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# The Effects of Political Representation on the Electoral Advantages of House Incumbents

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We examine factors that influence whether or not constituents know and like their representative in Congress, exploring how constituents respond to very different forms of political representation—descriptive, symbolic, and allocational—provided by House members. We compare the relative contribution that non-policy representational factors make to the electoral advantage that incumbents enjoy among their constituents. The statistical analysis demonstrates that several non-policy aspects of the representational relationship, including descriptive correspondence and the member's legislative activity, benefit the incumbent through increased name recognition and, ultimately, in voters' choices at the voting booth.

In the vast body of research that students of Congress have produced over the last several decades, the scholarly conversation over the nature of constituent representation stands as one of the longest-running and most interesting lines of inquiry. The classic work of Miller and Stokes (1963) sparked an exchange over the extent of issue congruence between representatives and the represented,<sup>1</sup> but a broader discussion also emerged about the very definition of representation (e.g., Mansbridge 1998; Pitkin 1967; Prewett and Eulau 1969; Weissberg 1978; Williams 1998). Even though the issue of political representation remains of interest to political theorists, interest among empirical researchers during the 1970s began to shift somewhat from political representation to congressional elections (see Mezey 1993). Electoral politics, and members' ongoing pursuit of reelection, though, also pointed empirical congressional scholars toward broader conceptions of representational connections (Mayhew 1974).

The existing body of empirical work on political representation recognizes at least six different perspectives on the representation mechanism. In addition to the Miller-Stokes perspective on policy representation, two types of non-issue representation—service and allocation representation—

involve a focus on constituent and district benefits. A fourth perspective recognizes symbolic actions as part of the constituent-legislator relationship (Eulau and Karps 1977; Sinclair 1997), while others recognize a different sort of symbolism in the descriptive nature of representation (Canon 1999; Lublin 1997; Mansbridge 1999; Tate 2003; Whitby 1997). Still other work has taken an extremely broad view and described representation as a collective, national-level phenomenon (Mansbridge 1998; Page and Shapiro 1983; Weissberg 1978).

In this article, we ask how constituents respond to several of these non-policy aspects of the representational relationship—and, in turn, how and when incumbents benefit electorally from these facets of representation. We test how member choices about activity (both symbolic and allocational) strengthen or weaken the electoral connection (Mayhew 1974), and we compare voter responses to these conscious member choices with constituent responses to the descriptive similarity between representative and voter. In addition, we examine whether legislative activity in Congress has any effect on whether constituents know and like their representative. In short, we offer new empirical evidence that the electoral relationship between member and constituent is affected both by what members *do* and by who members *are*.

## REELECTION, MEMBER ACTIVITY, AND DESCRIPTIVE CONGRUENCE

### *Constituent Responses to Incumbent Activity*

Through name recognition and positive constituent evaluations, House members enjoy stratospheric reelection rates. And, from Mayhew (1974), we have reason to believe that these advantages follow in part from members' own choices about their representational activity. Members engage in national policymaking as well as other decidedly

<sup>1</sup> Important examples include Achen 1977; Cnudde and McCrone 1966; Cobb and Kuklinski 1997; Erikson 1978; Fiorina 1974; Jackson and King 1989; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979; and Uslaner and Weber 1979.

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non-policy activities (such as constituency service) in order to cultivate constituency support (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Fenno 1978).

Service activities (like constituent casework), allocational activities (securing federal funds for local projects), and symbolic activities (such as speechmaking) each serve as a link between member and constituent (Eulau and Karpis 1977). Political scientists have spilled a fair amount of ink in the last two decades testing the electoral consequences of members' service activities. Empirical work that followed Fenno's seminal study (1978) found that much of member activity—legislative work and constituency service—is statistically unrelated to their electoral success (see Rivers and Fiorina 1989). Rivers and Fiorina hypothesize that a statistical link between the activity and success cannot be found because legislators earn a reputation for service and effectiveness that persists regardless of the actual time that they devote to casework. Nonetheless, others such as Johannes and McAdams (1981: 537) interpret the missing statistical link as evidence that "voters, essentially, are ingrates" who vote their policy predispositions regardless of service or allocational responsiveness. But others have found that service and pork do indeed assist members in maintaining the electoral connection (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Cover and Broomberg 1982; Fiorina 1981; Parker 1986; Serra and Moon 1994; Yiannakis 1981).

We revisit this question by presenting measures of constituency service activity in the broader context of other non-policy representation activities. In addition to service and policy activities, members may also engage in electorally-motivated activity that is essentially symbolic.<sup>2</sup> Symbolic responsiveness is a measure of representation that, according to the Eulau and Karpis typology, needs to be considered in analyzing representation: "[M]uch of what may appear to be policy responsiveness is largely symbolic responsiveness. From session to session, legislators on all levels of government—federal, state, and local—introduce thousands of bills which have not the slightest chance of ever being passed and, more often than not, are not intended to be passed. Yet representatives introduce these bills to please some constituents and to demonstrate their own responsiveness" (1977: 247). Thus, we see members often voting for legislation that they know will never become law (Edelman 1964, Pressman and Wildavsky 1973), and passing hundreds of nonbinding resolutions a year—the latter of which most voters do not understand as not constituting actual law. Symbolic representation, then, can be defined as activities that seek to convey the image that the legislator is hard at work for the interests of the constituency, regardless of the substantive significance of those activities.

