Article

What Gets Rewarded? Legislative Activity and Constituency Approval

Tracy Sulkin[1], Paul Testa[1], and Kaye Usry[1]

Abstract
Members of Congress (MCs) are concerned about reelection and act in office with this goal in mind. Whether citizens notice this behavior and how they respond remains an open question. We examine the relationships between legislators' characteristics and activity and their constituents' evaluations of their performance in office. We argue that MCs' behavior does filter down to citizens, but that their responses are conditioned by their partisanship and interest in politics. Our analyses combine 2006 and 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study survey data on citizens with information on legislators' activity in office in the 109th and 110th Congresses. The results reveal that there are widespread linkages between MC behavior and constituency approval, but that legislators' copartisan, outpartisan, and independent constituents respond in different, yet predictable, ways. Moreover, these effects are strongest among the most interested constituents. Our findings have important implications for our assessments of legislators' strategies and constituency representation.

Keywords
U.S. politics, U.S. Congress, representation, public opinion, voter information

Does what legislators do in office matter for their job approval and electoral prospects? The answer to this question is a clear "maybe." Although members of Congress (MCs) believe that their behavior has consequences for their fortunes (Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974), evidence of such effects has been harder to come by. Fiorina (1981, 546), for example, famously argues that the literature on congressional resource allocation might lead one to reasonably conclude that incumbents could "spend less money, go home less often, abolish their district offices, fire their staffs, and cut down on constituency service activities" without harming their electoral prospects. The same could be said for the effects of legislative activities and entrepreneurship, for which studies have found that "members of Congress acquire few campaign funds or votes from their positive accomplishments as legislators or as representatives" (Ragsdale and Cook 1987, 76; see also Wawro 2001).

A number of reasons have been posited for the lack of consistently strong statistical links between MCs' activity and their job approval or electoral performance. Most notably, the causal relationships between behavior and vote shares are complicated. If, for example, savvy legislators raise and spend more in advance of a difficult campaign, then the observed relationship between spending and performance is likely to be null or even negative (Jacobson 1978). It is also the case that MCs build enduring reputations for representation or policymaking that

exist apart from the actual time and effort spent (Rivers and Fiorina 1992; see also Bianco 1994). More generally, strategic MCs can attempt to calibrate their activity to promote reelection. We do not observe the full possible range of behavior, including legislators actively trying to lower their own job approval because, as Mayhew (1974, 37) puts it, "there is no congressman willing to make the experiment."

In this paper, we argue for the importance of an additional, underrecognized, factor in explaining the mixed results for links between legislative activity and constituency response—that most extant research assumes that constituents all respond *in the same way* to an MC's behavior. In contrast, we contend that citizens' reactions to their representatives' activity are conditioned by their partisanship. If this is the case, many interesting and important subconstituency effects may wash out in the aggregate.

More precisely, we hypothesize that there are some activities that are likely to be universally regarded (e.g., devoting attention to the district) or frowned upon (e.g.,

[1]University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign, USA

Corresponding Author:
Tracy Sulkin, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign, 1407 W. Gregory Dr., 420 David Kinley Hall, Urbana, IL 61801, USA.
Email: tsulkin@illinois.edu

being absent for roll call votes). Others will be met by different reactions from partisan subconstituencies. We expect, for example, that copartisans are likely to reward party loyalty in roll call voting, while outpartisans will punish it, and independents will fall somewhere in between. Understanding these patterns offers new insight into both legislator strategy and citizen response.[1]

Our analyses focus on the legislative activity of representatives in the 109th and 110th Congresses,[2] including behaviors such as their roll call voting patterns, introduction and cosponsorship of legislation, attention to the district, and speechmaking. Using Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data from the 2006 and 2008 election cycles (Ansolabehere 2006, 2008), we link this MC activity to constituents' subsequent evaluations of performance in office. By focusing both within and across districts, we are able to ascertain which behaviors are rewarded and punished, and by whom. Our results reveal that legislative activity does appear to register with voters in a more robust way than conventional wisdom would lead us to expect, but with systematic differences emerging across partisan subconstituencies. We conclude that this presents reelection-oriented MCs with a conundrum about how to balance various considerations. However, it also means that, with careful strategizing, they may have the ability to shape their reputations through their activity in office.

Our findings underscore the value to scholars of congressional representation of thinking about constituencies as legislators do—as a series of subgroups nested within the broader district (Fenno 1978). To use Fenno's terminology, these "concentric circles" reward different behavior on the part of their elected officials, and the relative size of partisan subconstituencies within a district shapes how MCs' activity in office is translated into approval. Accordingly, our results resonate with recent work on the effects of representational style (Grimmer 2013), the power of voters to guide the composition of the House (Jones and McDermott 2010), and the effects of polarization on MCs' behavior and reelection strategies (Adler and Wilkerson 2012; Harbridge 2015).

Legislative Action and Constituency Reaction

The relationship between legislators' behavior and their constituents' reactions has long been a central topic in the literature on congressional representation (see, for example, Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1974; Kingdon 1973; Mayhew 1974; Miller and Stokes 1963). Building on these foundational studies, more recent work has sought to explore MC–constituent linkages by focusing on four distinct questions. First, does legislators' behavior in office affect their subsequent electoral fortunes? Second, what do constituents *say*

they want from their representatives? Third, how do citizens react when presented with information (i.e., in an experimental setting) about the actions of legislators? Fourth, what "real-world" legislative activities are noticed by constituents, and do they respond in systematic ways to these behaviors?

