

# The Demand for Non-Ideological Representation in a Polarized World

September 11, 2020

## **Abstract**

While studies of representation often focus on policy congruence between voters and elites, this is not the only dimension of representation, and in fact Members of Congress attempt to alter the dimensions of representation on which they are evaluated. In this paper I explore how the legislator's presentation of self affects not only the voter's evaluation of the representative, but also the importance of the non-ideological evaluation of the legislator. Using original data from The American Panel Survey, I find that as the frequency of contact with the legislator increases, citizens' evaluations of the elite improve. Experimental evidence, however, demonstrates that these relationships are heavily conditioned by partisanship.

Members of Congress must meet their constituents' expectations to ensure reelection. Legislators might not be able to persuade constituents to accept their policy positions, but they often present themselves to constituents in a strategic manner so that voters value non-policy, or non-ideological, aspects of representation in equal or greater amounts than policy representation.<sup>1</sup> Fenno (1978) identifies this process of presentation of self for the purposes of dictating the terms of evaluation as "home style." Representatives build support in their districts through the cultivation of trust by stressing their qualifications, empathy, and identification with the electorate, rather than focusing on ideological or policy-based appeals. If trust is built successfully, voters may provide the legislator a certain amount of leeway in roll call voting, so long as that sense of trust is not violated (Bianco 1994).

The major research question of this analysis is: Do citizens reward legislators who engage in attentive home styles, even in an era of sharply polarized, partisan politics? Do constituents' perceptions and evaluations of legislators' non-ideological qualities influence their evaluations of the legislator on a non-ideological dimension? If so, do these evaluations influence the citizen's overall evaluation of their legislator? While many seminal works of representation address these issues, their evidence may be artifacts from a bygone, non-polarized era. Although some recent literature has focused on Fenno's conception of home style in legislator behavior (Butler, Karpowitz, and Pope 2012, Grimmer 2013ab, Broockman and Butler 2017), few have examined constituents' role in the process. Using original panel data, I model how citizens respond to their legislators' home styles. By asking individuals about the frequency, level, and content of their communications with elected officials, I investigate the ways in which home style and the information constituents receive from and

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<sup>1</sup>By *non-ideological*, I refer to those aspects of representation that include the legislator's personality, attentiveness to the district, and responsiveness to the needs of the constituents that are independent of traditional left-right roll call issues.

about their representatives influence their view of legislators. I find that changes in perceived legislator effort and the non-ideological evaluation have significant effects on the constituent's view of the legislator.

## **Home Style in a Polarized Era**

Legislators cultivate non-ideological reputations through their home styles. Fenno (1978) identifies three key characteristics members of Congress attempt to display in their trust-making strategy. First, is qualification; candidates and incumbents must demonstrate that they possess the credentials necessary to serve. Second attribute required for trust is identification. Identifying with constituents sends the message that "I am one of you. I am like you." Voters will more likely trust someone who is like themselves; hence positive evaluations can be drawn based on such connections. Finally, trust is cultivated by empathy. To gain trust, the member must convey to her district that she understands their problems and cares deeply about helping. In this way voters will believe the legislator is tending to their best interests in Washington. They will not be seen as just numbers in the bureaucratic paper shuffle. Rather, they have someone in the legislature who knows and cares greatly about the issues facing the district. As a result, they can trust their representative.

Home style's main objective is to create a re-election constituency independent of partisanship. The personal vote that results from the actions of representatives is based on the "extrapolicy aspects of representation" (Fenno 1978, 242. Mayhew 1974, 26). Home style may substitute or neutralize the role of partisanship in evaluations. For example, when controlling for parochialism, the effect of partisanship on senator approval is minimal (Binder, Maltzman, and Lawrence 1998). Home state reputations based on personal characteristics may trump partisan and ideological considerations (Fenno 1996).

Recent literature on the polarization of the American public at the district and state

level suggest that this traditional depiction of home style is dated. Since the electoral and partisan realignment of the South, congressional districts now represent larger concentrations of copartisans (Levendusky, Pope, and Jackman 2008, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006, Abramowitz 2010). This re-organization of ideologies and affiliations leads to a conditional approach to home style: members from more polarized districts will present themselves as strong position-takers towards the ideological extremes (Grimmer 2013ab). Fenno himself suggests that Southern realignment’s effect on home style is the promotion of position taking when interacting with constituents (2000).

The consequences of polarization may extend to the effectiveness of legislators’ home styles. Redistricting produced more ideologically homogeneous and extreme districts (Carson et al. 2007).<sup>2</sup> With less ambiguity and variance with respect to the constituency’s preferences, legislators may build relationships with voters by emphasizing policy and ideology more than personal traits. Subsequently, they will focus on their positions and voters will come to expect and demand such messages.

Polarization in the nomination process may also influence the ways in which legislators connect to their constituents. Prior to the 1970s, party professionals exerted much of the influence in choosing general election candidates. In the four decades since, party activists and ideologues have gained a greater say in the nomination process (Layman and Carsey 2002, Fiorina 2006). As primary elections became a more common method of candidate selection, more moderate candidates were “weeded out” before the general election (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007).<sup>3</sup> A more influential primary electorate also increases the demand on

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<sup>2</sup>Although redistricting may have influenced House polarization levels, it does not explain Senate polarization. Additionally, the relationship between longterm polarization trends and gerrymandering is not so clear (Theriault 2006).

<sup>3</sup>But see Hirano et al. (2010).

the legislator to build a reputation that will deter challenges from ideological extremities. More extreme partisans place greater importance on policy representation at the expense of service and symbolic representation (Grant and Rudolph 2004, Lapinski et al. 2016). For this reason, incumbents will not only feel pressure to vote less moderately, but they will also devote greater resources to promoting their policy making decisions.

Nationalization of elections in a polarized era may also devalue the role of home style. As legislators become more ideologically cohesive and distinct, the powers of the party leadership systems become more powerful (Aldrich and Rohde 1997, 2000, 2005). A more powerful leadership system ensures that those moderate party members who do exist will be coerced into voting with the party more frequently than desired. The effect of such a strong partisan system is distinct party brands. Voters, interpreting ideologically distinct parties, will identify partisanship as a more salient factor in the decision making calculus. They think less about their legislator as “one of their own” and more as a representative of a political party. Even if they are provided the opportunity to vote for a moderate, they will consider the median of that candidate’s party (Bafumi and Herron 2010). Creating a personal brand is an increasingly difficult task.

At the citizen level, citizens have also engaged in more partisan and polarized behavior over the past decades (Abramowitz 2010). The frequency with which Republican [Democratic] identifiers vote for Republican [Democratic] candidates has nearly monotonically increased since the 1970s (Bartels 2000). As voters rely more on partisanship as a heuristic of legislators’ future behavior, the importance of non-ideological qualities and behaviors should decrease (Jacobson 2015). Citizens may discount casework and symbolic representation as replacement-level abilities. Finally, the policy positions of the electorate are, on average, more extreme and better sorted within the public (Levendusky 2009). This phenomenon has the effect of increasing the salience of ideology to the voter when she is

making her decisions.

