The Electoral Costs of Legislative Action: Dynamic Partisanship and Agenda Control in the U.S. Congress

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Abstract

Members and congressional parties go to great lengths to signal bipartisanship to voters, believing they will be electorally rewarded for cooperating with the other party. However, the House majority party has an incentive to enact its preferred, party-oriented policy program, while obtaining minority party support requires legislative compromise. We theorize that electorally strong majority parties are relatively unconcerned about their public support, and are thus more willing to pass partisan bills. When the majority party's public support is tenuous, it moderates bills to receive the electoral benefits from bipartisanship. Using time-series data of public opinion polling and measures of bipartisanship in Congress, we find support for this claim. We also find that salient bills increase the strength of the relationship between majority party electoral standing and bill extremity. Finally, our results demonstrate the extent to which the majority party is electorally risk averse; proximity to an election does not change the relationship between electoral standing and bipartisanship on passage. Our results speak to the ability of the majority party to set the level of bipartisanship within the House and the inherent trade-off between dramatic policy change and public support.

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Members of Congress commonly assert that partisanship is bad for policy, bad for the institution, and unpopular with constituents (Manley 1965). The minority party demands compromise in exchange for its support, and makes appeals to voters to punish overly partisan majority parties. After passage of the 2009 stimulus bill in Congress, John McCain, a member of the Senate minority said, "That this is bipartisan legislation is simply not accurate. We want to work with the other side, and this is not the example that I think the American people wanted."[1] Conversely, the majority party seeks bipartisanship as a signal to voters that it cooperates with the minority and that its legislation is sufficiently moderate. In December 2022, President Biden, speaking on behalf of Democratic majorities in both chambers after enactment of an omnibus funding bill, used the word "bipartisan" seven times in five paragraphs.[2]

If the majority party maintains agenda control over the floor, it can propose and pass its preferred policies, which disproportionately distribute benefits to its own members. Yet, this approach risks alienating voters who prefer bipartisan lawmaking. To secure minority party votes, the majority may moderate a bill, moving it closer to the preferences of minority party members, but it will achieve fewer policy gains from the bill's passage. This tension, between producing the policy outcome preferred by members of the majority party, or achieving support from some members of the minority, is frequently at the heart of legislative negotiations in Congress. Most famously, in 2009 and 2010, Democrats sought Republican support for months during the markup of the Affordable Care Act in the Senate, repeatedly moderating the bill, only for every Republican member of Congress to vote against it on final passage. While Democrats tried to paint congressional Republicans as unreasonable, Republicans successfully claimed to voters that the health care bill was too partisan and ideologically extreme (Nyhan et al. 2012). More recently, in 2022 Democrats tried to convince moderate Republicans to vote for the Inflation Reduction Act as a way of addressing climate change, though none did.[3] According to former Republican House member Bob Inglis, there was no reason for Republicans to give Democrats a bipartisan vote, saying about the Senate, "I mean, they got 50 [votes], so pass it yourself...you know, people can count."[4]

[1] "Senate passes $787 billion stimulus bill," Politico.com, February 2, 2009. Accessed at https://www.politico.com/story/2009/02/senate-passes-787-billion-stimulus-bill-018837.

[2] "Statement from President Joe Biden on Passage of the Bipartisan Year-End Omnibus" The White House, December 23, 2022. Accessed at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/23/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-passage-of-the-bipartisan-year-end-omnibus/.

[3] For a Republican example, see the 2017 passage of the "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act", in which no House or Senate Democrat voted for the bill. In this case, the Republican Party apparently made the strategic decision to pass the bill it wanted without seeking Democratic support.

[4] "Some Republicans see climate danger. They voted 'no' anyway." Politico.com, August 12, 2022. Accessed at: https://www.politico.com/news/2022/08/12/republicans-climate-vote-no-00050830.

The extant research largely examines how voters respond to partisanship, treating it as exogenous to the legislative process and finding that individual members and parties collectively are punished for being too partisan. In their seminal work on party government in the U.S. House, Cox and McCubbins (1993) treat voters as exogenous to the legislative process pursued by parties, with majorities using their agenda control to provide co-partisans with the highest possible electoral payoff. By contrast, our approach examines how the House majority party induces a particular level of partisanship to change voter support, even at the expense of policy gains. By proposing different types of legislation to the floor, the majority party can manage their collective brand by strategically balancing policy changes and voter sanction.

We create a new dataset of public evaluations of the congressional parties, constructed from surveys across nearly thirty years. These data allow us to measure the effect of voting partisanship on congressional approval and the electoral prospects of the House majority and minority parties. We first quantify the extent to which partisanship hurts the majority party and, consistent with previous research, find short-term voter approval of Congress declines as roll call voting partisanship on passage votes increases. Surprisingly, bipartisanship on passage only improves congressional approval when bills receive substantial minority party support. That is, the relationship between bipartisanship and congressional approval is characterized by an exponential function; receiving only a few minority party passage votes has almost no affect on public evaluations of Congress.

The majority party responds to these temporal dynamics by changing the types of policies it proposes and passes based on its electoral support. When the majority party is electorally strong, the House passes more partisan bills. As the majority party's electoral standing declines, bills become more moderate because the majority increasingly values bipartisanship over policy gains. These results strengthen when voters have more information about legislative activity, such as when bills are salient. Additionally, we find this relationship exists for the entirety of a congressional term, and is not conditioned by proximity to an election, consistent with the notion that the majority party is always sensitive to its electoral standing.

This research emphasizes the responsiveness of parties to public preferences for moderation and demonstrates how agenda control varies within a congressional term in response to the larger electoral environment. Majority parties are more likely to go it alone when they can afford to do so; when the majority instead prefers to increase its electoral standing, it will solicit support from the minority party. This strategic manipulation of the types of bills passed in the House is evidence for positive

agenda control by the majority party. More broadly, the theory and findings are consistent with policy change that is constrained by thermostatic public opinion. Despite winning elections due to promises of dramatic policy change, majority parties find public appetite for such change limited, and risk voter sanction for moving policy too far, too quickly (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002; Wlezien 1995). This research highlights the inherent tension between majority party policy success and electoral success; partisan majorities in Congress can produce dramatic policy change or maintain their popularity, but they cannot do both.

Agenda Access and Partisanship in the House

In a pure majoritarian legislature, the median can dictate policy outcomes (Black 1948; Downs 1957). Because the House only requires a majority for passage, any policy passed by the chamber should lie at the median's ideal point. The rules of the chamber, however, may enable majority party agenda control, allowing it to cartelize the agenda, prevent majoritarian outcomes from reaching the floor, and produce non-median policies (Anzia and Jackman 2012; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Cox, Kousser and McCubbins 2010). These policy outcomes distribute a greater share of the policy benefits to members of the majority party and help it cultivate a party brand by avoiding internally divisive votes through negative agenda control, and by enacting party-oriented legislation through positive agenda control. While the chamber median receives an outcome it prefers to the status quo, it does not receive policy at its ideal point. Crucially, this implies that policy produced by the House does not lie at the median's ideal point, and is more ideologically extreme than would otherwise be the case (without majority party agenda control).

Evidence for the majority party cartel focuses on negative agenda control as it is the easiest phenomenon to observe (Cox and McCubbins 2003, 2005). Very few bills lose on the floor, and very few bills "roll" the majority party, when a majority of the majority votes on the losing side. Majority roll rates on the House floor are less than 5% (and often less than 1%) within a congressional term (Cox and McCubbins 2002, 2005). Similar results have been shown in other institutional settings, and vary based on the extent to which institutional rules empower the majority party to control the agenda (Anzia and Jackman 2012; Cox, Kousser and McCubbins 2010). Positive agenda control, in which the majority party is able to push its policies through the House, is more difficult to measure, but there is some evidence the House majority is successful at bringing its preferred bills to the floor (Ballard

2022).

Majority party proposals to the floor will elicit more support from majority party members than minority party members because on average, these bills are located closer to the ideal points of members of the majority party. Because these bills are located away from the chamber median and toward the majority party median's ideal point, in many (most) situations, minority party members will prefer the status quo to the proposed policy. The collective benefit received from the majority party's positive agenda control is the proposal and passage of floor legislation that provides the largest possible electoral payoff for its members, regardless of the preferences of the minority (see Cox and McCubbins 1993, ch. 9).[5] Thus, congressional partisanship is endogenous to the policymaking strategies of the majority party (Flynn and Harbridge 2016), which uses its policymaking prerogative to secure policy and electoral payoffs for its members at the expense of the minority. That is, the parties themselves, especially through the majority's use of rules and committees to control floor proposal power, set the level of partisanship for a given vote. If the majority wants to enact bipartisan policy, it can do so by proposing a more moderate bill to the floor for which at least one minority party member prefers the proposed bill to the status quo. Even a strategic minority party, that withholds its members' votes in order to signal majority party extremity to voters, should eventually be sensitive to policy gains (i.e., the bill is moved close enough to the ideal points of minority party members to attract their votes). The majority party must determine the extent to which it values passage of its preferred, extreme policy or bipartisan signaling to voters.

Public Preferences on Partisanship

Partisan voting on legislation is an almost unavoidable by-product of majority party control of the agenda, but the public has little appetite for partisanship in Congress (Ramirez 2009). These feelings stem from voter aversion to conflict, a sense that disagreements are indicative of a body that refuses to act in the public interest, and opposition to the policy outcomes ultimately produced (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2002; Kimball and Patterson 1997). While voters profess to respect procedural fairness during the policy development process, their approval of it largely depends on the extent to which they receive their preferred outcomes (Doherty 2015). Given that most voters have only weak and inconsistent ideological beliefs (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), they use partisan-

[5]This assumes some reasonable distributional characteristics of the ideal points of the majority and minority parties, discussed in greater detail subsequently.

ship as a signal that congressional majorities are out-of-step with voter preferences (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2018).

