

Representing the Under-Privileged: Tradeoffs Between Constituent Service and Legislation

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Abstract

The connection between socioeconomic privilege and political behavior has been well established, as has the national policy bias towards the preferences of the socioeconomically privileged. Yet little has been said about the role of a district's socioeconomic characteristics on representational activities. I propose that representatives from socioeconomically privileged districts spend more effort on legislation because privileged citizens are more likely to have clearer policy preferences and involvement in political activities. Meanwhile, representatives of less privileged districts focus on constituent service because the less privileged are more concerned about day-to-day life and the social safety net, areas that constituent service is well equipped to address. This theory is supported by multiple novel data sets, including how staff is allocated, legislative activity, and how members of Congress tweet. I show that while the privileged are disproportionately influential with respect to legislation, the less privileged are disproportionately served through constituent service.

1 INTRODUCTION

When does social status matter for political representation? The Declaration of Independence holds that all men are created equal,” but does this mean that all men (and women) should be equal in political representation? One prominent theorist, Robert Dahl, encapsulated a common answer: yes, governments ought to be responsive to the interests of all citizens, considered as political equals (Dahl 1971:1). That is, citizens should be represented equally, regardless of socioeconomic status. Yet the evidence to date indicates that socioeconomic status matters. Socioeconomic privilege translates directly to privilege in enacted policy (Bartels 2008, Gilens 2013).

Since the 1990s, theories and evidence on representation have focused almost exclusively on policy congruence and policy outcomes. They neglect other forms of representation such as casework, legislative effort, information provision, homestyle, and pork. However, this was not always the case. Previous to the 1990s, members of Congress were analyzed based on each of these kinds of representation. Since then, the field has moved to focus exclusively on policy, neglecting the other forms of representation. Yet members of Congress and their staffers still spend substantial amounts of time on the other forms of representation, particularly constituent service. Representatives spend the plurality of their time on constituent services while they are in their district, and time spent on constituent services is second only to policy work while they are in the capital. Staffers always spend the plurality of their time on constituent service (Congressional Management Foundation survey 2013).

Not only do members of Congress and their staff spend a substantial amount of time on constituent service, but that time is focused on activities that are likely to impact the less privileged. In particular, case work, one of the main forms of constituent service, is described as predominantly devoted to Medicare, Medicaid,

disability services, and veterans' benefits. All of these primarily impact the less privileged. Additionally, there is tantalizing evidence from the 1970s that the less privileged are more likely to care about casework than those who are socioeconomically privileged. Single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974: 5) will allocate their time based on the expected payoff. If the less privileged respond to casework and constituent service, representatives from underprivileged districts will spend more time on these activities. Thus, expanding our focus beyond policy congruence provides a window into representation for less privileged citizens.

I propose that representatives' behaviors are influenced by the socioeconomic characteristics of their districts because constituents' preferred representation varies by their socioeconomic characteristics. Those of higher socioeconomic status base their candidate selections on different kinds of representation than do the less privileged. This induces reelection-minded representatives to emphasize different styles of representation based on their district demographics. In particular, representatives with many socioeconomically privileged constituents will focus more intently on legislation because their constituents care more about policy. Representatives of less privileged districts will spend more time on casework and constituent service because casework focuses on the social safety net, and their constituents have a greater need for a functioning social safety net.¹

This paper uses evidence from staffing allocations, tweets by members of

¹The relationship here may be inverted with no impact on my theory. That is, it may be that districts with a lot of people who are rich and educated will elect representatives who naturally care about policy. Similarly, districts with a lot of poor and poorly educated constituents may elect those who will care about constituent service. The work by Carnes (2012) could imply that poor districts may elect working class politicians who are more in tune with the needs of working class constituents, and would be an interesting study in its own right. But my theory holds whether representative change their behavior based on district preferences, or districts elect compatible representative. No matter the reason, poor districts will be underserved if their representatives focus on constituent service at the expense of policy.

Congress, congressional legislative activity, and survey data to support this theory. I will show that legislators from privileged districts engage in more legislative activity than do their colleagues who represent less privileged districts. They use the time they could have spent on legislation on constituent service instead, as revealed by both staffing allocations and twitter. Representatives of less privileged districts focus both their staffers and their public statements through Twitter on constituent service. Representatives of less privileged districts spend \$14,146 per year more on staffers devoted to constituent service. This is close to one third of a staffers' salary. They also send 8 additional tweets publicizing constituent service activities. For Democrats, the difference is particularly striking: they send 17 more tweets devoted to constituent service when they represent socioeconomically disadvantaged districts. These tweets are not simply cheap talk. Each constituent service oriented tweet documents time intensive activities, such as holding town meetings, holding constituent service hours, meeting with constituents, and attending local functions. Representatives do not devote more than two tweets to any given activity. This provides an explanation for why the privileged are overrepresented in policy outcomes: representatives for the less privileged are focused on non-policy considerations.

2 BUILDING upon THEORIES of REPRESENTATION

Given the importance of who has a political voice to the theories of political representation, it may be surprising that empirical evidence connecting socioeconomic factors with representation has not been explored in greater detail. The paucity of empirical investigations connecting economic inequality and political representation

has been noted as recently as 2008 by Larry Bartels (2008: 252). This dearth has been substantially remedied for one aspect of representation: the degree to which enacted policy is congruent with citizen preferences, also known as policy congruence. Larry Bartels (2008), Martin Gilens (2013, 2014), and Benjamin Page (2014) demonstrate a general lack of representation through policy congruence for the poor. The rich are overrepresented overall (Bartels 2008: 259), in abortion policy (Bartels 2008: 267), foreign policy, economic policy, religious issues, and much of social welfare (Gilens 2012: 101). The only significant areas in which the less privileged hold their own are a few social welfare policies, such as Social Security, Medicare, school vouchers, and public works (Gilens 2012: 122). Both scholars show a strong overall bias toward the privileged for the policy congruence aspect of representation.

