Partisan Signaling and Agenda Control in the U.S. House of Representatives

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Abstract:

Theories of partisan influence in Congress suggest that the leadership can influence vote choices and legislative outcomes. Cox and McCubbins (2005) have theorized and Cox and Poole (2002) have found that party strength is most evident on procedural matters. In this paper, we take advantage of a new source of data providing updates from the Majority Leader's Office that, at times, indicate the leadership's positions on upcoming floor votes. Utilizing these data from recent congresses, we seek to offer a more nuanced explanation of voting in the U.S. House of Representatives. Whereas others have implicitly assumed that the party influences all procedural votes, our findings suggest that not all procedural votes are created equal. In fact, these floor updates indicate that the majority party offers direction on some procedural votes (e.g., ordering the previous question and special rules), but not on others (e.g., the motion to recommit). We find that the most liberal members of the party vote with the leadership on procedural votes at high rates and nearly 100 percent of the time when signaled by the majority leader. In contrast, moderate members are significantly less likely to support the party and are not responsive to these signals. Our findings have direct implications for individual voting behavior and legislative outcomes in Congress.

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Proponents of partisan influence in Congress (e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Cox and McCubbins 2005, 2007; Rohde 1991) believe that legislative outcomes can be manipulated for both electoral and policy benefits. Generally, these scholars argue that party organizations have two ways of manipulating these outcomes—negative and positive agenda control. The former often entails keeping divisive legislative proposals off the agenda, especially if party leaders suspect that they will lose (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Gailmard and Jenkins 2007). Positive agenda control, on the other hand, typically entails arm-twisting, vote buying, or other aggressive tactics associated with whipping (Rohde 1991). These strategies help to ensure that the majority party is disproportionally successful in obtaining their desired policy outcomes.

Negative and positive agenda control are employed to balance both electoral and policy goals in Congress (Mayhew 1974). For instance, Cox and McCubbins (2005) posit that party leaders attempt to keep divisive votes off the agenda that might otherwise result in legislative defeats, which could otherwise harm the party's brand name or reputation. Nevertheless, the nature of the legislative process dictates that controversial policies have to be voted on in Congress from time to time in order to bolster the party's record of accomplishments. To ensure success on divisive issues, party leaders seek near unanimous support on procedural matters that dictate the manner in which controversial bills are debated and considered on the floor. These procedural factors are less visible to constituents for the purposes of reelection (Arnold 1990), but are essential to the party for ensuring legislative passage (Cox and Poole 2002; Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008).

Recent work has confirmed the theoretical intuition that these procedural votes are of the highest priority to party organizations (see, e.g., Cox and Poole 2002; Roberts 2005; Snyder and Groseclose 2001). These and other scholars have found that party effects are more prevalent on

procedural votes and that legislators are more receptive to party pressure on these types of votes. As such, party leaders are more aggressive in seeking to influence votes on procedural matters since they can mean the difference between victory and defeat on the floor. Generally speaking, the workhorse of the parties in this regard is the whip system of Congress. Legislators within this system serve as loyal agents of the party leadership to ensure that rank-and-file members fall in line on tough votes that occur in Congress (Evans and Grandy 2009). However, the whip system is not the only organization in Congress that sends voting signals to the rank-and-file. The Majority leader's office, which is concerned with scheduling votes, is also an important player in the legislative process.

To date, party theorists have done an excellent job describing the macro-level concepts and rationale behind *why* parties seek to influence procedural votes in Congress. Much less attention has been devoted to the micro-level factors associated with *how* party leaders seek to specifically manipulate procedural outcomes. Even before whipping occurs, legislators are often given guidance on how to vote, yet very little is known about this important process. In order to shed light on this form of agenda control, we utilize a new source of data providing updates from the Majority Leader's Office that indicate the leadership's positions on upcoming legislation and scheduled floor votes. Utilizing these data from the 110th and 111th Congresses, we seek to offer a more nuanced explanation of voting behavior in the U.S. House of Representatives. More specifically, we show that some, but not all, members are responsive to the weak signals coming from the leader's office.

The organization of the paper is as follows. In the next section, we review the theoretical literature on agenda control and party influence in Congress. From there, we place whipping in the broader institutional and procedural context and discuss how it can facilitate party leaders'

goals. We next introduce the data employed in our analysis, particularly as it pertains to how the party leadership sets the agenda on procedural matters. We present descriptive evidence before turning to more systematic analysis of how often legislators vote with the leadership on whipped votes. The final section concludes and discusses the implications of our findings.

