COVERING CONGRESS:

MEDIA EFFECTS ON EVALUATIONS OF THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

A Dissertation

by

TYLER CHARLES JOHNSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

Major Subject: Political Science

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Covering Congress: Media Effects on Evaluations

of the Legislative Branch. (May 2009)

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This project takes an in-depth look at the role that media coverage of both individual members of Congress and Congress as a whole plays in shaping approval of legislators and the legislative branch. I argue that by examining what the media choose to cover and how the media cover it, we can learn more about the standards by which judgments of political performance take place. As such, I also contend that differences between the tone and substance in which the media cover *individual legislators* compared to how they cover the *legislative branch* go a long way to explaining why Americans cast favor upon those they send to Congress and cast doubt on Congress itself.

The essential dichotomy examined in the project, based on Thomas Patterson's (1993) assessment of the changing nature of how the mass media cover campaigning, splits reporting on Congress into *governing* coverage and *game* coverage. Governing coverage deals more with substantive issues, policy problems, and signals that business is taking place. Game coverage, on the other hand, is more concerned with the parliamentary struggles between actors and parties to pass legislation and accrue power; it treats politicians as strategic actors always competing for advantages. Game coverage also focuses heavily on winning and losing. I argue that the over time focus on either game or governing aspects of legislating and representing will drive assessments of members of Congress and Congress itself. More specifically, I analyze how game frame coverage is likely to spur negative job approval, while governing

frame coverage drives positive assessments of job performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Paul M. Kellstedt, David A.M. Peterson, and Alex Pacek for their guidance throughout the process of developing this dissertation. This wouldn't be what it has become without you.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues at Texas A&M University, who have made my time here an enjoyable and memorable experience both in and out of the classroom.

Finally, I must thank Larry DeHaan and N. Eugene Tester for starting me on the course that led me to where I am today. DeHaan, you taught me that life is cake. Tester, you taught me to live up to your first name. Without the two of you, I would not fully appreciate the power that lies in learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the 111th Congress began its session in early January of 2009, polling conducted by *USA Today* revealed a level of approval that seemed quite familiar to scholars and pundits alike: the job Congress was doing met with the favor of only approximately 20 percent of the public. It was not even as if Americans were unsure as to whether they approved of their Congress or not, as the same polls revealed that upwards of 70 percent disapproved of the job Congress was doing. This survey data looked eerily similar to survey data as the 110th Congress adjourned; for most of the second half of 2008, Congress struggled to find the support of one-fifth of Americans and at times threatened to break record low levels of approval. The news when it came to approval for other facets of the 111th Congress was equally grim. Generic congressional Democrats received only 36 percent approval according to a Research 2000 survey conducted during the new session's first week, while generic congressional Republicans fared twelve points worse. Congressional leaders also found themselves snared in the mire of low ratings, all unable to break through the forty percent barrier.

Within mere weeks, however, the fortunes of Congress had changed in the eyes of Americans. One poll conducted by FOX/Opinion Dynamics revealed by late February that Congress was at thirty-nine percent approval, while several others (Associated Press, Gallup, Ipsos/McClatchy) revealed anywhere from a ten to fifteen point increase from the earliest days of the session. At the same time, polling conducted by Research 2000 revealed that congressional Democrats had picked up nearly fifteen points in approval over the eight weeks since the 111th Congress began,

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This dissertation follows the style guidelines of the *American Political Science Review.*

while congressional Republicans had seen their fortunes decline by nearly ten points. Similarly, congressional leaders on the Democratic side of the aisle improved their approval rating by a few points at most, while leaders in the Republican minority saw their approval decline.

Obviously, these changes in approval did not take place in a vacuum. In fact, one might argue that they took place in one of the most tumultuous periods in political history over the past several decades. Following an election that saw Republicans swept out of the presidency for the first time in eight years and the installment of a unified Democratic government, during the early months of 2009 Americans saw the inauguration of Barack Obama set against the backdrop of an economic crisis that some have called the worst since the Great Depression. During this initial two month period of the 111th Congress, both parties found themselves welcoming new members, transitioning from Bush-era appointees to Obama-era appointees, and perhaps most importantly, trying to get a handle on what the best way to respond to economic chaos was. By mid-February, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the first major effort on the part of the Obama administration and Democratic leaders to deal with the fiscal crises at hand. The bill was passed 22 days after it was first introduced, and it was not passed without its share of controversy and squabbling between parties. Not a single House Republican voted for the initial or post-conference committee version, and only three Senate Republicans supported the legislation with votes.

If we were seeking a simple explanation for why congressional approval changed between early January and late February, we might claim the following: the public responded positively to Congress reacting to a problem and producing a tangible result (i.e. what has become commonly known as the "stimulus package"). We

might accept this straightforward interpretation, but it leads to another key question: how did this happen, namely what helped the American public get on board with congressional activity here when it had been unwilling to do so in prior months? We can assume that only a small percentage of Americans knew what specifically was in the bill, and a microscopically small percentage had even taken a look at the legislation. We can also assume that a similarly small percentage of Americans religiously followed the action by watching C-SPAN or C-SPAN2 coverage of House and Senate floor debate and voting. Instead, most Americans were forced to rely on an outside source for information on what the bill included, how the bill was proceeding through the House and Senate, and who was for or against the legislation and the elements within it. That source, for many, was undoubtedly a newspaper, a magazine, a television program, or a radio broadcast.

The Media and Approval

We know that when a newspaper writes about a piece of legislation or a television news program reports about it, they cannot discuss every detail. There are not enough column inches or hours in the day to go that in-depth. Instead, the media serves as a filter of sorts, holding onto what they deem key pieces of information while letting what they deem less essential pieces of information fall by the wayside. Americans, therefore, get part of the story. Perhaps more importantly for those in government, the part of the story Americans get is based on media choices and not on choices made by those actually elected and voting on legislation. Why should we care about this filtration role the mass media might play in shaping how Americans approve or disapprove of the legislative branch, its leaders, and its members? I argue that we should care given the potential power for governing that lies in approval for both legislators and the legislative branch.

At its base, the meaning behind approval might be similar to those argued in other opinion literatures (most prominently, the political trust literature as captured by Hetherington (2005)). Approval shows whether or not an entity like Congress is meeting the goals laid out by the public, or if it is failing to do so. Approval might also help Congress achieve goals when it is forced to interact with outsiders (Luhmann 1979). The presidency literature argues that presidential approval is a "source of influence" (Edwards and Wayne 2003, p.349) in negotiations with Congress. The potential for influence based on approval, however, is not necessarily a one way street. Just as the President can claim that he has the support of the general public, so too can congressional leaders wield the weapon of approval in their negotiations with the executive. Other reasons why we want to examine approval are that approval might send a signal as to broader feelings about American willingness to continue to buy into the democratic system and form of leadership chosen over two hundred years ago and still employed today (Warren 1999). For individual legislators, the importance of approval is clearer: it updates them on how well they are meeting the needs of constituents and it portends electoral successes or failures down the line.

This project will show though that approval may be a variable that is, to some extent, out of the hands of those (members of Congress, leaders within Congress, the institution itself) who truly need it. Instead, approval of legislators and the legislative branch is partially guided by how the media cover these political actors. More specifically, this project will show how specific media choices (more commonly called *frames*) drive the ebb and flow of congressional approval, separate popular legislators from unpopular ones and shape changes in month to month sentiments, and influence what individuals feel about Congress and those they send to Washington to represent them.

Outline

In Chapter II, I discuss the central front in the debate over approval of legislators and the legislative branch: the paradox that Congress consistently suffers from low approval while individuals members of Congress are generally liked and are often rewarded with surprisingly high levels of approval and, every two or six years, re-election. I lay out a description of the ongoing debate surrounding what shapes approval. I then proceed to discuss existing attempts to explain such opinions and assess why these attempts are not as broad or complete as they should be. I follow by laying out an argument that opinions of Congress and its members might be explained, to a great extent, by the media coverage these two groups receive; more specifically, I will claim that media framing, above and beyond the actual outputs of the House, the Senate, and their 535 members, goes a long way toward determining why Congress is consistently hamstrung by low opinion and why members of Congress receive positive reviews from the general public. I focus on the prevalence of two frames discussed by the campaign literature (specifically, Patterson (1993)): game and governing. I will close with a brief discussion of the path I plan on taking in determining what media coverage should be examined, why, and how in building and substantiating a link between what reporters report and how citizens respond.

Chapter III tackles one half of the paradox laid out by Fenno (1975): the approval of Congress. It begins by laying out already existing explanations for congressional approval. These explanations include the work of Congress itself, the work of outsiders, and events that shape the political landscape. I also show how scholars disagree strongly as to what truly determines the public opinion fate of the legislative branch. I then explain why the game and governing framing discussed in Chapter II are credible predictors of when and why Congress will be approved and disapproved.

After offering two testable hypotheses, I explain how approval of Congress is best measured given data limitations over time. I also explain how game and governing will be captured in the context of content analysis concerning Congress. After a detailed description of how I operationalize alternative predictors of approval and how to best model approval, I show that both game and governing drive approval in the ways predicted by both Chapter II and the hypotheses offered: game framing significantly drives approval downward, while governing framing has an upward effect. In essence, I show that the media, on top of several other factors, matters when it comes to determining the fate of the legislative branch in the eyes of Americans.

In Chapter IV, I analyze the other half of the approval equation: the approval of individual legislators. This chapter attempts to answer the question of why we love our members of Congress (and, in some cases, loathe them) through a look at media framing of what members of Congress do at home and in Washington. It examines how the decisions the media make in covering individual members of Congress (specifically for our purposes here members of the United States Senate) drive the success or failure of said members in terms of public opinion expressed through job approval polling. As in the previous chapters, this relationship between media and opinion will be studies through the lenses of game and governing framing. I argue that, in similar fashion to opinions of Congress as a whole, the fates of members of the Senate will be driven to some extent by the ability to be associated with issues and with accomplishments and disassociated with discussions of conflict and compromise.

While Chapter III and Chapter IV examine approval in a macro sense, Chapter V takes on the importance of game and governing framing at the individual level. It is our goal in this chapter to lay out previous reasons given by other scholars that

underpin individual-level sentiments toward legislators and the legislative branch. Often times, these predictors fall into one of two camps: predictors focused on demographics or predictors focused on information on and exposure to government. Following this discussion, I introduce the concepts of game and governing to the discussion of approval at the micro level. After offering some specific hypotheses, I describe the execution of an original survey experiment presenting individuals with newspaper stories skewed toward game and governing events in Congress and about legislators. I then search for links between exposure to said stories and assessments of Congress and its members. The models presented show that being presented with game and governing material have the potential to shape opinion at the individual level; the results are not consistent throughout the exploration of opinions of Congress, senators, and representatives, but they do show the power of media framing exists at this level.

Finally, this project concludes with Chapter VI, allowing us to discuss the totality of the research project. In this chapter, I address key findings and the success or failure of the attempt to tie framing to evaluations. I also revisit some of the broader themes discussed in the introduction. I close with a preview of how framing research of this kind might be applied to other political inquiries.

CHAPTER II

MEDIA EFFECTS AND FENNO'S PARADOX

In her 1967 book *The Concept of Representation*, Hanna Pitkin advises representatives to "not be found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented." Based on evidence drawn from countless surveys of public opinion (and for that matter, congressional election results going back decades), it appears that representatives are rarely out of step enough ideologically or politically to bring on the wrath of their constituency. Most members of Congress have consistently proven themselves able to curry the favor of those they represent, parlaying such support into an increasingly unbreakable level of job security within the House of Representatives and the Senate. Instead, it is Congress as a whole that often finds itself at odds with the American public, in terms of both what policies Americans want from their government and what the people have in mind when they envision how government should ideally function. As Richard Fenno (1975) first put it over thirty years ago, Americans love the members of Congress that represent them and see Congress itself as a "broken branch" in need of fixing. Why they might do so, however, has proven to be a complex question with no one answer.

For over three decades, scholars have been examining approval of legislators and the legislative branch. Slowly but surely, we have begun to determine what drives each phenomenon, but many questions remain unanswered. One such question is how information might drive such assessments. Every few years, Americans are asked to make a decision as to whether individuals or parties deserve to stay in power. In between elections, individuals are asked by survey researchers to determine whether or not those in power and those they elect are doing a good job. Few Americans study Congress and their representatives religiously, so the precious little information they

do pick up on in the meantime should be essential to understanding why Americans feel the way they do about Congress and its members. This chapter delves into what types of information might matter and why.

Fenno's Paradox

While pollsters and pundits alike had been examining the opinions of the public concerning their government and their elected officials for years, explanations for why opinions of Congress and its members were the way they were had not truly crystallized until Richard Fenno attempted to explain varying levels of support for legislators and the legislative branch as part of a 1972 editorial project entitled "The Role of Congress: A Study of the Legislative Branch."[1] Following ten members of the House of Representatives as they traveled around their home districts attempting to meet constituents, solve local problems, and shore up efforts to get re-elected in the future, Fenno discovered one core sentiment about representation that existed no matter where he visited: citizens seemed extremely happy with their member of Congress. Fenno went so far as to say that those he interviewed, no matter where they lived, thought they had the "best congressman in the United States" (p. 277). This claim of an excellent relationship between member of Congress and district existed amongst younger and older constituents, amongst Democrats and Republicans, amongst liberals and conservatives, and across districts from one coast to the other. Somewhat strong levels of satisfaction should be expected according to Fenno, given that in elections held previous to his research, over 95 percent of House members and over 80 percent of Senate members running for re-election were successful (Fenno 1975).

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[1]This presentation was later repackaged, more famously, as the chapter "If, As Ralph Nader Says, 'Congress Is The Broken Branch,' How Come We Love Our Congressmen So Much?" in Norman J. Ornstein's 1975 edited volume *Congress in Change: Evolution and Reform*. For clarity's sake, we will cite Fenno rather than Ornstein in discussing this work.

Also lying at the crux of Fenno's investigation into why polling data about Congress is the way it is are survey data that show that while opinions of members of Congress are booming, opinions of the institution are swooning. At the time Fenno first began investigating members of the House (1970), Congress found itself at 25 percent approval and 66 percent disapproval, a chasm between satisfaction and dissatisfaction that should appear familiar to scholars of congressional opinion. These numbers reflect a gap that is not a relic from nearly forty years ago, but rather a moment in a trend over time that consistently shows Congress as suffering and failing in its attempt to curry favor with the general public. As such, these figures did not seem to surprise Fenno either: as he put it, Americans "do not love our Congress" (p. 277).

Noting the seeming disconnect between these two ways (institutional-level and representative-level) in which Americans assess the performance of the legislative branch, Fenno finds himself asking the following: "if Congressmen are so good, how can Congress be so bad? If it is the individuals that make up the institution, why should there be such a disparity in our judgments?" (p. 278). Fenno chalks up this disparity to what he calls "differing standards of judgment" (p. 278). In essence, the variables citizens use to assess Congress as a whole are markedly different from the variables that separate good representatives from poor ones. Additionally, the variables used to assess Congress are applied in a more demanding fashion that those used to assess the members of the House and Senate that Americans are asked to approve or disapprove. A deeper discussion of these standards of judgment reveals the deficit in drawing favor from which Congress begins and the perpetual difficulty of any efforts to change the minds of Americans that Congress does and will continue to face.

According to Fenno, the fate of Congress depends on the ability of Congress to deal with and solve problems of national importance. This is, as he puts it, a "far less tractable task" (p. 278). After all, which problems are the most important problems? Which problems are national problems? Which problems can be solved, and which have no solution? Additionally, as Fenno puts it, there is an "inevitable existence of unsolved problems" (p. 278). The congressional workload is persistent; there is no point at which the legislative branch can rest on its laurels, confident that it has answered all the questions Americans are asking. While legislators know if they have met the standards of those they represent (they are re-elected, and the margin of this re-election sends a message), there is not necessarily a measure of congressional success according to Fenno. While the work (be it what they are working on or how they work on it) of Congress can be very familiar to Americans, it can be tough for Americans to determine what is a legislative branch victory and what is a defeat. On top of this, Fenno notes that the standards of judgment used to assess Congress are not necessarily constant from one time period to the next. Seven years before Fenno started his journey across congressional districts, polling data showed a populace interested in cooperation between the legislative and executive branches; Congress was penalized for being obstructionist. Five years later, surveys showed that Americans wanted their Congress to serve as a watchdog and to not cooperate so readily. In essence, the metrics of what the job of Congress is according to Americans is constantly changing; citizens are unsure as to how they want Congress to act, especially in relation to other political actors.

On the other hand, individual members of Congress benefit from clearer and more consistent paths toward meeting the needs of constituents and currying favor. When assessing members of Congress (and determining, as Fenno (p. 278) puts it,

their "representativeness"), citizens focus on two factors: personal style and policy views. Personal style is the identity members of Congress construct in the eyes of those in their district. This construction takes place via visits to the district (i.e. becoming and maintaining a physical presence at home), showing concern for local projects and the needs of specific individuals, and using the media to spread the message that this visiting and concern exists and persists. Policy views, on the other hand, are only a hurdle that members must concern themselves with in that they must make sure not to be too frequently out of line with district opinion. When it comes to standards of judgment, members of Congress also benefit from the fact that they, in some ways, can control the reshaping of standards over time. Congress cannot as easily control how Americans view their work; individual representatives can make an effort to educate their constituents as to what is successful representation.

Fenno also argues that there is a deeper dynamic that exists to the question of standards of judgment; this dynamic captures the relationship members of Congress have with the institution of which they are a member. This relationship is best characterized as uneasy. Senators and representatives must, first and foremost, worry about themselves and their ability to hold onto their jobs. While they might have interest in making sure Congress comes off looking good in the eyes of Americans, this interest takes a back seat to undertaking tasks that will ensure personal accomplishment and success in the eyes of constituents. As such, members of Congress are focused on building margins of victory that create an electorally impenetrable aura around themselves. Once this "unbeatability" is constructed, members are allowed to focus on further increasing their influence in the chamber of which they are a member. Underpinning both of these imperatives, for many members, is a constant desire to make and change the policies that government enacts and enforces. Fenno

argues that these priorities should not necessarily be criticized; after all, the very picture of representation is one in which representatives either try to mirror or mold opinions in their district over time to ensure congruency. As such, as citizens we should want our elected officials to focus on us. What Fenno does question, however, is the long-term effect on opinions of Congress that representatives create by, in their efforts to win over constituents, criticizing the very body of which they are a member. When members of Congress portray themselves as a soldier in a battle against the institution, they "run for Congress by running against Congress" (p. 280), essentially diminishing government to save themselves.

Another explanation for the standards of judgment Americans adopt that Fenno chronicles in his examination of opinions is the difficulty of understanding the functions of Congress versus the ease with which individual members can explain what they are doing and how they are doing it. Members of Congress approach their jobs by looking for ways to pursue individual concerns; they look for moments and opportunities that will, as Fenno puts it, provide maximized opportunities to perform, to influence, and to gain credit for accomplishments (an argument reminiscent of that of Mayhew (1974), who argues for the electoral benefits of being able to attach oneself to positive outcomes). Members of Congress, in essence, are looking for victories that are simple to explain to those in the home district. When 435 House members and 100 Senate members are all seeking these easily-explainable opportunities to reach goals, it leads to an institution that becomes "internally quite complex" (p. 282). As such, the House and the Senate (and, for that matter, Congress as a whole) suffer from a lack of organization, a lack of centralization, and a lack of well-coordinated decision-making according to Fenno; members work to their own ends and not necessarily to the ends of others or for greater institutional victories.

There are, of course, things like negotiation, bargaining, and compromise that exist and keep business moving on a day-to-day and bill-by-bill basis, but the presence of absence of these variables at large will always be dependent on the personal concerns of individual members. Congress is left, therefore, as an institutional body subject to the whims of its members, members whose desire to work on their own (and for themselves) and not with others (or for a greater congressional good) has led to a perception that the body is "difficult to grasp from the outside" (p. 282). In essence, individual members are complex beings, but the additive result of this complexity across 535 members and 2 chambers leaves us with a legislative branch that is, as Fenno put it, "difficult to understand" (p. 286).

In summing up his discussion of the different standards of judgment that allow members of Congress to benefit (in terms of opinion and re-election) from their work but leave Congress itself in a situation where it is hindered in terms of opinion by the totality of the work of its members, Fenno offers several prescriptions to move the public toward a more uniform set of guidelines for evaluating legislators and the legislative branch. He argues that "the more we come to see institutional performance as influenced by the desires of the individual member, the more the original puzzle ought to resolve itself" (p. 286). In order to reach this point, he argues for a greater understanding of "the close individual-institution relationship—chamber by chamber, party by party, committee by committee, legislator by legislator" (p. 286). Fenno also has specific prescriptions for the mass media in covering legislators and the legislative branch, as well as heuristics the average American can use in assessing their representation. He calls for the mass media "to forego 'broken branch' generalizations about Congress in favor of examining a committee in-depth, or to forego broad criticism of the seniority rule for a close look at a committee chairman" (p. 286);

essentially, Fenno wants the media to cease describing Congress and members of Congress as separate entities, but to instead talk about the actions of members as driving the actions of the body, and vice versa. Fenno holds Americans to similar standards as he holds the media. He wants citizens to "fix the term of our dialogue with (the individual member) more aggressively," "force (the individual member) to think more institutionally" and "hold (the individual member) more accountable for the performance of the institution" (p. 287).

Attempts to Answer the Paradox

In many ways, Fenno's piece asks more questions than it answers. Since it was published, several scholars have made attempts to deliver pieces of this puzzle of approval. Most of these scholars pick up on the idea that different standards of evaluation are at the heart of the discrepancy of opinion. Most of these scholars also focus on the tangible outputs of governing that legislators and the legislative branch bring forth with each passing term in session.

One of the first articles to attempt to solve the question posed by Fenno was that of Parker and Davidson (1979). Much like Fenno theorized, Parker and Davidson attempt to explain why American citizens hate Congress but love their member of Congress through looking at how each body is evaluated differently. Analyzing the results of two public opinion surveys, Parker and Davidson discover that domestic policy is the most popular item mentioned by respondents when asked how they evaluate Congress as a whole. Moreover, this factor of evaluation has shifted negatively over time; the authors note that in the first opinion study they include (from 1968), half of Americans using domestic policy factors positively evaluated Congress, while by 1977 that positivity was only held by seven percent of respondents using domestic issues. In addition, Parker and Davidson claim that what they call the "style and

pace of the legislative process" plays a role in how many judge the performance of the legislative branch. This style and pace can better be described as the process of making laws, and according to the authors, those who mentioned this process did so in a decidedly negative fashion. These two factors in total, claim Parker and Davidson, create in atmosphere in which Congress is a target for blame on a seemingly innumerable amount of issues, policies, and political problems.

Meanwhile, according to Parker and Davidson, members of Congress are held to a much lower standard. Evaluations are often based on constituency service performed by and the personal attributes of the members in question. Since it is difficult to get into trouble resulting from one's deliverance of projects to the district, one's performance when it comes to ensuring case work is handled, and one's own personal attributes, performance measures for members of Congress are noticeably more positive. Policy actions, according to authors, are rarely listed as factors leading to evaluations of individual members of Congress. When they are mentioned, they are often mentioned negatively; the rarity with which they are cited might be, as Parker and Davidson claim, a blessing in disguise for members, who should and often do feel a freedom when it comes to policy as a result. As Parker and Parker (1993) note, the actions of representatives cannot be easily followed by individual constituents except at a high cost, which is more likely that not not worth paying on most issues. As long as members are not egregiously and noticeably out of step on certain votes, it appears they can get away with a certain amount of personal freedom when it comes to dealing with domestic issues.

In the wake of Parker and Davidson, several others have attempted to take on the question Fenno posed, but most tend only to look at one part of the problem. In essence, many choose to answer either the "why do we trust/approve of our member

of Congress" question or the "why do we disapprove/distrust our Congress" question, but not both.

