Time, Place, and Manner: How Electoral Context Influences Congressional Voting Behavior

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While voter turnout in midterm elections typically lags behind turnout in more high-profile presidential election years, the 2014 midterm elections were particularly emblematic of the ways in which midterm participation can impact the electoral outcomes. *Time Magazine* proclaimed soon after the midterms, "The last time voter turnout for a national election was as low as it was on Nov.4, Hitler was still in power, and Mitch McConnell was only nine months old" (Alter 2014). Political analyst David Wasserman, who writes for the respected nonpartisan research firm, the Cook Political Report, summarized the changing nature of the electorate thusly:

> Midterm elections have always drawn older voters, and usually drawn white voters, to the polls in disproportionate numbers. Older voters are less transient, have grown deeper roots in their local communities, and pay much more attention to non-presidential elections than their younger counterparts. In the 1980s, that didn't hold partisan consequences. Today, that amounts to a built-in midterm turnout advantage for Republicans. (Wasserman 2014)

There is growing consensus among political analysts and scholars alike that the type of election—midterm or presidential—a member of Congress competes in has an impact on the numbers and types of voters likely to participate. This consensus extends to special elections, which have some of the lowest turnout rates of all, as well as party primaries, which tend to attract more staunchly partisan voters (e.g., Burden 2004; McGhee et al. 2014).

However, the extent to which these different types of elections might impact the behavior of the members of Congress (hereafter, MCs) pursue has been relatively less studied by political scientists. This study attempts to fill this gap by looking at how election type and timing can have perceivable impacts on the voting choices made by members. Drawing on the literature of congressional campaigns and congressional behavior, I demonstrate that different election types and the different electorates they attract can and do have effects on the vote choices made by MCs. Further, I look at how these effects differentially impact MCs at different points in their careers, as well as how the effects vary by party. I find that, consistent with Fenno's (1978) theory regarding changes over an MC's career, congressmen do seem to change their approach to vote choices in the House as they settle into their seat. Further, the analyses below demonstrate clear differences between Democrats and Republicans in the House over the last two decades, consistent with other work on the asymmetric polarization occurring among House members (e.g., Butler 2009; Jacobson 2013; Mann and Ornstein 2012).

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I briefly review the literature on congressional elections relevant to the current study, with particular emphasis on the factors that influence the incentives on MCs to pursue relatively more ideological[1] or extreme votes in the House. Second, I develop my theory about how election type and timing should provide opportunities for congressmen to pursue more extreme votes in the House, should they choose. Next, I turn to an empirical test of my theory, paying particular attention to the

[1] Although there are good reasons to suspect that member roll-call voting is not a perfect proxy for political ideology, given the agenda control exerted by the majority party in the House, in this paper I use roll-call voting behavior as a proxy for revealed ideology. Thus, whenever I refer to "ideology" in this paper, I am referring to congressional voting behavior as revealed ideology.

differences between freshmen and continuing members, as Fenno (1978) suggests we should. I conclude my empirical section with a look at how these electoral context factors differentially impact Democrats and Republicans in the House.

Incentives to Polarize?

Wide consensus exists on the fact that the two major parties in Congress have diverged from one another ideologically in the last several decades. Today, the polarization of the two parties, by a variety of measures, is higher than at any other time since the Civil War (Hare & Poole 2013). Nokken-Poole(NP)-NOMINATE scores[2], a transformation of the NOMINATE scores calculated by Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, and Nolan McCarty, paint a clear picture of congressional polarization, at least in terms of congressional voting behavior, over the last several decades. Other measures used to capture ideological positions of members of Congress include the scores produced by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the American Conservative Union (ACU). Tracking those scores over time yields substantially the same conclusion—namely, that members of both parties in the House of Representatives have continued to move farther apart from one another.[3]

[2] The NP-NOMINATE scores were developed by Nokken & Poole (2004) specifically to allow comparisons from one Congress to the next. These are a slight transformation of the DW-NOMINATE scores. DW-NOMINATE scores essentially fit members' voting patterns to a linear career trend. W-NOMINATE scores allow ideologies to be estimated within individual Congresses, but do not allow for comparisons across Congresses. The NP-NOMINATE scores were created to bridge the W- and DW-NOMINATE scores. These scores "retain both intercongress variability as well as intercongress comparability" (Ladewig 2010). Throughout this analysis, I use only the first-dimension scores from the NP-NOMINATE data. For more on the methodology underlying the NP-NOMINATE scores, see Nokken & Poole (2004) and Ladewig (2010).

[3] In this paper, I use NP-NOMINATE scores to measure ideology, rather than relying upon interest group scores such as the ADA or ACU scores. Because the NP-NOMINATE data take advantage of nearly every roll call taken,

The literature has suggested a number of incentives that might nudge MCs to pursue more ideologically extreme votes in Congress. First, the incumbency advantage improves the probability that a member, once elected to office, will be able to hold that seat into the future, protected against challenges both in primary and general elections (Abramowitz, Alexander, & Gunning 2006; Ansolabehere & Snyder 2002; Ansolabehere et al. 2007; Cox & Katz 1996; Jacobson 2004; Levitt & Wolfram 1997; Mayhew 1974; Praino & Stockemer 2012). Because of incumbents' advantages in resources and name recognition, it makes sense (and evidence suggests) that ambitious political figures outside of Congress might strategically wait for an open seat or weak incumbent to run for office (Cox & Katz 1996; Jacobson 2004; Levitt & Wolfram 1997).