However, policy congruence is only one aspect of representation in modern democratic republics. Research throughout the seventies and eighties demonstrated that “theories of representation must expand their focus” (Cain et al 1987: 2) beyond policy congruence to include casework, pork, information provision, bureaucratic oversight, and homestyle (Eulau and Karps 1988; Verba and Nie 1972; Fenno 1978; Pitkin 1967; Johannes 1980, Johannes and McAdams 1981; Fiorina 1977; Miller and Stokes 1963). When representatives talk about representation, they consistently mention these activities (Wright 1965).² Although studies since the 1990s have focused largely on policy congruence,³ studies from both 2013 and from 1965

²Also see the descriptions by the following members of Congress: Judy Chu chu.house.gov/day-life-judy, Vern Buchanan http://buchanan.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4323\%3Aa-day-in-the-life-of-a-member&catid=35&Itemid=141, John Carney http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfztLGK_Ea4, USA Today’s article <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/03/12/life-of-a-congressman/1980817/>, John Mica http://orlando.jobing.com/video_details.asp?i=45882&segment=19190, and Lou Barletta <http://citizensvoice.com/news/day-of-a-congressman-barletta-gets-used-to-washington-s-fast-pace-1.1228706>

³According to Eulau and Karps (1977: 240), the decline in casework studies was apparent by the early 1970s. Miller and Stokes have exactly one sentence acknowledging and dismissing the

demonstrate that much of a representative's time is spent on activities other than legislation. The study from 1965 demonstrates that while members of Congress spent the majority of their time⁴ on policy, they spent a full 28% of their time on casework. Their staffers spent more time on casework than on policy (Fiorina 1977:59).⁵ Today, the best evidence indicates that members of Congress only spend more time on legislation when they are in Washington, D.C. Even while in the capital, constituent service receives more attention than anything other than legislative work.⁶ While members of Congress are in their district, they spend more time on constituent service (Congressional Management Foundation Report 2013).⁷ Clearly, representatives and their staffers spend a substantial amount of time dealing with casework and constituent service.

Since the focus on representation must move beyond policy congruence, it is important to understand how representatives choose which representational activities to emphasize. Politicians are motivated to satisfy their constituents in order to get reelected (Mayhew 1974, Pitkin 1967), but they are constrained by time and resources. There is clear evidence that casework and legislation both strongly influence a representative's ability to get reelected (Serra and Moon 1994; Fiorina 1981)

importance of other kinds of representation (1963:48). Verba and Nie (1972) emphasized policy congruence, and downplayed the importance of "narrow and specific requests," which we now call casework.

⁴65% of their time

⁵Staffers only spend 14% of their time on policy. They spend at least 25% of their time on casework, and may spend up to 66% of their time on casework depending on how much of their correspondence is devoted to casework instead of publicity and information provision. This range is due to the fact that staffers spend 41% of their time on correspondence, which typically consists of casework as well as communications that distribute information and publicize the candidate. The study did not ask the respondents to break down communication activities into casework, publicity, information provision.

⁶While in D.C., representatives who responded to the survey spent 35% of their time on policy, and 17% of their time on constituent service. The remainder of their time was devoted to campaign work, media relations, family/friends, administrative work, and personal time.

⁷While in their districts, representatives spend 32% of their time on constituent service and 12% of their time on policy. Note that this study obtained responses from only 25 representatives.

and constituent approval (Cain et al 1987; Serra and Cover 1992). Politicians care about these evaluations: the most powerful determinant of how legislators allocate time to legislation, casework, pork, and communication what they perceive their constituents care about (Ellickson and Whistler 2001).⁸ Thus, if underprivileged citizens care more about constituent service than do privileged citizens, then representatives with more underprivileged constituents will focus on constituent service. Conversely, if privileged citizens care more about policy than the less privileged do, then representatives from privileged districts will spend more energy on policy.

Given that casework, legislation, pork, and communication impact reelection, variations in how their constituents want to be represented should be reflected in the representatives' activities. There is good reason to believe that constituents have varied representational preferences based on socioeconomic status. First, it is clear that the rich participate in different ways than the poor do. The rich are more likely to participate in campaign work and contribute financially (Verba et al 1995a, b). The preferences of the rich in the district are likely to be reflected through those who are closest to the representative and most likely to be his policy advisors, his personal constituency (Fenno 1978). Second, Verba and Nie (1987) argue that those who make particularized requests –i.e. casework– are more likely to be of low socioeconomic status. Common requests for personal help include “social security benefits, veterans’ benefits, civil service pensions, Medicare, immigration, the IRS, and other federal bureaucracies” (Serra and Moon 1994: 202-3). Requests from private groups and local governments include help for the implementation of public projects and small business loans (Fenno 1978: 101). Note that all of these

⁸They also look the district’s economic status. However, they merely treat it as a control variable, along with 14 other variables. Due to the large number of control variables included, many of which are collinear with district income, the coefficient is insignificant. It is, however, in the same direction as the income coefficients in this paper: richer districts get less casework.

particularized requests are more likely to impact those of low socioeconomic status.⁹ Thus, it is reasonable that representatives would focus on casework in poor districts and on legislation in richer districts.

3 THEORY and QUESTIONS

This is the theory in a nutshell. The actors in question are the potential voters and those who represent the voters. As far as motivations are concerned, citizens want their representatives to be responsive to their needs. Representatives, on the other hand, are motivated to single-mindedly seek reelection. With respect to the possible actions involved, voters can express preferences, and representatives can change their behavior to court voters. This courting process must be efficient, as representatives are constrained by time. Thus, if privileged citizens prefer that their representative focus on legislative activity, then representatives from districts dominated by privileged constituents will devote a larger share of their time and resources to creating legislation.