Research on the first question has mostly taken the form of aggregate studies of the relationship between legislators' roll call voting decisions and their vote shares in (or likelihood of winning) the next election. This work has convincingly demonstrated that MCs who are "out of step" with their districts (typically by voting at high rates with their parties and opting to prioritize party over constituency) perform worse at the polls (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010). These effects are often conditional—characteristics of particular votes matter (Bovitz and Carson 2006)—and may be most likely when there is a challenger present whose positions are closer to those of the constituency (Hollibaugh, Rothenberg, and Rulison 2013). Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that MCs are correct to be concerned about how their vote choices will be perceived, as even a single "wrong" vote might matter (Nyhan et al. 2012; Theriault 2005).

Analyses of the electoral effects of activities beyond roll call voting yield more mixed results. Sulkin (2005, 2011), for example, finds that legislators who take up their previous challengers' issue critiques and who follow through on their own campaign appeals at high rates do better in the next election than their colleagues who engage in less of these behaviors. Legislative effectiveness may yield similar dividends (Miquel and Snyder 2006; Volden and Wiseman 2014). However, there is little evidence that sheer volume of activity matters—bill introductions and other forms of legislative entrepreneurship do not appear to increase MCs' approval or vote shares (Ragsdale and Cook 1987; Wawro 2001; but see Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2003).

Of course, expectations about which activities pay off for legislators should be driven, at least in part, by evidence about what constituents say they want. Among the earliest studies of constituent expectations was Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987), whose surveys revealed that the most important activity (at 30%) was "keeping in touch with the people about what the government is doing," followed by "working in Congress on bills concerning national issues" (at 19%). In contrast, Grant and Rudolph's (2004) analysis of the relationship between citizen expectations and MC job approval found that desire for "work on local issues" outpaced national issues (46% vs. 39%), with "helping people with government" a distant third (at 16%). Nonetheless, in all cases, respondents expressed clear preferences about how their elected officials should prioritize their time.

Other studies of citizen expectations focus less on the overall behavior of legislators and more on demand for various components of representation (a la Eulau and Karps 1977). Griffin and Flavin (2011), for example, find that preferences for "spheres of representation" are relatively evenly divided between three categories (policy responsiveness, bringing money to the district, and constituency service), but that these vary considerably with demographic characteristics like race and income. Similarly, Harden (2013) demonstrates that demand for particular components of representation is a function of individuals' ideological leanings.

Another group of scholars interested in constituency preferences has taken a different tack, targeting not what citizens say they want, but what their responses to particular messages about legislative behavior reveal about their expectations. These studies have turned to survey experiments, showing that citizens prefer collective to dyadic representation[3] (Harden and Clark 2013); that they want their MCs to prioritize local opinion over national (Doherty 2013); that there is a general preference for bipartisanship, but that this varies with the strength of citizens' own partisanship (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011); and that the party brand matters, with citizens rewarding good party performance and punishing ethical lapses (Butler and Powell 2014).

The clear advantage of such experimental analyses is that they provide clean causal inferences, enabling researchers to make confident assessments that variation in the scenarios about legislative behavior presented to subjects affects their evaluations of individual representatives and Congress as a whole. The shortcoming, of course, is that while they do an excellent job of telling us how constituents would respond *if they knew* about the behavior of their MCs, they cannot tell us what, in the noisiness of the real world, actually appears to filter down, and to whom. To do so requires a complementary approach that links the behavior of a large sample of legislators with surveys of their constituents. Fortunately, the availability of surveys such as the Cooperative Congressional Elections Study (CCES) has made such analyses feasible.

Research on the links between legislative behavior and constituency attitudes has identified a number of interesting relationships. Parker and Goodman (2009), for instance, find that MCs' allocations of their Member Representative Allowances (MRAs) matter for their evaluations—those who spend more money on travel and franking are more likely to be viewed as constituency servants, whereas those who introduce more bills are more likely to be seen as policy experts. Ansolabehere and Jones (2010) show that citizens possess preferences on important bills before Congress, have accurate perceptions about MCs' votes on those issues, and use these to hold them accountable for their actions. Grimmer (2013) demonstrates that variation in senators' communication styles is linked to what constituents know about their legislators and how they evaluate their performance. Senators who focus more on policy in their statements to voters have constituents who are better informed about their roll call behavior.

In what follows, we build on these studies but diverge in two ways. First, rather than target a single type of activity, we sacrifice some depth to examine a wide variety of legislative behaviors. Second, and more importantly, we focus on developing and testing hypotheses about how constituents' partisanship conditions their responses to MCs' patterns of behavior. Our goals, therefore, are to identify which behaviors appear to elicit constituency reaction (and which do not) and to investigate the differing reactions of partisans, copartisans, and independents.

How Do Constituents Learn about MCs' Records?

