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Policy Preferences and Congressional Representation:
The Relationship between Public Opinion and Policymaking in Today's Congress

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ABSTRACT

For what kind of policies are elected officials more likely to be responsive to public opinion? The limited research in this area has found varying degrees of strength in the relationship between public opinion and policy on different policy domains. But scholarship about this important question has been handicapped by a lack of adequate measures and estimates of constituency opinion on policy issues. In this paper, I use the unprecedented statistical power and breadth of the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES) to explore the representation of constituency interests in Congress in greater detail than has previously been possible. I examine the relationship between congressional roll-call votes and constituency opinion on 20 different public policy issues. I find that in the House of Representatives between 1999 and 2000, the roll-call votes cast by members of Congress were responsive to public opinion to a significant degree on a wide range of policy issues, including abortion, military spending, education, crime, taxes and the environment. Democratic and Republican lawmakers are responsive to public opinion on substantially different subsets of policies, suggesting a typology of issue responsiveness that is highly dependent on the varying levels of credibility that parties establish with voters on different issues.

INTRODUCTION

Under what conditions—and for what kinds of policies—is government more likely to be responsive to public opinion? Two generations of political scientists have struggled with the conceptualization and measurement of responsiveness, defined broadly as the extent to which the policies enacted by elected officials are responsive to the preferences of their constituencies. Scholars generally agree that the more a policy is salient—that is, the more the public cares about the policy and views it to be important— the more likely politicians are to be responsive to public opinion on the policy. But many interesting, important questions regarding responsiveness remain to be answered. Two recent surveys of the field (Manza and Cook 2002 and Burstein 2003) argue that while scholars have generally found evidence of responsiveness across time and policies, they have failed to address the theoretically interesting and normatively important question of explaining *variation* in responsiveness.

Perhaps the biggest gap in the research is that, forty years after the pioneering work regarding responsiveness of Miller and Stokes (1963) and Lowi (1964), we still do not have empirically tested hypotheses that identify the policy domains on which we should expect more or less responsiveness by elected officials to public opinion. Should we expect politicians to care more about public opinion regarding tax policy or the environment? Defense spending or trade policy? Education or foreign policy? Political scientists have, at best, educated guesses as to the answers to these questions—and in fact, much of the most highly regarded research in the field has yielded conflicting findings.

In this paper, I explore these questions using the unprecedented power of the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES) rolling cross-section study. The largest-ever single-election academic study of political opinion and behavior, the NAES interviewed a total of 58,373 American adults between December 1999 and January 2001. Among the questions asked of respondents was a battery of questions regarding a range of policies at the heart of the political debate during the 2000 presidential campaign. These included prominent issues—such as taxes, military spending, abortion, and gun control—as well as

significant, but less salient issues such as crime, the environment, foreign policy, and business regulation. Although the NAES was designed to obtain a sample of the preferences of the nation as a whole, the random-digit dialing procedure used by the survey makes it possible to generate statistically unbiased estimates of opinion at the congressional district level, with about 130 respondents per district. Not every policy question was asked of every respondent, but on many policy questions the number of respondent per district is 50 or more, yielding reliable estimates of constituency opinion. In this study, I use responses from 21 of these questions (see Table 1.) The size of the NAES sample, its breadth of policy questions, and its random digit design make it far superior resource than any academic study to date for generating estimates of constituency opinion at the congressional district level and studying its effect on Congress.

THEORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The representation of citizen interests by elected officials is a topic of key concern to our evaluation—both normative and positive—of any liberal democracy. The empirical research on the representation of citizens' interests has thus long been prominent on the research agenda of political science. Rather than providing an exhaustive survey of this work[1], I will focus on the theoretical considerations and literature in one particular area: research that helps us to understand whether different policy domains exhibit varying levels of representation of constituents' preferences and responsiveness to constituent opinion.

Theoretical considerations

One natural reaction to the question of the extent to which citizens are represented to different degrees on different policies is whether we should expect any differentiation whatsoever, given that citizens have ill-defined views on many policies and generally

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[1] Good reviews of this literature can be found in Jewell (1983) and Burstein (2003).

Table 1.

Policy attitude variables from the NAES used in analysis

(Cells indicate average number of respondents per district for each variable)

abbreviation	Question wording	Seriousness of X as a problem	Should govt do X	How much effort into X	How much $ on X	Favor or oppose X	Other	district mean	district sd	NAES var id
poverty	Seriousness of poverty as a problem	127						.70	.039	BP01
taxrates	Seriousness of tax rates as a problem	127						.61	.051	BB01
criminals	Seriousness of underpunished criminals as a problem	125						.72	.049	BG12
drugs	Seriousness of drug use as a problem	57						.81	.051	BG13
outsource	Seriousness of job loss to foreign comp as a problem	57						.62	.080	BT02
govvouchers	Should fed govt give vouchers for pvt schools		127					.46	.077	BD02
govabrestrict	Should fed govt restrict abortion		125					.34	.113	BF02
partyfunds	Should fed govt limit money to political parties		124					.80	.045	BH01
civilwars	Should fed govt use military to stop civil wars		57					.29	.083	BJ08
prayer	Should fed govt allow school prayer		56					.61	.143	BT03
incomediff	Should fed govt reduce income differences		55					.53	.100	BP02
guncontrol	Govt effort to restrict gun purchases			126				.80	.064	BG06
gayjobs	Govt effort to protect gays from job discrimination			123				.67	.072	BL05
enviro	Govt effort on protect environment			57				.87	.047	BS01
elimreg	Govt effort to eliminate regulation on business			54				.65	.053	BT01
milspend	Govt spending on military				127			.77	.048	BJ07
sdi	Govt spending on missile shield				60			.72	.064	BJ03
educspend	Govt spending on public schools				57			.87	.045	BD09
suehmos	Favor right to sue HMOs					73		.82	.062	BE14
taxssa	Favor tax cuts vs. Social Security						108	.31	.063	BB05
inheritance	Favor eliminating inheritance taxes						48*	.73	.123	BB11