This theory requires that the following hypotheses be true:

HYPOTHESIS 1: Preferences between constituent service and legislation vary by individual socioeconomic characteristics: privileged citizens prefer policy, while less privileged citizens prefer casework.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Representatives focus more on constituent service in less privi-

⁹Indeed, these problems are remarkably congruent with policy areas where the poor are equally represented. Fenno has theorized that the personal constituencies of Congressmen have an outsized impact on their policy preferences because members of Congress regularly discuss policy concerns with these constituents. Casework provides another way that members of Congress regularly confront the policy needs of their constituents. This suggests that part of the reason that certain social welfare programs favor the preferences of the poor is because representatives learn about the need for the programs through casework.

leged districts.

HYPOTHESIS 3: Representatives focus more on legislative activity in privileged districts.

Evidence that confirms each hypothesis supports the argument representatives modify their behavior to accommodate the needs of their constituents. In particular, privileged constituents ask for more legislative activity, while the less privileged require more time spent on casework. I address each hypothesis in turn in the remainder of this paper.

Validation Checks

Theory requires that when socioeconomically privileged districts demand legislation, their representatives will be motivated to provide more legislation. The empirical tests I run in this paper demonstrate that less privileged constituents demand more casework as well as receive more of it. Nevertheless, it is important to rule out alternative explanations in the empirical analysis. There are a number of alternative theories that might confound my analysis. First, drawing from theories of the median voter, it could be that the relative ideal point of the legislator to his party could drive the amount of legislation he produces. That is, someone close to the party median in terms of ideal points should have a better chance of getting party support behind sponsored bills. I control for this, and do not find it has an impact on my analysis. Second, it could be the case that representatives who face minimal competition will not focus on legislation as much. This too does not impact my results. Note that this paper does not use an experiment to pinpoint causation. Instead I build a theory to show that constituents demand different services based on socioeconomic characteristics, and that representatives should vary their representation based on

the socioeconomic status of their districts.¹⁰ I support this theory by collecting and analyzing novel datasets while carefully ruling out plausible alternative explanations.

4 INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Data

Initial evidence for this theory comes from the National Election Survey of 1978. It provides tantalizing support for Hypothesis 1a. In particular, less socioeconomically privileged respondents preferred that their representative focus on casework instead of legislation. The NES survey from 1978 asked 2,304 people rank their preferences for whether their representative should focus on casework, pork, communication, bureaucratic oversight, or legislation. Table 1 shows the distribution of first choice preferences over these five activities.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Preferences over Legislator’s Activities

	casework	pork	bureaucracy oversight	communication	legislation
% prefer	12%	17%	17%	33%	21%

Source: A.N.E.S 1978

Of course, the survey was carefully worded to extract the respondents’ preferences without bias based on question wording. Thus, the questions did not simply ask “Do you prefer that your legislator engage in casework?” In fact, the question

¹⁰Note that my theory does not require that politicians ignore constituent service requests in rich districts. Indeed, the best evidence we have is that it is rare for politicians to ignore constituent service requests. Almost all respondents in the 1978 NES reported being satisfied by a response after asking for help from a member of Congress. Recent studies have shown high response rates to constituent service requests (Carnes 2015, Butler and Broockman 2011, Broockman 2014). These response rates do not vary by income, though they do vary by race. My theory instead requires that constituents request more constituent service in disadvantaged areas, and/or that politicians solicit and advertise constituent service activity more often.

did not use the terms legislation, pork, bureaucratic oversight, communication, or casework, presumably because these words are inherently biased. After all, very few people want members of Congress to use pork (Clement 2012). Casework causes a problem for a different reason: it is unlikely to be a term understood by many constituents. Instead, the questions were carefully worded to avoid bias and ensure comprehension. For example, the concept of casework was phrased as “helping people in the district who have personal problems with the government.”

The dependent variable for this analysis is whether the respondent preferred legislative activity over casework. I recoded the variables to be 0 if the respondent ranked casework higher than legislation, 1 if the respondent preferred legislation over casework. The independent variables are socioeconomic characteristics: income, party identification, education. I omit race for the purposes of this analysis, as the sample size of minorities was too small to justify inclusion.

Results: Testing Hypothesis 1

The results in Table 2 below demonstrate that the richer the respondent was, the more he or she preferred that legislators focus on legislation. Each X and O indicates a respondent to the survey, and whether the respondent preferred casework (if the symbol is at the bottom of the graph with a value of 0) or legislation (if the symbol is at the top of the graph with a value of 1). Each line graphs the estimated probability, based on family income, that a respondent prefers their representative to engage in legislation over casework. The solid line represents those with a high school education, and the dotted line represents those without a high school education.

Table 2: Respondent Preference, Legislation vs. Casework

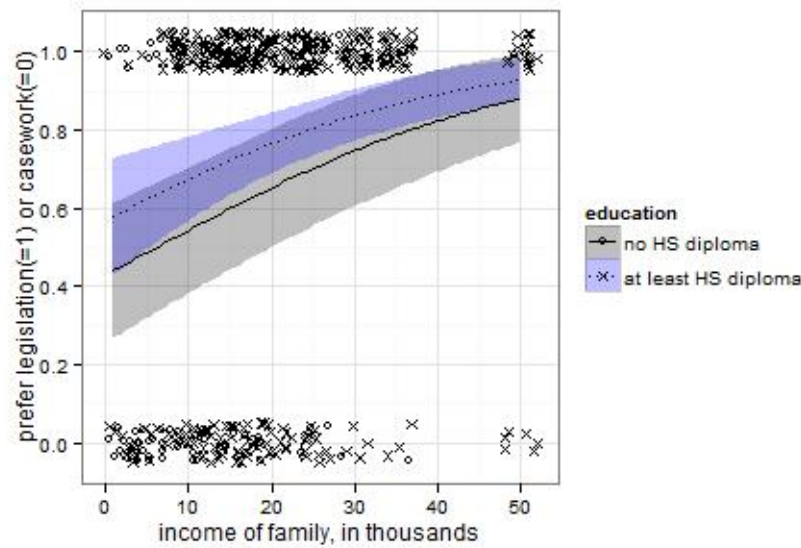
	Estimate
family's income (\$1000s)	0.045 (0.011)***
Republican ID	0.076 (0.056)
has HS diploma/GED	0.558 (0.276)*

Note: Logit regression, p-values in parenthesis, $n = 2304$.

