

Congressional Job Approval & Responsible Party Government: The Role of Partisanship & Ideology in Citizen Assessments of the Contemporary U.S. Congress

Carlos Algara*

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Abstract

Do citizens weigh the ideological nature of collective representation provided by Congress when assessing the job performance of their national legislature? While recent aggregate-level work suggests that congressional approval rises when Congress responds to the ideological preferences of the mass public, individual-level models posit that approval is a function of partisanship or valence considerations, with little consideration for policy. I fill this disconnect between two lines of research by presenting a model arguing that citizens weigh the ideological representation provided by their Congress in the face of two contrasting options of collective ideological representation in the responsible party government era. Using cross-sectional and panel survey data which allow for scaling citizens and the congressional parties in the same ideological space, I find that majority co-partisans and citizens closer in ideological proximity to the governing majority are more likely to approve of Congress. I also find that this the relationship between ideological proximity and approval is independent of partisanship. These findings have implications for the capacity of citizens to assess the collective representation of the chief policy-making institution of their national government.

Key words: Collective legislative approval, ideological scaling, proximity, citizen political behavior

*Department of Political Science, University of California, Davis; *Email:* calgara@ucdavis.edu. *Website:* <https://calgara.github.io>.