Many of the arguments as to why Americans tend to dislike their legislature as a whole are arguments that have to deal with the processes of politics itself. Moving beyond earlier pieces that showed approval was largely out of the hands of Congress, authors like Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) and Durr, Gilmour, and Wohlbrecht (1997) show that potentially controllable institutional factors play a key role. Through their look at survey data, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) show that the national dislike of Congress is not so much about the policies Congress passes, but instead consists of an idea that the political process is tainted. According to the authors, many of the characteristics that define the Congress (large size, overly ponderous, slow to act, open and prone to being argumentative or disputative, inefficient, inequitable) are characteristics that Americans hate. Americans also, despite being fans of democracy, are believed by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse to be passionately against some cornerstones of the democratic process, such as compromise, bargaining, the work of committees, bureaucracy, party activity, and debate. This hatred is affirmed in the statistical models of Durr, Gilmour, and Wohlbrecht (1997), who show that variables dealing with veto overrides and intra-Congress conflict significantly predict dissatisfaction. Moreover though, according to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, dislike of Congress is not limited to dislike of the institution itself, but also includes dislike of what one might call the "typical member of Congress." Americans might like the people they send to Washington, but they tend to dislike the people others send to Washington.

Given these institutional factors that hamstring the ability of Congress as a whole to find favor, what might allow Congress to gain esteem? Showing a sense

of efficiency and equity would provide one path (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). Americans also want opportunities to get involved in the political world, and they want to be heard and taken seriously. These are not easy tasks for the Congress to accomplish, especially when it has no institutional support for such actions (especially when such actions might come at the detriment of individuals fighting to keep their jobs). Additionally, at times approval and support are completely out of the hands of Congress; according to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, the "nature of the times" and support for other institutions can have some effect on how individuals view and assess their representation. Evaluations of Congress might also be hindered by the fact that Americans know little about the dominant players in Congress, how Congress operates, and how legislation is proceeding (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Mondak et al. 2007). Knowledgeable individuals assess Congress based on its own merits, but less knowledgeable individuals tend to rely on other informational cues (such as knowledge of the President) to make their decisions about other government actors (Mondak et. al 2007); as such, for some, evaluations of Congress might be evaluations of everything but Congress.

On the other hand, approval of individual members of Congress, it is argued, is based on the relationships that individual citizens are able to build with said members. Other than the potential positive effect that trusting the system as a whole might have on trusting members of Congress (Parker and Parker 1993), many claim that trust and approval of the members individuals send to Congress is based on personal and impersonal contact of one sort or another. Parker and Parker (1993), drawing upon Fenno's (1978) look at "home style," note that constituents often take what one could call an "ignorance is bliss" type of attitude toward their members of Congress. Approval is based, therefore, on the types of factors that lead individ-

uals to vote for a member of Congress in the first place (for example, as Mayhew (1974) argues, the ability to deliver projects to the home district, the ability to get information about the job that is being done across to constituents, and the ability to take positions on the key issues of the day) and until individuals hear news to the contrary they will continue to assume those they sent to Washington are doing a good job.

A question then presents itself: if we take as a given that Congress does produce outputs (and we should, seeing as we know legislators are writing bills and resolutions, holding committee hearings, giving floor speeches, and casting votes on the bills and resolutions that survive the process), we must wonder how most Americans would go about picking up on these outputs. Additionally, as Fiorina et al. (2009, p.124) state, "very few Americans experience national politics firsthand." Only a small percentage of Americans spend their lives immersed in the legislative process. Short of watching C-Span on a regular basis or constantly logging online to Thomas, the Library of Congress website that catalogues federal legislative activity and history, an individual would have an extremely difficult time keeping abreast of the unending flow of business taking place in the House and Senate.

Luckily, Americans do not necessarily need this full information in order to make decisions about the world around them (or, more specifically for our effort here, legislators and the legislative branch). Americans form what Lupia and McCubbins (1998, p.35) call "attention strategies," whereby they figure out how to pay attention, where to pay attention, and what information will allow them to make reasoned choices about politics. They may not pay attention to all information, but they are able to absorb some information (Graber 1988). Resources exist to deliver pieces of information. The premier resource available to the general public to teach lessons

about what is taking place in their government is the mass media. The media serve as a conduit of information that helps bridge the gap between the activity of politicians and the average American seeking to make sense of what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen.

Why and How the Media Matter

We know that the media lie at the center of the information dispersion and reception process for most Americans. Americans read newspapers and magazines, watch television, listen to the radio, and visit websites. Sometimes, this media usage is explicitly political. We know, however, that the political product that individuals encounter when utilizing these forms of media is not the entirety of political activity that has taken place that day. There is a distinct difference though between simply providing the totality of information to a public and providing a selection of information to the public, which is what the media do. As Patterson (1993, p.29) claims, "news is a highly refracted version of reality." The media need time and space to tell complex stories, but space and time are two luxuries the media generally cannot afford to waste (Graber 1988). There is a limited amount of airtime or column space that can be devoted to politics. Media sources must, therefore, as Lippmann (1922) argues, serve as a flashlight and not a mirror, highlighting some aspects and disregarding others. If the media are only telling part of the story, the part they are telling has the potential to drive what individuals remember, what individuals believe, and how individuals react when pressed to discuss their views. What the media discuss, therefore, needs to be examined under a more powerful microscope. It is, after all, the pool of information from which Americans draw in forming attitudes about their government and those who run it.

We know that the media tell some stories and ignore others. they attempt to

determine what is newsworthy and what is not (Clawson and Oxley 2008). They search for the types of stories that sell copies or attract viewers, and then push those stories until every potential detail has been presented and dissected. Throughout this process, the media are looking for tools by which they can structure the information they are presenting; they want the stories they are telling to fit a larger narrative, a narrative that gives reporters a story to tell and that, in a way, makes the decision of what to report and what to ignore that much easier.

The results of this media picking and choosing information has been shown to guide individuals along their personal paths of political decision making. As Cohen (1963) claims (and Iyengar and Kinder (1987) reassert), the media may not tell individuals what to think, but it surely tells people what to think about. The media discuss some problems and ignore others, assisting in the task of setting agendas and priorities for many Americans; this power is, according to Iyengar and Kinder (1987) not momentary or permanent, but it exists nonetheless. The power of media sources to shape opinion does not end with agenda setting and prioritization, however; it continues on to helping shape what is important, relevant, or memorable about an issue or problem (Berinsky and Kinder 2006, Clawson and Oxley 2008). This type of media effect is called framing. As defined by Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997, p.567), framing is "the process by which a communication source...defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy." Framing helps set standards by which Americans think about issues. When framing shapes opinion, we say that a framing effect exists (Clawson and Oxley 2008). As shown by authors such as Iyengar (1990), Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997), Nelson and Oxley (1999), Druckman (2001a), Kellstedt (2003), and Berinsky and Kinder (2006), there is great power in the possibility of framing effects, especially when it comes to the content of attitudes.

Put more clearly, the choices the media make when it comes to reporting on an issue drive the decisions individuals make on the same subject.

So, knowing that the media have the power to utilize frames, are doing so, and also that the media want to simplify their task of reporting as much as possible in order to structure their output, the question then presents itself: what potential media frames should we be looking at when attempting to gauge how the media shapes opinions of legislators? Examining an idea previously studied in the campaigning literature might offer a great deal of insight.

Game Versus Governing

It is important to have a feel for what we might expect out of media coverage of Congress. According to Arnold (2004), we should not expect the media to focus tightly on the nuances of legislation. We should not expect detailed discussion of committee work or floor debate. We should not expect scorecards of who voted how. In essence, we should not expect what one might call a "play by play" look at the process of making laws. Instead, Arnold suggests that the media, in covering Congress, might rely on broad storytelling. In addition, the media might utilize narratives that are well known by the general public and are easily understandable. If we are searching for potential known narratives that the general public might easily understand and process, examining the campaign literature might be a good start. Specifically, I argue that Patterson's (1993) work on the media and campaigning offers insight into how media members tackle major political questions.

According to Patterson (and his 1993 look at coverage of political campaigns *Out of Order*), the media view politics as a strategic game. They see candidates not as mouthpieces for various issues or ideas, but instead as constant competitors for advantages (or failures doomed to disadvantage). Similar to the ideas voiced by

Bartels (1988), Patterson argues that the concept of the horse race lies at the core of campaign reporting. As such, every single move that every single politician makes has a purpose behind it. Decisions are made to move ahead, to gain a foothold or to seize control of the competition. Patterson is not alone in this conceptualizing of the campaign as a struggle to get ahead (and to leave others behind); Weaver (1972) sees candidates as using governmental institutions, public problems, and policy debates only as pawns that can be moved in this larger game of political chess.

This game framing on the part of the media fits strongly with basic conventions of the news-gathering process. The game frame always ensures that reporters have a story to tell; when candidate A speaks about issue X, the story does not necessarily have to be about why issue X is important so much as it has to be about how talking about issue X will improve or damage the candidate's chances to connect with voters. Reporters, if focused on the candidates and their jockeying for position, are always ensured a new story because when there are multiple actors taking part in multiple activities, the situation is guaranteed to shift from one day to the next. Issues do not always change and they lack the novelty that the battlefield of campaigns always has. The rise of the game frame is borne out by Patterson, who shows a steady increase in game coverage of campaigns from 1960 to 1992. This is especially important given that, in earlier work on this topic, Patterson (1976) shows that voters are able to recall stories that utilize elements of the game.

Game framing translates neatly into a congressional context. Congress is an entity in which 535 individuals are constantly competing for advantages and disadvantages. At times, these advantages and disadvantages are related to individual survival, the ability to get re-elected. At times, these advantages and disadvantages are related to partisan survival, the ability to help assist one's party into power.

The game frame is not the sole frame of campaign coverage though. There is another frame in play, a frame Patterson calls the governing frame. The governing frame is centered around the idea that voters see politics as the method by which leaders are chosen, but perhaps more importantly as a forum through which problems are solved. Policies, leadership, and debating important issues are what matters to the public in the campaign setting. Patterson argues that the governing frame is all about, as V.O. Key (1966) once put it, "central and relevant questions of public policy." Governing is, therefore, the discussion of issues and the discussion of the ability to get things done. While governing framing may not be as prevalent in the campaign context as is game framing (Patterson 1993), it might be a more powerful shaper of how individuals feel about those running for office; voters are, as Patterson (1976) shows in his earlier work on media effects in campaigns, fifty percent more likely to react strongly to a governing story.

Governing framing translates neatly into a congressional context as well. While Congress is full of individuals and parties competing against each other, at its core this competition is also a competition over philosophies of governing and beliefs that some policy prescriptions are better than others. Issues are what the legislative process is all about; there is no "game" in Congress without the discussion of issues and the gears of the legislative process at times turning. While it is true that, at times, it appears that the struggle between parties and individuals overshadows the discussion of issues and the functioning of the legislative branch, the governing material that serves as the foundation on which the potential for governing framing is built persists.

Game and governing frames have direct applications from the sphere in which they originated, campaign coverage, to the political sphere that follows campaigning,

legislating. However, this does not necessarily mean that they might have an impact on opinion. Why might we expect them to not only be frames that exist, but also frames that have effects on attitudes? Just because frames exist does not mean they necessarily have power over opinions (Druckman 2001b, Druckman 2003). I argue that the link between game, governing, and opinion lies in the concept of "stealth democracy" first posited by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002).

Conventional wisdom, according to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, is that Americans want to be empowered at the expense of elites. Their research shows, however, that what Americans truly want is to not make decisions. Americans do not want to provide input. They do not want to know how the decision-making process is working. Instead, they want what the authors call a "stealth democracy." They want democracy to, as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002, p.2) put it, "exist but not to be visible." They want to know that options exist to hold elites accountable (i.e. elections), but they do not want to take advantage of them unless absolutely necessary.

When it comes to policy, Americans obviously want government to deal with the problems they see as paramount. They also want "the distance between their own policy preferences and the policies passed by government to be small" (Hibbing and Theiss Morse 2002, p. 16-17). This is what the authors call policy space. It is, however, not enough to completely characterize why Americans might feel the way they do about their government. Data in their work shows that a vast majority of Americans have preferences that line up with their perceptions of government positions, but still people report that they think government isn't working or is out of touch with most Americans. Where this disconnect rests is in the fact that, as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002, p. 36) claim, "Americans are attuned to the way

government works." This reality signals that in addition to policy space (recognition of what government can get done), individuals also have process space (recognition of how government can get things done or what it takes to get things done).

When it comes to this process space, a gap exists between what people want from the process of governing and how they perceive the process of governing to be taking place. They want outputs and they want these outputs delivered in a stealthy fashion (i.e. the gears of government should keep turning, but that turning should be as conflict free as possible). Instead, they see government as being overly ponderous and too focused on debate. At times, they feel government is prone to being argumentative, bound up in endless disputes. They see government as slow to act. They believe government is an entity that is pervaded by negativity (Hibbing and Theiss Morse 1995, 2002). These feelings have the potential to subsume any positive attitudes that might be derived from the policy accomplishments government is able to produce. In fact, Hibbing and Theiss Morse seem to argue that no matter what policy makers do, they can't seem to overcome the problems individuals have with the ways in which those policy makers operate.

Once again though, we must keep in mind that this policy and process doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is transmitted to the public via the newspapers, magazines, and websites we read, the television programs we watch, and the radio programs we listen to. The successes and failures associated with policy space are made manifest in media coverage via the governing frame Patterson discusses. The successes and failures related to process space is funneled to the public through use of game framing. Feelings about these spaces and the willingness of media members to report on the goings-on in each of these spaces has the potential to help in reinforcing or rejecting commonly held beliefs about government (or, specifically in the case of this inquiry,

legislators and the legislative branch). In essence, if Americans dislike hearing about the political process and they receive a large dose of process talk from the mass media, it is easy to see why they might dislike or disapprove of those entities the media associates with the process. Similarly, if the media gives the public a large dose of policy-related reporting, Americans might begin to see those politicians, parties, or institutions associated with the discussion of policy in a more favorable light.

At its core, therefore, this project operates under the following general theory:

Theory: Media framing of congressional activity alters public views of the legislative branch.

More specifically, however, I seek to test the following hypotheses in multiple contexts:

Hypothesis 1: Association with reporting of game frame activities leads to lower levels of job approval.

Hypothesis 2: Association with reporting of governing frame activities leads to higher levels of job approval.

We must keep in mind though that the legislative branch and the 535 legislators who work in it are separate entities and must be studied as such. These 535 legislators are individuals, standing up for themselves and not necessarily the institution. There is little reward in standing up for the legislature; all the reward (re-election, power) lies in the ability to control not how the branch is perceived, but how oneself is perceived in terms of policy and process. Representatives and senators work hard to give the media beneficial material to use (and also avoid material that might hamstring their efforts to gain rewards). Legislators can control their own fates in many ways, while the fate of Congress itself in the eyes of the general public is subject

to what the body can produce, how the body produces outputs, and how and to what extent the media choose to characterize policy and process. It is, in many ways, an institution without an ombudsman. Discussing how the fates of legislators and the legislative branch are intertwined is the subject of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER III

MEDIA FRAMING AND CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL

Ever since polling data first revealed that approval of Congress was low (and especially low in comparison to the other branches of government), scholars have attempted to explain why Congress does not receive the favor of the general public. Often times these explanations have focused on what Congress is doing; in other words, they have focused on the tangible, measurable outputs of Congress. Less examined are the ways in which Americans learn about Congress. Here, I test the validity of the game and governing approach to how the media frames political activity on national coverage of Congress. I find clear links between the volume of game and governing activity and the rise and fall of public sentiment toward the legislative branch over time, showing the power of the mass media to drive what Americans feel about Congress.

According to a poll taken in the summer of 2008, nearly 8 in 10 Americans felt their nation was on the wrong track.[2] Unsurprisingly, continuing economic problems (like the rising price of gasoline and the mortgage and foreclosure crisis) and a war with no end in sight were found to be two of the three main culprits in the search to explain why Americans feel as pessimistic as they do. Interestingly though, nearly a quarter of those surveyed pointed to a broader explanation for their fears concerning where American is headed in the near and distant future: poor leadership. This sentiment is borne out in more specific polling data, which shows Supreme Court approval under fifty percent for the first time in three years, a President hovering around thirty percent approval, and a Congress (traditionally the lowest rated of the three branches of government) sitting at nineteen percent approval, just one percent

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[2]More details on this AP-Ipsos poll can be found at http://www.ap-ipsosresults.com/

above the lowest readings ever taken.[3] Clearly, Americans are unhappy with the job their government is doing, and most of all, they are unhappy with the job their Congress is doing.

Amidst this atmosphere of disapproval, Congress keeps working. Congress searches for solutions to the problems that lead to American pessimism; it may not find solutions, but it continues to search. Media coverage of the activities of Congress bears out these countervailing forces, the desire to deal with issues versus the ability to manage ideologies and agendas consistently at odds. These forces present differing pictures to the general public as to what Congress is doing and how Congress is succeeding or failing at its constitutionally-inherited tasks. One need only look, in the aftermath of the aforementioned polling, at a wire story concerning a hotly debated surveillance bill to see the mixed messages concerning what Congress is doing and how they are doing it facing the public on a daily basis.[4] The Associated Press report details in specifics what the bill does, listing six specific tenets within the legislation. The reporting ties the bill to broader questions of security and terrorism, questions that Americans have been and continue to ask. The reporting also discusses the history of the legislation and the motivations behind crafting the bill. However, the story also sends different signals, wherein the bill is called "imperfect," a precursor to a "rubber stamp" for the White House on surveillance issues, and worthy of filibuster or defeat when it heads to the Senate. In short, those reading the article will be left with mixed feelings as to what Congress has truly accomplished, if anything. These mixed feelings are not limited to this single issue; in fact, as data presented later in this chapter will show, the story the media tell concerning the actions of Congress is

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[3]More details on this Gallup poll can be found at http://www.gallup.com/poll/108010/Bush-Congress-Supreme-Court-Near-Historical-Low-Approval.aspx

[4]See "House passes new surveillance law," Pamela Hess, Associated Press, June 21, 2008

always a mixed bag of successes and failures, of issues and conflicts.

It is no wonder Congress finds itself unable to get its head above water in terms of approval: with every bill passage reported by the media comes a bevy of information as to why that bill is bad for the country, ineffective, or both. Congress receives very few victories that come without defeats in terms of spreading wholly positive information about itself. With Americans dependent on the mass media for their information about what is taking place in the House and Senate, rare is the opportunity in which Americans receive information about Congress that is solely about work being performed and issues being handled. Instead, information is always tinged with discussions of who is winning and losing and why. The balance of these two frames, the balance of congressional work being discussed in terms of game activity or governing activity (as described in Chapter II), therefore, I argue, will go a long way toward determining whether or not Americans see a single bill or the preponderance of work performed as a good thing or a bad thing. The mass media control this balance.

Existing Explanations

Much of the work examining approval or disapproval of the United States Congress is work that approaches the question from the individual level, focusing on a set of explanations that are commonplace in public opinion research (such as involvement, efficacy, socioeconomic status, economic conditions, and feelings about other political actors). The few articles that examine approval of Congress through an over time, macro-level lens have developed a similarly consistent battery of explanations as to why Congress is held in that esteem it is from year to year. This battery of explanations captures the political fates of extra-congressional actors, national conditions, events and crises, congressional activity, and, to some extent, the

focus of the mass media on the legislative branch.

The impact of other institutional actors has been theorized to affect the approval of Congress. Scholars like Parker (1977), Patterson and Caldeira (1990), and Durr, Gilmour and Wohlbrecht (1997) have all speculated that the fate of the President might drive the fate of the Congress. More specifically, as Patterson and Caldeira put it, the "centrality of the presidency to much of U.S. political life" (p.31) might lead to a situation in which presidential successes and failures (and American assessments of said successes and failures) might bleed into the views citizens hold concerning government at large and all its components. Whether or not this is actually the case, however, seems to differ from one study to the next. Parker finds no relationship between the two in his 1977 piece, while thirteen years later Patterson and Caldeira find a positive and significant relationship. Durr, Gilmour, and Wohlbrecht, in perhaps the most specified congressional approval model of all, find that presidential approval does not affect congressional approval, but replication of their work by De Boef and Keele (2008) using a more general model finds similarly to Patterson and Caldeira: as presidential approval increases, congressional approval increases, suggesting linked fates across branches of government.

Broader national conditions have also been tested in attempts to broadly model approval of Congress. Beginning with Parker's (1977) look at unpopularity, these national conditions have often been expressed through the inclusion of economic variables. Arguments for the inclusion of such variables in a model gauging approval are fairly consistent, claiming that Congress will be rewarded in times when the economy is strong and that it will be punished when the economy is weak. Capturing what "strong" or "weak" means differs from model to model, but findings of a relationship between economics and approval are generally borne out. Parker (1977) finds

a significant link between unemployment and positive assessments of the legislative branch in which declining employment conditions hurt the Congress. Patterson and Caldeira (1990) find differently when it comes to unemployment (i.e. they find no relationship), but find instead that consumer sentiment matters; Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) find similarly with their measure that divorces consumer sentiment from the effects of other economic variables.

It has also been argued that specific moments in time matter greatly. More specifically, these arguments claim that models of congressional approval must measure scandals within the Congress and conflicts outside the Congress. The presence of these variables is reminiscent of Mueller's (1973) claim that international events and crises (and the reaction of our government to them) might create a "rally around the flag" effect (or the opposite) that shapes how we view political actors. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht were the first to include dummy variables that captured specific congressional woes (like Koreagate, ABSCAM, the Speaker Wright scandal, the Keating Five, and problems at the House Bank and House Post Office). Parker only measures the presence or absence of a war, but he also measures the amount of time between rally moments, seeking to capture the evaporation of public rallying. Results for events and crises prove widely inconsistent. Parker finds that wars in general do not predict popularity, but the distance between rallying events does. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht find that only one specific scandal (the House Bank debacle) affects approval; the effect is in the expected direction however (dropping approval by over 4.5 points).

Crises are not the only way in which specific moments in time are captured however. Scholars look at specific moments in governing through another lens: the partisan makeup of the Congress and the executive branch from one year to the next.

We might consider these to be more moments in governing than they are moments that affect the everyday lives of Americans, but they are situations that shape institutional interactions nonetheless. These situations are expressed, more often than not, by including dummy variables that capture periods of time in which government is unified or divided (i.e. where the President and Congress are controlled by the same party of by different parties). Such variables are generally included to capture the idea that, perhaps during times of unified government, the process of the legislative branch passing bills that will be signed into law by the President will run more smoothly since there is a shared vision amongst leaders. Results, however, do not bear this concept out; Parker, Patterson and Caldeira, and Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht all include variables that capture unified government, but none of these measures are significant predictors of changes in opinion. Additionally, attempts to measure legislative support for the President (by both Parker and Patterson and Caldeira) fall short of driving approval of Congress. Another way of measuring the interaction between the President and the Congress, looking at vetoes, has proven more fruitful for scholars. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht examine the level of vetoes per quarter and find them to be significantly linked to congressional approval; surprisingly though, according to their numbers, Congress benefits from presidential vetoes.

A more recent addition to the question of congressional approval has been the idea that the performance of Congress itself might be influencing how Americans assess the legislative branch. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht strive to determine whether or not the "essential activities of Congress" (p. 197) matter. They theorize that legislative productivity might spur increases in approval of Congress. They capture this productivity through two measures: the volume of bills passed per quarter

and the volume of major bills passed per quarter (as gauged by Mayhew (1991)). According to their findings, major bills matter, but instead of helping approval of Congress, they hurt approval; the authors speculate that major legislation often times confuses the public and leaves them unsure as to the benefits and drawbacks. Just passing legislation has no effect on approval. Another congressional activity, reacting to presidential vetoes, is found to be a significant predictor of approval of Congress, but interestingly, the more the Congress overrides a veto, the more their approval decreases. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht also examine items like cloture votes and debt ceiling votes, but their singular measure combining the two (intra-Congress conflict) is not a significant predictor of approval at the .05 level.