As a result of voter distaste for partisanship, the majority party is caught between competing incentives. It must take care not to alienate voters by engaging in partisan lawmaking, but it must also work to implement its agenda in order to differentiate itself from the opposing party, give voters a clear electoral choice, and produce benefits for different constituencies and interest groups (American Political Science Association 1950; Fenno 1973; Mayhew 1974; Stratmann 1992). Fundamentally, the purpose of the majority party cartel is to solve collective action problems and build its brand through the passage of its preferred policies (Aldrich 1995; Butler and Powell 2014; Cox and Magar 1999; Cox and McCubbins 2005; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Smith 2007). Not only does enactment of the party's program distribute benefits to specific constituents, voters generally prefer active legislators and look disapprovingly on "do-nothing" legislatures (Andersen, Lassen and Nielsen 2020; Flynn and Harbridge 2016).

While parties have electoral incentives to enact their policy program, the nature of agenda control and differing preferences across party coalitions means that votes are frequently partisan, contrary to voter preferences for cooperation. There is strong empirical evidence that legislator partisanship engenders electoral punishment; lawmaker vote share declines as party voting increases and moderate voters evaluate legislators poorly when they are too partisan (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). Increased party unity reduces future party seat share in the House (Lebo, McGlynn and Koger 2007). Additionally, voter evaluations of individual members track approval of the parties and the institution as a whole, conditional on each party's and legislator's ideological proximity to voters (Algara 2021*b*; Bae and Algara Forthcoming; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Jones 2010).

Parties are rewarded for legislative accomplishments but punished for being overly partisan and must carefully balance these competing interests. According to "strategic party government" theory (SPG), parties attempt to minimize the marginal cost of achieving party unity while maximizing the marginal benefit that accrues to the party from legislative success (Lebo, McGlynn and Koger 2007). More broadly, parties attempt to engage in responsive policy implementation, while simultaneously achieving bipartisan compromise and passing policies close to individual voters' ideal points. These efforts are sometimes successful and sometimes not, and debates over the extent to which the majority should modify policy to satisfy members of the minority and reach bipartisan agreement is a recurring

theme in congressional deliberations. We develop a theory of how majority party agenda access shapes partisanship in voting. We also demonstrate the circumstances under which the majority party will prefer to realize more extreme policy gains instead of bipartisanship, and vice versa.

Dynamic Agenda Control and Bipartisanship

Within a congressional term, we assume the majority party controls agenda access using both negative and positive power, ensuring only its preferred policies reach the floor, and these policies have the support of a majority of majority party members. No such cartel exists for minority party members so on average—varying based on the distribution of minority member ideal points—a greater number of minority party members will oppose legislation which reaches the floor. The policies themselves disproportionately distribute the benefits of policymaking to majority party members.

Though the majority is able to pass its preferred policy because it limits agenda access of alternatives, majority party members near the median are worse off than they would otherwise be if the median had proposal and agenda power. These members would prefer more centrist policy (i.e., closer to the median's ideal point rather than the majority party median's ideal point, Jenkins and Monroe 2012). If these members defect and abandon the cartel, they lose the collective benefits associated with the majority party, but receive more policy benefits as the chamber adopts policies closer to the chamber median's ideal point. In addition to the collective benefits provided to these members, the majority party uses institutional and electoral resources as side-payments to induce some majority party members, who would otherwise prefer a more centrist policy, to support the party cartel instead. Importantly, these inducements are conceived of as fixed within a congressional term in order to maintain the cartel, rather than occurring on individual votes. Common forms of side-payments include campaign finance support, assignment to preferred committees, and support for a legislator's sponsored bills (Cann 2008; Kanthak 2007, 2009).

For an individual bill, the majority party exercises its agenda power to propose a policy (sq') that it prefers to the status quo. Cartel theory characterizes the majority party's preference as lying at the party median (P) such that $sq' = P$. The proposal will receive a majority of floor support if it is closer to the chamber median (C) than the status quo, $|C - sq'| < |C - sq|$. If the proposal is farther from the median than the status quo, the proposed policy will be rejected by the median and fail to pass unless the majority party has successful bought-off the median (and other majority party members

with ideal points close to the median) using side-payments. Relaxing the assumption that the majority party median makes a proposal at its ideal point, it receives utility equal to the policy distance from its ideal point to the proposal, or $U_P = -|P - sq'|$ (assuming a linear loss function).[6]

From this basic model, we theorize the majority party median receives additional electoral-based benefits from bipartisanship. We define bipartisanship as a situation in which at least one member of the minority party votes for the majority party's proposal. This occurs if the distance from the minority party member with an ideal point closest to the majority party's proposal (N) prefers the proposal to the status quo, or $|N - sq'| < |N - sq|$. The majority party could offer non-policy based inducements within a congressional term to minority party members in exchange for their vote, but minority party members are not members of the cartel and hence excluded from side-payments. On an individual bill, the majority could engage in vote-buying of minority party members, though this is unlikely as the majority party has few resources of interest to minority party members (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

While the majority party in the House does not *need* minority party votes in order to pass its preferred policy, in some cases it may *want* minority party votes as a signal of legislative moderation and to improve its standing with voters. We characterize the electoral benefits from voters as b, where $1 \leq b \geq 0$. Thus, from passage of sq', the majority party median receives a payoff equal to the distance between its proposal and the status quo, plus b if at least one member of the minority party votes for the proposal, or $U_P(bipartisan) = -|sq' - sq| + b$. When the minority party member closest to the proposal, N, does not vote for the bill ($|N - sq'| > |N - sq|$), the majority party median receives only the benefits from the policy, $U_P(partisan) = -|sq' - sq|$.

Because b is positive, the majority party median always prefers a bill receive bipartisan support, all else equal. If at least one minority party member is closer to the majority party median than the status quo, the majority party simply proposes a bill at its ideal point and receives both its preferred policy and benefits from bipartisanship $U_P = P + b$.[7] Many bills have overlapping ideal point distributions of majority and minority party members. In these cases, the majority party median proposes and passes a bill at its ideal point while also receiving minority party votes. Commemorative bills often pass with near unanimity, but even legislation dealing with high profile and salient issues are frequently passed with large, bipartisan majorities (Curry and Lee 2019).

[6]We assume a proposal made not at the party median's ideal point is closer to the chamber median than the party medians ideal point. There is no reason for the median to propose a policy off its ideal point and farther from the chamber median than its own ideal point because the median is both worse off on policy and must expend more side-payments to the median.

[7]Note that $P = 0$ so utility to the party median is equal to b in this case.

The more interesting case is when no minority party member has an ideal point closer to the majority party median than the status quo. When this is true, no minority party member will vote for the majority party's proposal and the bill will pass the chamber, but on a strictly partisan vote. If the majority party wants to receive benefits from bipartisanship, it faces a decision about the type of policy to propose (and pass). It can pursue a moderate policy that may not lie at its own ideal point and receive benefits from bipartisanship, or it can pass a partisan policy at its own ideal point.

Attracting minority party support requires the majority to make a proposal that is closer to the status quo and away from the majority party median's ideal point, making the bill more moderate. Let $\overline{sq'}$ be the proposal equal to the majority party median's ideal point ($P = \overline{sq'}$). If the majority chooses to moderate its proposal and move it toward the chamber median, it offers $\underline{sq'}$ where $U_P(\overline{sq'}) > U_P(\underline{sq'})$. Because both proposals are compared to the status quo, the relevant comparison for the majority party median is the difference in utility between the proposal at their ideal point and the proposal closer to the minority party member plus the benefits from bipartisanship. The majority party chooses to make a bipartisan proposal if $|\overline{sq'} - sq| < |\underline{sq'} - sq| + b$, and a partisan proposal otherwise.

This model allows us to characterize situations in which the majority party median will make a proposal that attracts minority party support. The majority party prefers the bipartisan proposal if the electoral benefits outweigh the loss in utility from moderating the policy, $b > -|\overline{sq'} - \underline{sq'}|$, most likely to be true when benefits from bipartisanship, b, are high. Alternatively, if the differences between the majority party median's ideal point and the offer necessary to attract minority party support are small, a bipartisan offer is more likely to be made.

These dynamics frequently occur in a congressional term on the most substantively important and divisive issues. Controversial or polarizing agenda items produce ideal point distributions in which the majority party could choose to pass a bill without minority party support. In these cases, the majority successfully passes significant policy change, dramatically moving the status quo, but sends a partisan, extreme signal to voters. If the majority places high value on bipartisanship, policy change will not be as dramatic but will be more consensual. The theory also explains why parties spend significant time and effort negotiating with members of the minority on legislation. If at least one member of the minority has an ideal point close to the majority party's ideal point the majority can achieve bipartisanship and receive most of the policy benefits.

Notably, we do not need to assume that at least one member of the minority party lies on the same side of the status quo as the majority party median. It is possible, however unlikely, that the majority

party median makes a proposal that leaves it worse off on policy than it is under the status quo in order to receive benefits from bipartisanship. In this case, the majority would offer sq' slightly closer to the minority party, and on the opposite side of the status quo from its own ideal point, in order to receive b. We consider it far more likely that strategic proposals by the majority occur when at least one member of the minority party lies on the same side of the status quo, however.

Majority Party Policy Proposals and Minority Party Responses

We address two complications with the theory. First, we characterize bipartisanship as occurring when at least one member of the minority party votes with the majority. Given the trade-off between policy benefits and bipartisanship, the majority party should place the location of the bill at the point which attracts only one member of the minority party to vote for the bill. Specifically, the bill should be located at the ideal point of the minority party member closest to the majority party median's ideal point (and on the same side of the status quo as the majority party median). This offer allows the majority to receive benefits from bipartisanship and maximize the distribution of policy benefits to its own members.

Yet, virtually no bills are passed with only one minority party vote (162 votes out of 7,162 included in our sample had either zero or one minority party members voting in favor of the bill). We offer two possible explanations for this outcome. First, the majority party may believe voters are sufficiently informed about the dynamics of passage that they reward the majority party for the level of bipartisanship rather than *whether* a bill is bipartisan or not. If this is true, the basic findings of the model hold, but the majority party can achieve greater benefits by receiving more support from minority party members (i.e., making the bill more moderate).

