

Examining Constituency Service: Evidence from a Census of US Federal Agencies

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Abstract

A risk for constituents in representation is that experienced legislators with more power in the institution will allocate more effort to broad public policy goals, while shirking on providing district-specific benefits for constituents, such as constituency service. While there is a large literature that argues constituency service is a key component of representation and an important component of the incumbency advantage, no study has documented how legislators' effort on constituency service changes as they acquire more power in Congress and experience. To examine how increased power and experience affects legislators' provision of service we assemble a massive new database of nearly 350,000 Congressional requests to agencies between 2007 and 2017 obtained through over 396 FOIA requests, a near census of federal departments, agencies, and sub-agencies. Using this data set, we demonstrate that as legislators acquire power and experience in Washington, they deliver more constituency service to their constituents. When legislators are promoted in the institution legislators offer more constituency service requests. Further, we show that legislators provide less constituency service in their first year in Congress and that when districts elect a new representative, there is a substantial decrease in constituency service provided. In a series of robustness checks we show that our findings are not the result of constituent demand, nor is it merely a result of more experienced legislators being more easily recognized. Rather than experienced and powerful legislators focusing their efforts in Washington and away from their district, we demonstrate that legislators use increased resources to provide more services for constituents.

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1 Introduction

One of the oldest traditions of legislative representation in American politics is that of constituency service—the ways in which legislators help to channel and articulate individual constituent’s requests to the government. Constituency service is when Members of Congress “provid[e] help to individuals, groups, and localities in coping with the federal government” (Fenno, 1978). This tradition dates back to the first congresses when constituents sought assistance with Revolutionary War pensions (Eckman, 2017). Today constituents seek assistance with a wide range of topics from Social Security, Disability, and Veterans Benefits to Citizenship Applications to complaints about pollution and employment discrimination. Members also serve constituents by advocating on behalf of state or local governments or nonprofits who apply for federal grants, permits, or disaster recovery funds. Advocating on behalf of their constituents to federal agencies is an important facet of modern legislators’ jobs, and its growth has been used to explain the presence of the incumbency advantage (King, 1991).

Yet despite the centrality of constituency service in theories of congressional representation, constituency service remains one of the most opaque and least understood congressional activities. Indeed, we are not the first to observe the relative lack of empirical attention to constituency service in the literature. Over thirty years ago Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) began their seminal book *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence* with that same observation, and much of what we know empirically today about constituency service is due to their surveys of legislators, legislative staff, and constituents.

We tackle these classic empirical questions about constituency service with a new approach—by looking at when legislators contact government agencies on behalf of their constituents. Recent work using data on congressional correspondence has yielded important findings regarding the policy strategies of cross-pressured legislators (Ritchie, 2017), distributive politics (Mills and Kalaf-Hughes, 2015), descriptive representation (Lowande, Ritchie and Lauterbach, 2018), and the role of ideology in congressional oversight (Lowande, 2018).

We build on this work in this paper to address long-standing questions about how legislators balance the pursuit of legislative goals in Washington with the provision of constituency service. There are competing theoretical expectations about how legislators’ experience and power in Washington will affect the amount of constituency service they provide constituents back home. On the one hand, we might expect that power and experience will increase the levels of service. Drawing on formal models of accountability (for example, Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2006)), we might expect that if constituency service enables elected officials to demonstrate competence to their constituents, then increased power and resources in Washington will result in increased levels of service to constituents. This increase in service occurs as legislators either

siphon off some of their increased resources or use the increased resources that come with better committee assignments fungibly, allowing them to shift more effort to constituency service to satisfy the primary goal of reelection. Similarly, it could be that newly elected members of Congress incur start-up costs when they enter office. If start up costs are present, then incumbent legislators have an advantage, because their replacements—even if they will be more competent eventually—will necessarily provide less constituency service at the outset, but the level of service will rise as legislators hire staff and they establish a system for handling constituency caseload.

On the other hand, we might expect that as legislators spend more time in Washington and gain prestige they become less attentive to the district and their constituents and therefore decrease levels of service provided to constituents. This is articulated in theories of representation with a perceived trade-off between experienced legislators who wield institutional power within Washington and more recently elected legislators who are attentive to the district. As legislators acquire power in the institution, it is often asserted that they obtain “Potomac fever” and devote less attention to constituents back in the district (Fenno, 1978). A similar argument is made in the popular press (Edwards, 2005) and evoked in rallying cries to “drain the swamp” of politicians accused paying too much attention to Washington policy elite and not enough attention to their constituents back home (Rosenblatt, 2016). It seems intuitive that as they spend more time in Washington and assume more important roles in Congress, legislators would have less time for individual constituents. As attention drifts, we might also imagine that legislators allocate more of their resources towards their policy work. This might be particularly true as representatives occupy increasingly powerful positions in the institution—such as committee chairs or obtain seats on prestigious committees. While committee chairs have additional staff to handle legislative affairs, supervising these staff may direct a chairs’ attention to policy work.

To test how legislators alter constituency service with changes in power in Congress and experience in Washington, we use a massive new collection of constituency service requests to understand how legislators provision of service changes as they gain expertise and experience in the institution. To demonstrate how institutional power affects district attention, we utilize a new data set of 349,337 correspondences between members of Congress and constituents we compiled through hundreds of freedom of information act requests. Using this new data set, we also establish some important stylized facts about when and how elected officials contact federal agencies. We show that letter writing is not evenly distributed. Some members simply use this tactic more than others, even within strata of institutional power. Legislators’ district characteristics also helps explain their use of constituency service: senators from larger states make more requests. And legislators whose districts are composed of a larger proportion of veterans make more requests to the Veterans’ Administration, while those represent districts with a larger proportion of older residents make more requests

to the Social Security Administration. We also show that most contact with federal agencies is made on behalf of constituents. Using a manual hand-coding of the content of service requests, we show that nearly 90% of requests are made on behalf of constituents and only 10% are focused on policy related federal oversight. In general, the legislators who engage the bureaucracy do so broadly, across many agencies and advocate both for general policy and for individual constituents.

Using our new data set of constituency service requests, we show that as legislators spend more time in Congress they acquire expertise and access to resources that increase their provision of constituency service, rather than directing attention away from the district. In our most stringent specification, a within-legislator-agency pair difference-in-differences design, we show that more prestigious committee assignments cause legislators to provide more constituency service. Using a similar difference-in-differences design, we also show that newly elected legislators make fewer constituency service requests and that electing a new legislator causes a large drop in constituency service requests from a district's representative. We show that this difference is not due to selection in the sophomore election: we find a near identical effect when we restrict our analysis to representatives who last until their third year in office. Further, we show that legislators continue focusing on constituency service when contacting federal agencies as they acquire more power and experience in Washington.

Through a series of robustness checks and additional analyses, we show that the effects we identify are not the result of constituents strategically changing their demands for help, rather than reflecting changes in legislator effort. We show that there is little evidence that individuals shift responses to more established offices when a new representative is elected. When House members lose an election, there is no corresponding increase in constituency service requests from the state's Senate delegation. Further, we show that more prestigious committee assignments do not increase representative's name recognition and that the increase in name recognition that comes from a longer tenure in Washington does not align with the changes in constituency service over a legislator's tenure. Finally, our research designs limit the influence of constituent demand that might be present, by ensuring that we make within district comparisons.

Our results provide important new insights into how elected officials allocate their effort over their legislative career. We demonstrate that incumbents' acquisition of experience and power in Washington not only enables them to transmit their constituents' views more effectively through policy representation and influence. It also enables these legislators to increase the amount of constituency service provided to the district. This suggests that constituents with experienced legislators are able to benefit from that experience and increased prestige—demonstrating that there is no tradeoff between increased policy demand in the institution and particularistic goods in the district. Our results also help to explain how constituency service can contribute to the incumbency advantage: when constituents choose between legislators, they

necessarily will be forced to receive lower rates of constituency service if they want to replace an incumbent legislator . It also shows that popular concerns of legislators who have spent too much time in Washington and have lost touch with the district are misplaced. Rather, it is the legislators who have acquired experience and power in Washington who are best placed to deliver service for their constituents.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 explain divergent predictions about how legislators’ effort will be affected by institutional position and tenure in Congress. In Section 3 we explain our data collection process and provide basic summary statistics. Sections 4 and 5.3 show that better committee assignments and increased tenure cause more constituency service. And Section 6 provides robustness checks for our results and explores alternative explanations. We conclude in Section 7

2 How Does Experience and Power Affect Constituency Service?

A central tension in representation is how legislators balance their work on national level policy—such as passing legislation—and delivering particularistic goods to their constituents and district—such as providing constituent service. Legislators contact the bureaucracy to build support with constituents, because federal agencies have strong incentive to be responsive to elected officials. In fulfilling statutory missions, agencies must prioritize resources and use broad discretion, not only in processing visa, permit, and grant applications but in regulating private entities’ compliance with, for example, environmental, health, and labor laws. For a vast range of demands involving public or private actors, a federal agency will often be able to help if it prioritizes that demand over others.

Legislators are in a position to influence agency decisions. As public servants, agency staff may assign special importance to the demands of elected officials. For example, many agencies tag congressional correspondence as “VIP” and agency protocols often require faster response deadlines and higher signature levels. Agencies also have strategic reasons to meet congressional demands. Ad hoc review of a social security disbursement, visa application, or pipeline permit may be inefficient and diverge from protocol but nevertheless, a small price to pay if it could help the agency gain a small advantage in securing desired authorizations and budgets. Bureaucrats have incentives to build relationships and reputations that enhance their standing among members of Congress and those who have their ear, and they actively do so (Carpenter, 2001). In short, complying with legislator request may help agencies achieve their own goals. If an agency aims to grow its coalition of political supporters, we would expect them to frequently accommodate congressional requests.

Legislators’ experience in Washington, their on the job learning, and their acquisition of power in the institution, are likely to affect how they strike the balance between delivering service to constituents and

working on broader legislation. But there are competing theoretical expectations of how increased experience and power will affect how much constituency service legislators provide constituents and the kind of service they provide. On the one hand, formal models of constituency service predict that increased experience and power will cause legislators to bolster the amount of constituency service provided. Related to these models is the expectation that a new legislator will face significant start up costs as they hire new staff and establish the procedures that will effectively handle the constituency service case load. After these costs are incurred, constituency service would increase. On the other hand, concerns about legislators becoming fixated on careers in Washington lead to an expectation that power in Washington comes at the expense of constituencies, as legislators allocate more of their resources and efforts to influencing national level legislation. In this section, we explicate the logic of these distinct theoretical expectations in this section and explain why it is unclear how legislators with greater experience or prestige will alter their constituency service to constituents.