<sup>2</sup> The classic treatment of symbolism in politics appears in Edelman (1964:76), who argues that the uncertainty of modern society leaves citizens seeking symbols of action in the form of leaders "whose actions can be interpreted as beneficent" regardless of the actual quality of the representation.

From the time of Matthews' classic work (1960), political scientists have attempted to differentiate among members according to their level and type of activity (and the electoral advantages of those activities). Much of this work has focused on the distinction between "work horses" and "show horses"—a classification that has proven to be less than analytically useful—but member activity remains an important potential factor in understanding the representational relationship.<sup>3</sup> Mayhew's (1974) three activities (position-taking, credit-claiming, and advertising) fit neatly into the Eulau and Karpis concept of symbolic representation, and they suggest that non-policy activity has critical importance in reelection. Indeed, all three of the activities in Mayhew's thesis suggest symbolic representation is more important than substantive representation. Position-taking, in particular, is the most overwhelmingly symbolic of the three activities—Mayhew discusses floor speeches, bill introduction, and cosponsorship as examples. But even the particularistic activity of credit-claiming and the "home style" activities of advertising have strong symbolic implications. Overall, Mayhew's stylized member always prefers activity that the constituency will perceive as representational, regardless of the substantive effect.

Hall's work (1996, 1987) on participation helps to return us to a focus on how member choices about activity shape the representative relationship. Studying committees in particular, Hall warns that "participation is selective and purposeful" and that this fact demands "greater attention if we are fully to understand the phenomenon of representation in a decentralized Congress" (1987: 122). Finally, other research has found that a legislator's competence and integrity in Congress have electoral ramifications (Mondak 1995; McCurley and Mondak 1995).

In order to explore further constituents' responses to what members do, and whether members gain benefits from their Washington activity, we test the effect of several measures of legislator activity, including allocative and symbolic, on name recognition, constituent evaluations, and vote choices.

<sup>3</sup> Matthews drew the distinction between "show horses" who seek the legislative limelight, and "work horses" who do the work behind the scenes to produce good policy and maintain Congress' legitimacy. Payne (1980) argued similarly that legislative work and publicity are two separate concepts, and he found an inverse relationship between members' competence and their national media visibility. Yet some empirical research has called the "horse" dichotomy into question. Examining media coverage, Cook (1986) suggests that the two styles may not be reciprocal but rather reinforcing, and Ragsdale and Cook (1987) have found that Washington and district activity have little effect on electoral outcomes or challenger behavior. Johannes and McAdams (1981) reveal that member appearances on the floor add incrementally to electoral success in a model dominated by policy-voting effects, but bill sponsorship and leadership activities are unrelated to success. Langbein and Sigelman (1989) further suggest that the work horse/show horse distinction is a simplistic concept applied to a complex environment; members have devised ways to execute legislative work and advertising at the same time, an effect that may be enhanced by the nature of media coverage (Sinclair 1989).

*Constituent Responses to Descriptive Congruence*

In addition to the electoral implications of representation through activity, we are interested in testing voters' responses to the presence or absence of descriptive congruence with their individual representative. As a normative issue, political theorists have considered descriptive representation with renewed interest in recent years, stimulated by questions of voting rights and minority representation (e.g., Schwartz 1988; Young 1990; Williams 1998). Here, we are interested specifically in the way that the descriptive character of the representational relationship affects constituents' evaluation of their individual representative. We are looking for evidence that voters are more likely to recognize, like, and vote for an incumbent with whom they share the descriptive characteristics of gender and/or race. This connection may follow from the tendency to use such characteristics as informational shortcuts to make inferences "without data" (Popkin 1991) about candidates' substantive positions (also Mansbridge 1999: esp. 643-48; Bianco 1994). Other voters may show heightened support for descriptively similar representatives because they recognize intrinsic value in descriptive representation.

Recent research has produced some evidence for race and gender effects in constituents' evaluations of candidates and in vote choices. On one hand, stereotypes appear to be prevalent, with Whites judging Black candidates as less intelligent than White candidates on the whole (Williams 1989). Performance evaluations of legislators also follow racial lines. Black NES respondents who live in districts represented by a Black member of Congress rate their representative more positively than Blacks who are represented by a White member (Tate 2003); similarly, Whites represented by a White legislator are more satisfied with their representation than those represented by Blacks (Gay 1997, 2001).