* Average of responses to two questions regarding inheritance taxes

have even less of an idea about the actions that their Congressional representatives take on these issues. Assumptions like these have been at the heart of studies such as Erikson, Wright and McIver (1993) and Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson (2002), which examine the extent to which measures of general ideology—liberalism and conservatism—affect government activity in a broad sense. Studies in this vein have generally found a strong relationship between ideology and government action in the United States.

But many scholars have gone farther to argue that—despite the general ignorance about policymaking exhibited by most citizens—we should expect varying degrees of responsiveness of public opinion on different policy domains. Lowi (1963), Wilson ([1974] 1995), and Arnold (1990) all argue that the structure of policies and the organized interests supporting various policy outcomes should affect the representation of public opinion by elected legislatures. In particular, Arnold argues that diffuse, unorganized interests can be victorious over concentrated, special interests when costs or benefits can be easily recognized by the public. This hypothesis corresponds somewhat with Carmines and Stimson's (1980) notion of "easy" versus "hard" issues—easy issues being those that are more symbolic than technical, deal with policy ends rather than means, and have long been on the political agenda (p. 80). We might expect a stronger relationship between opinion and policymaking on easy issues.

However, very little empirical work has been done to assess whether the effect of the public's preferences on policymaking varies from issue to issue. In their pioneering work examining the relationship between the policy attitudes of survey respondents and their congressional representatives, Miller and Stokes (1963) found that a significant relationship existed in the area of civil rights, but not so in social welfare or foreign policy. Subsequent work pointing out methodological problems in this research has revised these findings, and demonstrated less variation in responsiveness across issue domains (Achen 1978, Erikson 1978). Page and Shapiro (1983) find that responsiveness is higher on domestic issues than foreign policy issues, and argue that this is because domestic issues tend to be more salient with the mass public.

Additional research on this topic has largely been conducted on an issue to issue basis, making comparisons between issues very difficult. Perhaps surprisingly given Page and Shapiro's result, defense issues have been found exhibit high degrees of responsiveness. The most persuasive of these findings is that of Bartels (1991), who uses National Election Studies data and roll-call votes cast on the defense budget by House members to estimate that constituency demand for increased defense spending accounted for about 10 percent of the total 1982 fiscal year appropriation for the Pentagon. Additional studies have found relationships of varying degrees on environmental policy, taxation and health (see Burstein 2003).

In sum, the research offers support for the idea that government activity bears some relationship with public opinion regarding policy issues. But research that offers us the opportunity to compare the strength of this relationship across issues is scarce. If government responds to public opinion to varying degrees on different policies, this phenomenon has yet to be decisively demonstrated by political scientists.

Theory's implications for methodology

The empirical study of representation often centers on either of two important questions about the functioning of representative democracy. A first question is: to what extent do elected officials do what their constituents want? Secondly: to what extent are officials influenced by public opinion? The first question addresses the notion of policy *congruence*—that is, the extent to which policymaking is congruent with the wishes of the public. The second question assesses the *responsiveness* of elected officials to public opinion in their policymaking decisions. While these questions are related, they can at times yield different conclusions. In particular, it is possible for legislators to be responsive to public opinion on a policy issue without ever actually doing what their citizens want. In this study, I examine whether there are varying degrees of congruence and responsiveness across policy domains.

Measuring congruence. Researchers have generally deemed opinion and policy to be *congruent* when a plurality of the public supports the policy adopted by government. Congruence is measured as a dichotomous variable. A difficulty that arises is that the policy questions asked of survey respondents and the policy choices faced by elected legislators are often quite different. Congruence studies are usually limited to the national level, where polls on topical public policy issues are taken with great frequency and the sample size is large enough to develop good estimates of national preferences on issues. As will be seen below, an advantage of the NAES is that the framing of questions allowed for assessments of congruence between constituency opinion and legislative behavior across a relatively wide range of policy topics.

Measuring responsiveness. In contrast to the notion of congruence, scholars have used the term *responsiveness* to describe the extent to which variation in opinion over time and space is associated with variation in activity by policymakers. Following Achen (1978), we can estimate the equation

$$POLICY = \alpha + \beta(OPINION) + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

Thus β is our estimate of the change in policy associated with a one-unit change in opinion, and captures the notion of how responsive the representative system is to opinion variation. In assessing whether responsiveness varies across policy domains, a thorny methodological problem presents itself—and as in the study of congruence, it is tied to the difficulty of finding opinion measures that correspond with policy decisions. Ideally, we wish to find opinion and policy variables that represent different issue domains, estimate the βs, and then compare them. Issue domains that have higher values of β can then be said to exhibit relatively higher degrees of responsiveness to public opinion. But it is also quite possible that variation in β across issue domains has nothing to do with variation in responsiveness—and instead indicates that opinion items for some policy domains are less valid than others. So while the study of congruence requires that measures of opinion and policy be on the same scale, the study of responsiveness across issue domains requires that measures of opinion be equally appropriate across domains.