This approach assumes that at least some of what MCs do in office reaches constituents. Given the evidence cited above, this is not an unreasonable expectation. Furthermore, despite the conventional wisdom that constituents do not pay attention to legislators' activity, there are a variety of ways in which such information could reach them. A select group of highly interested and attentive citizens may observe it directly by following, for example, the types of bills their MC introduces, how many votes he or she misses, and how often he or she appears in the national media. As a number of scholars have shown, local news coverage can be a useful and informative source for voters about MCs' actions (Arnold 2004; Fogarty 2008, 2011; Hayes and Lawless 2014; Snyder and Stromberg 2010). Other constituents may learn about an MC's accomplishments through his or her press releases (Grimmer 2013), website or social media outreach (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009; Evans, Cordova, and Sipole 2014; Lassen and Brown 2011), or through the campaign appeals of the incumbent or opponent (Sides 2006, 2007; Sulkin 2005, 2011). Still others may glean some information through the efforts of interest groups and other associations, or by talking with friends, neighbors, and coworkers (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Klofstad 2007; Mutz and Mondak 2006; Sokhey and McClurg 2012).

This is not to say that most citizens possess a great deal of information about the specifics of their MCs' actions. Findings about the lack of factual recall of such details are well documented (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Miller and Stokes 1963). Overall, though, we assume that at least some of what MCs do in office registers with their constituents, either directly or indirectly. Moreover, we share Ansolabehere and Jones' (2010)

view that, to assess the relationship between legislative behavior and constituency response, it is not necessary to pinpoint *how* constituents come to possess this information.[4] As they put it,

> We are agnostic about how people learn about the voting behavior of their members of Congress. We suspect that it is partly on facts learned from the media and campaigns and partly on inferences, but it is more than just guessing or partisan projections. (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010, 596)

Thus, our main objective in the analyses that follow is *not* to establish the causal mechanisms by which citizens learn information about legislators and then use that to evaluate them (or even to make claims about what citizens know and observe), but to ascertain whether the patterns we identify are consistent with a story in which legislative behavior affects constituency reactions.

Data and Hypotheses

We begin with two basic hypotheses. First, we contend that constituent evaluations of MCs are a function of characteristics of the respondent (e.g., partisanship, interest in politics), the behavior and status of the MC (e.g., volume of activity, district attention, seniority, leadership position), and the context of the ongoing race (e.g., presence and quality of the challengers). Second, we expect that partisan subconstituencies want different things from their MCs, and, hence, will have different reactions to MC records.

We discuss the expectations for each of our independent variables in more detail below. Before doing so, we provide more details about our data and measures. Our analyses combine two types of data: information on voters from the 2006 and 2008 CCES, and information on the activity of their legislators in the 109th and 110th Congresses (i.e., leading in to the 2006 and 2008 elections). The CCES, conducted by YouGovPolimetrix, provides a stratified national sample with sufficient distribution to permit analyses at the district level.[5] Given the nature of our argument and hypotheses, we focus on those districts where representatives were running for reelection. This yields 401 legislators in 2006 and 389 in 2008,[6] and 39,682 of their constituents.

Our unit of analysis is the individual respondent, and our dependent variable is MC job approval. This question is included on the preelection wave (October 2006 and 2008) of the CCES Common Content. It asks "Do you approve or disapprove of the way <Representative> handles <his or her> job as a member of Congress?" and is measured on a 4-point scale[7]—*strongly disapprove, somewhat disapprove, somewhat approve*, and *strongly approve*. In both sample years, 22 percent of respondents

strongly disapproved of their representative's performance, 17 percent somewhat disapproved, 34 percent somewhat approved, and 27 percent strongly approved. In the analyses that follow, we collapse these into a dichotomous "approve or not" measure for ease of modeling and interpretation, though we get the same pattern of results with the 4-point scale.

Constituents' partisanship (relative to that of their MC) is also a crucial component of our design. In our CCES samples, 52 percent of respondents are copartisans of their MC, 39 percent identify with the other party, and 9 percent are "pure" independents.[8] We find that 85 percent of MCs represented by a copartisan approve of his or her performance ($SD = 35$), as do 30 percent of outpartisans ($SD = 46$) and 52 percent of independents ($SD = 50$). Accordingly, there is substantial variation to explain.

Other characteristics of respondents are also drawn from the CCES surveys, including their strength of party identification (for Democrats and Republicans) and their level of interest in politics (coded 1 for those "very much" interested in politics and 0 for those "somewhat interested" and "not much interested").[9] As described in more detail below, we also draw on their responses to a question asking "What is the most important problem facing the country today?" to create a variable measuring the amount of attention their MC devoted to that issue in the congress leading up to the election.

Our data on legislators and their behavior include the status of the MC—whether he or she is a leader (Speaker, majority/minority leader, or whip), whether he or she serves as the chair or ranking member of a committee, and his or her seniority (in years). We also measure party loyalty (the percentage of the time the MC "cheats" on the party by voting against the party on roll calls where 50% of the Democrats vote against 50% of Republicans), volume of lawmaking activity (number of bill and joint resolution introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments), legislative success ("hit rate," the proportion of introduced measures that passed in the chamber), percentage of roll call votes missed, public visibility (number of one-minute speeches the MC makes on the floor and "bylines"—the number of editorials he or she writes for state or national newspapers), and district attention (number of district offices established by the MC, and the proportion of an MC's staff allocated to the district rather than DC).[10] Finally, we match the responses of individuals to the "Most Important Problem" question (coded by CCES as falling into one of eighteen categories in 2006 and one of fifteen categories in 2008) to Sulkin's (2011) codes for bill introductions and cosponsorships. This enables us to determine whether or not each MC introduced at least one measure dealing with that issue.[11] For example, if a respondent said that pollution was the most important problem, then the "Most Important Problem

action" variable would take the value of 1 if the MC introduced a bill on the environment, and 0 otherwise. For another respondent, who mentioned terrorism as the most important problem, this variable would reflect whether the MC introduced a bill on defense.