2.1 Why Experience and Power Could Decrease Legislators’ Constituency Service Effort

As elected officials garner more experience in Congress and more in the institution, one set of theoretical models lead to an expectation that the amount of constituency service would increase. An influential set of formal theory papers argue that constituents are fundamentally engaged in a screening task: attempting to identify elected officials who are competent and able to effectively deliver representation to the district (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2006; Gordon and Landa, 2009). Under this model of representation, constituency service helps reelection minded legislators increase their chance of reelection if legislators are able to exceed constituent’s expectations of the kinds of service that legislators will provide constituents.

Critically, constituents’ demands for service and for legislators to demonstrate their competence do not go away, even as legislators acquire power in the institution. For example, after Richard Lugar (R-IN) lost a primary election to Richard Mourdock (R-IN) in 2012, analysts argued that “At its heart, Lugar’s defeat was attributable to the fact that he broke the political golden rule: Never lose touch with the people who elected you”. More generally, we might expect that even if constituents are supportive of the power their representative has over policy, they still expect that those elected officials will be attentive to the district and to demonstrate their competence with constituency service. This would induce elected officials to continue to focus on providing goods to the district, in order to maintain their chance at reelection.

The result is that these models predict that as a legislators’ resources increase, they will increase their levels of constituency service (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2006, Proposition 1). There are two mecha-

nisms that will be observationally equivalent for our results: increased resources and an increased likelihood of success when making a request. First, as legislators acquire more prestige in Washington then they usually acquire more resources. For example, becoming chair of a Congressional committee provides legislators with better access to committee staff and a larger budget. Even if these resources are earmarked for policy work, they can increase the resources legislators have available for constituency service. This is because legislators with more access to committee resources can use those resources for policy work, while then focusing the office resources on delivering constituency service (MICHIGAN GUYS CITATION). Second, as legislators become more powerful then agencies have a great incentive to be responsive. More powerful legislators can more easily alter an agency’s budget or create additional work through Congressional hearings. As a result, agencies often prioritize the service requests from the most powerful members of Congress. The increased likelihood of a response provides legislators with the opportunity to demonstrate their effectiveness to their constituents. This increases the marginal return on making service requests, providing more prestigious legislators with more incentive to make those requests.

Using a similar logic, we also expect that new legislators will face “start up” costs that will result in them making fewer constituency service requests to agencies. When a new legislator is elected to office, they face a substantial administrative burden. Not only does that legislator have to hire new staff and open district offices. The legislator also needs to establish protocols, priorities, and procedures in their office for handling constituency service requests. They also lack many of the “standard” responses that more established offices will use to handle particular kinds of letters. In terms of the Ashwort and Bueno de Mesquita (2006) this is increasing the marginal cost of providing constituency service. As legislators build an office and establish protocols, these start up costs should subside. And as a result, we would expect new legislators to make fewer constituency service requests, but only as they establish their constituency service operation within the office.

2.2 Why Experience and Power Could Decrease Legislators’ Constituency Service Efforts

A different theoretical expectation is that as legislators spend more time in Washington, they become detached from their district. This concern is present in the political science literature on Congressional careers. Richard Fenno documents that some members of Congress catch “Potomac fever”. While newly elected legislators may remain primarily focused on re-election, more senior legislators may prioritize other goals. As legislators acquire power in Congress, it is often asserted that they “go Washington” and devote less attention to constituents back in the district (Fenno, 1978). It seems intuitive that as they spend more

time in Washington and attain more influential institutional roles in Congress, legislators might focus on other priorities resulting in less attention paid to constituents. While Mayhew emphasizes re-election as the primary goal that motivates legislators, Fenno (1973) identifies five goals: re-election, power in the House, good public policy, a career beyond the House, and private gain. As Fenno describes in *Congressmen In Committees*, different institutional positions (congressional committees) can be more or less useful to accomplish these goals. Some committees may be more useful for achieving re-election, because they position you to be of service to your constituents, other committees may not be valued by constituents, but could be used to influence foreign policy, or still other committees might help a member achieve wealth or jobs in the future via lobbying positions or corporate board seats down the road.

A parallel argument about legislator behavior emerges in public advocacy for reforms in Washington, in particular with activists who advocate for term limits. These activists argue that elected officials who are repeatedly re-elected to Congress become detached from their district. For example, Ted Cruz (R-TX) argued in favor of term limits in a Senate hearing, stating that the politicians at the time of founding traveled to Washington and then planned to return to their district. In its place, Cruz argued that “Today, members of Congress aren’t doing that. Instead, far too many of our politicians come to Washington to stay”. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made a similar indictment against Joe Crowley in her successful primary challenge. She would regularly remind audiences that Crowley had “been there for 20 years” She would then ask, “What has this power been used for? It’s not being used for us.”

If members shift their focus from the district to a career in Washington, we should expect that their attention to constituent issues will also decrease. This would occur as more experienced legislators allocate staff to address broad legislation in Washington, or as legislators who acquire more power focus their efforts on law making, rather than delivering goods to the district.

2.3 Alternative explanation for Changes in Constituency Service: Constituent Demand

Our key theoretical puzzle is to understand how legislators’ effort for constituents changes as they gain power and experience in Washington. But usually legislators depend on constituents to first ask for help navigating the federal bureaucracy. An alternative explanation for why legislators’ rates of constituency service provision change is that they receive different amounts of requests from constituents. While this would still be interesting substantively, a constituent demand explanation for the provision of constituency service would suggest that varying levels of service provision do not inform debates about how legislator effort changes over their time in Washington.

Of course, we should expect that constituent demand will inform what agencies legislators contact. For example, some districts will be comprised of groups—such as veterans or social security recipients—who will request particular kinds of constituency service from their representative. Our designs will attempt to limit the influence of this kind of constituent demand by examining how individual legislator’s rates of contact changes within particular agencies.

A more challenging form of demand would be if constituents redirect their requests towards legislators who they expect to be more powerful. For example, we might hypothesize that as legislators acquire more power in Washington they are more easily recognized by their constituents and therefore more likely to receive requests for help from constituents. Constituents might also expect that more powerful legislators could more effectively provide constituency service and as a result direct service requests towards those legislators. Similarly, it could be the case that as legislators gain more experience in Washington they are more easily recognized by constituents and, as a result, more likely to receive constituency service requests.

While we will assess implications of constituency demand for our results, we note that constituency demand could also be closely related to legislator effort. Elected officials can encourage requests for help navigating the federal bureaucracy through workshops, newsletters to constituents, and even stories in local papers. If the prevalence of these stories reflects legislators focus on the district, then increases in requests from constituents could reflect the effort of elected officials.

3 A Comprehensive Data Set of Constituent Service Requests

To test how experience and power affect the provision of constituent service, we utilize an original collection of constituent service requests, collected from 396 FOIA requests made to federal agencies and sub-agencies. Through our collection process, we have received data on 383818 instances of members of Congress contacting federal agencies. We focus on requests made from 2007-2017, resulting in a data set of 349,337 contacts from members of Congress with federal agencies.

3.1 Hundreds of FOIA Requests to Assess Congressional Communication with the Bureaucracy

To assess when and how members of Congress communicate with the bureaucracy, we conducted—to the best of our ability—a census of federal agencies and sub-agency communication. Specifically, we identified all departments, agencies, and sub-agencies and submitted requests for all communication with members of Congress from 2007-2017. To date, we have received records from every department other than the

Department of State. While the specific the length of records to our response might vary over time, our most stringent specifications will include legislator-by-agency fixed effects, which ensures that our comparisons are made within agency. This limits the opportunity for left-censoring to affect our conclusions.

Variation in Responses to Identical FOIA Request Responses to our FOIA requests varied significantly. Most agencies offered logs of congressional correspondence, which record a date, sender, and summary of each contact. Logs generally include any written requests, as well as many phone and email records. For example, Between May 2015 and December 2017, the Department of Justice Office of Administrative Law Judges received 132 emails, 109 telephone calls, and only 54 letters. Between 2007 and 2017, the Postal Regulatory Commission received 100 emails, 30 faxes, 173 letters, 118 calls. In this paper, we use “contacts” and “letters” interchangeably to refer to all modes of correspondence. Small agencies or regional offices had staff search their email history or provided hand-written records that we had transcribed. Department Secretary offices generally queried a correspondence tracking database designed to track all correspondence, but our FOIA requests to sub-departmental components almost always recovered additional records of communication that was not in central databases. As one central office FOIA officer put it “Legislative Affairs is supposed to be the front door for the department, but if somebody knows somebody, well...” (personal communication, Feb. 21, 2018). Because of such idiosyncratic relationships, capturing patterns of correspondence that “go around” a Department Secretary’s office is key to avoiding erroneous inferences about legislator behavior. For example, when chairs of the Homeland Security committee wrote about immigration enforcement issues, they almost always contacted the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office of the Executive Secretary, but, at the same time, the Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) component of DHS directly received thousands of contacts from a different set of legislators. Our census approach ensures that we capture the totality of legislators’ behavior.

Upon receiving the records, we extracted names matching variations of legislators’ names and then merge in data about their position in Washington, district, and career. In Appendix A we provide our procedure for converting the raw files from federal agencies into the a data set appropriate for analysis. For approximately half of our contacts we also use the brief description included in the data set to classify the reason for contacting federal agencies. Our coding process began with the authors coding a representative sample of records. We then trained undergraduate and graduate RAs. The first several thousand letters or log entries were double coded. For example, of over 10,000 log entries for the Environmental Protection Agency, the first 2,500 were double-coded. Our overall inter-coder agreement was 0.78, which rose to 0.9 when we subsetting our analysis to coding decisions where the coders had a great deal of certainty. Throughout the hand-coding process, we also developed subagency-specific coding rules where certain regular expressions

indicated certain types of correspondence. For example, where "rulemaking" consistently indicated that a legislator's request involved an agency rule, all cases yet uncoded by hand for that agency are assigned to be type "Policy-Rulemaking" for the present analysis.

