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# Beyond Policy Representation in the U.S. House

## Partisanship, Polarization, and Citizens' Attitudes About Casework

Michael W. Wagner

*University of Delaware*

Although a great deal of work shows that House members generally effectively represent the policy preferences of the majority of voters in their district, we know less about a more general level of representation enjoyed by those who do not support the incumbent. This problem is conceptualized by examining whether citizens, especially those in the *opposing constituency*, view casework as a partisan enterprise. Using data from the American National Election Study (ANES) cumulative file, this alternate way to consider representation illustrates that members of the opposing constituency are less satisfied with casework and less likely to think their representative would be helpful if contacted. Additionally, negative attitudes about casework generally increase in size for all citizens as the parties become increasingly polarized at the elite level and as one's individual representative becomes more extreme. Implications regarding the importance of political parties in the representation process are discussed.

**Keywords:** *representation; casework; U.S. House of Representatives; partisanship; polarization; political participation*

Representation lies at the heart of the democratic process. Generally, representation is studied by examining whether representatives support policies that their constituents prefer (Miller & Stokes, 1963). Studies of this kind often measure representation by examining how well representatives' voting behavior corresponds to their districts' mean opinion (Erikson,

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Wright, & McIver, 1993). Thus, our understanding of representation often stems from scholars estimating the extent to which liberal legislators represent liberal districts and conservative representatives represent conservative constituencies.

In general, it is clear that members of Congress do a reasonable job, via roll-call voting, of representing the policy interests of the majority of their constituents (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002; Erikson & Wright, 2000, 2001), but how well do citizens believe they are represented when it comes to issues other than policy? In this article, I test this question from two different perspectives. First, examining alternate forms of representation is especially pertinent for citizens who are a part of what I call the *opposing constituency*, that is, members of the major political party that is not the party of their representative in the House. This is because these citizens are already less likely to receive the same level of policy representation as citizens of a district who are in the same party as their congressperson. Second, this question affords the opportunity to assess representation in times of elite polarization, that is, how do citizens assess the quality of the service representation they receive when elites are polarized compared to times when the divide between elected Republicans and Democrats is not as substantial?

I argue that one way to measure how well citizens believe they are represented in these ways is to scrutinize their attitudes and behaviors regarding congressional casework, a representative activity that is thought to be applied equally to all constituents. Casework has been shown to influence citizens' vote choice (Fiorina, 1981). Indeed, Fenno claims that for members of Congress, "constituency service is totally nonpartisan and non-ideological" (Fenno, 1978, p. 104). In this article, I examine whether *citizens*, especially those in the opposing constituency, feel the same way. Thus, I ask the following general question: Does the party-in-electorate believe that casework is nonpartisan? Specifically, do those in the opposing constituency exhibit different attitudes and behaviors regarding casework than those who are members of the same political party as their representatives? Finally, as Republicans and Democrats in Congress become more polarized and as individual representatives exhibit more extreme views, are all partisans in the electorate less likely to look favorably on casework from their members of Congress?

In an era of increased partisan polarization at both the elite (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997) and mass (Hetherington, 2001) levels, members of the opposing constituency should less likely believe that their representatives would be helpful if contacted than those citizens in the same party as their

Congress members. When Congress polarizes, and as some Congress members become more extreme in their voting behavior, those in the opposing constituency are likely to view casework as a partisan enterprise and, thus, both should evaluate it less positively and be less likely to seek it. What is more, a Congress member's constituent copartisans may well be turned off from actually seeking casework by a polarized atmosphere.

Investigated in this way, representation focuses on how much of a chance there is, from a constituent's perspective, to receive a form of representation from his or her Congressperson other than policy representation via roll-call voting, especially when the constituent might prefer a policy representative from the other major political party. This analysis speaks to the ongoing conversation about how political parties and party polarization affect representation.

## Representation and Casework

Eulau and Karps (1977) parse representative responsiveness (Pitkin, 1967) into four categories: policy responsiveness, service responsiveness, allocative responsiveness, and symbolic responsiveness. As noted above, political scientists know a great deal about policy responsiveness. Regarding allocative responsiveness, Cox and McCubbins (1986) declare that a representative's best strategy is to promise redistributions to his or her reelection constituency, leaving members of the opposing constituency little chance to receive allocative representation.

Several political scientists have examined the role that constituency casework, the bread and butter of service responsiveness, plays in the incumbent advantage (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1984; Fenno, 1978; Fiorina, 1974, 1977; Mann & Wolfinger, 1980; Serra & Moon, 1994; Yiannakis, 1981). Although Johannes (1983) demonstrates that a member's seniority is inversely related to a variety of casework-related measures, he notes that "much—perhaps most—of casework activity seems to be idiosyncratic, with the various components largely unrelated to each other" (p. 545). Indeed, Fenno (1978) finds that many Congress members are very concerned about the level of constituent service provided by their offices, as they are convinced that casework plays a role in their reelection. In the words of Serra and Moon (1994) "democratic theory suggests that representation should be associated with both service and policy responsiveness" (p. 200). Generally, then, representatives are thought to treat casework in a nonpartisan manner.

