

Group Interests, Constituency Characteristics and Demands for Representation

Dino P. Christenson¹, Jennifer Lin², and Todd Makse³

¹Faculty of Political Science
Boston University

²Undergraduate Student
New College of Florida

³Faculty of Political Science
Florida International University

Florida Political Science Association, March 2019

Guiding Questions

- 1 How does one's social identity influence their demands for representation?
- 2 How does knowledge of the district's constituency characteristics influence one's demands for government responsiveness?

Past Research

- People demand representatives to represent them based on the most salient aspects of their personal identities
- Not many are as politically sophisticated to understand how politicians prioritize representation
- Citizens may not be as knowledgeable about national politics, but they know what people in their inner circle desire from the national government
- Collective v. Dyadic representation - Legislator like me rather than a legislator like my country

Hypotheses

- 1 ***Egocentric Hypothesis:*** As a representative's effort on behalf of groups with which the citizen identifies increases, the citizen's evaluation of the representative will become more positive.
- 2 ***Proportionality Hypothesis:*** Citizens will expect that representatives expend effort on behalf of groups in proportion to their role in the constituency.
- 3 ***Heterogeneity Information Hypothesis:*** The link between representative effort, citizen identity and citizen evaluations will be attenuated by information about the heterogeneity of one's constituency and strengthened by information about the homogeneity of one's constituency.
- 4 ***Size Information Hypothesis:*** The link between representative effort, citizen identity and citizen evaluations will be attenuated by information that the identity group is a small part of the constituency and strengthened by information that the identity group is a large part of the constituency.

Study 1

Experimental Design

- Participants were recruited from Introductory Political Science class and provided ZIP codes - 26 congressional districts represented
- Tasks of Representatives
- Closeness to group and perceptions of influence
- Demands for Effort
- District Homogeneity and Effects on Demands

Tasks of Representatives

Thinking about some of the tasks that members of Congress must perform, which of the following tasks would you consider to be somewhat or very challenging, and which would you consider somewhat or very routine?

- Balancing the needs of diverse constituencies - 53%
- Writing legislation - 27%
- Voting on legislation/Communication with constituents - 11%

Closeness to Groups

Individuals often feel close to certain groups in society, either for personal, social or familial reasons. For each of the following groups, please indicate whether you feel very close to the group, feel somewhat close to the group, or do not feel close to the group.

- College Students
- Small business
- Military
- Elderly
- The Poor
- Farmers
- Unions

Distribution of Group Attachment

Table: Distribution of Group Attachment

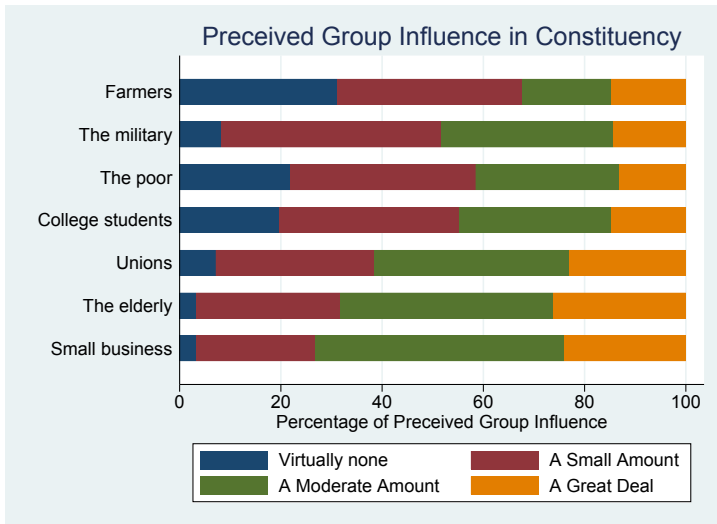
Group Interest	Very Close	Somewhat Close	Not Close	Partisan Gap*
College Students	84%	12%	4%	-0.01
Small Business	26%	44%	30%	0.17
The Military	23%	37%	40%	0.22
The Elderly	16%	59%	25%	0.14
The Poor	11%	45%	43%	-0.22
Farmers	10%	30%	60%	0.17
Unions	8%	21%	71%	-0.12

*Partisan gap indicates the difference between Republicans and Democrats' propensity to identify with the group. A score of 1.0 would indicate all Republicans very closely identify with the group and all Democrats do not feel close to the group, while a -1.0 would indicate the opposite.