We have classified a sample of correspondences, 194,251, into five categories: "Individual Constituent Service" (i.e. casework or advocacy on behalf of a group such as employees of a company), "Nonprofit or Local Government Constituent Service" (e.g. help with a grant application), "Corporate Constituent Service" (e.g. help with a contract), "Corporate Policy" (e.g. policy explicitly aimed to benefit a specific industry), and "Policy" (general policy work related to legislation, budgets, or rulemaking). We define constituents broadly such that they need not be in a member's district. For example, Representative Tauscher of Wisconsin wrote to the Defense Commissary Agency on behalf of the Jelly Belly Candy Co., based in California. Jelly Belly was then "given a chance to resolve issues" with their contract. This was coded as "Corporate Constituent Service" and included in our broader measure of constituent service. We also consider constituent service as broader than casework. For example, Senator Rubio asking the IRS for special treatment for residents of hurricane-affected parts of Florida was coded as "Individual Constituent Service." We note these "hard cases" to illustrate the boundaries of our coding scheme. Most contacts were more easily parsed into either individual casework or policy work related to hearings, regulations, and legislation.

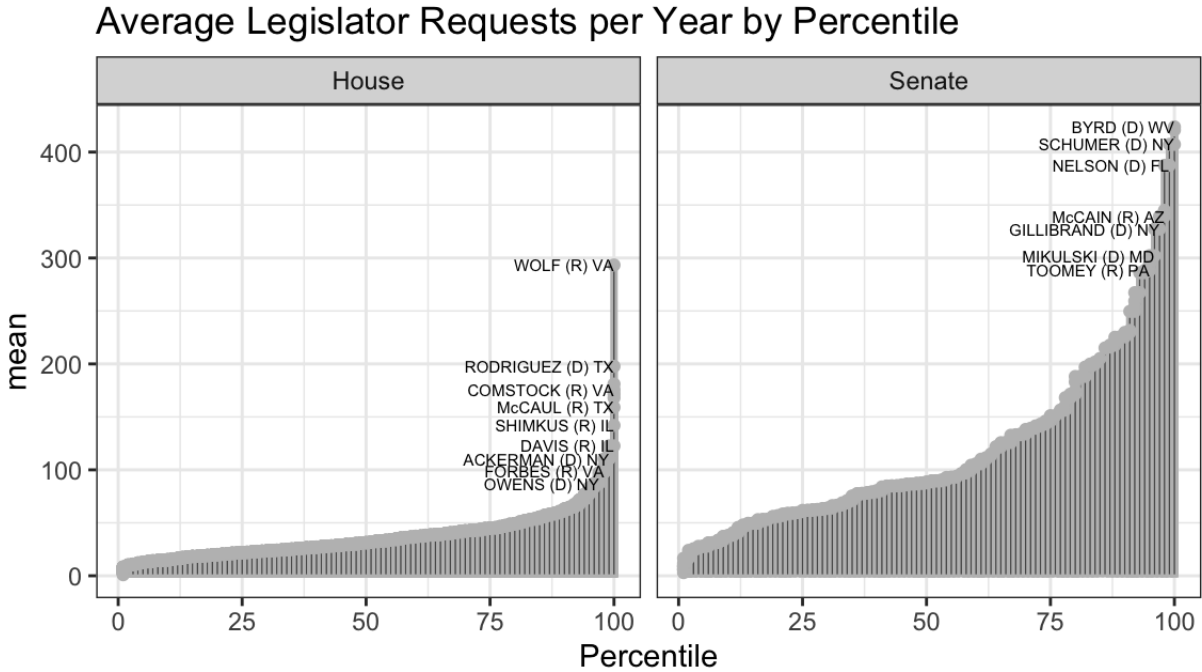
3.2 Who Contacts the Bureaucracy?

Before testing how legislators' efforts to provide constituency service change as they acquire prestige and experience, we first use our extensive data set of constituency contacts, to establish novel facts about how legislators contact federal agencies and why they contact those agencies. Overall, we demonstrate that there is considerable variability in the rates legislators contact federal agencies, but we find surprising consistency in the purpose of the communication: when legislators contact federal agencies, they are primarily focused on providing constituency service, with only a small fraction focused on policy. And we show that legislators are responsive to demographic characteristics of their constituency, but there is still considerable variability in contact rates within quite similar districts.

3.2.1 Rates of Contact with Federal Agencies

Legislators vary a great deal in how much they contact federal agencies. Figure 1 shows the average number of contact rates per year for House members (left-hand panel) and senators (right-hand panel). In the Senate Robert Byrd (D-WV) has the average rate of constituency service provision of 433 constituent service contacts per year. Other senators—such as Charles Schumer (D-NY) and John McCain (R-AZ)—have similarly high

Figure 1: Variation in Across Legislator Contact Rates



This figure presents the average number of contacts with federal agencies per year for House members (left-hand panel) and senators (right-hand panel), where the legislators' counts are sorted by their per year percentile rank. This reveals that senators and House members regularly contact federal agencies, but there is considerable variation in the rates of contact across legislators.

rates of contacted federal agencies. But other senators contact at a much lower rate. For example, John Kennedy (R-LA) made 5 constituency service requests in 2017. On average, senators in our data set contact federal agencies 86 times per year.

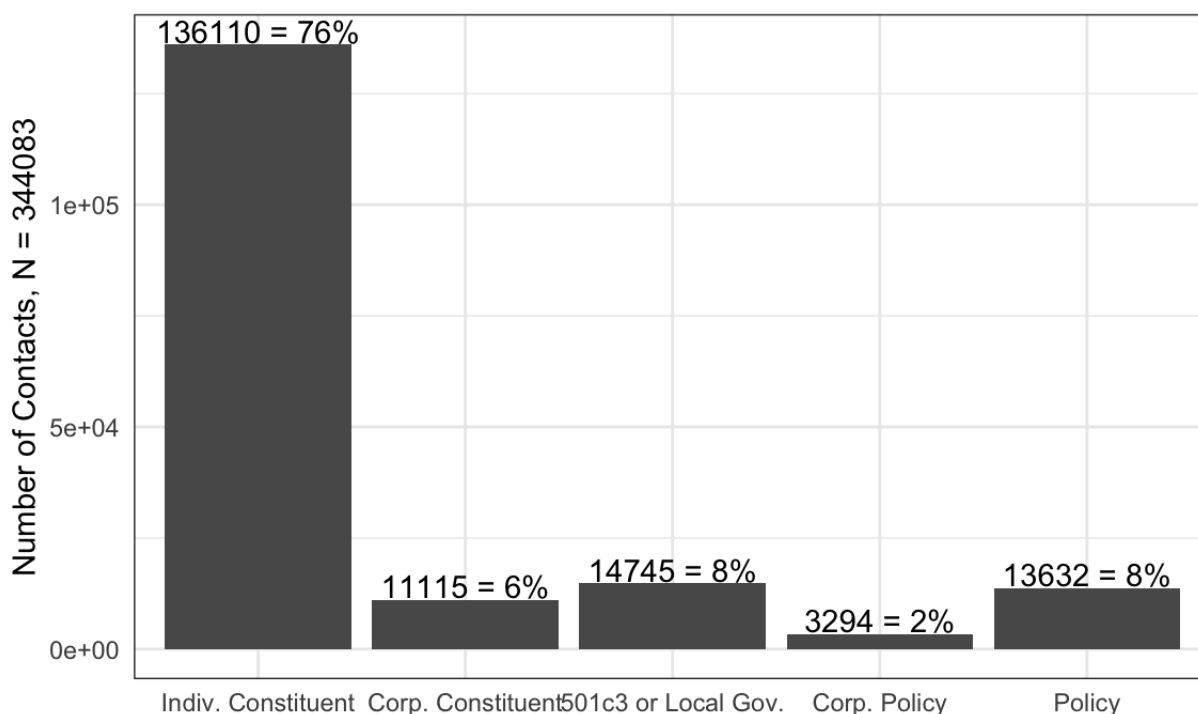
We see similar variation in the House, but with overall lower rates of contacting federal agencies—reflecting the demographic and resource differences across the two institutions. Frank Wolf (R-VA) had the highest rate of contact with federal agencies, averaging 306 contacts per year. Like the Senate, other legislators contacted at a much lower rate. Overall, House members averaged 29.4 contacts with federal agencies per year. But like the Senate we considerable variability in the rates of contact across House members.

3.2.2 Legislator's Contact with Federal Agencies are Focused on Constituency Service

Overall, when legislators contact federal agencies in our sample they are helping constituents navigate the federal bureaucracy. To reach the conclusion that contacts with federal agencies are constituency service focused, we use our hand-coded sample of legislative contacts and examine the distribution of reasons why legislators contact federal agencies. Figure ??, uses our most granular coding scheme and the proportion

of contacts that fall within each category. The left-hand bar shows that 76% of all contacts with federal agencies are made on behalf of individual constituents. A smaller percentage, 6%, is focused on constituent service requests for corporations in the district and 8% of requests are made on behalf of non-profits and local governments. We do find that legislators contact federal agencies to perform policy work, but this constitutes less than 10% of all requests made to federal agencies.

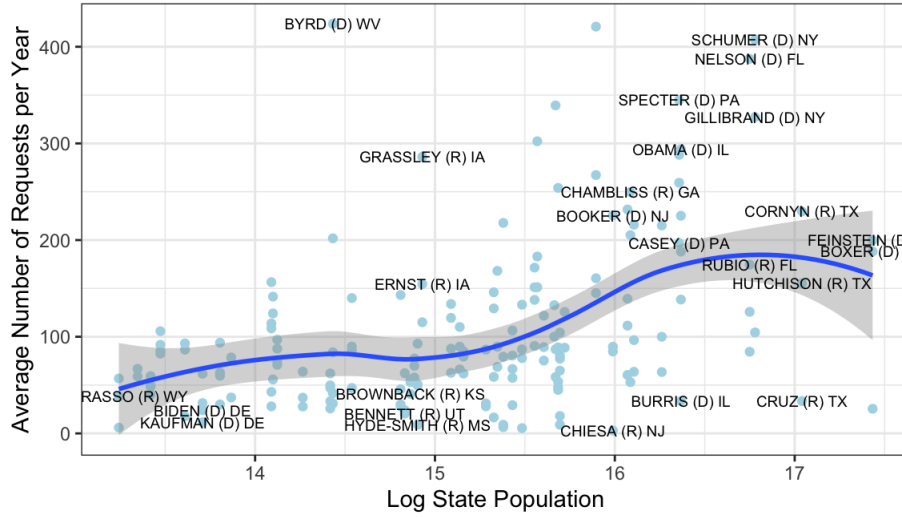
Figure 2: Distribution Across Types of Congressional Requests 2007-2017



The prevalence of constituency service requests is found across legislators regardless of their position in Congress or tenure in Washington. To make these simple comparisons we will group together service for individuals, corporations, and non-profits into a “constituency service” category, while allocating other policy contacts into a “policy” category. Using this more coarse classification, we find 82% of contacts that chairs of committees make with federal agencies is focused on constituency service and 87.9% of contacts from members of prestige committees is focused on constituent service. Similarly, 89% of the contacts legislators make in their first year are focused on constituency service and 87.5% is focused on service in their sixth year.

