

**FOCUSING ON THE BIG ISSUES:
Selective Attention, Issue Publics, and the Principal-Agent Problem in
Congressional Districts**

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Abstract

Using multilevel regression and poststratification, I construct a measure that captures the fragmentation of attention to specific issues within individual Congressional districts. I then simulate district-level ideology scores and test whether the distribution of attention to issues affects the ideological distance between constituents and their representatives. I find a statistically significant relationship, suggesting that issue publics and the concept of salience deserve renewed attention in studies analyzing the factors that impact representation.

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Introduction

How well are citizens represented by their political leaders? This question, foundational to democratic theory, has been posed in the American context since at least the Federalist Papers, and its empirical veracity has been investigated continuously since the modern study of representation began with *The American Voter*. From the very beginning, however, this research has been plagued with methodological difficulties stemming from low district sample sizes and disagreements over measurement. Moreover, rich debates have arisen not only over how well constituents' opinions are reflected by their members of Congress, but the sources of divergence between the two.

My paper seeks to contribute to this tradition by drilling down to the Congressional district level – the building block of representative democracy. Here, I ask two questions: First, does average citizen ideology broadly explain the voting behavior of representatives in Congress? And second, is this behavior affected by the specific issue-based concerns of constituents? In doing so, I draw a connection between the concepts of *salience* and *issue publics* to theorize that the distribution of citizens' attention to specific issues mediates the translation of their overall ideology to that of their representatives. I avoid concerns over sample size – the “Miller-Stokes problem” – by employing multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) to simulate mean district ideology and to construct a novel measure of issue salience for the analysis.

My theory takes a somewhat different approach from recent studies of policy responsiveness on the state level. Lax and Phillips (2009b) use MRP to simulate support for gay rights in the states as a predictor of actual policy; this approach has been extended to examine state-level support for judicial nominations (Kastellec, Lax and Phillips 2010) and a host of other specific issues (Lax and Phillips 2010). By contrast, another strand of research has focused on the relationship between overall citizen preferences and the behavior of their representatives. Starting with Miller and Stokes (1963), this work views *dyadic* representation as the mechanism of primary importance (for review, see Besley and Coate 2008). In seeking to measure ideological responsiveness as mediated by issue salience, then, this paper attempts to bridge these two approaches.

Theoretical Motivation

What do we mean by “representation”? As Achen (1978) outlines, studies of this sort often imply a liberal normative conception in which constituents’ opinions ought to be mirrored by their representatives (Pitkin 1967). Achen’s measures of “proximity” and “responsiveness” map nicely to this standard, and variations on the latter have formed the basis for most subsequent studies of representation in specific policy domains. However, one implication immediately arises from this conception of representation: Homogeneous districts – those in which citizens’ opinions are more similar to one other – should more easily be represented than heterogeneous ones. This connection between diversity and representation has

been cited in the literature as one of the possible factors leading to a departure from median-voter predictions (Gerber and Lewis 2004).

Indeed, one of the enduring puzzles of electoral politics is the divergence between the clear predictions of Downs' stylized model of candidate competition (1957) and the empirical reality. For example, candidates from different parties have systematic differences despite competing to represent the same constituents. Some attempts to address these inconsistencies imply modifications to the Downsian model such that candidates pay closer attention to the median voter among their supporters – that is, their same-party constituency (Clinton 2006). Others posit influence by interest groups, voter ignorance, campaign finance, the existence of “safe” seats, and the role of issue salience (Bafumi and Herron 2007). Any of these mediating factors can impact the distance between the median ideology of a district and the ideology of its representative in Congress.