Theories of Partisan Agenda Control in Congress

The past two decades has witnessed an explosion in the growth of scholarship detailing the influence of political parties in Congress. Initially, students of congressional politics set out to address the resurgence in parties after a substantial decline in the preceding decades (see, e.g., Rohde 1991). Soon thereafter, Krehbiel (1993) challenged this view of parties by arguing that for party influence to be significant, it must be documented independently of legislators' own personal preferences. In response to this challenge issued by Krehbiel, numerous attempts were made in the ensuing years to demonstrate that parties do independently influence legislative outcomes in Congress (see, e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Binder, Lawrence, and Maltzman 1999; Cox and Poole 2002; Snyder and Groseclose 2000).

During the last decade, emphasis has gradually shifted away from the question of whether parties matter in Congress to *how* exactly parties influence policy outcomes. In the view of Cox and McCubbins (2005), the primary influence of Congress is through negative agenda control. In particular, the majority party will block "bad" legislation, or amendments, from coming to the floor if such legislation is likely to split or highlight divisions within the party. This is often accomplished through the practice of using restrictive rules issued by the Rules Committee (Marshall 2005; Monroe and Robinson 2008).

This negative agenda-centered theory of party influence contrasts with the perspective of party influence offered in a series of papers by Aldrich and Rohde. In their view, party leaders influence legislative outcomes by means of a mix of both positive and negative agenda control. More specifically, the ability of party leaders to increase the discipline of rank-and-file members is conditional upon both intraparty homogeneity and interparty heterogeneity. As the majority party becomes more homogenous, the leadership has more discretion in choosing when and how to employ its agenda power. Typically, this will entail arm-twisting, promising favors, engaging in vote buying, and whipping recalcitrant members on crucial or important votes (see Aldrich and Rohde 2000).

In building upon these theoretical perspectives, other scholars have sought to further refine how parties specifically influence legislative outcomes. These scholars have largely done so by focusing on positive agenda control. In particular, they highlight what types of issues and votes party leaders choose to pressure rank-and-file members. For instance, Snyder and Groseclose (2000) find that party pressure is elevated on procedural and platform-type votes.[1] Although Cox and Poole (2002) take issue with the size of the party effects that Snyder and Groseclose report, they c find increased party effects on procedural votes – such as votes on special rules or chamber organization. Furthermore, in his response to Krehbiel and Meirowitz (2002), Roberts (2005) finds elevated party pressure on another procedural tool, the motion to recommit.[2]

Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008) further investigate the interrelationship between positive and negative agenda control. They argue that the distinctions between the two are not as clear as

[1] Platform-type votes include most economic issues – such as budgets, social security and the debt ceiling.
[2] The motion to recommit can only be offered by an opponent of a bill at the conclusion of debate. If the motion is successful, it sends the bill back to the parent committee (Oleszek 2007). As Roberts (2005) notes, supporters of the bill can amend the motion.

the previous literature suggests. In particular, they examine votes on questions to order special rules and votes to adopt special rules from 1953 to 2002. They find that – contrary to the expectations outlined by Cox and McCubbins (2005) – the majority party was often "rolled" on these procedural roll calls (on this point, see also Carson, Monroe, and Robinson 2011). They emphasize that success on those votes was highly conditional on the amount of power allotted to and exercised by party leadership. As such, the authors conclude that, "useful and important analytical distinction(s) between positive and negative agenda control is not as clear in practice as it is in theory when we consider the construction of procedural terms for floor consideration of legislation" (Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008: 22).

Partisan Agenda Control and Procedural Signaling

Implicit in the preceding theoretical discussion is the notion that legislators rely on certain cues when making important voting decisions. At the most basic level, legislators base voting decisions on their underlying ideological attitudes, which may or may not be especially intense on a given issue. When the attitudes are not well defined, legislators may be pulled in conflicting directions by their constituency, party organizations, and special interests (Arnold 1990). On certain issues, ideological, partisan, and constituency interests may closely align with one another. However, on more controversial and salient issues, considerably more divergence might emerge among these interests, forcing representatives to make much more difficult and consequential decisions (Kingdon 1989).

As much as possible, the party leadership attempts to make roll call voting decisions as easy as they can for its members on most legislation that comes before Congress. While the majority party wants to win, it frequently does not need its entire membership to fall in line to do

so. Moreover, the party leadership is preoccupied with maintaining its majority status and doing so occasionally requires placating representatives who represent cross-pressured districts (Arnold 1990).[3] In order to maximize the likelihood the party will win while simultaneously minimizing its loss of seats, the party leadership must be strategic in choosing when to pressure members on controversial legislation or key votes. Thus, when the party leadership finds it has more votes than necessary to pass a bill (or realizes that it does not have enough votes to be successful), it will release extraneous, cross-pressured members to vote with their constituencies. Otherwise, these legislators might find it difficult to support the party position on controversial legislation (King and Zeckhauser 2003).