A final (and less fully formed) explanation scholars have examined in attempting to model congressional approval is that of the potential effects the mass media might have on the assessments citizens deliver when it comes to the legislative branch. Both Patterson and Caldeira and Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht dip their toes in the waters of explaining how the media might affect approval, but do so in markedly different ways. Both groups of scholars focus on content, but have different conceptions of what content might be important and why. Patterson and Caldeira are interested in how personal coverage gets (i.e. how many stories in a given period of time mention individual members of Congress), how institutional coverage gets (i.e. how many stories in a given period of time mention Congress or its components), and how ethical coverage gets (i.e. how many stories in a given period of time mention, as they put it, "ethical issues, pecadillos, indictments or convictions, and congressional investigations" (p. 34)). This is what we might consider to be the first real attempt to broadly link newspaper coverage to approval of Congress. Patterson and Caldeira do find links between the institutional coverage, the ethical coverage, and

approval; when Congress is being discussed in any way, approval goes down, and when Congress is being discussed in terms of its ethics, approval goes down. On the other hand, Durr Gilmour, and Wolbrecht are less concerned about breaking down coverage into different broad types and more concerned about other factors of how newspapers convey information: the raw amount of information and the placement of information within the newspaper itself. These authors create a singular measure that they call a "coverage score" (p. 189), which captures the product of the positivity or negativity of an article, the location of an article within the newspaper, and the length of the story itself. Quarters in which stories score high in this measure are quarters in which approval of Congress increases, while stories in which this measure is low are quarters in which approval of Congress decreases.

There are theoretical and empirical motivations for further refining the ways in which we examine the link between the mass media and various measures of approval of the legislative branch and its members. As I will now lay out, there is great reason to believe that looking at the game and governing frames distinctly (will matter in the context of congressional job approval.

Game, Governing, and Congressional Approval

As Chapter II illustrates, there are reasons to believe that game coverage will drive approval (in general) downward and that governing coverage will drive approval upward. This is because game coverage reinforces broadly held existing feelings that government is burdened by the political process. On the other hand, governing coverage reinforces different feelings, feelings that represent the hope that government is responding to the issues Americans want addressed and that government is working as it should. Why should we believe that these relationships will hold true at the level of the entire legislative branch? The reasons, I argue, are linked to more specific

sentiments Americans have concerning Congress itself.

Americans have many beliefs about Congress beyond simple approval or disapproval of the job Congress is doing. Americans have opinions on how Congress deals with specific policy problems, how confident we should be in both the institution itself (and in specific leaders in Congress), how much faith we should put in Congress, how we should rate Congress in comparison to other institutions, how much power Congress has, how in touch Congress is with Americans, and how efficacious we should feel when it comes to interacting with Congress (Dennis 1981; Patterson and Magleby 1992). Perhaps the most coherent picture of the outcomes of these polls is painted by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) in their description of Congress as "public enemy." Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, through the polling they conduct, draw several conclusions about how Americans view Congress. Americans see Congress as large and therefore ponderous to a fault. They see Congress as inefficient and inequitable. They feel Congress does a poor job of dealing with the issues deemed most important and most in need of address. They feel that Congress is stymied by a lack of cooperation, but they also, thanks to compromises, are worried that Congress is unable to find the right answer to problems (and perhaps instead legislators are settling for the most politically expedient solution). In short, Congress clearly has a perception problem, and that problem is multi-faceted in nature and not easily solved.

Given, as argued in Chapter II, that the mass media are the premier source of information about Congress for most Americans, what the media say (or do not say) about the actions of Congress can be expected to go a long way toward reinforcing or contradicting these widely held views and, as such, molding opinion about approval at a specific point in time. I posit throughout this work that there are two frames we

should be looking at in the congressional context: game and governing.[5] We should expect the prevalence of these frames to have wildly different effects on the opinions of Americans when it comes to reviewing and rating the legislative branch. Game coverage, in that it is tinged with constant discussion of compromise and conflict, should serve to reinforce and further fuel the opinions of Congress as slow, inefficient, and ineffective as displayed in the survey data delivered by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995). Game language provides a constant reminder to Americans that Congress is still stuck in the morass, slow to change and slow to accomplish anything. Game language in the congressional context only tells Americans what they think they already know about Congress: that it is too caught up in battles for power to battle for the issues and solutions citizens crave. Game language, to put it in terms used by Kimball and Patterson (1997), reinforces what citizens think "Congress is actually like" (p. 701). In that it activates and builds upon existing negative sentiments about the ways in which Congress does business, we should expect game coverage to drive approval of what Congress has just done and plans to do in the future. More specifically, I argue the following:

Hypothesis 1: Increases in coverage of game frame activities leads to decreasing congressional job approval.

If, on the other hand, as Parker and Davidson (1979) and Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 2002) suggest, Americans want the legislative branch to address salient issues and deliver policy outputs directly connected to these salient issues, they are likely to respond favorably to media discussions capturing the presence of and movement on these issues in Washington (i.e. governing coverage). Governing coverage, in that it directly addresses salient issues in the context of Congress, inextricably links

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[5]As Chapter II notes, these frames are based on concepts originated by Patterson (1993). He uses them solely in a campaign context however.

Congress to a perception that accomplishments are coming forth from the House and the Senate. In that governing coverage is not just about issues but also about the words and phrases that suggest the business of legislating is ongoing, media discussions of said ongoing activity on these salient issues will also go a long way toward reinforcing expectations of what government should be doing (i.e. expectations about what Congress could be that stem from early socialization) that Kimball and Patterson (1997) first discussed. Governing language sends a signal about Congress that runs counter to that of the game frame: it tells readers that Congress, despite whatever struggles between parties and partisans that exist, is still an institution that is constantly working and that work is centered on the problems citizens need addressed. These signals should lead to positive feedback. More specifically, I argue the following:

Hypothesis 2: Increases in coverage of governing frame activities leads to increasing congressional job approval.

I will now explain how I plan to go about testing these hypotheses.

Examining Congressional Approval

The dependent variable of interest in this chapter is approval of Congress as a whole; more specifically, it is approval of the job that Congress is doing. I will be assessing this variable from the first quarter of 1977 to the last quarter of 2006, giving me thirty years of approval data. In examining approval, this means that, for the most part, I am looking at questions that use the following language: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?" A smaller number of questions ask this in slightly different fashion, using the wording "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing?" It is important to note that this decision to use only questions of this nature does remove several other types of questions from

the equation. For example, I ignore questions that ask about approval of specific parties within Congress and specific leaders within Congress. I leave these out of my assessment of approval of the legislative branch because I feel they force individuals to examine factors that might be wholly unrelated to congressional job approval.[6]

There are complications, however, with looking at polling data of this nature over time. Many polling groups and media entities ask questions of the nature described above, but often times they fail to ask the question regularly. For example, Gallup, one of the first to ask a question capturing congressional job approval, goes from asking it once or twice a year throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, to asking it monthly and sometimes weekly in the early 2000s. Finding a way to utilize multiple measures of congressional job approval is ideal; it will give us a more nuanced picture as to the changing state of opinion over time, and it will eliminate any potential problems that using only one survey outfit might generate. One way to combine survey data from multiple sources into a single measure is to use Stimson's dyadic ratio algorithm, which I choose to use here. According to Stimson (1991), the best way of dealing with the fact that we do not necessarily have data over time (i.e. that we have missing values) is to focus on the information we do have. We do so by, as Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) put it, using not just a single series of data over time but rather the "shared movement" (p. 179) of as many similar series as we can accrue. Stimson's algorithm, as he puts it, is utilizing a common metric and averaging only measured values; backward recursion, forward recursion, and smoothing allow the formula to produce a single series to examine.

As Table 1 shows, I use data from ten survey outfits to create my over time measure of congressional job approval. The ten data sources range widely in terms

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[6]For a look at the specific questions examined in this study, see the Appendix.

Table 1: Correlations Between Survey Items and Mood Index, 1977 - 2006

Indicator	N	Loading
ABC/Washington Post	9	0.94
ANES	4	0.99
CBS	36	0.86
CBS/New York Times	59	0.94
Fox News/Opinion Dynamics	17	0.90
Gallup	46	0.96
Gallup/CNN/Usa Today	28	0.94
NBC/Wall Street Journal	57	0.94
Time/CNN	18	0.90
Washington Post	48	0.92
Percent variance explained:		85.9

of the number of times they asked relevant opinion questions on Congress, ranging from a low of four times asked to a high of 59 times asked. All ten survey sources load remarkably well into a single measure, and 85.9 percent of the total variance of the measure is explained. As stated earlier, the Stimson dyadic ratio algorithm smooths multiple sources of data into a single useful source. Figure 1 gives us an initial look at this combined measure of congressional job approval.

Taking a look at Figure 1, we see a great deal of movement over time in opinions about the job Congress is doing. Approval of Congress starts out at just over 40 percent at the beginning of the series (quarter one of 1977) and decreases throughout the end of the 1970s as the Democratic-controlled Congress finds itself unable to accomplish many of the goals of the Carter administration. The mid-1980s bring with it increased approval (even in a period of divided government and even divided Congress with a Republican-controlled Senate and a Democratic-controlled House), but the late 1980s and early 1990s see a noticeable dip in approval to then historic lows. Approval of Congress rose throughout the 1990s as Republicans reclaimed the majority in both chambers for the first time in decades. This approval, unsurpris-

Congressional Approval, 1977–2006

Figure 1: Approval of Congress, 1977-2006

ingly, peaks in the period just after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Since the highs of late 2001 and early 2002, approval of the job Congress is doing has steadily decreased over time.

Measuring Framing and Congressional Approval

Before discussing what content will be analyzed, it is essential to discuss how the content analysis process works and what should be kept in mind as we pursue a content analysis-based answer to our questions. Content analysis is the process of studying communications for the prevalence of words, phrases, ideas, themes (and, in our case, media frames) within a text or group of texts (in our case, newspapers). Broadly speaking, content analysis is, as Mitchell (1968, p.230) puts it, "technical procedures for producing data" and not a process of manipulating or analyzing data. It can help us answer many questions about rhetorical methods (Titscher et al. 2000). Berelson (1952), in his pioneering tome on the state of content analysis, discusses how this process is well suited for examining communications because of how objective

and systematic it can be. We must take precaution to ensure the way in which we analyze content meets these standards. We want to be certain that the way we go about gathering data does not raise questions of validity and reliability. The process taken to deliver validity and reliability on content analysis is generally similar across attempts. Titscher et al. (2000, p.64), translating earlier work by Mayring (1988), describes a multi-stage process all content analysts must undertake. Two key stages we must take care to address in detail are as follows: the source material must be determined, along with what specific questions we seek to answer with said material.

Determining Source Material

This chapter seeks to link specific frames of media coverage to the measure of congressional approval just illustrated. To do so, it is important to discuss the process of collecting media accounts of Congress and removing useful information from said accounts. Using the Lexis-Nexis electronic media database, I collected all stories that discussed Congress in any fashion from January 1977 to December 2006.[7] Stories were collected from the *Washington Post*; this choice (versus using the *New York Times* like several other scholars examining media) was made because the archives of the Post date to 1977, farther back than any other credible national news source.[8]

Before looking in detail at the nature of coverage of Congress over time, we

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[7]The specific search terms used in Lexis-Nexis to build my potential pool of stories about Congress were "Congress," "Senate," and "congressman."

[8]Some have argued that, given the limited readership of a single newspaper and the decreasing readership of newspapers over time, anyone examining media should be concerned about using newspaper coverage as a gauge of media coverage broadly defined. I feel these fears are worthy of debate but, in the end, are not entirely warranted. As Caldeira (1986) argues, elite media may reach a small percentage of the public, but it reaches nearly all of the individuals we might consider to be "opinion leaders." This coverage also will, as Caldeira puts it, "filter down into the towns and villages of America." In addition, some of the decreased readership of newspapers is being balanced out by sharp increases in the use of alternative forms of reading the reporting newspapers undertake, such as the use of newspaper websites.

must first address a key question about said coverage: what constitutes a story about Congress? What separates a substantive story that individuals can use to learn about the workings of the legislative branch from a story that provides mere fluff? Content analysis of media coverage requires decision rules, and the decision rules for this examination are as follows:

1) Stories in which Congress as a whole (and, more specifically, stories just about the House or Senate) in which the legislative branch is taking an active role are stories about Congress. This includes stories about bills being introduced, debated, conferenced between House and Senate, and passing or failing. It also includes stories about congressional hearings. In total, stories like these where the Congress acts make up the bulk of stories analyzed here. This decision rule removes stories in which Congress is not the actor, but rather the subject of actions. For the most part, this means that stories where the President tells Congress he is going to take some sort of action are not included; it also means that stories in which agencies report to Congress are not included. In these cases, the actors speaking to Congress are, more often than not, the engine driving the story.

2) Stories in which multiple members of Congress make news for their activities are stories about Congress. More often than not, these stories include ones in which a group (for example, "House Republicans") introduce legislation or react to other groups of legislators or other branches of government. This also includes stories about congressional scandals in which multiple members are involved.

3) Stories that deal with changing leadership within Congress are stories about Congress. These may be stories about the decision-making process when it comes to picking who will take on leadership roles; they may also be stories about how leadership may change based on potential electoral shifts.

4) Stories that are about a single legislator are not stories about Congress. This keeps stories about unilateral action on the part of a member of Congress and detailed stories about a legislator's electoral activities (in Washington or at home) out of the database.

5) Stories about party politics that do not explicitly refer to congressional activities are not stories about Congress. This separates stories that talk about, for example, "Democrats" from stories that talk about "House Democrats" or "Congressional Democrats."

These five decision rules, I argue, allow me to clearly examine what Congress is doing and how the public might react to such activities. They assist in keeping out potential contaminants to the analysis that might result from studying coverage of other branches of the federal government, other government agencies, and other political actors (interest groups, candidates) at the same time as I study the legislative branch. These decision rules best allow me to build the most appropriate and pure pool of stories that will be linked to approval of Congress.

Using these decision rules leaves me with the pool of stories over time as shown in Figure 2. There are several important things to note about the coverage of Congress over time. First, we should note that there is a great deal of movement from quarter to quarter in terms of the number of stories about Congress. Some of this movement is probably driven by institutional factors like elections and vacations, while some is undoubtedly driven by congressional activity. This movement is substantive interesting, but it is not the focus of our analysis and as such is left to future discussion. We should also note that there has been a downward shift in coverage over time. For most of the quarters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, coverage of Congress reached the level of approximately 100 to 150 stories per quarter. By the

Number of Stories About Congress, 1977–2006
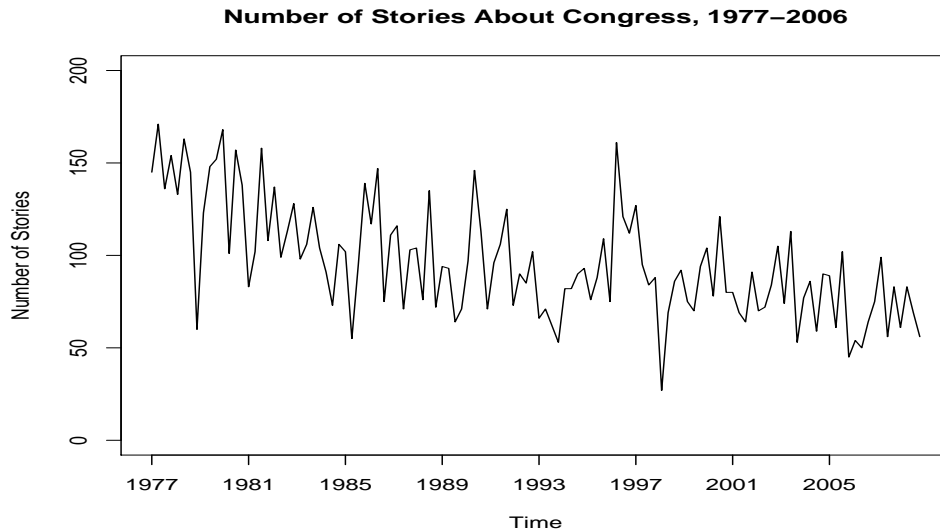
Figure 2: Number of Stories About Congress, 1977-2006

time of the late 1990s and early 2000s, this has dropped to a level between 50 and 100 stories per quarter. It appears overall coverage of Congress is decreasing. Certain periods of time, however, do overcome this downward movement; the scandals of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the transition in chamber control of the mid 1990s were two periods of time in which media focus on congressional activity was high.

It is important to reiterate in our discussion here that there have been several scholarly works (Patterson and Caldeira 1990; Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997) that have tangentially linked media coverage to assessments of the legislative branch. These two studies provide a good start to the discussion of the potential for media effects, but they do so more as part of a larger exploratory debate about congressional approval and not necessarily as a discussion of the power of the media and the multifaceted mature of reporting on Congress. They also execute their analysis in markedly different ways. The path my content analysis takes differs from these earlier attempts. First, the level of analysis being examined here is not the story,

but instead is a raw count of words or phrases that fit certain frames per quarter. As will be discussed below, this allows us to study the presence or absence of multiple frames of language within a single story, rather than trying to awkwardly fit each story as a whole into a potentially clumsy category. Not every story is a game story or a governing story; in fact, we should expect very few stories to be one dimensional in the language they use. Instead, we should expect stories to contain a mix of language from both frames. This language builds up from story to story, from day to day, from week to week, and from month to month. It is the volumes of this game and governing language from quarter to quarter over time that matters.

Second, my "database" of stories about Congress attempts to capture only stories about Congress itself and is not a kitchen sink of every story remotely mentioning Congress. This decision rule should give us a more pure look at what coverage of Congress as a whole looks like, plus it keeps us from conflating coverage of Congress from coverage of its members (seeing as we are attempting to separate the factors that drive assessment of legislators from assessments of the legislative branch). This decision rule differs from that of Patterson and Caldeira, who seem to include everything remotely related to Congress (including stories about individual members acting on their own); my standards for inclusion and exclusion seem to be closer to that of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, who state that they are including stories about Congress itself (but unfortunately are not all that explicit about what exactly that means). Including dummies for scandals (a la Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht) should provide a proxy for the presence of scandals that equals the Patterson and Caldeira look at levels of scandal coverage. Excluding stories about individual members of Congress eliminates the need to look at a volume of personal stories within media coverage. This leaves us with the institutional volume Patterson and Caldeira

examine, which is the set of stories most clearly central to the workings of Congress; this institutional set of stories is where I feel multiple frames might be at work driving evaluations in different directions.

The strategy used to analyze coverage of Congress in this study differs greatly from the attempts previously discussed. Rather than place stories as a whole into one category or another, content analysis via computerized analysis of text allows us to extract the relevant portions of a story and decide how stories fit multiple frames and to what extent. This process is undertaken using a computer program called WordStat.[9]

Wordstat allows text to be categorized using user-generated dictionaries. Once the content set for analyzing by the user is compiled, Wordstat allows for the construction of lists (or dictionaries, as the program calls them), that will be the focus of the analysis. Dictionaries are simply words or phrases that the user wants the program to search for. The user can create his or her own dictionaries, but if the user chooses, Wordstat will also suggest appropriate synonyms that might help enhance the dictionary compilation process. To alleviate fears that the computerized content analysis process is producing results that contain invalid or incorrect forms of the words and phrases included in dictionaries, Wordstat also includes what the creators call a "proximity operator" process to ensure only appropriate versions of the words and phrases being searched for are counted.[10] Once our dictionaries are

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[9]Wordstat is produced by Provalis Research.

[10]The most common proximity operator is setting up decision rules to ensure opposite versions of the words and phrases to be searched for are not included in frequency totals. For example, consider a study in which we were interested in determining how often the economy is portrayed as strong in the media. Consider two potential phrases within a series of stories: "the economy is strong" and "the economy is not strong." These two phrases are opposites, but if we merely search for the word "strong" in stories about the economy, the second phrase would be included. Proximity operators can be set up to ensure that the second phrase is not included (by telling the program to ignore negating words like "no," "not," or "nor" within a certain number or words of any items in our dictionary.)

set, Wordstat scans our source material for the words and phrases inside them and produces frequency counts.

I argue that going down the computerized content analysis path is a smarter approach for studying material in this context than simply relying on the specific human coding strategy employed by others. Why might this strategy offer greater insight into content about Congress? There are two clear reasons:

1) Not all stories are wholly about game or governing, wholly positive or negative or neutral (as Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht claim), or wholly institutional, personal, or scandalous (as Patterson and Caldeira claim).

Media stories in general tend to tell many different tales; this is especially true when it comes to stories about Congress. A story might start by discussing the outcome of a vote in Congress, but then transition into a discussion of the history of the legislation, an interview with the individuals for and against the bill, and a prediction about the future of the issue within the branch. Trying to put a story then into one category instead of multiple categories proves difficult.

However, placing a story into, for example, two categories might lead one to wonder if the story is equal parts one category and equal parts the other. Finding a way to code a story as being, for example, seventy percent game and thirty percent governing would be the most accurate way to capture what story a story is telling. Looking for key words and phrases within a story allows us to approximate this measure most closely.

For example, consider the following paragraphs from a March 12, 2006 *Washington Post* story about the Senate intelligence committee:

The Senate intelligence committee, once a symbol of bipartisan oversight,

is now so torn by partisan warfare that it can barely function in a time of sharp national debate over intelligence matters, according to several analysts, officials and past and current members.

Inter-party animosity has simmered since the 1990s, but it heated up when Republicans took steps to limit probes into President Bush's handling of the Iraq war and domestic spying. It reached a full boil Tuesday, when the committee voted along party lines to reject a proposed investigation of the administration's warrantless surveillance of Americans' international communications. It voted instead to create a White House-approved subcommittee to oversee the operation, infuriating Democrats and some civil libertarians.

These two paragraphs send multiple messages to the reader. The use of the word "partisan" and the phrase "barely function" sends a clear game frame message that the business of the committee has slowed and that partisanship matters on this committee. However, the story also conveys a certain amount of information that fits the governing frame as well, namely that the committee is dealing with issues salient to the war in Iraq and domestic spying, two hot button issues. The paragraph also discusses that a vote was taken, suggesting the work of the committee is ongoing despite the struggles between the parties.

If we attempted to code stories rather than language here, we would clearly run into trouble. These paragraphs are not wholly game oriented or governing oriented. We cannot quite say that the story is neutral either; rather, it sends two clear and distinct types of signals. Looking at the volume of words within a story like this allows for the capturing of multiple frames (and eventually, the examination of their independent effects) rather than attempting to pit the frames against each other on

a per story basis.

2) Computer coding is better equipped to rigidly capture the nuances within each story than human coding.

If we use a computerized content analysis software package, not only can we can look within a story for multiple frames and multiple directions a story might capture, but we can also ensure a strict standard by which stories are judged. A computer program will give the scholar the same results every time a group of stories is analyzed. Multiple human coders, however, might read stories differently. Computer coding guarantees consistency of analysis across stories. Computerized content analysis also allows me to set up decision rules that make sure I get the versions of words I am looking for and not the opposite meanings.

Determining the Questions to Be Asked

Now that I have established my decision rules for determining how to analyze thirty years of stories about Congress, I must address what I am specifically looking for within these stories. Put simply, I am looking for words and phrases that fit the game and governing frames explained in detail in Chapter II.[11] Before we finally let the computerized process run, we must determine the most useful output of the analysis. In this case, we rely on simple frequency counts of game and governing language. We must also decide how we want these frequencies to be summed; in the case of this chapter, quarterly frequency counts are chosen, but this decision is a flexible one. We could look at weekly counts, monthly counts, yearly counts, or by document counts; it all depends on how we choose to analyze the entirety of our data

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[11]For lists of specific words and phrases used in the content analysis, consult the appendix. A survey asking college students to match these words and phrases to broad framing concepts was successfully conducted in the Spring of 2008 and found congruence between frames offered and language considered.

and how we construct the files of content we choose to let the computer program survey.

When it comes to capturing the governing frame of media coverage of Congress, I seek out two broad types of ideas: words and phrases that capture issues and words and phrases that capture legislative activity (defined constitutionally, almost like a glossary of legislative terms). Figure 3 illustrates the presence of these words in coverage of Congress over time. It provides a raw count of words present that fit my conception of the governing frame.

