empirical results are, at best, mixed. We find little evidence that participation in party or committee leadership depresses the relationship between constituency policy preferences and roll-call behavior; neither interaction coefficient is statistically significant, indicating that party leaders and committee chairs or ranking minority members are similarly responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents as other rank-in-file members. We also find no evidence that cosponsorship activity weakens the relationship between district ideology and roll-call behavior. Since cosponsorship activity is less time-consuming than full sponsorship activity, it makes sense that it would not mitigate the activities of legislators on behalf of their constituents. On the other hand, we find that sponsorship activity does
diminish the connection between constituency preferences and roll-call ideology \((b = -0.0003, t = -3.24)\); based on our results, it would appear that House members who are active in sponsoring legislation are less likely to be sensitive to the policy preferences of their constituents when they are casting their roll-call votes. High levels of policy activity do appear to diminish policy responsiveness among U.S. House members.

**Partisan Differences in Policy Responsiveness?**

One other factor to consider is whether there are partisan differences in policy responsiveness between Democratic and Republican legislators. It is possible that members of the two political parties have different constituency orientations, and hence the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior—as well as the heterogeneity of that relationship across different conditions—may differ across party groups. Hence we estimate our full model separately for Democratic and Republican House members. The results are reported in Table 2.

As one can see, there are some considerable differences in the processes that result in policy responsiveness for Democrats and Republicans. First, we estimate a simple model (results not shown) in which we depict roll-call conservatism as a function of party, constituency policy preferences, and the interaction for party and constituency policy preferences. Based on these estimates, it appears that Democrats \((b = 0.007)\) are significantly more responsive to constituency preferences than are Republicans \((b = 0.005)\), and the difference in responsiveness is statistically significant \((b = -0.020, t = -7.03)\). At the simplest level there is a moderate (but significant) difference in policy responsiveness for Democrats and Republicans.

Second, both Democrats and Republicans shift their level of policy responsiveness as a function of district diversity, though in both cases the effect of diversity on policy responsiveness is opposite of expectations. For Democrats, the effect of constituency ideology on roll-call behavior increases significantly as district diversity increases \((b = 0.002, t = 7.13)\). However, for Republicans there is an even stronger response to district diversity, with policy responsiveness shifting considerably as district diversity increases \((b = 0.006, t = 9.86)\). Districts held by Republican House members are less diverse than those held
by Democratic House members, and it seems that this matters for Republican policy responsiveness.

Overall, it appears that the unexpected diversity effect applies to both Democratic and Republican House members, with members of both parties becoming more responsive to constituency policy preferences as district heterogeneity increases. However, the diversity effect is stronger for Republicans than for Democrats.

Third, the remaining interaction effects appear to apply only to Democratic House members and not at all to Republican House members. Once one moves beyond the district diversity interaction effect, the relationship between constituency policy preferences and roll-call behavior is relatively uniform for Republicans—or, at least, the level of policy responsiveness is not systematically linked to the variables that our theoretical arguments suggest they should be. It would seem that Republicans shift their policy responsiveness as a function of district diversity, but there is very little else that has a systematic effect on the degree to which Republican House members link constituency preferences to their roll-call behavior.

On the other hand, for Democratic House members there are several other variables that mediate the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior. For Democrats, as seniority increases, policy responsiveness decreases ($b = -0.00008, t = -6.45$); however, seniority has no effect on policy responsiveness for Republicans. The effects of electoral threat are quite surprising. For Democrats, highly-educated constituencies—which should hold elected officials to a high level of policy responsiveness—promote a lower level of policy responsiveness ($b = -0.0001, t = -4.54$), and contrary to expectations, Democrats who win election with the largest margins have the highest level of policy responsiveness ($b = 0.00002, t = 3.60$). Neither of these variables affects the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call voting among Republicans. Finally, we find that bill sponsorship and bill cosponsorship behavior among Democratic House members has a strong negative effect on the linkage between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior; Democrats who are active in sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation are less likely to exhibit policy responsiveness than those who are less active. There is no significant effect of these variables on policy responsiveness among Republicans.
Overall these results point to strong partisan differences in how U.S. House members link constituency preferences and their roll-call behavior. Both Democratic and Republican House members decrease their sensitivity to constituency preferences as a function of district diversity, though the effect of district diversity on policy responsiveness is in the wrong direction and is stronger for Republicans than Democrats. For the other mediating variables, there are discernible interaction effects for Democrats but none for Republicans. Democratic House members shift their policy responsiveness as a function of seniority, election margin, district education, and bill sponsorship and cosponsorship behavior, though the interaction effects are in the unexpected direction for election margin and education. On the other hand, policy responsiveness among Republican House members is unrelated to these other mediating variables. This suggests that the heterogeneity in policy responsiveness is not solely a function of these variables, but rather is mediated by partisanship.