Nonetheless, there are still reasons to expect the home style phenomenon and non-ideological evaluations play an important role in the representational relationship. First, legislators continue to provide non-ideological goods to their constituents, even prioritizing service over casework (Parker and Goodman 2009, Butler, Karpowitz, and Pope 2012). Although they may have difficulty in establishing their own brand distinct from the party, such a challenge may provide greater incentive to engage in traditional home style activities (Dropp and Peskowitz 2012). If moderates are pinned to an ideological label they find harmful, they must create a connection to the public that is distinct. Within the modern era, legislators do, in fact, engage in such behaviors when they may be out of step with their constituency. They focus less on policy when promoting their records (Grimmer 2013ab) and their electronic communications are less ideological as their constituency becomes more moderate (Radford and Sinclair 2017).

Evidence indicates that polarization has yet to eradicate the demand side for non-ideological representation. Recent studies of elections indicate that personal characteristics of candidates are able to provide insurmountable advantages (or disadvantages) (Stone and Simas 2010). In a 2013 nationally representative survey, more than three-fourths of Americans identified “Keeping in touch with constituents” as very important in their vote choice, while “Working on national issues” was identified as very important by fifty-seven percent.<sup>4</sup> Other recent evidence points to constituency service as being the highest priority of citizens from their legislators (Harden 2016).<sup>5</sup>

Changes in the American political environment demand investigation into the relevancy of home style and non-ideological representation. Although general trends might

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<sup>4</sup>The American Panel Survey, November 2013 wave

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that this finding is from the 2010 CCES for state legislators.

suggest the minimalization of a personalistic dimension's importance, evidence still remains that legislators provide and voters demand such traits. While the evidence exists, little of it focuses on how individuals react to perceptions of such behaviors and how voters employ non-ideological evaluations. For this reason, I aim to test the following hypotheses in this analysis.

From Fenno and the subsequent literature on constituent-legislator interactions, I identify three important elements of the home style process that would influence how the citizen perceives the legislator: the frequency with which the constituent comes into contact with the legislator, the level of contact, and the content of information. Previous research suggests that, all else equal, the more one encounters their member of Congress, the more likely they will develop a favorable view (Sinclair 1990) and be aware of their activities (Grimmer 2013a). As a result, the more one encounters their legislator, the more positive their evaluations should be. Those constituents who encounter representatives that devote more time to home style are likely to increase their evaluation of the member with respect to non-ideological elements of representation (Parker and Goodman 2009, 2013).

Furthermore, the level at which one encounters their legislator should influence the ways in which the citizen perceives representation. To reach constituents as directly as possible, legislators engage in various tactics. First, legislators will allocate their staff and personal resources to either help those in need of casework or to discuss policy issues. Second, incumbents engage in strong messaging practices to alert the public of their reputations and accomplishments. This process can take place in multiple ways. Common forms involve the congressional franking system, town hall telephone calls, press releases, floor speeches, mass media advertisements and interviews, and, more recently, social media and internet communications (Grimmer 2013ab, Adler, Gent, and Overmeyer 1998, Lawless 2012). While less common with the average constituent, personal contact is still highly valued by legislators.

It is here where the member can present herself both verbally and contextually. The member who travels home often, makes public appearances, and personally meets with constituents improves her relationship of trust. In general, closer, more personal contact should allow for greater manipulation of the legislator's image. As a result, the type of contact should be related to the ability to craft a reputation among the constituency.

Finally, the content of information should influence the legislator's evaluation on a non-ideological dimension. Legislators often highlight their engagement in service to their district independent of policy considerations. Fenno labels this behavior "servicing the district" by providing help to individuals, groups, and localities in coping with the federal government (101). Since service and symbolic attachment are less controversial and have wider appeal, legislators promote their ability to help constituents and note their personal roots in a district (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, Butler, Karpowitz, and Pope 2012). When one considers the highly polarized nature of the political landscape, the personal vote cultivated by case-work or one's personal background stands as strong non-ideological means to reach those who are on the opposite side of the aisle, or at least not as ideologically extreme as the primary constituency (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005). In this way, those on Capitol Hill need not sacrifice their partisan reputations or their image of loyalty in the House in order to work towards re-election.

**H1: Frequency of Contact and Non-Ideological Evaluation Hypothesis:**

Increased frequency of contact with the legislator will improve the citizen's non-ideological evaluation.

**H2: Level of Contact and Non-Ideological Evaluation Hypothesis:**

More personal levels of contact with the legislator will improve the citizen's non-ideological evaluation.

**H3: Content and Non-Ideological Evaluation Hypothesis:**

Receiving messages of constituency service or the personal background about the legislator will improve the citizen's non-ideological evaluation.



Fenno proposes that trust, or what I assume is reflected in a positive evaluation of the legislator's non-ideological activities, should lead to positive evaluations of the legislator. While much attention has been given to the purpose and form of home style, it is less understood how constituents react to exposure of their legislators' presentation of self. Fenno's arguments suggest that successful cultivation of a trustworthy image will lead to support among voters for personal rather than partisan or ideological votes. Others have used measurements of home style at the elite level, such as amount of franked mail, trips home, and federal appropriations procured for the district (Parker and Goodman 2009), to determine its effectiveness. Unfortunately, studies have yet to identify this influence at the individual level. This paper takes up where other works have ended: it tests the hypothesis that those constituents exposed to home style place higher value on non-ideological characteristics in the representation relationship. Additionally, it tests the prediction that home style exposure leads to a more positive evaluation of the member of Congress.

**H4: Non-Ideological Evaluation and General Approval Hypothesis:** Increases in the non-ideological evaluation will increase likelihood of approval of the member

## Research Design

### Methods: Panel Structure

Obtaining measures of exposure to legislators home styles is difficult. A common tactic by researchers has been to employ legislator-level behaviors to predict individual-level outcomes. While much data on legislator tactics exist and advances in textual analysis allow for greater measurement of home style content, it is unclear if individual constituents surveyed were in fact exposed to the treatment of presentation of self (Fiorina 1981). Survey experiments

may be a novel approach to this research question (Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood 2012, Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood 2015). Yet, relying solely upon lab studies or limited treatment period experiments may also prove problematic when studying the effects of home style. First, it is very difficult to manipulate real-world legislator behaviors such as visits to public events and provision of aid when dealing with the federal government. Second, constituent-legislator relationships, as stressed by Fenno, are not necessarily susceptible to one-shot effects. The trust which a representative wishes to cultivate often takes months or years. Thus, even a field experiment may not yield the external validity to how citizen-legislator relationships ebb and flow.

My first analysis relies on nationally representative survey responses about observations and evaluations of legislator performance. Little national survey evidence exists on respondents recalling legislator’s public activities and this work attempts to fill that gap (Parker and Goodman 2009). Admittedly, problems could exist with the validity of constituent’s self-reported exposure. To be sure, much evidence exists that turnout is often exaggerated among many individuals (McDonald 2003). Furthermore, other studies find that survey respondents often provide higher than actual levels of contact with electoral campaigns (Vavreck 2007).<sup>6</sup>

Even if over-reporting of exposure were non-existent, these survey designs may be vulnerable to selection-biases, and consequently endogeneity issues, within a cross-sectional design framework. For example, those subjects who have high opinions of their representatives at the time of the study are more likely to seek their legislator’s responsiveness activities

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<sup>6</sup>To confirm the validity of these self-reported measures, I conduct a series of analyses using House members’ press releases. I find evidence that the changes in frequency of information regarding legislators is significantly related to changes in the frequency of elite messaging. The results of these analyses are discussed in the Appendix.

than those who already hold a negative opinion (Green, Gerber and Nickerson 2003). Thus, it would appear that exposure to legislator effort influenced opinions about the representative. Such a design would confound any inference that could possibly be made from the data.