Alternatively, the majority party may not have sufficient information on minority party members' preferences to place the bill at the precise ideological location within the policy space which attracts only a single minority party member. That is, observed minority party support may be a function of the majority moderating policy in an imprecise manner that attracts more votes than would be the case if it had perfect information on minority party legislators' preferences. This possibility is consistent with the theory and offers an explanation for the observed distribution of minority party support across all bills in the dataset.

Relatedly, we consider the possibility that minority party members may strategically withhold their vote even if they prefer the majority party's proposal to the status quo. The minority party (collectively)

has incentives to seek moderation of the bill so it should seek to misrepresent the ideal points of its members to moderate policy while also denying the majority party bipartisanship. While the minority party leadership may prefer individual members not vote for the majority party's bill in order to deny the majority party benefits from bipartisanship, the minority has no way of coercing this behavior. The minority party could offer side-payments to induce minority party opposition to the policy, but the minority does not enforce a cartel, allowing minority party members to vote based on policy preferences only (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

The minority could also engage in vote-buying on individual votes, but the dynamics for the minority party become similar to those for the majority: it must decide how many resources to spend on individual votes based on the value it receives from damaging the majority party's brand. Evidence for such behavior is weak. High roll rates and less party cohesion in the congressional minority are well-documented (Jenkins and Monroe 2016). While we believe vote-buying by the minority to prevent bipartisanship unlikely, the empirical effect of this would be to produce a null relationship in our empirical tests.

Empirical Predictions for Bipartisanship and Congressional Approval

A maintained assumption of the theory is that voters care about bipartisanship and reward the majority party for passing legislation supported by members of both parties. Voters hold beliefs that value comity and compromise and see bipartisanship as a signal of moderation. We conduct an empirical test of this assumption, examining whether an increase in bipartisanship increases overall approval of Congress. Congressional approval is a coarser measure of voter responsiveness to partisanship than a direct measure of majority party approval but there is substantial evidence voters are not sufficiently informed to assign blame, via survey measures, directly to the majority party for partisanship. Instead, voters lower their evaluation of the entire institution, which disproportionately affects majority party electoral prospects (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Kimball 2005; McDermott and Jones 2003).

Proposition 1: An increase in House partisanship at time t will decrease voter approval of Congress at time $t+1$.

Proposition 1 characterizes voter support as decreasing given increasing partisanship, but the theory characterizes the majority party as receiving benefits, b, if at least one member of the minority party votes for the majority party's proposal. As a result, the majority party should make proposals that

attract only one minority party member, yet this is not observed in the data. One explanation is that the majority party receives more benefits from bipartisanship as the percentage of the minority party voting in favor increases. That is, bipartisanship has a continuous effect on voter approval rather than a dichotomous effect where b is not fixed at a given time, but increases as the proposal attracts more minority party support.

We investigate whether voters reward majority parties for the level of bipartisanship, and whether the relationship between electoral support and minority party support is linearly increasing. We also investigate possible non-linear relationships between the two. Voters may reward the majority party only for a baseline level of bipartisanship, and additional movement toward minority party members' ideal points does not provide additional benefits. Put differently, there are diminishing marginal returns to the majority party for increased bipartisanship past some threshold of minority party support. Another possibility is that voter benefits to bipartisanship increase exponentially such that the majority receives relatively small increases in voter support at low levels of bipartisanship, but at high levels voter support increases more dramatically.

The relationship depends on how voters process information about bipartisanship. If they learn only that a bill is bipartisan, they will reward parties in a discontinuous manner, for having a minority party member vote for the majority's proposal or not. If voters learn about the number or percentage of minority party members voting for a bill (and value that information), they reward the majority party for increasing minority party support. Information about the degree of bipartisanship is provided provided through the media or elected officials themselves and voters must use this information to differentiate between different types of bipartisanship (i.e., those with minimal minority party support and those with high minority party support).

Given the dearth of literature on this question, we do not have strong prior beliefs about the type of relationship between bipartisanship and voter approval. Proposition 2 broadly characterizes the relationship as non-linear. We have weak expectations that voters reward the majority part for increasing bipartisanship up to a point, then the majority party suffers from decreasing marginal returns, but we investigate a number of different functional forms. If the majority party is rewarded only for bipartisanship and not increasing bipartisanship, it is evidence that the majority party attracts more minority party support than necessary because of incomplete information about the ideal points of minority party members.

Proposition 2: The relationship between House partisanship at time t and voter approval at time $t+1$

will be characterized by a non-linear relationship.

Empirical Expectations for Majority Party Electoral Strength and Bipartisanship

The main empirical implication of the model is that when the value of bipartisanship increases, or when the distance between the majority party median's ideal point and an acceptable proposal decreases, the majority party median will bring more moderate policies to the chamber floor.[8] We focus exclusively on final passage bills, where votes consider the majority's policy proposal in final form and are assumed to be an expression of a legislator's true preference (Roberts and Smith 2003). Procedural votes, used to transact the business of the chamber, are often not majority party proposals and tend to be highly partisan (Ryan 2022; Theriault 2008).[9]

The location of a bill in the ideological space cannot be directly measured *a priori* (Peress 2013; Smith 2007), but it can be inferred from the percentage of the minority party voting for the bill. Assuming that members of each party are distributed along a single-dimension ideological scale, with the Democratic median to the left of the Republican median, vote totals from each party can be used as a proxy for the ideological location of a bill (Krehbiel 1998; Riker 1962).[10] As a bill becomes more moderate, minority party support and bipartisanship on final passage votes should increase. Minority party support is measured using the percentage of the minority party voting in favor, and bipartisanship is measured using the proportion of votes which are party unity, in which a majority of each party votes against each other (Brady, Cooper and Hurley 1979; Carson et al. 2010; Sinclair 1977).

The majority party's valuation of bipartisanship at a given point in the congressional term depends on their current electoral standing. More vulnerable majorities will prefer to improve their standing with voters and be more willing to reduce the total policy gains distributed to individual members. Thus, we expect electorally strong majorities to produce more partisan bills.

Hypothesis 1: Greater electoral support for the majority party at time t will decrease minority party support on final passage votes at time $t+1$.

Hypothesis 2: Greater electoral support for the majority party at time t will increase the proportion

[8] The distance between an acceptable proposal to the minority and the majorty party median's ideal point is itself based on whether a minority party member has an ideal point close to the majority party median.

[9] These include the motion to order the previous question, the motion to adjourn, etc., which are theoretically distinct from passage votes.

[10] There is substantial evidence this distributional assumption holds in Congress, e.g., Poole and Rosenthal (2007).

of party unity votes on final passage votes at time $t+1$.

We expect a null relationship for majority party support because members of the majority are largely insensitive to policy movement as these members will almost always lie closer to the proposal than the status quo. Even for majority party members who prefer the status quo, they have received side-payments to maintain the cartel and vote for policy they might not otherwise prefer.

Voter Information and Partisan Voting

The claim that voters evince lower support for parties as partisanship increases depends on the assumption that voters are able to effectively monitor the actions of the majority party. That is, if voters are unable to identify votes as partisan or not, the majority party will be less responsive to possible electoral sanction because the value received from bipartisanship will be small. In general, evaluations of voter sophistication reveal that the public is largely uninformed and unaware of basic government functions or activities (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lupia 1994), yet, there is substantial evidence that legislators are punished by voters for diverging from their preferences and for being too extreme or partisan (Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart 2001; Binder, Maltzman and Sigelman 1998; Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Erikson 1990; Jessee 2009; Peskowitz 2017; Shor and Rogowski 2018). Much of the literature focuses on conditions under which constituents are able to engage in better monitoring of elected officials, which increases constraints and results in improved representation (Kalt and Zupan 1990). To examine the conditionality of the relationship between electoral strength and partisan floor proposals, we identify two conditions in which more information on majority party behavior is likely to be conveyed to voters, increasing legislator constraints, and producing divergent effects between majority party electoral standing and proposal partisanship.

The first is when congressional elections are more proximate. As elections approach, voters have more incentives to gather information and increase their knowledge of the candidates and parties (Gelman and King 1993). Campaigns also play an important activation role, providing voters with information about candidates and issue positions, and triggering latent partisan or ideological beliefs (Lenz 2009). Because voters are more likely to respond to partisan bills near an election, the majority party will be more sensitive to their electoral standing and the corresponding effect on bill partisanship will be strengthened.

Hypothesis 3: The effect of electoral support for the majority party at time t *on minority party*

support on final passage votes at time $t+1$ will increase as proximity to an election increases.

Hypothesis 4: The effect of electoral support for the majority party at time t on the proportion of party unity votes at time $t+1$ will increase as proximity to an election increases.

Similarly, voters are more attuned to the passage process and policy extremity of important, controversial, and otherwise salient bills, and legislators are punished to a greater extent on these bills for being "out of step" with their constituents (Carson et al. 2010; Nyhan et al. 2012). Press coverage, unfamiliar issues, and issue salience all positively affect the ability of constituents to monitor elected officials (Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Snyder and Stromberg 2010). Thus, we expect a positive conditional effect of bill salience on the relationship between majority party electoral standing and minority party support and bipartisanship

Hypothesis 5: The effect of electoral support for the majority party at time t on minority party support on final passage votes at time $t+1$ will increase as bill salience increases.

Hypothesis 6: The effect of electoral support for the majority party at time t on the proportion of party unity votes at time $t+1$ will increase as bill salience increases.