Perception of Influence

Thinking about each of the following groups, how much influence would you think this group might have in your member of Congress' district? Would you say they have a great deal of influence, a moderate amount of influence, a small amount of influence, or virtually no influence?

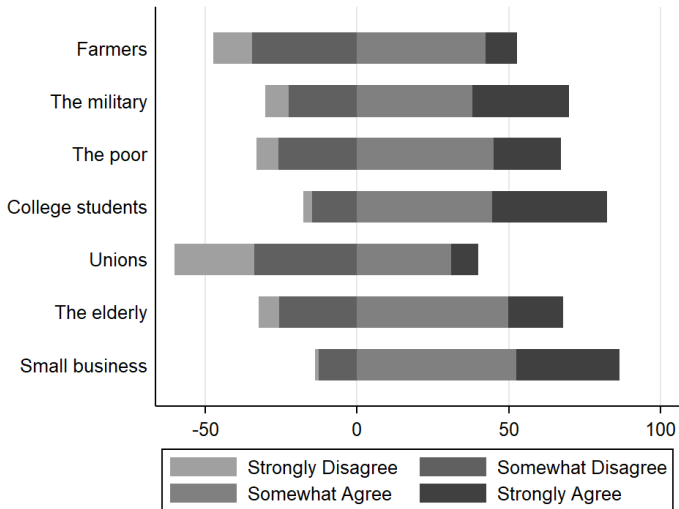
Perceived Group Influence in Constituency



Demand for Effort

Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. Again, with respect to each of the following groups, how would you respond to the statement "I would not consider a member of Congress a good representative unless they exerted major legislative effort on behalf of [Insert groups from Group Attachment Measure]"

Demands for Representational Effort



Experimental Vignettes

- 2 versions for participant's own district
- Homogeneity condition - Emphasis on district homogeneity
- Heterogeneity condition - emphasis on diversity in district
- Facts were based on data reported by the US Census Bureau and the *Almanac of American Politics*

Experimental Condition Vignette - Example

Homogeneity Condition

Based on the information provided, your member of Congress is Mike Turner, a member of the Republican Party. He has served in Congress since 2003. The Third District of Ohio is a largely urban district which is dominated by the city of Dayton; more than three-quarters of its population resides within Montgomery County. The district is heavily Republican: it has supported Republican presidential candidates in the last three elections, and Turner has not faced a competitive election since being elected to Congress. The district is also racially homogeneous: whites make up more than 80% of the district's residents, and this number rises to over 90% outside of Dayton proper.

Heterogeneity Condition

Based on the information provided, your member of Congress is Mike Turner, a member of the Republican Party. He has served in Congress since 2003. The Third District of Ohio stretches across large sections of southwestern Ohio, from the city of Dayton to rural counties east of Cincinnati. Although Dayton is the largest city in the district, a majority of its residents live in the Cincinnati media market. The district leans Republican in presidential and Congressional elections, but had a history of electing Democrats to Congress throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and the city of Dayton provides a strong base of Democratic support. The district ranks as one of the most racially diverse in the state of Ohio, with the city of Dayton almost evenly split between black and white

Analysis and Results

- **Analysis:** Ordered logit models and accounted for errors in individual differences
- **Model 1:** Personal attachment to group leads to higher demands for representation (23%) than group preceived group influence (9%)
- **Model 2:** Framing of district homogeneity does not alter demands for representation - If anything, reminders of district composition leads some respondents to think MCs should not cater to some groups
- **Model 3:** Closeness to group and preceived group influence are not influenced by information related to the distribution of the district
- **Model 4:** Participants are more likely to support representation for groups and parties that they identify, and this is not influenced by the distribution of interests in their district

Study 2

Experimental Design

- 225 Introductory Psychology students
- Tasks of Representatives
- Vignettes on representative choice

Tasks of Representatives

Thinking about some of the tasks that members of Congress must perform, which of the following tasks would you consider to be somewhat or very challenging, and which would you consider somewhat or very routine?