Currently, the only way I can determine to address this issue is by discussing the face validity of the opinion measures as good indicators of opinion in each policy domain.

METHODOLOGY

Measuring opinion

As shown in Table 1, the 2000 NAES included questions covering a wide range of public policy issues facing the United States in that year's presidential campaign. Most of these questions were either designed by or based on those developed by Shanks and his colleagues in the Survey of Governmental Objectives (now called the Public Agendas and Citizen Engagement Survey) (see Shanks 2001 and Shanks et al 2002). They seek to capture four dimensions of opinion regarding public issues: (1) the public's assessment of (1) the *seriousness* of a particular policy problem; (2) which of possible *alternatives* the government should take regarding an issue; (3) how much *effort* the government should take about an issue; and (4) how much the government should *spend* on an issue. A total of 49 policy questions were included in the 2000 NAES; of these I identified 21 questions (listed in Table 1) that could be linked in a straightforward way with one or more significant roll-call votes cast by Congress in 1999 and 2000 (see below).

To obtain estimates of opinion on each of these issues at the congressional district level, I rescaled all variables zero-one, and then averaged all the responses in each congressional district.[2] The NAES underrepresented younger Americans and racial minorities (for example, only 8.6% of the NAES sample was African-American and 9.6% was between 18 and 24 years of age; corresponding figures from the 1990 Census were 12.1 % and 10.8%). I therefore post-stratified the NAES sample by district on the basis of age and race using U.S. Census congressional district-level enumerations of these

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[2] The NAES reports that it estimated respondents' congressional districts based on their phone numbers. I am currently in communication with the designers of the NAES to obtain more information about the validity and reliability of this estimate.

variables (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). The district-level estimates were calculated using these post-stratification weights, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Post-stratification weights used to calculate estimates of district-level opinion
(averaged over all districts)

	weight
Race	
Asian-American	1.23
Black	1.38
Hispanic	0.73
White/other	0.98
Age	
18 - 24	1.63
25 - 34	1.30
35 - 44	0.94
45 - 64	0.78
65 and over	1.09

On their face, these estimates of district-level opinion appear valid. Figures 1 through 4 are maps depicting the geographic distribution of opinion on abortion, environmental protection, gun control, and loss of jobs to foreign competition. A quick glance at the maps indicates that the distribution of opinion regarding these issues is as expected.

Figure 1. Distribution of opinion regarding restrictions on abortion

Support for restricting abortion
- 0.0000 to 0.2030 (40)
- 0.2030 to 0.3330 (114)
- 0.3330 to 0.4640 (208)
- 0.4640 to 0.5950 (128)
- 0.5950 to 1.0000 (33)
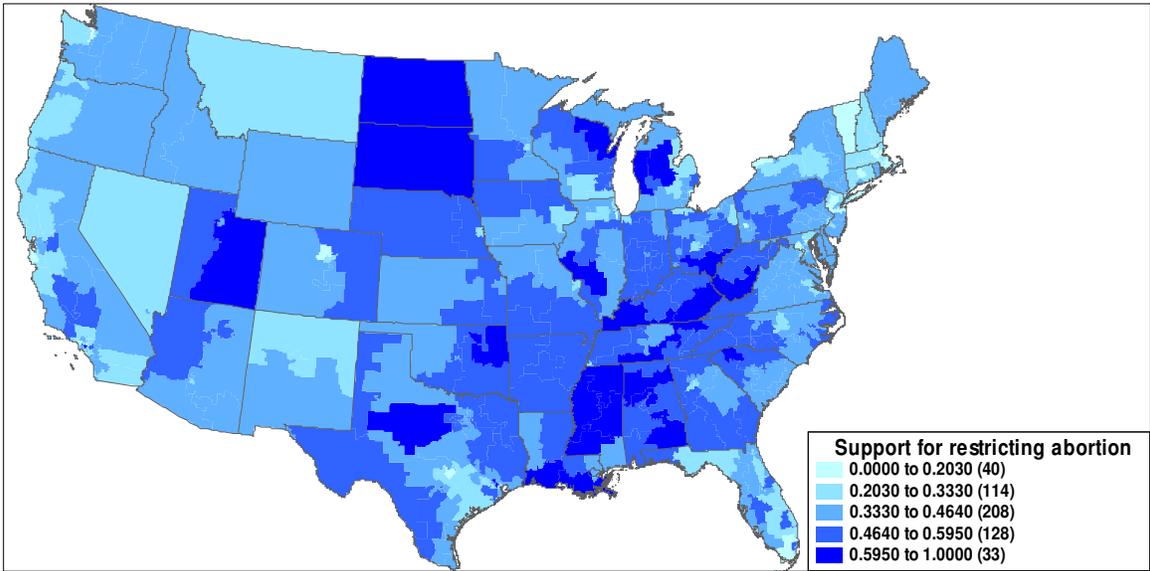
Figure 2. Distribution of opinion regarding environmental protection