One possible way to overcome these many issues is with long term panel data. By taking advantage of a panel structure and measuring change in addition to the level of the observed variables, it allows the researcher to identify the real undulations that may occur within a long-term relationship. By asking panelists to provide their level or type of contact with their legislators, and measuring their perceptions over time, the researcher is able to observe within-subject variation. Since this design relies on self-reported exposure from the respondent, it is not immune to the issue of unreliable responses. Yet, this study should control the bias that over-reporting produces. By focusing on change rather than level, over-reporters should maintain their over-reporting behavior over time. This assumption suggests that the unreliable behavior should not produce biased estimates of a differenced model.

Data for the observational survey are drawn from the August 2013 and October 2014 waves of The American Panel Survey (TAPS). TAPS is a monthly online survey of about 2000 people. Panelists were recruited as a national probability sample with an address-based sampling frame in the fall of 2011 by GfK. Individuals without internet access were provided a laptop and internet service. In a typical month, over 1700 of the panelists complete the online survey. More technical information about the survey is available at <http://taps.wustl.edu>. For waves of interest to this project, slightly over 1100 panelists responded to the outcome variables in both August 2013 and October 2014.

## Outcome Variables

To measure the predictors and effects of citizens' views of their legislators' non-ideological evaluation, I construct a latent variable scale. This variable is derived from a set of items that are connected to extant literature on the multiple dimensions of responsiveness, particularly those outlined in Fenno's conception of trust. They capture citizens' perceptions of their representatives' qualification, identification, and empathy. These items include honesty, understanding of the issues, sufficiency in experience, keeping in regular touch with the district, leadership skills, and compassion. On each item, the panelists are asked how well each of the characteristics describes their legislator on a four-point scale. For each month, I derived a single dimension factor analysis factor score for each wave for each panelist using an exploratory factor analysis.<sup>7</sup> The change from the first to the second wave is calculated from the standardized factor scores. This change in non-ideological evaluation is the outcome variable for H1-H4. Table 5 in the Appendix displays the factor loadings of the two waves of non-ideological evaluation variables.

H4 requires an outcome variable that measures the overall evaluation of the representative. I follow the pattern of Grimmer (2013b) and rely upon job approval measurements. Each month of the panel survey gathers data on the approval of individual members of Congress. The panelist ranks her representative on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disapprove to strongly approve. Change in approval is produced by taking the difference between the 2013 and 2014 values.

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<sup>7</sup>Analyses using an additive scale produced similar results in the main analyses.

## Explanatory Variables

The first explanatory variables in this analysis are changes in the content of legislator presentation of self (here, the frequency of being made aware of the representative's service or personal background while previously reporting not hearing about such material), changes in the level of contact (here measured as changes in the highest level at which the panelist reported hearing information about their legislator), and changes in the frequency with which the panelist reported coming into contact with their legislator.

In August 2013 and October 2014, TAPS included questions regarding the ways in which constituents learn about their members of Congress. The items of greatest interest to this study include the frequency, level and content of the messages they receive. Each panelist provided information regarding the *frequency* of reading or hearing about or having personal contact with their member of Congress on a five-point scale from "never" to "once a week or more." From there, they were asked about the *level* of contact they had. This variable was coded into three ordered categories: "Third Party mediated" (Print media, television media, radio media, and internet media), "Representative Initiated Contact" (Internet or social media controlled by member, mail from member, phone call from member), or "Personal Contact" (Public event or large group meeting, Personal or small group meeting with member). This creates a four level variable with a base category indicating that the individual experienced no contact with the legislator. Respondents were provided a list of these types of contact and were also allowed to provide a free response. Nearly all free responses fell into these three categories. To measure *content*, panelists were asked what the content of each meeting with the member discussed. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in those interactions that involved "Personal assistance provided by the Representative to a constituent" and "Representative's personal background."

The *change in frequency* variable is derived by taking the difference between the two

waves of the given panel. This choice results in a nine category variable ranging from -4 to 4 that indicates how the frequency of interaction between the legislator and the constituent changed over the years. To measure the *change in level* of contact, I chose to treat the ordered variable as continuous on a scale of 0 to 3, once again, taking the difference between the two years. Such a decision produces a continuous variable ranging from -3 to +3, with high values indicating the strongest jumps in the type of contact for the constituent. Finally, I chose to operationalize changes in the *content* of the presentation of self with two dummy indicators. As noted above, within both waves I measure whether or not the panelist was made aware of information regarding the legislator’s personal service or personal background. To indicate change here, I simply created two dummy variables that are set at “1” if the panelist claims to have heard about either of these subjects when previously stating she had not, and “0” for all other cases.

For the first set of hypotheses, the dependent variable is continuous. Hence, ordinary least squares estimate the effects of exposure to home style on the non-ideological evaluation. Recall that the first hypothesis predicts that increases in exposure to home style on the part of the legislator will increase the panelist’s evaluation of her non-ideological characteristics. The likelihood that constituents obtain information about their members of Congress is dependent on a variety of factors. Failure to account for these variables could lead to confounding at the individual level (Grimmer 2013b), so I include controls that may be related to a constituent’s ability to retrieve information about representatives: racial group, education, income, gender, and political interest (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Griffin and Flavin 2007). Yet, since I am interested in within-subject change, the modeling strategy is less concerned with time-invariant covariates on the two outcome variables that measure change. As a result, the main analysis will not include such demographic controls.<sup>8</sup> At the

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<sup>8</sup>All analyses in this manuscript were run using demographic controls. The addition of these variables did

same time, I am interested in heterogeneity of constituents' reactions to variations in the legislator's presentation of self. I interact the explanatory variables from the previous model with a four-point measure of the panelist's interest in political affairs. The second outcome variable is the change the constituent experiences in her overall evaluation of her legislator. Using ordinary least squares, I am able to estimate the first difference in this evaluation variable in relation to the change in the non-ideological evaluation of the elected official. Within this model, the explanatory variable is the dependent variable from the previous analysis.

## Findings

The results for the first analysis appear in Table 1.<sup>9</sup> Column I suggests that changes in the content of information a constituent receives about her legislator is significantly related to his changing non-ideological evaluation. The explanatory variables in this model are indicators where "1" represents the panelist responding that they had come across information regarding the personal background of or constituency service provided by their member of the House of Representatives in October 2014 when they had previously said they did not hear any such information in August 2013. Thus, a "0" indicates that no change in response occurred for the individual from 2013 to 2014. Column I displays that being made aware of 

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not influence the statistical relationship between the main explanatory variables and the outcome variables. See Table 7 in the Appendix.

<sup>9</sup>The models were also estimated using various demographic controls, accounting for the possibility that certain observable, time-invariant characteristics may influence the change in the non-ideological evaluation. These models provided similar results regarding the time-variant covariates. These results may be found in the Supplementary Appendix in Table 6.

service, as well as the personal background or character, is significantly associated with an increase in the panelist’s non-ideological evaluation of the representative. Being made aware of the service record is associated with a roughly .29 unit increase in the non-ideological evaluation. While this distance may appear relatively small considering the spread of change in the dependent variable is roughly -3 to 3 on the relevant scale, it represents a roughly ten percent increase on the observed latent factor. Being made aware of the character or personal background is significantly related to the change in non-ideological evaluation, but the estimates show that the effect is much weaker.