Sample Selection and Time Aggregation

Our main dependent variables of interest measure the ideological location of majority party policy proposals (bills) within the House of Representatives, as operationalized by minority party voting percentage in favor and whether the vote on the bill was a party unity vote. The sample is limited to votes on initial passage in the House (before negotiations with the Senate), or on final passage. Vote totals for each party come from the PIPC dataset (Crespin and Rohde N.d.), which characterizes the following types of passage votes: final passage/adoption of a bill, final passage/adoption of conference report, final passage/adoption of resolution, final passage/adoption of joint resolution, final passage/adoption of a bill under suspension of the rules, final passage/adoption of a joint resolution under suspension of the rules, final passage/adoption of a resolution under suspension of the rules.[11]

For a given vote, we find the percentage of Republicans and Democrats voting in favor of the question (i.e., "yea"), equal to all yes votes divided by total votes, within each party. Each party is coded into majority and minority status. party unity votes are defined within the PIPC data and occur when a majority of the majority party votes against a majority of the minority party. Votes are included

[11] PIPC codes 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 19. Though passing a bill or resolution under suspension of the rules requires a 2/3 majority and thus requires that the bill be bipartisan, we include these votes because excluding them would select for the most partisan or controversial legislation.

from 1991 (102nd Congress) to 2019 (116th Congress).

Aggregating Votes Over Time

The theory predicts changes in majority party behavior within a congressional term based on electoral standing. As a result, the data structure is a moving time-series using final passage votes and the two measures of bill bipartisanship inferred from vote totals. We aggregate vote totals to the quarterly level and within each quarter find the average majority and minority party support on bills and the average number of party unity votes, out of all final passage votes. Because partisanship is at the vote-level, an increase in minority party support indicates that on average within a given quarter, final passage votes received a greater share of support from minority party members. Our empirical models control for the total number of votes taken within a quarterly time-period.

The advantage of a longer time-series such as quarterly (rather than weekly or monthly) is that more votes occur within a given quarter and the time variables are less sensitive to a particular vote, producing more stability in the variables. The advantage of a shorter time-series is that it is able to capture smaller and more transitory perturbations in congressional approval or majority party electoral support, though the shorter time period is subject to more imprecision. Results in the main body use the quarterly time period data, though they are largely robust to using monthly time periods (shown in the Appendix).

Figure 1 shows the temporal distribution of our aggregate vote partisanship with a loess regression line to articulate the temporal curve for both the majority and minority parties. Higher values indicate higher average support for a given party for passage votes within that quarter. For the minority party, higher values indicate greater bipartisanship within a quarter.[12] Thus, a score of 100 indicates that, on average for a quarter, all legislators of a given party voted for all legislative proposals on passage. Since the majority party are first-movers with a monopolization of both positive and negative agenda setting powers, we expect face validity of our measure to show far greater support on passage roll call votes for the majority party in comparison to the minority party.

Unsurprisingly, the minority party is far less supportive of legislation subject to final passage than the majority party. The average level of support for the minority party (i.e., percentage of the minority party voting in favor of passage) is 71% while average support for the majority party is 95%. Figure

[12] A missing score for a given temporal period reflects a lack of roll-call votes during that temporal period.

Figure 1: Party Support on Passage Roll-Call Votes By Party, 1991-2019

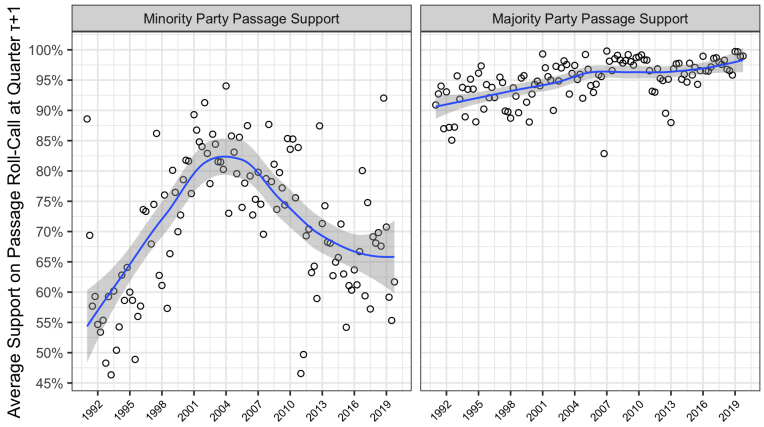


Figure 1 presents the degree of bipartisanship in the form of average percentage of legislators in a given party voting affirmative on final passage votes in the U.S. Congress over the course of the quarterly time-series. As such, higher values indicate *more bipartisanship* for the minority party and *more partisanship* for the majority party.

1 also shows far more partisan variation within the minority party relative to the majority party.[13] As the right panel of Figure 1 shows, the majority party is overwhelmingly united on final passage votes over time, with little fluctuation in the degree of party unity. The standard deviation for the majority party is 4% over the course of the quarterly time-series, while it is 12% for the minority party, as shown in the left panel of Figure 1. Combined, these patterns suggest that the majority party may strategically propose and pass more moderate bills which elicit greater support from the minority party, while majority party members are almost always overwhelmingly supportive of the passage agenda of majority party leaders (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

Another way to conceptualize legislative extremity or moderation in the U.S. House is through the proportion of passage roll-calls in which a majority of the majority party votes against a majority of the minority party (i.e., the proportion of party unity votes). Figure 2 presents shows the proportion of party unity votes by quarters in the U.S. House from 1991 to 2019. Low values indicate fewer passage votes within a quarter were party unity votes, while high values indicate complete roll-call divergence between the parties in a given quarter, with majority party legislators voting as a unified bloc against the position of a unified bloc of minority party legislators. There are clear temporal trends, with party unity votes more common in the 1990s and after 2007, while the period from 2001 to 2006 featured greater bipartisanship. Taken together, our roll-call based measures present clear variation in the degree of final passage support between the two parties and overall partisanship within the chamber.

[13]Note that Figures 1 & 2 possess missing data for only one out of the 116 quarters from Q1 1991 to Q4 2019, Q4 1996, due to a lack of final passage votes during this temporal period.

Figure 2: Proportion of Party Unity Passage Roll-Call Votes, 1991-2019

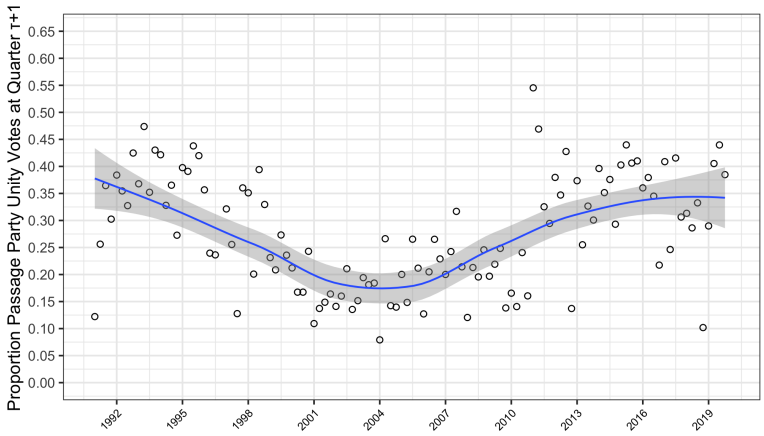


Figure 2 presents the proportion of the roll-call agenda constituting on passage votes in the U.S. Congress over the course of the quarterly time-series. Greater values indicate greater proportion of final passage roll-calls being classified as party unity votes in which a majority of the majority party votes against a majority of the minority party.

Measuring Electoral Strength

Our main theoretical claim is that lower public support for the majority party will motivate greater bipartisanship as the majority will make policy concessions in an attempt to improve their electoral standing among voters. This claim depends on the assumption that voters dislike partisanship and prefer parties compromise. To empirically evaluate these assertions, we require a temporal measure of the mass public's perceptions of the Congress, as a whole, and of the electoral standing of the majority party. Drawing on previous work, we find two common approaches to measuring how the mass public perceives the job performance of the congressional majority. First, scholars traditionally turn to congressional approval as a measure of the mass public's support for the congressional majority given that the congressional majority is responsible for agenda setting responsibilities and the ideological orientation of policy ultimately passed (for evidence of this assumption see Algara 2021*b*; Kimball and Patterson 1997). As previously discussed, the public has difficulty directly assigning blame to the majority party , but congressional approval as a quasi-measure of majority party support is validated in previous work showing that greater congressional approval correlates with more pronounced electoral gains for the congressional majority at the voter and aggregate levels(Algara 2021*a*; Jones 2010).

Our second measure, the majority party's support on the generic ballot, is intended to capture the majority party's perception of its own electoral standing. Unlike voters, the majority party is sufficiently sophisticated to directly evaluate likely election outcomes, and there is substantial evidence

both parties are keenly aware of how they are likely to perform. The parties use private polling, actively engage in the campaign process, and coordinate with outside interest groups and party-oriented institutions. While congressional approval measures voters' perceptions of Congress, the generic ballot is a better reflection of the parties' perceptions of their electoral support.

Used by both scholars and pundits seeking to assess the electoral dynamics of control of Congress (Algara 2023; Bafumi, Erikson and Wlezien 2010; Moore and Saad 1997), the generic congressional ballot question typically asks voters which party's candidate they would prefer if elections for Congress was held at the time of the question being asked (Moore and Saad 1997). As such, the poll is "generic" in that it measures partisan preference in the upcoming congressional election rather than asking about specific candidates or races, with the resulting generic congressional ballot measure providing a preference for the majority party relative to the minority party. In a similar fashion as congressional approval, previous work validates the generic congressional ballot by showing that this measure is highly predictive of the ultimate aggregate seat performance won by the majority party (e.g., Algara 2023; Bafumi, Erikson and Wlezien 2010; Kastellec, Gelman and Chandler 2008) and even of preceding incumbent retirements incurred by the majority party (Wolak 2007).

We collect aggregate survey marginal data on (1) congressional approval and (2) the generic congressional ballot. With respect to the first measure of congressional approval we turn to the survey marginals collected by Bae and Algara (Forthcoming), which represents the universe of survey poll marginal data from the *Roper Center* measuring the job approval of the U.S. Congress. To our knowledge, this standing dataset of congressional approval survey marginals represents the most comprehensive data assessing the mass public's attitudes on congressional job performance in the literature. This dataset yields 1,669 survey marginals measuring how the mass public regarded the job performance of their national legislature beginning in 1974 and ending in September 2021. With respect to the second measure of the generic congressional ballot, we turn to the survey marginals collected by Algara (2023), which also represents the universe of survey poll marginal data from the *Roper Center* measuring the mass public's preference for the majority or minority party candidate in a given upcoming congressional election.[14] This dataset, which represents the most comprehensive portrait of the mass public's preference for partisan control of Congress, relies on 3,956 nationally representative survey marginals from multiple outlets from 1959 to 2020 and over 30 election cycles.[15]

[14]The Roper Center data is supplemented with survey marginals collected by *Real Clear Politics* in latter cycles.