Governing Coverage of Congressional Activity, 1977–2006
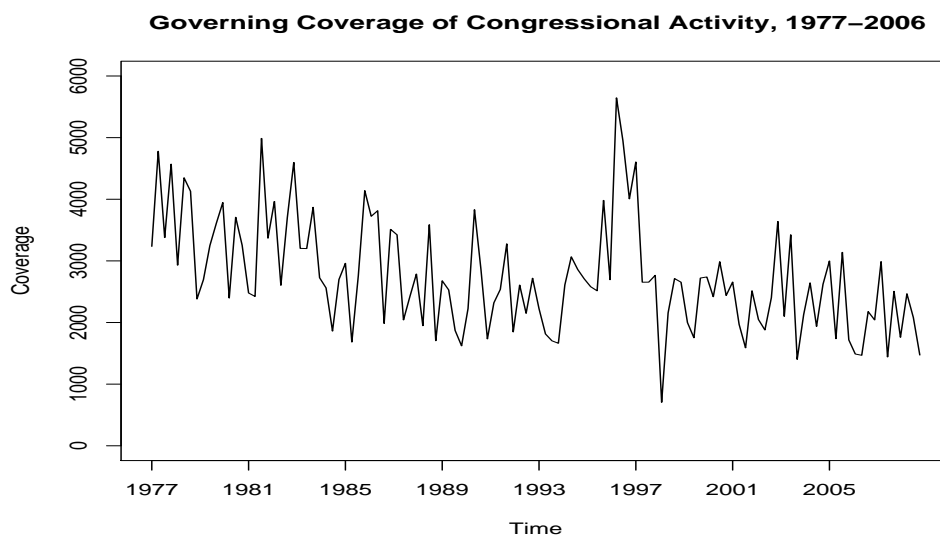
Figure 3: Number of Governing References, 1977-2006

A look at the presence of governing coverage over time shows us that there is a great deal of movement from quarter to quarter in terms of how the media addresses issues and the nuts and bolts of how a bill becomes a law. There appears to be a slight downward movement in the series of mentions of governing terms, but that movement appears to have leveled off somewhat over the past ten years. The most noticeable movement within the series occurs in the mid 1990s.

When it comes to seeking out the game frame of media coverage of Congress, I am looking for words and phrases that capture conflict and consensus within the House and Senate. This leads to a search for a list of words that illustrate disagreement and agreement. Figure 4 shows us the prevalence of game frame word usage by the media over time. It delivers a raw count of game words from 1977 to 2006.

Game Coverage of Congressional Activity, 1977–2006
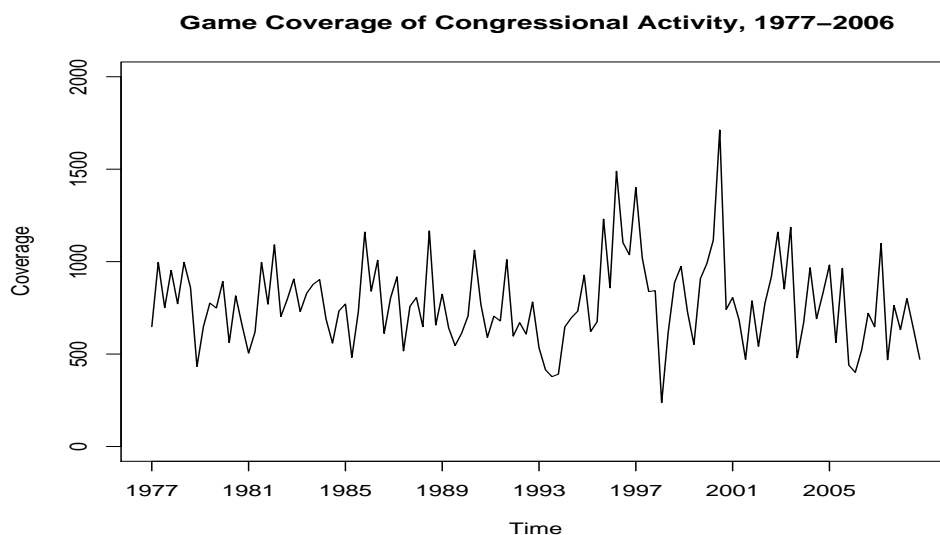
Figure 4: Number of Game References, 1977-2006

The movement of game references over time appears much steadier than the movement of governing references. The number per quarter in the late 1970s us almost always between 500 and 1000 references; the same holds true for 2001 onward. Two areas of note in this figure are the mid 1990s and the late 1990s/early 2000s, two periods of high partisan contentiousness. One interesting fact we also should point out when it comes to game coverage is that, unlike in the sphere of campaign coverage by the media, game coverage has not necessarily surpassed governing coverage. Governing coverage is consistently higher than game coverage when it comes to Congress, a fact that might be surprising to some individuals who have offered ad hoc theories that coverage of Congress is swamped by discussions of how the two

parties are not getting along and working.[12]

For the purposes of ease of analysis, these game and governing volumes per quarter will be scaled to groups of 100 references. Examining the effects of one additional word or phrase per quarter would not offer us much theoretical leverage, whereas thinking about language in terms of hundreds of words or phrases is far easier to conceptualize. We can see how one hundred game or governing words might translate into a few extra game- or governing related paragraphs or stories per month and as such can envision how this volume of reporting might more easily be picked up by those taking in the efforts of the mass media.

Beyond the potential effects of media coverage on assessments of Congress, there are other potential factors that are known or are believed to drive how Americans evaluate the legislative branch. These factors include the actions that legislators perform each and every day in the House and Senate, the reactions of other branches of government, external social factors, and past evaluations delivered by Americans.

The activities of Congress itself have the potential to explain the branch's popularity. When Congress shows they are accomplishing tasks, they might be sending the signal that they are doing the jobs they were elected to do and therefore might be worthy of a reward via improved public favor. One such signal of accomplishment Congress could send would be the passage of bills. The content of the bills might not matter; as Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) state, a passage of a bill equals a gain for someone in the general public; thus, the more bills that are passed means the more people are receiving improvements in some form. Including a variable that captures the number of bills Congress passes each quarter, therefore, is a good way

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[12]While the governing and game series do move together to some extent, correlation of the two series does not reach a level at which multicollinearity is a fear.

to capture congressional outputs. Such a variable is included in my approval model; it is a simple count of the number of bills passed by the House and Senate, not necessarily the number of bills signed into law. It only counts bills passed by both chambers and not bills passed by a single chamber.

In addition to general levels of bill passage, larger signs that the totality of government is functioning smoothly might drive Americans to believe that government is working for them. One such signal would be the presence of unified or nondivided government. When all branches of government are controlled by the same political party, the potential for legislation to move without hindrance from entrance in a chamber of Congress to the desk of the President for signature is heightened. Nondivided government is not a guarantor of political harmony, but it does create a clear alliance between lawmaking and law adopting. In this study, dummy variables are included to capture the presence of unified government, defined as one party control of the House, Senate, and presidency. This captures the following time periods: 1977:1-1980:4, 1993:1-1994:4, 2001:1-2001:2 and 2003:1-2006:4. The variable captures the potential change in approval of Congress by coding the first quarter of this unified government as a 1 and all other quarters through the data as a 0.[13]

Not all signals Congress sends, however, are so positive. Just as often (and perhaps more often) as the members of Congress work to pass legislation, so too do they work to stem the tide of legislative changes. At times, this is simply done by not letting legislation progress from introduction to committee to a floor vote, but capturing these legislative delays might be difficult. Looking instead at highly visible gestures of slowing bills from votes might therefore be a better option. A variable is included in the model to capture cloture votes, which serve as a sign that

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[13]Coding unified government in several other ways did not produce substantively different results.

filibusters, perhaps the strongest outward signals of congressional obstruction and gridlock. The variable is a raw count of cloture votes actually taken per quarter and does not capture moves toward cloture votes.

Signs that the gears of government have ground to a halt have the potential to shape how Americans assess their representation. Congressional overrides of presidential vetoes have the potential to show that the Congress is relevant and vital in the face of constitutional controls established to hold the legislative branch back. On the other hand, the number of presidential vetoes per quarter sends the reverse signal to Americans. Vetoes potentially show the public that congressional action is being denied; as such, the power and esteem of Congress has the potential to be diminished in the eyes of the public. Measures of vetoes and overrides per quarter are included to capture this give and take between the executive and legislative branches. I create two variables here, one a raw count of vetoes per quarter and the other a count of vetoes overriden per quarter.

When it comes to assessing the shape that congressional approval and trust takes over time, it is also important to factor in specific events that might negatively shake the foundations of support. Following the lead of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht**?**, I include dummy variables that capture the potential power of congressional scandals to alter perceptions of congressional strength. These scandals include Koreagate (1977:1-1978:4), ABSCAM (1980:3-1982:1), Keating Five (1990:3-1991:4), House Bank (1991:3-1992:3), House Post Office Investigation (1992:2-1992:4), and the congressional lobbying scandal (2005:1-2006:4). Only scandals lasting multiple quarters and encompassing multiple members of Congress were included in the model. The scandals are separated into distinct variables and are given a value of

1 in each quarter the scandal was present.[14] Specific events also have the potential to drive approval in a positive direction. Just as the President benefits from "rally around the flag" sentiments, so too might the House and Senate. Therefore, I include one dummy variables to capture events that might drive approval of Congress in a positive direction. This variable captures the September 11 attack and the invasion of Afghanistan (2001:3-2001:4). This variable is coded similarly to the scandal variables, with a 1 in each quarter the event is present.

As both Patterson and Caldeira (1990) and Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) show, the fates of Congress are not so easily divorced from the fates of other branches of government. Key to their analyses of public esteem of Congress is a belief that views of the President are tied to views of Congress. Therefore, it is essential to include a measure of presidential approval in any model that seeks to explain what drives the public's trust in and approval of the legislative branch. The measure of presidential approval used in this model utilizes Gallup polling data from the final month of each quarter over the thirty years examined.

On the other hand, some factors that shape approval of government are factors that, in some part, are out of the hands of legislators. One such variable is the economic expectations of Americans. Congress can pass laws that affect the economic future of the United States, but economic conditions may or may not be ultimately related to these laws. Despite this, politicians are expected to improve the financial state of the nation and its citizens. As Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht hypothesize (and show to be valid in their model of congressional approval), just as Americans hold the President responsible for economic conditions, so too do they hold legislators responsible for such fates. A measure of economic expectations similar to that of the

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[14]Creating and employing a variable that captures all scandals into a single measure instead of using multiple measures does not substantively change the results.

authors mentioned above is included as a control on the ebb and flow of congressional assessments. The measure of economic expectations included here is the Index of Consumer Sentiment measure taken by the University of Michigan Survey of Consumers.[15] It captures consumer opinions about several economic subjects, including their own financial situation as well as broader national financial situations.

We know, however, that there is a relationship between presidential approval and economic expectations that might devalue efforts to directly study the effects of these variables on congressional assessments. We must, therefore, take steps to divorce the effect of economic assessments on presidential approval from the overall models. In order to do so, I regress presidential approval on economic expectations to remove the potential directionality issues.[16] This leaves me with a more pure measure of presidential approval with which to gauge effects on congressional job approval.

It is also essential to include a measure of congressional approval at the time point prior to each quarter being examined here. Rarely would we expect huge movement in approval from one quarter to the next, and more often than not evaluations will be based on information drawn from experiences in the recent past. We should expect the relationship between past and current approval to be a powerfully strong one. A measure of this nature also serves another purpose, in that it captures past values of the other variables in the model. As such, I include a lagged version of congressional approval as a nod toward the potentially glacial movement of approval over time and the changing rates of decay when it comes to the effects of multiple competing factors.

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[15]This measure can be found at http://www.sca.isr.umich.edu.
[16]Like De Boef and Keele (2008) but unlike Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997), I do not multiply this variable by negative one based on the unification or division of government.

Methods

Attempts to model approval over time have grown more sophisticated with each passing attempt. Parker (1977) and Patterson and Caldeira (1990) use a very simple multivariate model. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht improve greatly on these attempts through their use of distributed-lag models. They theorize that congressional approval will be "a function of current and past values" of exogenous variables included in the model; this modeling choice allows for more recent outcomes to account for "greater change than those more distant" (p. 193). This distributed-lag modeling regresses the dependent variable (approval) on both lagged measures of approval and exogenous explanatory variables that are measured contemporaneously. Including a lagged dependent variable in a model in this fashion has been the source of much consternation (for a detailed explanation of the questions surrounding this modeling choice, see Keele and Kelly (2006)), but for over a decade, the distributed-lag path toward explaining congressional approval went unchallenged.

De Boef and Keele, in a January 2008 piece in the *American Journal of Political Science*, offer a different strategy when it comes to choosing a time series model, one that should be heeded especially when it comes to examining opinion over time. The authors point out some specific mistakes often made in modeling that prove useful for our endeavors here. De Boef and Keele, in reviewing time series regression choices over a ten year period from 1995 to 2005, find that many authors use restrictive models without explaining why. This choice, in their opinion, "suggests a potential for bias" (p. 186). De Boef and Keele suggest authors take a look at error correction models (or ECMs) as a less restrictive choice when it comes to time series. ECMs, according to the authors, are often times so associated with cointegration that they are immediately cast aside when it comes to the use of stationary data. However,

proofs have shown that cointegration is not a requirement for the use of ECMs. If we are seeking to, as De Boef and Keele put it, "estimate and test for both short- and long-run effects and to compute a variety of quantities that help us better understand politics" (p. 191), ECMs might provide the most fruitful path through this context. In choosing between an autoregressive distributed-lag model (or ADL) and an ECM, the authors claim that the ECM allows for a "tighter link between theory and model" (p. 195) along with three readily available metrics: short-run effects, the long-run multiplier, and the error correction rate. It also minimizes questions surrounding invalid restrictions that can prove problematic.

As described by Kelly (2005), ECMs are useful when theory "suggests a de-pendent variable responds to short-term changes in independent variables and/or maintains a long-term level consistent with these variables" (p. 873). There can, therefore, be both immediate effects and effects distributed over time. If we were talking about ECMs in a bivariate sense, we would be testing a formula that resem-bles the one below:

$$\Delta Y_t = \beta_1 \Delta X_{t-i} - \beta_2 (Y_{t-1} - \beta_3 X_{t-1} - \gamma) + \varepsilon_t$$

Kelly interprets the above equation as follows. The goal is to examine "the effect of changes in X and the level of X in comparison to Y" (p. 873). In the equation, β_2 captures the error correction rate; in other words, it "captures how quickly discrepancies in the equilibrium distance between X and Y are eliminated" (p. 873). β_1 measures the short-run relationship between X and Y. β_3 measures the long-run relationship between X and Y. In addition, γ is the "distance between variables when in their equilibrium state" (p. 873). Since our model here is multivariate, we

assume a formula like the one above but with an X for each potential determinant of congressional approval.

De Boef and Keele go one step further in terms of guiding the analysis to be performed here in this chapter, in that they replicate the Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht findings using both an ADL and an ECM in addition to the results originally reported in the 1997 piece. The ECM version of modeling congressional approval reveals some new findings that will be important to keep in mind as we execute a model including game and governing framing, namely that presidential approval has an immediate effect, economic expectations have a long-run effects, and the Durr/Gilmour/Wolbrecht media measure has almost equal short- and long-run effects.

Following in the footsteps of the error correction model used by De Boef and Keele in replicating Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, this chapter will also use an error correction model in estimating congresssional job approval. Regardless of whether or not the findings reveal short- or long-run significance, an ECM should prove useful here given the use of quarterly data (in other words, a great deal of memory is built into each quarter, so even short-run significant results speak to something). Like De Boef and Keele, I will report short- and long run-results for media coverage, presidential approval, and economic expectations, but I will also include information that captures these types of effects for the other hypotheses Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht test, namely the ideas that congressional outputs, governmental situations, and events and crises matter.

Findings

Findings for the error correction model of congressional job approval are located in Table 2.

Table 2: Media Framing and Congressional Approval, 1977-2006

Predictors	Long Run Effects	Short Run Effects
Congressional Approval$_{t-1}$	-0.273* (.069)	
Game Framing	-.623 (.421)	-.819* (.351)
Governing Framing	.130 (.119)	.222* (.101)
Presidential Approval	.092 (.081)	.122* (.069)
Economic Expectations	.184* (.066)	.233* (.102)
Bills Passed	.010 (.019)	.029* (.016)
Cloture Votes	.013 (.146)	-.029 (.098)
Vetoes	.439* (.260)	.245 (.177)
Veto Overrides	.503 (1.757)	-.579 (1.354)
No Divided Government: 1977-1980	4.791 (7.527)	2.231 (4.978)
No Divided Government: 1993-1994	-18.399* (8.449)	-14.770* (7.222)
No Divided Government: 2001:1	12.829* (6.894)	7.706* (4.510)
No Divided Government: 2003-2004	.833 (6.438)	-.964 (4.505)
Scandal: Koreagate	-3.868* (2.223)	3.543 (5.427)
Scandal: ABSCAM	1.910 (2.068)	5.415* (3.201)
Scandal: Keating Five	-1.970 (3.019)	5.071 (3.798)
Scandal: House Bank	-1.650 (4.528)	-4.511 (4.007)
Scandal: House Post Office	-2.056 (5.469)	-10.620* (6.304)
Scandal: Lobbying	-3.077 (1.921)	-1.191 (4.314)
Event: September 11	12.174* (4.291)	6.862* (3.904)
Constant	-4.141 (5.768)	
N	119	
Adjusted R-Squared	.292	

Note: Data are quarterly, 1977:1 to 2006:4. Standard errors are in parentheses.
* = $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

Taking a look at the results, we find immediately that both hypotheses presented earlier are validated. Game framing has a negative and significant effect on congressional job approval. According to the numbers, for every one hundred additional game references per quarter, congressional approval decreases by just over four-fifths of a percent.[17] In essence, when the news media discuss congressional activity as a game in which conflict and compromise are the outcomes sought by strategic actors and parties, the legislative branch suffers. This relationship between game framing and congressional approval is a short-run relationship in which the effects do not last into the future.

While the presence of game langauge is shown to have a negative effect on congressional job approval, the presence of governing language is shown to have an opposite effect. For every one hundred media references in a quarter to governing, approval increases by two-tenths of a percent.[18]In essence, the discussion of Congress working on legislation and dealing with issues positively alters the assessments Americans deliver concerning the legislative branch. Similarly to game coverage, however, these effects only exist in the short-run; they do not persist long after they are delivered by the mass media. These findings, taken in total, show that specific types of media matter in driving approval of Congress over time. The language the mass media utilize in covering Congress has a distinct and nuanced effect on the ways in which Americans examine their government.

The results of this model of congressional approval also bear out, for the most part, the findings of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) and De Boef and Keele

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[17]It is important to point out that an increase of one hundred game references could happen quite easily; on average, there are 776 game references per quarter.

[18]As with game references, it is important to point out that an increase of one hundred governing references in a three month span could happen quite easily; on average, I find over 2700 governing references per quarter.

(2008) when it comes to the role presidential approval and economic expectations play in driving congressional approval in both the short- and long-run. When it comes to presidential approval, I find a short-run relationship between support for the president and support for Congress; when support for the president increases, so too does support for Congress. These findings support the earlier error correction model performed by De Boef and Keele (which contradicted the non-findings of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht). Like both sets of authors, I too find that economic expectations matter; unlike both sets of authors, I fund a multifaceted relationship between these expectations and congressional approval. Here, economic expectations matter in both the short-run and the long-run; when economic expectations go up, Congress is rewarded with positive job assessments on the part of the public. The power of these positive expectations affects approval immediately, and it also continues to affect approval across future time periods; the results show, however, that the immediate effect is the strong effect of the two.

When it comes to the effects of actual congressional actions on the job approval of Congress, the findings are quite mixed. It appears that actually getting things done matters, as bill passage has a short-run effect on congressional job approval. When Congress passes more bills, they are rewarded with higher approval. These findings differ from those of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, who find no relationship. Similarly to these authors, however, I find that vetoes have an positive and significant effect on congressional job approval; interestingly though, this relationship exists in the long-run. This might suggest that inter-branch conflict has effects that persist, unlike measures of intra-branch conflict like bill passage. Like Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, I find no relationship between cloture votes and congressional job approval; unlike these authors, however, I find no relationship between veto overrides

and congressional job approval.

The results linking governmental situations and congressional job approval bear out the idea that, at certain times, unified government can have wildly different effects on how Americans view their legislative branch. The period of unified government in the late 1970s appears to have no effect on congressional job approval. The period of unified government in the 1990s, however, had an impressively negative effect on how individuals responded to a period of complete Democratic rule. The presence of this unified government from quarter one of 1993 to quarter four of 1994 had both short- and long-run negative consequences for the public perception of Congress. These results differ from those of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht. Interestingly, the single quarter of unified Republican government in the first quarter of 2001 had the exact opposite effect; here, both short- and long run- results show a positive effect of this change in control. A return to unified government under Republican control after the 2002 elections (i.e from the first quarter of 2003 through the last quarter of 2006) showed no similar spark in terms of boosting approval for Congress.[19]

As for scandals and events, the findings are similar to those of the look at governmental situations in that they are mixed. The Koreagate scandal of the late 1970s has a significant negative long-run effect on congressional job approval; these findings, to some extent, bear out findings of Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, who found a negative significant relationship between the two in their distributed-lag model. Inexplicably, however, the scandal that followed the Koreagate scandal in Congress, the ABSCAM scandal, comes back positively related to congressional job approval in the short-run. The only other scandal found to significantly affect assessments of the legislative branch is the Post Office scandal in the House in the early 1990s; this

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[19]Removing the media measures from the model has no substantive effects on significance or signs of the competing explanations

scandal had negative, short-run effects on approval. The Keating Five and House Bank scandals of the early 1990s and the Abramoff Lobbying scandals of the mid 2000s were not found to be related to the measure of job approval. In terms of specific potential "rally around the flag" events, the model tests only one: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The model finds that there was rallying around the flag in both the short- and long-run; the long-run positive effects were nearly double the effects in the short-run.

Taking a look at the findings in total, we can conclude several things. The mass media matter in very specific ways: game coverage and governing coverage have opposite effects that push approval downward and upward respectively. The media only matter in the short-term however. Other governmental entities matter (i.e. the President), as does the economy. Congress can affect its own fate, but only through passing bills and sometimes via falling into the trap of scandal; Congress can also be affected, by both the actions of others (i.e. through vetoes) and through the results of elections (unifying government behind one ideology) and national events.

Implications

The most clear-cut message we can take away from the findings of the error correction model of congressional job approval in this chapter is that, as expected and predicted, the media matter. When the media use language that fits the game frame of coverage, approval of Congress is driven downward. Game terms touch at a raw nerve of the general public that is tired of politicians who are caught up in conflict and are too willing to sell out and compromise their ideals. Americans respond to these types of depictions of the legislative branch in markedly negative fashion. These effects are not long lasting effects, but they are significant. On the other hand, when the media uses language that fits the governing frame of coverage,

approval of Congress is enhanced in the short-run. Governing terms assuage the public's need for issues to be addressed, policies to be presented, and work to be ongoing and performed stealthily, to borrow a phrase from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002). When the media describe Congress in these terms, Congress benefits when it comes to the assessments delivered by the American people; this benefit may be short lived statistically, but it is a benefit that must be appreciated nonetheless (especially given Congress's seemingly nonexistent ability to get its head above water in terms of public opinion of its performance).