Figure 3: Senators from larger states do more constituent service.

Senator Requests per Year by State Population



3.2.3 Constituent Characteristics and the Provision of Constituency Service

While legislators are focused on constituency service when they contact federal agencies, the characteristics of their districts helps inform the agencies that legislators contact. We show now that population size and characteristics of constituents—the proportion who are veterans and the the proportion over 65—is correlated with how legislators make constituency service requests. These correlations provide face-validations for our measures of legislative effort, but they also suggest that cross-sectional comparisons will conflate legislative effort with the characteristics of districts. Given this potential conflation, our most stringent specifications below will include fixed effects for each legislator-agency pair, ensuring that we make within district comparisons.

We should expect senators who represent larger states to make more service requests. They have a larger number of constituents who might make requests of the senator. And senators are allocated a larger budget to handle that increase in requests. Figure 3 shows that this is the case: senators from larger states provide more constituency service on average. This is true for senators from larger states, like John Cornyn (R-TX), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), and Pat Toomey (R-PA). While there is an increase associated with population size, Figure 3 also shows that there is considerable across state variation in the amount of service senators provide.

The number of times legislators contact particular agencies is also correlated with the demographic composition of their districts. To demonstrate the correlation between demographic characteristics and the rates legislators contact agencies, we focus on two example agencies: the Veterans Administration (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). We measured the prevalence of two groups in the district:

veterans—the residents who might plausibly need assistance navigating the VA—and residents who are over 65 years of age—and therefore satisfy the age eligibility for social security. We then ran a simple bivariate regression of the total number of contacts a legislator made of the agency on the proportion of constituents who are veterans or who are over 65.

In both instances we find a correlation between district composition and the number of times legislators contact the agency. For example, for the VA we find that 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of residents who are veterans is associated with an increase of about .84 constituency service requests to the agency. Similarly, a one percentage point increase in the proportion of residents over 65 is associated with an increase of an additional 0.03 requests made to the agency. Overall, this suggests legislators’ efforts are correlated with the district’s demographic composition.

4 Assessing The Effect of Changing Positions and Increased Experience in Washington on Constituency Service

Using this data set of federal contacts, we now assess how legislators’ changing position in Congress affects their provision of constituency service. Our primary models will be a series of difference-in-differences regressions, which are similar to the specifications in Berry and Fowler (2006). Our most stringent specification will make examine changes that are within legislator and agency. Specifically, we will estimate regressions of the form:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta' \mathbf{Committee\ Position}_{it} + \sum_{s=1}^6 \eta_s \mathbf{I}(\text{tenure}_{it} = s) + \gamma_{ij} + \delta_{jt} + m_{it} + p_{it} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

Where Y_{ijt} represents the number of requests legislator i makes to agency j in year t , so our analysis in this section takes place at the legislator-agency-year level. γ_{ij} is a fixed effect for the legislator-agency dyad. This fixed effect accounts for individual characteristics of legislators, such as legislators who are more skillful at filling constituency service requests than other legislators. Critically for our research design, this fixed effect also enables us to account for time-invariant constituent demand for constituency service with an agency, ensuring our results are not driven only by constituent demand. It also accounts for characteristics such as the population of a state, demographic characteristics of its residents, and local industries that might be particularly likely to request help with specific agencies. And it also ensures that we adjust for the different time periods agency data is available. δ_{jt} is an agency-year fixed effect, takes into account agency-level common shocks across legislators in the provision of constituency service.

Assuming that legislators' trends contacting agencies to provide constituency service follows parallel paths, β represents the average effect of changing prestige on a legislator's provision on constituency service. We focus on four measures of a legislator's committee position: (1) whether they are a committee chair, (2) whether they are a ranking member of a committee, (3) whether they are members of a prestige committee, and (4) whether they have a position on a committee with oversight over a particular component of the bureaucracy. We focus on these four committee assignments because each represent different ways a legislators can acquire more power while in Washington. As a legislator becomes a committee chair or ranking member, they have increased responsibilities when drafting and revising legislation and they have increased access to and control of committee resources to accomplish policy goals—in particular, the use of committee staff. Similarly, legislators who join more prestigious committees are given the opportunity to shepherd national level policy through the legislative process.¹ And when legislators obtain the power to regulate a component of the federal government, they increase their ability to influence how the agency implements and executes federal law.

As Berry and Fowler (2006) note, changes in legislators' committee assignments are often due to circumstances outside of the legislator's control, such as changing majority status, retirements on committee, or exclusion due to losses from a prior election (Grimmer and Powell, 2013). For the parallel trends assumptions to be violated, it would need to be the case that legislators differentially altered their rates of constituency service in anticipation of joining particular committees. To make this assumption more plausible, There are time varying characteristics of legislators that can affect their provision of constituency service as well. To make this assumption more plausible we include a series of controls that capture time-varying characteristics of a legislator that might confound our inference about the effect of committee prestige. A particular concern is that legislators obtain new committee assignments when their party moves into or out of the majority or at the same time as the president party changes. To address these concerns, we include an indicator for whether the legislator's party is the majority in year t , m_{it} and if the member of Congress is from the same party as the president in year t , p_{it} . Throughout, we cluster our standard errors at the legislator by agency level.²

In this same regression we also include indicators for legislators first six years in Congress, $\sum_{s=1}^6 \eta_s \text{tenure}_{it}$. The effects of interest $\eta_1, \eta_2, \dots, \eta_6$ describe how a legislator's provision of constituency service in a particular year differs from legislators who serve beyond 7 years. We focus on the provision of constituency service over the first 6 years of a legislators tenure in Washington in order to assess how the provision of service from a legislator changes over their initial years in Washington, in order to capture the extent to which

¹We say that a House member is on a prestige committee if they are on Appropriations, Ways and Means, Rules, Budget, or Armed Services and if a senator is on Rules, Foreign Relations, Commerce, Budget, Armed Services, or Appropriations.

²All our results are robust to clustering at the legislator level.

new legislators face start-up costs. This specification, however, is ill equipped to assess how electing a new representative affects the amount of constituency service a constituent receives. To address this, in Section ?? we examine how electing a new representative affects the number of constituency service requests made on behalf of a district with a different difference-in-differences specification, at the district-year level.

5 The Effect of Increased Power on the Provision of Constituency Service

Table 1 provides the coefficient estimates from Equation 1. We focus first on the estimated effect of increased committee prestige. Table 1 shows that as legislators' acquire more prestige, their rates of constituency service increase. This is true in a cross-sectional comparison of legislators. The first column of Table 1 excludes the legislator \times agency and year \times agency fixed effects, but does include controls for majority status and being from the same party as the president. Table 1 shows that committee chairs, ranking members, members of prestige committees, and members of the oversight committee provide substantially more constituency service than other legislators. These differences, though, conflate legislators' overall ability with their position in Washington. If legislators who are better at their jobs or who exert more effort are also selected for more prestigious committees, then the estimates from the first column of Table 1 confound legislators' overall ability with their institutional position.

To address this confounding, the estimates from Column 2 of Table 1 provides the estimated effects from the difference-in-differences specification in Equation 1. Across all four measures of committee prestige, we find that improved positions in the institution cause legislators to increase the amount of constituency service. Consider first the effect of being a committee chair. We estimate that becoming a committee chair causes an increase of 0.213 constituency service requests per agency (95-percent confidence interval [0.07, 0.36]). Across all agencies, this represents an increase of approximately 11.8 additional constituency service requests or an increase that is about 20% of the average number of contacts per agency in our data set. Membership on the Oversight Committee causes a similar increase in constituency service—a 0.16 per agency increase. There is a smaller increase for individuals who become a ranking member and for those who join a Prestige Committee, though the increase is statistically significant for the prestige committee. Becoming a ranking member of a committee causes an increase of 0.09 contacts per agency, while joining a prestige committee causes a 0.07 per agency increase in the number of constituency service contacts a member of Congress makes.

The findings in Table 1 are robust to alternative specifications and different formulations of the dependent

Table 1: Estimating the Effect of Increased Prestige and Tenure on Constituency Service Provision

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Committee Chair	0.682 (0.0855)	0.213 (0.0747)	0.213 (0.0747)	0.0328 (0.00648)
Ranking Member	0.789 (0.0848)	0.0916 (0.0659)	0.0916 (0.0659)	0.0216 (0.00638)
Prestige Committee	0.440 (0.0332)	0.0688 (0.0263)	0.0688 (0.0263)	0.0169 (0.00467)
Oversight Committee	0.422 (0.0299)	0.169 (0.0193)	0.167 (0.0195)	0.0575 (0.00324)
First Year	-0.203 (0.0308)	-0.149 (0.0346)	-0.153 (0.0350)	-0.0246 (0.00526)
Second Year	-0.0835 (0.0339)	-0.0448 (0.0334)	-0.0413 (0.0336)	0.00388 (0.00509)
Third Year	-0.0478 (0.0345)	0.00958 (0.0326)	0.00956 (0.0326)	0.00930 (0.00480)
Fourth Year	-0.0201 (0.0380)	0.0339 (0.0307)	0.0339 (0.0307)	0.0144 (0.00469)
Fifth Year	-0.0405 (0.0356)	0.0129 (0.0294)	0.0129 (0.0294)	0.00178 (0.00433)
Sixth Year	-0.0420 (0.0371)	0.0289 (0.0277)	0.0289 (0.0277)	0.00333 (0.00414)
Majority, President's Party	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legislator \times Agency Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Year \times Agency Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
All Legislators	✓	✓		✓
Serve At Least Second Term			✓	
Dependent Variable	Count	Count	Count	Log(Count + 1)
Observations	337610	337610	330215	337610

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator \times agency level

Column 1 shows the average differences across committee assignments and years in Congress. Column 2 presents the difference-in-differences estimates. Column 3 subsets to legislators who serve at least 3 years in Congress. Column 4 takes the Log of the counts + 1 as the dependent variable.

variable. For example, we might be concerned that legislators with particularly high rates of constituency service are driving the results. The fourth column shows that we obtain the same findings if we use $\log(Y_{ijt} + 1)$ in our difference-in-differences specification. Further, our results are not due to differential attrition. The third column shows that we obtain nearly identical results if we restrict our analysis to legislators who serve beyond at least three years.