- Balancing the needs of diverse constituencies - 48%
- Writing legislation - 44%
- Voting on legislation/Communication with constituents - 18%

Vignettes on Representative Choice

- Used common identity as college students to ascertain their feelings of how politicians justify their voting choices on policy that affect college students
- Large (20%) or small (1%) proportion of district are college students - manipulation of importance

Summary of Experimental Scenarios

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Incumbent Decision	Voting for bill that would cut money for hypothetical university	Leading effort to pass financial reform bill that would cut student loan benefits	Accepting seat on Agriculture Committee in lieu of seat on Education Committee
Incumbent Defense	Other groups in district will benefit from the bill's tax cut provisions	Bipartisanship is valuable; getting things done better than demanding the perfect bill	Agriculture is a large sector in the district; opponent pitting groups against each other
Constituency Trait Varied	Size of university, % of residents affiliated with the university	% of college graduates in the district who have federal student loans	How rural district is; how large agricultural sector in district is
Condition 1	Largest university 20% of residents	50% of graduates	75% rural – Third largest agricultural sector in the country
Condition 2	4th largest university 1% of residents	10% of graduates	30% rural – Agriculture is third largest sector in district

Questions

- 1 Who was more convincing: Incumbent or Challenger?
- 2 Based on the decision, are you more or less likely to support the re-election of this MC?

Results and Analyses

- Participants supported incumbents more even if the incumbent did not necessarily go with their interests
- Across the scenarios, people were equally likely to support re-election regardless of importance condition

Responses to Experiment Vignettes

	Scenario 1 University Funding	Scenario 2 Student Loans	Scenario 3 Committee Work
<i>Incumbent Has Better Argument</i>			
High Importance Condition	61.0%	37.9%	67.7%
Low Importance Condition	62.6%	49.2%	69.4%
Expected Difference (Sign)	(-)	(-)	(+)
Observed Difference (S.E.)	-0.2 (0.06)	-0.11 (0.07) #	-0.02 (0.06)
N	225	225	225
<i>Vote for Incumbent</i>			
High Importance Condition	51.7%	42.1%	61.2%
Low Importance Condition	50.5%	41.5%	65.4%
Expected Difference (Sign)	(-)	(-)	(+)
Observed Difference	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.06)
N	225	225	225

Note: # $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

General Discussion

Group Identities Guide Demands for Responsiveness

Voters favor representatives who cater to their most salient social identities

- Study 1: Closeness to group influences perceptions of what warrants representation
- Study 2: District composition does not do much to influence evaluations demands for representation

Hypotheses Revisited

- ① ***Egocentric Hypothesis:*** As a representative's effort on behalf of groups with which the citizen identifies increases, the citizen's evaluation of the representative will become more positive. – **Not Really**
- ② ***Proportionality Hypothesis:*** Citizens will expect that representatives expend effort on behalf of groups in proportion to their role in the constituency. – **No**
- ③ ***Heterogeneity Information Hypothesis:*** The link between representative effort, citizen identity and citizen evaluations will be attenuated by information about the heterogeneity of one's constituency and strengthened by information about the homogeneity of one's constituency. – **No**
- ④ ***Size Information Hypothesis:*** The link between representative effort, citizen identity and citizen evaluations will be attenuated by information that the identity group is a small part of the constituency and strengthened by information that the identity group is a large part of the constituency. – **No**

Future Directions

- Observing results via observational methods
 - Campaigns
 - Legislative Behavior
 - Outcome of Future Elections

Discussion and Questions