Often, the pivotal vote is the underlying rule or vote on procedure and not the substance of the legislation. Simply stated, congressional rules govern the manner in which a bill is debated, amended, and considered on the floor. By dictating the amendment process, rules have the ability to centralize proposal power under the majority party leadership. In other words, the leadership determines what gets voted upon on the floor and what does not (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Cox 2000; Rohde 1991; Smith 1989). Despite their importance, rules are often less salient to constituents given the complexity associated with them. Indeed, votes on special rules often lack the "traceability" of amendment or final passage votes that would otherwise attract negative attention from constituents or special interests (Arnold 1990). Other votes such as moving the previous question or motions to recommit are likely even harder to explain to constituents in the district.

In light of the preceding discussion, we should expect to see greater evidence of partisan influence at the procedural stage of the legislative process. This is not to say that whipping does

[3] As Mayhew (1974: 99) argues, "There is no member of either house who would not be politically injured—by being made to toe a party line on all policies (unless of course he could determine the line)."

not occur at later stages of this process. In fact, Evans and Grandy (2009) document the role of whipping in Congress, particularly on final passage votes. As they contend, the whip system in Congress is utilized largely to facilitate the passage of legislation, especially when it appears as though legislators are wavering in their support of key tenants of the majority's agenda. Over time, the whip system has become much more important in Congress as the size of partisan majorities has been reduced and polarization among the membership has increased (Burden and Frisby 2004; Evans and Grandy 2009).

Despite recent scholarship documenting the importance of the whip system in Congress, little systematic research has examined the micro-level processes associated with how the party forms winning coalitions, especially on the key, early votes in the legislative process that set the stage for more dramatic final passage votes. Specifically, the literature does little to inform us about when, how, and under what conditions, the majority party leadership instructs members at the procedural stage of the legislative process. In many cases, these instructions should occur when the party needs member support and the outcome is uncertain. However, as many rules are technical in nature, the party will often provide as much guidance as possible to alleviate problems associated with information asymmetry when it comes to voting on procedural matters. In the next section, we discuss how the majority leadership has begun utilizing emails to deliver floor updates on upcoming procedural votes in Congress before offering hypotheses about how the signals may influence voting behavior.

Leader's Floor Updates

In order to examine how the majority party instructs members on procedural votes, we utilize a new dataset that consists of the Democratic Leader's floor update emails for the second

session of the 110th Congress and the entire 111th Congress.[4] The majority leader's office sends these updates to Democratic members and their staff while Congress is in session multiple times throughout the day.[5] Generally, there is a morning email (separate from the *Daily Leader*) that describes the legislative agenda for the day. Then, as votes approach, the office sends out additional emails. On some votes, the emails provide simple instructions, or "signals," such as vote yes or no. For amendments, the emails frequently give a one or two sentence description of the substance of the amendment. The emails will often give warnings that the Republicans might offer dilatory motions such as the motion to adjourn or force a vote on approval of the House journal.

Figure 1 provides an example of one email with signals. For two votes, the motion to adjourn and the special rule, there are instructions to vote yes. For the two substantive votes, there are no instructions. We think it is important to differentiate these instructions from traditional whipping since we have no evidence of the leader's office counting votes or "twisting arms" in the usual sense. In addition, since the leader sometimes sends these emails only minutes before (or even after a vote has started) there is no time to do anything other than to offer the leader's position. Nevertheless, we will test if a signal as weak as an email is enough to change voting behavior at the margins.[6]

[4] The emails are forwarded to one of the authors on a real time basis from a Democratic staff member. We are currently working on adding the first session of the 112th Congress to the analysis.
[5] The Majority Leader also sends out the *Weekly* and *Daily Leader*, that lays out the expected votes for the day or week. These emails do not include any instructions. We should note that these emails are both different and separate from the *Daily* and *Weekly Whip* reports.
[6] In contrast to e-mails sent from the Whip's office, the majority leader only sends correspondence on select votes. This suggests the leaders' e-mails are likely serving as a proxy for how salient the vote is to the majority, and as such, highlighting votes that are likely accompanied by positive agenda control techniques. Future iterations of this paper will build on this issue.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the different types of votes taken by the House and the proportion of the time the party offered instructions.[7] It is clear from the table that the party gives the majority of instructions on procedural votes while only offering a few instructions on substantive votes. In fact, the majority party rarely provided instructions on the final passage of a bill or conference report.

Within the procedure category, the leadership frequently gives instructions on two types of important positive agenda setting votes – moving the question on a special rule, and then the vote on the rule. It is essential that the party win on these votes, especially moving the previous question, because a loss can concede agenda setting powers to the minority party. Instructions were commonly provided on motions to adjourn since losing this vote could shut down the session prematurely if offered by the minority Republicans, or cause the House to stay in session beyond a desired date when the motion is put forward by the majority party. Additionally, the leadership frequently supplied instructions on motions to table. Generally, a motion to table is used to dispense with other motions that might force the majority to take an uncomfortable vote. If these signals carry any weight, we expect to find members supporting the leaderships' position more on signaled votes compared to non-signaled votes. In addition, we can also determine if all members of the party vote in lock step with the leadership on agenda setting votes, or if there is variation across different types of members based on their degree of liberalness. In order to increase comparability, we focus our analysis below only on procedural votes.