5.1 Minimal Changes in the Subject of Legislators' Requests

As legislators obtain more prestigious committee assignments in Washington they increase the number of times they contact federal agencies. While we have already shown that the vast majority of contact with federal agencies is focused on constituency service, it might be the case that the increased contacts are

Table 2: The Effect of Prestige and Tenure on the Types of Contact with Federal Agencies

	(1)	(2)
Chair	-0.0508 (0.0111)	-0.0590 (0.0140)
Ranking Minority	-0.00326 (0.0102)	-0.0225 (0.0134)
Prestige	0.0330 (0.00619)	0.0110 (0.0108)
Oversight Committee	0.00311 (0.00983)	0.00274 (0.0110)
First Year	0.0292 (0.00892)	0.0684 (0.0127)
Second Year	0.0288 (0.00843)	0.0562 (0.0123)
Third Year	0.0281 (0.00764)	0.0531 (0.0116)
Fourth Year	0.00769 (0.00905)	0.0319 (0.0121)
Fifth Year	0.00707 (0.0103)	0.0241 (0.0135)
Sixth Year	0.0188 (0.00939)	0.0273 (0.0103)
Intercept	0.827 (0.0116)	0.825 (0.0135)
Majority, President's Party		✓
Legislator Fixed Effects		✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓
Observations	5876	5876

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator level

This table shows how the proportion of contacts focused on constituency service changes as legislators acquire more power and experience in Washington. Overall this demonstrates that the increased number of contacts with federal agencies from more experienced and prestigious legislators results in more constituency service.

focused on issues not related to providing constituency service. This could be particularly plausible when legislators acquire positions on committees with oversight over a particular federal agency. In this section we show that even legislators with prestigious committee assignments are largely contacting federal agencies to perform constituency service and that the increase in constituency service that occurs with increased prestige cannot be explained by only an increase policy focused requests. Increased rates of contact does, in fact, reflect increased particularistic goods for the district.

To describe what legislators contact federal agencies about, we use the hand classification codes from Section 3 and code each of the contacts with federal agencies as either constituency service or policy focused. Overall, 86.7% of the average legislators' contacts with agencies are about constituency service. The first column of Table 2 describes how the proportion of contacts that are constituency service differs over legislators' first six years in office. This shows that a higher proportion of contacts from legislators are focused

on constituency service in legislators initial years in office, but overall all legislators are allocating the vast majority of their contacts towards providing constituency service. In their first six years 88% of legislators' contacts with federal agencies are focused on constituency service, while 85.7% of contacts from legislators after their first six years are focused on constituency service. This alone is strong evidence that the increased rates of contact from more experienced legislators indeed translates into more constituency service.

Our research design is unable to identify the effect of increased tenure on the types of contacts legislators make, because to make the assessment it implicitly requires conditioning on a post-treatment variable: contacting federal agencies. Nonetheless, a difference-in-differences regression can provide interesting descriptive evidence about how the content of legislators' contact with federal agencies changes as they gain more experience. To that end, Column 2 uses a difference-in-differences regression to assess how tenure in Washington affects the proportion of contacts focused on constituency service. While there are significant changes in the proportion focused on constituency service, we still find that the vast majority of contacts are focused on constituency service. This ensures that the additional contacts from increased tenure result in additional constituent service requests.

5.2 Increased Resources of Increased Power: The Heterogeneous Effect of Committee Power

As we explained above, there are at least two reasons why more power in Washington could cause legislators to increase the amount of constituency service. First, legislators might increase the amount of constituency service they provide because increased power in Washington provides them with increased resources. Second, legislators might expect a higher marginal return from their constituency service requests, because agencies have incentives to be more responsive to requests from more powerful legislators. In this section we use our research design to better understand the extent to which resources or increased influence affects the number of constituency service requests legislators make.

To provide evidence for why prestige increases constituency service provision, we examine how the effect of becoming a committee chair or joining a committee differs depending on whether the committee has oversight power over federal agency. If resources explain why legislators increase their constituency service, then we should expect that increased prestige to cause an increase in the number of requests made to agencies the legislator's committee has oversight and non-oversight authority over. If, however, the increase in requests is because of legislators' increased likelihood of success, then we should expect the largest effects of increased prestige to be made towards committee where the legislator's committee has oversight authority.

In both analyses we find evidence that the effect of prestige is biggest on requests made to agencies

where the legislator’s committee has oversight authority, though there are increases made to non-oversight committees as well. And because there are more non-oversight authority committees, the increases that we find increased power comes from both legislators expecting increased expectations of success and from the increased resources of more powerful positions.

5.2.1 Heterogeneous Effect of Becoming Committee Chair

To determine if a committee has oversight authority over a component of the federal government, we use the definition of oversight from PAPER HERE. Oversight Chair_{ijt} will be equal to 1 if a legislator *i* is chair of a committee with oversight authority over an agency *j* in year *t* and Non-Oversight Chair_{ijt} will be equal to 1 if legislator *i* is chair of a committee without oversight authority over agency *j* in year *t*. To assess how the effect of chair varies according to whether a committee has oversight authority, we estimate the following difference-in-differences model at the agency-level:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_1 \text{Oversight Chair}_{ijt} + \beta_2 \text{Non-Oversight Chair}_{it} + \sum_{s=1}^6 \eta_s \text{tenure}_{it} + \gamma_{ij} + \delta_{jt} + m_{it} + p_{it} + \epsilon_{ij}(2)$$

where β_1 describes the effect of becoming a committee chair with oversight authority and β_2 the effect of committee chair with non-oversight authority. The other parameters parallel the specification in Equation 1.

Table 3 shows that legislators who are committee chairs with oversight authority make substantially more constituent service requests to agencies they have oversight authority over than agencies they lack oversight authority, but committee chairs make more requests to both types of agencies. The first column shows that there are large cross-section differences: committee chairs make an additional 2.3 constituent service requests to agencies they have oversight authority over, while making 0.37 more service requests to other agencies.

The second column of Table 3 shows that there is an increase in both the number of constituency service requests made to agencies chairs have oversight authority over. Becoming a chair with oversight authority over an agency causes an increase 1.5 additional constituent service requests made to those agencies. In contrast, becoming a chair with non-oversight authority causes a smaller but still substantively important 0.13 additional constituent service requests per agency.

This difference in effect size, however, does not imply that the majority of constituent service requests are made to committees where chairs have oversight. This is because committee chairs have oversight authority only a small fraction of agencies. For example, in 2010 on average chairs had authority over 5 agencies, while having non-oversight authority over 52 agencies. For this year, we would expect committee chairs to send an additional 7.5 constituency service requests to agencies their committee has authority over, while sending

Table 3: Decomposing Chair Effect

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Committee Chair, Oversight Power	2.326 (0.773)	1.529 (0.681)	0.307 (0.0664)	0.124 (0.0511)
Committee Chair, Non-Oversight Power	0.373 (0.144)	0.131 (0.0769)	0.0651 (0.0150)	0.0332 (0.00943)
Legislator \times Agency Fixed Effects		✓		✓
Year \times Agency Fixed Effects		✓		✓
Prestige	✓	✓	✓	✓
Majority, President's Party	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tenure	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dependent Variable	Count	Count	Log(Count + 1)	Log(Count + 1)
Observations	337610	337610	337610	337610

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator \times agency level

This table shows that the increase in constituency service from becoming chair comes from legislators increasing contact with agencies they have oversight authority over. The first column shows that oversight chairs have substantially higher contact rates in the cross section than non-oversight authority chairs in the cross section. The second column shows that this difference persists in the difference-in-differences specification. The third and fourth columns show that this finding is robust to using a different formulation of the dependent variable.

an additional 6.7 requests to agencies with non-oversight authority.

5.2.2 Heterogeneous Effect of Joining a Committee

To assess the effect of joining a committee on constituency service requests, we examine how the effect of joining the committee varies by agency.³ We estimate a heterogeneous treatment effect model, where the effect of joining a committee is allowed to vary across agencies. Because this increases the number of parameters drastically, we use a LASSO regression to regularize the parameters. Specifically, we estimate a model of the form:

$$\log(Y_{ijt} + 1) = \sum_{j=1}^J \beta_j \text{Committee}_{izt} \text{Agency}_{ijt} + c_z + \gamma_j + \eta_i + \lambda \left(\sum_{j=1}^J (|\beta_j| + |\gamma_j|) + |c_z| + \sum_{i=1}^N |\eta_i| \right) + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

where we choose λ using cross-validation and mean squared error.

Figure ?? shows the heterogeneous effect of joining Agriculture (top-left panel), Armed Services (top-right panel), Homeland Security (bottom-left panel), and Appropriations (bottom-right panel).⁴ The bar in each figure represents the estimated effect, with the black bars representing agencies the committee has oversight authority over and light-gray bars represent the effect for agencies where committees do not have oversight authority.

³In Appendix ?? we provide the overall effects of individual committees on the number of constituent service requests.

⁴In Appendix ?? we include the effect for all committees.