CONCLUSION

This study is based on the premise that not all legislators are equally responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents. Given all of the attention directed at the study of legislative representation, it is somewhat surprising that there has not been greater effort in the literature to understand variation in policy responsiveness among legislators and across constituencies. Much of this literature has begged this key question: Why are some legislators more responsive to their constituents than other legislators?

While some of this variation in legislative responsiveness is seemingly random, it is also likely that there is a systematic component to that variation. Some legislators are more or less responsive to constituents' policy preferences because of their own characteristics, their personal goals and priorities, or the relevant characteristics of their constituencies. In this paper we develop and test a broad-based theoretical model to explain variation in policy-responsive behavior among U.S. House members. Our model depicts variation in legislative responsiveness to constituency policy preferences as a function of the
quality of policy signals emanating from legislators' constituencies (as associated with constituency homogeneity), electoral threat (which creates an incentive for House members to adopt policy positions close to those of their constituents), and participation in the legislative process (which results in a higher priority being given to intra-chamber activity at the expense of constituency-based action). In operational terms, we suggest that the linkage between the policy views of House members' constituents and their roll-call behavior is mediated by a variety of variables, including constituency diversity, election margin, constituency education, member seniority, party and committee leadership status, and participation in the legislative process through sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

Our findings provide reasonably strong evidence in support of several hypotheses relating to the determinants of variation in legislative responsiveness among U.S. House members from 1981 to 2000. We posit that the linkage between House members’ roll-call behavior and the policy preferences of their constituencies will be strengthened by well-educated constituencies, low seniority, and low levels of participation in Washington-based activities such as party leadership, committee leadership, and sponsorship and cosponsorship activity. Under these circumstances, House members are more likely to receive clearer policy signals from their constituents, are likely to be motivated by the threat of electoral defeat to follow the views of their constituents, and are likely to prioritize constituency activities over Washington-based activities. Our results demonstrate that roll-call responsiveness is significantly stronger for House members representing districts characterized by high levels of constituency political engagement and sophistication. Surprisingly, we find little evidence of effects of electoral threat or constituency diversity; contrary to expectations, legislative responsiveness is actually higher among House members representing (1) safe districts, rather than marginal, vulnerable districts, and (2) diverse districts. However, the results of our analysis strongly support the hypothesis that more senior House members will be less responsive to their constituents than their more junior colleagues. Moreover, our empirical results suggest that House members who are active in bill sponsorship are significantly less likely to link
constituency preferences and roll-call behavior, though party leadership, committee leadership, and bill cosponsorship are not related to legislative policy responsiveness.

What are the implications of our findings? First, such findings might have very strong implications for debates surrounding the creation of legislative districts through the redistricting process. If district heterogeneity makes policy responsiveness more likely, the representative nature of legislative districts may be affected by how state legislators draw congressional and state-legislative district lines. Since diverse constituencies increase legislative responsiveness, one might argue that district lines should be drawn to maximize the diversity of legislative districts. Whether district homogeneity is linked to policy responsiveness is subject to some debate (Carson, Crespin, Finocchiaro, and Rohde, 2007; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2006; Theriault, 2008; Masket, Winburn, and Wright, 2012).

Second, the finding that legislative responsiveness decreases as seniority increases has significant implications for how voters cast votes in legislative elections. It would appear that there is a strong tendency for legislators to become detached from the policy preferences of their districts and to become less responsive to constituency preferences as they increase their seniority. Moreover, the effect of seniority on reduced legislative responsiveness has implications for debates about legislative term limits. Some observers may consider the linkage between seniority and legislative policy responsiveness to be an argument in favor of term limits, since our findings suggest that the relationship between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior is diminished as seniority increases. A value system that gives primacy to legislative responsiveness may well suggest support for a strong regime of legislative term limits, though of course there are other values (e.g., policy experience, resistance to pressure from organized interests) that are achieved by a regime of unlimited legislative terms.