Given that we sometimes have multiple indicators of the same general concept, and because the activities are all measured on different scales, we choose to standardize them by calculating *z*-scores for each MC's score on that variable in each Congress. Then, for lawmaking (introductions, cosponsorships, and amendments), public visibility (one-minute speeches and editorials), and district attention (No. of district offices and proportion of the staff devoted to the district vs. DC), we average the component variables to come up with a single score for each. Accordingly, we have a total of seven measures of legislative activity—party loyalty, district attention, lawmaking, Most Important Problem action, legislative success, missed votes, and public visibility. These measures enable us to assess the degree of association between constituent evaluations and a wide swath of legislative behaviors.

Finally, we control for features of the current campaign that may affect attitudes toward the incumbent and, hence, job approval. These include the amount of money raised during the term (total receipts from the Federal Election Commission), whether the MC had a primary challenge, and whether he or she faced a "quality" general election challenger (i.e., from a politically experienced candidate).

Expectations about Partisanship and Constituency Reaction

We hypothesize that there are three general categories of legislative activities—those that will be approved by all types of constituents, those that will be universally disliked, and those that will elicit different responses from partisan subconstituencies. We predict, for example, that district attention should be rewarded by copartisans, outpartisans, and independents alike, as all types of constituents should appreciate time and resources devoted to extra policy efforts to cultivate the constituency. In contrast, all should react negatively when MCs miss roll call votes, as this is viewed by many as the defining job of legislators, and abstentions are often reported in state and local newspapers.

We expect that constituents will view most other activities through a partisan lens. Copartisans, for example, should prefer that their MCs have status, and so will react positively to chamber and committee leadership, seniority, majority status, and public visibility/prominence (i.e., speaking on the floor and writing editorials). Second, given their shared partisanship, they will want their legislator to

toe the party line in voting and will therefore reward party loyalty. Third, they should be more approving if their representative is a productive legislator who is active in the lawmaking process and, at least occasionally, sees his or her bills pass into law, and will be particularly pleased when their MC acts on the issue they believe is most important.

Like their copartisan district-mates, outpartisans of the MC will prefer legislators who attend to the district and do not shirk on their duty to cast roll call votes. In contrast, though, they should *not* reward party loyalty and instead will prefer MCs whose voting deviates away from the party line and toward the preferences of the constituent. For the effects of legislative activity and status, however, there are competing expectations. Do outpartisan constituents prefer an active, visible, and powerful representative, perhaps because there is the perception that he or she will be able to do more for the district? Or, given that they do not identify with their MC's party, do they prefer that he or she be less consequential? We expect that, all else equal, the latter is more likely to hold true.

It is most difficult to make predictions about pure independents. Do they react more like copartisans or outpartisans, do they fall somewhere in between, or are their patterns of responses distinct? We argue that the effects depend on the nature of the activity. For example, in responding to district attention and roll call absenteeism, independents should behave like their copartisan and outpartisan peers. However, because they lack attachments to either party, we expect that they will neither reward nor punish party loyalty. Furthermore, we anticipate that, like copartisans, they will be more likely to reward legislative success and policy congruence (i.e., because they should prioritize outcomes over partisanship), but that they will be skeptical about having a powerful "establishment" MC, and so, like outpartisans, will be less approving if their representative is in the majority party or a leader.

Table 1 summarizes our expectations for the directions of the relationships between legislative activity and constituent evaluations for copartisans, outpartisans, and independents. Before moving on to assess these expectations, we offer two caveats. First, many of the legislator-level variables are correlated with one another (e.g., senior MCs are more prone to enjoy legislative success; those who engage in more lawmaking are more likely to introduce a measure on the constituent's most important problem), so we do not expect that all will emerge as significant predictors of approval.[12] Second, we underscore that one cannot interpret a significant coefficient to mean that citizens directly observe or learn about that behavior and then purposely choose to reward or punish the incumbent. Like Ansolabehere and Jones (2010), Grimmer (2013), Parker and Goodman (2009), and others, we seek to investigate whether the patterns are consistent with a

Table 1. Expectations about Legislative Activity, MC Status, and Constituency Reaction.

	Copartisans	Outpartisans	Independents
District attention	+	+	+
Missed votes	−	−	−
Party loyalty	+	−	None
Lawmaking	+	−	?
Most Important Problem action	+	−	+
Public visibility	+	−	?
Success	+	−	+
Leader	+	−	?
Chair/ranking	+	−	?
Seniority	+	−	?
Majority party	+	−	?

This table summarizes our expectations about the effect of each legislative activity variable on constituent approval of the MC's performance. MC = member of Congress.

story in which they do. This is in contrast to an account in which voters pay no attention to what MCs do in office, or in which the effects of partisan projection overpower any variation in actual activity.

Another issue to be considered is whether the assumption that legislative behavior drives approval is legitimate, or whether the relationship between the two is more likely to be reciprocal. In studies of campaign spending and approval/electoral outcomes, the latter is most appropriate, because incumbents adjust their spending in response to the perceived closeness of the race. However, our question is less prone to thorny causal issues because legislators' activity does not tend to change much from Congress to Congress. As Ragsdale and Cook (1987, 66) describe it,

> Members' allocations of resources in any one year most closely reflect past year allocations; they are not strongly predicted by the circumstances of elections past or present. Members take trips to the district in numbers similar to the times they have gone home in the past, place bills in the hopper at the same pace they have regularly done so, and maintain a relatively constant staff size in the district.