[15]This dataset begins with 1959 since this is the first year in which the generic ballot was asked on a consistent enough basis to generate a monthly or quarterly time-series.

To develop the two temporal variables measuring public support of the congressional majority, we turn to Stimson's (1998) *dyad ratios* latent variable to identify shared variance across differently worded surveys measuring either congressional approval or the generic ballot. Akin to factor analysis, the *dyad ratios* latent variable model allows for the estimation of a smoothed time-series of the latent variable of interest from survey marginals produced by varying methods, sampling, and question wording by survey organizations (McGann 2014). In other words, this latent estimation approach allows us to create a dynamic single measure of (1) congressional approval and the (2) majority party's support on the generic congressional ballot leveraging the entire universe of survey questions from various pollsters that differ in how they measure these concepts, the samples they draw upon, and the specific survey methodology they use. We specify a total of two *dyad ratios* latent variable models measuring (1) congressional approval and (2) majority party support on the generic ballot at the quarterly level. We estimate the entire time-series and present the results of our subsetted temporal period of interest in Figure 3.[16]

Figure 3: Latent Trend in Mass Public's Perception of Congressional Majority Party, 1991-2019

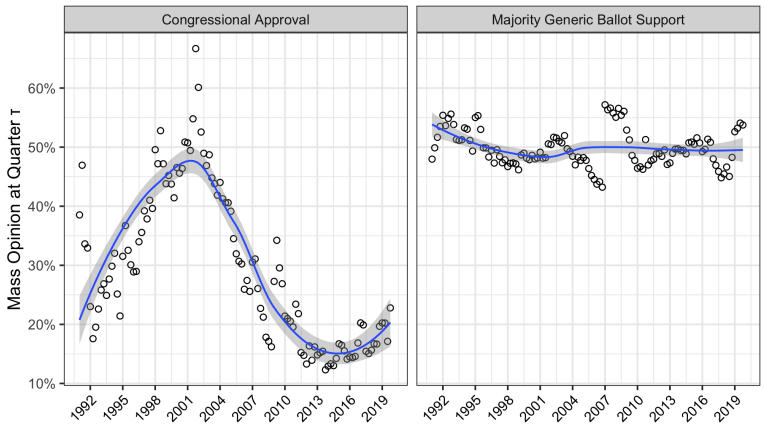


Figure 3 presents the latent estimated time-series from dyad-ratios models estimated at the quarterly level (Stimson 2018). Latent time-series estimated from $N = 1,669$ and $N = 3,956$ nationally representative survey marginals measuring congressional approval and the congressional generic ballot collected from the *Roper Center*.

As Figure 3 shows, there is variation in the mass public's support of Congress overall and the congressional majority. As other scholars document, we find that Congress enjoyed relatively higher approval ratings in the latter 1990's than in the contemporary period from 2013 to 2020 (Algara 2021*a*; Griffin 2011). Moreover, we also replicate the finding that Congress enjoyed a rally of public support

[16]The results of our latent variable estimation suggests a high degree of validity in our scaling procedure despite stark variation in polling method, survey organization, and sample size, with each quarterly and monthly latent variable model explaining at least 80% of the variance in the latent congressional approval or generic ballot variable.

following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, consistent with other national institutions such as the presidency (Stimson 2004). There is a healthy degree of variation in the public's perception of congressional job performance with a standard deviation of about 13%. Reflecting the highly competitive nature congressional elections following the 1994 Republican Revolution (Lee 2009), the mean of the majority party's support on the generic ballot is about 50%, with a standard deviation of 3%. This series also contains a high degree of external validity, with the lowest level of majority party support occurring in the fourth quarter of 2006, when Republicans received only 43% support prior to losing their majorities in the House and Senate during the 2006 midterms.[17] By contrast, Democrats received the highest level of majority party support, 57% in the first quarter of 2007 and 58% in the first quarter of 2009, immediately before and after massive Democratic electoral gains. Moreover, the correlation between congressional approval and the majority party lead's in the generic congressional ballot is -0.11 in the quarterly series, suggesting that each outcome captures distinct facets of congressional majority support.

Estimation Strategy

To evaluate our testable implications, we specify a lagged dependent variable (LDV) OLS regression model at the quarterly level. This single equation model takes the following functional form:

$$y_{t+1} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 y_t + \beta_i x_t + \beta_k k_c + \varepsilon_t \tag{1}$$

where y_t is the value of the dependent variable at time $t+1$, α_1 is the relationship between the dependent variable at time $t+1$ and the lagged dependent variable at time t, β_i is the estimated relationship between our lagged quarterly level explanatory variables $x1_t$ and the change in our dependent variable of interest at time $t+1$ y_t , and β_i is a vector of coefficients capturing the estimated relationships between a vector of lagged control variables measured at the congressional biennium level k_c.

Each specified model includes a vector of lagged control variables. These include presidential approval coded in the direction of the majority party, the number of passage roll-call votes taken during that temporal quarter, the ideological policy mood of the mass public, consumer sentiment, GDP growth per capita, change in majority party status, and the number of quarterly periods until

[17] To that point, Republicans lost 32 seats in the House and 6 seats in the Senate during the 2006 midterms.

the next general election.[18] We also include a vector of Congress-specific control variables known to correlate with our key outcome variables of interest: ideological heterogeneity in the majority and minority parties; ideological polarization (distance) between the two congressional parties, and the presence of divided partisan control of federal policymaking institutions. The ideology variables are measured using DW-NOMINATE scores, with polarization equal to the distance between the party medians and heterogeneity equal to the within party standard deviation. We estimate our models in a simple bivariate form—which only includes our lagged outcome variable and explanatory variable of interest estimating β_i—and the fully specified form. All models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Testing Propositions: Bipartisanship & Congressional Approval in the U.S. House

To evaluate the two propositions, we model congressional approval as a function of the degree of partisanship found in the U.S. House and assess whether this relationship is characterized by a non-linear relationship. We specify our baseline model articulated in equation 1 with the outcome variable taking the form of congressional approval in two distinct ways: (1) the first model leverages majority and minority average support within a quarter as two distinct explanatory variables and (2) the second model leverages the measure of overall partisanship using the proportion of party unity votes in the House. To evaluate the second proposition (the relationship between House partisanship at time t and congressional approval at time $t+1$ is non-linear), we estimate a number of different functional forms, using minority party support squared and logged. If the relationship is non-linear, there will be a significant relationship between one of these independent variables and congressional approval.

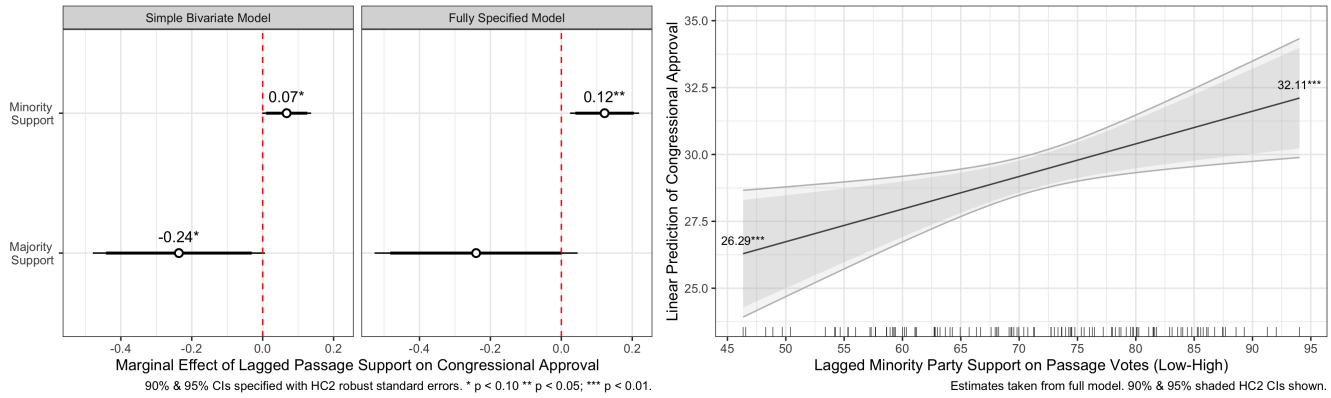
Evidence for Proposition 1 is shown in Figure 4 in the form of marginal effects and linear predictions for both the bivariate and fully specified models. Figure 4A, shows that greater minority support at time t correlates with higher congressional approval at time $t+1$. By contrast, we do not find evidence in the fully specified model that majority party support on final passage correlates with higher congressional approval, suggesting that the majority is rewarded with higher congressional approval only when it can elicit support from minority party legislators. Figure 4B shows the predicted value of congressional approval at time $t+1$ over observed values of minority party support at time t. At the lowest value of quarterly minority support in which 46.34% of minority party legislators vote for

[18] We code presidential approval in the direction of the congressional majority, with this value taking presidential approval during a co-partisan president and this value taking presidential disapproval during an opposing partisan president such that positive values indicates a more favorable assessment of presidential performance for the majority party. Note that we estimate presidential approval using the *dyad ratios* model from 6,050 nationally representative polls measuring presidential approval from the *Roper Center*.Please see the appendix for a complete list of the coding scheme of our control variables.