Primary elections are often named by political analysts as an incentive to polarize. Because only involved partisans are typically sufficiently attuned to intra-party contests to arbitrate among primary-election candidates, the people who vote in primaries, especially at the congressional level, are typically those who are most attentive and involved—potentially the most ideologically extreme voters in the electorate (Ansolabehere, Snyder, & Stewart 2001; Mayhew 1974; see also Layman & Carsey 2002). Furthermore, the involvement of relatively more extreme interest groups in primary (and general) elections drives the candidates to polarize (Poole & Rosenthal 1984). However, empirical work presents mixed results. Several studies find that primary electorates are typically no less extreme than are general-election electorates (Abramowitz 2008; Hirano et al. 2010).

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rather than a nonrandom sample of votes considered important by a particular group, they are potentially less biased. Also, the ADA scores penalize for absences, which can have an impact on the measures (Fleisher and Bond 2004, 343). However, when I conducted a test analysis using a single Congress with both ACU and ADA scores, the results were substantively similar.

Others, however, maintain that primary voters are more ideologically extreme, or that the characteristics of primary elections tends to draw more extremist participation (e.g., Brady, Han, & Pope 2007; Fleisher & Bond 2004; Jacobson 2000).

Political observers tend to blame gerrymandering for the increased polarization in the House (see also Carson et al. 2007); however, scholarly work suggests this is not the case. At best, gerrymandering seems to have marginal effects on the incentives for MCs to pursue more extreme agendas in (Brunell & Grofman 2005; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal 2009). If gerrymandering is not the source of polarization, perhaps redistricting more generally is? Evidence suggesting the process of redistricting can have an impact on ideological extremism tends to come from states where major redistricting efforts are undertaken in the decennial redistricting, such as in states where new seats are added through reapportionment or where major changes to the district boundaries are made (see Carson et al. 2007).

A final potential source of incentives to polarize may be the constituency itself. As members want to get reelected (e.g., Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974), any discussion of congressional polarization should also account for constituency preferences. Substantial evidence suggests that MCs are responsive to district composition and preferences (Brady & Lynn 1973; Canes-Wrone, Brady, & Cogan 2002; Erikson 1976; Fleisher & Bond 2004; McCarty et al. 2013; Miller & Stokes 1963). Further, a handful of scholars argues that changes in district ideology have contributed to changes in the voting behavior of elected representatives (see Boatright 2004; Glazer & Robbins 1985; Stratmann 2000). There is

also limited evidence to suggest that members of Congress are polarizing more so than their constituents (Bafumi & Herron 2010; Harbridge & Malhotra 2011).

A Theory of Electoral/Reelection Incentives

Existing theory about candidate ideology suggests that those seeking office should move to the middle of the left-right political spectrum to attract the median voter's support (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984). However, the reality is that members of Congress today continue to move farther away from the ideological center by many measures, including their roll-call voting choices in Congress. While certainly a number of factors influence those decisions by individual members, as discussed above, I suggest here that at least a small role is played by the electoral contexts a member faces over his or her career, particularly in his or her first election.

Fenno's (1978) important work on how members represent their districts provides a useful framework for developing expectations about how electoral context shapes the representational style of MCs. Fenno pinpoints "two recognizable stages" of a member's career, the *expansionist* stage and the *protectionist* stage. This distinction structures our understanding of the difference between relatively new members' behavior and the contrasting behavior of their more senior colleagues. Fenno suggests that early-career MCs should be looking to build a core of supporters who will consistently support him or her in reelection campaigns. By contrast, later-career MCs will be more interested in keeping support of their primary and reelection constituencies, rather than building new bases of support (pp. 172-173).

To understand how this can impact the voting choices made by MCs, we must think about the role of three key components to a House election: who is expected to vote in a given election, what those voters will expect from their representative, and how powerfully the incumbency advantage will work to the member's advantage. I look at each of these factors in turn to develop a theory of the incentives presented by different types of congressional elections.

First, MCs will be keenly interested in who is expected to vote in a given election. A number of factors can influence turnout on Election Day, but two that are of particular interest are the type of election and general voter satisfaction with the status quo. Data on turnout indicates clearly that voter turnout declines in non-presidential elections (McDonald 2014). If a member can count on his or her reelection constituency to turn out on Election Day, then he or she can stay the course vis-à-vis voting choices in Congress. However, if the member is concerned that his or her reelection constituency will be less likely to turn out, then he or she may well need to consider adjustments in strategy or voting to attract a broader reelection constituency else face the specter of losing the election.

This insight gives us leverage on understanding how the differential patterns of turnout in presidential versus midterm elections can influence different voting choices by MCs. Turnout in midterm elections is typically much lower than in presidential election years; further, the demographics of midterm voters in the last two decades, roughly, has favored the Republican Party. Thus, it stands to reason that Democrats running in midterm elections should be more likely to pursue moderate voting strategies—the better to attract

more voters by moving toward the median voter. By contrast, with a midterm voter pool that demographically favors Republicans, we should expect Republican Party candidates to have more leeway in pursuing relatively more extreme voting choices in Congress; they need the median voter less, particularly in midterm elections.

Second, members will think carefully about the preferences of those most likely to vote in their reelection campaign. While members are generally not expected to change their ideology substantially from term to term (e.g., Poole 2007; Theriault 2008), there are times when small changes are called for (Burden 2004; Fleisher & Bond 2004), such as when a member changes parties (Nokken 2000). Having said that, given the costs incurred by changing ideology beyond incremental shifts, along with the evidence that such a strategy rarely turns out well for the congressman (Lee, Moretti, and Butler 2004), MCs will generally stick to their ideological guns. When we pair this theoretical expectation with those developed above, we see how a MC's first successful campaign for Congress can have a lasting impact on the types of ideology he or she is incentivized to pursue in his or her voting. When elected in a midterm election, as compared to those elected in presidential election years, MCs who are Republicans will have incentives to pursue relatively more extreme votes, whereas Democrats will have incentives to pursue relatively more moderate votes. Over their careers, these ideological voting patterns should persist.