Results

The initial question we consider is the extent to which weak signals, such as an email from the majority leader, can matter. If they are at all effective, we should find that a greater

[7] The PIPC program at Duke University coded the vote types for the 110th Congress while the authors coded the votes for the 111th Congress.

proportion of Democrats supporting the party on votes with instructions compared to votes without instructions. To test this hypothesis, we created two measures. The first is the proportion of time a member followed the signals, and the second is how often they voted with the party on non-signaled votes. In both categories, we only include procedural votes in order to increase comparability across the two measures. If we were to include final passage votes, they would almost all fall into the non-signaled category and certainly bias results towards lower levels of party support on non-signaled votes.[8]

In order to measure the party position on votes without signals, we initially compared how the majority leader, Steny Hoyer, and the majority whip, James Clyburn voted. If they both voted the same way, we used that position as the party position. If they differed, or one of them did not vote, we coded the way the majority of the party voted as the party position. While the measures had a high of 1 for both Congress, the minimum signaled vote proportion was .61 in the 110th Congress (Nick Lampson – TX) and .29 in the 111th (Walt Minnick – UT). Lampson also had the low score for non-signaled votes in the 110th Congress (.58) while Bobby Bright (AL-2) supported the party 44 percent of the time in the 111th Congress.

Figures 2 and 3 present several scatterplots of our measures plotted against two variables, a member's W-NOMINATE score (Poole and Rosenthal 2007) and the Democratic share of the presidential vote in their congressional district. In both figures, the closed circles are the scores for signaled votes while the open circles are for non-signaled votes. We also plotted simple lowess curves to indicate the general trends in the data and put in vertical lines to denote the party and chamber median. It is clear from all the figures that the overall levels of party support are generally high across both types of votes. Party support for signaled votes (dashed lines) tends to be slightly higher across most of the variation in the x-axes, but not all of it, with

[8] Crespin (2010) finds representatives are responsive to constituents on substantive votes and the party on procedure.

support dropping off as members move from the party median towards the chamber median and beyond.

In Figure 2, we see that party support on signaled votes is nearly perfect for members to the left of the party median for the 110th and the 111th Congresses. The pattern is similar, although at slightly lower rates for non-signaled votes. For members to the right of the party median, but to the left of the chamber median, support is still high on both sets of votes but the general trend is downward with a greater drop-off in the 111th Congress. For the few members to the right of the chamber median, the support is lower still. We also see the difference between the two categories declines and even crosses for a few members. We should be cautious though in drawing inferences about differences between groups in this last category due to the nature of lowess curves and lack of statistical hypotheses tests. In Figure 3, the patterns appear to be generally similar with members from districts with a large Democratic base supporting the party at extremely high rates, a small drop-off for representatives between the two medians and then a larger decline on the other side of the chamber median. These figures offer what we think are some interesting preliminary findings. First, they show that the signals from the Majority Leader's office work as members appear to support the party at higher levels when they receive a signal. Second, they demonstrate that not all members support the party on procedural votes. This is an especially interesting result as much of the Congress literature to date has generally assumed that members of the majority party will simply vote with the party on procedural votes in order to facilitate control of the agenda. While "enough" members support the party, some do not, even when asked.

In Table 2, we perform a series of difference of means tests to determine if members are more likely to vote with the party on procedural votes when they receive instructions. During

the 110th Congress, Democrats voted with the party at a rate of .981 when there were instructions and .949 otherwise. For the 111th Congress, the difference was even larger, 4.8 (.946 vs. .898). These differences, along with a t-test when we pool the observations, are significant at the .05 level. Although the differences appear small, a difference of one percent of the Democratic majority corresponds to roughly 2.3 votes in the 110th Congress and 2.5 in the 111th Congress. Substantively, this means an average of 9.6 more Democrats voted with their party on procedural votes when the Leader's office gave instructions and indicates that instructions are effective and may mean the difference between winning or losing on an extremely close vote.

We also examine differences across three groups, those to the left of the party median, to the right of the chamber median, and in between the two medians. Democrats to the left of the party median appear to vote with the party on signaled votes unconditionally, at a rate of .994 compared to .949 on non-signaled votes. For moderates between the medians, the difference is similar—.04—but the overall rates are a few points lower. These two differences are also statistically significant. Finally, when we examine the most moderate members, their support plummets below .80, although the difference between signaled and non-signaled votes is not significant. This finding is consistent with the theoretical argument that moderates may be less responsive to the needs of the party when they come at the expense of their constituency" (Mayhew 1974). Taken together, these results are consistent with Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008) who find that supporting the party on procedural votes is clearly conditional. The difference here is we examine individual members rather than particular votes.