Figure 4: Relationship between House Passage Support$_t$ & Congressional Approval$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

(a) Marginal Effects: Party-Specific Support

(b) Linear Predictions: Party-Specific Support



(c) Marginal Effects: Chamber-Specific Partisanship

(d) Linear Predictions: Chamber-Specific Partisanship

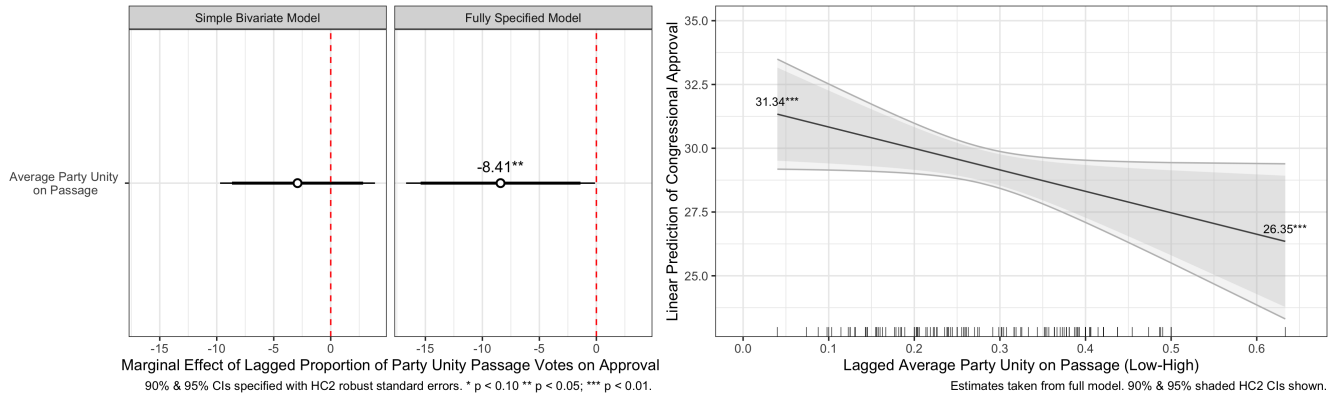


Figure 4 evaluates proposition 1 positing the effect of lagged passage roll-call support at time t on congressional approval at time $t+1$ in the form of marginal effects and linear predictions. Linear predictions are estimated from the full model. Significant marginal effects in the figure at $\rho < 0.10$ labelled and presented with 90% & 95% confidence intervals estimated from HC2 robust standard errors around our point estimates.

passage, the predicted value of congressional approval is at 26.29%. By contrast, at the highest value of average minority party support (94.03%), the predicted value of congressional approval rises to 32.11%, a significant first-difference rise of 5.82%.

Figure 4C, provides suggestive evidence in the fully specified model that more party unity votes within a quarter produce lower congressional approval. The substantive effect is shown in Figure 4D. When the proportion of party unity votes in the House is at its minimum of 0.04, predicted congressional approval is at 31.34%. This falls to 26.35% when party unity is at its maximum of 0.63, a significant first-difference decline in congressional approval of 5%.

Non-Linearity Between Partisanship and Congressional Approval

Though there is a relationship between partisanship and congressional approval, we investigate whether the majority party is rewarded for increased minority support in a linear manner, or whether

voters discount or reward high or low levels of bipartisanship (Proposition 2).

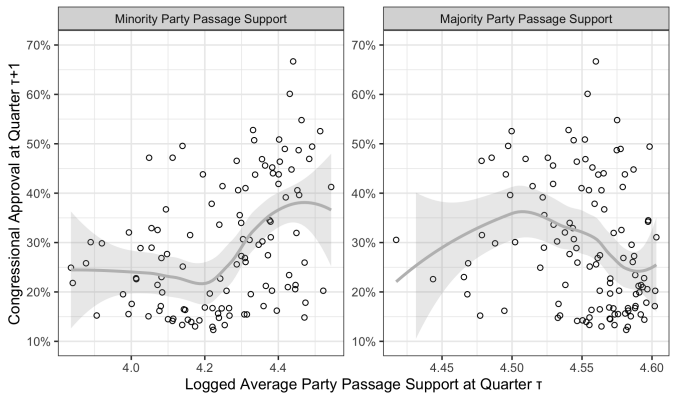
We estimate a set of models that replicate the four models testing Proposition 2 in Figure 4A, but square and log our key party-specific or chamber partisanship partisanship variables. The results are shown in Table A.2 in the Appendix. The squared terms of minority party support at time t are insignificant predictors of congressional approval at time $t+1$, as are the squared party unity votes variables. There is no evidence that the majority party receives a decreasing marginal increase in public approval as bipartisanship increases.

The logged terms in Table A.2 are statistically significant and in the predicted direction, indicating that voters do not substantially reward the majority party until a high level of minority party support is achieved. The converse is also true: a decrease in party unity voting does not produce increased congressional approval until the proportion of party unity votes decreases dramatically. Scatterplots of the relationship between logged minority party support in Figure 5A (left panel) and logged party unity voting in Figure 5B clearly show this relationship; when bipartisanship is low the Congress sees only a minimal increase in approval, but when bipartisanship reaches high values, congressional approval also increases dramatically.

Taken together, we find support for the assumption that Congress as a whole, and the majority party indirectly, is rewarded for passing more moderate bills. This suggests that the majority party can influence its own standing by strategically manipulating the degree of partisanship through its agenda control prerogative. We also find, however, that bills must be very bipartisan to receive voter rewards, giving the majority a substantial incentive to produce very moderate legislation. When the majority needs minority party support, it must make significant policy concessions to the minority.

Figure 5: Non-Linear Relationship between House Passage Support$_t$ & Congressional Approval$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

(a) Party-Specific Passage Support



(b) Chamber Passage party unity Voting

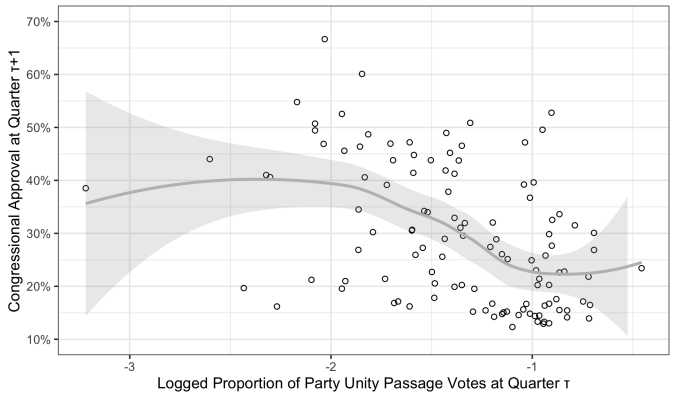


Figure 5 shows scatterplots with loess lines of logged minority party support (A, left panel) and congressional approval, and proportion of party unity votes (B) and congressional approval. Majority party support (A, right panel) included for comparison.

Additive Results: Majority Party Electoral Support & Dynamic Agenda Control

We now turn to evaluating our core hypotheses: greater electoral support for the majority party at time t will decrease bipartisanship on legislation at time $t+1$. To test these hypotheses, we respecify equation 1 with outcome variables of (1) minority party support on final passage votes (i.e., bipartisanship) and (2) the proportion of final passage votes that are party unity votes, both within a quarter. We evaluate each using a simple bivariate and fully specified model framework. We also use these models to predict majority party support on passage as a function of electoral support to provide for a placebo test of our theoretical framework, as we expect there to be no relationship between the two.

Figure 6A finds consistent support in the bivariate and fully specified models that increases in majority party electoral support, measured using the generic ballot, produces a decline in the proportion of the minority party voting in favor of bill passage. In the fully specified model the substantive effect

is equal to a 1.79% decline in the percentage of minority party legislators voting in favor of a proposal on passage during the following quarter for each 1% increase in the majority's generic ballot support. By contrast, we do not find consistent evidence that the majority's electoral support is substantively correlated with majority party support on final passage, indicating that the majority party is largely unified on final passage votes irrespective of the strength of the electoral brand (and insensitive to more moderate legislation).

Figure 6B, evaluates the magnitude of this relationship in substantive terms in the form of linear predictions. When the majority support on the generic ballot is at its lowest (43.2%), final passage votes attract support from about 82.6% of the minority. When majority support is at its highest (57.2%), final passage votes attract support from only 57.6% of minority legislators, a decline of 24.9% support from the minority party. These substantive results point to evidence for our hypothesis that majority parties that enjoy greater electoral support among the mass public make less ideological concessions to the minority party; instead they use their positive agenda power to pass bills that are increasingly distasteful for the minority. However, majorities that are electorally tenuous make ideological concessions to the minority on policy proposals in hopes of reaping the benefits of bipartisanship.

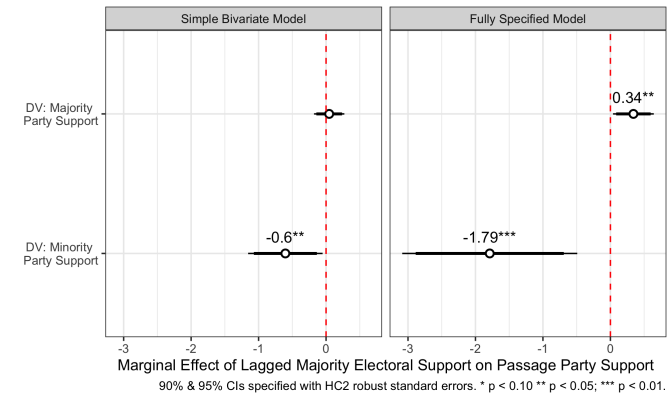
Figure 7 shows results for the models predicting party unity votes as a function of majority party electoral support (H_2). As Figure 7A shows, we find consistent evidence in both the simple and full models that an electorally strong majority results in an increase in party unity voting on final passage votes. In the fully specified model a 1% increase in majority support on the generic ballot increases the proportion of party unity votes by 0.018 in the U..S House, or about 2%. At the minimum value of majority party generic ballot support (43.2%), only about 16.6% of passage votes within a quarter are party unity votes, while at the maximum value (57.2%), about 42% of quarterly passage votes are party unity votes, (shown in Figure 7B). These results support H_2 and are consistent with the previous results examining minority party support.

Conditional Results: Does Voter Information Condition Bipartisanship?