We also should not ignore findings beyond those of the crux of our argument (that the media matter). Results show that a wide variety of factors that lie in and out of the hands of members of the House and Senate matter when it comes to what drives positive and negative assessments of the place in which they work. Bill passage matters in the short-term and in positive fashion; the extent to which bills can be and are passed is something that is left entirely for Congress to decide. Economic expectations have both short- and long-term effects on how the public perceive Congress; this suggests that perhaps if Congress can spur economic changes for the better, these polling benefits can be perpetual. This is obviously more difficult for Congress to control than, say, bill passage. Electoral outcomes shape approval, in that periods of unified government show markedly different effects on job approval that are based on the dynamics of the times; the unification of government behind one party is something members of Congress work for, but cannot guarantee. The fate of Congress is also found to be linked to that of the President (both in terms of short-run effects of presidential approval and long-run effects of vetoes). It seems, therefore, that just like with the relationship between what Congress does and what the media cover, Congress is clearly not in control of its own approval-related destiny;

it is inextricably linked to the actions of other political actors. The effects of this link may not last long, but the link remains.

More importantly, perhaps, the macro-level results here begin to answer the question of how the media might be driving Fenno's paradox. So long as the media continue to address the bargaining aspects of congressional activity, the give and take between members of Congress and between chambers within Congress, and the seemingly inevitable conflict between individuals and factions, it is difficult to envision congressional job approval rebounding. Congress has no ombudsman, as it were, to promote itself, its focus on issues, and its policy production; as long as the media write the narrative of what Congress is doing and as long as that narrative contains and focuses to some extent on elements of conflict and compromise, Congress, barring events that artificially inflate opinion, might be perpetually stuck in the morass of low approval.

Individual members of Congress, on the other hand, do have a path toward boosting their image in the eyes of constituents. The standards of judgment when it comes to the performance of members of Congress are, as Fenno claimed, different. As we will see in Chapter IV, the role the mass media play in shaping these standards of judgment is a role that competes with the ability of each member of Congress to promote themselves and their accomplishments. This competition of information ensures a whole different relationship when it comes to the potential effects of game and governing on Fenno's paradox.

CHAPTER IV

MEDIA FRAMING AND SENATORIAL APPROVAL

From the moment an individual is elected to Congress, he or she is already thinking about how to get re-elected to Congress. Part of the strategy undertaken by these re-election seeking members is completely under the members control, but scholars remain conscious of the fact that although members would like to personally tell every constituent what has been accomplished and what will be accomplished, for the most part members of Congress must rely on outsiders to spread the message. Just as with Congress, legislators must be concerned with how they are portrayed by newspapers in their home states. However, while Congress has no entity attempting to ensure it receives positive press, individual members of Congress work to control the information flow concerning them through the way the approach the job, the issues they work on, and the level to which they get involved in party and partisan politics. This chapter examines how game and governing framing might affect individual members of Congress (specifically senators) and the level to which constituents approve or disapprove of them. As with congressional approval, it is shown that game and governing framing matter, but the specific dynamics reveal that they matter in different ways.

In the early months of 2006, Virginia Senator George Allen had what many would call a bright and boundless political future ahead of him. After winning his Senate seat in a narrow victory over an incumbent slightly over five years earlier, Allen had become a rising star within his party, serving as a fundraising chair in a year of Republican successes and even being mentioned in some circles as a potential presidential candidate in 2008. Perhaps more importantly for his role as junior Senator of Virginia, he was viewed by those in his state and in Washington as a hard

worker who accomplished much of what he set out to accomplish and as someone able to deliver on promises to those who sent him to Washington in the first place. As such, he consistently enjoyed levels of approval of the job he was doing as Senator of nearly sixty percent (and gaps between positive and negative approval of nearly thirty percent) from the citizens of his state. Moreover, he enjoyed a generally friendly relationship with the media, never falling victim to what one might consider to be highly problematic coverage.

Within less than a year's time, however, George Allen found himself not only off the short list of potential seekers of the White House, but also out of a job altogether. The rigors of the campaign season proved too much for Allen, who succumbed to several scandalous moments and stories that at times overshadowed the national and local issues salient to citizens. Negative opinion of him rose nearly twenty percent throughout the summer and fall of 2006, much of that movement coinciding with the candidate's public relations disasters. While these scandalous moments and stories were of Allen's own doing (and not mere media creations), the inability of Allen to steer the media away from a troublesome narrative and back toward a substantive narrative has been cited as a major pitfall in his re-election efforts. His re-election story went from a local story to a national story, from a story about governing to a story about the game surrounding him. He could not control the message the media put forth, and in the end the message controlled him.

Americans tend to like their member of Congress, at least until given reasons not to. Media narratives and decision-making processes reinforce this facet of public opinion. Allen's story is only one of many stories of politicians whose careers have been shaped by the stories the media choose to cover and the ways in which the media cover them, but it is particularly illustrative of how quickly the story of who a

politician is and what he is doing can change, and so too public opinion. Politicians are dependent on the media to assist them in conveying their positions, beliefs, and actions to the general public; however, they cannot control this flow of information. As such, they are subject to the decision-making processes media outlets undertake in determining what information is salient and what is not (or, as often the case may be, what information will help sell newspapers and what will not). Unlike Congress as a whole (which has no sort of ombudsman looking out for its best interests), however, individual members of Congress do have a lever of control over the media. Members of the House and Senate, in that they decide how they will act and when they will offer up information that could potentially be reported on by newspapers and television stations, essentially have a good deal of sway over what the pool of potential stories the media might pick and choose from looks like. This fact creates a sort of uneasy symbiosis between the political mass media and elected officials, a relationship in which both need each other to survive in one way or another, yet both are not necessarily looking for an equal partnership and instead are looking to be the dominant player in the coupling.

Why Do Members of Congress Care About the Media?

If members of Congress are, as David Mayhew claims, "single minded seekers of re-election" (Mayhew 1974), they must employ a wide variety of strategies in accomplishing the goal of keeping their jobs and ensuring easier paths toward re-election in the future. Mayhew points to three such paths: advertising, credit claiming, and position taking. These paths do not exist in a vacuum, however; they are exposed to the efforts of outsiders to promote or dissuade citizens to buy into the message the member of Congress is selling. One such outsider that might help or harm a legislator's efforts to advertise, claim credit, and take positions is the mass media.

The relationship between the advertising, credit claiming, and position taking functions that members of Congress employ and the potential for the mass media to enhance these functions is fairly straightforward and is increasingly part of the congressional re-election "playbook" as it were. In lieu of paying for media time to get one's name out to the masses, point out what one has delivered for the district, and clearly state where one stands on the issues, members of Congress are increasingly hopeful that if they make their outreach efforts interesting enough, they will be covered by newspapers and television stations, earning them "free media" as it were. Advertising, which Mayhew defines as "disseminating one's name" to "create a favorable image" is something politicians often do through their use of television advertisements and direct mail during campaign season or through newsletters sent to constituents thanks to the the powers of the franking privilege, but its goals can be accomplished just as easily through being mentioned in a newspaper story in conjunction with something happening in the home district or on Capitol Hill. Credit claiming can be undertaken through similar politician-sponsored media purchases, or even through the giving of speeches, but it can also be derived through an association publicized in a news story between a specific member of Congress and a specific distributive project delivered to a district through federal legislation. Position taking is often performed through talking directly to small crowds of individuals or through directly debating foes, but the magnitude of those reached by such talking and debating can be increased when the contents or key moments are picked up by a print or television reporter.

It is patently obvious that this link between what politicians must accomplish to build the electoral connection and what resources the mass media offer exists, but it leads one to wonder how the media reacts to elected officials and their attempts

to thrust themselves into the media spotlight in a manner favorable to their future prospects. An examination of the minimal literature on how the media actually do cover specific members of Congress will offer greater insight into the successes of elected officials when it comes to their efforts to garner name recognition, tie themselves to beneficial legislative outcomes, and make their feelings known on the salient issues of our time.

What We Know About Legislator Coverage

Members of Congress hope that the media will tell their stories, but ceding the bulk of that power to the media comes at a price, namely the potential to lose control of how that story develops. Scholars are beginning to learn about how members of Congress are faring when it comes to this tradeoff, but we still seem to know very little about how the mass media cover individual members of Congress over time. Detailed, systematic examination of media outputs in this realm seems to be limited to the work of R. Douglas Arnold, who content analyzes media coverage of House members in his 2004 book *Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability*. What we do know from this work, however, is limited in terms of both media scope (only examining newspaper coverage and not television coverage or burgeoning resources like the internet), legislative scope (only examining twenty-six of four hundred thirty-five members), and time (only examining coverage within a two year period). Despite these empirical setbacks, thanks to Arnold's work, we can begin to draw some basic and potentially useful conclusions about what media coverage of legislators looks like.

One key finding in Arnold's work (a finding of particular interest to legislators seeking media paths toward securing the electoral connection) is that newspaper coverage of representatives is a "regular event" (Arnold 2004). The median newspaper

mentions local representatives once every two days on average, and this level of coverage is fairly constant over a two year period (increasing slightly during what we might call the campaign season). This level of coverage is also not driven by ideology (conservatives get no more or less coverage than liberals), gender, or race. In addition, this coverage is predominantly news coverage, and not coverage via other channels (i.e. editorials, opinion columns, or letters to the editor).

Members of Congress are being covered regularly, but it is important to know what this regular coverage looks like. Another finding in Arnold's work that should be encouraging to elected officials hoping that the media will serve as a conduit of information is that of the articles in which they are covered, representatives are the main subject of the article forty percent of the time (Arnold 2005). Even when representatives are not the main subject of the article, politically useful and relevant information about them is conveyed to the reading public. These findings make the following clear: representatives are not just part of the story, but in many cases they and their actions are the story itself.

Above and beyond covering members of Congress and covering them prominently, the content of coverage the media delivers is of the utmost importance. Members of Congress cannot adhere to the concept that all press is good press; they need both quantity and quality (i.e. favorability) when it comes to the attention they receive from newspapers and television stations if they are looking for an easier path toward ensuring re-election. Arnold's examination of the content of media coverage reveals that position taking on the part of representatives is regularly covered, as is roll-call voting (Arnold 2004). In other words, high profile moments of expressing positions are the moments that newspapers seek to capture. On the other hand, newspapers seem less interested in covering bill introduction, committee work, and

leadership work.

A question less examined in general, however, is the link between media coverage of members of Congress and accountability, which we can think of in terms of both electoral outcomes and assessments like job approval, trust, and confidence. Arnold's study does examine linkages between the volume of media coverage and individual-level recollections of reading about challengers and incumbents, discovering that incumbents have a huge advantage in terms of volume of coverage and that this disparity drives the ability of citizens to remember reading about candidates; this relationship holds even in the face of campaign-related controls. The volume of newspaper coverage is also found to drive the propensity of individuals to be able to assess an incumbent or challenger in terms of ideology and likes or dislikes. These findings are salient to campaign dynamics; it is evident that on top of the financial mountain challengers must climb in order to be competitive, they must also deal with the obstacle of the lack of name recognition being reinforced by media decision-making. However, they tell us little as to how media coverage drives the decisions that individuals make, be those decisions to pull the lever for one candidate instead of another on election day or to state unequivocally that they like their member of Congress or loathe them.

Game, Governing, and Senatorial Approval

Why should we expect media coverage (and, more specifically for our efforts here, the content of that coverage) to matter when it comes to moments in which individual citizens can begin to hold their elected officials accountable? I argue that we should expect such a relationship because of the media's firm grasp on the dynamics of information flow between what is happening both at home and in Washington (with regard to the activities and accomplishments of members of

Congress) and what is read, heard, and potentially absorbed by Americans. The media's role as a gatekeeper of information provides Americans with, as Lippmann (1922) once claimed, a flashlight and not a mirror when it comes to pointing out what is taking place. When it comes to individual members of Congress, that flashlight is far less powerful; what it is able to point out, therefore, has far more power to affect perceptions.

As discussed in Chapter II, when it comes to gaining facts about elected officials, most Americans (provided they are even interested in gaining information about politicians) have to look to others to gather details and weave them into a broader, more coherent narrative; they are, as Zaller (1992, p.6) argues, "dependent on unseen and usually unknown others for most of their information." This is especially the case when it comes to the day-to-day performance of a member of Congress. Much of the work members of Congress perform within the chambers of the House and Senate is difficult for the average American to understand. Even if the majority of Americans did have a firm grasp on how the legislative process works, the lack of transparency at times of this process lends itself to a state in which said citizens would be thirsting for information but not necessarily able to find it. Pieces of legislation are posted online and debates are often televised on C-SPAN and the like, but rare is the American who has the time or the patience to weed through ream upon ream of paper or hour upon hour of footage to find useful morsels of information by which to assess the state of their representation. The prospects for citizens within a constituency learning about the activities of their elected officials when traveling back from Washington to the home district is equally grim. As Hall (1996) points out, legislative time is short. As such, members of Congress can only spend so much time in their home districts. They can only give so many speeches

and shake so many hands. This places clear limits on the opportunities for direct contact that individual constituents have with their elected officials.

For most members of Congress, it is the local media that weaves the narrative of what an elected official is doing in Washington and is doing within the home district. As Arnold (2004) claims, the national press does not make stars out of all five hundred thirty-five members of the House and Senate. The burden falls to more localized sources to get the word out. Some scholars have shown anecdotally that this is to the benefit of most politicians. Mutz and Flemming (1999) claim that the tone of local coverage differs greatly from national coverage, resulting in less negativity, while Robinson (1981) claims that the local press is generally "softer" than the national press. This positivity and softness translates neatly into the type of coverage a member of Congress hopes to transmit to his or her constituents, namely a relatively straightforward examination of successes and accomplishments said member has achieved both nationally and locally. This is the essence of governing coverage (as discussed in Chapter II) at the local level. Governing coverage for specific members of Congress is coverage that ties them to issues and to legislative accomplishment; it is coverage that links them to actually doing something of substance.

Why then does this matter in terms of accountability? It matters because, short of knowing a member's party identification and sharing it or not sharing it with them, knowing what an elected official has done (or has not done) substantively should serve as a useful heuristic by which to assess performance. Should the local media be delivering a high volume of this substantive coverage, individuals should be increasingly able to find ways in which to support their elected officials. Should members of Congress suffer in their ties to substantive accomplishments, they might find themselves struggling to explain to the people they represent what they are

actually doing (seeing as the job of Representative or Senator can be difficult to capture and convey succinctly). In sum, members of Congress receiving high levels of governing coverage should be individuals rewarded by constituents with high levels of approval. More formally, therefore, I argue the following:

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of local newspaper coverage of governing frame activities with respect to a specific senator lead to higher senatorial job approval.

On the other hand, members of Congress are hoping to avoid being tied publicly an opposite dynamic, namely the old adage that "government in action" is "government inaction." Since, as scholars have argued, the local press in the past has been overwhelmingly favorable to politicians representing the area in which said press operates, the presence of negative information involving a member of Congress should be especially noteworthy and alarming to citizens. It breaks a pattern of coverage and casts the member in a new and unflattering light. Game coverage (as discussed in Chapter II) at the local level captures such media dynamics. It assesses a member of Congress and his or her ties to the types of problems that have led Mann and Ornstein (2006) to reiterate the idea that Congress is broken: the personal missteps, the infighting, the squabbling, the intractability of certain individuals, the slowness of the process, and the inability to deliver accomplishments, be they localized or nationalized. It also, as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) point out, can paint a member of Congress as willing to capitulate and give in rather than hold fast to his or her ideals.

The possibility of game coverage to affect accountability takes root in the sheer fact that it changes the perceptions of the average citizen. As Fenno (1975) points out, Americans tend to like their member of Congress. Increases in media coverage that describes their representative as a part of the problem and not part of the

solution might begin to erode that approval of one's elected officials that has been impressive over time. It runs counter to the general perception that one's member of Congress is a likeable person who is generally doing good work for a district or a state. Members burdened by high levels of game coverage should also be burdened by lower approval levels than those free of media-based associations with infighting and gridlock. As such, I argue the following:

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of local newspaper coverage of game frame activities with respect to a specific senator lead to higher senatorial job approval.

Local media coverage may make up the bulk of media assessments of what a member of Congress is doing and how he or she is doing it, but it does not make up the entirety of the potential media narratives. The potential still remains for members of Congress to be discussed on their own by national media sources or to be swept up in the broader media narrative concerning the state of the legislative branch as a whole. As such, being a part of national media coverage is a double-edged sword for most members of Congress. Being mentioned by a national media outlet as a major player in the success of a piece of legislation or in the movement on a specific issue might trickle down into added benefits at the local level for a member of the House or the Senate. On the other hand, as Mutz and Flemming (1999) note, when a member of Congress gets mentioned by the national media, it increasingly seems more often than not that it is for doing something wrong instead of doing something right. National media sources are increasingly utilizing negative information in their discussions of politics (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998), and the follies of politicians fit that frame perfectly. Becoming a major topic of discussion in more national newspapers is most likely more trouble than it is worth for members of Congress, who are focused on gaining the favor of their constituents and not the entire nation.

Senators caught up in the national media news cycle might just be the senators caught up in the troublesome interactions between party leaders over the process of doing business. As such, I argue the following for the following relationships between being discussed in the national press and the level of one's approval standing within a state:

Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of national newspaper coverage with respect to a specific senator lead to lower senatorial job approval.

After inquiring into how game and governing framing separate senators with high levels of approval from senators with low levels of approval, we also might inquire into how game and governing might shape changes in approval from one month to the next. Does media framing just separate those with high approval from those with intermediate or low approval, or does it shape the movement of approval from one month to the next? I argue that it should. Senators who receive high levels of governing coverage should not only see high levels of approval (as argued in Hypothesis 1), but they should also see their approval ratings increase from the previous month. They should benefit from the local publicizing of their relationship to legislative accomplishments and from association with highly salient issues in the spotlight. High levels of governing coverage should reinforce feelings that the senator is focusing on issues and getting things done; as such, they should lead not only to higher approval for those typically rewarded but also higher approval than normal for those that suffer from low levels of public favor. On the other hand, senators receiving high levels of game coverage should also see declines in their approval in comparison to the previous month. High levels of association with the squabbling that takes place in congressional negotiation and between parties should cause senators with low approval to fall further out of favor with their constituents and should penalize

senators typically approved of by those that sent them to Washington. As such, the following hypotheses will also be tested:

Hypothesis 4: Higher levels of local newspaper coverage of governing frame activities lead to increases in approval from one month to the next.

Hypothesis 5: Higher levels of local newspaper coverage of game frame activities lead to decreases in approval from one month to the next.

Measuring Framing and Senatorial Approval

In this examination of the relationship between media messages and opinion of legislators, I will be looking solely at members of the United States Senate; this decision is partly a function of the availability of data and partly a function of the fact that examining the entire population of a political entity might offer a bit more empirical leverage over the question of accountability than, say, a look at only a sample of members would. To capture approval ratings for the senators in my model, I will be relying on approval data taken from polling performed by SurveyUSA from January 2006 to December 2006.[20] SurveyUSA's data is ideal for this examination of approval because they poll all fifty states for eleven consecutive months; as such, they are able to provide data on all one hundred senators. SurveyUSA's approval question is straightforward (asking to citizens of Alabama, for example, "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Richard Shelby is doing as United States Senator?"), and their sample size remains consistent (at 600 individuals) from survey to survey for each senator in question. SurveyUSA asks this question for most senators from January to November; however, for approximately one quarter of senators, they ask the question into December as well. I see no theoretical or empirical reason not to include this data in the model as well; it can only further add to our understanding of the phenomena

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[20]More information on this data can be found at http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html

under examination.

A question naturally presents itself, however: how should this data best be used to capture the differences from one senator to the next but also to capture the differences for each individual senator from one portion of a year to another? One might argue that aggregating approval data (and many of the independent variables yet to be discussed) to the yearly level eliminates an examination of the interesting (and at times substantive) movement in approval of senators from one month to the next. Not every senator's approval moves drastically over time, but some show a remarkable ebb and flow that deserves explanation. Aggregating to a quarterly level might also diminish our ability to tell a story about over time movement in approval ratings. On the other hand, it could be argued that looking at this data in monthly fashion might create another set of problems, namely that the nature of the job of being a senator leads to temporal issues over the span of a year. If we are arguing that what a senator does (or does not do) is at the heart of how that senator is perceived, might a senator's ability to take part in activities be shaped by the fact that at times on the senatorial calendar, no work is being done and as such, no new information is necessarily being generated on some of the members of the Senate? Take for example the month of August, a time during which Congress often is taking a vacation. Senators who are up for re-election might be the subject of news stories, but those who are not might fall off the political map, especially since at this time few members of Congress are generating press coverage and none are generating legislation. I argue that this is not the problem that it might appear to be; lack of Washington related activity in down times might be replaced by heightened activity on the part of the senator in the state they represent. The same goes for other recesses that take place throughout the calendar year, as well as periods of

time when a senator is not in Washington (trips home on weekends, trips abroad, and so forth). In choosing how to deal with these questions, I opt to use as much of the data as possible (in essence, seeking to study as much potential movement in opinion as possible) and examine each senator from month to month.

The clearest way of using this approval data, therefore, is to make monthly job approval into a dependent variable that allows us to ask (and hopefully answer) the question "what drives senatorial job approval?" with a handful of potential explanatory variables. However, there are other ways of using this job approval data that present themselves. One way to do so is to ask a related question: what explanatory variables might drive change in a senator's job approval from one month to the next? If a senator's approval goes up five points from one month to the next, what might they have done (or what might have happened in covering what they have done) in that month to spur that change? This allows us to use the SurveyUSA approval data in two ways: one that attempts to explain why different senators have different levels of approval at different points in time, and one that attempts to explain why different senators' approval increases or decreases at different points in time.

The key independent variable of interest here is media coverage of the one hundred senators in question. The models to be presented here, however, examine media coverage in multiple ways. The first (and perhaps most important) path of linking media coverage to senatorial approval is an examination of how local newspapers cover the actions of members of the Senate. If, as former House Speaker Tip O'Neill once stated, "all politics is local," then it is at the local level where we can expect the press to be seeking information on the activities of elected officials and where we can expect media-based information to have the greatest effect on holding

politicians accountable. It is not the presence or absence of coverage that matters here for our question of what drives approval however; instead, it is the content of what the local press are saying. Similar to the methods employed in Chapter III, therefore, I employ computerized content analysis of local newspaper coverage utilizing the concepts of game and governing frames of activity. This variable will be also be constituted similarly to the examination of media frames of Congress as a whole, whereby counts of words associated with the game and governing frame will be used to gauge the level of game and governing coverage taking place concerning a Senator within the specified time frame.

It is important, however, in examining local newspaper coverage, to make sure I am examining the right type of local newspaper coverage. Simply picking a newspaper in a state at random and analyzing its content would not be the best strategy toward examining the potential for political accountability. Instead, a successful model will seek out the most dominant media voice in each state, expecting that these dominant sources of information are best equipped to deliver cues to individual citizens and as such shape opinion of elected officials. Therefore, for each of the states under examination, I set out to examine content (via the Lexis-Nexis database) from the newspaper with the highest circulation at the time the project was undertaken.[21] However, this is not always possible. For example, the *Indianapolis Star*, the newspaper in Indiana with the highest circulation, is unavailable via Lexis-Nexis; instead, I rely on the *South Bend Tribune*, which is available and is the third highest in circulation in that state. For almost every state in the model, I am able to pull media coverage from a newspaper that is top three in circulation.[22] There are,

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[21]Circulation data are drawn from the Audit Bureau of Circulation and can be found online at http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/newsform.asp.

[22]For a complete list of the newspapers chosen, see Appendix.

unfortunately several states that do not have any major daily newspapers with coverage available via Lexis-Nexis (seven states to be exact: Arizona, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, and South Dakota). Examining wire service usage of news coverage from these states does not help fill the data gap, nor does searching for other free online archives. These states are therefore omitted from the model at this time due to these data limitations. Instead of examining data for one hundred senators (across fifty states), we are left with eighty-six senators to study (across forty three states).

Another concern is making sure that the choice of newspaper does not in any way bias the potential levels of game and governing coverage of a senator. We want to be certain that, for example, a newspaper located in a city considered to be dominated by conservatives does not cover a Democrat in a noticeably different fashion than a newspaper located in a city considered to be dominated by liberals. For example, does Senator Barbara Boxer receive noticeably different coverage from the San Diego Union Tribune than she does from the San Francisco Chronicle? To guard against potential problems such as the example cited above, I inquired into levels of monthly coverage (i.e. number of articles), as well as levels of game and governing coverage over 2006 of Senator Boxer in both newspapers. All three categories revealed relatively high correlations, signaling that the two newspapers, despite regional differences in ideology, were similar in when they covered the senator and how they covered the senator.