This may be because behavior has become habitual (Fenno 1978), because work routines enable MCs to deal with the busyness that is life in Congress (Bernhard, Sulkin, and Sewell 2014;), and/or because of the congratulation-rationalization effect (Kingdon 1967)—they believe that their behavior produced their success.

The Model and Results

To test our hypotheses, we require a model that fits the unique structure of our data. We have individual-level data on constituents' approval of their MC and on their characteristics, and these constituents are nested within districts, where the behavior of the MC is constant across

respondents (but varies across districts). As such, we estimate logistic regressions with robust clustered standard errors where the clusters are a district/Congress.[13]

Table 2 presents a series of models where the dependent variable is MC job approval (1= approve, 0 = disapprove). Our independent variables include the characteristics of MCs, respondents, and the relationships between them described above. The results in the first column include all respondents, the second column is limited to MCs' copartisans, the third column is outpartisans, and the fourth column is pure independents.

The most important finding to emerge from these analyses is that there are indeed a number of systematic relationships that emerge between MCs' legislative activity and their constituents' approval of their performance. This is in clear contrast to arguments that these evaluations are solely a function of partisanship or of other individual considerations that are divorced from legislators' records. However, as predicted, many of these effects wash out in the analyses that combine all constituents into a single model. This is because, for some indicators of activity, copartisans and outpartisans respond in different directions, and, for others, there is a significant relationship for some partisan groups' approval but not others.

Importantly, the patterns of results for specific indicators are largely consistent with our hypotheses. We see, for example, that copartisans, outpartisans, and independents all punish absenteeism, and that copartisans reward party loyalty in voting, outpartisans disapprove of it, and independents' evaluations are unaffected by it. The results for district attention demonstrate how MCs might be able to calibrate their activity to win over constituents. Although copartisans (somewhat unexpectedly) react negatively to increased attention,[14] outpartisans and independents both reward it.

We also find relationships between activity and approval for the other four indicators (public visibility, lawmaking,

Table 2. Relationships between MC Activity and Constituent Evaluations.

	All constituents	Copartisans	Outpartisans	Independents
MC behavior				
District attention	0.062 (.027)*	−0.131 (.034)**	0.199 (.042)**	0.139 (.047)**
Missed votes	−0.265 (.045)**	−0.171 (.066)**	−0.336 (.071)**	−0.198 (.075)**
Party loyalty	−0.131 (.025)**	0.147 (.035)**	−0.339 (.031)**	−0.069 (.038)
Lawmaking	−0.022 (.032)	−0.001 (.042)	−0.127 (.062)*	0.003 (.063)
Most Important Problem action	0.069 (.036)	0.159 (.058)**	−0.007 (.045)	0.104 (.078)
Public visibility	−0.001 (.026)	0.078 (.037)*	−0.071 (.039)	0.038 (.046)
Success	−0.014 (.021)	0.016 (.037)	−0.088 (.039)*	0.090 (.045)*
MC status				
Leader	−0.231 (.229)	−0.503 (.379)	−0.203 (.178)	−0.256 (.548)
Chair/ranking	0.035 (.085)	0.102 (.118)	0.056 (.134)	−0.070 (.140)
Seniority	0.005 (.003)	−0.003 (.003)	0.010 (.005)*	0.000 (.005)
Majority party	−0.142 (.045)**	−0.146 (.069)*	−0.085 (.068)	−0.355 (.079)**
Respondent characteristics				
Strong party ID	0.074 (.029)*	0.742 (.042)**	−0.496 (.041)**	—
Interest	−0.355 (.032)**	0.217 (.048)**	−0.898 (.044)**	−0.201 (.073)**
Democrat	−0.216 (.047)**	−0.088 (.061)	−0.374 (.063)**	—
Independent	0.806 (.056)**	—	—	—
Campaign context				
Total receipts	−0.061 (.021)**	0.017 (.031)	−0.123 (.034)**	−0.016 (.041)
Primary challenge	−0.173 (.049)**	−0.250 (.071)**	−0.140 (.074)	−0.197 (.090)*
General quality of the challengers	−0.234 (.062)**	−0.194 (.094)*	−0.388 (.094)**	−0.017 (.104)
109th Congress	−0.062 (.043)	0.249 (.063)**	−0.322 (.065)**	−0.031 (.075)
Same party	2.656 (.047)**	—	—	—
Constant	−0.466 (.073)	1.282 (.085)	0.312 (.095)	0.358 (.113)
Number of groups	784	784	778	758
Number of observations	39,682	20,814	15,062	3,806
Log pseudo likelihood	−20,158.94	−8,304.27	−8,449.35	−2,596.56

The table presents logistic regression coefficients with robust clustered standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is constituent approval of the MC's performance. MC = member of Congress.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Most Important Problem action, and legislative success), and, as predicted, the presence and/or direction of these effects varies by constituent group. Copartisans reward public visibility and, although they do not directly reward overall legislative energy and success, respond positively when their MC is legislatively active on the issue of most importance to them.[15] Outpartisans, on the contrary, prefer that their MC not be legislatively active or successful—MCs who score highly on the lawmaking and success indicators receive lower level of approvals from outpartisans than those who are less energetic and less successful. Perhaps not surprisingly, independents react less to the behavior of the MC—the only significant indicator (other than absenteeism and district attention) is success, which, as predicted, is rewarded.