**Table 1.** Predicting Change in Non-Ideological Evaluation

	I	II	III	IV
Made Aware of Service	0.286*** (0.082)			0.226*** (0.079)
Made Aware of Character	0.170*** (0.064)			0.072 (0.062)
$\Delta$ Level of Contact		0.222*** (0.023)		0.169*** (0.027)
$\Delta$ Frequency of Contact			0.126*** (0.016)	0.067*** (0.027)
Constant	-0.049** (0.024)	-0.023 (0.021)	-0.031 (0.021)	-0.061*** (0.023)
$N$	1, 135	1, 135	1, 135	1, 135
$R^2$	0.02	0.07	0.05	0.10

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Column II demonstrates that increases in the level of contact on a scale of -3 to +3 also are related to changes in the non-ideological evaluation of representatives. As the level of contact increases, the panelist’s evaluation of the legislator increases in kind. That is, the model predicts that should a voter come into contact with representative disseminated materials, while previously only encountering third party materials, she is likely to increase her non-ideological evaluation modestly. While the coefficient in the table suggests that increases in the level of contact are analogous to the content of communication, with respect



to their effects, it should be noted that this variable is the change of a scale. Thus, a two-unit increase in the level of contact, while rare within the sample, is associated with changes of a very high magnitude on the latent factor scale.

Increases in the frequency of contact also are strongly related to changes in the non-ideological evaluation scale. Such a result suggests that stronger public effort on the part of the legislator has the potential to significantly improve the representative's non-ideological image. This result holds when controlling for other types of changes in the presentation of self. While the change of frequency is the smallest effect in magnitude, it does remain significant and positive. Column IV indicates that within the less parsimonious model, being made aware of the representative's character is no longer a reliable effect. This change may be the result of hearing negative information regarding the background of the legislator, thus weakening the overall effect. Finally, it should be noted that the intercept term in column IV is negative and statistically significant. From this finding, it can be concluded that there was a slightly negative trend towards incumbents from the summer of 2013 to the fall of 2014.<sup>10</sup>

It is necessary to determine how these changes in the non-ideological evaluation are related to the individual's overall evaluation of the legislator. To determine the effects of these non-ideological perceptions, the model regresses the change in overall approval of the legislator on the change in the non-ideological evaluation variable from August 2013 to

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<sup>10</sup>Even with panel data, the causal inference of this model may be inhibited by the fact that certain panelists may be more likely to seek out a legislator as an election nears, for reasons such as partisan or ideological attachments. To address this issue, I performed a sensitivity analysis to determine if certain covariates may confound the effect of reported contact with the legislator on non-ideological evaluations. When accounting for this potential selection bias, the results of this analysis found that constituents are still likely to improve their non-ideological evaluation. A greater discussion of this analysis may be found in the Appendix.

October 2014.<sup>11</sup>

Table 2 displays the results of this model. Column I demonstrates that a significant increase in the approval of the legislator is associated with a similar change in the non-ideological evaluation. A rather large positive coefficient of 0.328 indicates that representatives' evaluations are closely tied to their perceived non-ideological attributes. To better understand the magnitude of this effect, consider that the mean value of observed change in the non-ideological evaluation is approximately zero. That is, the average person's perception of these extra-ideological elements did not change during the study. One standard deviation from this mean is roughly 0.731. An increase in this variable by one standard deviation from the mean is associated with a predicted change of approval of 0.351, meaning that a hypothetical panelist would increase her approval by roughly one-third of a category. Similarly, a change of one standard deviation less than the mean produces a prediction of  $-0.133$  categories change in the outcome.

**Table 2.** Predicting Change in Legislator Approval

	All	Shared PID	Opposite PID or Independent
$\Delta$ Non-Ideological Evaluation	0.328*** (0.042)	0.285*** (0.063)	0.344*** (0.058)
Constant	0.108*** (0.031)	0.157*** (0.051)	0.072* (0.039)
<i>N</i>	1,076	380	676
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.05	0.05

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Although these predicted changes appear quite small, their magnitude must be put

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<sup>11</sup>Once again, this model was run using several time invariant covariates that may influence each individual's trend in approval over the course of the time period. The results of this model were consistent with the main explanatory variables' relationship to change in legislator approval. The findings may be found in the Supplementary Appendix in Table 8.

into context. The scale of approval is only a five-point measurement, indicating that the possible level of movement is quite constrained. The outcome variable in this analysis may take on nine possible values, but the individual panelist may only move a maximum of four units. Furthermore, the majority of movement is contained to two units. Very few individuals oscillate from strongly disapprove to strongly approve. With this pattern in mind, it becomes apparent that the predicted change from a one standard deviation increase is analogous to nearly twenty percent of all possible movement on the scale. Hence, these somewhat reasonable changes in the explanatory variable are related to rather meaningful perceptions of the legislator.

Table 2 also attempts to uncover whether legislators can make gains with ideologically opposed or ambiguous constituents on these non-ideological characteristics. Within columns 2 and 3, the results of a subsetting regression are displayed by those who identified as the same party as the legislator and those who identified as Independent or of the opposite party, respectively. These results show that Fenno's argument that legislators can improve their standing among their constituency by appearing as trustworthy representatives has empirical merit. Among both copartisans and those who are not aligned, significant positive effects exist. This model suggests that the non-ideological evaluation is relevant among both copartisans and those individuals who do not share affiliation with legislator.

To further demonstrate the importance of the non-ideological evaluation with respect to the overall evaluation of sitting legislators, consider the possibility that a citizen's attitudes towards her representative may be influenced by a change in perception of the legislator's policy positions in relation to her own. The perceived closing of a gap in ideological distance should correspond to a more positive evaluation of the legislator. If changes in the non-ideological evaluation are not responsible for changes in approval when controlling for the change in perceived policy agreement, the addition of a policy variable should significantly

decrease the magnitude of the non-ideological evaluation’s effect.

In order to test this possibility, each panelist was asked to report how well she believed her legislator represented her policy preferences on a five-point scale, from “not well at all” to “very well” in both waves of this study. The difference of these measures, a five-point scale ranging from  $-4$  to  $+4$  with zero indicating no change in perceived congruence, was included in the previous regression models. The results of this exercise may be found in Table 3. The first column, which includes all panelists, demonstrates that while the estimated coefficient for change in the non-ideological evaluation decreases, it is still not significantly different from the effect reported in Table 2. Furthermore, the effect is still positive and significant, indicating that an increase in the non-ideological evaluation is positively associated with a change in approval, even when controlling for changes in policy congruence.

