

The Influence of Partisan Conflict & Policy Responsiveness on Majority Party Electoral Fortunes & Congressional Job Performance: A Time-Series Approach*

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Abstract

Recent work suggests that the aggregate approval rating of the U.S. Congress is a function of both policy responsiveness by the institution and the level of partisan conflict between both parties (Ramirez 2009, 2012). However, standing models of the role of partisan conflict and policy responsiveness in congressional approval focus on Congress as a collective institution, rather than distinguishing between the legislative parties. In this paper, we specify a model which posits that policy responsiveness and partisan conflict not only influence approval of Congress as a whole, but also have differing effects on the electoral standing of the majority party in their relative generic ballot advantage to the minority party. We argue that partisan conflict decreases the generic congressional ballot advantage for the majority party and the approval rating of Congress as a collective institution. We also argue that policy responsiveness by Congress to the national mood raises the electoral standing of the majority party and the collective approval of Congress. Using a unique dataset of quarterly congressional approval and congressional generic ballot differentials from 1969 to 2016, we provide a comprehensive test of our model during varying periods of congressional polarization.

Key words: congressional approval, generic congressional ballot partisan conflict, policy responsiveness

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