Though the evidence is mixed, it seems that congress members are right to worry about casework. As Yiannakis (1981) demonstrates, those who seek service responsiveness from their representatives become part of the “grateful electorate” of voters who are more likely to support incumbents on election day regardless of party identification. Furthermore, voters who engage in the casework process with an incumbent, although still identifying with the challenger’s party, are more likely to be “swayed by casework to vote for the incumbent” (Yiannakis, 1981, p. 568).

Thus, casework is generally considered to be “pure profit” for legislators (Fiorina, 1978). Mann and Wolfinger (1980) show that although the direct payoff of casework may be limited, having a reputation for providing good constituent service, it has value for representatives. Specifically, Fiorina (1981) finds that constituents who have positive casework experiences are 11% more likely to vote for the incumbent. If the constituent also hears of another satisfactory casework experience from someone else, the likelihood increases by 21%. Casework, at least before more recent polarization between the parties at the elite and mass levels, benefited representatives regardless of the party affiliation of the person for whom the legislator completed constituent service.<sup>1</sup>

If casework is pure profit provided to citizens in a nonpartisan manner, what reason would members of the opposing constituency have to treat it through partisan-colored glasses? It is useful to recognize that a representative does not always look at his or her district as a single unit (Fenno, 1978).<sup>2</sup> Fenno explains that these views of constituency shape House members’ decisions on resource allocative representation. Those outside the primary and reelection constituency live in sections of Fenno’s concentric circles that do not receive much policy representation and may not receive much in the way of service and allocative representation. These constituents receive less attention from their congressperson. Thus, those in the opposing constituency may view casework less favorably and seek it less often than those who have a place in one of Fenno’s more prominent concentric circles.

Conversely, Yiannakis (1981) concludes that constituents’ partisan preferences are significant in determining whether the constituents will seek allocative representation but found them to be less significant than being contacted by their representatives and knowing people who have contacted their representatives. After more than 20 years of increasing partisan polarization at the elite level (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997) and a concomitant decline in trust in government, complete with citizens preferring to sit on the democratic

sidelines than to get involved in partisan sniping (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), my inquiry examines whether the opposing constituency's attitudes and behaviors regarding casework have become less positive.

## Hypotheses, Data, and Research Design

This article analyzes four related questions. First, "Are members of the opposing constituency less likely to be satisfied with casework than a representative's co-partisans?" Second, "Are members of the opposing constituency less likely to believe that their congressperson would be helpful if contacted?" Third, "Are members of the opposing constituency less likely to contact their congressperson than representatives' constituent copartisans?" Fourth, "How does elite polarization and member extremity influence the opposing constituency's attitudes and behaviors regarding casework?"

*Hypothesis 1:* Members of the opposing constituency who contacted their representatives in the House will be less likely to be satisfied with the casework provided by their congress members than will the incumbents' copartisans be.

*Hypothesis 2:* Members of the opposing constituency who did not contact their representatives in the House will be less likely to think their representatives would be helpful if contacted than will their incumbents' copartisans.

*Hypothesis 3:* Members of the opposing constituency will be less likely to contact their representatives in the House to seek constituent services than will their representatives' copartisans.

Alternatively, those in the opposing constituency could more likely contact their congressperson to complain, express alternative opinions, and actively seek representation other than policy representation. It is possible that the efficacy generated from complaining, even to a source believed to be unsympathetic, would trump a constituent's feelings that their requests for representation would fall on deaf ears.

For each hypothesis, however, I expect that as congressional polarization and/or member extremity increases, members of both the opposing and reelection constituency should be less likely to contact their congressperson, be satisfied with casework, and think their representatives would be helpful if contacted. Regardless of elite polarization and member extremity, though, I hypothesize that members of the opposing constituency should still exhibit behaviors and attitudes about casework that are more negative than those in the reelection constituency.

## Data and Research Design

Data for this article come from the American National Election Study (ANES) 1948-2000 cumulative survey file. The relevant years of the ANES for this article are 1978-1994, because those are the only years respondents were asked questions about constituent service they sought and received. Fortunately, these years reasonably overlap the time period where partisan elites became more polarized (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997). The surveys were conducted every 2 years. The dependent variables included in this analysis are (a) contact, a dichotomous variable representing whether a respondent contacted his or her congressperson; (b) satisfied, which represents whether a constituent who did contact his or her representative was *very satisfied*, *somewhat satisfied*, *not very satisfied*, or *not at all satisfied* with the service received from his or her representative; and (c) helpful, which represents whether a constituent feels that his or her representative would be *very helpful*, *somewhat helpful*, or *not very helpful* if contacted.

For contact, 1 = *contacted representative*, 0 = *did not contact representative*. I use logistic regression analysis in the model using this dependent variable. The helpful variable is coded 1 = *not very helpful*, 2 = *somewhat helpful* and 3 = *very helpful*. Satisfied is coded 1 = *not at all satisfied*, 2 = *not very satisfied*, 3 = *somewhat satisfied*, 4 = *very satisfied*. An ordered logit analysis is used in models with these dependent variables.