**Table 3.** Predicting Change in Legislator Approval, Controlling for Change in Perceived Policy Agreement

	All	Shared PID	Opposite PID or Independent
$\Delta$ Non-Ideological Evaluation	0.195*** (0.054)	0.218*** (0.085)	0.185*** (0.071)
$\Delta$ Perceived Policy Agreement	0.235*** (0.060)	0.119 (0.092)	0.296*** (0.079)
Constant	0.077** (0.032)	0.132** (0.055)	0.050 (0.040)
$N$	1,050	378	672
$R^2$	0.07	0.06	0.06

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

The effect of change in policy congruence is statistically significant and positive for the set of all panelists, suggesting, unsurprisingly, that as citizens believe their representatives better reflect their own preferences, their approval of the legislators increases. This relationship is statistically reliable for those of the opposite party or Independents, but it is somewhat weaker for those sharing the partisanship of their legislator. The finding that

the non-ideological evaluation, but not perceived policy agreement, holds a significant influence on evaluations of legislators for copartisans, would seem to run counter to Fenno's argument that it is policy which most resonates with shared partisans. While surprising, this finding further underlines the importance of changes in non-ideological evaluation for both copartisans and those who do not share the partisan identity of the legislator.

These findings hold great importance for the polarized world. While some may posit that the importance of parochialism has diminished with nationalized elections and polarization, I find that at the individual level, changes in the evaluations of legislators on an alternative dimension, even when controlling for partisanship and policy congruence, play an influential role in overall approval. Legislators who are out of step with their constituencies may be able to build support by building goodwill through their home styles in meaningful ways. Similarly, simply because a constituent aligns with her representative in Congress does not mean that the incumbent is secure. Rather, a weak home style, and subsequently a weak NPE, can significantly harm the representational relationship, even for a copartisan. Thus, party and ideology do not monopolize the ways in which constituents connect to their elected officials.

## **Home Style Survey Experiment**

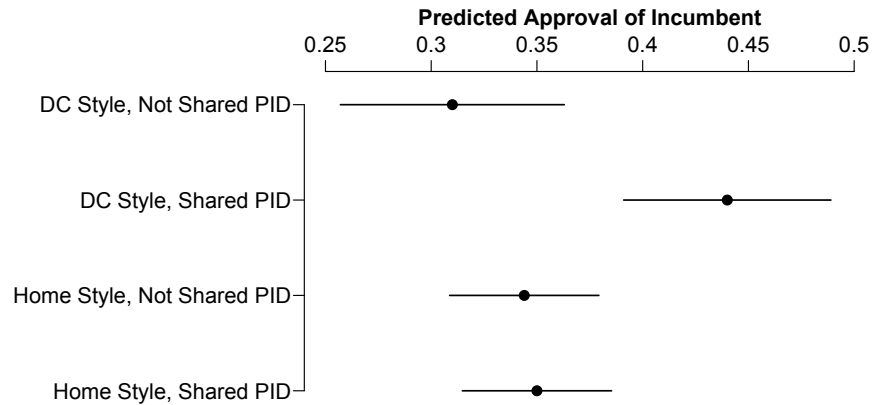
Panel data demonstrate a strong relationship between perceptions of legislator public effort and evaluations on a non-ideological, personalistic dimension. Those legislators who increase their visibility in their districts are found to be more likely to be evaluated on a dimension of honesty, compassion, and attentiveness. In turn, these evaluations exert significant influence on how members of Congress are evaluated. I extend these findings by further identifying a causal link between evaluations of legislators and perceptions of home style. By manipulat-

ing the amount of time a legislator spends in his district, I investigate the extent to which constituents value how legislators allocate their time. Furthermore, by manipulating the partisanship of an incumbent legislator, I am able to identify if whether representational styles can win support across party lines. In the summer of 2017, panelists of the The American Panel Survey were presented with the a vignette that described an incumbent member of Congress who was faced with decision of allocating his free time between Washington, D.C. and his home district:

*Congressman Daniel Thornton is a [Democrat/Republican] serving in the United States House of Representatives. Like many representatives, he spends time in Washington D.C. and his home district. During the past six months, he has spent approximately [75%/25%] of his weekends in Washington D.C. and [25%/75%] of his weekends in his home district.*

Panelists were randomly assigned to receive one of four treatment conditions. Treatment assignments could be classified into four pairwise groups of legislator partisanship and weekend priorities: Republican-home district concentration, Democrat-home district concentration, Republican-Washington concentration, and Democrat-Washington concentration. Following the presentation of the experimental vignette, subjects answered two survey questions. First, they provided their level of approval of the hypothetical member of Congress on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disapprove (coded as “-2”) to strongly approve (“+2”). Second, they were asked how many weekends they thought a member of Congress should spend in his home district, provided there are four weekends in a month.

The results of the experiment suggest that evaluating representational styles demands more nuance. When approval scale is collapsed to a dichotomous indicator of “Approve”/“Not approve,” those subjects who evaluated a legislator spending more time in Washington D.C. registered an approval rate of 38%. At the same time, those evaluating a member of Congress who spent the majority of his weekends in their home district provided



**Figure 1.** Predicted Level of Approval for Incumbent Legislator by Treatment

an approval rate of 34%, a significantly lower level. That is, those who evaluated home style focused legislators were less likely to approve of the elite than those who evaluated legislators who spent most of their time in Washington, D.C. When put into the context of our observational analysis, this result is somewhat surprising. Previously we demonstrated that perceptions of increased contact are nearly universally accepted. Yet, we should consider that these experimental results are for a legislator who does not represent the panelist. Furthermore, we are evaluating cross-sectional evaluations. Theories of home style hinge upon the notion that reputations are built over time. Thus, panel data may be more ideal to evaluate within subject change in response to perceptions of attentiveness.

When integrating the partisanship of the respondents and the vignette representatives, we find significant heterogeneity in how citizens evaluate their legislators' representational styles. As shown in Figure 1, when a subject was informed that a member of Congress spent the majority of their weekends in their district, little difference in approval exists. When considering the vignettes in which the legislator spent the majority of his weekends in Washington D.C., the results suggest a slight, but not significant, difference in approval

for those panelists who do not share partisan identification; 31% of non-aligned subjects approved of the legislator who spent the majority of his weekends at home.

When considering co-partisans evaluating a legislator who spends the most of his weekends in Washington D.C., however, a strong representational style effect becomes apparent. the predicted level of approval for such a member is roughly 44%. This statistically significant difference suggests that co-partisans are more likely to reward a representational style that focuses on Washington work rather than home style. Small gains in support may be possible for members of Congress who engage in personal contact and frequent trips home, but the results of the experiment suggest such marginal shifts are limited to those who are not part of their party's constituency. At the same time, a co-partisan is at an advantage when he engages in *less* personal contact in the district.

These results complement those of the observational study. While cultivating a personal brand that is built upon name recognition and personalistic politics can be beneficial to incumbents over a long period of time, when creating a reputation a legislator can build support by focusing on Washington work. These results are consistent with previous work suggests that independents tend to reward bipartianship, while strong partisans tend to penalize not working towards the party's goals (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). In a similar manner, co-partisans tend to reward working on policy, while independents and members of the opposition reward personalistic representation.

## **Changes in Constituency and Changes in Legislator Travel**

The experimental results suggest that partisans prefer a member other own party to spend more time in their district, while there is slight evidence that those not aligned with the incumbent legislator prefer more time in the district. While constituents may respond to



differences in representational style, it remains unclear if members of Congress adjust their representational style in response to their constituency. One way to identify changes in style is to examine if changes in district boundaries, particularly which citizens comprise a constituency, are related to changes in legislator travel to their home districts. The findings from the experiment lead to the prediction that as a district becomes more favorable to party of the incumbent legislator, she will travel home less frequently, while a district that becomes more competitive should pressure her to travel home more frequently. Redistricting after the decennial census provides an opportunity to examine if changes in constituency influence home style activities for incumbent members of Congress.