In order to determine if our results hold up to systematic scrutiny, we estimate several OLS regressions where the dependent variable is measured the same as above—the proportion of the time a member votes with the party on signaled and also non-signaled roll calls. To test if

there is a difference between the two, we include a dichotomous variable, *signaled*, that is coded one for each members' signaled vote score and zero for non-signaled votes.[9] In additional regressions, we test several hypotheses about where support is high and where it drops off.

In addition to the *signaled* variable, we include a few control variables in our model. We expect members from districts with a strong Democratic base should vote with the party more often, all else equal. This conjecture holds for two reasons. First, a Democrat with a strong base does not always have to decide between voting with her district and voting with the party. On most votes, the two positions are similar enough that when a member votes with the party, she is also voting with her constituents. However, members who represent districts with a smaller Democratic base are often forced to cast votes that either support the party or the voters back home (but not both). Second, we also expect that the amount of Democratic support in the district and a member's electoral safety should be highly correlated. As such, members from strong Democratic districts can support the party more often, even if it means occasionally voting against the district, and still feel secure about returning to Congress year after year (on this point, see Carson, Koger, Lebo, and Young 2010). We measure *Democratic base* as the Democratic presidential candidate's share of the two-party vote in the election prior to the respective Congress.

We also expect that candidates who faced a primary challenge should support the party less compared to legislators who did not have to contend for their party's nomination. If a member has to worry about a challenge from within her own party, she usually needs to be particularly careful not to stray from the district's views on the issues. While most constituents do not routinely pay attention to procedural votes, a primary challenger will likely use a high (or

[9] This means each member is included in the estimate twice for each congress. For this reason, we cluster the standard errors on each representative, using STATA's cluster command. See Froot (1989) and Williams (2000) for more on clustering.

low) party support score as a way to show the member is out of touch with the district. To measure this concept, we include a dichotomous variable, *Primary Challenge*, coded one for members who faced a primary challenger and zero otherwise.[10]

Additionally, we include a dichotomous variable, *Freshman*, to determine if freshman members are more or less likely to support the party leadership. From one perspective, it would make sense for freshmen to be more deferential to the party given that they are new to the job and often must seek guidance elsewhere in terms of how to vote (Kingdon 1989). Members in the party leadership provide a good source for cues in this sense and can often reward loyal freshmen with campaign money for their next election (Cann 2008). An alternative perspective emphasizes the individual ideological qualities of those legislators. In the 110th and 111th Congresses, the Democratic Party saw an influx of members from more conservative House districts, which could result in an increased propensity for member defections among these freshmen legislators. Finally, we also include a dichotomous variable coded one for the 110th Congress.

We present the results from the initial estimation in Table 3 and continue to find that members vote with the party at greater proportions (.04) when the party sends a simple signal in an email.[11] The control variables work as we expected as members with a larger Democratic base vote with the party at higher levels. Representatives who faced a primary challenge and freshman were less likely to toe the party line with the effect of *freshman* twice as large as the *primary challenge variable.*

[10] Since some members face only token competition in a primary, we coded members who received 90 percent or more of the primary vote as a zero. Freshmen legislators were omitted from this coding.

[11] Since our dependent variable is a proportion, we could estimate models such as a glm with a logit link, a tobit censored at 0 and 1, or various count models. Using these models we continue to find members vote with the party more on signaled versus non-signaled votes.

In the next regression, we include dichotomous variables for each of the three groups—left, middle, and right—while suppressing the constant terms.[12] This allows us to test for differences between the three types of members with the coefficients on each of the group variables represent the average level of support for the groups. Similar to the results in Table 2, the proportion of support for the party declines from left to right. Using a Wald test, we find the support from the left-most group is significantly greater than the middle group at $p = .06$. The difference between the other pairs (middle and right, and left and right) is statistically significant at $p < .05$, even when controlling for other factors.

Finally, we estimate three additional regressions using just the members in each of the groups.[13] Now, the *signal* variable tells us if representatives in each of the groups are supporting the party at higher levels when a signal is sent by the Leader. Members in the left and middle groups appear to be responsive to signals on procedural votes, supporting the party .045 and .04 more, respectively. For the members to the right of the floor median, they show no difference when a signal is sent. The controls also vary across the three groups in substantively interesting ways. The presidential vote coefficient is now negative and small for the left group, positive and slightly larger for the middle group, and over one for the right group. This large coefficient for the right group means that moderate members are very responsive to changes in their base, while the influence is quite small for the other groups. Once we separate out the three categories, it appears that moderate freshmen are less likely to vote with the party on procedure while there is no difference from the left and middle. If the result was consistent across the three groups, then we could not really parse out if freshmen were supporting the party less based on ideology, or

[12] When suppressing the constant, the R^2 can no longer be interpreted in the normal fashion so we report a corrected version.
[13] An alternative approach is to interact the group variables with the signal variable. We decided the ease of interpretation was worth the decrease in efficiency.

because they were new and did not know how to vote on complex procedural matters. However, since the significant result is only with the most moderate members, we are more confident that these freshmen are deliberately voting against the rest of their party.