Support for environmentalism
- 0.0000 to 0.7980 (33)
- 0.7980 to 0.8434 (105)
- 0.8434 to 0.8890 (213)
- 0.8890 to 0.9340 (136)
- 0.9340 to 1.0000 (33)
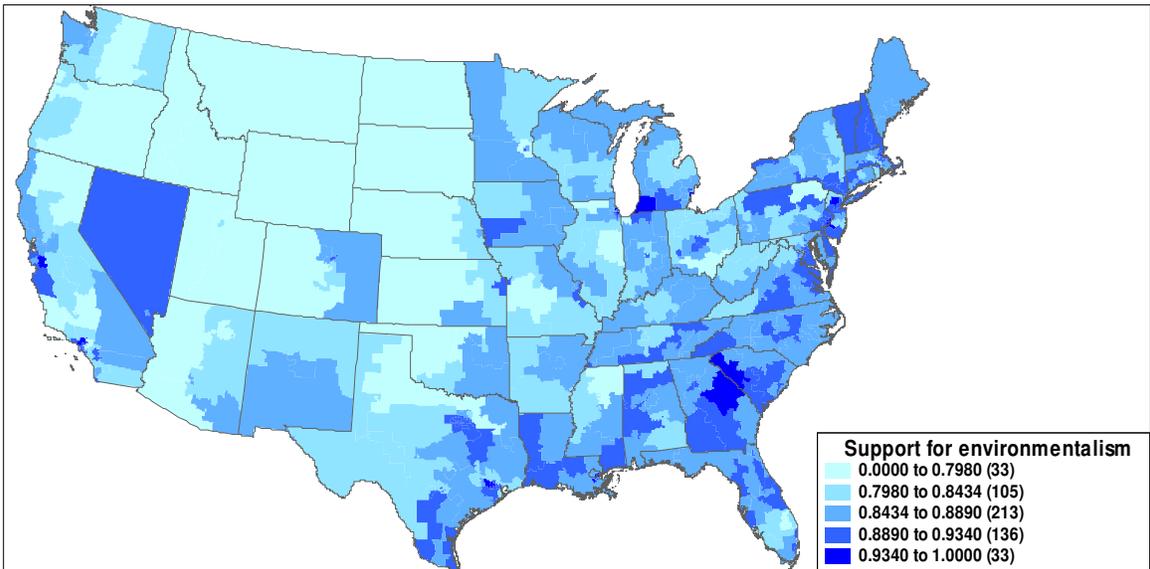
Figure 3. Distribution of opinion regarding gun control

Support for gun control
- 0.0000 to 0.6980 (31)
- 0.6980 to 0.7630 (141)
- 0.7630 to 0.8270 (193)
- 0.8270 to 0.8930 (110)
- 0.8930 to 1.0000 (49)

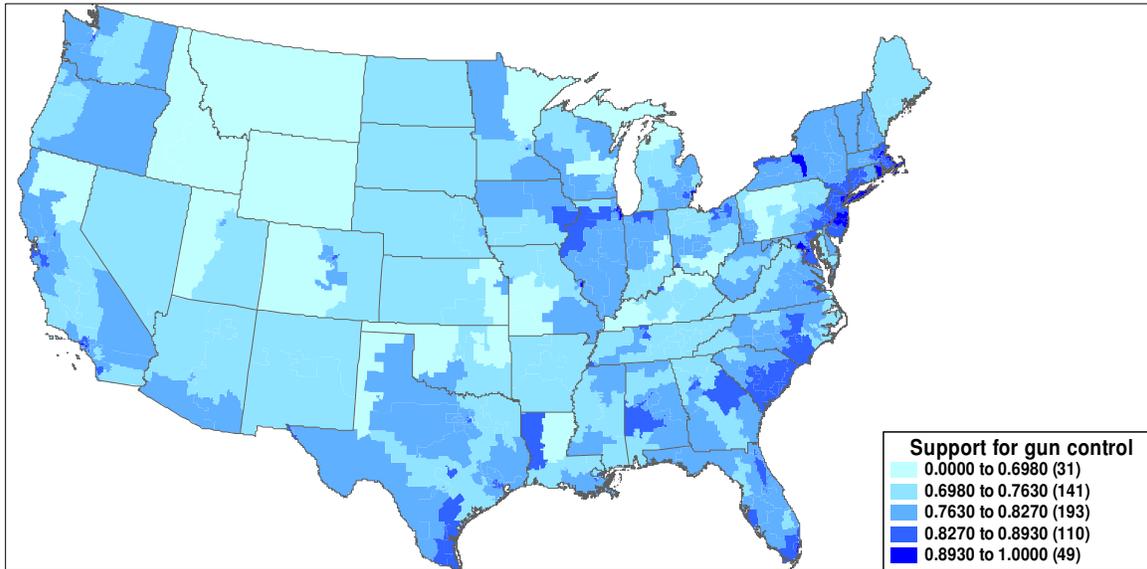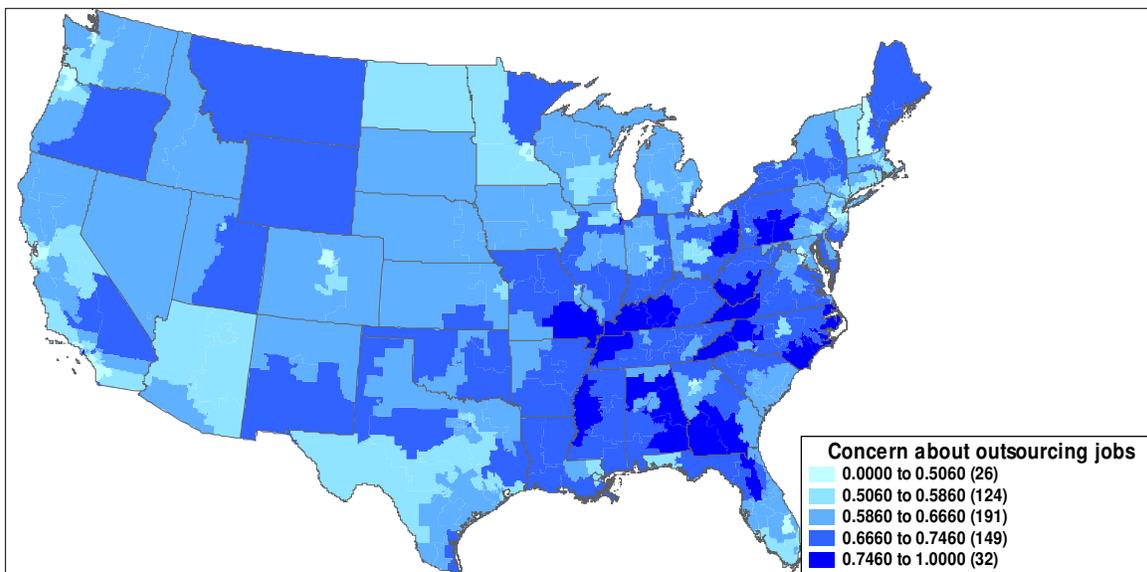**Figure 4. Distribution of opinion regarding
the seriousness of job loss to foreign competition as a problem**