Preference for legislation was coded as 1, casework as 0.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 1: Estimated probability that respondent prefers their representative engage in legislation.



The effect is large and significant. A respondent whose family earns \$20,000 per year prefers casework 50% of the time. If that same respondent earned \$40,000 per year, the probability of preferring casework decreases to 25%.¹¹ This is an decrease of 25%. Additionally, having a high school diploma or GED increases the respondents chance of preferring legislation because the more educated are more

¹¹\$20,000 per year corresponds to the bottom quartile of the income distribution in 1978. \$40,000 per year corresponds to the top quartile of the income distribution.

likely to understand the legislative process. Finally, being Republican may increase the chance of preferring legislation. Although not meeting the traditional criteria that the significance be greater than 0.05, this finding is reasonable and consistent with findings described later in the paper. Republicans may tend to prefer that people make their own way without excessive government interference.

Of course, while compelling, this result relies on data from several decades ago. The 1978 NES survey was the last survey to ask this question, and is the best evidence to date on individual preferences of types of representation. Fortunately, it is in accordance with evidence that supports hypothesis 1b: repeated finding in the literature that privileged individuals care more about policy issues than do less socioeconomically privileged individuals (Verba et al 1995b, Verba and Nie 1987: 80).¹² Combining these findings with the fact that legislators care about what their constituents want (Ellickson and Whistler 2001), the conclusion is clear. Legislators should respond to what constituents want by sponsoring more bills and passing more laws in more districts dominated by privileged citizens. Conversely, they should spend more time advertising and performing casework in districts with poorer and less educated constituents.

There are many reasons that a representative might spend more time on constituent service in a poor district. First, the district may have more people demanding constituent service. As I noted earlier, casework generally centers on the social safety net relied on by the disadvantaged. Since constituents reported getting satisfactory responses from their politicians over 95% of the time in 1978, and modern evidence shows that politicians respond to almost all casework requests (Carnes 2015, Butler and Broockman 2011, Broockman 2014). Indeed, poor constituent

¹²Verba and Nie label individuals who prefer casework as “parochial participants.”

service seems to be a good way to get negative media attention. Two of the top stories for the member of Congress from the richest district in 2012 were about Gerry Connolly responding badly to casework requests. In one case, he reportedly threatened a constituent who touched his arm (Frieire 2009), and in another an angry citizen posted a blank form letter nominally “responding” to a request (Williams 2009). This would entail that representatives in disadvantaged districts have higher caseloads. Second, politicians might advertise constituent services more often in disadvantaged areas, expecting to get a popularity boost from appearing to be in touch with the people. I will show evidence for this option through my analysis of Twitter, where politicians from disadvantaged districts advertise their constituent service activities. Finally, it could be the case that politicians from rich districts neglect constituent service demands. Because politicians seem to have consistently high response rates to constituent service requests, this is unlikely to contribute. The first two reasons have better evidence in their favor.

This analysis indicates that there should be positive and significant results in the next three sections. If representatives allocate their time based on constituent preferences and constituents’ preferences vary by demographics, then less educated and poor districts should receive more constituent service.

5 REPRESENTATION THROUGH CONSTITUENT SERVICE

Data Sources

It’s clear that constituent service, particularly casework, provides services that are

particularly important to the less privileged. Additionally, the 1978 NES survey indicates that casework has been more important to the less privileged. Thus, representatives of less privileged districts should spend more time on constituent services. However, this hypothesis is difficult to test because data on constituent service is hard to come by. Previous to this project, the last time data was collected on constituent service for House members was in the 1980s. Several surveys of members of Congress were created, both by political scientists and by the House of Representatives itself. Unfortunately, the data collected then is no longer available. Even if it were available, it would be highly dated.

What is more, such a survey would be close to impossible to replicate today. Members of Congress have dramatically lower response rates today than they did 30 years ago. The Congressional Management Foundation, a well established and well connected nonprofit organization, had only twenty-five members of Congress respond to their brief survey on how members of Congress spend their time. Conducting a survey on a representative sample of members of Congress would be prohibitively costly and time intensive, if possible at all in the modern era. Nor do members of Congress release data on how much time or how much effort they spend on constituent service.

Fortunately, there are two data sources that I can leverage to provide compelling support for the second hypothesis: members of Congress devote more resources to constituent service in poor districts. The first comes from the quarterly reports on how members of Congress allocated their staffing budgets. The second data source leverages the fact that almost all members of Congress tweet. Constituent service tweets reflect time intensive activities, and because tweets do not repeat any given activity more than once they provide a useful metric for constituent

service activity.

Data Source: Salaries of Congressional Staffers

My first test of Hypothesis 2 uses data from the House’s budgetary report for 2013. I analyze any differences between Congressional staffing allocation in privileged and underprivileged districts.

I collected data from House disbursements documents.¹³ The House publishes a document describing how money was spent each quarter of each year. Each member of Congress is allocated around one million dollars to spend on their staffers per year. From each of the four documents in 2013, I scraped information on the staffers and their titles and salaries for each member of Congress.¹⁴ I categorized each staffer into one of 5 categories by job title: legislative, constituent, communication, chief of staff, and other.¹⁵ I then added together the salaries for all constituent service staffers, communications staffers, etc. for each member of Congress.¹⁶

Data Source: Congressional Tweets

My second test to determine whether members of Congress from less privileged districts spend more resources on constituent service uses data from Twitter. Members of Congress use Twitter as a method for both advertising their activities and for communicating with their constituents. But their tweets are much more than simple cheap talk. This is a sample of three randomly chosen constituent service

¹³Available at house.gov.

¹⁴This was an encrypted pdf document, so substantial text parsing was necessary to turn the document into a data source that contained each member of Congress and how much they paid each staffer.