In using Lexis-Nexis archives to search for media coverage of senators under examination, I opt for the broadest parameters possible. Coverage in the news section or on the front page of a newspaper has the potential to shape views of a politician as coverage, but so might coverage in a section entirely devoted to local news. We

have no reason to believe that one method of coverage would be more powerful than the other in shaping how individuals perceive their elected officials. As such, I allow for any mention of a senator to be counted as news worthy of examination for game or governing language. I also set parameters to capture use of a formal title (i.e. "Senator Shelby") or a full name (i.e. "Richard Shelby"). In cases where politicians could possibly go by multiple names (i.e. "Charles Schumer" is sometimes called "Chuck Schumer"), the search accounts for both possibilities. These broad parameters allow me to gather every mention of a senator across the time period under examination.

As discussed earlier, local media coverage is not the only type of coverage that might affect how citizens of a state perceive of the job a senator is doing. National media coverage can thrust a senator into the spotlight, adding a second layer of media dynamics that senators must either embrace or avoid. A senator being discussed by what we might consider national media sources for his or her contributions to promoting issues or getting work accomplished in Washington might be exalted by locals within his constituency for being a major player on the political stage. On the other hand, a senator who, through ties to media coverage of political infighting or political compromising, is seen as part of the problem Americans have with Congress in general, might suffer from his or her connection to this nationalized narrative. As such, taking a look at a senator's connection (if any) to the national media's framing of congressional politics is an essential counterpart to the examination of the effects of local press. I include, therefore, a monthly count of mentions of the senators being examined in Washington Post articles from January 2006 to November/December 2006. Such analysis will offer insight into how senators are bound to the national narrative that is often picked up on by other popular media outlets (such as television

and the Associated Press) and whether being bound to that narrative drives how constituents perceive them.

Media coverage is potentially a major force in determining which senators receive high approval ratings from their constituents and which senators receive low approval ratings, but it is not the only potential force at play here. We might want to consider alternative explanations based on Fenno's concept of "hill style" (Fenno 1978). Hill style is an expression of the type of senator each senator is while working in Washington. It is captured by such factors as legislative productivity and connections to key power brokers within the House and Senate. It is true that some of the work of cultivating and employing a hill style for each senator is work performed by the media; after all, a senator can hardly be expected to directly connect with one percent of his constituents, let alone the bulk of those he or she represents. However, the path for direct connection with constituents, unfiltered by the media, remains a possibility that must be accounted for at some level. To get at capturing the possibility that hill style can directly shape opinion, I suggest two variables: one capturing the number of bills a senator proposed per month (a signal of their legislative productivity and, as such, perhaps a signal that a legislator is working or not working), and one capturing party affiliation (accounting for positive or negative associations that might exist at the time with either political party). Ideally, these variables capture the possibility that citizens can pick up on information directly emanating from Washington-based activity.

It is also essential to realize that current opinion is more than likely a function of all of the variables discussed here plus opinions of the past (which, as modeled, express the significance of previous levels of the independent variables within this model). Therefore, the model will also include a variable capturing past levels of

approval as well.

Methods

It is important that we keep in mind what our data look like: we are examining the approval of eighty-six senators. For some of these senators, we capture approval for a period of ten months, while for others, we have eleven months to work with. To put this data in commonly used methodological terms, we have 86 cross-sectional units that we are studying over time. In other words, we have what one could call panel data. There are clear advantages to this statistical approach to looking at data (Baltagi 1995, Gujarati (2003). Panel data benefit the inquiry by taking heterogeneity in the units being analyzed into account. Panel data grant us leeway in terms of degrees of freedom. Panel data allow for examining effects that cannot be detected by limiting oneself to either cross-sectional or time-series data alone. Perhaps most importantly, panel data allow us to study the "dynamics of change" (Gujarati 2003, p.638).

However, as Stimson (1985) suggests, examining data across multiple units and multiple data points is a double edged sword in some ways. Stimson notes the positives other scholars have expressed, but also delivers a warning to those undertaking this type of statistical modeling in stating that "regressions on data jointly structured in space and time...can be formidable both in the strength of their design properties and in the number of special statistical problems encountered with them" (Stimson 1985, p.914) In essence, it is crucial that we heed the warnings of scholars who have studied data like the data being studied here (also commonly referred to as time-series cross-section data) and select an appropriate model to best harness the potential explanatory power for the phenomenon under examination.

One place to start in selecting an appropriate model is with Stimson's (1985,

p. 929) look at regression in space and time. Stimson suggests that if one's N is greater than one's T (what he calls cross-sectional dominance), there are three potential options: ordinary least squares, fixed effects, or random effects. Beck and Katz (1995), however, point out some major issues with the concept of using ordinary least squares with time-series cross-sectional data, namely that "most analysts...are not willing to accept the assumption of spherical errors" (p.636); in essence, they claim that if we use ordinary least squares, we may not be certain that our standard errors are accurate. More specifically, they note the potential that large errors for one unit may be correlated with large errors for another unit at the same time, that variances of errors could possibly differ from one unit to the next (what they call "panel heteroscedasticity," and that errors might depend on time. Beck and Katz claim that other potential modeling choices "make more efficient use of the data" (p.636).

A potential solution to these questions is to use the fixed effects approach suggested by Stimson. As Gujarati (2003, p.642) notes, fixed effects allow one to "take into account the individuality of each...cross-sectional unit" through letting the intercept vary but assuming that slope coefficients are constant. We must determine, however, that the fixed effects approach is appropriate instead of the random effects approach. Gujarati suggests that one reason one might choose a fixed effects approach instead of a random effects approach is if one believes that the units being studied are "not random drawings from a larger sample" (p.650); in that we are not randomly drawing senators from the universe of senators, we might consider adhering to this suggestion. To more formally make this decision though, we run a Hausman test to determine if fixed effects are needed to eliminate bias. Hausman tests run on the data in this chapter reveal the need for fixed effects; we are unable to reject

the null hypothesis that intercepts are uncorrelated with the regressors. As such, we proceed with a fixed effects approach to dealing with our panel data.

Findings

We begin our inquiry into senatorial approval by taking a look at the major variable under examination: senatorial approval, game coverage, and governing coverage. Table 3 lists the descriptive statistics for these three variables.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Senators

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Senatorial Approval	55.01	7.99	79	34
Governing References	183.02	153.57	0	1643
Game References	70.94	59.80	0	483
Number of observations	889			

The average senator receives fifty-five percent approval from his or her constituents. In other words, senatorial approval is only slightly more than a majority of one's state. Given the low approval Congress typically receives (throughout 2006, approval was typically in the twenties or thirties), the average senator should at least be comforted by the clear separation between their approval and approval of the institution in which they serve. The senator achieving the highest approval in the model was Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine, who received positive approval on the part of 79 percent of her constituents in November of 2006 (her tenth consecutive month with approval above 70 percent). On the other hand, the senator achieving the model's minimum level of approval was Senator Mike DeWine of Ohio, whose performance was approved of by only 34 percent of citizens in November of 2006. It should be no surprise that this level of approval came in the wake of his defeat (to Representative Sherrod Brown) in a quest for a third term.

When it comes to game coverage in their state's most highly circulated newspapers, senators are associated with, on average, 70 game references per month. The senator who received the most game references in a single month was Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee, who saw 483 game references used in coverage of him in July of 2006 in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. Frist's game coverage being at this high level is not entirely surprising, given his leadership position within the Senate (and therefore his regular activity in negotiating with or sparring with political opponents). Four senators experienced months during which coverage of them was associated with no game coverage at all; these senators were Senator Mike Crapo of Idaho (who had game free coverage in May and July), Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts of Kansas (who received no game coverage in March), and Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina (with a November free of game framing). On the other hand, when it comes to governing coverage in their state's most highly circulated newspapers, senators are associated with, on average, 183 governing references per month. The senator who received the most governing coverage in a single month was also Senator Frist of Tennessee, who saw 1643 governing references used in coverage of him in July 2006. Only three senators had months without any governing coverage whatsoever; once again, these were Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts of Kansas, who received no governing coverage in March, and Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, who received no governing coverage in November. These three senators receiving no game or governing coverage in these specific months should be no surprise, given that these are the only three instances in the model in which senators are left uncovered by highly circulated newspapers (the *Topeka Capital Journal* and the *Charleston Post and Courier* respectively) in their states.

It is also interesting to note that senators receive, on average, just over two and

half times more governing coverage than they do game coverage per month in highly circulated newspapers in their home states. This should be reassuring to senators who are focused on not only advertising what they are doing and what they stand for, but also attempting to control the coverage that ends up in front of the eyes of those who will, at some point down the road, head to the polling place and decide their fate. In general, media coverage appears to have the potential to do more good than harm. What we will now see is whether or not there is more than face value benefit to the volume of coverages that exist. Having examined the key data within the model, we now move to our first model, a look at game and governing frames potentially affect senatorial approval. In addition, we look at the possibility that competing explanations (bill authorship, volume of national coverage, party affiliation, and previous approval) drive monthly approval of senators. Table 4 tests the validity of the first three hypotheses discussed previously, revealing the findings of the first fixed effects model executed.[23].

When it comes to the link between governing framing, game framing, and senatorial approval, we see a mixed bag of findings. Governing coverage plays no role in separating those with high levels of monthly job approval from those with low levels of approval. The coefficient is positive (as we would expect), but not statistically significant. Hypothesis 1 is found to be invalid. On the other hand, game coverage is significantly linked to monthly job approval. Senators with higher levels of game coverage have lower levels of approval from their constituents. For every one additional game reference in local newspapers, we see a decline in approval of one one-hundredth of a percent. At face value, this effect is incredibly small, but

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[23]Other variables capturing state partisanship, upcoming re-election battles, presidential aspirations, senatorial partisanship, and senatorial polarization were included in models; however, the model drops these variables

Table 4: Explaining Monthly Senatorial Approval

Predictors	Effect On Approval
Senatorial Approval$_{t-1}$	.154* (.036)
Game Framing	-.006* (.004)
Governing Framing	.002 (.001)
National Coverage	-.004 (.016)
Bills Authored	-.044* (.022)
Party Affiliation	1.676 (2.865)
Constant	45.882* (2.516)
Number of observations	889
Number of groups	86

Note: Fixed effects model.
Data are monthly, 2006:1 to 2006:11 or 2006:12 depending on the senator.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
* = $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

we know that the average senator receives 70 game references per month (and thanks to Table 3 that the standard deviation when it comes to game references is just under 60). A one standard deviation increase in game references would bring about a drop in approval of about six tenths of a percent. Hypothesis 2 is validated by this model.

We should not be surprised by the statistical link between game coverage and low approval. As Fenno (1975) discusses, individual members, for the most part, have a good deal of built in good will with their constituents. Moreover, members of Congress are highly focused on trying to ensure that said good will remains high or increases over time. Game coverage runs counter to those efforts. It paints members of Congress as caught up in partisan politics and in the infighting that exists in the Senate. It is a sign that a senator has caught in a snare that he or she has been desperately trying to avoid.

The findings in Table 4 also help us answer several other questions as to what separates senators with high levels of approval from senators with intermediate or

low approval. National news coverage is not a variable that helps us explain approval. In Hypothesis 3, we argued that those senators caught up in the Washington news cycle might be seen as creatures of Washington or as more focused on national politics and less focused on what was good for the state being represented. This does not appear to be the case. Interestingly though, there is a significant link between bill authorship and approval, but this link is not in the direction that would be expected. For every additional bill authored, a senator's approval declines by about four hundredths of a percent. We would think that bill authorship would be a tangible symbol of accomplishment, but in that writing a bill is not the same as voting for a bill or specifically delivering a project to a district, perhaps it is not seen as getting something done. Political party affiliation (included to capture potential differences that might exist given political situations in the year under examination) is not a predictor of high or low approval either. Being a Democrat does not lead to more reward or disfavor than being a Republican, even in a year during which many Republicans generally fell out of favor with the general public. Unsurprisingly, we also find a strong relationship between the previous month's approval and the current month's approval as well.

Having shown that one form of framing (specifically game framing) plays a role in separating senators with high levels of approval from senators with low levels of approval, we now move to answering the question of how media framing in local newspaper coverage might shape movement of approval from one month to the next (in other words, the change in approval that each senator undergoes). In addition to looking at the role game and governing framing plays in driving change in approval, we also look at the role competing explanations play; as with the previous model, competing explanations here include volume of national coverage, bill authorship,

and party affiliation). Table 5 tests the validity of the fourth and fifth hypotheses discussed previously, revealing the findings of the second fixed effects model executed.

Table 5: Explaining Change in Monthly Senatorial Approval

Predictors	Effect On Approval
Game Framing	-.004 (.005)
Governing Framing	.003* (.002)
National Coverage	.008 (.021)
Bills Authored	-.037 (.029)
Party Affiliation	.306 (3.735)
Constant	-.472 (2.068)
Number of observations	889
Number of groups	86

Note: Fixed effects model.
Data are monthly, 2006:1 to 2006:11 or 2006:12 depending on the senator.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
* $= p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

Here we find the opposite of the model looking strictly at senatorial approval. Whereas game framing separates senators with high levels of approval from senators with low levels approval, change in approval from one month to the next can be explained by levels of governing coverage. A one unit increase in governing coverage drives improvement in senatorial approval from one month to the next of about three thousandths of a percent. This is a small number to be sure, but keep in mind that the average senator receives approximately 183 governing references per month (with a standard deviation of 154). A one standard deviation increase in governing framing would drive an improvement of about one-half percentage point in approval from one month to the next. So, governing framing significantly shapes change in approval from one month to the next. It may not guarantee high approval (as was displayed by the first model), but it can bring about short term movement in approval in positive fashion. Getting involved with issues and with the business of legislating

might therefore be a prescription senators should heed if looking to bring about a bit of change in the perceptions of those they represent. These findings perhaps represent an accomplishment bump of sorts.

While Hypothesis 4 (governing framing's effect on change in approval from previous month to current month) is validated by this latest model, Hypothesis 5 (seeking a link between game framing and change in approval from last month to current month) is not found credible. Game framing separated senators with high approval from senators with low approval, but it is not found to drive month to month shifts in public favor. At the same time, competing explanations for monthly shifts in approval are also found to be insignificant. National news coverage does not matter, nor does bill authorship or political party affiliation.

Implications

Once again, in this chapter, we discover that media framing plays a role in shaping approval. Senatorial approval in general is driven by game framing. Higher levels of game framing showing up in a senator's local media coverage is associated with a lower level of monthly job approval. Changes in senatorial approval from the previous month to the current month, on the other hand, are driven by governing framing. Higher levels of association in local media coverage with issues and the business of legislating are shown here to lead to positive movement in approval from one month to the next. Framing matters when it comes to senatorial approval, but as shown here, different frames matter in different ways.

Senators can learn lessons from the findings here, lessons that might shape the relationship they develop with the local media. Being associated with issues and legislative business may not guarantee a high level of approval, but it can cause short term positive movement in public sentiment. Those suffering from low approval and

seeking to turn the public in their favor, even slightly, might be advised to focus on issues and the nuts and bolts of the legislative process. Senators who already have high levels of approval should recognize that their lack of association with the elements of the game is a factor that has propelled them to the heights they have achieved. Continued focus on governing can only go a long way toward ensuring they stay at the level of favor they have achieved.

CHAPTER V

MEDIA FRAMING AND THE INDIVIDUAL

As shown so far, game and governing framing help answer questions about approval of Congress and its members in a macro sense, both over time and cross-sectionally. What we have yet to answer is how game and governing affect the individual, and how they stack up against other demographic and political predictors in determining who will approve or disapprove of Congress and who will approve and disapprove of the individuals sent to Washington. Through an original survey experiment, here we begin to answer those questions. At the micro level, we find that media framing shapes how individuals feel about Congress and, to some extent, how they feel about certain legislators.

The questions driving our examination so far have been, at face value, questions mostly answered by scholars and pundits alike through macro-level analysis. When we attempt to evaluate the job Congress is doing, often times we rely solely on (or, to put it another way, take as shorthand) a look at the percentage of people who approve of Congress and the percentage of people who disapprove. When we attempt to evaluate the job that a specific senator or representative is doing, we often use the same strategy of focusing on the aggregate number. The questions Richard Fenno asked over thirty years ago, however, are not solely questions that lend themselves to macro-level explanations. They are questions that deserve individual-level answers.

When Fenno asks why we hate our Congress, he is not just asking about why Congress's levels of approval are consistently low. He is also asking about what individual Americans see when they look at the legislative branch, and at the same time where this vision of Congress as troublesome or problematic comes from. Similarly, Fenno's question about why we love the members of Congress that

represent us is a question that points to the unique relationships citizens build with the individuals they send to Washington. The answers to these questions may lie in who we are, what we are taught, or in the types of information we expose ourselves to on a daily basis.

Existing Explanations

Examining the individual level determinants of support for Congress and its members has taken two related paths over the past several decades. One path examines how demographics and political factors shape our assessments of individual players in the legislative branch, as well as the branch itself. The other path looks at different ways in which information might matter. For the most part, these inquiries have focused solely on Congress (with a handful of detours into what drives approval of other major political players) and have ignored how individuals feel about their own representative or senator. We will attempt, therefore, a discussion of the literature surrounding this question of what shapes how we feel about Congress and use the findings to better understand what might and might not drive feelings about those we send to Washington.

The earliest individual level investigations into what shapes support for Congress began with the types of variables that often begin any inquiry into public opinion in a political context, namely demographics, measures of participation, and measures of ideological leanings. Over thirty-five years ago, Davidson and Parker (1972), in an attempt to take a state-level inquiry performed several years earlier by Boynton, Patterson, and Hedlund (1968) national, examined correlates of public support of Congress. They discovered that demographic factors like occupation, income, age, and education did a poor job of predicting positive support for the institution. Davidson and Parker had better luck finding links between explicitly political

variables like partisanship, political participation, political efficacy, and campaign interest and support for Congress. The work of Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan (1992) two decades later concurs with earlier attempts; no links between demographics and support are found, while variables like political efficacy and party identification do shape how individuals feel about the job Congress is doing.

At the same time these demographic and political inquiries were taking place, so too were a handful of investigations into the tight linkages between approval levels of various facets of the legislative branch. As Born (1990) points out, members of Congress may attempt to separate themselves from the institution, but often times there is an inescapable shared fate between the two. Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan (1992), in their discussion of the multifaceted nature of congressional approval, expand on how this might shape opinions, namely that individuals might transfer their feelings about individual members that represent them to the institution as a whole. These beliefs are borne out in some of the links they examine between legislator approval and legislative branch approval, finding that feelings about senators were significantly linked to feelings about Congress. Work by Kimball and Patterson (1997) reinforces this relationship between support for specific individuals in the legislative branch and support for the branch as a whole.

Game, Governing, and Individual Approval

Over time, however, discussions of approval of Congress at the individual level have often times become discussions about information, specifically what types of knowledge might drive American opinion expression. Scholars undertaking the debate over what factors might separate those who support the job Congress is doing from those who oppose it enter this arena keeping a few truths in mind; these truths are, as Mondak et al. (2007, p. 34) put it, that "Americans seem to know little

about the dominant players in Congress, how Congress operates, and the legislation Congress produces." Links between knowledge and approval of Congress and its members have been analyzed by several groups of scholars. These scholars tend to conclude that knowledge does have the power to shape our assessments (and specifically, in this case, to stir, as Patterson and Kimball (1997, p. 716) put it, "strong feelings" about the legislative branch. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) find that greater knowledge about Congress is associated with more critical evaluations of Congress and its members. Mondak et al. (2007) use a battery of political knowledge questions about procedures, politics, and policies (akin to those focused on by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996)) to present an even more nuanced picture of a relationship between knowledge and approval, showing that those with higher amounts of knowledge dislike Congress, but also that uninformed individuals use a handful of other criteria in assessing the legislative branch.

Critiques of this approach of conflating knowledge with correct or incorrect answers to civics questions exist however (for example, Graber (2001), who argues that measurements of political information should be more focused on what people need to know that on history and events), and they suggest we take a more multifaceted approach to what possessing useful political knowledge and information truly means. We can do this in several ways. One is to rely on other measures of exposure to politics (and argue that exposure to politics builds in individuals stores of practical information on how government works, if government is working, and how they can play a role in making government work). This can be accomplished through reintroducing several variables into the equation explaining approval of Congress and its members that have been left out by recent scholars, namely variables that capture participatory measures like voting and proximity to politics measures like political

interest. Exposure to information about government can also be captured through specific media measures gauging the use of televised and print media specifically related to hard news. Once again, the game and governing frames as discussed in detail in Chapter II are two such measures that might prove fruitful for examination.

Along the lines of relationships argued for and tested in previously presented examinations of the relationship between game, governing, and approval of Congress and its members (i.e. Chapter III and Chapter IV), I will examine the validity of the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to game language about Congress will lead to negative job approval of Congress.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to governing language about Congress will lead to positive job approval of Congress.

Similarly to the macro-level examinations of Congress in Chapter III, here at the individual level I argue that exposure to game language will drive negative assessments of Congress, while exposure to governing language will drive positive assessments of Congress. We should expect individuals exposed to new game information to feel that it reinforces previously held information about the woes of Congress, while exposure to new governing information should move individuals off such disparaging views and toward a more positive view on the legislative branch.

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to game language about one's senators will lead to negative job approval of one's senators.

Hypothesis 4: Exposure to governing language about one's senators will lead to positive job approval of one's senators.

Similarly to the macro-level examinations of the Senate in Chapter IV, here

at the individual level I argue that exposure to game language will drive negative assessments of one's senatorial delegation, while exposure to governing language will drive positive assessments of one's senatorial delegation.[24] Governing language on senators should reinforce generally held existing positivity towards legislators sent to Washington, while exposure to game language should erode said positivity.

Hypothesis 5: Exposure to game language about one's representative will lead to negative job approval of one's representative.

Hypothesis 6: Exposure to governing language about one's representative will lead to positive job approval of one's representative.

To date, this study has yet to look at the relationships between game, governing, and approval of the individual member of the House of Representatives. Coming into this inquiry, I have no opinion as to why individuals would react differently here than they would when it comes to their approach to assessing their senators. If anything, we might expect individuals, when asked to assess their representative, to come to the table with less existing information and attitudes than they would when asked about their senators, given the fact that senators work in a brighter spotlight than members of the House. This might lead us to expect game and governing coverage to play a stronger role in opinion formation about representatives in comparison to senators.

Measuring Framing and Individual Approval

To test the potential linkages between game coverage, governing coverage, and

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[24]Due to the nature of the experimental design utilized (and the nature of the pool of subjects from which I am drawing), I am asking survey questions about senatorial job approval in the broadest sense possible, one in which I do not use specific names of senators but rather simply ask about the performance of one's senators in total. This is not an ideal situation, but I argue it is the most appropriate given my inability to pre-verify the residency of each and every person within my subject pool.

individual opinions of the performance of Congress, Senators, and representatives, an experiment was conducted on over 500 students in introductory-level political science courses at Texas A&M University in the Spring of 2008.[25] Students were told they were participating in a survey intended to gauge reactions to the legislative branch and its members. After listening to a description of how to participate, students were given a packet of information. The process of delivering treatments to individuals taking part in the survey was entirely random, and the randomizing of the treatment packets was performed by simply shuffling the packets and distributing them as subjects took their seats in a classroom. 457 students took part in the experiment. Initial efforts were made to ensure an approximate ratio of six packets with framing information for every one control packet; 75 of each of the six framing treatments were entered into the packet shuffling process, along with 25 of each of the control treatments).