A useful way to think about representation, given this theoretical and empirical jumble, is to conceive of the linkage between constituents and their political leaders as a principal-agent problem (Peltzman 1984). Citizens elect candidates to office in order to represent their views as faithfully as possible, but evaluations – in theory, based on the voting record in Congress (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010) – require effort and attention. In this way, the people's “supreme controlling power” over their leaders, as John Stuart Mill once envisioned, can actually be incomplete and haphazard. No one pays full attention to the agent's every public utterance or action, most pay no attention at all, and some focus only on a specific subset of the agent's behavior. This observation suggests the crucial

role of public vigilance in evaluating – and constraining – a representative’s behavior. Yet, as the growing literature on policy responsiveness might imply, many citizens evaluate their representatives on specific issues – and their priorities might not be shared across the district. If representatives can get away with voting differently than the median voter on certain issues, one possible explanation is that those issues aren’t salient. And if salience helps to drive systematic differences between representatives’ voting behavior and the views of their constituents, then measures of this phenomenon need to be taken seriously on the district level.

The problem with “salience” as a concept in politics is that different issues can be salient for different people. In 2006, the year I focus on, immigration was highly salient – that is, many people thought it was the most important issue facing the country, and it was an actively debated issue in Congress. But immigration matters more for some people than for others, and this manifests itself differently in various regions of the country. One way to think about this is to resurrect the concept of “issue publics,” groups of people that consistently vote on the basis of a specific issue (Converse 1964). In an analysis of salience and issue publics using data from the NES, Krosnick (1990) concluded that “the nation may be conceived of as an amalgamation of issue publics, groups of people with highly important attitudes toward specific policy options. Individuals tend to belong to only a few issue publics, and it seems that the majority of Americans probably fall into at least one.” Depending on the year, the region, and other macro- and micro-level political factors, then, people may evaluate their representatives’ behavior through the lens of issues they particularly care about or issues that are particularly salient.

Aggregating up to the district level, the overall fragmentation of individuals' attention to various issues – itself a form of diversity – should affect how well the agent is carrying out the wishes of his or her principals.

My theoretical expectations are as follows: The more fragmented citizens' attention is among many potential issues of interest, the closer their average ideology should be to that of their representative. Conversely, the more lopsided constituents' attention, the more divergent the representative's ideology from that of his or her district. The latter case does not necessarily contradict findings of convergence on individual policies of importance to specific issue publics. In fact, they can be easily reconciled. As Lax and Phillips (2009b) write, "By giving voters what they want on the more salient issues, legislators may be able to, in other policy areas, pursue their own policy goals, repay interest groups for prior and future support, satisfy core constituencies, etc." This implies that responsiveness on specific issues may in fact be directly related to shirking on others. Yet the opposite effect is also plausible: Perhaps, when salience is low on particular issues, legislators fall back on ideology as a cue to their constituents' more general leanings. This could result in *better* ideological representation (perhaps at the possible expense of misreading opinion on a particular policy). The research question then boils down to the following: Do legislators who represent their constituents well on salient issues tend to represent them well overall? Or are the salient issues the exception?

Measuring Salience and Ideology

Rather than evaluate responsiveness on a host of issues, my strategy is to look at the overall reflection of constituent opinion in representative behavior as measured by ideology. As I will show, there has been considerable debate about how best to measure ideology on the state level. The ideology of members of Congress is more straightforward: I use the first dimension of Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE scores, which scale roll-call votes using a factor-analytic technique. The first dimension is widely believed to reflect the traditional left-right political spectrum as manifested in the two-party system. So the ideology measurement I will be using is the *latent* ideology of Congress members, derived from their actual voting behavior.

Using MRP to simulate state-level (and now, district-level) opinion is the most recent advance in the debate over how to report citizens' ideological tendencies in a valid measure. The most well-known method, disaggregation, was developed by Erikson, Wright & McIver (1993), who found that many national-level *New York Times*/CBS polls could be combined and then separated into relatively unbiased state-level samples. These samples could then be used to compute the average self-reported ideology in each state, which the authors found to be notably stable over time. The shortcoming of this work is that, depending on the sample size of the individual surveys, results from a decade or more might be necessary to generate representative samples on the state level. Disaggregating to the district level using a similar method would be prohibitively difficult. The original EWM method has been challenged by other scholars who contend that state-level ideology is much more fluid than disaggregation suggests. Furthermore, they contend, if