Conclusion

In this paper, we set out to accomplish three things. First, we wanted to document the micro-level role that the majority party plays in signaling legislators in terms of how to vote on important legislation. Although we are continuing to learn much about the whip system and its role in positive agenda control in Congress (see Evans and Grandy 2009), we know significantly less about the influence of party leadership prior to substantive votes occurring on the floor. In particular, this paper has shown that the majority party is cognizant of the balance legislators must maintain in order to get reelected and support the party platform. As such, the leadership is more likely to signal positions on procedural matters where traceability is much lower and the risks to legislators are reduced (Arnold 1990). On substantive votes such as final passage and amendments where traceability is high, the Majority Leader offers little guidance to members and we believe this task is left to the whip system.

The second goal for this paper was to begin to document an as yet understudied aspect of the legislative process. Prior research has often tried to measure the leadership's position on key votes taken in Congress by using various statistical techniques to estimate "ideal points" or other positions. The data that we employ in this paper clearly offers a viable, alternative specification that is known rather than estimated and future work can utilize to tap into the majority's position on some votes taking place in the House. Use of this measure could be important to students of

congressional politics seeking to determine the role of party in influencing rank-and-file member behavior.

Our third and final goal in this paper was to apply the measure of partisan signaling to the individual decision-making processes used by rank-and-file legislators. Specifically, we wanted to determine what factors led to members adopting the majority party's position. In particular, we found that legislator ideology and constituency influence were important predictors in this decision calculus for some, but not all, members. Members who were to the left of the party median, supported the leadership at extremely high rates across all types of procedural votes, and nearly perfectly when signaled. In contrast, members who are to the right of the floor median, and generally not needed to get a majority on any particular vote, supported the party at much lower rates on agenda setting votes and were not responsive to the signals. We think these results are important because they reinforce the idea that while support for the leadership is high, and the majority is rarely rolled, it does not imply that all members toe the party line, even when the votes are harder to trace back to substantive changes in policy outcomes.

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Figure 1 – Example of Floor Update

Office of the Majority Leader Steny Hoyer

Leader's Floor Update

The House is now taking the following votes:

1) **Adjournment Resolution** (H.Con.Res. 172) - To provide for the House to adjourn for the August District Work Period – **VOTE YES** – 15 minutes

2) **H.Res. 691** - Rule providing for consideration of H.R. 2749 - Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 - **VOTE YES** – 5 minutes

3) **H.R. 2728** - William Orton Law Library Improvement and Modernization Act (Rep. Lofgren - House Administration) Suspension bill – 5 minutes

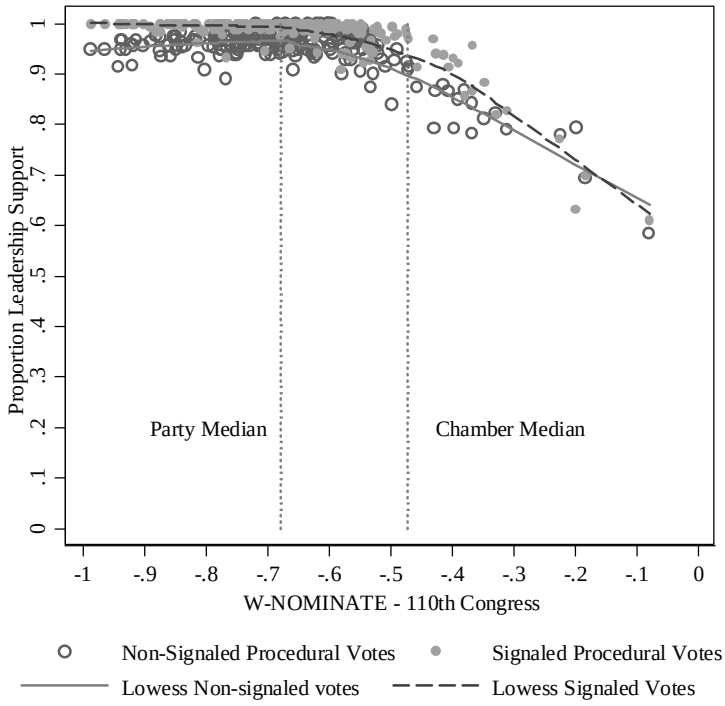
4) **H.R. 2510** - Absentee Ballot Track, Receive, and Confirm Act (Rep. Davis (CA) - House Administration) Suspension bill – 5 minutes

Next votes: about an hour on motion to recommit and final passage of H.R. 2749 - Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 (Rep. Dingell – Energy and Commerce).