In addition to the core hypotheses, we also posit that the relationship between the majority party's electoral brand and partisanship in Congress is conditioned on voter information. We examine two such situations in which the majority party is likely to be even more sensitive to its electoral standing: proximity to an election (H_3 and H_4) and when bills passed are salient or important (H_5 and H_6). As we

Figure 6: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Passage Support$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

(a) Marginal Effects



(b) Linear Predictions

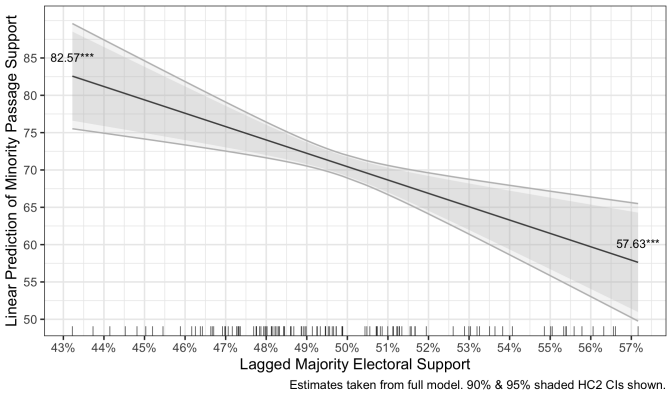


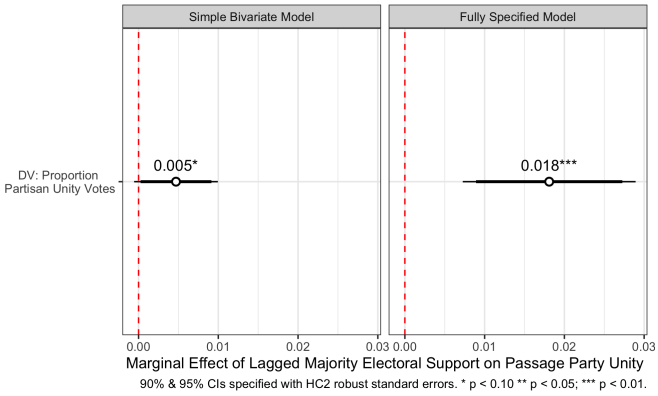
Figure 6 evaluates hypothesis 1 positing that greater electoral support for the majority party at time t correlates with a decrease in minority party support on final passage votes at time $t+1$. Linear predictions are estimated from the full model. Significant marginal effects in the figure at $\rho < 0.10$ labeled and presented with 90% & 95% confidence intervals estimated from HC2 robust standard errors around our point estimates.

note, scholars argue that campaigns activate information-seeking behavior among voters (Lenz 2009). Further, more salient bills receive greater media coverage and attention from legislators of both parties, making voters more aware of their effects. Both situations should strengthen the relationship between majority party electoral support and bill extremity.

Figure 8 evaluates both H_3 and H_4 by showing the estimated marginal effect of majority party electoral support on (1) minority support and (2) proportion of party unity votes over electoral proximity, measured as the number of quarters prior to the election. We estimate these conditional linear marginal effects through an interaction between majority electoral support and quarters to an election. As Figure 8A shows, we find no evidence that the marginal effect of majority party electoral support on minority party passage support varies by electoral proximity. Instead, the negative effect of majority party electoral support on minority party support is statistically significant across all time periods, inconsistent with H_3. We find a similar lack of support for H_4 in Figure 8B, which shows that increasing majority

Figure 7: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Unity Votes$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

(a) Marginal Effects



(b) Linear Predictions

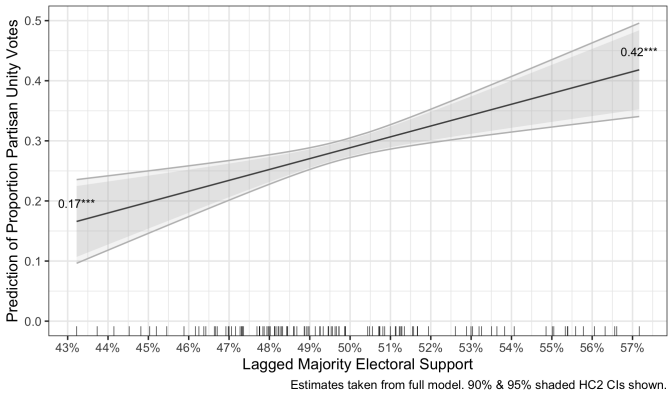


Figure 7 evaluates hypothesis 2 positing that greater electoral support for the majority party at time t correlates with an increase in the proportion of party unity passage votes at time $t+1$. Linear predictions are estimated from the full model. Significant marginal effects in the figure at $\rho < 0.10$ labelled and presented with 90% & 95% confidence intervals estimated from HC2 robust standard errors around our point estimates.

electoral support significantly correlates with an increase in party unity voting on final passage, independent of temporal proximity to the election. Substantively, these set of conditional marginal effects present a clear story: majorities make policy concessions to the minority when they are unpopular over all quarters within a Congress, independent of proximity to an election. These results are consistent with the notion of an electorally risk-averse majority party.

To test our second conditional relationship we take the full baseline models and interact them with our measure of quarterly bill salience, measured using Congressional Quarterly's (CQ) article lines written about a given bill receiving a roll-call passage vote (Baumgartner and Jones 2013). Because this is a bill-level measure, we aggregate it to the quarterly level from the first quarter of 1991 to the fourth quarter of 2010 (the period for which the data is available). The result is an aggregate measure of the salience of the roll-call passage agenda at the quarterly level. The distribution of the variable is skewed, with a substantial number of zeroes, so we bin the measure into two equal categories at

Figure 8: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Passage Support$_{t+1}$ By Electoral Proximity

(a) Marginal Effects: H_3 (b) Marginal Effects: H_4

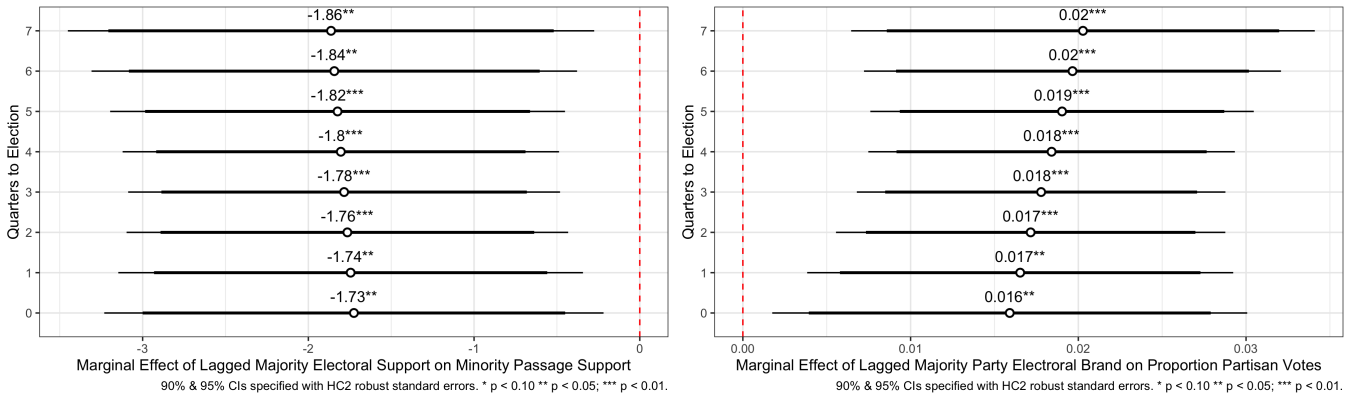


Figure 8 evaluates hypotheses 3 and 4 positing that the effect of majority electoral support on (1) minority party support and (2) proportion of party unity votes is conditional on temporal proximity to congressional elections. Significant marginal effects in the figure at $\rho < 0.10$ labelled and presented with 90% & 95% confidence intervals estimated from HC2 robust standard errors around our point estimates.

its mean, indicating if a given quarter observed "low bill salience" activity or "high bill salience" activity.[19] We interact this binned measure of bill salience with lagged majority electoral support at time t to estimate the marginal effect of majority electoral support on our outcome variables of interest over low and high values of legislative bill salience.

Figure 9A finds evidence for H_5 which suggests that the marginal effect of majority party electoral support at time t on minority party support on passage at time $t+1$ increases as bill salience is higher. The marginal effect of a 1% increase in the majority's electoral standing on the generic ballot correlates to a 1.57% decrease of minority party support on final passage during a quarter with low legislative bill salience compared to a -2.90% decrease during periods of high legislative salience. These two marginal effects are significantly distinct from each other ($\rho < 0.10$), suggesting that the marginal effect of majority party electoral support is significantly greater during periods in which the majority brings high salience legislation to the floor for passage compared to periods in which they bring relatively lower salience legislation to the floor.

Figure 9B presents congruent findings for the party unity outcome variable. In this model, the marginal effect of majority party electoral support on the proportion of party unity passage votes in a given quarter is insignificant during a quarter in which the majority brings low salience proposals to

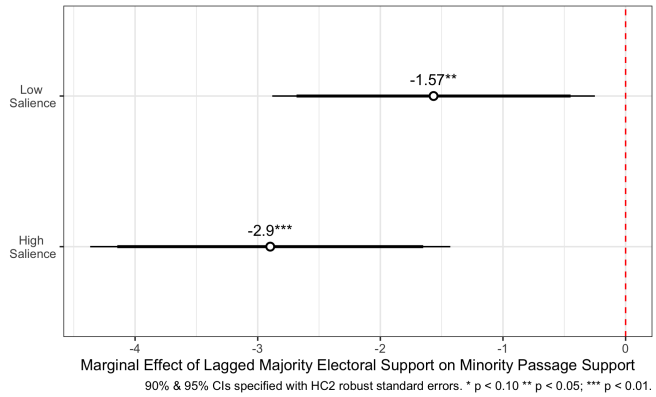
[19]Because of the structure of the dataset, there are relatively few observations. Binning into two categories is the most efficient use of the limited observations as additional bins produces too few observations (roughly 25 per bin) to make valid inferences.

the floor for passage. During quarters of high bill salience, the marginal effect of a 1% increase in majority party support on the generic ballot correlates with a significant increase of 2% in party unity passage votes.