Concern about outsourcing jobs
- 0.0000 to 0.5060 (26)
- 0.5060 to 0.5860 (124)
- 0.5860 to 0.6660 (191)
- 0.6660 to 0.7460 (149)
- 0.7460 to 1.0000 (32)

Measuring policymaking

Because the NAES was conducted between December 1999 and January 2001, to measure policymaking I used votes cast in the House of Representatives during the 106th Congress (1999-2000). A total of 1,214 roll-call votes were cast during this period in the House. To identify roll-call votes appropriate for analysis, I consulted the annual lists of significant votes compiled by two highly regarded resources on Congress: *Congressional Quarterly* (which lists what it calls "key votes") (Congressional Quarterly 1999 and 2000) and the *National Journal* (which compiles a list to calculate annual "vote ratings" for each legislator) (National Journal 1999 and 2000). Both sources limit their lists to votes of substantial import or controversy. In order to be considered for inclusion in my analysis, a roll call vote had to be included on one of these two lists. This procedure yielded a universe of a total of 140 votes.

Roll call votes included in responsiveness analysis. To choose votes from this pool for analysis, I determined whether the subject matter of the vote could reasonably be deemed to be related to the subject matter of one of the policy attitude questions in the NAES. I did not use votes whose outcomes were lopsided in one direction or another; and I disregarded votes on bills that either covered more than one policy domain. A total of 77 House votes from the 106th Congress were included in my analysis. A list of all of these votes and the policy questions with which they were paired can be found in the Appendix. These 77 votes were used in my analysis of responsiveness—i.e., the relationship between variation in public opinion and variation in roll call voting.

A quick glance at the list reveals that some variables are more closely related to the subject matter of roll call votes than others. For example, attitudes regarding abortion, military spending, the environment, and eliminating business regulation were closely related to roll call votes cast on these issues in the 106th Congress. But in one important policy domain—the social and religious issues that divided Congress in 1999 and 2000—there were few variables that directly captured public opinion. For example, several roll call votes were held on issues regarding religion and religious expression, but

the most appropriate policy attitude question for these votes was a question asking respondents whether they supported prayer in public schools. I thus used this variable as a proxy for respondents' attitudes regarding these religious issues. Inevitably, I was forced to make similar judgment calls about other roll call votes and policies.

Roll call votes included in congruence analysis. For 39 of the roll call votes in 13 policy domains, it was possible to directly map the preferences of survey respondents to roll-call votes cast by the House of Representatives. On these votes, the preferred outcome—either for the alternative under consideration or the status quo—could be inferred for every survey participant using his or her response to the relevant policy attitude question. For example, the survey question of how much effort—more, the same, less or none—the government should spend on eliminating regulations could be paired with roll call votes on eliminating federal mandates to the private sector (roll call 1999-17), limiting product liability lawsuits (2000-25), and waiving fines for failing to meet federal paperwork requirements (1999-20). The survey question asking whether the government should give vouchers to send students to private schools mapped directly onto roll call 1999-521, which would have authorized a limited voucher program for children in poorly performing public schools. The survey question about whether the military should be used to stop civil wars was used to infer survey respondents' positions on U.S. intervention in the Kosovo conflict and in Haiti, which were the subject of several roll-call votes during the 106th Congress.

However, several votes whose subject matter matched closely with survey questions did not make it into the congruence analysis, as the specific issue under consideration did not map directly to survey responses. For example, roll call vote 1999-301, which would have removed prohibitions on coverage for abortions from federal health plans, did not directly map onto the survey question of whether the government should make it harder to get an abortion. While those who answered "yes" to this question could certainly be surmised to support an "aye" vote on this proposal, a similar determination is not possible for those who answered "no" to the survey question. Votes like this did not make it into my analysis of representation. In addition, by definition I

could not include roll call votes associated with the "seriousness of a problem" survey questions, because these questions do not ask respondents whether they want the government to do anything about issues. The votes included in the congruence analysis are indicated in the Appendix.