¹⁵Many job titles were misspelled or abbreviated, as were the names of many members of Congress. All errors were corrected with the help of Python.

¹⁶The category of “other” included job titles like IT Staffer and Employee, Part Time. On average, it accounted for 20% of a representative’s staffing budget.

oriented tweets:

- “Next week our mobile constituent service center will be in Milford. Here is the schedule” – Representative Kerry Bentivolio:
- “VA says it will complete all cases 2 years or older within 60 days!”
–Representative Jackie Speier
- “If you’re a veteran in the in 9th district having trouble with a va disability claim contact our office” –Representative Todd Young

While it is theoretically possible that members of Congress are misrepresenting themselves through these tweets, it is highly unlikely. Members of Congress are generally followed by thousands of people, many of whom would notice or be scandalized by clear misinformation. The statements in constituent service tweets provided by members of Congress are generally highly factual, referring to activities performed or services offered. The potential for backlash for misrepresenting a tweet viewed by thousands of people, primarily constituents and media members, is enormous. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that these tweets are truthfully representing the activities described. These tweets also represent time intensive activities, indicating that the activity itself is substantial. Touring traffic control towers and dealing with V.A. disability claims are resource intensive activities. Finally, the tweets themselves are not costly, while the constituent service itself is both costly and popular among constituents. There is every reason for a representative to publicize their constituent service activities. Thus, representative’s tweets should be representative of their constituent service activities.

New tools allow for the automatic analysis of text documents, allowing for a comprehensive look at how representatives present themselves through Twitter. I

used an implementation of semi-supervised document classification to analyze the tweets from members of Congress. Effectively, the methods I used linked the word and sentence structure of the tweets to the content of the tweets. For example, if a tweet uses combinations of the words “cases,” “you,” “touring,” “veteran,” then the method will classify the tweet as being constituent service oriented. On the other hand, if the tweet uses combinations of the words “pass,” “reauthorization,” “proposed ban,” “chairman,” or “hearing,” then the method should classify the tweet as being policy oriented. This method is not perfect, but it can achieve high accuracy and allows for the analysis of millions of tweets, a task that that would be effectively impossible by hand.

In order to turn Twitter into a data source, I first scraped all available Tweets for each member of Congress.¹⁷ In the end, I found 355 House members active on Twitter, and collected up to 4,000 Tweets per House member. In total, I collected 528,835 tweets. The next step was to process the Twitter data and classify each tweet into either constituent service or policy statement.¹⁸ First, I hand coded a training data set of 500 randomly selected tweets. After splitting the hand coded tweets into two random subsets, I simultaneously trained 5 different classification models on the subset containing 400 tweets. These classification models automatically associated tweet syntax with my hand coded classification. In order to determine the accuracy of the newly trained classification models, I asked the program to predict the remaining one hundred hand coded tweets. The trained classification model was able to accurately identify 67.5% of the tested tweets. This was not adequate, so I improved the coding of initial subset of 400, and ran the model again. This time I

¹⁷I collected all Twitter handles of members of Congress in 2013 from <http://www.govtrack.us/data/us/111/>, accessed January 2014

¹⁸In order to do this, I used a tool in R called RTextTools.

achieved an accuracy rate of 72.4%. I repeated this process until I had an accuracy rate of around 75%. I then hand coded an additional 1000 randomly selected tweets, and ran a training model on 700 of these new tweets. The accuracy of the updated classification models was 77.5% for the remaining 300 hand coded tweets. Finally, I ran the classification model on the entire set of 527,835 tweets. Because the hand-coded data was randomly selected, the classification model is expected to be about 77.5% accurate for the entire data set. This is an accuracy rate that slightly exceeds general expectations for a text classification model.

Data Sources: District Demographics and Controls

Demographic data on 2013 economic, educational, and ethnic characteristics of each Congressional district came from the U.S. Census website.¹⁹ The representative's party information was collected from the government website for the House of Representatives, and the representative's affiliation with the Congressional Black Caucus was collected from their website. I control for Cook Partisan Voting Index to capture district safety, and use DW-Nominate scores to control for how far a representative is from the mainstream ideology of his or her party.

The main measure I use is the socioeconomic privilege in a district. This is the latent variable underlying both district education and income to measure socioeconomic privilege. I combine the percent of a district that is wealthy, as measured by the percent of a district's households earning over \$75,000 per year, and the percent of a district that has a bachelors degree using factor scores. In general, the process of determining this latent variable is called factor analysis. It takes two or more variables, and determines one or more common latent variable behind the original

¹⁹Located at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> accessed January 2014.

variables. For district education and income, one latent variable captures the combination of the two with over 91% accuracy.²⁰ I use this latent variable to create a new variable for the socioeconomic privilege of a district. There are two reasons to use this instead of education and income as separate variables. First, my theory is about socioeconomic privilege in general, so a variable for socioeconomic status is called for. The NES study indicates that both components of socioeconomic status play into individual preferences for casework. Second, education and income are highly correlated (if they were not, there would be no single common latent variable with such high explanatory power). Highly correlated variables are difficult to interpret in statistical models, so creating a single variable makes my analysis simpler.²¹ I normalize this latent variable to be between 0 and 100 in order to correspond with the fact that the measure is based on the percent of a district that is wealthy and educated.

Results: Testing Hypothesis 2

Now that the tweets of the 355 representatives who have official accounts with Twitter have been classified, and the staffing resources of all representatives have been put into a dataset, it is possible to begin testing Hypothesis 2: do representatives of less privileged districts focus more attention on constituent services? The data is easily modeled by a multivariate linear regression. The results are presented in Table 3.

²⁰This is speaking somewhat loosely. The first factor accounts for over 91% of the variation between the two variables. The second factor accounts for less than 8%, so I simply use the first factor as the latent variable that captures district socioeconomic status.

²¹Indeed, when I use education and income separately, income sometimes captures the explanatory power of the model, and sometimes education does. It is more common for income to be the stronger effect. Using either alone retains the same general results, with some small variance in the standard errors.