Some evidence suggests that male and female political candidates are evaluated differently as well. Using experimental methods, Sapiro (1981) showed that gender serves as a cue for voters, and that competence judgments follow gender lines. Other experimental work follows in this tradition—Leeper (1991) finds that voters associate "feminine" qualities with female candidates even when those candidates take "masculine" issue positions, while Rapoport et al. (1989) find some evidence that voters use candidate personal traits to make inferences about issue positions. Traits are not simply descriptive features, but Leeper and others would give us reason to believe that voters associate gender with certain traits, which might then lead to issue inferences, as Rapoport et al. find (but see Huddy and Terkildsen 1993 and Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Empirical work on voter behavior provides additional evidence for gender-based evaluations (e.g., McDermott 1997; Zipp and Plutzer 1985).

Our analysis of descriptive congruence focuses on this connection between candidate and voter traits, in contrast to most voting research on gender and race, which has looked either at how voters react to female and minority candidates or at how voters vote differently according to

their own gender and race.<sup>4</sup> Some very recent work has pointed toward vote choice based on gender correspondence between individual voters and candidates (Chaney 1996; Dolan 1998; Paolino 1995; Plutzer and Zipp 1996). We take up this issue as well. We determine how constituents respond in name recognition and candidate evaluation as well as vote choice to female and minority candidates based on descriptive links to their representatives.<sup>5</sup>

**DATA AND ANALYTIC APPROACH**

To test the electoral importance of symbolic, allocational, and descriptive representation, we have constructed a data set that merges information about incumbents in the 103rd House (1993-94) with public opinion data gathered from their constituents. We first created several measures of the attributes and activities of the representatives and then matched each member's measures with his or her constituents' 1994 NES sample data.<sup>6</sup> We also included information on FY1994 federal outlays to the district of each member in the data set.<sup>7</sup>

This approach allows us to take advantage of the large number of observations in the NES survey. The 1994 NES survey included 1795 respondents and covered 190 congressional districts. On average, the 1994 NES yielded 9.5 respondents per district, although the number of respondents per district ranged from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 56.<sup>8</sup>

*Dependent Variables*

Our line of inquiry focuses on the electoral implications of constituent responses to several facets of representation.

<sup>4</sup> We note that previous work, particularly the experimental analyses, has offered some strong evidence that cue-based voting is a matter of racial and gender biases as much as it is a matter of voters' preferences for descriptive representation or use of congruence as a general issue-position cue. In this paper, we do not attempt to distinguish between voters' prejudicial biases and more substantively-based preferences. We are concerned only with providing evidence that race and gender correspondence at the level of the individual legislator and voter has a strong effect on name recognition and electoral outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> By looking at the individual nature of descriptive representation in this way, we extend beyond the usual national-level understanding of descriptive representation, which views representatives as "symbols" for particular groups and looks analytically beyond the geographic district.

<sup>6</sup> We thank Larry Bartels for helpful discussions on these issues.

<sup>7</sup> This measure, compiled by Bickers and Stein (e.g., 1996), reflects the total direct payments to the district, excluding insurance and loan guarantees. The figures are not adjusted for population; however, population-adjusted figures yield very similar results in the analysis. We thank Ken Bickers for providing the outlay data.

<sup>8</sup> Research on the impact of constituents on member behavior identifies measurement error as a problem when using survey data such as the NES (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978; Bartels 1991). However, we are interested in the effect of members' activities on constituents' knowledge and voting decisions. For our analysis, the relevant unit is the constituent; information on the member is a type of contextual data. Thus, the accuracy of our behavior measures does not depend on how many other respondents happen to have the same member of Congress.

Toward this end, we selected several dependent variables that indicate the attitudes of each district's constituents toward their member of Congress. First, we examine whether constituents are aware of their incumbent through name recognition, and whether they can offer at least one reason for "liking" the incumbent. Then, we analyze constituents' voting in each district using a dichotomous vote choice measure (indicating whether or not the respondent voted for the incumbent in 1994) as the dependent variable.<sup>9</sup>

The dependent variables—name recognition, "liking" the incumbent, and vote choice—represent different evaluative and behavior components, and the regression models differ accordingly. High name recognition and positive constituent evaluations can be expected to contribute to a member's security, but they may or may not translate directly into votes. We first determine whether individuals from a member's geographic constituency recognize the representative and provide positive evaluations of the member. We then turn to a subset of the constituency, namely voters in the midterm election, to ask what factors produce a pro-incumbent vote. Thus, we ask two very different questions (recognition and evaluation vs. vote choice) using two different sets of respondents (geographic constituency vs. voters in contested elections).<sup>10</sup>

### *Independent Variables*

Members' activities in Washington assume a variety of forms and, in the non-policy realm, can convey a representative image to the constituency both in an allocative way and, more broadly, through symbolic means that convey the image of a member who is important and hard at work for the constituency. Our general measure of a member's level of legislative activity is the number of bills sponsored by each representative, including private bills and resolutions.<sup>11</sup> This measure captures the broad symbolic impression of the member's activity, which mediated sources may convey to the constituency. To capture an allocative aspect of bill sponsorship, we also include a measure for the percent of

sponsored policy bills that address local needs of the representative's constituency.<sup>12</sup>

Another type of legislative activity—floor speaking—is even more clearly symbolic and electorally-directed, especially in the C-SPAN era. We include a variable measuring the log of each incumbent's total floor speeches during the 103rd Congress, noting that the member can garner media coverage and constituency recognition through this activity.<sup>13</sup> We include floor speeches since, as with bill sponsorship, recognition should not depend upon the policy content of the member's discourse but rather on the fact that the member is acting symbolically in a way that is visible to the constituency.