RESULTS

Congruence analysis

On the 39 roll call votes for which it was possible to map constituency preferences directly to the policy proposals under consideration, I coded survey respondents who could be inferred to agree with the proposal as ones and those who disagreed as zeros. In doing so, I paid close attention to the meaning of each roll call vote to ensure that the mapping of survey responses to preferences was accurate. For example, on a bill that would reduce federal mandates on the private sector (1999-17), respondents saying they thought the government should do "more" to reduce business regulation were coded as one, while those who said the government should do the "same," "less," or "none at all" on this issue were coded as zero, because all these responses indicate that they would favor the status quo to the policy proposal under consideration. By contrast, those saying "more" and "same" were coded as ones for a proposal to delay OSHA ergonomics rules (1999-366), because these respondents could be inferred to prefer this proposal to allowing the ergonomics rules to go into effect.

Once I coded all survey respondents' imputed positions on the roll call votes, I calculated the proportion of respondents in each district favoring each proposal under consideration in the roll call votes (using the post-stratification weights described above). I then calculated a "congruence score" for each member of congress casting a vote on the proposal that was the proportion of the district's population agreeing with the position the legislator took on the roll call vote. In cases where a policy domain had more than one roll call vote in the analysis, I averaged legislators' congruence score over all votes in that domain.

Table 4 displays the average congruence scores by policy domain for all House members, as well as separate averages for Republican and Democratic members. Remarkably, the average congruence score varies little across policy domains: on the high end, representatives agreed with 61.3 percent of their constituents on average regarding the establishment of a missile defense shield; on the low end, representatives agreed with 48.0 percent of their constituents on using the U.S. military to intervene in foreign civil wars – a range of only 13 percentage points between the issues exhibiting the greatest and least degree of congruence.

Table 4.
Congruence scores by policy domain

Policy domain	Number of roll-call votes	All MCs average congruence score	std. dev.	Republican MCs average congruence score	std. dev.	Democratic MCs average congruence score	std. dev.
Foreign policy/defense							
U.S. intervention in civil wars	8	48.0	17.7	61.0	12.2	34.5	11.1
Missile defense shield	2	64.6	25.9	81.9	8.0	46.3	25.9
Military spending	2	61.3	16.7	67.4	12.1	54.6	18.3
Economic issues							
Education spending	1	52.4	23.0	32.3	9.4	73.7	10.2
Business regulation	11	47.2	6.9	44.1	5.4	50.3	7.0
Eliminate inheritance tax	2	56.5	16.0	66.0	9.1	46.2	15.4
Tax cuts vs. Social Security	1	48.8	20.9	31.4	5.7	67.2	14.3
Allow lawsuits against HMOs	1	60.3	31.1	39.0	30.2	82.7	7.5
Social issues							
Environmental protection	3	57.4	22.8	41.3	18.5	74.5	11.7
Abortion	2	50.0	18.7	39.7	12.0	61.2	18.2
School vouchers	1	50.4	8.6	48.3	5.2	52.6	6.3
Gun control	5	56.2	12.7	50.7	12.8	61.9	9.7
Ban soft money to political parties	1	55.8	30.2	35.4	27.2	77.0	14.7

However, substantial differences do appear between Democratic and Republican legislators. A two-sample t-test for differences in group means found statistically

significant differences ($p < .001$) in the congruence scores of the two parties' representatives on every policy domain. Republicans were substantially more likely to agree with their constituents on defense and foreign policy issues, as well as on cutting the inheritance tax. Democrats were more likely to agree with their constituents on social issues and economic issues, with the most pronounced differences found in education, environmental protection, "patients' rights" legislation, and regulation of political campaigns.

The key implication of these findings for the study of representation is that party affiliation matters when analyzing differential representation of preferences across policy domains. Had I analyzed all members of congress together, very little differentiation would have been apparent, and I would have missed a major aspect of the representation of constituency preferences in the 106th Congress.

Responsiveness analysis

I now turn to the analysis of responsiveness of legislators to constituency preferences. As indicated above, the less stringent requirements of this analysis allowed me to increase the number of roll call votes analyzed and to expand the scope of policy domains under study to 20 different issues.

As stated previously, my goal was to estimate the effect of one unit change in opinion on the policy decisions of Congress—the βs in equation (1) above. But because roll call votes present a dichotomous dependent variable for analysis, I instead used probit to estimate:

$$\text{Pr(ROLL CALL VOTE} = 1) = \alpha + \beta(\text{OPINION}) + \varepsilon \qquad (2)$$

Because probit coefficients do not easily lend themselves to substantive interpretation, I used the CLARIFY software package (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) to calculate "first differences": in this case, the effect of an opinion shift from the

5th percentile to the 95th percentile in the distribution of district opinion. (I used the 5th and 95th percentiles of opinion—rather than its minimum and maximum—to avoid having my findings rest on extreme values at either end of the distribution of opinion.) Where there was more than one roll call vote in a policy domain, I averaged these first differences across the domain.

Table 5 presents the responsiveness of all House members on the 20 policy domains. It contains several very interesting results. The association between opinion and roll-call votes is strong across many different policy domains, with roll-call votes cast by Congress on gay rights, abortion, military spending, gun control and education spending bearing the strongest relationships with constituency opinion on these matters. The relationship is generally stronger among social issues than among foreign policy or economic issues, but it is found across all three of these broad issue areas.