Members of Congress often publicize their trips to their district, but no database exists that accurately aggregates their travel. One possible source to address this void is the House Statements of Disbursements (SoD). The document produced every quarter by the General Publications Office lists the receipts for each House Office. While the SoD does not identify the exact number of trips to the district, it does identify each office charge for commercial travel that uses the Citibank Travel Card. The Citibank Travel Card is only allowed to be used for official travel by the member or their staff. To gather a proxy measure for travel to the district, I scraped the SoD for 2012 (Congressional district boundaries from the 2000 Census) and 2013 (Congressional district boundaries from the 2010 Census). I use two separate measures that capture change in the political composition of the member's district. First, I subtract Barack Obama's vote share from the 2010 Census district from the 2000 Census district. Thus, positive numbers reflect a pro-Democratic shift. Second, I subtract the MRP ideology scores as derived by Tausonovitch and Warshaw (2012) from the same censuses. Here, higher values indicate a more conservative shift in the member's district. Using ordinary least squares, I regress the change in commercial travel using the Citibank card from the 2012 to 2013 on these changes in political composition interacted

with a dummy variable for partisanship (where 1 represents “Republican”). Hence, a positive sign on the interaction with Obama vote share indicates that a Republican goes home more when her district is less Republican. I also include controls for member tenure and state fixed effects.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 4.** Change in Travel to the District

	I	II
$\Delta$ Obama Vote Share	2.261 (13.265)	
$\Delta$ Conservatism		2.500 (3.456)
Republican	0.764 (1.385)	1.319 (1.362)
$\Delta$ Obama Vote Share $\times$ Republican	6.390 (22.841)	
$\Delta$ Conservatism $\times$ Republican		-8.528 (8.878)
Tenure	0.026 (0.067)	0.022 (0.066)
Constant	-18.733*** (6.749)	-18.840*** (6.744)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
$N$	324	324
$R^2$	0.16	0.16

DV is each legislator’s change in usage of Citibank Credit Card for Commercial travel from 2012 to 2013. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

The results of the regressions can be found in Table 4. In the first column, the interaction between President Obama’s vote share and Republican party identification is positive. This result means that as a Republican’s district becomes more favorable to Democrats, she is likely to go home more frequently than if her district were relatively more favorable to Republicans.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, as shown in column II, when a Republican’s district is more

<sup>12</sup>The sample of legislators includes only those who served in both years and reported more than 20 receipts.

<sup>13</sup>Note that nearly all legislators traveled less in 2013 than in 2012, an election year. Nonetheless, variation

conservative, she goes home less frequently. While these results suggest that legislators do adjust their personalistic representational styles in response to the partisanship of their constituencies, the results suffer from a lack of precision and power. Still, the coefficients are consistent with the experimental results.

## Conclusion

I provide strong evidence that from the demand side, representation has more than one dimension. Home styles have the ability to reach across partisan and ideological divides, but these effects are limited by context. Among those constituents who do not share a partisan affiliation, observational panel data demonstrates that legislators can make connections. The preceding analysis would seem to give strong support to the research question at hand: does the concept of home style and the non-ideological component of the representational relationship remain in a polarized world. The empirical evidence strongly supports that presentation of self is effective in building support among the constituency, even in an era charged by ideology. While images of partisan rancor and influential ideologues dominate popular political narratives, constituents' evaluations of their legislators exhibit fluidity that is systematically related to perceptions of effort. These perceptions are associated with non-ideological evaluations that matter a great deal for legislator support.

At the same time, however, the results of a survey experiment demonstrate that significant variation exists in how co-partisans reward a representational style that focuses on Washington work. Rather than reward a non-ideological home style, members of the same party provide significantly higher evaluations when the legislator remains in Washington.

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exists in the deceleration of official travel in the non-election year and the results provide evidence that more favorable seats go home less.

This result demonstrates that there are limits to building up a positive non-ideological brand. Members of one's own party may view such traits as having diminishing returns, particularly if it comes at the cost of policy gains. In fact, observational data suggest, albeit not at a traditional level of statistical significance, that district shifts are related to changes in home styles: members whose constituencies become more ideologically and partisan aligned are expected to make fewer official trips.

These findings do not negate previous work that identifies the public as more polarized or partisan. Rather, I argue that approaches to representation that limit their conclusions to a single dimension are merely underspecified. In addition to providing evidence of multidimensional representation at the individual level, I also demonstrate that views of legislators change in meaningful ways. The possibility exists that during this polarized era, legislators have merely adapted their home styles to meet their goals of re-election. If, as some put forward, that the polarization of the public is overstated in relation to elites (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005), then the findings from this analysis may suggest home styles serve to exacerbate polarization rather than limit it. By taking advantage of their non-ideological evaluations with copartisans, anti-partisans, and Independents alike, incumbent legislators may be building up greater leeway with constituencies. In this way, they are able to move further right or left with fewer consequences.

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## **Supplementary Appendix**

### **Factor Loadings of Non-Ideological Evaluations**

**Table 5.** Factor Analysis of Non-Ideological Evaluations

Variable	Loading on Factor 1	Uniqueness
<i>2013</i>		
Honesty	0.855	0.270
Understands Issues	0.906	0.160
Has Sufficient Experience	0.873	0.221
Keeps in Regular Touch	0.782	0.368
Is a Strong Leader	0.849	0.279
Shows Compassion	0.845	0.139
First Factor Eigenvalue	4.650	
Second Factor Eigenvalue	0.410	
$\alpha$	0.94	
<i>2014</i>		
Honesty	0.892	0.205
Understands Issues	0.929	0.118
Has Sufficient Experience	0.899	0.164
Keeps in Regular Touch	0.832	0.286
Is a Strong Leader	0.893	0.203
Shows Compassion	0.871	0.214
First Factor Eigenvalue	4.940	
Second Factor Eigenvalue	0.340	
$\alpha$	0.94	

## Models with Time-Invariant Covariates

Table 6 demonstrates the effects of changes in perception of legislator effort on the changes in the non-ideological evaluation, while controlling for time-invariant covariates. Time invariant covariates include a dichotomous indicator for the citizen’s race (1=“White”, 0=“Other”), years of education (a 15-category ordered variable treated as continuous), income (a 16-category ordered variable treated as continuous), a dichotomous indicator for sex (1=“Female”, 0=“Male”), the perceived ideological distance between the panelist and her House member (coded as the panelist’s perceived absolute difference with the legislator on a 7-point ideological scale ranging from “very liberal” to “very conservative”), a 4-point measure of political interest, and dichotomous indicator representing shared partisanship between the panelist and the House member. The results suggest that nearly all of the effects from Table

1 remain consistent when adding these time-invariant covariates. Becoming aware of service to the district or personal background and character information has a strong, positive effect on the change in the non-ideological evaluation. Additionally, an increase in the frequency and level of contact are strongly, positively associated with a change in the non-ideological evaluation. That is, even when controlling for a series of baseline covariates, exposure to home style is significantly related to positive evaluations of non-policy. These patterns are also consistent with the statistical analyses for Hypotheses 2 and 3. That is, when controlling for a series of time-invariant traits of the panelists, I find that the relationship between non-ideological evaluations and perceptions of public effort (Table 7) and the relationship between non-ideological evaluation and approval are positive and significant. More directly, I find that even when controlling for possible confounders, the findings hold.