If you have any questions please contact: name redacted

To subscribe (Democratic staff only), email email redacted with your name, office, and position.
To unsubscribe, respond with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.
Visit MajorityLeader.house.gov for more press, floor and member resources

Figure 2 – Proportion of Leadership Support by Member Ideology



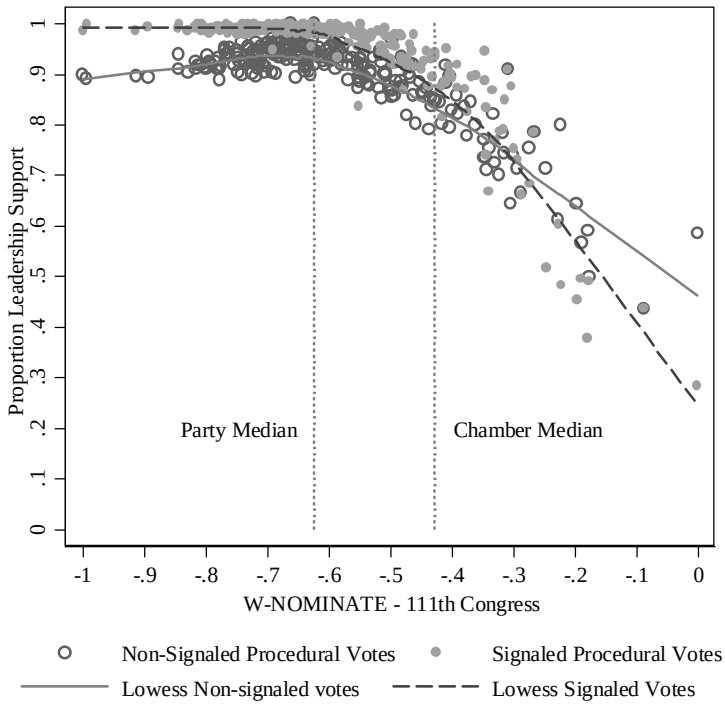
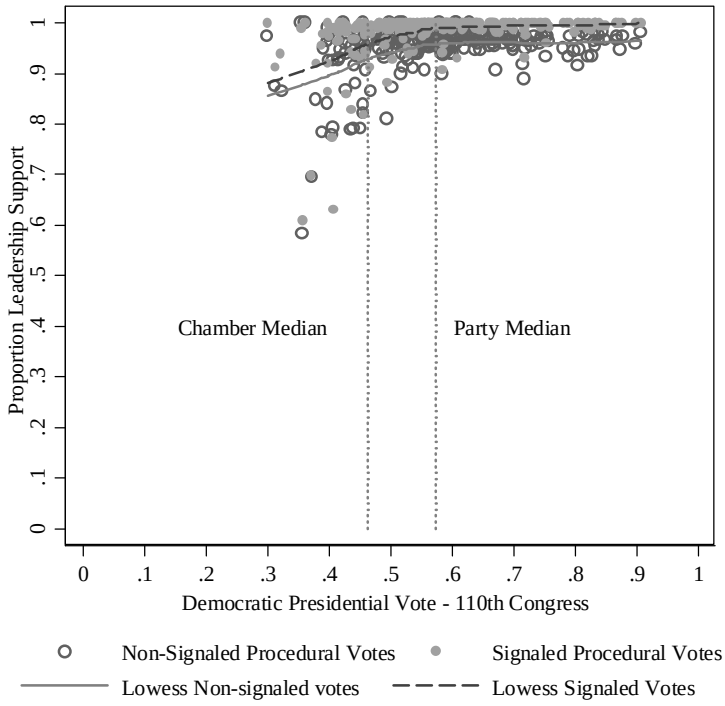