Table 3: Constituent service activities by district

	% staffing budget	% tweets
socioeconomic privilege	-0.011 (0.044)*	-0.016 (0.009)**
Republican member	-0.020 (0.051)	-0.069 (0.000)***
Cook PVI	-0.001(0.059)	-0.003(0.000)***
seniority	-0.001 (0.441)	-0.008 (0.000)***
distance from party ideology	0.010 (0.753)	-0.002 (0.959)
log % black population	0.001 (0.879)	-0.001(0.934)
Black caucus member	-0.048 (0.024)*	0.034 (0.172)

Note: OLS, p-values in parenthesis. Staffing: $n = 435$. Twitter: $n = 355$.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 2: Percent budget devoted to constituent service staffers

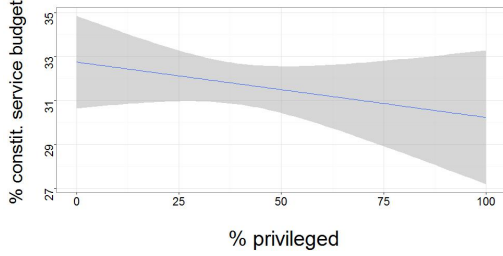
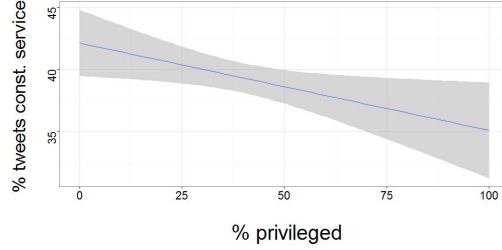


Figure 3: Percent tweets devoted to constituent service



The model provides interesting and highly significant results for many of the variables. I will focus on socioeconomic privilege and the representative's party identification. The results for seniority, Cook scores, and Black caucus member will be discussed briefly.

The main result supports Hypothesis 2. District socioeconomic privilege has a substantial negative effect on constituent service, both as measured through staffing and public statements. Figures 2 and 3 plot the estimated effect of district privilege

on staffing and tweets, respectively. District socioeconomic privilege creates a significantly negative effect on how much a representative focuses on constituent service. That is, the representative of a district with a large percentage of constituents who are educated and wealthy will not use Twitter to advertise and discuss as many casework services, nor will they devote as many staffers to constituent service.

The effect sizes for each are substantial, as shown in Table 4. I looked at the estimated budget/tweets for a privileged district, and compared that to the corresponding difference for a district that is not privileged.²² I controlled for the party of the district’s representative simply because there is an interaction between district privilege and party membership.²³

The magnitude of the effect is particularly obvious for the staffing budget. Overall, an unprivileged district will spend \$14,146 more per year on constituent service staffers than a privileged district. The estimated difference is particularly striking for districts represented by Republicans. An unprivileged district represented by a Republican will spend a full \$21,200 more on constituent service staffers. This is over half the salary one staffer. The difference for districts represented by Democrats is still substantial at close to \$10,000, despite being half the magnitude of that for Republicans. I include a comparison between Republicans and Democrats overall to put the differences listed through the remainder of this paper in context. Republicans, as noted above, have a self-help ideology. They are less likely to advocate that the government help individuals with problems. As seen in the 1978 NES

²²In particular, I look at the district that is more privileged than 75% of all other districts, and compare against the district that is more privileged than only 25% of all other districts. This gives an indication of the difference between a privileged and non-privileged district.

²³These estimates are useful for providing some insight into the result. It should be noted that like all estimates, there is some error associated with them. That is, they are estimates, not precise values. The interaction effects for party and privilege fall outside of the standard levels of significance.

data, Republican citizens care less about it. Since this is exactly the role of constituent service, the data reflects the fact that Republicans devote fewer resources overall to it.

The magnitude of the effect for Twitter is substantial when you consider that most tweets devoted to constituent service describe an activity that the member of Congress and/or their staffers are spending multiple hours or most of a day on (town hall meetings, constituent service hours, spending part of day with constituents) or are asking constituents to contact them for particular casework needs. Thus, 17 tweets, which is the estimated number of extra tweets that a member of Congress in the Democratic party will devote to constituent service when representing a socioeconomically disadvantaged district, represents a fair amount of work. Intriguingly, the effect size for Republicans is estimated to be close to 0. It appears that their tradeoffs between policy and constituent service appear primarily in their staffing budgets instead of their Twitter feeds.

Table 4: Estimated effect on constituent service for various groups

	staffing budget	tweets
privileged districts and Republican MC	-\$21,200	-0.53
privileged districts and Democrat MC	-\$9,786	-17
Republican/majority party MC	-\$12,448	-24

There are multiple interesting results from this model that do not directly impact the hypothesis being tested. Members of Congress who should not worry as much about reelection due to seniority and district safety (as measured by the Cook PVI) are less likely to tweet about constituent service, and might spend a little less on their constituent service staffing. Members of the Black Congressional Caucus are also less likely to devote monetary resources to constituent service staff, though the effect goes in the opposite direction without statistical significance for Twitter.

Clearly, the socioeconomic privilege of a district affects the behavior of its rep-

representative. In particular, representatives from less privileged districts, particularly ones with low education and low black population, tend to emphasize constituent service in their staffing allocation and their tweets. This result supports Hypothesis 2, that representatives from less privileged districts disproportionately focus on constituent service.

6 REPRESENTATION THROUGH LEGISLATION

Data

To test the third hypothesis, I constructed a dataset of the path of House bills through the legislative process. The House bills data encompasses all proposed legislation in the 113th Congress, 2013-2014. I parsed from the text of all bills to determine who sponsored each bill, the title of the bills, how far the bill got through Congress, and whether these bills had become law as of 2015.²⁴ The bulk data source also contained basic data on members of Congress.²⁵

Results: Hypothesis 3

The analysis that follows will provide evidence for the third hypothesis: representatives of privileged districts spend more time on legislation and policy. In order to support this hypothesis, the focus will be on legislative activities that have a positive influence on policy changes and that require personal effort by the legislator. This excludes activities such as filibustering which are designed to halt policy changes. It also excludes cosponsorship, and roll call votes which can and are done

²⁴Data found at <http://www.govtrack.us/data/us/113/>, accessed August 2015. This site scrapes bill information from congress.gov, a process that is illegal to automate on my own. I have checked the validity on over 3,000 bills, and have found no errors.