## 0.1 Sensitivity Analysis

Typically, causal inference in the social sciences relies upon an assumption that treatment statuses are independent of potential outcomes, conditional on a set of possible confounders (Imbens 2003). Although this modeling strategy employs a panel structure to overcome some of the problems with self-report and selection bias for the treatment, it is necessary to perform a sensitivity analysis which accounts for violations in this ignorability assumption. For example, it is certainly possible that those who are already aligned ideologically or by party with their legislators will develop stronger positive feelings over time and seek out these legislators, particularly as an election nears (e.g. Gelman and King 1993). In this analysis, I must determine if individual traits of the panelists influence their likelihood of coming into contact with their legislators, and therefore influence the interpretation of exposure to legislators in relation to changes in the non-ideological evaluation.

Formally, this confounding can be expressed as (Blackwell 2014):

**Table 6.** Predicting Change in Non-ideological Evaluation

	I	II	III	IV
Made Aware of Service	0.295*** (0.088)			0.231*** (0.086)
Made Aware of Character	0.222*** (0.070)			0.122* (0.069)
$\Delta$ Level of Contact		0.215*** (0.025)		0.161*** (0.029)
$\Delta$ Frequency of Contact			0.123*** (0.017)	0.065*** (0.019)
White	0.037 (0.054)	0.053 (0.053)	0.065 (0.054)	0.058 (0.053)
Years of Education	-0.007 (0.014)	-0.011 (0.014)	-0.007 (0.014)	-0.014 (0.014)
Income	0.008 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)
Female	-0.033 (0.047)	-0.032 (0.046)	-0.038 (0.047)	-0.035 (0.046)
Ideological Distance	0.048*** (0.016)	0.050*** (0.015)	0.045*** (0.015)	0.050 (0.015)
Political Interest	-0.097*** (0.029)	-0.080*** (0.028)	-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.077*** (0.027)
Share Party ID	0.133*** (0.051)	0.139*** (0.050)	0.148*** (0.051)	0.133*** (0.050)
Constant	-0.360*** (0.174)	-0.285* (0.170)	-0.321* (0.172)	-0.321* (0.172)
$N$	951	951	951	951
$R^2$	0.04	0.09	0.07	0.12

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 7.** Predicting Change in Non-ideological Evaluation, Conditional on Interest

	I	II	III
Made Aware of Service	0.260 (0.075)		
Made Aware of Character	-0.112 (0.169)		
$\Delta$ Level of Contact		0.104* (0.057)	
$\Delta$ Frequency of Contact			0.015 (0.040)
Political Interest	-0.075** (0.031)	-0.073*** (0.028)	-0.064** (0.029)
Made Aware of Service $\times$ Political Interest	-0.019 (0.116)		
Made Aware of Character $\times$ Political Interest	-0.192** (0.089)		
$\Delta$ Level of Contact $\times$ Political Interest		-0.064** (0.030)	
$\Delta$ Frequency of Contact $\times$ Political Interest			-0.061*** (0.020)
White	0.042 (0.054)	0.054 (0.053)	0.065 (0.054)
Years of Education	-0.007 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.014)	-0.008 (0.014)
Income	0.009 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)
Female	-0.036 (0.047)	-0.036 (0.046)	-0.043 (0.047)
Ideological Distance	0.045*** (0.016)	0.047*** (0.015)	0.044*** (0.015)
Share Party ID	0.136*** (0.051)	0.135*** (0.050)	0.141*** (0.051)
Constant	-0.321*** (0.175)	-0.271 (0.170)	-0.291* (0.172)
$N$	951	951	951
$R^2$	0.05	0.10	0.08

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 8.** Predicting Change in Legislator Approval

	I	Shared PID	Opposite PID or Independent
$\Delta$ Non-ideological Evaluation	0.297*** (0.044)	0.221*** (0.071)	0.321*** (0.059)
White	0.000 (0.075)	0.040 (0.119)	0.001 (0.099)
Political Interest	0.018 (0.040)	0.051 (0.068)	0.000 (0.050)
Years of Education	-0.048** (0.019)	-0.010 (0.014)	-0.049** (0.024)
Income	0.016 (0.009)	0.023 (0.017)	0.007 (0.013)
Female	0.083 (0.066)	0.018 (0.110)	0.131 (0.083)
Ideological Distance	0.003 (0.020)	0.081* (0.047)	0.001 (0.050)
Constant	0.511** (0.236)	0.567 (0.403)	0.500* (0.300)
$N$	931	336	584
$R^2$	0.05	0.06	0.06

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

$$q(a, x) = E[Y_i(a)|A_i = a, X_i = x] - E[Y_i(a)|A_i = 1 - a, X_i = x] \quad (1)$$

Within this function,  $q$  represents the confounding as a function of being exposed to the legislator's home style,  $a$ , and covariates which may influence the likelihood of treatment.  $Y_i$  is the outcome for panelist  $i$ ,  $A_i$  represents the treatment, where a value of 1 corresponds to receiving an increase in exposure in information, and  $X_i$  refers to a set of each individual's covariates. Thus, confounding is defined by the difference between the expected observed outcome between treatment groups, conditional on a set of individually heterogeneous covariates. If treatment is assigned randomly, then the outcome's relationship to treatment group is assumed to be independent. As a result, confounding is non-existent. Yet, in an observational study such as the present, a similar assumption cannot be made.

Blackwell (2014) outlines a possible solution to the violation of the ignorability assumption. By modeling a confounding function of the treatment status and observed outcome, researchers are able to determine both the raw amount of confounding and the variance in the observed outcome explained by confounding produced by the covariates that are responsible for selection bias. Using this approach, it is necessary to construct a confounding function in which the treatment status is regressed upon covariates which may influence the likelihood of such status. Using this logistic regression estimation, the predicted values for each individual represent a propensity score to being in the treated group. These scores are then used to replace the observed outcome with an adjusted outcome without omitted variable bias. The new outcome variable is then regressed upon the treatment variable along with the confounding function, providing a new estimate that controls for selection bias.

The strength of this approach is that it allows for researchers to determine the extent to which confounding influences the estimated effect of the treatment. This method reparameterizes  $q$  so that it is possible to determine the extent to which the variance in the outcome variable,  $R^2$ , can influence the observed effect. Figure 2 displays the results of this analysis.<sup>14</sup> For the sake of interpretation, I have limited the analysis to the treatment of increased frequency of exposure to home style. The y-axis represents the estimated effect of an increase in this variable.<sup>15</sup> On the x-axis, the figure displays the amount of variance in the outcome variable, here the change in non-ideological evaluation, explained by the confounding variables. The  $\times$  symbols represent the amount of partial variance each covariate has with the outcome variable.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Sensitivity analysis performed using the `causalsens` package in R

<sup>15</sup>The `causalsens` package does not allow for a continuous treatment variable. Thus, I have chosen to dichotomize the variable to “1” if the panelist reported an increase in contact and a “0” otherwise.