The exception, of course, would be if one's district changes significantly, hence changing the reelection constituency. One such instance is in the case of a reapportionment change that adds to the state one or more new congressional district(s). Although this happens rarely, when it does, those who control the state's redistricting efforts have an

opportunity to reshape the congressional districts in a way that favors the incumbent party. We would thus expect that, *ceteris paribus*, states with positive net changes in congressional apportionment should see an increase in the ideological voting among its congressional delegation, as MCs adjust to the reshaped election constituency.

Finally, the incumbency advantage is critical to account for in understanding how members think about running for reelection. Empirical work on congressional campaigns tends to suggest that ideology plays a relatively small role in the election outcome; instead, factors like candidate quality or whether an incumbent is running for reelection tend to dominate vote choices (Burden 2004). Hence, the incumbency advantage provides members with the necessary cover, so to speak to pursue a more ideologically motivated voting agenda in Congress, should they choose (e.g., Ladewig 2010).[4] Given the increased confidence a member could reasonably have in his or her probability of victory in the next election, the potential punishment from voters for pursuing more extreme policies should be lower. However, these members, committed as they are to a particular space on the ideological spectrum, may find themselves vulnerable to flanking—that is, to challenges from more extreme candidates; should this happen, this may well incentivize a member to shift toward a more ideologically extreme position.

[4] Of course, having the ability to pursue a more ideologically extreme voting agenda does not necessarily mean a member will choose to do so.

Data and Measures

In testing the nature of the incumbency advantage on member ideology,, I look at a number of contextual factors from members' elections. Given that freshmen MCs should face different incentives than do continuing members, I separate my analyses to look at each group of members separately. Also, given the different incentives faced by Democrats and Republicans, particularly in midterm elections, I expect there to be substantial differences in how Democrats and Republicans respond to the electoral incentives before them. Of course, substantial scholarly analysis of patterns in congressional voting confirms that Democrats and Republicans do, indeed, behave differently. For example, Figure 1 plots the average NP-NOMINATE score by party in each Congress for the last four decades; this figure makes clear that relative voting patterns within the Democratic Party have changed at a much different pace (i.e., hardly at all) than has that of the Republican Party. Certainly some of that apparent moderation in the 1970s was a result of many southern MCs identifying with the Democratic Party, prior to the sorting of southern MCs to the Republican Party.

For a look at the relative heterogeneity of each party during this timeframe, Figure 2 shows histograms of absolute NP-NOMINATE scores for Democrats and Republicans by Congress. By the 107th Congress, there is clear separation of the two parties' relative voting records. The story of the 107th-112th Congresses is a story of Republican movement to the right paired with Democratic consistency.

[Figure 2 about here]

For the remaining empirical analyses, I maintain an individual-level focus on members of Congress. To evaluate the extent to which election type and timing allow members to pursue relatively more ideological agendas in Congress, I compiled an original dataset on members of Congress. Where appropriate in this section, I italicize the names of the variables used in subsequent analysis for clarity.

I began with the NP-NOMINATE data made available at Keith Poole's data site. From the full dataset, I extracted the full set of records for any of member who served in the 103rd-112th Congresses (from 1993-2013). For example, John Dingell (D-MI) had served 29 terms through the 112th Congress, so he has 29 records in the dataset.[5] This strategy allowed for a diverse collection of both long-term and relatively new members within the dataset. I also captured each member's *first-term NOMINATE* score, as a way to look at changes in ideology over time and to control for the relatively—but not entirely—consistent nature of member ideology.

The NP-NOMINATE data have been specifically designed to facilitate comparisons across Congresses over time. To look at how extreme a member's voting patterns were relative to the chamber, I took the *absolute value of the NOMINATE* score. This is the dependent variable used in the analyses that follow.

Tenure was computed as the number of terms the member had served in Congress to date.[6] As a member's incumbency advantage builds over time, he or she will have more

[5] The full set of records for each MC was used to account for Congress-to-Congress changes for each new term the MC serves.

[6] Others have found that the incumbency advantage is not a linear phenomenon. In fact, there is good reason to expect that the nonlinearity takes a parabolic form, with a leveling off over time. To control for the potential non-linear effects of tenure, I included a quadratic term for tenure, $tenure^2$.

leeway in pursuing more ideologically motivated policy agendas. For that reason, I expect to see members growing incrementally more polarized as their tenures in Congress grow. Given the well-documented phenomenon of polarization via member replacement (see Fleisher & Bond 2004; Theriault 2008), I also expect *freshmen* to be more ideologically extreme than their predecessor was.

To control for the party switchers, I added a dummy variable for the term in which the member switched party, as well as for each subsequent term. For example, first-term Congressman Rodney Alexander (LA) switched parties just days before the 2004 election, changing from Democratic to Republican. He is coded as a party *switcher* in 2004 and his three subsequent elections. I expect members who switch parties to polarize—that is, to adopt voting pattern that achieves a larger absolute value on the dependent variable.

Those who appeared mid-Congress (N=56) were coded as having been elected in a *special election*. If the member elected in a special election resulted in a party switch for the district, I coded that with a dummy variable as well (*SE switched)*. I later added a second dummy variable to each member who was *first elected in a special election* for the entirety of his or her service in Congress. I did the same for those *first elected in midterm election* years. I expect members elected in special elections and in midterm years to have more ideologically extreme voting records than those elected in presidential years.