Members' party, seniority, and leadership positions can also be electorally advantageous as symbols of member activity. Constituents may judge a member's quality and the effectiveness of his or her representational activities by the leadership positions that the member has obtained. In contrast to the Senate, where individual non-leader members have ample opportunity to seek the limelight of the national media (Sinclair 1989), the environment of the House reserves most of the national attention for leadership figures. Moreover, seniority or membership in the majority party may itself have electoral value to the incumbent (Cox and McCubbins 1993), and it may increase visibility. In the analysis, we include seniority in years as of 1993 and dummy variables for party leaders and members of the Democratic Party.

A related measure of activity can be found in members' committee work. As Hall (1996) elucidates, members make choices in the committee context to be active in ways that are visible to the constituency. Generally speaking, the committees on which a member serves help to determine the opportunities that he or she will have to engage in district directed credit-claiming and advertising activity. The opportunities here are somewhat different—and perhaps even more important—than those of the party leadership positions because they not only increase visibility but also provide opportunities to take actions that are desirable to the constituency, both symbolically and substantively. In order to measure each member's access to these sorts of opportunities, we include total assignments to constituency and undesirable committees as separate independent variables.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Appendix A presents detailed information on the dependent and independent variables.

<sup>10</sup> Members may pursue some activities not because of the expected effect on the geographic constituency or voters but rather because of a quest for policy influence or Washington power. Of course, members are likely to want their activities and positions to have positive implications for both the constituency and the Washington community, but it is not unreasonable to expect members to make trade-offs between choices that have positive and negative effects, if necessary, especially as they become more electorally secure.

<sup>11</sup> Private bills and resolutions are important to include since constituents are unlikely to distinguish among types of bills and since private bills may result in more recognition from the constituency than substantive policy bills. A constituent may be more likely to receive and recall the fact that the member, for instance, had a park named after a prominent local citizen than that the member sponsored a complex piece of national legislation on regulatory policy.

<sup>12</sup> Other measures of legislative activity are available, including bill cosponsorship and effectiveness ratings (i.e., percentage of sponsored bills that clear the committee, the floor, or the president's desk). We do not employ a cosponsorship measure since cosponsorship requires minimal effort and is quite common (Wilson and Young 1997). Further, bill sponsorship is more likely the type of information representatives report to constituents in mailings and other communications (Mayhew 1974).

<sup>13</sup> We take the log of floor speeches because of the variable's skewed distribution. A handful of legislators (typically in the party leadership) gave a very large number of floor speeches.

<sup>14</sup> Constituency committees, as defined by Smith and Deering (1990) are committees that provide benefits primarily to committee members' constituents. In the 103rd House, constituency committees included Agriculture, Armed Services, Education and Labor, Interior, Merchant Marine, Public Works, Science and Technology, Small Business, and

We also include two campaign measures as control variables in the analyses (see Appendix A for the operationalization of these variables). In the name recognition and incumbent evaluation models, we simply include a measure of the incumbent's total campaign spending in the general election. We hypothesize that higher levels of incumbent campaign spending will increase the incumbent's name recognition and positive evaluations. In the voting model, we include measures of challenger quality and the incumbent's share of major-party campaign spending in the contest. Challenger quality is a dichotomous variable that identifies challengers who have held elective office.<sup>15</sup> We expect that constituents are less likely to vote for the incumbent being challenged by a quality candidate. The campaign spending measure in the voting model also incorporates challenger spending and thus indicates the degree to which the incumbent dominates campaign communication. We expect that constituents are more likely to vote for the incumbent as the incumbent's share of campaign spending rises.

Descriptive congruence is captured through dummy variables that provide an indicator for respondents who are of either the same race or the same gender as the incumbent representative. As we described above, this kind of individual-level correspondence is underexplored in the literature, and these independent variables allow us to examine how members benefit from descriptive correspondence with their constituents as well as the extent to which constituents follow gender- and race-based shortcuts in voting. To account for constituent partisanship, we have created a similar "descriptive" independent variable that denotes constituents who are of the incumbent's party.

Finally, we incorporate two constituent variables that have received scholarly consensus as key influences on voting and recognition of the incumbent. First, a general predisposition to follow politics may influence a constituent's ability to recognize and form an opinion about one's elected representative. Thus, interest in politics is included as a control variable in the name recognition and "likes" models. Interest in politics is measured as a combination of two NES items: the respondent's reported level of interest in the 1994 campaigns and his or her inclination to discuss politics with family or friends. Second, a con-

stituent's overall rating of Congress is also included as a control variable (except in the name recognition model) to test whether institutional approval affects support for the incumbent (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).