ideology is so stable, then it may be necessary to look elsewhere – in particular, to national-level political and economic trends – to explain the partisan fluidity of state Congressional delegations and policies. One competing measure, devised by Berry et al. (1998), takes interest groups’ scores of both members of Congress and their electoral challengers, weighting the two by vote share. This “citizen ideology” measure has been challenged by others (Carsey and Harden 2010) as closer to elite-level ideology, and by EWM themselves (2007) as essentially a measure of the partisan leanings of states’ Congressional delegations, which would explain why it fluctuates from year to year. The latter criticism is especially devastating, since it implies a major assumption: As the authors write, “While some researchers might argue that the votes of a state’s congressional delegation is an ideological mirror of its electorate, we think that this idea serves better as a proposition to be tested than as assumption on which to base further analysis.” In short, it is clear that the choice of measure can have a major impact on our empirical understanding and theoretical conception of representation and policy responsiveness in the states. I overcome the potential shortcomings of the latter approach, and the restrictions imposed by survey data in the former, by employing MRP on the district level. In this way, I make no assumption that members of Congress represent the median voter in an ideological sense. Finally, by focusing on districts as the unit of analysis, I can more precisely analyze the mechanism of representation in Congress than on the state level.

The measure of district-level ideology that I use, then, is constructed from successive MRP simulations of the percentage of liberal and conservative residents.

I compute the liberal share and conservative share of these two percentages in each district, then I subtract the conservative share from the liberal one. The result is a measure of the difference between the proportions of liberal versus conservative residents in each district. I take this as a proxy for the overall liberalism of a district.

Salience is a tricky concept to capture. In one notable study, RePass (1971) coded an open-ended question in the 1960 and 1964 National Election Studies to construct an index of which issues most concerned the respondents. Other authors have used the volume of coverage in national news media as a rough proxy for salience (Lax and Phillips 2009b). Unfortunately, neither such approach is plausible on the district level.¹ Instead, I take a question from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study that asks respondents to name the most important issue facing the nation. Given Krosnick's observations about issue publics, it seems justifiable to use a measure that asks only for the *most* important issue rather than a ranking; moreover, the dichotomous nature of the responses is well suited to the MRP simulation technique for generating district-level estimates. Once this is done, the data yields reasonably accurate proportions in each district of people who view a given issue as the most important facing the nation. To be clear, this could be capturing either a fleeting concern (salience) or a more permanent focus of attention (to members of issue publics). The assumption I make is that respondents at the time actually evaluate their representatives' behavior through the lens of that

¹ This resolves a potential endogeneity problem in which government action or policy adoption could drive media coverage; looking at the local level makes it possible to identify variation in the relative importance of *national* issues of concern without having to worry about what the quantity of media coverage actually captures.

issue – or at least, that the representatives believe this to be the case. A body of research beginning with Page and Shapiro (1983) finds evidence for increased responsiveness on more salient issues (and especially morally tinged, highly charged ones).

Once these proportions have been generated, they need to be aggregated into a single measure that captures the dispersion of constituents' attention among the many issues they could conceivably follow. To take one extreme, everyone who pays attention to politics at all in a given district might be motivated solely by the problem of crime. All constituents would comprise the issue public for crime, the most salient issue in that district. Their representative would understand that his behavior and policy pronouncements on that issue must, more than any other, reflect exactly what he believes the median voter thinks about crime. On the other extreme, there might be countless relatively small issue publics, each of which cares primarily about a single policy. To account for these possibilities and anything in between, I construct a modified Herfindahl index for each district. This index, originally devised to study monopolies in economics, is typically used in sociology to measure diversity; it has been adapted in political science to measure political, social, and ethnic diversity in the American states (Sullivan 1973) and, more recently, to measure ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) and other types of heterogeneity around the world. Typically, the index is simply the sum of squared shares of each type of group – say, percentages of each ethnicity or language group in a region. Instead, I use the district-level simulations of each “issue public” of interest as the components of the index. The result is a fraction between 0 and 1 that

indicates how “dispersed” constituents are among the various issues. Alternately, it can be thought of as a measure of the electorate’s divided attention:

$$\sum (p_i)^2 \text{ for } i = 1 \text{ to } n \text{ issues,}$$

where p_i is the fraction of respondents who believe issue i is the most important.