Figure 4: Heterogeneous Effects Across Committees

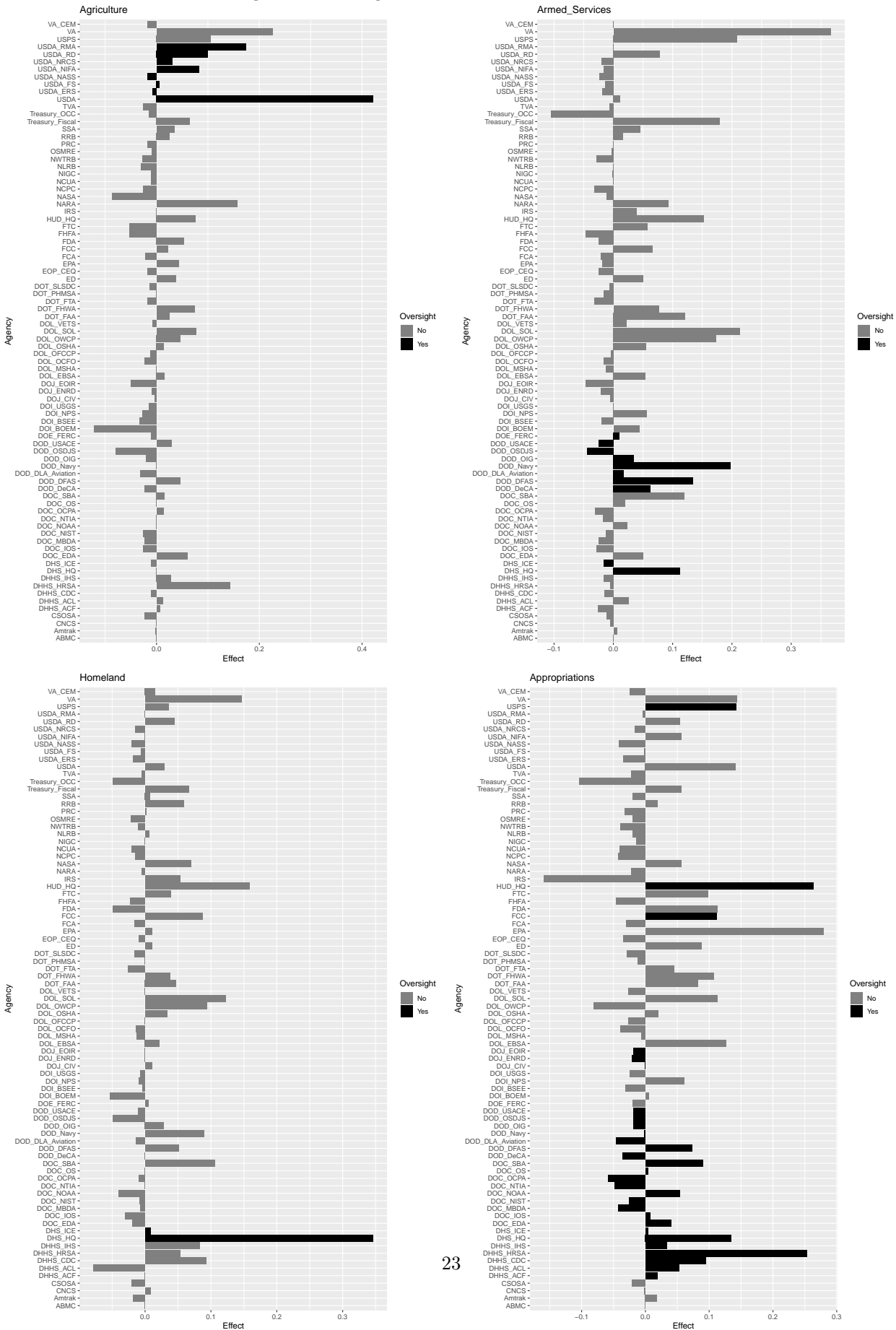


Figure 4 shows that the largest effects are concentrated on agencies a legislator’s committee has oversight authority over, but there are also increases for non-oversight committees as well. Consider first the Agriculture committee. The largest effect is on contact with the USDA, which the Agriculture committee has oversight authority over. There are similarly large effects for other components of the USDA—suggesting that joining the Agriculture committee causes legislators to increase contact with agencies with oversight. We see similar increases for the other committees as well: when legislators join a committee, there is a large increase in with agencies they have oversight over. On average, the estimated effect is 0.05, or a 5% increase in constituent service requests. But there are also large increases in the non-oversight committees as well. For example, the second-largest agency specific effect for Agriculture is for the Veterans Administration. And across committees there is an average increase of 0.01 on non-oversight committees.

Increased Power and Increased Constituency Service In this Section we have shown that acquiring power in Washington causes legislators to increase their production of constituency service at home. This increase occurs across all four measures of committee position that we examine, but is strongest for committee chairs. Further, we show that there are only small effects on the types of contacts legislators make, with even more powerful legislators focused primarily on constituency service. Using a heterogeneous treatment effect model, we have shown that the increase in constituency service is consistent with both legislators having access to increased resources and a higher likelihood of success when contacting agencies. Rather than forgetting about the district and contracting Potomac Fever, it would appear that more power in policy making enables legislators to more effectively deliver particularistic goods to the district.

5.3 The Effect of Increased Experience in Washington on the Provision of Constituency Service

As legislators acquire more power in Washington, we find that they increase their provision of constituency service. While this suggests that more powerful legislators are paying more attention to their constituents, it could still be the case that as legislators gain experience in Washington, they decrease their provision of constituency service. To first test whether this is the case, we use the estimates in Table 1, but now focus on the coefficients in legislators’ first six years in office. The counterfactual in mind here is how a particular legislator’s provision of service changes over the first six year in office, where we include aspects of the office such as committee staff and protocols for constituency service.⁵

The first column of Table 1 shows that there are large descriptive differences: legislators in their first year

⁵Note, that interpreting these coefficients does require that we assume the effects are linearly separable. But this is a particular strong case, because most legislators do not become chairs, ranking members, join prestige committees or the oversight committee in their first six years in Washington.

make many fewer contacts than more experienced legislators, with first year legislators making approximately 0.2 fewer requests per agency than legislators in their seventh year or beyond. This difference shrinks in the second year, but remains statistically significant. But we have to exercise caution when interpreting the differences in Column 1, because they conflate the effect of increased experience in Washington with the different characteristics of legislators at different phases of their career.

To address the differences in legislators at different career stages, the second column of Table 1 estimates the difference-in-differences specification in Equation 1 and we now focus on the tenure coefficients. This demonstrates that legislators provide less constituency service in their first year in office and as they acquire experience in Washington, the differences subside as legislators provide additional service. Legislators in their first year in office provide 0.1 fewer constituency service requests per agency than legislators in their second year and 0.16 fewer requests than legislators in their third year—both differences are statistically significant at conventional levels. The overall increase in number of constituency service requests from a legislator’s first to third year is similar in size to the increase that comes from becoming a member of the oversight committee: resulting in about 10.1 more constituency service requests per-year. Once legislators enter their fourth year, however, we see that there are no longer differences with longer tenured legislators. We find small and statistically insignificant differences for legislators in their fourth through sixth years. This demonstrates that as legislators acquire experience, they make more contacts with federal agencies.

As with the analysis of committee prestige, the findings in Table 1 are robust to alternative specifications. We might be concerned that the set of legislators who serve in their third year are different than the legislators who serve in the first years. If this were the case, then our findings would be the result of both the experience and expertise that comes from more years in Washington and House members who win reelection, an indication that they are better able to perform the job than other legislators. To address the potential different samples in each year, the third column of Table 1 assesses the changes in the number of contacts of federal agencies for legislators who serve in Congress for at least three years. This reveals a very similar pattern: legislators initially providing less constituency service in their first two years, then more contacts subsequently. And Column 4 in Table 1 shows that the results are robust to analyzing $\log(Y_{ijt} + 1)$, ensuring that our results are not because of outliers.

5.4 Assessing the Effect of a New Representative on Constituency Service Requests

Using a within-legislator comparison, we have found that legislators make fewer contacts with federal agencies in their first year in office, but the number of contacts with agencies stabilizes after their third year. In this

section we examine a related, though distinct, question: how does the provision of constituency service to a district change after the election of a new representative? Rather than examining changes in the number of contacts by making a within-legislator comparison, we are now going to make a within-district comparison. This enables us to assess how electing a new legislator affects the total number of contacts with the federal government a district’s representative makes. In other words, this enables us to assess the costs or benefit of a new elected official.

In order to make this comparison, we change the level of our analysis and focus now on the number of contacts made from the representative of a particular state or district i in a year t , Y_{it} . As in the prior sections, we will use a difference-in-differences approach to take into account the specific characteristics of districts and over time changes in how legislators provide constituency service. Specifically, we estimate regressions of the form:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_1 \text{New Member}_{it} + \sum_{s=2}^6 \beta_s \text{tenure}_{s[it]} + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

Where γ_i is a district specific fixed effect that takes into account the particular demographic characteristics of the district, along with the levels of demand from district residents. δ_t is a year fixed effect that takes into account common shocks. Our key effect of interest β_1 is the effect of a district electing a new representative, for districts that do elect a new representative over the course of our study. In order to understand how the effect of a new representative changes over time, we also estimate the district level differences for a legislators second (β_2) through sixth-year (β_6).⁶

The first column of Table 4 provides a simple difference-in-means for districts represented by a new member and then for legislators through their first six years in office. In this descriptive comparison, districts represented by new legislators receive substantially fewer constituency service requests to federal agencies. On average, districts with a new representative have 27.4 fewer constituency service requests made on their behalf. The magnitude of this difference shrinks for districts represented by legislators in their second year (18.6 fewer constituency service requests) and then reaches a relatively stable number for districts represented by legislators in their third through sixth years, with some slight evidence that legislators make more contacts in election years—the even numbered years of tenure for the vast majority of legislators in our sample.

To account for differences in district size, demographics, and demand for constituency service, the second column estimates the difference-in-differences from Equation 3. In this specification we see a large causal

⁶It is worth noting that this treatment is fundamentally different for a district than the treatment we examined before, which was at the legislator level. In each election the district faces the choice of either allowing their incumbent to acquire another term of tenure in the chamber or replacing her with a new member. This is different than the within legislator comparison, because legislators are only able to acquire more tenure or leave the chamber.

Table 4: The Effect of New Members on Number of Requests at the District Level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
New Legislator	-27.40 (4.034)	-20.08 (3.118)	-7.591 (1.719)	-90.99 (12.79)
Legislator 2nd Year	-18.61 (4.012)	-12.01 (2.899)	-2.975 (1.829)	-57.31 (12.58)
Legislator 3rd Year	-13.89 (4.168)	-5.174 (3.095)	0.295 (1.774)	-34.31 (15.66)
Legislator 4th Year	-9.636 (4.299)	-2.895 (3.070)	2.093 (1.873)	-18.66 (15.42)
Legislator 5th Year	-13.91 (3.664)	-3.713 (2.381)	-0.0498 (1.500)	-18.40 (10.90)
Legislator 6th Year	-9.269 (4.183)	-2.484 (3.122)	-0.368 (1.666)	-4.244 (15.97)
District Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
All Districts	✓	✓		
House Only			✓	
Senate Only				✓
Observations	5961	5961	4832	1129

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at district level

This table shows how constituent service at the district level changes over time. Model 1 is a cross sectional comparison excluding district and year fixed effects. The second column is a district x year difference in differences model. Column 3 focuses the diff-in-diff on legislators who survive their first election.

effect of a new member taking over: electing a new member causes a decrease of 20.1 constituency service requests (95-percent confidence interval [-26.2 , -14.00]). This represents a sizable change in the number of service requests representatives make on behalf of their new constituents. The effect of electing a new representative, however, dissipates quickly. Districts represented by a legislator in her second year of service receive 12.01 fewer constituency service requests—still a substantively important decrease in contact with federal agencies, but nonetheless not as drastic as the first year decrease. After the second year the differences are smaller in size and we fail to reject the null that the provision of service is no different than legislators who represent the districts more than 6 years. This phenomenon—new legislators providing substantially fewer contacts with federal agencies—is found when we examine the House (Column 3) and the Senate (Column 4), separately. In short, it is clear that new legislators make fewer contacts for their constituents than well-established elected officials.