#### CONSTITUENT RESPONSES TO INCUMBENT ACTIVITY AND DESCRIPTIVE CONGRUENCE

Our statistical analysis reveals that several aspects of the representational relationship provide valuable electoral advantages for the incumbent representative. Since our dependent variables are dichotomous, we estimate a logit equation to estimate the electoral effects of legislative activity and descriptive representation measures. A standard logit model assumes that observations are independent. However, given the nature of our data, this assumption is questionable. In particular, respondents from the same congressional district may be related in some unmeasured way. To account for this possibility, we calculate robust standard errors (Huber 1967) applied to NES respondents clustered by district.

Overall, members enhance the electoral resources of name recognition and positive constituent evaluations through symbolic representational activity, and they also enjoy greater recognition and more positive evaluations when descriptive congruence is stronger. Not surprisingly, these electoral resources also appear to pay off for the member on election day.

In the analysis, we determine whether symbolic representational activity and descriptive representation increase incumbent name recognition among constituents. Table 1 displays the results of a logit model with name recognition of 1994 House incumbents as a dependent variable. While some types of member activities increase incumbent visibility among constituents, other forms had no effect on name recognition. Significantly, members who sponsored a higher percentage of local legislation (among all of the bills they sponsored in the 103d Congress) and spent more money on their reelection campaign received higher levels of name recognition. It is no surprise that campaign activity draws attention from constituents (the intended audience). It is perhaps more surprising to find that legislative activity influences incumbent's name recognition as well. Legislative activity certainly draws attention from the media, interest groups, and attentive publics, and representatives have logical, electoral incentives for touting their legislative activities (Mayhew 1974). Constituents thus learn about the legislative behavior of incumbents through any of these conduits. In analyses not reported here, we also find that bill sponsorship is related to the likelihood that a constituent recalls having received mailings from the incumbent and having read about the incumbent in a newspaper or magazine.

In addition, members who spoke most frequently on the House floor and those who served on constituency committees received no greater name recognition among constituents. Similarly, federal spending in the district does not appear to boost the incumbent's name recognition. The two control variables for the member's seniority and the

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Veteran Affairs. Undesirable committees are: District of Columbia, Ethics, House Administration, and Post Office. Smith and Deering also identify two other types of committees that could be relevant: policy (e.g., Judiciary) and prestige (e.g., Appropriations). Because of multicollinearity, we do not include the number of assignments to all four types of committees—if a member is not on a prestige committee, for instance, he or she is certain to be on one of the others. Some committees also transcend the categories (e.g., Education and Labor is both a policy and constituency committee [Box-Steffensmeier and Sinclair 1996]). When the number of policy committee assignments was included in the analysis, the coefficient was not statistically significant and did not alter the other findings. We exclude policy and prestige committees, then, for the sake of parsimony.

<sup>15</sup> We are grateful to Gary Jacobson for providing the challenger quality data.

≡ TABLE 1  
LOGIT ANALYSIS OF INCUMBENT NAME RECOGNITION, 1994

	Coefficient	RSE	P-Value (1-tailed)	Probability Change
<i>Descriptive Representation Variables</i>				
Same Race	1.233	0.280	<0.001	0.27
Same Gender	-0.010	0.144	0.472	
Same Partisanship	0.068	0.160	0.333	
<i>Symbolic/Activity Variables</i>				
Total Federal Outlay to District	-0.0001	0.0001	0.342	
Floor Speeches (Logged)	0.093	0.150	0.268	
Bills Sponsored	0.006	0.011	0.318	
Campaign Spending (Categorical)	0.292	0.135	0.016	0.10
Local Percentage of Bills Sponsored	0.694	0.388	0.037	0.11
Leadership	-0.109	0.352	0.379	
Member Seniority	0.033	0.017	0.030	0.17
Constituency Committees	0.093	0.114	0.206	
Undesirable Committees	0.112	0.255	0.330	
Democratic incumbent	0.100	0.204	0.312	
<i>Respondent Characteristics</i>				
Political Interest	1.033	0.101	<0.001	0.44
Constant	-3.027	0.767	<0.001	

N = 1232

Model Chi-Square = 148.22 ( $p < 0.001$ )

Pseudo  $R^2 = 0.12$

*Dependent Variable:* Dummy coded 1 if respondent recognizes incumbent's name.

Cell entries are logit coefficients, robust standard errors (clustering on member ID), and one-tailed p-values.

The change in probability of recognizing the incumbent's name is calculating by varying a particular variable from its minimum value to maximum value while holding all other variables constant at median values.

constituent's political interest also positively and statistically significantly boosted name recognition.

Table 1 reveals that descriptive representation has a mixed effect on incumbent name recognition. Constituents who were of the same race as the incumbent House member were more likely to recognize their representative. This effect was statistically significant and notably large. Constituents of the same race as the incumbent had a probability of recognizing the incumbent that was roughly 27 percent higher than constituents of other races. In contrast, gender and partisan correspondence between constituent and representative has no statistically significant impact on incumbent name recognition.