²⁵Data on members consists of name, party affiliation, committee membership, date entered into current Congress.

merely by showing up or telling a clerk to add your name to a bill. Thus, three dependent variables will be used. (1) The number of bills sponsored by a legislator. (2) The number of bills sponsored by a legislator that successfully pass the House of Representatives. (3) The number of laws that are created by their sponsored bills. These variables will effectively demonstrate that legislators devote costly time and effort to changing law when they have to answer to privileged constituents.

The following models measure district socioeconomic privilege as discussed earlier. Because the dependent variable is a count of bills and the data is over-dispersed, I use a negative binomial model (Rocca and Sanchez 2007: 136).

Table 4: Number of Bills Sponsored, Passed, and Enacted by district: 2013-2014

	Sponsored Bills	Passed House	Enacted Laws
socioeconomic privilege	0.076 (0.023)*	0.070 (0.009)**	0.033 (0.415)
Republican member	-0.121 (0.069)	1.270 (0.000)***	0.881 (0.000)***
Cook PVI	0.005 (0.263)	-0.010 (0.165)	-0.012 (0.245)
seniority	0.007 (0.335)	0.028 (0.016)*	0.048 (0.003)**
distance from party center	0.413 (0.051)	-0.013 (0.979)	-0.476 (0.390)
log % black population	-0.082 (0.014)*	-0.298 (0.000)***	-0.324 (0.000)***
Black caucus member	-0.004 (0.976)	1.059 (0.000)***	1.212 (0.002)**

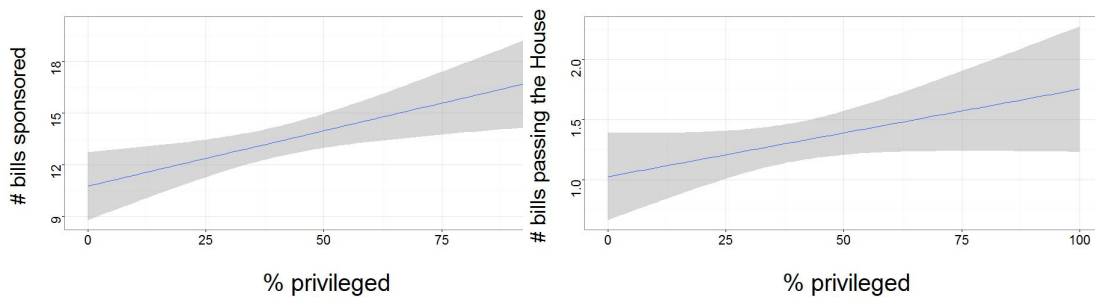
Note: Negative Binomial regressions, p-values in parenthesis, $n = 436$.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results of the negative binomial regressions in table 4 demonstrate that the more privileged the district, the more legislative activity occurs. First, bills are more likely to be sponsored by a legislator in a privileged district. This supports my theory, but not as well as the result that legislators in privileged districts successfully shepherd bills through the House's legislative process. Few bills that are sponsored

are ever reported out of committee, the first major hurdle in the legislative process. Of those, even fewer pass the first chamber: for the 113th Congress, only 9.8% of all sponsored bills were approved by the House. The process of deciding the kind of bill that will likely be passed, then lobbying colleagues to ensure its passage, is much more involved than simply sponsoring a bill. All one has to do to sponsor a bill is tell the House clerk that you want to sponsor a bill. The vast majority never make any progress at all through the legislative process, but many members of Congress use them to claim credit for caring about an issue for their constituents. It is safe to say that many of these bills were never intended to make progress, but were simply cheap talk. However, constituents are less likely to track what happens to a bill,²⁶ so a bill that progresses through the House is likely to be more than cheap talk. As we see, privileged districts also have representatives who sponsor bills that are approved by the rest of the House of Representatives. Oddly, the effect is almost non-existent for enacted laws. This discrepancy is odd, but does not significantly detract from my theory that representatives from privileged districts spend more effort on legislation than do those from less privileged districts.

Figure 4: Bills sponsored by party Figure 5: Bills passed through House



As shown in table 5, the magnitude of the effect for bills sponsored and passing

²⁶or blame their representative for failure to progress. It's too easy to blame the rest of Congress if a bill stays in committee. It's not your fault. It's their fault.

the House is substantial. Again, I compare privileged districts against non-privileged districts, and examine the effects for Republicans and Democrats. A privileged district nets an extra 1.35 sponsored bills, with the effect size being similar for both Democrats and Republicans. The mean number of bills passed is around 13, so this is a 10% increase in sponsorship. The results also show that Democrats members of the House sponsored more bills, with an average of 14.18 against the Republican with 12.52. This is an unusual result. It is generally true that the majority party is more active legislatively across the board. However, in this case, the minority party was more active in one aspect of legislation. It seems to have been relatively fruitless: Republicans again dominate the legislative process for bills that are voted on.

Whatever the reason, the importance of being in a privileged district is the same as being in the minority party when it comes to sponsoring bills. The magnitude of the effect of privilege is smaller for bills that pass the House. However, considering that the average number of bills approved by the House for any individual sponsor is only 1.31, there is still a 25% improvement for privileged districts represented by Republican, which is a larger relative improvement than that for bill sponsorship.

Table 5: Effect size for majority party member, privileged districts

	sponsored bills	passed House
extra bills for privileged district, Republicans	+1.28	+0.33
extra bills for privileged district, Democrats	+1.43	+0.09
extra bills for Republican/majority party	-1.66	+1.25

There are a few other results from table 4 that deserve to be mentioned.