The Costs of Newly Elected Members Taken together, our results demonstrate that new legislators experience substantial start-up costs when newly elected and that when a new legislator represents a district, they receive much less constituency service. Legislators in their first year provide much less constituency service than they do in their second year and reach a stable level of service in their third years. Further,

when districts elect a new representative or senator, they experience a sharp decrease in the amount of constituency service requests made on their behalf. Rather than experienced legislators forgetting about their districts, then, our evidence suggests that newly elected legislators struggle to provide the levels of service that experienced legislators deliver to their constituents.

6 The Limited Effects of Constituency Demand

An alternative explanation for our results is that the amount of constituency service legislators provide is largely driven by constituency demand. We have attempted to limit the influence in demand when assessing how power and experience affects the provision of constituency service. For example, our empirical strategy in Sections 4 and 5.3 account for static demand based on characteristics of the district. For example, districts composed of veterans might see more requests for assistance with the Veterans' Administration, or districts with older residents might have greater demand with the social security administration. Because our analyses take into account either legislator-agency or district fixed effects, we compare how the levels of constituency service change holding constant these characteristics of the district.

Yet, we might expect that constituents' requests could be driven by a legislator's changing power in Washington or prestige. Constituents could, for example, direct more of their requests to legislators who are more powerful or who have been in Congress for a longer period of time. In this section, we present evidence that additional constituent requests to legislators is unable to explain our results, even though we have shown that there is a correlation between the demographics of a district and the number of requests legislators send to particular agencies. We demonstrate the limited effects of constituency service using two distinct approaches. Building off the theoretical discussion in Section 2, we might worry that legislators' increasing prestige leads them to have higher name recognition, causing constituents to direct more constituency service requests to them. We show, however, that as legislators acquire more institutional power in Washington it does not cause an increase in name recognition. While more experienced legislators do higher name recognition, increases in name recognition do not align with the increases in constituency service that legislators provide their constituents, making name recognition a poor explanation for the increased number of contacts legislators make on behalf of their constituents.

If how constituents direct their requests for service explains our results, then we might expect there to be spillover across legislators. When new members are elected, constituents could direct their service requests to more experienced legislators who are better known to the constituent seeking help. We show that when a district is represented by a new legislator, other members of Congress and same-state senators do not have an increase in the amount of constituency service provided. This suggests that constituents are not merely

redirecting their service requests to more experienced legislators. Rather, members of Congress’ are able to both solicit and fulfill constituency service requests when they have adequate staff. As their staff budget expands, they are able to fulfill more requests.

6.1 The Limited Effects of Prestige and Tenure on Name Recognition

To assess how changing prestige and tenure affects legislator’s name recognition, we use the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) cumulative file. This collects a set of survey responses from 2006-2018, providing a total of 452,755 total individual level responses. All respondents were asked if they approve of their representative in the US House and both senators. If the respondent provided an assessment of the elected official, we coded the respondent as recognizing the legislator’s name. If, however, the respondent selected the option that they had never heard of the representative, or were not sure, then we code them as not recognizing the legislator.

Given our focus on how legislators alter their name recognition among constituents, we estimate the average name recognition for each legislator in each survey Y_{it} , or the proportion of respondents who provide an evaluation of the legislator. We then use cross-sectional and difference-in-differences regressions to assess how legislators name recognition changes as they acquire more experience and as they increase their institutional prestige.

Table 5: Limited Changes in Name Recognition		
	(1)	(2)
Second Year	-0.0385 (0.00642)	-0.0230 (0.00641)
Fourth Year	-0.0263 (0.00646)	0.000275 (0.00682)
Sixth Year	-0.0281 (0.00676)	-0.0112 (0.00634)
Eighth Year	-0.0132 (0.00663)	0.00132 (0.00674)
Legislator Fixed Effects		✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓
Observations	3667	3667

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator level

The first column of Table 5 shows average levels of name recognition of legislators’ tenure in the House and Senate. This demonstrates that legislators who are newer to Congress have lower-levels of name recognition. Further, we continue to see lower-levels of name recognition for legislators at the end of their second year, then for legislators serving in their 10th year and beyond. Yet, both the persistence of this difference and the rate at which it is resolved suggest that name recognition is likely to have only a limited explanation for why

legislators receive more requests after their first year. This is because even second-year legislators—when the decrease in constituency service has already begun to be resolved—continue to have lower name recognition.

The third column of Table 5 shows that, on average, legislators who hold more power in Washington do have higher name recognition back in the district. Yet, using a difference-in-differences design to make within-legislator comparisons over their careers, we see that these differences disappear. Column 4 shows that when legislators acquire more power in Washington, it has little effect on their name recognition with constituents. And finally, columns 5 and 6, which includes both tenure controls and prestige, shows the same basic pattern: increasing prestige in Washington does little to affect name recognition back in the district.

6.2 No Evidence Constituents Redirect Requests Away from New Legislators Towards Incumbent Legislators

In this section we engage in a more direct test of whether constituent demand explains variation in how legislators provide constituency service. If constituents are merely redirecting their requests for constituent service in response to characteristics of legislators, then we should expect that the number of requests that incumbent legislators make will increase when there are new representatives in their state. We would expect an increase if constituent demand explained our results because constituents would direct their service requests away from the new legislator and towards incumbent legislators. If this spillover occurs, then the most natural target for the constituent requests would be one of the senators representing the constituent’s state, but a different House member could also receive the request.

To assess the whether constituents direct requests towards incumbent legislators when new members represent them, we examine how incumbent legislators’ constituency service requests change in response to having new representatives in their state. We measure the presence of new member in the state in two ways: either the proportion of House members and senators in the state who are new or an indicator for whether there is a new House member or senator in the state. As in Section MM we measure the number of constituency service requests that are made from a districts representative in a particular year. Using this dependent variable, we then estimate a series of difference-in-differences regression where the treatment is the measure of new members in the state and we include district and time fixed effects. Further, we restrict the regression to incumbent legislators only.

Table 6 presents the estimates of this regression. The first two columns are estimated on all incumbent legislators and show that neither the proportion of new members nor the presence of a new member significantly affect the constituency service requests for other legislators. In fact, the effect of changing the proportion of new legislators is in the opposite direction than would be expected if constituents direct service

requests towards new members, though the difference does not approach conventional significance levels.

Table 6: Little Evidence of Spillovers from New Legislators

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Proportion New Legislators	-3.032 (5.753)		-24.56 (14.33)	
At Least One New Legislator		-0.0522 (1.307)		-3.826 (3.719)
District Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senators Only			✓	✓
Observations	5507	5507	1076	1076

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at district level

Columns 3 and 4 of Table 6 reveal the same pattern when examining senators only. Again, we see that the estimated effect of having a new legislator in the state and the proportion of new legislators is in the opposite direction than expected if spillover is occurring and does not approach statistical significance.

7 Conclusion

Using a new data set on constituency service requests made to federal agencies, we show that legislators increase their effort as they gain more power. Even as legislators gain power the vast majority of requests legislators make is focused on constituency service. And using a heterogeneous effect model, we have shown that the increase in requests made because of prestige are consistent with both an increase in resources and an increase in the likelihood of legislators success. Further, we show that legislators make fewer service requests at the start of their career and that new legislators make substantially fewer service requests than their more experienced colleagues,

Our results are broadly consistent with the predictions about the provision of constituency service from multi-task selection models, such as Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2006). Constituent service provides an incumbency advantage in these models because it provides legislators the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to constituents. Our results show that legislators take advantage of this opportunity, particularly as they become more powerful. Further, our results show that legislators will have an advantage in providing service over new representatives. This provides an advantage because any switch in representation will necessarily imply a decline in particularistic services to the district.

Our results also flip some of the concerns of term limit advocates on their head. While a number of term limit advocates argue that elected officials will lose focus on their district, we show that the more experienced legislators provide more attention to their district. There does not appear to be widespread outbreaks of

Potomac Fever. Rather, it appears that reelection oriented legislators are focused on providing service to the district to keep their place in Washington.

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Table 7: Contacts From Members of Congress to Federal Agencies

Department	Components FOIAed	Records received	Coded	N
Department of Agriculture	29	29	11	9641
Department of Commerce	19	18	10	8510
Department of Defense	49	10	7	8005
Department of Education	1	1	1	3973
Department of Energy	8	2	1	6119
Department of Health and Human Services	15	8	5	29195
Department of Homeland Security	14	12	12	35183
Department of Housing and Urban Development	2	1	1	31852
Department of Justice	23	3	2	2379
Department of Labor	22	11	7	51836
Department of State	1	0	0	0
Department of the Interior	11	7	6	5731
Department of the Treasury	7	5	5	12785
Department of Transportation	10	6	6	20497
Department of Veterans Affairs	6	3	2	76295
Independent Agencies	77	39	26	81817
Total	294	155	102	383818

A Contact Codebook

We provide the following codebook to a team of hand-coders to code the content of Congressional contact with legislative agencies and for extracting information about the legislator. The codebook provides a series

of steps to move from raw correspondence logs to data formatted for the analysis conducted here.

A.1 Codebook for Coders

Guidelines for turning congressional correspondence logs into useful data:

The first step is to identify the columns that contain the member of Congress (or Committee), the date that the member initiated correspondence, and the column that best describes the subject. These should be named FROM, DATE, and SUBJECT. We should also have empty columns named TYPE, CERTAINTY, ALT_TYPE, POLICY_EVENT, EVENT_NAME, EVENT_DATE, and NOTES.