Descriptive and symbolic representation have somewhat similar effects on constituents' abilities to provide reasons for liking their House member. Table 2 presents the results of a logit analysis with a dummy dependent variable indicating whether the respondent could offer at least one positive evaluation of the incumbent.<sup>16</sup> Symbolic activity affects

constituent evaluations of the incumbent as well as name recognition. The number of bills sponsored and the percentage of local bills increased the constituent's ability to provide a positive evaluation of their elected representative. In addition, legislators serving on committees that specialize in addressing constituent interests won positive evaluations in comparison to legislators serving on other committee in Congress. At the same time, a fairly direct measure of allocative activity, federal spending in the district, had no statistically significant effect on constituent evaluations of the legislator.

In Table 2, we report the findings on descriptive representation. We find that racial correspondence between the constituent and the incumbent had a positive, statistically significant effect on incumbent evaluations in 1994. Partisan correspondence, also, registered a significant effect. In contrast, gender-based descriptive correspondence was statistically unrelated to constituent evaluations. Finally, several of the control variables for respondent characteristics

<sup>16</sup> We also estimated a negative binomial regression model of the number of reasons the constituent mentioned for liking one's representative (up to a maximum of 5 mentions). The substantive results are the same except that the constituency committee variable is not significant in the

negative binomial model. There is not a lot of variation in the number of likes mentioned. Most offer no more than two reasons for liking the incumbent.

≡ TABLE 2  
LOGIT ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENT'S ABILITY TO IDENTIFY A REASON FOR LIKING INCUMBENT, 1994

	Coefficient	RSE	P-Value (1-tailed)	Probability Change
<i>Descriptive Representation Variables</i>				
Same Race	0.634	0.252	0.006	0.15
Same Gender	-0.029	0.119	0.406	
Same Partisanship	0.892	0.127	<0.001	0.21
<i>Symbolic/Activity Variables</i>				
Total Federal Outlay to District	-0.0001	0.0001	0.167	
Floor Speeches (Logged)	-0.202	0.222	0.182	
Bills Sponsored	0.026	0.014	0.028	0.35
Campaign Spending (Categorical)	0.079	0.148	0.297	
Local Percentage of bills sponsored	0.526	0.440	0.116	0.12
Leadership	0.326	0.403	0.210	
Member Seniority	0.024	0.010	0.009	0.23
Constituency Committees	0.174	0.124	0.081	0.12
Undesirable Committees	-0.162	0.276	0.278	
Democratic incumbent	-0.246	0.260	0.172	
<i>Respondent Characteristics</i>				
Political Interest	0.968	0.124	<0.001	0.40
Disapproval of Congress	0.016	0.066	0.407	
Constant	-2.622	1.030	0.006	

N = 1265

Model Chi-Square = 175.06 ( $p < 0.001$ )

Pseudo  $R^2 = 0.11$

*Dependent Variable:* Dummy coded 1 if respondent offers at least one reason for liking incumbent.

Cell entries are logit coefficients, robust standard errors (clustering on member ID), and one-tailed p-values.

The change in probability of recognizing the incumbent's name is calculating by varying a particular variable from its minimum value to maximum value while holding all other variables constant at median values.

(political interest, incumbent seniority) were statistically significant, having substantively large effects on positive evaluations of the incumbent.

For incumbents, the final payoff from these representational resources, of course, is realized on election day. Table 3 shows the results of an analysis of constituent vote choice as a function of a similar set of independent variables. In 1994, higher levels of bill sponsorship and bills addressing local interests increased electoral support for the incumbent. The probability of voting for the incumbent was 10 percent higher for the most prolific bill sponsors as compared to the least prolific. Once again, a more direct measure of allocative activity, federal outlays to the representative's district, does not appear to have a statistically significant effect on voting for the incumbent.

Several forms of member activity had statistically significant and *negative* effects on voters' tendencies to support the incumbent. In particular, members who made larger numbers of (logged) floor speeches in the 103d Congress *decreased* the likelihood that constituents would support them in the 1994 election. Apparently, constituents did not reward member activity that was pure showmanship. Legislators are rarely, if ever, recognized for making great

speeches on the House floor. Floor speeches are not likely to increase name recognition in a positive way.<sup>17</sup> However, as the cases of Mike Pappas, Bob Dornan, and Jim Traficant indicate, embarrassing or poorly chosen speeches on the House floor can receive extensive media coverage. Thus, floor speeches provide campaign fodder for potential challengers. We also find that constituents were less likely to support the reelection of members whose activity involved service on undesirable committees that did not provide substantive results for the constituency.

Descriptive representation also benefited incumbents electorally in 1994. Table 3 shows that electoral support was greater among constituents whose race and gender corresponded with their House member, even after controlling for partisanship. As we would expect, constituents of the incumbent's party were also much more likely to vote for the incumbent.