Finally, this research leaves some unresolved issues that should be explored in future work. First, do legislators react in other ways to the clarity of signals emanating from their districts? Specifically, one might speculate that as House districts become more diverse House members may target their attention
toward the policy views of their own partisans in their district; this suggests that House members take clear signals when they are available but focus their attention on their own partisans when the policy signals emanating from their constituencies become more ambiguous. Alternatively, does district diversity drive House members to search for the policy preferences of the median voter as the safest strategy for creating electoral security?

Further, what explains some of the counter-intuitive findings presented in our analyses? We are struck, for instance, by the unexpected finding that legislative policy responsiveness increases with higher levels of electoral safety, rather than decreases, as is consistent with the marginality hypothesis. In subsequent work we intend to explore this surprising relationship further. Moreover, we are surprised by the finding that the processes generating legislative policy responsiveness differ for Democratic and Republican House members. When we estimate our models separately for Democrats and Republicans, we find that only district diversity affects the linkage between constituency preferences and roll-call behavior for both parties. Other variables affect this linkage only for Democrats but not for Republicans. It is also the case that some of these interaction effects estimated for the sample of Democratic House members are in a direction that is contrary to expectations. Not only does electoral safety increase Democratic legislative responsiveness, but so do lower levels of college education. It is also the case that the sponsorship effect detected in the full sample is joined by an even stronger cosponsorship effect in the Democratic model. These anomalies warrant further investigation.

We also find that some of our null results are quite interesting. We expect that party leadership, committee leadership, and bill cosponsorship all would contribute to reduced legislative policy responsiveness among U.S. House members, though our findings do not support this argument. In one sense this is “good news” for observers of legislative politics. What these null findings suggest is that U.S. House members who serve in leadership roles or who are active in cosponsorship activities are no more or no less responsive to the policy preferences of their constituents than House members who do not
serve in those leadership roles and who do not take on an active cosponsorship role. It would appear that House members can participate in the Washington-based legislative process without jeopardizing their policy representational activities. Perhaps it is actually possible for some House members to balance Washington-based and constituency-based activities?
ENDNOTES

1. We note that we intend to apply our theoretical model to data from the 2000s. We are in the process of collecting data to extend our analyses through 2010.

2. There is actually some debate concerning the degree to which electoral safety in one election insulates incumbents from electoral defeat in subsequent elections (Jacobson, 1987; Bauer and Hibbing, 1989; Garand, 1991; Garand, Wink, and Vincent, 1993a, 1993b; Jacobson, 1993). The linkage between vote margins in adjacent elections has important implications for the marginality hypothesis. If large vote margins virtually guarantee an incumbent reelection in subsequent elections, then those incumbents winning with a large percentage of the vote need not be as responsive to the views of their constituents. On the other hand, if large vote margins are not strongly related to improved prospects for victory in subsequent elections, legislators should be motivated to link their roll-call behavior to the policy preferences of their constituents in order to avoid vengeful voters and improve their electoral prospects.

3. In particular, Snyder (1992) suggests that roll-call indices based on votes selected by ideological or other interest groups create greater extremism in roll-call ideology than is actually the case. This is, in part, because the roll-calls selected for inclusion in roll-call indices are a biased sample of all roll-calls. When indices are based on a more inclusive set of roll-call votes, selection bias and artificial extremism are less likely to occur.

4. This single dimension explains upwards of 80% of the variance in roll-call voting over the time period of their study. Poole and Rosenthal also uncover a second dimension, but this dimension accounts for a relatively minor proportion of the variance in roll-call voting. This second dimension is interpreted as reflecting intra-party conflict, which is largely attributed to ideological differences within the parties. During periods of normal intraparty conflict, this dimension is very weak. However, realignment periods are often characterized by their intraparty conflict, and this dimension becomes stronger during realignment periods.
Figure 1. Model of variation in legislative policy responsiveness
Figure 2. Relationship between roll-call conservatism (DW-Nominate scores) and district conservatism, 1981-2000.
Table 1. FGLS estimates for model of heterogeneity in policy responsiveness, U.S. House members, 97th - 106th Congresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model (1)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model (2)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party [+1]</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>227.21***</td>
<td>0.621</td>
<td>189.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District ideology [+]</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>42.95***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>2.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>8.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.0002</td>
<td>-0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education * district ideology [+1]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.00003</td>
<td>2.90**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.0003</td>
<td>-3.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.00002</td>
<td>3.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-4.96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority * district ideology [+/+]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>-8.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.0002</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee leader</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-3.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee leader * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills sponsored</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>3.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills sponsored * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.0003</td>
<td>-3.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills cosponsored</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-4.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills cosponsored * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.00008</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.367</td>
<td>-146.09***</td>
<td>-0.281</td>
<td>-13.45***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N                                      4307   4301
R²                                     0.844  0.855
Wald $\chi^2$                           82664.38  56021.85
Prob($\chi^2$)                         0.0000  0.0000