In a best-case scenario, the ideology of district voters would exert an important control on the member's ideology. To test this, I gathered election results from congressional and presidential elections, disaggregated by congressional district,

generously provided by PoliData.[7] From these data, I calculated two independent variables for use. First, I calculated the Democratic Party share of the congressional vote and presidential vote in the concurrent or most recent election. I also calculated the *margin of victory* by the winner.[8] Similar to other analyses (e.g., Fleisher and Bond 2004), I then normalized the *presidential vote*:

Presidential vote = presidential Democratic vote share among district voters
– presidential Democratic vote share nationally

This provides a reasonable measure of how relatively liberal or conservative a district is, compared to the nation as a whole.

Some districts are consistent supporters of one party or another, while others are less so. We would expect districts where one party consistently wins to elect MCs who are relatively more ideologically extreme. By contrast, those districts where the outcome of elections is less certain should elect more moderate members of Congress. To test this, I created a dummy variable indicating that a district is *inconsistent* if the two-party winners for Congress and in the last two presidential elections were not of the same party.[9]

A number of other characteristics of each member and each district were necessary to code. I coded the *size of the state's delegation* in Congress; this allows us to determine whether relatively large states, presumably better able to draw more ideologically homogeneous districts, send representatives who are more extreme than are those from

[7] I control for district ideology using presidential vote returns following others in the literature, who have found this serves as a reliable proxy for district ideology (e.g., Levendusky, Pope, and Jackman 2008).
[8] The margin of victory was calculated as 2*democratic share – 1, which always generates a positive difference between the percentage of the vote won by the two major party candidates.
[9] A district need support only *one* person (either to Congress or in the last two presidential races) of a different party for this variable to take a value of one.

small states. I expect they will. I also coded with a dummy the *at-large districts*, where I would expect members to be least extreme, given their statewide constituency.

Second, I look at the results of reapportionment in the 2000 census cycle. The theory predicts that states with a positive *net change in apportionment* should produce more ideologically motivated members, as compared to states with no change or a loss of seats in apportionment. This is because when a state's apportionment in Congress increases, it requires nontrivial redrawing of district boundaries, which may provide the cover necessary for state legislators to draw safer seats for their party's congressional representatives (or aspirants).

Third, to see if MCs who serve in the majority or minority party leadership roles are systematically more ideologically extreme, I coded, again with dummies, all MCs who served in one of the major *leadership* roles in any of the congresses under observation.[10] Changes in the procedures of Congress have helped party leaders move the parties to more polarized positions, particularly in the leaders' abilities to manipulate parties and their members (Cox & McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet & McCubbins 1991). A small literature (e.g., McGann, Grofman, and Koetzle 2002) suggests leaders will be more extreme than their party members. Yet, given that the leadership is elected by the entire chamber, it seems

[10] The leadership positions that were counted were speaker of the house, majority leader, minority leader, majority whip, minority whip, and the caucus chairmen for each party. Historical data on who had served in each of these roles was obtained from the House Clerk's web site.

plausible that the leadership could be relatively moderate. I include this variable to test whether polarization in the House is reflected by the voting patterns of the leaders .[11]

Fourth, for each *presidential election year*, I coded a dummy to capture the dynamic impact of a presumably larger electorate participating. I expect the effect to be negative, that those members elected in presidential years, with a larger portion of voters participating, will feel pressure from voters to pursue more moderate policies in Congress.

Fifth, consistent with other research, I coded a dummy for states in the *south.* I expect southern Republicans to be more extreme and southern Democrats to be more moderate.

Finally, I created a *party* dummy coded to 1 if the MC was a Democrat, to control for what was visually evident in Figure 1—namely, that Democrats seem to have been polarizing less than have Republicans.

Analysis

A number of potential estimation techniques are available to control for the lack of independence within the dataset; one might estimate a large regression model with clustered standard errors for each MC, or use panel data models—random-intercept, fixed effects, or random-effects models (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal 2005). Ultimately, I ran each model using each of these estimation techniques, with virtually no substantive difference in

[11] While the Speaker of the House rarely votes in floor votes, the Speaker's ideology undoubtedly has at least some impact on the rank-and-file members. The Speaker's NP-NOM score is coded as his or her NOM score prior to becoming Speaker.

the results. For ease of interpretation, then, I present the regression results, with clustered standard errors, below. Full results from all of the models are available upon request.

Using each member's absolute NP-NOMINATE score as the dependent variable, I estimate results for freshmen members and continuing members separately, as some of the independent variables capture the impact of electoral context on a first-term MC's ideology, while others plausibly explain changes in ideology over time. Table 2 reports the results.

[Table 2 about here]

Freshmen members. Among freshmen, a number of variables appear to exert a substantively interesting impact on voting behavior in Congress. Looking first at the district variables, we see that the newest MCs feel the effects of their districts' voting patterns. There is a strong positive relationship between the presidential vote and the MC's relative ideological voting pattern, indicating that members from more solidly left or solidly right districts will likewise move farther away from the middle. There is a similar positive relationship between the previous member's voting behavior and the freshman's vote choices. When the district has a record of voting for different parties, though, the MCs moderate, just as we would expect them to.

The variables for electoral context perform reasonably well and similar to expectations. In particular, states that have seen changes in their congressional delegation apportionment in both of the last reapportionment cycles have members with significantly more extreme voting patterns. This suggests an indirect relationship between gerrymandering and ideological polarization in the House, particularly among freshmen; when a state must completely redraw its congressional district lines, to accommodate new

seats or to eliminate old ones, freshmen with more ideological inclinations are more successful than in other electoral contexts. Further, freshmen MCs elected in midterms are more extreme than their peers, suggesting some merit to the size-of-the-electorate argument advanced by pundits and political observers. However, the positive coefficient for presidential election year advises caution in making inferences with respect to the midterm election finding. Overall, it appears that most of the electoral context variables, at least for freshmen, push new members to more ideological voting choices. The lone exception is the variable for a picked-up seat in a special election. Consistent with expectations, these MCs find it prudent to moderate their voting patterns, presumably to retain support from constituents who have historically supported their political opponents.