Viewing this district-level salience index as the quantity of interest, then, it will first serve as an independent variable whose effect on outcomes – representatives’ ideology – will be tested, controlling for other factors. The next stage of the investigation will then focus on the *difference* between constituent and representative ideology, in absolute value, as a function of the salience index and other predictors. This most closely corresponds to the theoretical connection between salience, issue publics, and representation. Before constructing this dependent variable, I standardize both the DW-NOMINATE scores and constituent ideology scores so that they are on a comparable scale.² The result is a measure of ideological proximity between constituents and their representatives.

One final note about the measures: As noted, my choice of using both DW-NOMINATE scores and simulated district-level ideology means that I am comparing two quantities on (more or less) the same scale. While the values of each are calculated in completely different ways, they map onto the same liberal-to-conservative space and thus avoid the problem – first identified by EWM (1993) – of comparing policy outcomes to citizen ideology, which lack a common metric.

² I subtract the mean and divide by the standard deviation.

Data and Method

My primary data source is the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, which was given in several online waves before and after the midterm elections that year. With approximately 36,500 adult respondents in a stratified national sample over that period, the survey has more than enough observations for simulating accurate estimates for subnational units such as districts. The survey was administered jointly by 36 teams at universities across the country via Polimetrix, which recruits participants online. To correct for potential opt-in selection bias, proximity matching was used to construct a “representative” sample (Ansolabehere 2010).

The 2006 CCES survey is a well-suited data source for at least two reasons. First, its motivating goal is to serve studies of the representation process, from voters to members of Congress. As such, it contains state and district indicators for each observation, extensive demographic variables, and questions about respondents’ perceptions of their own representatives and the most important issues facing the country. And second, the sample size is very large – more than large enough to accurately simulate opinion on the district level, as numerous validity tests performed by Warshaw and Rodden (2010, unpublished manuscript) prove. The particular question I use to construct the Herfindahl index asks: “What is the most important problem facing the country?” Respondents are given 18 possible responses, plus an open-ended “Other” option (which 5.36% chose). By far, the

modal choice was the Iraq war (23.64%), followed by terrorism (17.53%), corruption in government (11.29%), and immigration (11.19%). “Health care and health costs” was just starting to become a major issue, with 8.11% of respondents choosing it as the most important problem, and the economy/jobs ranked sixth at 6.13%.

To measure ideology and party identification, I use the five-point ideology scale and seven-point party ID scale from the survey, respectively. The latter is constructed from a series of three questions designed to pinpoint “leaners” and to distinguish between “strong” and “weak” party identifiers. In order to reduce these measures to dichotomous indicators, I treat strong and weak identifiers the same, and I collapse the two ideology categories (regular and “very”) for both liberals and conservatives while discarding the moderates. After these coding procedures, I am left with dichotomous indicators for liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, and each of the major issues considered important by respondents. This is necessary because MRP uses multilevel logit (ordered logit is not available) and cannot handle more than two categories in the dependent variable.

Multilevel regression and poststratification was developed to generate reliable estimates of public opinion in subnational units from national surveys (Park, Gelman and Bafumi 2004; Gelman and Hill 2005). It proceeds in two steps. First, an individual-level model is estimated on the national sample, including demographic and geographic variables as predictors with varying slopes. Next, the random effects from each of these non-nested categories are summed up for each possible combination of the demographic and geographic factors. The estimates for

each combination are then weighted and summed by their actual occurrence in each district. These weights are obtained from Census data.³ To model district-level opinion, I create a combined race/gender variable from the CCES data and code five education categories that correspond with the Census's measure. The model is as follows:

$$\Pr(y_i=1) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\gamma_0 + \alpha_{r[i]}^{\text{racegender}} + \alpha_{e[i]}^{\text{edu}} + \alpha_{d[i]}^{\text{district}})$$

where

$$\alpha_{r}^{\text{racegender}} \sim N(0, \sigma^2_{\text{racegender}}), \text{ for } r = 1, \dots, 8$$

$$\alpha_{e}^{\text{edu}} \sim N(0, \sigma^2_{\text{edu}}), \text{ for } e = 1, \dots, 5$$

$$\alpha_{d}^{\text{district}} \sim N(\alpha_{s[d]}^{\text{state}} + \gamma_0 \cdot \text{income}_d + \gamma_1 \cdot \text{urban}_d + \gamma_2 \cdot \text{vets}_d, \sigma^2_{\text{district}}), \text{ for } d = 1, \dots, 436$$

$$\alpha_{s}^{\text{state}} \sim N(\alpha_{z[s]}^{\text{region}} + \beta \cdot \text{pctrelig}_s, \sigma^2_{\text{state}}), \text{ for } s = 1, \dots, 51$$

$$\alpha_{z}^{\text{region}} \sim N(0, \sigma^2_{\text{region}}), \text{ for } z = 1, \dots, 5$$

Here, the dependent variable y is any of the dichotomous measures I am simulating from the CCES survey on the district level: liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, and one for each of the “most important” issue areas. At the individual level, the probability that the dependent variable is 1 is modeled as a function of the respondent's race, gender, and education level, along with the district in which he or she lives. The demographic coefficients are allowed to vary

³ There are some limitations with Census data on the district level, most notably that data is based on people 25 years of age or older. Rodden and Warshaw note this but also point out that given the relative political participation of those aged 18-25, this is a negligible loss.

over each category and given noninformative priors. The district coefficients are in turn drawn from a normal distribution modeled on the state in which it is located, in addition to median income, urbanization, and percent of residents who are military veterans. State coefficients, finally, are modeled as a function of region and the percent of “religious” and Mormon residents.⁴

Results

The district-level ideology measure has strong external validity. The most conservative district, according to the measure, is AL-04, which supported John McCain in the 2008 election with his highest margin in the state. Barack Obama, meanwhile, received his second-lowest vote share in the entire country there. A likely factor driving the estimate is that the district has the lowest percentage of African Americans in Alabama, in addition to a relatively low median income. The most liberal district is NY-15 – upper Manhattan covering Harlem, Morningside Heights, and Columbia University, and represented by Democrat Charles Rangel. The correlation between the ideology measure and the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE scores is 0.65. It is important to note that DW-NOMINATE scores report imputed ideology for each member of Congress over his or her entire tenure as a representative, so it is possible that the correlation understates ideological congruence for a specific year (in this case, 2006). In order to test this possibility, I

⁴ All of the group-level covariates used in the model are from the Census, with the exception of the religion data, which comes from the Association of Religious Data Archives 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Study.

also took the Nokken-Poole DW-NOMINATE scores recalculated separately for each Congress. I found that in fact, the correlation is virtually the same, and the correlation between the two DW-NOMINATE variables (109th Congress separately vs. scores over all Congresses) is .995. Therefore, I conclude that there are no year-specific effects biasing my analysis. The models I report below yield substantively identical results regardless of which measure I use.

First, with districts as the unit of analysis (N=435; D.C. not included in DW-NOMINATE) I run a straightforward linear regression with normalized DW-NOMINATE scores as the dependent variable, and with the simulated constituent ideology measure, the Herfindahl index, and controls as the predictors. The index I use in this model covers the six most frequently mentioned issues only, but including all or most issues does not change the results. The controls I include are *sharediff*, the difference in self-reported party ID share (Democrat-Republican), *voteshare*, Obama's 2008 two-party vote share in the district, and district-level covariates: percent urban, percent veterans, and (logged) median income.