Even more interesting is the differential patterns of responsiveness among Republican and Democratic legislators, which separate the issues into three types. Leading the list are the highly salient social issues of gay rights, abortion, and gun control: lawmakers from both parties are highly responsive to district opinion on all three of these issues. In contrast to those who claim that the "gun lobby" (or for that matter, the "gay lobby" or the "Religious Right") has undue influence on Congressional decisions regarding these issues, it is clear that in both parties, legislators are highly sensitive to the opinions of voters on these matters. However, it is also worth noting that large economic interests—who presumably can command larger staffs of lobbyists and more generous campaign contributions—have little stake in the outcomes of any of these three issues.

A second category of issues are the wedge issues that unite one party's adherents while dividing those of the other party. A glance at Table 5 shows that Republicans are more likely to break with their party and follow the wishes of their constituents on the issues of patients' rights, free trade, environmental protection, and campaign finance reform. Similarly, Democrats are highly sensitive to district opinion on military

Table 5.
Responsiveness of Congress to public opinion by policy domain and party

		Effect of opinion on roll call votes of...		
Policy domain	Number of roll-call votes	all MCs	Republican MCs only	Democratic MCs only
Foreign policy/defense				
Military spending	2	.68	.29	.72
Missile defense shield	2	.45	.02	.49
U.S. military intervention in civil wars	11	.20	.04	.07
Economic issues				
Education spending	1	.50	.05	.03
Poverty	3	.44	.13	.15
Tax cuts vs. Social Security	1	.34	.01	.10
Eliminate inheritance tax	2	.33	.03	.22
Tax rates	6	.30	.06	.17
Patients rights legislation	1	.29	.29	.02
Free trade	2	.16	.35	.08
Business regulation	11	.06	.04	.06
Social issues				
Gay rights	1	.81	.87	.32
Abortion	12	.68	.57	.53
Gun control	9	.61	.52	.42
Environmental protection	3	.49	.40	.13
Religious issues	5	.41	.17	.42
Crime	2	.39	.14	.35
Campaign finance	1	.10	.28	.04
School vouchers	1	.09	.23	.02
Drugs	2	.08	.11	.13

Cell entries are first differences: the effect of a shift in district opinion from the 5th to 95th percentile of the distribution of opinion on roll-call vote decisions by legislators in the House of Representatives.

spending, the missile defense shield, taxation, religious issues, and crime. The conclusion that immediately arises from this pattern of issues is that legislators are more sensitive to opinion on policies on which the public is more trusting of the other party's positions and competence. For example, survey data consistently finds the public to have more confidence in Democrats on healthcare and the environment, while trusting

Republicans more on the military and taxes. (This pattern of issues is also found in the congruence analysis displayed in Table 4.) It appears that legislators try to overcome these "credibility gaps" by becoming more responsive to district opinion regarding on the issues where their credibility is weakest.

A final category of issues exhibit low responsiveness after controlling for legislators' party. These are issues on which either district opinion is so closely aligned with the party affiliation of incumbents—such as education and poverty—or they are of such small importance to voters that opinion has hardly effect on policymaking whatsoever, as in the issues of business regulation and military intervention in foreign civil wars. Legislators appear to get a "free pass" on these issues, although their decisions are closely related to their party affiliation.

Table 6 lays out this typology of issue responsiveness. As in the congruence analysis described above, it demonstrates the importance of considering the party affiliation of legislators when measuring the extent to which constituent interests are represented by elected officials.

Table 6. A typology of issue responsiveness

Category	Description	Examples
1. Highly salient issues	Issues that exhibit high degrees of responsiveness among legislators of both parties. They are highly salient, easy to understand, and connected with affect more than with intellect.	gay rights abortion gun control
2. "Credibility gap" issues	Issues that exhibit high degrees of responsiveness among legislators of only one party. Lawmakers of the responsive party are in a constant struggle to gain the credibility on these issues they believe is necessary to holding onto elected office in their districts.	<u>Republicans</u>: environment free trade/protectionism patients' rights <u>Democrats</u>: military spending taxation religious issues crime
3. Inconsequential issues	Issues that exhibit low degrees of responsiveness once the party of legislators is controlled for. Voters are unlikely to use their legislators' positions on these issues to evaluate their performance.	education poverty drugs interventions in civil wars

CONCLUSION

In this study, I use the unprecedented opportunity offered by the NAES to generate new ideas about the relationship between public opinion and the policies enacted by Congress. I find strong relationships between opinion and policy across many issue domains. The study's most important contribution is to highlight the impact of the party affiliation of incumbent legislators on the extent to which constituent interests are represented by elected officials. Research that fails to take partisanship into consideration is likely to miss important aspects of the opinion-policy relationship.