The final set of variables deals with the members themselves. Democrats are more moderate, overall, than are their freshmen Republican counterparts, consistent with the evidence unearthed by others and evident in the graphs presented earlier.

Continuing members. The second column of Table 2 reports results for the non-freshmen. The district variables have similar impacts on returning MCs as on freshmen; in particular, districts that are not consistent supporters of the same party tend to elect more moderate-voting congressional representatives. Southern representatives serving in their second or later terms tend to be slightly more moderate than members from other regions.

The electoral context variables are where we begin to see differential effects on freshmen versus continuing members. States where apportionment changes have required one or two substantial re-drawings of congressional districts are sending back to Washington more ideological members. Unlike the results for freshmen, the type of election

that first brought a member to Congress does not seem to impact his or her long-term voting patterns. Instead, the evidence presented for the electoral context variables suggests, as with freshmen, that political entrepreneurs at the state level are better able to manipulate the congressional districting when the state gains or loses one or more seats through the reapportionment process.

Finally, the attributes specific to a particular member perform quite well. Democrats are consistently less extreme than their Republican counterparts. The longer a member serves, the more incentives he or she faces to move away from the center, although this effect does exhibit a nonlinear trend. Leaders in the House are slightly less extreme than their rank-and-file members, although this effect is quite weak. The evidence in the second column of Table 2 suggests the incumbency advantage does create an environment for polarization among the longer-serving members of Congress.

Among the variables included in these initial models, two performed quite poorly; The *size* of the state's congressional delegation and the dummy variable for states with a single, *at-large* district perform exceeding poorly. For that reason, I drop these two variables from the next step in the analyses: Analyzing each party separately.

Comparing the Parties

Given the asymmetric polarization unearthed in this analysis, as well as in previous work, it seems reasonable to conclude that there may be substantively different effects occurring within each party. To test this, I ran models for each party separately, both for freshmen and continuing members; the results appear in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

As we see, there are indeed different patterns of polarization within each party. What we see is a fascinating picture of how the electoral dynamics within each party operate—and how differently these dynamics play out, both within and between parties.

First, the results for freshmen Democrats and freshmen Republicans suggest new members affected by very different forces. Starting with district factors, freshmen appear far more attuned to district composition than are incumbents. Freshmen Republicans and Democrats seem to choose a voting strategy based on how consistently their district votes for a single party, as well as the voting strategy of their predecessor. Democrats, however, moderate their voting when the district does not consistently choose candidates from the same party, whereas Republicans do not change their behavior in this kind of district. Further, Democrats of all kinds—both new and returning members—moderate when they represent southern districts; Republicans show no similar pattern of representation. New Republican members moderate when they win their seat by a large margin, but continuing members who win by big margins tend to pursue more extreme voting agendas. This suggests again the importance of an incumbency advantage: Bigger vote margins, and more leeway to pursue a more ideological agenda in Congress.

The variables for electoral context are also illuminating in terms of party differences. The story of the middle variables in Table 3 is a story of Republican response to electoral incentives. Democrats generally do not change their voting behavior in response to election type, timing, or redistricting efforts. By contrast, Republicans are more likely to take opportunities to pursue a more extreme policy agenda where available. In

particular, freshmen Republicans are more likely to have extreme voting records when their state's congressional districts have changed substantially in the last 10-20 years. Freshmen Republicans elected in midterm elections are also substantially more extreme than their counterparts. Interestingly, Democrats elected in presidential election years tend to be more moderate, as we would expect with a larger number of voters turning out, but Republicans are more extreme when elected in presidential election years.

Finally, the results in the bottom third of Table 3 demonstrate few consistent effects for characteristics associated with the member. The lagged dependent variable (capturing initial NOMINATE score) is a strong predictor of current voting patterns, as we would expect. Republicans serving multiple terms in the House tend to grow slightly more extreme each term, but Democrats do not respond in similar ways. This finding suggests that while Theriault's (2008) story of polarization via member replacement is likely, there is still some incremental change occurring among the more seasoned House members.

In general, the Democrats are a more homogeneous party than are the Republicans, and the fit statistics Table 3 demonstrate that these models do quite a good job of explaining variation among Democrats, but relatively poorer job for Republicans (although still rather strong).

The regression results reported here confirm statistically what many observe in congressional polarization; namely, the patterns of and pressures on member polarization are quite different across the parties. These results suggest that estimating a single model of polarization for all members of Congress may well be, in the modern era, inexact at best. A good deal of the variation on each of our independent variables is explained well in one

party but not the other. For one final look at this, I predicted the average absolute NP-NOMINATE score for each party over the full set of terms, holding all other variables at their means. The results, which appear in Figure 3, demonstrate that MCs of each party respond to the strengthening incumbency advantage by moving to incrementally more extreme positions over a long career, but that the Republicans remain, throughout, farther from the median voter than do Democrats.

Discussion

The results of the analyses discussed above reveal several important trends in the polarization of Congress over the last two decades. A number of variables not normally included in analyses of congressional behavior are related to the legislative voting choices members make. Variables capturing the timing and type of election in which a member is running can make an impact on the relative freedom that member has to pursue a relatively more ideological voting agenda. Republicans representing states where reapportionment has forced the state to redistrict substantially also behave differently than those members whose states were not affected by reapportionment. Geography matters; Democrats from the South tend to pursue more moderate agendas. Finally, members may find incentives to pursue relatively more extreme legislative agendas when they represent a district where one party dominates; conversely, when the partisan leanings of a district is less clear, members may feel incentives to pursue more moderate votes.