Unsurprisingly, seniority increases the amount of legislation a representative engages in, with the exception of simple bill sponsorship. More interesting is the fact that

there is a contradictory effect between district minority population and the race of a representative. Districts with more minority citizens have a strong negative effect on legislation across the board. This is in line with much of the current research on district minority populations and legislations (Keane and Griffin 2009, Rocca and Sanchez 2007). However, minority members of Congress are much more likely to sponsor successful legislation. The magnitude of the effect for sponsoring bills that are enacted into law is in fact larger than that for being in the majority party.

Note that the choice to define \$75,000 and above as my measure of affluence while constructing my measure of socioeconomic privilege was arbitrary. The data provided by the census breaks income into 8 brackets of varying sizes. The census lists the percentage of each district that falls into each income bracket. It is simple to group these into a variable that captures the percent of the district that is high income. Fortunately, the entirety of my analysis is highly robust to the particular group I define as high income. One robustness check is provided in table 6. It is clear that the substantive size and significance of my main explanatory variable, income, on the number of bills sponsored is very similar across each grouping of income brackets. The two control variables that are significant in my model are also robust to the specification. Indeed, each variable increases or decreases in the direction it is expected. The percentage of the district that earns more than \$150,000 per year has a stronger effect on sponsored bills than does the percent of the district that earns more than \$100,000 per year, and so on down the up through \$35,000. At this point the effect size increases mildly, but never surpasses the effect estimated for rich. Similarly, Republican membership should be more influential for the more affluent, which table 7 below supports.

Table 6: Robustness of Income to Bills Passed in House

	district income	Republican member	seniority
% over \$200k	0.030 (0.035)*	1.189 (0.000)***	0.025 (0.033)*
% over \$150k	0.020 (0.022)*	1.188 (0.000)***	0.025 (0.035)*
% over \$100k	0.014 (0.015)*	1.179 (0.000)***	0.026 (0.030)*
% over \$75k	0.013 (0.013)*	1.171 (0.000)***	0.026 (0.027)*
% over \$50k	0.008 (0.012)*	1.189 (0.000)***	0.025 (0.035)*
% over \$35k	0.015 (0.020)**	1.147 (0.000)***	0.028 (0.017)*
% over \$25k	0.018 (0.034)*	1.137 (0.000)***	0.029 (0.014)*

Note: Negative Binomial regressions, p values in parenthesis, $n = 436$.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The primary conclusion to draw from table 5 is that the magnitude of the effect of being in a more privileged district is the same or of similar magnitude of the effect for being a member of the majority party in the 113th Congress. It is known that being part of the majority party makes a legislator much more likely to sponsor and get bills passed into law. The effect for income is in the same ballpark as that for party membership.

7 CONCLUSION

The existing findings on economic inequality and representation tell us that those with socioeconomic privilege are disproportionately influential. I find that this influence comes, at least in part, from legislators representing less privileged districts putting less effort into legislation. Yet this analysis demonstrates that representatives are not ignoring the less privileged; they are simply representing them in ways that had not yet been measured. Clearly, the impact of casework deserves more attention. Determining how much effort representatives spend on constituent services

through their monetary and time allocations is one way to understand the impact of casework, and more generally of representation of the less privileged. Other measures should be developed to pinpoint the amount of time and effort is spent on constituent service, and how conscious the representatives themselves are of these tradeoffs.

This analysis does not speak to the relative importance of casework and legislation, but does point to for additional discussion. If certain members of Congress are indeed sacrificing policy for casework, then we need to understand whether this is a worthwhile tradeoff. Casework is highly focused. It tends to address problems of people in need or public works. People ask for help with federal assistance programs like Medicare difficulties and disability status or for help on existing public work projects. While important, help on these issues tends to be less sweeping than creating laws.²⁷ Legislation often deals with large scale projects like like appropriations for Homeland Security or implementing trade agreements. This is in addition to dealing with the foundation of public assistance programs and creates public works. A theoretical exploration of what differences in casework and legislation mean to society would be useful. Of course, updating the data on citizen preferences over legislation and casework would be fruitful, as would data on how much time each representative spends on various activities.

Another way to expand upon my findings is to look at why legislators sometimes create policy that the less privileged prefer. It is intriguing that commonly requested casework issues mirror the policy where the poor are better represented. Casework requests include Social Security, Medicare, taxes, and public works (Serra and Moon 1994: 202-203; Fenno 1978:101). These are most of the areas where Gilens

²⁷Not always though. Many laws are devoted to focused areas like naming public buildings, or creating pork for particular recipients.

(2012: 121) finds the poor are better represented.²⁸ This suggests that legislators may change policy to reflect what they hear is needed. Casework demands tell them one set of problems, while conversations within their social circles that are higher income may tell them another. Testing this, possibly through interviews, would be highly informative.

The question of minority representation comes up throughout this analysis. Districts with high populations of African-American constituents are regularly underrepresented in legislation while black members of Congress devote fewer staffing resources to constituent service. This is in line with Verba and Nie's (1987: 97-98) findings that parochial constituents are not socioeconomically privileged and are not African-American. Thus, if constituents who request casework are not African-American, then districts with many African-American constituents are not going to receive much constituent service. Intriguingly, African-American members of Congress are much more likely to sponsor successful legislation. That is, black representatives are more likely to sponsor bills that make it through the House, and that become national law. The magnitude of the effect is larger than that for being in the majority party. This is striking and deserves a separate study devoted to exploring this finding.

Finally, determining the degree to which my results generalize across different congressional terms should be fruitful. In particular, congressional terms from different eras of politics may be affected differently by education, race, income, and freshman status. Alternatively, congressional terms with a different majority party may also change the results. Examining both possibilities would demonstrate the ways privilege influences legislation.

²⁸School voucher programs are also better represented. This issue may not be listed by Serra and Moon because it was not as prevalent before Serra and Moon's article was published in 1994.

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