Note: Each model is estimated using feasible generalized least squares (FGLS). The underlying model assumes a heteroskedastic error structure across panels with no cross-sectional correlation and is estimated using estimates of the first-order autoregressive process that are common to all panels. The model $R^2$ is calculated as the squared correlation coefficient for predicted and observed values.

*** coefficient significant at the .001 level
** coefficient significant at the .01 level
* coefficient significant at the .05 level
Table 2. FGLS estimates for model of heterogeneity in policy responsiveness, by party, U.S. House members, 97th - 106th Congresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District ideology [+].</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>8.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>-4.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>7.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-7.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education * district ideology [+].</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>-4.54***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>-1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>0.00002</td>
<td>3.67***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>-0.0003</td>
<td>-1.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority * district ideology [+/-]</td>
<td>-0.00008</td>
<td>-6.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader</td>
<td>0.0005</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>-0.0003</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee chair</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-3.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee chair * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills sponsored</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>2.96**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills sponsored * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>-0.0002</td>
<td>-1.89*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills cosponsored</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-6.06***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log+1 bills cosponsored * district ideology [-]</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-5.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.223</td>
<td>-13.75***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 2368, 1865  
R²: 0.4855, 0.2215  
Wald χ²: 2455.44, 1086.07  
Prob(χ²): 0.0000, 0.0000

Note: Each model is estimated using feasible generalized least squares (FGLS). The underlying model assumes a heteroskedastic error structure across panels with no cross-sectional correlation and is estimated using estimates of the first-order autoregressive process that are common to all panels. The model R² is calculated as the squared correlation coefficient for predicted and observed values.

*** coefficient significant at the .001 level  
**  coefficient significant at the .01 level  
*   coefficient significant at the .05 level
Appendix 1: Description of variables in model of representative behavior among U.S. House members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roll-call ideology</td>
<td>Scale of roll-call conservatism, as measured by Poole and Rosenthal (1997) and updated on the Voteview website. These scores are based on the first dimension derived from Poole and Rosenthal's multidimensional scaling analysis of all non-unanimous roll-call votes from 1789 to 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member party</td>
<td>1 = Republican senator; 0 = Democratic House member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District ideology</td>
<td>Scale of mass ideology among district constituents, based on Ardoin and Garand (2003) and coded in a conservative direction. These scores are based on a top-down simulation based on (1) model estimates derived from a state-level analysis of Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) state ideology scores, and (2) simulation of House district ideology obtained by substituting House district characteristics into the model with state-level estimates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity</td>
<td>Measure of district diversity based on Koetzle (1997). The diversity scores are based on deviations from the mean values of four demographic variables (i.e., percentage black, percentage urban, percentage of high school graduates, and median family income) for each apportionment period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District education</td>
<td>Percentage of state population with at least some college, a college degree, or a post-graduate degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety</td>
<td>Proportion of the vote received by the incumbent in the immediately previous election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>Number of consecutive years served in the U.S. House.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader</td>
<td>1 = House member is a party leader; 0 = otherwise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee leader</td>
<td>1 = House member is chair or ranking minority member of House committee; 0 = otherwise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log bills sponsored</td>
<td>Log of the total number of bills sponsored in the current congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log bills cosponsored</td>
<td>Log of the total number of bills cosponsored in the current congress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2: Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roll-call ideology</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>-0.844</td>
<td>1.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District ideology</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>10.744</td>
<td>13.663</td>
<td>-46.710</td>
<td>35.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District diversity</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>2.051</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.0000003</td>
<td>2.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>9.182</td>
<td>7.789</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral safety</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>68.384</td>
<td>13.974</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>38.296</td>
<td>12.021</td>
<td>13.768</td>
<td>74.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leader</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee leader</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log bills sponsored</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>2.707</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log bills cosponsored</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>5.516</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