Far more importantly, this study indicates the clear importance of party on polarization. Across the models, Democrats and Republicans behave in different ways. By looking at the impacts of our independent variables within each party separately, we further see the importance of party by demonstrating how differently the forces of legislative voting operate in each party. That we cannot treat Democrats and Republicans, at least in the current era of polarization, similarly is of paramount importance in further developing and testing theories of congressional behavior. I suspect similar patterns emerge in mass ideology as well—a suspicion well suited for future study.

Another direction for this research in future iterations would be to look at additional contextual variables in congressional elections. As has been done in related research, incorporating controls for economic conditions, for example, or the quality of challengers in elections would help us round out our understanding about how electoral context influences voting patterns in Congress. Ultimately, however, this study contributes to our understanding of the patterns of recent congressional polarization by providing a mechanism to understand the ways in which electoral context incentivizes (or fails to incentivize) MCs in moving their party away from the center.

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Figure 1. Absolute Change in DW-NOMINATE by Party, 1971-2013 (92nd-112th congresses)

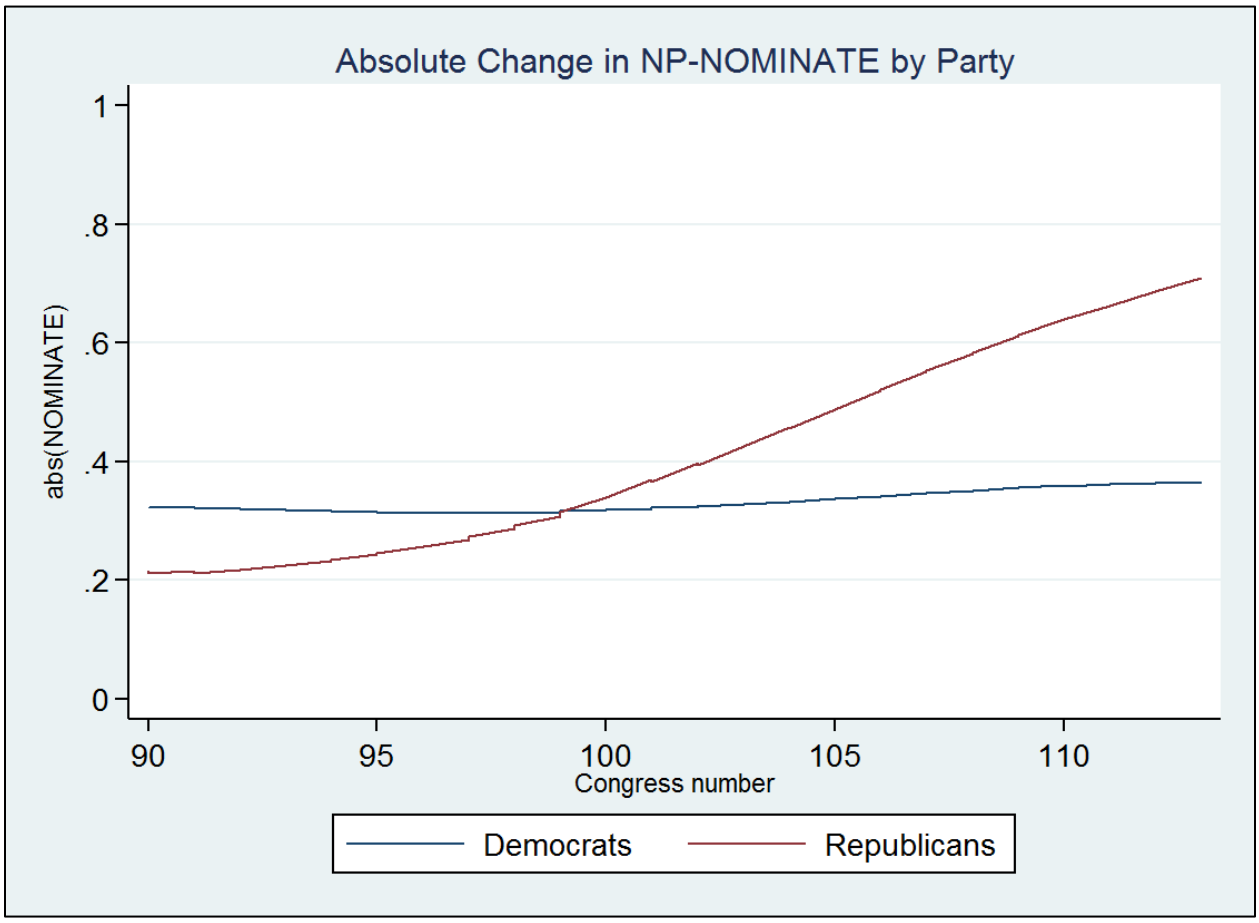

Figure 2: NP-NOMINATE Scores by Party and Congress

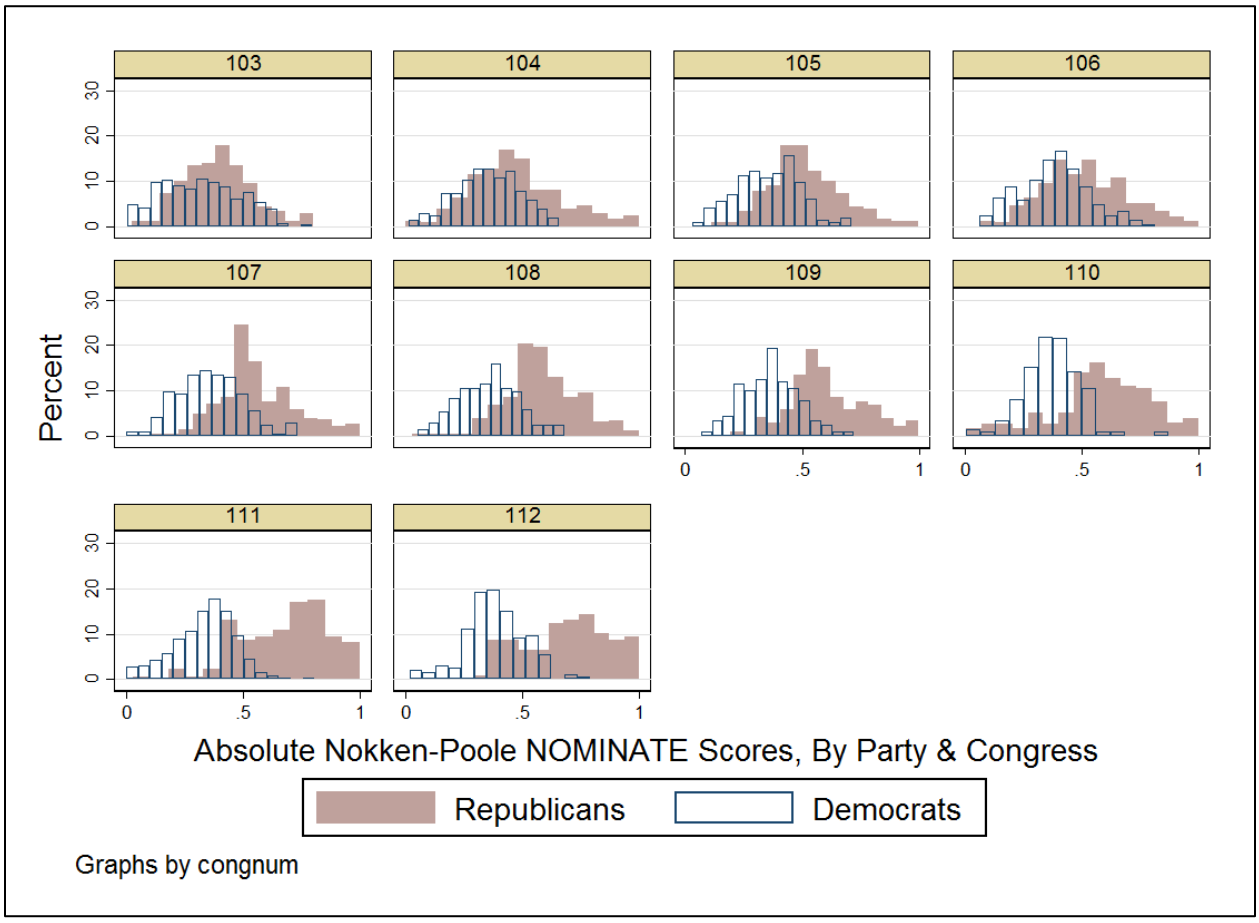

Figure 3: Predicted NP-NOMINATE Scores by Party and Term Number

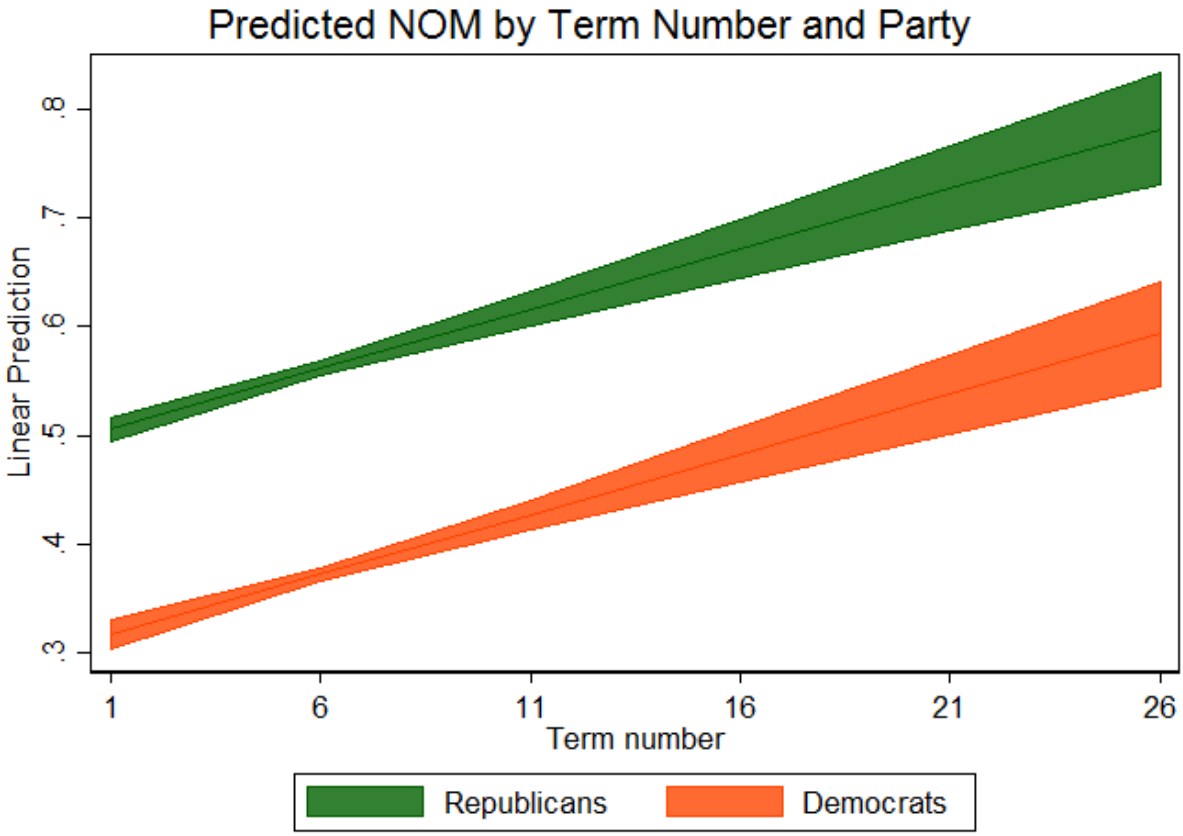

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Absolute NP-NOMINATE score (dependent variable)	0.46	0.20	0	1
Margin of victory (congressional election)	0.39	0.29	0	1
Normalized presidential vote (absolute value)	0.11	0.09	0.00	0.44
District has changed party vote in at least one of the three most recent contests	0.30	0.46	0	1
South (dummy)	0.31	0.46	0	1