<sup>16</sup>For this analysis, I have chosen to include age, sex, race, interest in politics, shared partisanship,

The results of the figure indicate that for the entire range of possible variance explained by the confounding covariates, the effect of an increase in exposure to home style remains positive and statistically significant from zero. That is, even when accounting for the selection bias of coming into greater contact with the representative, constituents are still likely to increase their perceptions of the elected official’s non-ideological attributes. Such a finding greatly strengthens the causal claims of the home style relationship.

## 0.2 Validating Measure of Self-Report with Press Releases

To further ameliorate concerns regarding the change in frequency variable, I compare the panelists’ responses to changes in contact with changes in legislators’ public messaging strategies. I gathered 212 House members’ official press releases for the six month period before the first wave of the study and the six month period for the second wave of the study. Press releases are typically made available on the official House websites of members.<sup>17</sup>

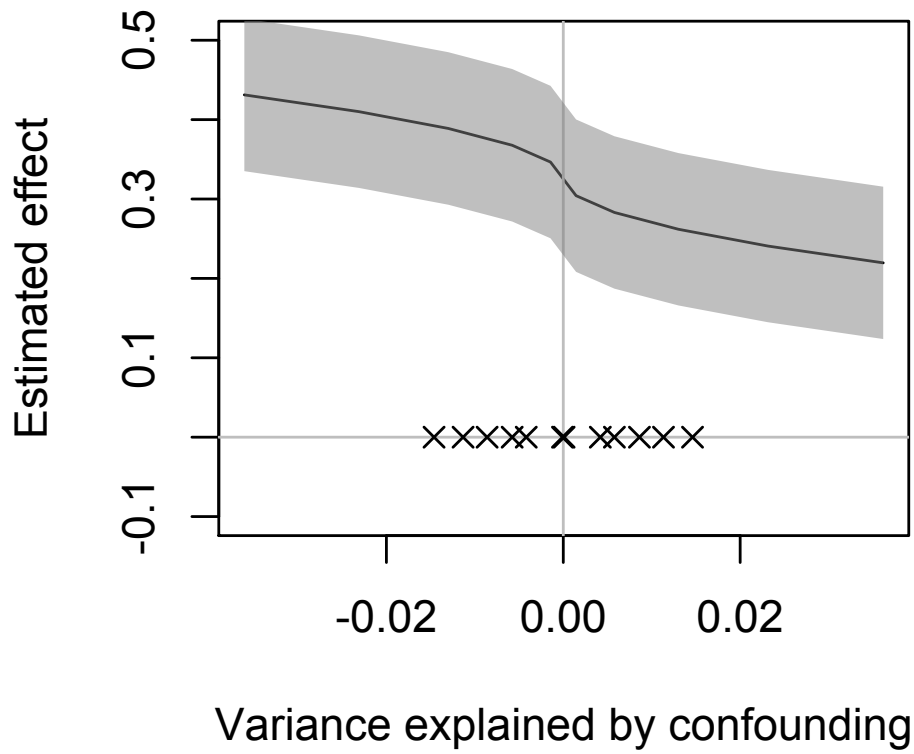
I measure change in frequency of legislator disseminated information by subtracting total amount of press releases in the six-month period before the 2013 wave from the total amount of press releases six months prior to the 2014 wave. The resulting variable is weakly correlated with the change in reported levels of contact and information reception from panelists (0.16), though it has a much weaker relationship with the change in NPE (0.05). Legislators’ change in press releases across these periods has a mean of almost  $-1$ , but there is high variation. The values range from  $-36$  (indicating 36 fewer press releases) to 121

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and perceived ideological distance on a 7-point scale in the confounding function. The analysis tests these covariates for both negative and positive values.

<sup>17</sup>For those legislators who had left office by the time of data collection in 2015, I was able to gather information using the *Wayback Machine* from the *Internet Archive* `web.archive.org`. With a few exceptions, sufficient captures were available to collect press releases in the period of this study.





**Figure 2.** Sensitivity Analysis

(indicating 121 more press releases) and the standard deviation is nearly 14.

I use this change in press releases in a two-stage least squares instrumental variable analysis that may be found in Table 9. The findings of this analysis suggests two main points regarding the models in the main text. First, these changes in press releases are significantly related to citizens' changes in the differences in reported frequency of contact. Although the sample from district to district may be weak to identify direct effects legislator by legislator, in the aggregate, I find that changes in legislator messaging strategies are borne out in the responses of panelists. That is, it would appear that the measurement has some external validity. Second, the second stage of the model suggests that the effect for change in contact remains on the change in the NPE. As panelists report higher levels of contact, their evaluation of the legislator significantly improves. Although the reliability is at the .1 level, the magnitude of the effect is still quite strong. It should also be noted that this is only on a quasi-random sample of districts. Increasing the sample to the full set of panelists should provide the precision necessary to achieve acceptable levels or reliability.

I further examine the relationship between this change in press releases with the change in reported frequency in Table 10. Once again, column I confirms that press releases and reported levels of contact have a statistically reliable, positive relationship. That is, some evidence exists that shifts in reported contact are related to changes in real world political activity, particularly when controlling for time-invariant covariates which may be associated with natural shifts in perceptions. This effect, however, is quite small. A shift of 10 press releases, a somewhat sizable difference, changes the level of reported frequency roughly 0.16, or three percent of the entire scale.

As stated previously, the measure for change in press releases possesses high levels of heterogeneity. The magnitude of the effects may be understated by the few members of the House who changed their behavior by one hundred or more press releases. To address

**Table 9.** Instrumental Variable Analysis

	First Stage	Second Stage
$\Delta$ Press Releases	0.017** (0.008)	
$\Delta$ Change in Contact		0.281* (0.160)
White	0.192 (0.172)	-0.249** (0.122)
Political Interest	-0.075 (0.081)	-0.014 (0.072)
Years of Education	0.014 (0.032)	-0.026 (0.023)
Income	-0.006 (0.025)	0.011 (0.018)
Female	-0.263 (0.163)	-0.057 (0.023)
Shared Partisanship	0.082 (0.169)	0.097 (0.133)
Constant	-0.066 (0.426)	0.252 (0.310)
$N$	493	493
$R^2$	0.06	0.08

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 10.** Predicting Change in Reported Frequency

	I	II
$\Delta$ Press Releases	0.016** (0.008)	
Directional Press Release Change		0.255*** (0.063)
White	0.220 (0.162)	0.019 (0.126)
Political Interest	-0.069 (0.079)	-0.122 (0.076)
Years of Education	0.019 (0.031)	0.014 (0.027)
Income	-0.012 (0.024)	-0.015 (0.021)
Female	-0.235 (0.154)	-0.140 (0.118)
Shared Partisanship	0.141 (0.157)	0.207 (0.131)
Constant	-0.107 (0.414)	-0.162 (0.369)
$N$	539	539
$R^2$	0.06	0.04

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

this issue, I collapse the change in press release variable to a three point scale where  $-1$  represents a decrease in output,  $0$  represents no change, and  $+1$  reflects an increase in the number of press releases distributed. The results of this model may be found in Column II of Table 10. With this estimate, I find stronger support of a relationship between the difference in press releases and the change in the scale of reported frequency. A positive shift in the output of official messages is predicted to increase the perception of contact by roughly one-fourth of a category. Although this study of press releases does not confirm the validity of each panelist's experience, it does provide some evidence that general shifts in the panel survey are related to trends in legislator behavior.