Importantly, these relationships between legislative activity and constituency approval are robust[16] and substantively meaningful in magnitude. To illustrate the size of the effects, Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities

for the effects of each measure of legislative activity on job approval.[17] These results are derived from a model (presented in Online Appendix C, http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/) that includes interactions between partisanship and activity (i.e., rather than separating the sample by copartisans, outpartisans, and independents), and thus provides for a stricter test of the differences across partisan groups.

For example, all else equal, a constituent with a copartisan MC who votes with his or her party the mean amount of time (about 90% of roll calls) has a .79 probability of approving of that MC's performance. If the MC scores one standard deviation above the mean in party voting (about 97.5% of roll calls), the probability of support increases to .81. For outpartisan constituents, the probability of approving of an MC who shows an average amount of loyalty to the party is .58, but that drops to .50 if the MC is one standard deviation above the mean in party support. For independents, the drop is smaller with
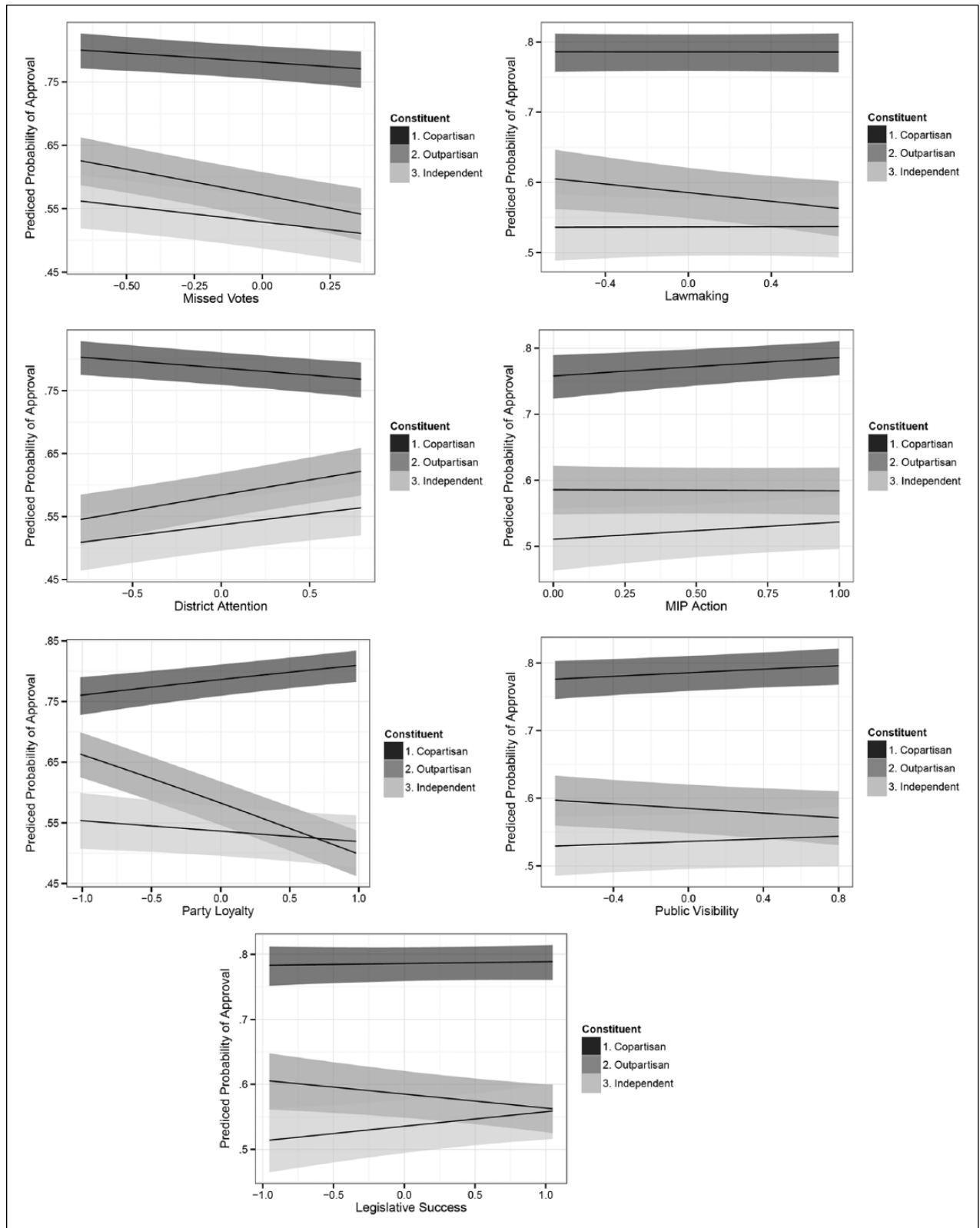
Figure 1. Predicted probabilities for effects of legislative activity on job approval.