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APPENDIX

Roll call votes included in analyses

Year	Roll Call No.	Proposal	Policy attitude variable	Included in responsiveness analysis	Included in congruence analysis
1999	49	Authorize Kosovo deployment	civilwars	*	*
1999	100	Prohibit ground forces in Kosovo without Congressional authorization	civilwars	*	*
1999	101	Remove U.S. forces from Kosovo	civilwars	*	*
1999	103	Authorize air operations in Kosovo	civilwars	*	*
1999	118	Substitute Democratic alternative for spending for Kosovo conflict	civilwars	*	
1999	119	Bar funds for invasion of Kosovo by U.S. forces	civilwars	*	*
1999	183	Prohibit permanent Defense Department presence in Haiti	civilwars	*	*
1999	189	Strike provision to prohibit funding for Kosovo	civilwars	*	*
1999	266	Recognize achievement in Kosovo	civilwars	*	*
2000	89	Withhold funds for Kosovo	civilwars	*	
2000	193	Require burden-sharing in Kosovo	civilwars	*	
1999	215	Bar release of prisoners due to overcrowding	criminals	*	
2000	317	Reduce funding for truth-in-sentencing grants	criminals	*	
1999	186	Permit U.S. military to help in drug enforcement on borders	drugs	*	
1999	218	Require schools to adopt zero-tolerance drug policy	drugs	*	
1999	319	Increase funds for teachers	educspend	*	*
1999	16	Reduce health and safety mandates	elimreg	*	*
1999	17	Reduce federal mandates on private sector	elimreg	*	*
1999	20	Waive fines for violations of federal paperwork requirements	elimreg	*	*
1999	128	Limit legal liability for Y2K computer problems	elimreg	*	*
1999	276	Financial services overhaul, including repeal of Glass-Steagall Act	elimreg	*	*
1999	336	Require annual cost-benefit analysis of federal regulations	elimreg	*	*
1999	366	Delay of OSHA ergonomics rules	elimreg	*	*
2000	7	Limit liability lawsuits	elimreg	*	*
2000	25	Restrict punitive damages in product liability lawsuits	elimreg	*	*
2000	250	Strike ban on ergonomic standards	elimreg	*	*
2000	179	Use oil royalties to establish land conservation	enviro	*	*
2000	281	Eliminate proposed restrictions on monument designations	enviro	*	*
2000	305	Delay implementation of air quality standards	enviro, elimreg*	*	*
2000	471	Broaden coverage of federal hate crimes to include gays	gayjobs	*	
1999	173	Bar FDA review of RU486	govabrestrict	*	
1999	184	Permit abortions at overseas military hospitals	govabrestrict	*	
1999	261	Criminalize interstate transportation of minor for abortion	govabrestrict	*	*

Year	Roll Call No.	Proposal	Policy attitude variable	Included in responsiveness analysis	Included in congruence analysis
1999	301	Remove prohibitions on abortion coverage in federal health plans	govabrestrict	*	
1999	349	Bar federal funds to foreign orgs that perform abortions	govabrestrict	*	
1999	465	Make it a crime to injure or kill a human fetus	govabrestrict	*	
2000	104	Ban late-term abortions	govabrestrict	*	*
2000	203	Allow abortions in military hospitals overseas	govabrestrict	*	
2000	318	End ban on abortions for federal prisoners	govabrestrict	*	
2000	373	Prohibit FDA tests of RU486	govabrestrict	*	
2000	396	Remove ban on federal funds to foreign orgs that perform abortions	govabrestrict	*	
2000	422	Allow coverage for abortion in federal health plans	govabrestrict	*	
1999	521	Authorize voucher program for students in low-performing schools	govvouchers	*	*
1999	211	Increase juvenile gun penalties	guncontrol	*	
1999	234	Require background checks at gun shows w/in 24 hrs	guncontrol	*	
1999	235	Require certain gun show dealers to run background checks w/in 3 days	guncontrol	*	
1999	236	Ban gun sales without safety devices	guncontrol	*	*
1999	238	Ban juveniles from semiautomatic assault weapons	guncontrol	*	*
1999	240	Repeal DC gun ban	guncontrol	*	*
1999	244	Require background checks at gun shows	guncontrol	*	*
2000	306	Block adding cities to HUD safe-guns program	guncontrol	*	*
2000	324	Bar gun-safety agreement with Smith and Wesson	guncontrol	*	
2000	254	Phase out estate and gift taxes	inheritance	*	*
2000	458	Override veto of estate tax elimination	inheritance	*	*
2000	85	Increase supplemental defense spending	milspend	*	*
2000	196	Terminate Trident II missile	milspend	*	*
1999	56	Reduce steel imports	outsource	*	
2000	228	Normalize trade with China	outsource	*	
1999	422	Campaign finance reform (1999)	partyfunds	*	
1999	110	Reduce threshold for bankruptcy means-testing eligibility	poverty	*	
1999	112	Exempt small businesses from bankruptcy rules to prevent job loss	poverty	*	
1999	370	Increase funding for legal services	poverty	*	
1999	221	Permit state and local govts to display 10 commandments	prayer	*	
1999	223	Prohibit discrimination by Office of Juvenile Justice based on religion	prayer	*	
1999	298	Limit right to make a claim of infringement on religious liberty	prayer	*	
2000	109	Allow religious orgs to compete for certain block grants	prayer	*	
2000	295	Limit FCC regulation of non-commercial religious broadcasters	prayer	*	
1999	58	Impose requirements on SDI	sdi	*	*
1999	59	Support deployment of SDI	sdi	*	*

Year	Roll Call No.	Proposal	Policy attitude variable	Included in responsiveness analysis	Included in congruence analysis
1999	490	Establish patients' bill of rights for HMOs	suehmos	*	*
1999	90	Approve 2/3 taxes constitutional amendment (1999)	taxrates	*	
1999	331	Substitute Democratic version of a proposed tax cut	taxrates	*	
1999	333	Reduce taxes by $792 billion over 10 years	taxrates	*	
1999	485	Provide tax breaks for medical savings accounts	taxrates	*	
2000	119	Approve 2/3 taxes constitutional amendment (2000)	taxrates	*	
2000	127	Abolish the tax code	taxrates	*	
2000	74	Democratic budget resolution with focus on Social Security solvency	taxssa	*	*