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-0.0130	1.4470	-0.01	0.9928
ideo.norm	-0.0453	0.1050	-0.43	0.6668
sharediff	-0.7837	0.4543	-1.73	0.0852
voteshare	-4.5347	0.4586	-9.89	0.0000
my.vars\$herfindahl	7.8556	3.1040	2.53	0.0117
gcv\$pct.urban	0.6875	0.2493	2.76	0.0061

gcv\$vets	-1.4869	1.7867	-0.83	0.4057
gcv\$inc	0.1177	0.1611	0.73	0.4654

As is clear from the table above, the Herfindahl index has a significant effect on the dependent variable. In line with my theoretical predictions, it seems to have a mediating effect on the overall translation of constituent ideology to representative ideology (adjusted R^2 is approximately 0.60). So far, it is difficult to interpret the coefficient on the predictor of interest. However, by switching the dependent variable to the absolute value of the difference between the normalized DW-NOMINATE and constituent ideology scores – in effect, subtracting ideology from both sides of the equation and taking the absolute value – I am analyzing precisely the quantity of interest. By doing so, I also remove any fleeting directional component that could otherwise cloud the relationship between salience and representation. Below, I report the results of a linear model with ideological distance as the dependent variable:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	6.4741	2.1573	3.00	0.0029
sharediff	-0.8750	0.2925	-2.99	0.0029
herf3	7.3318	2.1676	3.38	0.0008
gcv\$pct.urban	-0.5729	0.1609	-3.56	0.0004
gcv\$vets	-4.3139	1.1678	-3.69	0.0002
gcv\$inc	-0.5239	0.2396	-2.19	0.0293

voteshare	-1.2057	0.3573	-3.37	0.0008
gcvsouth	-0.1965	0.0585	-3.36	0.0009
factor(dw.nom\$party)200	-0.4265	0.0591	-7.21	0.0000
pctblack	0.0086	0.0022	3.90	0.0001
pctbach	0.0124	0.0059	2.10	0.0366
sharediff:factor(dw.nom\$party)200	3.2633	0.3291	9.92	0.0000

Here, I use a Herfindahl index that covers most of the issues from the CCES survey. It is again strongly statistically significant (at the $p < .001$ level). In addition to the previous controls, I include the percent of each district's population that is African American and the percent that has at least a bachelor's degree; I want to account for any other factors that could affect overall ideological congruence independent of mere attention to specific issues.⁵ I also include a dummy for districts located in Southern states. There is one additional issue: Theoretically, candidates should behave differently if their party affiliation diverges from the district median. Imagine a Republican representative from a Democratic-leaning district, or vice versa. In such cases, constituents might also evaluate their representatives differently. To account for this, I include a dummy for the party of a district's representative and an interaction between this dummy and the overall difference in party ID share in the state. Both are highly statistically significant. The adjusted R^2 decreases here to about 0.29.

⁵ Out of concern that it may not be necessary to include these controls since they are already used in the individual-level MRP model, I ran the model without them and found substantively similar results.

Looking at the other predictors, it is clear that almost every variable has a statistically significant effect in the expected direction. For example, districts that are more urban and have higher median incomes have representatives who are more reflective of their mean ideology. Districts with larger African-American populations are more likely to have greater ideological divergence (although this effect is very small). One odd coefficient is that on the variable for the percentage of each district that has a bachelor's degree or higher. The expectation would be for more highly educated districts to have better representation overall (e.g., a negative coefficient rather than a positive one). I investigate this anomaly by including an interaction of the variable with income under the theory that the two are highly correlated and that the model could be picking up a spurious effect. As expected, the coefficient on percent with bachelor's degrees is now in the predicted direction (although insignificant). Finally, the interaction between the party of the representative and the difference in district party share has the expected effect. For the base category (Democrat), the slope on the difference in party share is negative: The more Democratic a district is, the less divergence between its ideology and that of its Democratic member of Congress. This slope becomes positive, however, when the interaction kicks in for a Republican legislator: We see greater distance between the Republican representative's ideology and that of his or her constituents as they get more Democratic.