This figure shows the effect of *a* ± 1 standard deviation change in an activity on the predicted approval/disapproval probabilities of an average copartisan, outpartisan, and independent (right column) holding other predictors at their sample means or modal values.

the probability of approval falling from .54 to .52. Similarly, an MC who misses the mean proportion of votes (about 3.5%) has a .79 probability of approval among copartisans, a .58 probability among outpartisans, and a .54 probability among independents. If, instead, the MC misses 7 percent of votes (about one standard deviation above the mean), the probability of approval among copartisans drops to .77, among outpartisans to .54, and among independents to .51.

Individually, these effects may not seem overwhelming, but if we combine them (e.g., comparing a party loyalist who is always present for votes with a disloyalist who regularly misses them), there is the potential for a substantial impact on evaluations. This is especially true when we consider that there are floor and ceiling effects on approval—most copartisans (86%) approve of their MC and most outpartisans do not (70%). And, because most legislators are knowledgeable about their constituencies and act in ways to promote their reelection, we do not see the full range of possible activity.

In addition to the effects for legislative activity, our results in Table 2 point to a number of other interesting findings. First, we uncover the expected patterns for respondent characteristics; strong partisan identifiers and highly interested constituents approve of their copartisan MCs/disapprove of MCs who do not share their identification more so than do weaker identifiers or the less interested. Second, there are almost no relationships between MC status and approval, with the exceptions that majority party MCs get less approval from copartisans and independents, and outpartisans are, all else equal, more approving of senior members. Importantly, then, constituents do not appear to either reward or punish party or committee leadership positions, instead focusing more on the activity of the MCs.

Finally, campaign context matters. The CCES surveys were all done in the midst of an election, and we find that MCs who faced a primary challenge received less approval from copartisans and independents, and those facing a high quality (i.e., politically experienced) general election challenger were more likely to be disapproved of by both copartisans and outpartisans. Of course, the causality here is complicated; constituents may be affected by the challenger's campaign itself, it may be that the MC's weaknesses provoke both constituency disapproval *and* the likelihood of a challenger, or some combination of these (and other) factors may be at work. Regardless, we see relationships between constituents' views and the ongoing electoral context.

Discussion and Conclusion

What do we conclude about the relationships between legislative activity and constituent evaluations? First, and most fundamentally, linkages *do* exist between the behavior of MCs and assessments of their performance. It appears that legislators are correct in inferring that what they do in office matters for their future prospects—citizen evaluations are related to more than just partisanship. And, even if these relationships are not, in reality, causal, cautious MCs may assume that they are and behave accordingly, leading to responsive behavior. Although constituents may hold members, particularly majority party MCs, responsible for the collective performance of Congress (Adler and Wilkerson 2012; Jones and McDermott 2010), approval is also a function of micro-level factors.

Second, there are important differences across subconstituencies. As expected, copartisan, outpartisan, and independent constituents react differently to the same patterns of behavior. Indeed, looking only at the overall results (the first column in Table 2), we would conclude that constituents prefer moderate legislators who do their jobs and attend to their constituents—the classic story to come out of work on median voter theory and the personal vote. However, *copartisans* do not react in this way. They respond with higher approval of party loyalists[18] and to those who devote fewer resources to district offices and staff. Such findings underscore that discussions of what constituents want from their representatives often need to be more nuanced. Thinking of constituents as "the people" and of legislative strategies as having uniform effects leads us to incomplete, if not incorrect, assessments of the linkages between activity and approval.

Our results also suggest that strategic MCs who know their districts well—and can sense whether they are likely to have competition in the primary or general elections or both—may have the ability to affect their approval ratings by how they spend their time in Congress. For example, MCs whose constituencies include many independents may want to focus on moving legislation through the system, as that behavior is rewarded by independent voters. However, if they need to win over outpartisans to retain their seats, investing in the lawmaking process might not be the best choice, as outpartisans react negatively to legislative energy and success, and it does not appear to yield general dividends with copartisans (though they do reward activity on the issues they see as the most important).

These patterns bear on our understanding of partisan differences and, potentially, the effects of polarization and the concomitant (though not necessarily causal) homogeneity of House constituencies. While there is evidence that "good" behavior is rewarded, the findings also highlight how different the preferences of copartisans, outpartisans, and independents are. Lacking longitudinal data, we cannot assess whether or not these gaps have widened over time. But if polarization has led to increasing divergence in reactions to MC behavior at the same

time that districts have become more ideologically homogeneous, this has implications for a variety of phenomena, including, for example, Fenno's Paradox—the finding that constituents generally love their congressperson but hate Congress. On one hand, in homogeneous districts, such love is easier to cultivate. An MC can simply adopt a pattern of legislative behavior that resonates with copartisans. On the other hand, changes to the electoral landscape that lead to more homogeneity in constituencies reduce the need for incumbents to accommodate the preferences of outpartisans and independents, and may decrease these constituents' approval of their MC. This is not just because they do not like how their legislators vote but because partisan subconstituencies have fundamentally different views about how their MCs should spend their time.

It is impressive that our findings emerge when we aggregate across all MCs, as doing so does not take into account variation in how legislators frame their records to their constituents, or in the nature of local media coverage of legislative activity. We know from Fenno (1978), Grimmer (2013), and others that legislator's stylistic choices have very real effects on how they are perceived. MCs can shape constituents' reactions to their activity by strategically framing some aspects and downplaying others. Taken to the extreme, the downside of this strategic power is that their efforts may deceive voters about the level of representation that is being provided (Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014). We also know that citizens are more likely to be informed about their MCs' actions when they are covered by local media, and that local media give more coverage to legislators who are out of step with their district's priorities (Fogarty 2008; Snyder and Stromberg 2010). It is therefore both empirically interesting and normatively important that approval moves with actual activity. A useful extension of the work undertaken here would be to parse out the relative effects of activity, communication strategies, representational style, and local media coverage on MC approval, overall and broken out by subconstituencies.