Since the electoral effects of symbolic legislative activity have not been examined closely, we take a further look here.

<sup>17</sup> The effect of the floor speeches remains even when outliers (members who made more than 200 speeches) are excluded, though the effect is slightly weaker.



≡ TABLE 3  
LOGIT MODEL OF RESPONDENT'S VOTE CHOICE, 1994

	Coefficient	RSE	P-Value (1-tailed)	Probability Change
<i>Descriptive Representation Variables</i>				
Same Race	0.565	0.329	0.043	0.06
Same Gender	0.457	0.197	0.010	0.04
Same Partisanship	3.155	0.242	<0.001	0.61
<i>Symbolic/Activity Variables</i>				
Total Federal Outlay to District	-0.00002	0.0001	0.468	
Floor Speeches (Logged)	-0.344	0.189	0.035	0.12
Bills Sponsored	0.027	0.015	0.034	0.10
Incumbent Share of Campaign Spending	4.231	0.785	<0.001	0.45
Challenger Quality	-0.045	0.251	0.428	
Local Percentage of bills sponsored	0.876	0.459	0.028	0.05
Leadership	0.360	0.331	0.139	
Member Seniority	0.007	0.018	0.346	
Constituency Committees	-0.065	0.152	0.335	
Undesirable Committees	-0.785	0.340	0.011	0.24
Democratic incumbent	-0.962	0.252	<0.001	0.06
<i>Respondent Characteristics</i>				
Disapproval of Congress	-0.307	0.118	0.005	0.07
Constant	-1.985	1.230	0.054	

N = 645

Model Chi-Square = 201.45 (p < 0.001)

Pseudo R2 = 0.37

*Dependent Variable:* Dummy coded 1 if respondent voted for the incumbent.

Cell entries are logit coefficients, robust standard errors (clustering on member ID), and one-tailed p-values.

The change in probability of recognizing the incumbent's name is calculating by varying a particular variable from its minimum value to maximum value while holding all other variables constant at median values.

We use the logit estimates in Table 3 to calculate the predicted probability that a respondent votes for the incumbent (and an associated confidence interval) under different combinations of values for the partisanship variable and four legislative variables: floor speeches, bills introduced, local percentage of bills sponsored, and undesirable committee assignments (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). The other independent variables are held constant at median values, except for the congressional approval measure, which is set at 2 ("somewhat approve"). The median incumbent is a rank-and-file Democrat with 5 years of service and one constituency committee assignment. The median incumbent also represents a district that receives \$1774 million in federal outlays and accounts for 80 percent of the campaign spending in the 1994 general election. Finally, the median voter shares the same race as the incumbent but is the opposite gender.

The predicted probabilities are presented in Table 4. The first column represents instances where the voter does not share the incumbent's party affiliation and the second column represents cases where voter and incumbent share the same party affiliation. Clearly, partisanship is a strong predictor of vote choice, as the predicted probabilities in column 2 are substantially larger than those in column 1,

even in light of the large confidence intervals. The predicted probabilities in Table 4 also reflect the electoral importance of legislative activity, especially for incumbents trying to woo voters outside their party. An incumbent with a favorable legislative profile (75th percentile in bills sponsored and local legislation, 25th percentile in floor speeches, and no undesirable committee assignments) has about an even chance (estimated probability of .50) of gaining the vote of citizens outside her party coalition. In contrast, an incumbent with an unfavorable legislative profile (25th percentile in bills sponsored and local legislation, 75th percentile in floor speeches, and one undesirable committee assignment) has a much smaller chance (.16) of winning over that same voter. An unfavorable profile of symbolic legislative activity also begins to put an incumbent in danger of losing votes from his own party. For the many vulnerable Democratic incumbents in 1994, symbolic legislative activity may have affected their chances at reelection.

#### CONCLUSION

Through name recognition, constituent evaluations, and vote choice, we have shown that incumbent members of

≡ TABLE 4  
 PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF VOTING FOR INCUMBENTS WITH VARYING LEGISLATIVE PROFILES, 1994

Profile of Incumbent Legislator	Predicted Probability of Voting for Incumbent (90% confidence interval in parentheses)	
	Incumbent Not the Same Party as Voter	Incumbent and Voter Share Same Party Affiliation
Favorable: 19 bills (4 devoted to local issues), 29 speeches, no undesirable committees	.50 [.37, .63]	.96 [.93, .98]
Median: 10 bills (1 devoted to local issues), 51 speeches, no undesirable committees	.37 [.27, .47]	.93 [.88, .96]
Unfavorable: 5 bills (0 devoted to local issues), 87 speeches, one undesirable committee	.16 [.07, .26]	.79 [.65, .90]

All predicted probabilities and confidence intervals are computed based on the logit estimates in Table 3 using CLARIFY software (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001).