Next, I investigate the possibility that my results are being driven by a particular subset of the issues considered important by constituents. I run the same model again using different versions of the salience index, each time including a

different mix of component issues – “liberal” issues (Iraq, health care, poverty, the environment, etc.), “conservative” issues (abortion, terrorism, etc.), social issues (gay marriage, abortion), economic issues (taxes, jobs and the economy), and all *but* social issues. It turns out that the issues mattering most to liberals have a strongly significant effect, but the conservative index has no statistical significance at all. Moreover, social issues – at least in 2006 – seemed not to have much salience. Here is the model with the liberal index included:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	5.0116	2.1011	2.39	0.0175
sharediff	-1.0433	0.3051	-3.42	0.0007
herf.l	8.8179	3.0780	2.86	0.0044
gcv\$pct.urban	-0.4948	0.1564	-3.16	0.0017
gcv\$vets	-4.1928	1.1703	-3.58	0.0004
gcv\$inc	-0.3281	0.2292	-1.43	0.1530
voteshare	-1.2974	0.3619	-3.59	0.0004
gcv\$south	-0.1855	0.0585	-3.17	0.0016
factor(dw.nom\$party)200	-0.4110	0.0589	-6.97	0.0000
pctblack	0.0074	0.0022	3.35	0.0009
pctbach	0.0075	0.0060	1.25	0.2127
sharediff:factor(dw.nom\$party)200	3.0776	0.3243	9.49	0.0000

From looking at the above tables, salience appears to have the strongest effect of all the predictors. However, it would actually be surprising if it had a greater impact on ideological divergence than, say, presidential vote share or other demographic factors. In order to make accurate inferences about the relative impact of each predictor, I run the model again with the variables normalized:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	1.0523	0.0472	22.30	0.0000
n.sharediff	-0.1761	0.0589	-2.99	0.0029
n.herf3	0.0971	0.0287	3.38	0.0008
n.pct.urban	-0.1136	0.0319	-3.56	0.0004
n.vets	-0.1008	0.0273	-3.69	0.0002
n.inc	-0.1315	0.0601	-2.19	0.0293
n.voteshare	-0.1801	0.0534	-3.37	0.0008
gcv\$south	-0.1965	0.0585	-3.36	0.0009
factor(dw.nom\$party)200	-0.2045	0.0616	-3.32	0.0010
n.pctblack	0.1270	0.0325	3.90	0.0001
n.pctbach	0.1199	0.0572	2.10	0.0366
n.sharediff:factor(dw.nom\$party)200	0.6568	0.0662	9.92	0.0000

Now, it becomes clear that while salience, or the importance of issue publics, is significant, it has a modest effect on the outcome compared to the other predictors. I tried to quantify this further by comparing two logit models predicting

the party of a district's representative. The first model predicts the party on the basis of constituent ideology and the *sharediff* variable used above; the second model also includes the Herfindahl index. I then compute the percent correctly predicted (PCP) and expected percent correctly predicted (ePCP). The PCP increases from 81% to 82.5%, a modest increase in accuracy of 1.7%. The ePCP, considered by many to be a better measure (Herron 1999), increases from 73% to 74%, an improvement of about 1.1% -- the second model correctly predicts an additional four to five seats in Congress.

Discussion

The answer to my first question, whether ideology on the district level broadly explains legislators' overall ideology as manifested in their roll-call behavior, is clearly yes – at least to an extent. This is seen in the first model above, although much of the explanatory power is taken up by the difference in district-level party share and Obama vote share (themselves strongly predictive of ideology). Dropping these controls would give constituent ideology a statistically significant and strong effect on representative ideology. The most important finding from the models above is that the coefficient on the salience index is always positive. In the final model above, this means that one standard-deviation increase in the value of the index in a district is associated with about a 0.1-standard-deviation increase in ideological distance between constituent ideology and the district's Congressional representative. What does it mean when the salience index increases?