In sum, our results suggest that the relationship between MC activity and constituent approval functions as if information about what legislators do filters down to constituents. Our approach complements other recent work that shows that citizens are capable of using information about their representatives' performance to make political judgments and shape electoral outcomes (see, for example, Jones and McDermott 2010; Lenz 2012). Moreover, the general pattern of results accords with a story in which constituents' partisanship shapes what they notice about, and how they react to, their MCs' choices about how to approach their jobs. Unpacking these dynamics lends important insight into legislative strategy, citizen competence, and the quality of congressional representation.

Notes

1. The dependent variable in our analyses to follow is constituent approval/disapproval of the representative's performance. Accordingly, when we speak of constituents rewarding/punishing or responding to legislative activity or to legislators being held accountable for their actions, we are referring to relationships between the behavior of a member of Congress (MC) and the constituent's approval or disapproval. As others have discussed, there exists some lack of clarity in the literature on definitions of accountability, responsiveness, and related concepts (see, for example, Maloy 2014).

2. Many MCs appear in the sample in both Congresses; our total observations include 401 representatives in the 109th Congress and 389 in the 110th, with 459 unique legislators.

3. Collective representation refers to the extent to which Congress in its entirety represents the citizenry well, whereas dyadic representation focuses on the relationship between a constituent and his or her particular representative.

4. There are parallels to the literature on policy congruence. If a political system produces an outcome in which MCs' and constituents' positions align, this is normatively good. Whether it occurs because MCs change their behavior to match constituency preferences or coincidentally, as citizens choose like-minded representatives, is a separate question.

5. On average, we have about one hundred survey respondents per legislator.

6. Many MCs appear in the sample in both election years, and we take this into account in the analyses. Our sample includes 459 unique legislators. We omit partial termers, as we lack complete information on legislative activity for many of them, and because it may be unclear to survey respondents which of the two MCs who served their district they are evaluating.

7. There is also a "not sure" option, chosen by about one-fifth of respondents. We choose to omit these observations from our analysis, though the results are similar when they are included as a "neither approve nor disapprove" category.

8. On the standard 7-point partisanship scale, we code respondents who are "strong" Democrats/Republicans, "weak" Democrats/Republicans, and independents "leaning" Democrat/Republican as partisans. Pure independents are classified as independents.

9. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) also includes data on a wide variety of demographic characteristics of respondents, such as age, gender, race, education, and income. We ran models that included these

variables and found that, while they generally predict approval, their inclusion had no effect on the relationships between activity and approval. As such, in the interest of parsimony, we exclude them.

10. Data on voting were obtained from Poole and Rosenthal's VOTEVIEW, on total activities from Sulkin (2011), on legislative success from Adler and Wilkerson's Congressional Bills Project, on missed votes from Jenkins and Nokken (2008), on one-minute speeches from Rocca (2007), and on district offices/staff percent from Parker and Goodman (2009). The authors collected data on legislator characteristics and editorials.

11. Given the low number of introductions that MCs undertake (an average of ten to twelve per Congress across all issues), the important distinction is between MCs who do and do not introduce on an issue.

12. Online Appendix A (http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/) presents the full set of correlations between individual MC characteristics and the indices of legislative activity. As shown, correlations between the indices themselves are generally low, indicating that they tap into different dimensions of activity. The highest correlations between MC characteristics and behavior are for majority and committee leadership status and seniority with success (in the range of .26–.36).

13. Given the nature of the data, it would also be appropriate to estimate a multilevel statistical model. In Online Appendix B (http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/), we do so and demonstrate that the results in Table 2 are robust to either model. While in theory using a multilevel model would more efficiently leverage the variation in legislator behavior and constituency response within and across districts (Gelman and Hill 2006; Snijders and Bosker 2012; Steenbergen and Jones 2002), in practice with these data, the two approaches tell essentially the same story (i.e., just some small differences in coefficients across the two models). We opt to present the results of the logistic regressions because they better accommodate the interactions between partisanship and activity summarized in Figure 1.

14. It is not clear why MCs who devote more resources to the district receive lower approval ratings from copartisans. One explanation is that district attention is part of a strategy to reach out to a wide swath of constituents and that copartisans prefer a more exclusive approach.

15. The significant result for Most Important Problem action provides the strongest (albeit still circumstantial) evidence that constituents may actually be attentive to MC activity.

16. To assess the robustness of the results in Table 2, we reestimated the models excluding characteristics of MCs and respondents (i.e., including only measures of legislative activity) and by including those characteristics, but entering only one measure of legislative activity at a time. Both of these tests yield results that correspond to the patterns presented in Table 2.

17. Using the coefficients from the models in Online Appendix C (http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/), we let each legislative activity vary by its standard deviation while holding all the other predictors at their sample means or modes to obtain predicted probabilities for each level of job approval.

18. This is not necessarily counter to median voter theory, however, because the median voter in a homogeneously partisan district is also likely to be a party loyalist.

Supplemental Material

Replication data for this article can be viewed at https://sites.google.com/site/paultesta/.

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