Figure 3 – Proportion of Leadership Support by Presidential Vote



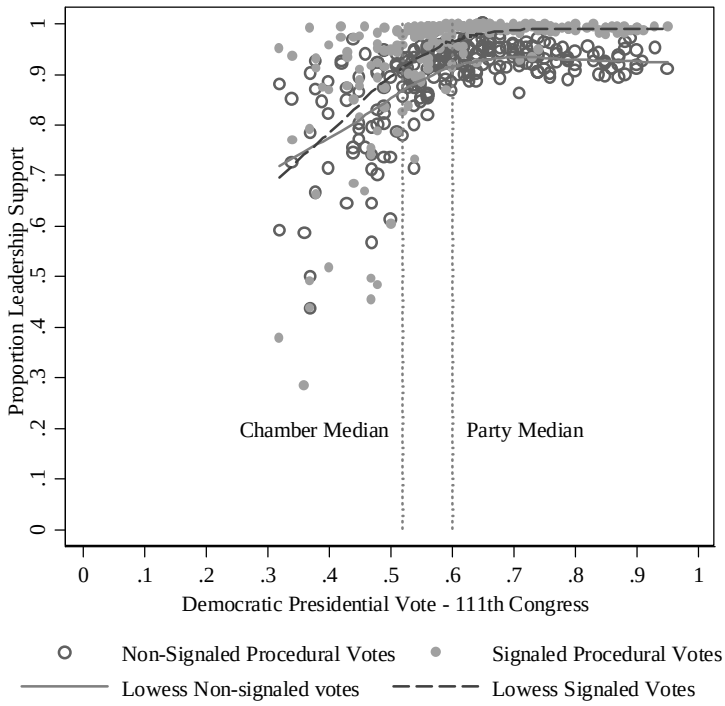


Table 1 – Vote Types by Congress

Vote Type	110th Congress		111th Congress	
	Total Votes	% Instructions	Total Votes	% Instructions
Substantive and Suspensions				
Final Passage of a Bill	45		101	3.0
Final Passage of Conference Report	4		12	8.3
Final Passage of Resolution	2		5	60.0
Final Passage of Joint Resolution			3	
Passage of a Bill under Suspension of the Rules	133		304	0.3
Passage of a Joint Resolution under Suspension of the Rules	2		3	
Final Passage of Concurrent Resolution	7	14.3	18	72.2
Passage of a Concurrent Resolution under Suspension of the Rules	18		39	
Passage of a Resolution under Suspension of the Rules	86		347	
Straight Amendments	82		359	6.1
Passage over Presidential Veto	5	20.0		
Motion to Suspend the Rules and Concur	6		14	
Procedural				
Motion to Reconsider			16	
Appeal of the Chair's Ruling	2	50.0		
Motion to Recommit to Conference	1		2	100
Motion to Rise from the Committee of the Whole	3	100.0	1	
Passage of Special Rule	65	80.0	132	92.4
Motion to Commit			3	33.3
Motion to Consider	5	100.0	7	85.7
Motion to Refer	2		8	87.5
Motion to Order Previous Question	1		4	75.0
Election of Speaker			1	
Motion to Recommit	35		65	12.3
Motion to Instruct Conferees	10		11	
Motion to Table	38	65.8	35	80.0
Motion to Recede and Concur	16		40	32.5
Previous Question on Special Rules	68	82.4	69	92.8
Dilatory				
Motion to Approve House Journal	13	92.3	13	100.0
Motion to Adjourn	39	79.5	19	63.2
Miscellaneous (non dilatory)			14	14.3

Table 2 – Proportion Voting with Leadership on Procedural Votes

	Vote Type		
All Groups	**Signaled**	**Non-Signaled**	**Difference**
110th Congress	.981	.949	.032*
111th Congress	.946	.898	.048*
Pooled	.963	.922	.040*
By Group			
Left of Party Median	.994	.949	.045*
Between Medians	.976	.936	.040*
Right of Chamber Median	.789	.770	.019

*Difference sig. at $p<.05$

Table 3 – OLS Regression of Party Support

Variables	Base Model	Groups	Left	Middle	Right
Signaled Party Support	0.040*	0.040*	0.045*	0.040*	0.019
	(0.0023)	(0.0023)	(0.0014)	(0.0025)	(0.016)
Democratic Base	0.24*	0.056*	-0.022*	0.083*	1.11*
	(0.035)	(0.019)	(0.0085)	(0.020)	(0.21)
Primary Challenge	-0.015*	-0.0029	-0.0034	-0.0089	-0.015
	(0.0055)	(0.0043)	(0.0032)	(0.0063)	(0.026)
Freshman	-0.039*	-0.021*	-0.0035	-0.0043	-0.10*
	(0.011)	(0.0064)	(0.0018)	(0.0051)	(0.029)
110th Congress	0.047*	0.031*	0.013*	0.040*	0.12*
	(0.0050)	(0.0036)	(0.0014)	(0.0033)	(0.027)
Left of Party Median		0.90*			
		(0.014)			
Between Party and Floor Medians		0.89*			
		(0.011)			
Right of Floor Median		0.73*			
		(0.019)			
Constant	0.77*		0.96*	0.87*	0.28*
	(0.024)		(0.0061)	(0.012)	(0.10)
N	986	986	492	376	118
R^2	0.320	0.621	0.668	0.455	0.423

Standard errors clustered by member in parentheses
* $p<0.05$