The packet included an information sheet about the project. This information sheet described the purpose of the study (to determine if and how media portrayals of legislative situations relate to opinion), what students would be asked to do (answer demographic and political questions and read a short story about legislating), the risks involved (minimal, but not greater than those encountered in daily life), and the benefits of participating (no direct benefits other than adding to a greater understanding of political phenomena). Subjects then filled out a short demographic questionnaire that asked them about gender, race, political interest, party identification, political beliefs, media consumption (newspaper news reading and television news viewing), and recent voting behavior.[26]

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[25]Although, as Peterson (2001) suggests, college student populations might be slightly more homogenous than general populations, there are no specific expectations in this context that such differences in homogeneity will bias the outcome in a specific fashion or direction. As such, I feel comfortable with the chosen population under examination.

[26]The specific questions asked can be found in Appendix Two; question wording was drawn from

Receiving the packet of information allowed the experiment to place students randomly into one of nine treatment groups. Differences in treatments were based on the media story the individual subjects read following completion of the demographic questionnaire. Media stories dealt with one of three topics: Congress, a senator, or a representative. Based on the wording of the stories, subjects were led to believe that the stories dealt with their representation in Washington; however, specific names of senators and representatives were not used in the media stories (instead, the stories utilize phrasing like "the senator" and "the representative" to avoid potential confusion). Media stories dealt with one of three reporting styles as well: a style geared toward game framing language, a style geared toward governing framing language, and a style that used neither of these frames and served as a control. With differences across story topics and reporting styles, nine distinct groups of subjects were created. For our purposes here, we will label them as follows: Congress-Game, Congress-Governing, Congress-Control, Senator-Game, Senator-Governing, Senator-Control, Representative-Game, Representative-Congress, and Representative-Control.

Each media story began with a headline that set up the reporting style at play throughout the story. For example, stories discussing Congress and using game framing language began with the headline "Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Continue To Quarrel." Game framing stories dealing with the senator or the representative merely switched the first word of the headline. This headline phrasing, in using the word "quarrel," sends an immediate game frame signal to the reader. Stories dealing with Congress and using governing framing language began with the headline "Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Debate, Work To Schedule Votes." Similar headlines with first-word variations were

wording commonly used in other surveys such as the American National Election Study.

used for governing stories dealing with senators and representatives. This headline phrasing, in using the words "debate," "work," and "vote," sends an immediate governing frame signal to the reader. Stories given to control groups utilized truncated versions of these headlines; for example, the control group receiving a story about Congress only saw a headline that read "Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill." Each media story, regardless of reporting style or story topic, then contained a lead common lead paragraph that laid out the justification for why the media would be covering the event at hand; in the case of the control groups with no reporting style, this lead paragraph was the only item the subject read. This lead paragraph discusses how, on the day of a congressional recess, the story topic (be that Congress, the Senator, or the Representative) dealt with some last minute economic issues.

After the common lead paragraph, the stories the subjects in the game and governing framing categories read progress in markedly different fashions. Those reading a story in which the media use game framing to discuss congressional, senatorial, or representative activity hear that the session was filled with "disagreements, obstruction, and attempts to impede the legislative process." They hear about how there are hopes to end bickering but there is also a lack of willingness to step forward and bring opposition groups together. They hear about quarrels and failed negotiations. They hear about retaliation and skirmishes that could have been avoided but continue to flare up. They hear about battles, divisions, and a lack of winners throughout the political process. On the other hand, those reading a story that ties governing language to Congress, a Senator, or a Representative hears a completely different picture of the action that has just taken place. These individuals read about "key votes" that have taken place. They read about bills and votes scheduled for the future, and about the committee and subcommittee work planned to take place once

Congress returns. They also read about a bevy of other issues that the subject of the story will be involved in in the near future, such as the environment, immigration, education, and the federal budget. In short, whereas those in the game framed stories hear about the push and pull between fighting and compromise (which pushes more toward the fighting end of the spectrum), those in the governing framed stories hear about the actual work being performed and the issues that have been and will be dealt with.

After reading their media story, subjects were asked to answer a series of questions about Congress, their United States Senators, and their United States Representative.[27] Subjects were asked if they strongly approved, approved, disapproved, or strongly disapproved of the job Congress is doing, if they trusted in the legislative branch a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all, and if they had a great deal of confidence in Congress, a fair amount, only a little, or none at all. Subjects were then asked similar job approval, trust, and confidence questions about Senators and their Representative.[28] Subjects, in all cases, were also given the opportunity to respond that they had no opinion or were not sure. These questions, in total, allow me to examine the potential effects of media framing (and other competing explanations) on a variety of specific and distinct ways of evaluating legislators and the legislative branch. Our focus here will be on three of these measures: approval of Congress, approval of one's senators, and approval of one's representative.

My intent is to see how media framing affects measures of approval in legislators and the legislative branch. While determinants of congressional, senatorial, and representative approval have been examined in terms of individual-level survey

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[27]The specific questions asked can be found in Appendix Two.

[28]The wording of the questions asked was taken from existing questions available via IPoll, the Roper Center's online survey question database at http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.

responses (as discussed earlier), none of these measures mentioned above have been probed by scholars in the context of the potential effects of the mass media. Each of these measures mentioned above is measured with a range of responses from low (strongly disapprove) to high (strongly approve), offering several distinct categories from which individual subjects can choose.[29]

The key independent variables of interest in each of the models will be the type of media coverage received. Individuals either received game framing, governing framing, or no framing whatsoever (i.e. control group). All models include variables capturing the presence or absence of game coverage and governing coverage in the media story read by the individual; this creates two dichotomous media framing variables. These variables will allow us to determine if game coverage has negative and significant effects and if governing coverage has positive and significant effects in each context. Efforts were made to ensure that similar numbers of subjects received the framed treatments (and also that similar numbers of subjects received the control group treatments). A breakdown of these efforts can be found in Table 6.

Table 6: Treatment Categories of Participants

Treatment Type	Number	Percent
Game Coverage/Congress	62	13.6
Governing Coverage/Congress	62	13.6
Game Coverage/Senator	67	14.7
Governing Coverage/Senator	63	13.8
Game Coverage/Representative	74	16.2
Governing Coverage/Representative	69	15.1
Control/Congress	21	4.6
Control/Senator	20	4.4
Control/Representative	19	4.2
N	457	

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[29]Specific questions and response categories can be found in Appendix Two.

As Table 6 reveals, there is an approximately six and one-half to one ratio between treatments with framed media information and control packets (397 framed packets were read by subjects, with 60 control individuals). Just over forty-four percent of subjects read articles with game frame information, while just over forty-two percent read articles with governing frame information. Relatively similar numbers of individuals surveyed read responses dealing with Congress, a senator, or a representative (31.7 percent, 32.8 percent, and 35.4 percent respectively). In short, the number of respondents in each framing treatment is relatively well balanced, as is the number of subjects in each control treatment.

In each model, I utilize two media attention variables: one that captures television news viewing and one that captures newspaper news reading. Despite the findings of Davidson and Parker (1972) linking media awareness to congressional support, many scholars seem to leave media coverage variables out of their model for unknown reasons. Including these two measures of individual-level relationships to informative media will allow me to paint a broader picture of how tuned in individuals are to reporting about political phenomena; it will also offer insight into how the politically informed differ from the politically uninformed, if at all. The wording of these variables (in that they ask about television news coverage and not just television viewing, as well as newspaper news reading and not just newspaper reading) offer added leverage over commonly asked media questions, which often capture media usage wholly unrelated to an individual's learning about the political world around them. In addition, these variables should serve as proxies for the amount of political information each individual has; as Mondak et al. (2007) have shown, political information can shape how citizens view the legislative branch.[30] We

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[30]Media variables are not perfect proxies for the type of political information Mondak and his co-authors examine, which is a battery of fourteen general political knowledge questions. However,

should expect individuals who read news sections of the newspaper or watch news programming on television to have more political information to use in evaluating government than those individuals who consume little to no news via print or televised sources. Both variables range from zero days a week of news media exposure to daily exposure to print and televised news.

Along with the media framing and media attentiveness variables in each model, I also seek to capture several other competing explanations for congressional, senatorial, and representative approval. These competing explanations have been chosen based on the efforts of other scholars who have previously undertaken similar efforts. These competing explanations, in many ways, boil down to two distinct categories: political factors and demographic factors.

First, in addition to the main media-related independent variables of interest, each model will control for the effects of similarly worded dependent variables that tap sentiment about other political actors. As Patterson, Ripley, and Quigley (1992), Kimball and Patterson (1997), and Mondak et al. (2007) show, approval of individual legislators has the potential to shape approval of the legislative branch. I employ this philosophy in each of my models. For example, in a model looking at approval of Congress, I include each subject's responses to the approval questions on his or her senator and representative. I also seek to determine if the opposite relationship exists; there is potential that one's opinions of one's senators and representatives might be driven by one's opinions of Congress. This also means that in the senatorial and representative approval models, I include the congressional approval measure.

Following in the footsteps of those who have previously modeled congressional

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media attentiveness along with political interest measurements should capture a broader sense of individual political awareness, which is similar to what is tapped by Mondak.

approval at the individual level, I also include variables capturing connections to political phenomena in my models; these variables, despite being only tested in models looking at Congress, will also be placed into the models looking at senatorial approval and representative approval. The first of these variables is party identification, which ranges from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican (and offers in-between categories allowing individuals to label themselves not-so-strong party affiliated or as being unsure or having no opinion about the question). The second of these variables captures political sentiment removed from party labels. It measures Political Ideology, and it ranges from highly liberal to highly conservative. Like with the party identification variable, it offers less rigid classifications (in this case "slightly" liberal or conservative), as well as a category for non-identifiers and those who are unsure. I offer a variable that captures a general interest in politics. It assesses the individual's belief that he or she is interested in politics, offering response possibilities from highly interested to highly disinterested (along with intermediate categories similar to those discussed earlier).[31] Separate from the political interest variable, I also include a variable that captures political activity/participation. This is the simplest of the political variables, in that it merely asks if the individual did or did not vote in the primary election held approximately six weeks before the survey experiment was performed.[32] These political variables, in total, will allow us to determine if parties, ideology, interest, and involvement matter not only at the congressional level (where findings have been mixed), but also at the level of the senator and representative

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[31]Despite the fact that these students are in political science classes, we should not necessarily believe that they are predisposed to being interested in politics more so than a general population; this is because taking such introductory political science courses is mandatory in the state of Texas and as such, the population should be a mix of people enthused to learn about government and people who have to be there to fulfill a degree requirement.

[32]The fact that this variable captures political activity through primary voting might will naturally make it stricter than a variable that captured general election voting; however, it should be remembered that the primary in question, held in March 2008, was a highly contentious one at the presidential level.

(where findings are nonexistent).

All of the three models also include standard controls for race (offering African American, Asian American, Caucasian, and Latino options) and gender (offering male and female options). Since the population of the survey experiment is limited to college age students, variables capturing other status measures (for example, age and education) are moot. Said students are all at nearly equivalent levels of education (give or take a few years). Students are also all nearly similar in age (give or take a few years). Given the nature of the pool of subjects, I also do not include variables that capture differences in income; such a question would either reveal that students are, for the most part, in similar economic states (since they are presumably studying and taking classes and not working full time), or would try to get at the economic status of families (which would be a different question altogether). As such, I leave such questions out of my analysis entirely to ward off problems of interpretation.

Methods

Having answered the question of what variables are most appropriate when it comes to modeling congressional, senatorial, and representative approval, the next question presents itself: what model is most appropriate? This is an especially important question given the categorical nature of our dependent variable. Long and Freese (2006) note that, in the case of models analyzing variables that range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, many who study said variables would not automatically assume that the distance from strongly agree to agree is the same as the distance from agree to disagree. This fact means that we have to treat our approval variables differently. An ordinal regression model fits the bill.

The ordinal regression model, as Long and Freese (2006, p. 183) describe it, is a nonlinear model where "the magnitude of the change in the outcome probability

for a given change in one of the independent variables depends on the levels of all the independent variables." This means that, while sign and significance of coefficients is directly interpretable, impact may not be so easily understood. As such, following each ordinal regression model (in this case, ordered logit models of congressional approval, senatorial approval, and representative approval), I will discuss key findings in terms of marginal changes that exist.

Findings

Before getting to the potential relationships that exist between game framing, governing framing, and congressional, senatorial, and representative approval, it is important that we dig deeper into the pool of subjects undertaking the experimental process, so that we have a better idea of the individuals we are dealing with (and so we can see how typical or atypical a set of individuals we might have). Table 7 lays out demographic and media attentiveness findings from our set of subjects.

A look at the demographics of our pool of subjects reveals a set of individuals that is slightly more male than female (54 percent to 46 percent) and fairly heavily caucasian in terms of racial category (over three quarters of individuals taking part). Latinos make up just under ten percent of the population of subjects, while Asian Americans make up just under seven percent and African Americans make up three and one-half percent.

In terms of media attentiveness and usage, the findings present a somewhat bleak picture as to how aware citizens might be of what is taking place when it comes to the news. Almost seventy percent of subjects read the news portion of a newspaper somewhere between zero and two days per week. Only just over twelve percent of subjects were what we might call regular readers of news sections, in that they use them between five and seven days per week. When it comes to using

Table 7: Demographic Characteristics and Media Usage of Participants

Variable	Percent
Sex	
Male	54.0
Female	46.0
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian	76.1
Latino	9.6
Asian American	6.8
Other	3.9
African American	3.5
Newspaper News Usage	
Zero Days A Week	33.7
One To Two Days	36.1
Three To Four Days	17.7
Five To Six Days	6.1
Every Day	6.3
Television News Usage	
Zero Days A Week	23.7
One To Two Days	39.7
Three To Four Days	21.3
Five To Six Days	6.1
Every Day	9.2
N	457

the televised media for news coverage, the results are slightly more positive. Only approximately sixty-three percent of subjects fall into the zero or one to two days per week categories. Over fifteen percent of individuals surveyed utilized the television for news programming five, six, or seven days each week.

In addition to demographic and media usage variables, the survey also measured four variables that captured each subject's involvement in the political process. These variables include the subject's political views, party identification, level of political interest, and recent voting history. Table 8 lays out the distribution of these political variables in the pool of experimental subjects.

Table 8: Political Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Percent
Political Interest	
Highly Interested	13.8
Interested	51.4
Unsure	14.1
Disinterested	16.5
Highly Disinterested	4.2
Political Ideology	
Highly Liberal	5.3
Slightly Liberal	14.0
Moderate	27.9
Slightly Conservative	33.8
Highly Conservative	19.1
Party Identification	
Strong Democrat	5.7
Not Very Strong Democrat	18.2
Independent	15.1
Not Very Strong Republican	35.4
Strong Republican	25.6
Recent Primary Voter	
Yes	17.0
No	83.0
N	457

Taking a look at the political characteristics that define our subjects, we find that the pool of individuals taking part in this experiment can be classified as, for the most part, interested in politics. Over sixty-five percent of participants described themselves as either interested or highly interested. Only approximately twenty percent fell into the categories of disinterested or highly disinterested. This political interest, however, did not translate neatly into actually taking part in political activities (by which I mean going out and casting a vote in a recent primary election). Primary election participation often separates the casual political enthusiast from the hardcore political activist, and we see some of that separation here. Only seventeen percent of those surveyed cast a ballot in the primary elections held in the months prior to the taking of the survey.

Broadly speaking, the political characteristics of those surveyed reveal a pool that is best described as leaning toward the right of the political spectrum. Approximately forty-eight percent of those responding described themselves as slightly or highly conservative, while only just short of twenty percent felt they fell into the slightly or highly liberal categories, leaving us with almost a 2.5 to 1 disparity in terms of ideology. Almost twenty-eight percent of subjects described themselves as moderate. When asked to align themselves with an actual political party name, subjects appeared to be much more willing to move out of the moderate category. Just shy of twenty-four percent of those surveyed identified themselves as strong or not very strong democrats (an increase of nearly five percent from the liberal categories measured by the political ideology question). On the other hand, sixty-four percent of the subjects under examination placed themselves in the strong or not very strong republican categories (an increase of over six percent from conservative identifiers). The moderate (independent) category in terms of party identification is nearly cut

in half from the political ideology category. Overall, we can conclude that the pool is tilting toward the right and is more willing to commit to a party name than to an ideology.

Moving away from looking at descriptive statistics, we now tackle the first key questions formalized in Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2: does exposure to game information increase an individual's likelihood of responding negatively in terms of congressional job performance? Similarly, does exposure to governing information increase an individual's likelihood of responding positively in terms of congressional job performance. The answers to these questions are revealed in Table 9.

Table 9 displays the results of an ordered logit model linking media coverage of Congress (and several other potential explanatory variables) to assessments of congressional job performance. The results of this model clearly show that game framing matters when it comes to individual-level responses to congressional job approval, while governing framing does not. Individuals given a news article describing Congress in terms of conflicts and compromises were significantly less likely to approve of the job Congress is doing than those individuals in the groups that received other types of coverage. On the other hand, there is no clear link between receiving governing coverage and positive assessments.

Interestingly, several of the competing explanations are also linked to congressional job approval. Individuals who were less interested in politics were also more likely to rate Congress's performance positively. Individuals who did not vote in the most recent primary elections were also significantly more likely to rate Congress positively in terms of the job being done. There were also clear links across assessments of different facets of Congress: individuals who rated their senators and representative highly also felt Congress was doing a good job. These results send several clear

Table 9: Media Framing and Individual Approval of Congress

Predictors	Individuals Reading About Congress
Game Framing About Congress	-1.252*
	(.511)
Governing Framing About Congress	-0.673
	(.512)
Gender	-0.160
	(.268)
Race	-0.322
	(.232)
Political Interest	0.296*
	(.165)
Political Views	-0.069
	(.250)
Party Identification	-0.040
	(.219)
Voting	0.898*
	(.407)
Newspaper News Usage	0.112
	(.180)
Television News Usage	-0.105
	(.167)
Approval of Senators	0.875*
	(.313)
Approval of Representative	0.691*
	(.263)
N	139

Note: This is an ordered logit model.

Higher values of congressional approval signal increased approval of Congress.

* = $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

signals: individuals who are disinterested and uninvolved in the political experience seem to find positives in the legislative process, regardless of party, ideology, and personal characteristics. Due to the nature of ordered logit models, however, coefficients are not directly interpretable in terms of effects. As such, we must separately interpret the substantive effects of these relationships. Table 10 offers one way of doing so.

Table 10: Substantive Effects of Predictors of Congressional Job Approval

Predictor	Effect
Game Coverage	-0.563
Political Interest	0.157
Voting	0.170
Senatorial Approval	0.274
Representative Approval	0.245

Note: Effects are in terms of shifts in standard deviations.

Here we see the substantive effects of variables found to be significant predictors of the job approval of Congress. We can consider these effects in many ways; the method used here considers the marginal change in y* with respect to x_k. Holding all other variables constant, we are looking at how a unit increase or a standard deviation increase in x_k shapes how many standard deviations y* increases by. We see that for a unit increase increase in game coverage of Congress (i.e. the effect of being subjected to game coverage of Congress), support for Congress decreases by .56 standard deviations. Moving to the non-media related effects, we find the following. A standard deviation increase in political interest leads to increased support of Congress by .16 standard deviations. A unit increase in voting (i.e. the effect of not having voted in the most recent primary election) leads to support for Congress declining by .40 standard deviations. Similar substantive effects exist for support of one's senatorial delegation, one's representative, and one's support of Congress. For

a one standard deviation increase in support of one's senators or one's representative, one's support for Congress increased by .27 and .25 standard deviations respectively.

Our next question of inquiry is the potential linkage between game coverage, governing coverage, and approval of the job one's senatorial delegation is doing. As Hypotheses 3 and 4 posit, I expect that exposure to game coverage will shape an individual's opinions of the job that his or her senatorial delegation is doing in negative fashion, while governing coverage will have the opposite effect, driving a positive boost in performance assessments.

Table 11 displays the results of an ordered logit model linking media coverage of senators (and several other potential explanatory variables) to assessments of senatorial job performance. Here, we find the exact opposite results as were revealed by the earlier model linking media coverage to congressional job performance: when it comes to approval of one's senators, governing coverage is what matters. Individuals given a news article describing senatorial action in terms of governing were significantly more likely to rate their senators positively than individuals in the other two groups. On the other hand, game coverage of senatorial actions does not seem to shape individuals' assessments of the jobs their senators are doing.

The competing explanations for senatorial job approval are much more minimal than those for congressional job approval. The only clear link is between approving of Congress and approving of one's senators. Again, individuals who approved of one facet of the legislative branch were significantly more likely to approve of another; in other words, the more you approve of Congress, the more likely you are to approve of the jobs your senators are doing. Once again, we must separately interpret the findings of the model linking media coverage and senatorial approval. The substantive impacts of the two significant predictors are displayed in Table 12.

Table 11: Media Framing and Individual Approval of Senators

Predictors	Individuals Reading About Senators
Game Framing About Senators	0.401
	(.536)
Governing Framing About Senators	0.956*
	(.558)
Gender	-0.087
	(.351)
Race	-0.157
	(.318)
Political Interest	-0.180
	(.194)
Political Views	-0.259
	(.278)
Party Identification	0.364
	(.262)
Voting	0.050
	(.507)
Newspaper News Usage	-0.225
	(.177)
Television News Usage	-0.010
	(.176)
Approval of Congress	1.035*
	(.236)
N	149

Note: This is an ordered logit model.

Higher values of congressional approval signal increased approval of Congress.

* = $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

Table 12: Substantive Effects of Predictors of Senatorial Job Approval

Predictor	Effect
Governing Coverage	0.460
Congressional Approval	0.409

Note: Effects are in terms of shifts in standard deviations.

Here we see the effects of two variables (exposure to governing coverage about Senators and approval of Congress) on approval of one's senators. Similar to our substantive analysis of approval of Congress, we will examine these findings in terms of standard deviation movement. For a unit increase in governing coverage of a senator (i.e. being in the treatment group exposed to such coverage), approval of one's senators increased by .46 standard deviations. A standard deviation increase in approval of Congress drove a .41 standard deviation increase in approval of one's senators.

So, we see that game coverage has shaped assessments of Congress, while governing coverage has shaped assessments of senators. Now, we turn to assessments of one's member of the House of Representatives. We do so in similar fashion to the previous two models discussed, with an ordered logit model linking individual-level exposure to game or governing coverage to a measure of job approval of one's representative. This model will allow us to test Hypotheses 5 and 6, which posit similarly to earlier hypotheses that game coverage will move opinions negatively while governing coverage will move opinions positively.

Table 13 displays the results of the model linking media coverage of representatives (and several other potential competing explanations) to an approval measure of the job one's representative is doing. Here, we find that media coverage is irrelevant to assessments of the job performance of one's representative. Game coverage does not push approval downward, and governing coverage does not push approval upward. As such, the last two hypotheses are found to be without merit. On the other hand, some of the competing explanations are found to have significant links to representative job approval. Political interest has a negative and significant effect on approval of one's representative; the more disinterested you are in politics, the

Table 13: Media Framing and Individual Approval of Representative

Predictors	Individuals Reading About Representative
Game Framing About Congress	-0.625
	(.516)
Governing Framing About Congress	-0.361
	(.501)
Gender	-0.230
	(.291)
Race	0.158
	(.225)
Political Interest	-0.324*
	(.176)
Political Views	0.555*
	(.206)
Party Identification	-0.242
	(.189)
Voting	0.070
	(.440)
Newspaper News Usage	0.080
	(.157)
Television News Usage	-0.164
	(.160)
Approval of Congress	0.987*
	(.235)
N	154

Note: This is an ordered logit model.
Higher values of congressional approval signal increased approval of Congress.
* = $p < 0.05$, one-tailed tests.

more likely you are to look negatively on your representative (this contrasts with the earlier finding of a positive benefit for Congress in the minds of those who take little interest in politics). Political ideology also shapes one's assessment of one's representative. The more conservative the individual, the more likely one was to rate one's representative as doing a good job in doing his or her job. Also linked to representative approval (as it was in the senatorial model) was sentiments about the job Congress was doing. If you liked the job performance of Congress, you were significantly more likely to approve of the job your representative is doing. Table 14 elaborates on the substantive impact of these competing explanations found to drive representative approval.