Both of these results provide evidence for H_5 and H_6, that the policy salience of the roll-call passage agenda brought to the floor by the majority party leadership conditions the extent to which electoral support shapes minority party support and bipartisanship. Unpopular majorities can increase their electoral support by providing policy concessions to the minority party when they consider and pass particularly high salience legislative agendas on the floor.

Figure 9: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & party unity Voting$_{t+1}$ By Legislative Salience

(a) Marginal Effects: H_5



(b) Marginal Effects: H_6

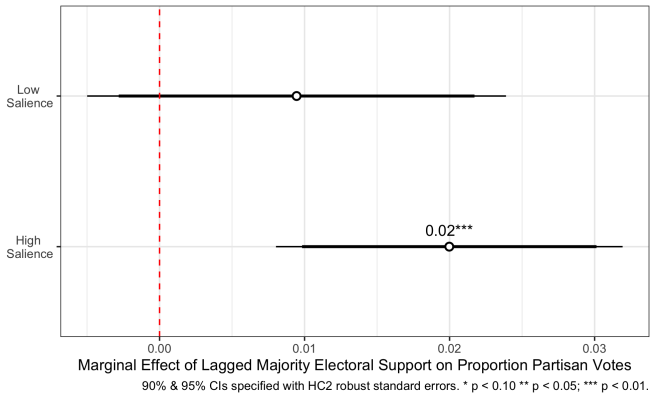


Figure 9 evaluates hypotheses 5 and 6 positing that the effect of majority electoral support on (1) minority partisanship and (2) overall chamber partisanship is conditional on legislative salience. Significant marginal effects in the figure at $\rho < 0.10$ labelled and presented with 90% & 95% confidence intervals estimated from HC2 robust standard errors around our point estimates.

Conclusion

Rather than treating congressional partisanship as a fixed output of the passage process, we explore how the majority strategically sets the level of partisanship. When the majority wants to increase its standing with voters, it uses its positive agenda power to propose and pass more bipartisan legislation. Our empirical evidence suggest this relationship is strengthened for more salient bills, though surprisingly, proximity to an election does not meaningfully affect it. All the results demonstrate an electorally concerned majority party which strategically manipulates the House agenda based on public opinion.

We also shown an important result with respect to the relationship between bipartisanship and

voter support: low levels of bipartisanship do not boost the majority party much, but the effect is exponentially increasing at high levels of bipartisanship. If the majority party decides to make appeals to the minority, it must pass substantially moderate bills to receive any meaningful marginal benefit from voters. This explains why parties seemingly either make an effort and invest time and energy into soliciting buy-in from the minority, or decide to go it alone, and make little effort to appeal to members of the minority. For majority parties seeking substantial policy change, moderating the bill is an all-or-nothing proposition.

Broadly, we answer an important question about the trade-off between policy change and public support. In recent years, control of Congress has dramatically swung between the two parties. As the extant literature notes, this seems to incentive quick, dramatic lawmaking, as majorities seek to make policy change before they lose power. In turn, this promotes partisanship and incivility as the majority forges ahead without seeking minority support, often running procedural roughshod over the minority in an attempt to stay one step ahead of electoral sanction. Our theory and results highlight that these dynamics are at least partially the result of voter expectations and preferences. Parties are swept into power on the promise of dramatic policy change, but voters quickly sour on the majority when the specifics of legislation become salient. Parties, uncertain about whether to make the promised change or water down legislation to achieve minority party support must make difficult decisions about how much they value bipartisanship compared to their policy preferences.

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Appendix A Supporting Appendix for "The Electoral Costs of Legislative Action: Dynamic Partisanship and Agenda Control in the U.S. Congress"

Contents

A.1 Table of Model Results Assessing Proposition 1: Relationship between House Passage Support & Congressional Approval

Table A.1: Relationship between House Passage Support$_t$ & Congressional Approval$_{t+1}$

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Minority Passage Support$_t$	0.067+	0.122*		
	(0.038)	(0.047)		
Majority Passage Support$_t$	-0.236*	-0.240+		
	(0.117)	(0.145)		
Proportion Unity Passage Votes$_t$			-2.911	-8.406+
			(3.592)	(4.295)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓		✓
N	114	114	114	114
R^2	0.912	0.926	0.909	0.922
Adjusted R^2	0.910	0.915	0.907	0.912

Models 1-2 evaluate party-specific passage support effect.
Models 3-4 evaluate chamber passage support effect.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.
HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.2 Table of Model Results Assessing Proposition 2: Non-Linear Relationship between House Passage Support & Congressional Approval

Table A.2: Non-Linear Relationship between House Passage Support$_t$ & Congressional Approval$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Medium Binned Minority Passage Support$_t$	0.460	1.543						
	(0.942)	(1.057)						
High Binned Minority Passage Support$_t$	1.372	3.058*						
	(1.103)	(1.339)						
Medium Binned Majority Passage Support$_t$	-0.414	0.111						
	(0.961)	(1.069)						
High Binned Majority Passage Support$_t$	-1.285	-0.989						
	(1.047)	(1.344)						
Logged Minority Passage Support$_t$			4.739+	8.535**				
			(2.591)	(3.180)				
Logged Majority Passage Support$_t$			-22.413*	-22.639+				
			(10.886)	(13.326)				
Medium Binned Proportion Unity Passage Votes$_t$					-1.191	-2.058*		
					(0.950)	(1.028)		
High Binned Proportion Unity Passage Votes$_t$					-0.439	-2.250+		
					(0.999)	(1.251)		
Logged Proportion Unity Passage Votes$_t$							-1.099	-2.381*
							(0.865)	(0.992)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓
N	114	114	114	114	114	114	114	114
R^2	0.910	0.924	0.912	0.926	0.910	0.923	0.910	0.923
Adjusted R^2	0.906	0.911	0.910	0.915	0.907	0.912	0.908	0.914

Models 1-4 evaluate party-specific passage support effect while Models 5-8 evaluate chamber passage support effect.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$. HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.3 Table of Model Results Evaluating Hypothesis 1: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Passage Support$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

Table A.3: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Passage Support$_{t+1}$

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Majority Electoral Support$_t$	-0.603*	-1.788**	0.046	0.341*
	(0.288)	(0.535)	(0.102)	(0.166)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓		✓
N	113	113	113	113
R^2	0.402	0.571	0.204	0.559
Adjusted R^2	0.385	0.510	0.182	0.496

Models 1-2 evaluate effect on minority passage support.

Models 3-4 evaluate effect on majority passage support.

$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.

HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.4 Table of Models Results Evaluating Hypothesis 2: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$, 1991-2019

Table A.4: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$

	(1)	(2)
Majority Electoral Support	0.005	0.018***
	(0.003)	(0.005)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓
N	113	113
R^2	0.292	0.492
Adjusted R^2	0.279	0.425

Models 1-2 evaluate effect of majority electoral support on party line passage votes in the U.S. House.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.
HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.5 Table of Models Results Evaluating Hypothesis 3: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Minority Passage Support$_{t+1}$ by Electoral Proximity, 1991-2019

Table A.5: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Minority Passage Support$_{t+1}$ by Electoral Proximity

	(1)	(2)
Majority Electoral Support	-1.788**	-1.725*
	(0.535)	(0.662)
Quarters to Election	-0.117	0.861
	(0.424)	(5.975)
Majority Support x Quarters to Election		-0.020
		(0.120)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓
N	113	113
R^2	0.571	0.571
Adjusted R^2	0.510	0.505

Models 1 presents the full model testing Hypothesis 1.

Model 2 presents full model with interaction term.

$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.

HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

Table of Models Results Evaluating Hypothesis 4: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$ by Electoral Proximity, 1991-2019

Table A.6: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$ by Electoral Proximity

	(1)	(2)
Majority Electoral Support	0.018***	0.016*
	(0.005)	(0.007)
Quarters to Election	0.001	-0.030
	(0.005)	(0.064)
Majority Support x Quarters to Election		0.001
		(0.001)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓
N	113	113
R^2	0.492	0.493
Adjusted R^2	0.425	0.421

Models 1 presents the full model testing Hypothesis 2.
Model 2 presents full model with interaction term.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.
HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.6 Table of Models Results Evaluating Hypothesis 5: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Party Passage Support$_{t+1}$ by Legislative Salience, 1991-2019

Table A.7: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Minority Passage Support$_{t+1}$ by Legislative Salience

	(1)	(2)
Majority Electoral Support	-2.092**	-0.234
	(0.773)	(1.023)
Legislative Bill Salience	-3.234	63.605*
	(2.309)	(25.599)
Majority Support x Legislative Bill Salience		-1.332*
		(0.508)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓
N	77	77
R^2	0.727	0.755
Adjusted R^2	0.660	0.690

Models 1 presents the full model testing Hypothesis 1.
Model 2 presents full model with interaction term.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.
HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.

A.7 Table of Models Results Evaluating Hypothesis 6: Relationship Between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$ by Legislative Salience, 1991-2019

Table A.8: Relationship between Majority Electoral Support$_t$ & Passage Party Line Voting$_{t+1}$ by Legislative Salience

	(1)	(2)
Majority Electoral Support	0.012+	-0.003
	(0.007)	(0.011)
Legislative Bill Salience	0.004	-0.503+
	(0.025)	(0.296)
Majority Support x Legislative Bill Salience		0.010+
		(0.006)
Lagged Dependent Variable	✓	✓
Quarterly Controls		✓
Congress-Specific Controls		✓
N	77	77
R^2	0.536	0.557
Adjusted R^2	0.440	0.457

Models 1 presents the full model testing Hypothesis 2.
Model 2 presents full model with interaction term.
$+\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; *** $\rho < 0.001$.
HC2 robust standard errors reported in parenthesis.