Our aim is to classify the subject of correspondence between members of Congress and government agencies. This may be done using keywords (potential keywords in *italics* below), but may also require googling subject lines (e.g. what does this acronym mean in this context!?) and inferring why the request is being made. This may require identifying a member's relevant policy positions. For example, if the subject is "mining regulations" or "open internet," a member's voting history on related bills or donations from the industry may help us infer if the letter was policy work on behalf of the industry (type 4) or not (type 5). Limiting your search to a date range around the letter date may yield relevant public statements. If you have questions, find something interesting, or, in your efforts to classify a confusing correspondence, you discover information like a related public statement, note it in the NOTES column. In some cases, columns other than the SUBJECT may offer helpful information. This may be difficult at first, but will get easier.

The outcome is a spreadsheet with the first columns being FROM, DATE, SUBJECT, TYPE, CERTAINTY, ALT_TYPE.

At the end of this codebook there are two tools:

- 1) An example for how to auto-apply these codes in R.
- 2) A list of specific coding decisions for cases that required discussion among our team—please read through and add to this list as you encounter difficult cases.

Below are 5 potential codes for the TYPE and 3 potential codes for your level of CERTAINTY that it is this type. If you less than Very Certain (i.e. if only Fairly Certain, or Toss Up), also record your second best guess as ALT_TYPE, otherwise leave this column blank. Only leave NOTES if you think it would be helpful for the team to revisit the entry.

A.1.1 TYPE

1 = Personal Service

Individual, non-commercial constituent service

Examples: Help with a government form, passport, visa, back pay, military honor, enlistment, criminal case, request for personal information (e.g. one's FBI file), disability application, worker compensation, personal complaint, discrimination case, job application, health insurance, financial services complaints, etc.

2 = Commercial Service - Transactional

Anything related to a specific individual case by a business (including business owners like farmers and consultants) Help with a grant application, payment, loan or contract (buying anything from or selling anything to a government agency) Help with an individual case of tax assessment, fine, or regulatory enforcement action Help with public relations on behalf of a business

Examples: allocation of radio spectrum, case against a company, tax dispute, contract for purchase of military surplus, crop insurance distribution, debt settlement, foreclosure assistance, a fine for a law violation, etc.

3 = Government and Nonprofit Service - Transactional

Same as for (2), but for municipal or state governments (including cities, counties, etc.) or non-business-oriented non-profit organizations (i.e. NOT ones that represents an industry or trade association)

4 = Commercial Service - Policy

Anything applying to a class of commercial activity or businesses (e.g. shipping, airlines, agriculture). This could include legislation, bills, acts, appropriations, authorizations, etc.

Authorization of or appropriation to a government program that is targeted towards a particular industry or industries Regulation of an industry or commercial practice or competition

Examples: Milk prices, insurance or loan eligibility criteria, purchasing policies, crop insurance rates, pollution criteria, classification of products for trade or taxation, conservation appropriation, worker visa types, restrictions, or caps, etc.

5 = Policy Work - NOT in the service of any individual, business, specific industry

Examples: Lawmaking

Request for policy-relevant information. This includes prospective legislation, legislation under consideration, or already implemented legislation that requires oversight.

Oversight

Committee requesting a report or testimony at a hearing Requesting clarity on an agency rule

Lobbying administrative policy

Agency rulemaking with non-commercial implications (comments on agency rulemaking may often be (3))

Political work

Meeting with organized constituent groups (e.g. workers, people with disabilities, environmentalists) about policy (meetings with industry groups generally fall under (4)).

Media requests

6 = Other

Suggest a new category in the NOTES column, only if it cannot be fit under 1-4. For example, requesting dirt on one's political opponents could be called "partisan" as it is none of the above. Other specific types: thank you (for thank you notes with no other information), congratulations (for congratulatory correspondence on appointments or retirements with no other information), family member (for correspondence on behalf of a family member)

0 = Really no idea, no guesses, completely unclear

A.1.2 CERTAINTY (regarding TYPE)

1 = Very Certain (≥95% sure)

2 = Fairly Certain (between 95% and 50% sure)

3 = Toss Up (≤50% sure)

A.1.3 POLICY.EVENT

If the correspondence is about policy (TYPE 4 or 5), does it reference a specific government action or event?

If so record all that apply separated by a semicolon. Leave this blank for individual constituent services or general policy suggestions.

• budget allocation (allocating funds to a particular purpose or program)

• "decision" (e.g. a ruling, order, or adjudication between parties, e.g. a company seeking a permit resolving a dispute between an employer and union, between two companies. Or two parties present alternative policy interpretations before a commission.

â€”Disasterâ€” (reaction to a sudden event that causes great damage. Examples could include a hurricane, flood, oil spill, or shooting)

â€”J earmarkâ€” (a provision in a piece of Congressional legislation that directs specified federal funds to specific projects, programs, organizations, or individuals)

”enforcement” (a putative action, e.g. a company being fined or a license being revoked or a state being found not in compliance with federal law, NOT for individual actions such as military discharge, deportation, or criminal proceedings)

â€”facilitiesâ€” (anything related to a facility or buildingâ€”openings, closures, conversions of spaces, cleanups of military bases, etc.)

”grant” (allocation of government funds)

”hearing” (e.g. a committee or budget hearing, NOT a court hearing or administrative hearing for an individual, for example about benefits)

â€”Informationâ€” (gathering information in some matter, not exactly related to a piece of legislation. Examples would be, but are not limited to, a study, investigation, and/or report)

â€”inviteâ€” - e.g. to a non-governmental function, conference, fundraiser, or rally

”lawsuit” (a recent or upcoming court case, litigation, or settlement)

”legislation” (an upcoming or recent bill or resolution, often members will be asking for information)

â€”mediaâ€” (a request made in reference to a news story)

”meeting” (e.g. an upcoming or recent meeting with agency staff, NOT a meeting with a constituent)

”rule” (a proposed regulation, agency rulemaking, agency guidance, notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM, SNPRM, ANPRM), or request to extend a public comment period)

A.1.4 EVENT.NAME

If there is an EVENT, copy text from the log or letter about the event such as the date of a hearing or meeting, the name of a bill or agency rule, the company or state subject to an enforcement action, or the court or parties involved in a lawsuit.

A.1.5 EVENT.DATE

If there is an EVENT, add the date in a day-3 letter month-year, e.g. 01-Jan-2018, format.

If there is no date, type ”past” or ”future” with respect to the date of the correspondence.

If unclear if it is in the past or future, leave this blank.

A.1.6 CONSTITUENT.TYPE

If the correspondence is from an individual constituent (or unorganized group of constituents, i.e. TYPE 1), we capture more information about these constituents where possible. In many agencies constituents are members of larger groups, like veterans, homeowners, LGBTQ, etc.—these groups are not mutually exclusive; a constituent may be both a veteran and disabled.

There are two ways to code constituent variables:

- 1) This sheet lists constituent types and keywords for identifying that type. Add a new line to this sheet for each new CONSTITUENT.TYPE identified. All letters containing those keywords for that agency will be tagged as representing this type of constituent.
- 2) In the R scripts in the agencies folder.

A.1.7 CONSTITUENT.CLASS

Where possible, we also code the economic class of constituents in the same way.

1 = "lower"

2 = "middle"

3 = "upper"

If you become confident that all entries containing a certain word or phrase are all one TYPE, we can save time by automatically applying this to all entries. This can be done in two ways:

- 1) If you are comfortable R, write a script, [agency].R that applies your rules. See example below.
- 2) If not, write classification rules in some standard intuitive way in the github issue for that agency. (For example, If "contract" in SUBJECT, TYPE = 2, CERTAINTY = 1.) Then ignore all future entries that meet your criteria (we will automatically apply your codes later).

Example from USDA.RD.R

```
options(stringsAsFactors = FALSE)
library(tidyverse)
library(magrittr)
library(googledrive)

gs_ls() # log in to google drive
```

```
data <- gs_title("USDA_RD") %>% gs_read() # get data from google drive
```

```
unique(data$SUBJECT) # view unique SUBJECT strings
```

```
data %<>% mutate(TYPE =
  ifelse (SUBJECT %in% c(
    # i.e. if SUBJECT is exactly one of these strings:
    "Payment Assistance",
    "Delinquency ",
    "Insurance ",
    "General Servicing",
    "Foreclosure",
    "Debt Settlement",
    "Escrow  ",
    "Recapture Receivable Account",
    "Payoff "),
    2, TYPE)) # then make it TYPE 2
```

```
# Or, for imperfect matches (notice how some words above had random spaces added), use "regular expressions"
```

```
?regex
```

```
?grepl
```

```
data %<>% mutate(TYPE =
  ifelse (grepl(
    # i.e. if SUBJECT contains:
    # (& means "AND", | means "OR")
    "Payment|
Delinquency|
Insurance|
Servicing|
Foreclosure|
Debt Settlement|
Escrow|
```

```

Recapture Receivable Account|
Payoff",

        SUBJECT),
        2, TYPE)) # then make it TYPE 2, otherwise keep TYPE

# Notice how the odd spaces are no longer needed to return a match
# Also notice how "Payment Assistance" is now matched with just "Payment"

cbind(data$SUBJECT, data$TYPE) # view results

```

B Per-Committee Effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
agriculture	0.111 (0.0472)									
appropriations		0.0697 (0.0627)								
armed_services			0.0854 (0.0578)							
budget				0.0787 (0.0374)						
education					-0.0495 (0.0558)					
energy						-0.00559 (0.0530)				
ethics							0.0868 (0.0790)			
financial_services								-0.0103 (0.0416)		
foreign									-0.0359 (0.0344)	
homeland_security										0.171 (0.0478)
Observations	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator x agency level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
house_administration	0.0293 (0.143)									
judiciary		0.108 (0.0561)								
natural_resources			-0.0526 (0.0376)							
rules				-0.0947 (0.0837)						
science					-0.0762 (0.0329)					
small_business						0.0210 (0.0406)				
transportation							0.0163 (0.0442)			
veterans								0.00924 (0.0860)		
ways									-0.0899 (0.0433)	
banking										0.379 (0.130)

Observations	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610
--------------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator x agency level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
commerce	0.181 (0.123)				
environment		0.202 (0.170)			
finance			0.0699 (0.186)		
foreign_relations				0.171 (0.175)	
health					0.391 (0.268)

Observations	337610	337610	337610	337610	337610
--------------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator x agency level