Table 14: Substantive Effects of Predictors of Representative Job Approval

Predictor	Effect
Political Interest	-0.146
Political Ideology	0.304
Congressional Approval	0.370

Note: Effects are in terms of shifts in standard deviations.

As with the previous two models, when discussing substantive impacts we will do so in terms of shifts of standard deviations. Interest in politics (in this case, a one standard deviation increase in interest) is linked to a .14 standard deviation drop in approval of one's representative. Ideology, as was just discussed, also plays a role in shaping approval of representatives; with every standard deviation movement in a conservative direction, approval of one's representative increases by .30 standard deviations. Finally, once again, there is a tight link between approving of the branch and approving of the individuals; a one standard deviation increase in approval of Congress drives a .37 standard deviation increase in approval of one's representative.

Implications

Just as we saw at the macro level, game and governing coverage have the power to shape opinions of individual legislators and of Congress at the micro level. However, at the micro level, the picture is not as straightforward. Game coverage is a significant predictor of approval solely at the level of Congress. This might be because game coverage of Congress only further hammers home the widely-held sentiment that Congress is an institution burdened by gridlock. Governing coverage is a significant predictor of approval solely at the level of one's senatorial delegation. This might be because governing coverage of senators reinforces the lessons we are taught about the individuals we send to Washington, namely that they are working for us in the face of the gridlock caused by other legislators. Unfortunately, however, this concept and explanation is not reinforced by the model examining approval of representatives. Nor is the idea that because representatives receive less media attention than do senators, individuals will be more easily swayed by new information pushing a game or governing perspective on legislative activities.

Given the findings here, we can also make broader claims about how this research fits into the pattern of research a handful of scholars have already performed in this topic. Like most scholars, we find no link between demographics and approval at any level of examination. Like most scholars, where we do find strong linkages is between approval of one portion of the legislative branch and approval of other portions; approval of Congress is linked to approval of specific legislators and vice versa.

In sum, we see that at another level of analysis, the type of media coverage individuals are exposed to can play a role in their assessments of legislators and the legislative branch. Media coverage targeted in this fashion may not shape opinion

in each and every way predicted, but it still has the potential to shape attitudes in positive and negative ways depending on the inclusion of governing and game elements.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Try as they might to control information flows about what work is being done and how work is being done, Congress and its members must rely on the media to spread messages about what work is being done, what issues are being addressed, and what outputs are being produced. Often times, the message the media does spread is a mix of these aforementioned messages along with a discussion of how individuals, leaders, parties, and chambers went about their work (and often times, the problems that ensue). As this project has shown, this has implications for how legislators and the legislative branch go about their business and, eventually, how they are perceived by the general public. These specific implications will now be discussed.

Chapter III showed that over a thirty year period between 1977 and 2006, both game and governing framing significantly affected approval of congress. The findings were in the direction predicted by the hypotheses, namely that game framing would drive congressional approval downward while governing framing would drive congressional approval upward. The chapter validates the idea that what the mass media report has the power to shape evaluations. Additionally, the chapter verifies the work of previous congressional approval models that show the power of economic expectations and presidential approval in affecting how American approve or disapprove of the legislative branch.

Chapter IV showed that game and governing framing significantly affected senatorial approval during an eleven month period in 2006 (the second half of the 109th Congress), but in different ways. Levels of game framing separated senators with low approval from senators with high approval. On the other hand, levels of

governing framing were linked to positive movement in senatorial approval from one month to the next. These findings show the situational power of game and governing framing when it comes to the opinion-based fates of legislators.

Chapter V showed the power of game and governing framing at the individual level. An original survey experiment showed that reading a heavily game framed story about Congress significantly drove opinions of Congress downward. It also showed that reading a heavily governing framed story about a senator significantly drove opinions of one's senatorial delegation upward. These findings revealed that game and governing have effects not just at the macro level and not just over time, but also at the micro level.

The findings in total here also speak broadly to the debate over the power of the media in shaping opinion. As Clawson and Oxley (2008) discuss, general sentiment about media effects seems to be that media does not have a hypodermic effect or a minimal effect, but rather a subtle effect that is in many ways situational. Among these subtle effects are the power of the media when it comes to agenda setting, priming, and framing. Generally, the findings here support the idea that media framing is real and powerful. More specifically, the findings throughout this project lend credence to the idea that there are distinct ways in which the media define their discussions of legislators and the legislative branch and that these definitions drive the ways in which Americans assess Congress and its members.

Revisiting Fenno's Paradox

More importantly for our earlier discussion of where assessments of Congress and its members come from, we can argue that game and governing framing add another piece to the puzzle of solving the paradox laid out by Fenno (1975) over thirty years ago. As Chapter II points out, Fenno was concerned with discovering

why Americans seem to dislike Congress but like the members of Congress they send to Washington. Fenno chalked this up to what he called different standards of judgement, and since then scholars have attempted in piecemeal fashion to determine what those standards of judgement might be.

I argue that levels of game and governing coverage are part of the judgement matrix that Americans bring to the table when asked to evaluate their representation. As Chapter III shows, game coverage helps suppress approval, while governing coverage lifts up approval. Levels of governing coverage may be higher in the average quarter than levels of game coverage, but as Table 2 reveals, the impact of game coverage is nearly four times as high as governing coverage. Game coverage is clearly keeping Congress mired in the disfavor to which Fenno alludes. When governing coverage increases though, Congress can benefit. Unfortunately for Congress, as discussed earlier, is the fact that no one is looking out for the institution. No one, outside of leaders in the majority party perhaps, can work to ensure that Congress works more efficiently and deals with more issues than it has in the past, and even those leaders have their own futures to worry about.

Additionally, we can see how game and governing matter when it comes to the legislators we love (and the small few we do not love). Game coverage helps explain the outliers in Fenno's argument, the ones that are unloved (or, at least, are unloved by a larger number of constituents than the norm). Those who receive higher levels of game coverage, i.e. those who are tied to discussions of squabbling and gridlock, are those who are the exception to Fenno's rule. They suffer in the eyes of those citizens that sent them to Washington. It is the governing coverage that we often associate with legislators (the self-serving discussion of legislators working on issues and producing outputs for their states or districts, in essence the media-based crux

of Mayhew's (1974) prescription for legislators to advertise, take positions, and claim credit) that separates the upwardly mobile in terms of opinion from those who are not improving in the eyes of the public. Game and governing frames are linked with a state's ability to assess which senators are performing well, which are not performing well, and which are deserving of better or worse approval than in the past.

Media framing may not be a silver bullet when it comes to answering the many, many questions that Fenno asked, but it definitely plays a role in explaining both opinions about Congress and opinions about individual legislators. Moreover, as has been discussed throughout this project, media framing may prove a more logical response to Fenno's questions than most responses based on the outputs of Congress and its members, given American reliance on media for information and lack of direct access to politics and politicians.

Future Research

The findings here naturally lead to applications in other subfields when it comes to the link between media framing and opinion. Patterson (1993) showed the viability of game and governing framing in a campaign context, and here we show the viability of these frames in a congressional context. Might these frames also exist in an executive or judicial context? Might they shape approval in both of those contexts? Such possibilities are worth examining. We might also want to ask ourselves what other frames besides game and governing might exist in any of these contexts. Some existing research does exist along these lines (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) for example has inquired into positivity and negativity, while others (Patterson and Caldeira 1990) have looked specifically at scandal coverage), but continued examination of the ways in which media members tell stories is necessary, not only because we should want to know what shapes approval, but also because

we should want to monitor the dynamics behind the ways in which the media work, allowing us to assess how well the media carries out its reporting and watchdog functions.

Given the constant changes in the business of media, tracking the prevalence of frames over time is also worthy of inquiry. As Patterson (2000)? has shown, competition in media has lead to a shift away from covering leaders and issues and toward stories without a policy angle. What implications might this have for the game and governing frame? Should we expect to see these frames decline over time (especially the governing frame)? With newspapers at risk of disappearing in some places or reconfiguring their purpose and scope in others and with television outlets trimming their budgets (and as such, their ability to do original news-gathering), what will potential declines in information quality mean for the ability of Americans to credibly assess Congress itself as well as those who represent them in the House and Senate?

Regardless of an ever-changing media environment, one thing has not seemed to change over time: the fact that the mass media are and will continue to be, as Clawson and Oxley (2008, p.61) put it, "an intermediary between citizens and elites, providing both with the information essential for a well-functioning democracy." This role has definite rewards for society, in that it saves time and energy for Americans when it comes to efforts to gather information about the political world around them. It helps minimize the difference between the costs of learning about politics and the potential benefits of being an active, engaged citizen. This only works, however, so long as we can be confident in the material the media produce. If the media have to report about Congress and its members in a fashion whereby they pick and choose what is newsworthy and what is not, we must hope that this picking and choosing is

done in a way that assists the public and not in a way that only assists the media in making their job easier or in moving their financial bottom line from the red to the black. We must hope that the media, in serving as a watchdog, is not in constant need of being watched themselves.

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APPENDIX A

The following is a list of root words utilized in the search for game coverage of Congress:

impede, cease, stop, block, obstruct, prevent, halt, bicker, disagree, feud, quarrel, assail, attack, criticize, poll, battle, win, lose, impugn, protest, retaliate, combat, skirmish, process, election, fundraising, divide, split, shutdown, partisan, leader, agree, leadership, advance, guide, pilot, spark, start, direct, drive, persuade, usher, affect, command, contribute, induce, manage, prompt, move, spur, influence, sway, debate, agree, consensus, unity, unite, champion, agree, unanimous, unison, pact, bipartisan, negotiate, filibuster, cloture

The following is a list of words utilized in the search for governing coverage of Congress:

hold, vote, joint committee, joint session, joint resolution, lame duck, lobby, marking, nomination, special session, sponsor, standing committee, subcommittee, motion, budget, chairman, agriculture, environment, health, crime, drug, welfare, tax, death penalty, capital punishment, child care, civil rights, gun, busing, affirmative action, war, job, inflation, economy, abortion, education, unemployment, terrorism, military, medicare, medicaid, school, AIDS, unions, birth control, business, labor, urban, city, cities, natural resources, endangered species, budget, free speech, internet, gay rights, immigration, veterans, social security, poverty, peace, technology, infrastructure, security, reform, energy, free trade

APPENDIX B

The following are the questions utilized in Chapter III for the composition of the dependent variable capturing approval of Congress from 1977-2006.

ABC News/Washington Post N=9 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?

ANES N=4 In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. (United States) Congress has been handling its job?

CBS N=36 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

CBS/New York Times N=59 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

Fox News/Opinion Dynamics N=17 Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing?

Gallup N=46 Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is handling its job?

Gallup/CNN/USA Today N=28 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

NBC/Wall Street Journal N=57 In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing?

Time/CNN N=14 In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job that the U.S. (United States) Congress is doing?

Washington Post N=48 Do you approve or disapprove of the way the US (United States) Congress is doing its job?

APPENDIX C

The following newspapers were used in Chapter IV in examining media coverage of senators throughout calendar year 2006.

Alabama: Birmingham News

Alaska: Anchorage Daily News

Arkansas: Arkansas Democrat Gazette

California: San Francisco Chronicle

Colorado: Denver Post

Connecticut: Connecticut Post

Florida: St. Petersburg Times

Georgia: Atlanta Journal Constitution

Idaho: Lewiston Morning Tribune

Illinois: Chicago Sun Times

Indiana: South Bend Tribune

Iowa: Dubuque Telegraph Herald

Kansas: Topeka Capital Journal

Louisiana: New Orleans Times-Picayune

Maine: Portland Press-Herald

Maryland: The Capital

Massachusetts: Boston Globe

Michigan: Grand Rapids Press

Minnesota: St. Paul Pioneer Press

Missouri: St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Nebraska: Omaha World-Herald

Nevada: Las Vegas Review-Journal

New Hampshire: Manchester Union Leader

New Jersey: Newark Star-Ledger

New Mexico: Albuquerque Journal

New York: New York Times

North Carolina: Raleigh News and Observer

North Dakota: Bismarck Tribune

Ohio: Columbus Dispatch

Oklahoma: Tulsa World

Oregon: Portland Oregonian

Pennsylvania: Philadelphia Inquirer

Rhode Island: Providence Journal

South Carolina: Charleston Post and Courier

Tennessee: Chattanooga Times Free Press

Texas: Houston Chronicle

Utah: Salt Lake City Tribune

Vermont: Brattleboro Reformer

Virginia: Virginian-Pilot

Washington: Seattle Post Intelligencer

West Virginia: Charleston Gazette-Mail

Wisconsin: Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Wyoming: Wyoming Tribune Eagle

APPENDIX D

The following are the media stories given to individuals participating in the experiment discussed in Chapter V.

Treatment One: Story about Congress using Game Framing

Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Continue To Quarrel

Attempting to prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the House and Senate passing legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. Both chambers also passed preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session filled with disagreements, obstruction, and attempts to impede the legislative process, Congress opened its latest session with high hopes for ending partisan bickering but few members stepping forward and showing a willingness to champion efforts for bipartisan unity and consensus.

Upon their return, House members are scheduled to begin debate on several measures halted in late March thanks to quarreling over stark divisions between key members. Leaders hope these talks will spur negotiations between feuding members of the opposing parties, but senior legislative aides said Monday that such hopes might prove to be fruitless ones.

"We're moving to fix this," a House aide said to reporters, "but we can't persuade members to talk when they're so focused on retaliating against opponents and attacking their fellow members of Congress." Another aide, speaking confiden-

tially to reporters, pointed out several skirmishes that could have been avoided but threatened to flare up in the upcoming days and weeks.

Members of the Senate plan on returning to Washington with similar desires to find consensus on measures slowed by the threat of filibuster last fall, but face similar battles as their House counterparts.

"Divisions are threatening to shutdown all efforts to advance our body's agenda," claimed key Senate leaders asked about the obstructions of the past few months. "There may be very few winners this spring," the leaders went on to state.

Treatment Two: Story about Congress using Governing Framing

Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Debate, Work To Schedule Votes

Attempting to prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the House and Senate passing legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. Both chambers also passed preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session filled with key votes on important issues like energy policy, crime, and welfare and impending committee decisions concerning legislation on health care, terrorism, and civil rights, Congress closed its latest session Tuesday with plans to continue tackling issues on the minds of Americans.

House members are scheduled in the upcoming weeks to begin voting on several measures that passed through committee in late December before representatives left for their holiday break. Leaders hope to quickly address bills dealing with environ-

mental concerns and immigration, but senior legislative aides said Monday that such votes might not be taken until after the House deals with bills addressing tax breaks and the federal budget.

"We're moving to schedule as many votes as we can," a House aide said to reporters asking about House progress on key issues, "and we expect several committees and subcommittees to provide more action in the upcoming days and weeks that will require further motions to address." Another aide, speaking confidentially to reporters, pointed out that he expects legislative sponsors to aggressively address new issues in the upcoming weeks, such as military funding, infrastructure, and free trade.

Members of the Senate will return to Washington in two weeks with similar desires to move legislation through committee and schedule votes in the near future. Similar to their House counterparts, Senators expect to discuss the war in great detail, without forgetting legislation dealing with inflation and funding education. Senators also expect to vote on several federal-level nominations over the next few months.

"We have a broad agenda to tackle in the near future, from discussing the budget to ensuring that military issues like caring for veterans and preventing terrorism are answered," claimed key Senate leaders asked about bills handled over the past few months. "We will be handling many issues this spring that need to be addressed," the leaders went on to state.

Treatment Three: Story about Senator using Game Framing

Senator Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Continue To Quarrel

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the Senator helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session filled with disagreements, obstruction, and attempts to impede the legislative process, the Senator planned to return for the latest session in a few weeks with high hopes for ending partisan bickering in which he was involved, but finds few of his fellow members stepping forward and showing a willingness to champion efforts for bipartisan unity and consensus.

The Senator is scheduled to participate in debates on several measures halted in late December thanks to quarreling over stark divisions between key members. He hopes these talks will spur negotiations between feuding members of the opposing parties, but he also stated Monday that such hopes might prove to be fruitless ones.

"We're moving to fix this," the Senator said to reporters, "but we can't persuade members to talk when we're so focused on retaliating against opponents and attacking their fellow members of Congress." An aide, speaking confidentially to reporters, pointed out several skirmishes that the Senator was embroiled in that could have been avoided and have threatened to flare up once again in the upcoming weeks and months.

Fellow Senators will return to Washington with similar desires to find consensus on measures slowed by the threat of filibuster last fall.

"Divisions are threatening to shutdown all efforts to advance our body's agenda," claimed key Senate leaders asked about the obstructions of the past few months.

"There may be very few winners this spring," the Senator went on to state.

Treatment Four: Story about Senator using Governing Framing

Senator Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Debate, Work To Schedule Votes

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the Senator helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session in which he participated in key votes on important issues like energy policy, crime, and welfare and impending committee decisions concerning legislation on health care, terrorism, and civil rights, the Senator will return to Washington in a few weeks with plans to tackle issues on the minds of constituents.

The Senator is scheduled to begin voting on several measures that passed through committee in late December before the Senate left for their holiday break. He hopes to quickly address bills dealing with environmental concerns and immigration, but his legislative aides said Monday that such votes might not be taken until after the Senate deals with bills addressing tax breaks and the federal budget.

"We're moving to schedule as many votes as we can," the Senator said to reporters asking about Senate progress on key issues, "and we expect several committees and subcommittees to provide more action in the upcoming days and weeks that will require further motions to address." Another of the Senator's aides, speaking confidentially to reporters, pointed out that he expects the Senator to aggressively

address new issues in the upcoming weeks, such as military funding, infrastructure, and free trade.

Fellow members of the Senate will return to Washington with similar desires to move legislation through committee and schedule votes in the near future. Similar to his House counterparts, the Senator expects to discuss the war in great detail, without forgetting legislation dealing with inflation and funding education. He also expects to vote on several federal-level nominations over the next few months.

"We have a broad agenda to tackle in the near future, from discussing the budget to ensuring that military issues like caring for veterans and preventing terrorism are answered," claimed the Senator when asked about bills handled over the past few months. "We will be handling many issues this spring that need to be addressed," he went on to state.

Treatment Five: Story about Representative using Game Framing

Representative Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Continue To Quarrel

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the Representative helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session filled with disagreements, obstruction, and attempts to impede the legislative process, the Representative planned to return for the latest session in a few weeks with high hopes for ending partisan bickering in which he was involved, but finds few of his fellow members stepping forward and

showing a willingness to champion efforts for bipartisan unity and consensus.

The Representative is scheduled to participate in debates on several measures halted in late December thanks to quarreling over stark divisions between key members. Hopes are high that these talks will spur negotiations between feuding members of the opposing parties, but he also stated Monday that such hopes might prove to be fruitless ones.

"We're moving to fix this," the Representative said to reporters, "but we can't persuade members to talk when we're so focused on retaliating against opponents and attacking their fellow members of Congress." An aide, speaking confidentially to reporters, pointed out several skirmishes that the Representative was embroiled in that could have been avoided and have threatened to flare up once again in the upcoming weeks and months.

Fellow House members will return to Washington with similar desires to find consensus on measures slowed by the threat of filibuster last fall.

"Divisions are threatening to shutdown all efforts to advance our body's agenda," claimed key House leaders asked about the obstructions of the past few months. "There may be very few winners this spring," the Representative went on to state.

Treatment Six: Story about Representative using Governing Framing

Representative Closes Session With Economic Bill; Both Sides Debate, Work To Schedule Votes

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the Representative helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also

played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

On the heels of a 2007 session in which there was participation in key votes on important issues like energy policy, crime, and welfare and impending committee decisions concerning legislation on health care, terrorism, and civil rights, the Representative will return to Washington in a few weeks with plans to tackle issues on the minds of constituents.

The Representative is scheduled to begin voting on several measures that passed through committee in late December before the House left for their holiday break. The Representative hopes to quickly address bills dealing with environmental concerns and immigration, but his legislative aides said Monday that such votes might not be taken until after the House deals with bills addressing tax breaks and the federal budget

"We're moving to schedule as many votes as we can," the Representative said to reporters asking about House progress on key issues, "and we expect several committees and subcommittees to provide more action in the upcoming weeks that will require further motions to address." Another of the Representative's aides, speaking confidentially to reporters, pointed out that he expects the Representative to aggressively address new issues in the upcoming weeks, such as military funding, infrastructure, and free trade.

Fellow members of the House will return to Washington with similar desires to move legislation through committee and schedule votes in the near future. Similar to his Senate counterparts, the Representative expects to discuss the war in great detail, without forgetting legislation dealing with inflation and funding education.

"We have a broad agenda to tackle in the near future, from discussing the budget to ensuring that military issues like caring for veterans and preventing terrorism are answered," claimed the Representative when asked about bills handled over the past few months. "We will be handling many issues this spring that need to be addressed," he went on to state.

Treatment Seven: Control Story about Congress

Congress Closes Session With Economic Bill

Attempting to prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the House and Senate passing legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. Both chambers also passed preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

Treatment Eight: Control Story about Senator

Senator Closes Session With Economic Bill

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the 110th session of Congress recessed today with the Senator helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

Treatment Nine: Control Story about Representative

Representative Closes Session With Economic Bill

Attempting to help prevent a potential recession predicted by analysts, the

110th session of Congress recessed today with the Representative helping pass legislation aimed at halting an economic slowdown and spurring job growth. He also played a role in passing preventative legislation aimed at rolling back increasing gasoline prices amidst discussion of how to balance business and environmental factors.

APPENDIX E

The following questions were asked to all individuals taking part in the survey experiment discussed in Chapter V. Questions one through nine were answered before reading a treatment, while questions ten through eighteen were answered after reading a treatment.

1. Please fill in (Code Denoting Treatment Number) for Question One.

2. What is your gender? A) Female B) Male

3. What racial group do you consider yourself to be a part of? A) African American B) Asian American C) Caucasian D) Latino E) Other

4. How interested would you say that you are in politics? A) Highly Interested B) Interested C) Unsure D) Disinterested E) Highly Disinterested

5. On a scale from highly liberal to highly conservative, how would you characterize your political beliefs? A) Highly liberal B) Slightly liberal C) Moderate D) Slightly conservative E) Highly conservative

6. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what? A) Strong Democrat B) Not Very Strong Democrat C) Independent D) Not Very Strong Republican E) Strong Republican

7. Did you vote in the primary elections held in March? A) Yes B) No C) Unsure

8. On average, how often do you read the news section of a newspaper? A) zero days a week B) one to two days a week C) three to four days a week D) five to six days a week E) every day

9. On average, how many days a week do you watch news coverage on televi-

sion? A) zero days a week B) one to two days a week C) three to four days a week D) five to six days a week E) every day

10. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing? A) Strongly Approve B) Approve C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Disapprove E) Strongly Disapprove

11. As you know, our federal government is made up of three branches: an Executive branch, headed by the President, a Judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court, and a Legislative branch, made up of the Senate and House of Representatives. Let me ask you how much trust you have at this time in the Legislative branch, consisting of the US Senate and House of Representatives–a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all? A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Not Very Much E) None At All

12. Please tell me how much confidence you have in Congress: A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Only A Little E) Almost None

13. Do you approve or disapprove of the job your U.S. Senators are doing? A) Strongly Approve B) Approve C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Disapprove E) Strongly Disapprove

14. Let me ask you how much trust you have at this time in your U.S. Senators: a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all? A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Not Very Much E) None At All

15. Please tell me how much confidence you have in your U.S. Senators: A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Only A Little E) Almost None

16. Do you approve or disapprove of the job your U.S. Representative is doing? A) Strongly Approve B) Approve C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Disapprove E)

Strongly Disapprove

17. Let me ask you how much trust you have at this time in your U.S. Representative: a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all? A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Not Very Much E) None At All

18. Please tell me how much confidence you have in your U.S. Representative: A) A Great Deal B) A Fair Amount C) No Opinion/Not Sure D) Only A Little E) Almost None

VITA

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