

The Influence of Partisan Polarization and Geographic Neighborhood Context on Congressional Cosponsorship Policy Networks*

Carlos Algara and Ross Butters[†]

June 2018

Abstract

The classical “Textbook Theory” of Congress posits that legislators are relatively autonomous actors who work together on a bipartisan basis to maximize their probability of re-election (Shepsle 1989). This classical district-centered theory of Congress posits that legislators are motivated to engage in bipartisan legislative behavior and work together by the geographical similarity of their respective districts. Congressional scholars have largely cast doubt on the importance of district-centered considerations to inform the behavior of legislators, shifting the focus to partisan-centered preferences (Rohde 1991, Cox & McCubbins 1993, 2005). Moreover, while scholars have debated these theories, they have said relatively little about the salience of these theories across varying policy issues. Using the distinct expression of legislative behavior provide by bill co-sponsorship and geographic proximity methods we explore the extent to which district similarity influences how legislators work together in the Congressional network across varying degrees of partisan polarization. Treating Congress as a series of distinct policy networks and using exponential random graph models (ERGM), we evaluate a theory arguing that geographic proximity is a salient predictor of legislator cooperation in district-centered policy domains (i.e. agriculture, land management), even during the hyper-partisan contemporary Congress. These results have implications for the role which district-centered considerations plays in informing congressional cooperation across differing policy domains and levels of partisan polarization.

Key words: Congressional policy networks, Textbook Congress, District-Centered geographical proximity

*Preliminary abstract prepared for the 2018 Political Networks Annual Conference in Fairfax, VA (June 6-9, 2018). Working title presented as a placeholder.

[†]Department of Political Science, University of California, Davis