Congress reap electoral benefits from several aspects of the representational relationship. Clearly, constituents favor and reward descriptive representation. Constituents whose race corresponds with their incumbent's race are more likely to identify and positively evaluate the member. Party correspondence also has the same effect as race. House members receive stronger positive evaluations from constituents who identify with their political party. Gender does not show the same effect on identification and evaluation, but voters do seem to follow gender cues in their voting decision. Our findings, then, support the notion that voters recognize descriptive representation and reward it electorally.

Why is descriptive representation electorally important to voters? It is clear through six decades of empirical research that Americans don't know that much about their representatives in Washington, and yet a large majority of Americans express satisfaction with the person who represents them in the House of Representatives. Of the many factors that explain constituents' satisfaction with their representative's performance, descriptive characteristics are very important. Members of Congress are elected to represent the roughly 600,000 constituents in their districts, districts that are diverse and complex. Constituents want representatives who look like them because they feel, rightly or wrongly, such representatives will be more responsive to their interests. Political representation from the vantage point of the voter has a great deal to do with "being like me" on two salient dimensions: race and party.

Constituents also respond positively to the symbolic nature of a member's activity, notably in the form of bill sponsorship. Yet they respond negatively, at least at the ballot box, to members who are more garrulous on the House floor and serve on undesirable committees. Clearly, legislators' actions, including their choices about committee assignments and speechmaking, are additional means through which they are judged by constituents. While previous empirical work has failed to find such a connection between legislative outputs and constituent satisfaction

(Rivers and Fiorina 1989), we are confident in the robustness of our findings on member activity, particularly in light of the logic pursued by Hall (1996) that members are deliberate and calculating in how they choose to invest their time in Washington. Political representation, it follows, reflects the same strategic, electoral calculations.

We believe, therefore, that these findings provide support for the idea that representation follows several avenues, and that each of those routes provides an electoral resource for incumbent members. Future research should continue to pursue questions of how descriptive, symbolic, and allocative forms of representation interact and shape legislative politics. In particular, the dyadic relationship between individual voters and members, which has long been a focus for research on policy representation, should receive greater attention as a unit for analyzing other forms of representation.

#### APPENDIX VARIABLES IN THE ANALYSIS

##### *Dependent Variables*

*Incumbent Name Recognition:* Dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent could identify which of the House candidates was the incumbent (based on NES v431), 0 otherwise.

*Vote for the Incumbent:* Dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent voted for the incumbent, 0 if the respondent voted for the challenger (uncontested and open seat races are excluded from the analysis).

*Identifying Reason for Liking Incumbent:* Dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent could offer a reason for evaluating the incumbent House member positively, 0 otherwise.

##### *Symbolic/Activity Variables*

*Total Federal Outlay:* Total federal outlay to incumbent's congressional district in FY1994, in millions of dollars. Total includes all direct payments to the district, excluding insurance and loan guarantees.

*Floor Speeches*: Logged number of speeches incumbent made on the House floor during the 103d Congress.

*Bills Sponsored*: Total number of bills sponsored by incumbent during 103d Congress, including resolutions and private bills.

*Local Legislation*: Percentage of policy bills sponsored by the incumbent during 103d Congress that deal with local issues.

*Campaign Spending (Categorical)*: Amount of money incumbent spent on the 1994 general election campaign in 1994, divided into high (over \$600,000), middle (\$300,000 to \$600,000) and low (under \$300,000) categories.

*Share of Campaign Spending*: Incumbent's share of total major-party spending in the 1994 general election.

*Challenger Quality*: Coded 1 if the challenger has held elective office, 0 otherwise.

*Seniority*: Number of years incumbent served in the House, as of 1993

*Party Leader*: Dummy variable indicating representatives in the leadership of either party during the 103d Congress. Among Democrats, this measure includes the Speaker, majority leader, caucus chair and vice-chair, majority whip, floor whip, ex-officio whip, and all chief deputy whips and deputy whips. Among Republicans, it includes the minority leader, conference chair, vice-chair, and secretary, minority whip, chief deputy whip, and all deputy whips and assistant deputy whips.

*Constituency Committees*: Number of constituency committees to which the member was assigned in the 103d Congress.

*Undesirable Committees*: Number of undesirable committees to which the member was assigned in the 103d Congress.

*Democratic Incumbent*: Dummy variable coded 1 for Democrats, 0 for Republicans. The district of Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was not included in the 1994 NES sample.

#### Descriptive Representation Variables

*Gender*: Dummy variable coded 1 if the NES respondent and incumbent were of the same gender, 0 otherwise.

*Race*: Dummy variable coded 1 if the NES respondent and incumbent were of the same race, 0 otherwise.

*Partisanship*: Dummy variable coded 1 if the NES respondent and incumbent were of the same party, 0 otherwise.

#### Respondent Control Variables

*Interest in Politics*: Combination of two NES variables, one that measures the respondent's level of interest in the 1994 campaigns (NES v124) and another that measures whether the respondent discusses politics with family or friends (NES v128). The scale runs from 0 to 2, with 2 corresponding with the highest level of interest.

*Disapproval of Congress*: Coded 1 through 4, with higher values corresponding to greater disapproval of Congress (based on NES v321).

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