In effect, larger proportions of people are focusing on fewer issues. In theory, this causes the ideological space to collapse into fewer dimensions, making evaluations of the representative more direct and straightforward. Following this reasoning, overall divergence likely increases because members of Congress have greater freedom in roll call votes on issues that their constituents are *not* following as closely. The result is congruence on individual issues, but greater divergence overall. In other words, issue publics truly matter: If an issue is salient and a significant share of the population believes it is important enough, a district's member of Congress will likely respond. However, since the translation of constituent ideology to roll-call ideology is mediated by many factors including salience, other policy areas of vital importance can be overlooked. This is why lower values of the salience index – signifying attention to issues that is more dispersed among district constituents in the aggregate – are associated with less distance between district and representative ideology.

To take an example, the district with the highest value of the Herfindahl index is MI-13, which includes the east side of Detroit. A full third of respondents in the CCES survey from that district (32 out of 98) said that jobs and the economy were the most important problem facing the nation – no other issue came close. (This figure was just over 6% among respondents nationwide.) Eighteen percent in the district said Iraq, and 10 percent chose health care. A look at the constituents' ideology and that of their representative gives an illustration of the dynamic captured in the models above. The representative, Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, has a normalized DW-NOMINATE score of -1.24 (where negative is left of center),

while the district ideology measure yields a score of 1.95 (where positive is left of center), which is about two standard deviations more liberal than the mean. This means that the representative was nearly three-fourths of a standard deviation to the right of her constituents overall. The lowest value of the index, by contrast, is for Utah's 3rd Congressional district. The responses in the CCES survey show a more dispersed set of concerns than in MI-13: 16.4%, the highest percentage, said corruption was the most important issue facing the nation, followed closely by Iraq, terrorism, and immigration. Other issues had about even support, such as poverty (6.5%). Here, Rep. Chris Cannon was also more conservative than his constituents, but not by as much (about 0.45 s.d.). Given the apparent directional pattern in these divergences, it is possible that the national partisan wave of 2006 was playing a role in defining the issues on which constituents were evaluating their representatives (which, as we know, heavily benefited the Democrats in the election). As a result, it is not clear that similar partisan consistencies would be evident in other years.

Since overall ideology is imputed from votes on many different issues, perhaps it is not all that surprising to see more divergence associated with increasing attention paid by specific issue publics. Partially, this is a result of the interaction between issues and ideology, a demonstration that congruence on specific policies can be associated with an agent's ideological drift on other dimensions. If the literature on policy congruence has taught us anything, it is that state electoral institutions are broadly responsive to the public's opinions (but more so for some issues than others). This paper has shown that more insight might be gained by examining overall representation on an ideological basis. Moreover, issue

publics and salience are concepts that deserve further study in the study of representation in the American states.

Conclusion

These findings imply that even the existence of “fringe” issues – those with only a marginal following nationwide – can have an impact on how well overall a district’s median ideology is mirrored by its representative in the national legislature. To be sure, the effects identified in this paper are modest. But, now that improved methodology and computing power have made district-level opinion estimates accessible, it should be possible to extend the concepts used here – salience and issue publics – by developing better measures and more precisely pinpointing the interaction of ideology, issue opinion, and district-level representation.

A number of extensions to this analysis are possible. First, future studies could examine changes in salience and their effects on ideology and political outcomes over time. The year 2006 was a major political inflection point in the United States, and it is possible that the issues chosen in the survey simply reflected the anger in the electorate toward the Bush administration as it manifested itself midway through the president’s second term. Whether this is a structural artifact of a specific year could be tested by examining multiple surveys over several successive election years. Next, I foresee possible improvements to the salience measure by incorporating some notion of respondents’ knowledge of the issues, in

addition to their actual policy positions. Finally, the mechanisms examined here investigate a particular aspect of the electoral connection but stop short of incorporating elections themselves. Bringing them into the analysis – along with other national factors, such as partisan mood and economic conditions – could potentially strengthen the causal chain.

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