District previous NOMINATE score (absolute value)	0.44	0.18	0	1.23
Presidential election year (dummy)	0.40	0.49	0	1
At-large districts (dummy)	0.01	0.11	0	1
Number of congressional districts in state	17.44	15.32	0	53
Net change in state apportionment (in 2002)	0.09	0.83	-2	2
Originally elected in midterm election (dummy)	0.47	0.50	0	1
Originally elected in special election (dummy)	0.10	0.30	0	1
Party (dummy)	0.49	0.50	0	1
Party switcher (dummy)	0.007	0.08	0	1
Special election party change (dummy)	0.002	0.05	0	1
Tenure * tenure	47.78	72.51	1	841
Tenure in office (in terms)	5.51	4.17	1	29
First NOMINATE score (absolute value)	0.42	0.18	0	1
Member of leadership (dummy)	0.03	0.18	0	1
Freshman member	0.16	0.37	0	1

Table 2. House Members' Voting, 1993-2013

Variable		Freshmen	Continuing Members
District	Margin of victory	-0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)
	Presidential vote	0.76*** (0.11)	-0.06 (0.05)
	District votes inconsistently	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.02*** (0.005)
	South	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02** (0.007)
	DW NOM score of previous rep	0.05 (0.04)	-
Electoral context	Presidential election year	0.06*** (0.02)	0.007*** (0.002)
	At-large seat	-0.03 (0.06)	0 (0)
	Size of state's delegation	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Net change in seats in 2002 reapportionment	0.03*** (0.009)	0.01*** (0.004)
	1st elected in midterm	0.09*** (0.02)	0 (0)
	1st elected in SE	0.003 (0.03)	0 (0)
	SE switched	-0.19*** (0.07)	-0.11*** (0.01)
Member	Party (1=Democrat)	-0.23*** (0.01)	-0.14*** (0.008)
	Switcher	-0.10 (0.10)	0.02 (0.09)
	Tenure	-	0.01*** (0.002)
	Tenure^2	-	-0.0002** (0.0001)
	1st term NOMINATE	-	0.75*** (0.02)
	Leadership	0.03 (0.05)	-0.02* (0.01)
	Constant	0.43*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.02)
	Model diagnostics ** p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01*	R^2: 0.41 MSE: 0.17 N=705	R^2: 0.73 MSE: 0.10 N=3,701 Clusters=845

The dependent variable is absolute value of each member's NP-NOMINATE in each Congress. Positive signs indicate more extreme voting behavior; negative signs indicate more moderate voting. Errors were clustered by member.

Table 3. Relative Voting Behavior, by Party, 1993-2013

Variable		Freshmen Democrats	Continuing Democrats	Freshmen Republicans	Continuing Republicans
District	Margin of victory	0.03 (0.03)	0 (0)	-0.11** (0.05)	0.03** (0.02)
	Presidential vote	0.48*** (0.11)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.91*** (0.20)	-0.06 (0.11)
	District votes inconsistently	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.03*** (0.007)	-0.02 (0.02)	0 (0)
	South	-0.02* (0.02)	-0.02*** (0.007)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02* (0.01)
	NOM score of previous rep	0.11*** (0.04)	-	0.05 (0.05)	-
Electoral context	Presidential election year	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.007** (0.003)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.02*** (0.004)
	Net change in seats in 2002 reapportionment	-0.008 (0.01)	0.006* (0.003)	0.04 (0.01)	0.006 (0.007)
	1st elected in midterm	-0.003 (0.04)	-0.008 (0.006)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.004 (0.01)
	1st elected in SE	0.04 (0.02)	0 (0)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.003 (0.02)
	SE switched	-0.21*** (0.05)	-	-0.15 (0.14)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Member	Switcher	-	0.01 (0.03)	-0.11 (0.12)	0.02 (0.11)
	Tenure	-	0.002 (0.002)	-	0.01*** (0.004)
	Tenure^2	-	0 (0)	-	0 (0)
	1st-term NOMINATE	-	0.75*** (0.03)	-	0.82*** (0.04)
	Leadership	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.02)	0 (0)	-0.02 (0.02)
	Constant	0.27*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.02)
	Model diagnostics ** p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01*	R^2: 0.40 N=280	R^2: 0.73 N=1,895 Clusters=450	R^2: 0.19 N=425	R^2: 0.60 N=1,806 Clusters=443

The dependent variable is absolute value of each member's NP-NOMINATE in each Congress. Positive signs indicate more extreme voting behavior; negative signs indicate more moderate voting. Errors were clustered by member.