## Independent Variables

The first independent variable of interest is *opposing constituency* (coded 1 if a respondent is a Democrat and his or her member of Congress is a Republican or if the respondent is a Republican and his or her member of Congress is a Democrat and 0 if both the respondent and representative are in the same party). *Extremity of representative* is the absolute value of the DW-NOMINATE score of a constituent's congressperson, with a 1 representing an extreme member and 0 representing a moderate member (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997).  $OC \times Extremity$  is an interaction term multiplying opposing constituency and extremity of representative. As a congress member of the opposite party becomes more extreme, those in the opposing constituency should see casework as increasingly partisan.<sup>3</sup> *Polarization of chamber* is the DW-NOMINATE score of House Democrats and House Republicans (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997).<sup>4</sup>

I also employ several control variables in the analysis that have been shown to affect casework and political participation more generally (Johannes, 1983;

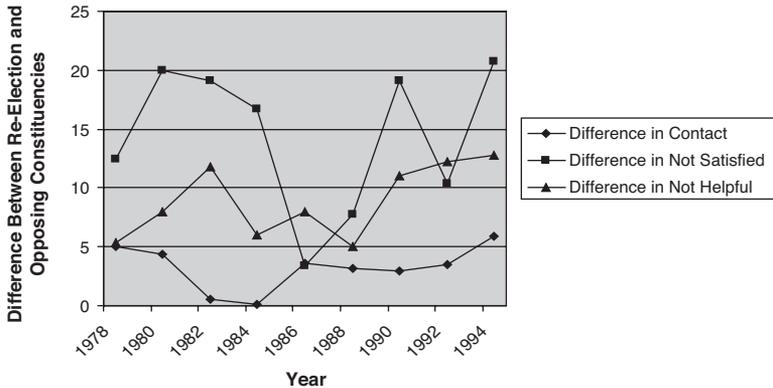
Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Yiannakis, 1981), including the education level of the respondent (*education*), the income level of the respondent (*income*), the racial identity of the respondent (*race*), the region of the country the respondent lives in (*region*), the age of the respondent (*age*), whether the respondent knew of someone else who contacted his or her congressperson (*friend contact*), and whether the respondent was contacted by his or her congressperson (*contacted*).

## Results

Figure 1 shows the simple differences in the attitudes and behavior regarding casework reported by ANES respondents in the opposing constituency and citizens in the reelection constituency from 1978 to 1994. As the figure demonstrates, during most of the early period of the time series, a time of limited partisan rancor among elites and in the electorate, there is not as much of a difference between the opposing constituency and the reelection constituency's likelihood of contacting of a congressperson as there is by 1994—the precise time that elite polarization began heating up. Indeed, in 1982 and 1984, there was no distinguishable difference between the propensity of the reelection constituency or the opposing constituency to contact their House members. However, as Congress became increasingly polarized, as it did in 1992 and 1994, differences between the opposing constituency and reelection constituency emerged. In 1994, about 14% of those in the opposing constituency reported contacting their House member, whereas just more than 20% of those in the reelection constituency did.

The difference between the opposing and reelection constituencies' satisfaction with casework increased from about 3% in 1986 to more than 20% in 1994. However, the period preceding 1986 also shows significant variation in differences in the various congressional constituencies' satisfaction with casework. Regarding how helpful citizens believed that casework would be if it were sought, Figure 1 shows a general increase in the difference between the percentage of those in the opposing and reelection constituencies that believed their representatives would be *not at all helpful* if contacted. In 1978, the difference between the two groups was 5%; by 1994 it had increased to nearly 13%. It is interesting to note that for each variable, the differences between the reelection and opposing constituency were never greater than in 1994—a time widely considered to be one of elite polarization. Of course, the trends presented in Figure 1 do not

**Figure 1**  
**Difference in Attitude and Behavior Regarding Casework, 1978-1994**



systematically examine how a variety of important factors influence constituents' attitudes and behavior when it comes to casework.

Table 1 reports the coefficients, standard errors, and levels of statistical significance of variables in the analyses examining whether members of the opposing constituency believe casework is partisan. In the left-hand column, the contact model is reported. As hypothesized, the logistic regression analysis demonstrates that membership in the opposing constituency is negatively—though at a modest level of statistical significance ( $p < .10$ )—related to the seeking of congressional casework. The *extremity of representative*,  $OC \times Extremity$ , and *polarization of chamber* are all negatively related to seeking casework, as hypothesized; however, the variables fall short of conventional levels of statistical significance. The control variables *education*, *age*, *race*, *contacted*, and *friend contacted* are all significantly and positively related to seeking casework. It is important to keep in mind that the nature of the language used in the ANES questions do not permit a definitive claim that the contact from a member of Congress (*contact*) or the knowledge that a friend contacted a member of Congress (*friend contact*) came before the respondent did contact his or her representative. Indeed, the ANES question used for the contact variable does not definitively distinguish when the respondent contacted his or her representative. *Region* was not related to the seeking of casework.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1**  
**The Opposing Constituency's Behavior**  
**and Attitudes About Casework**

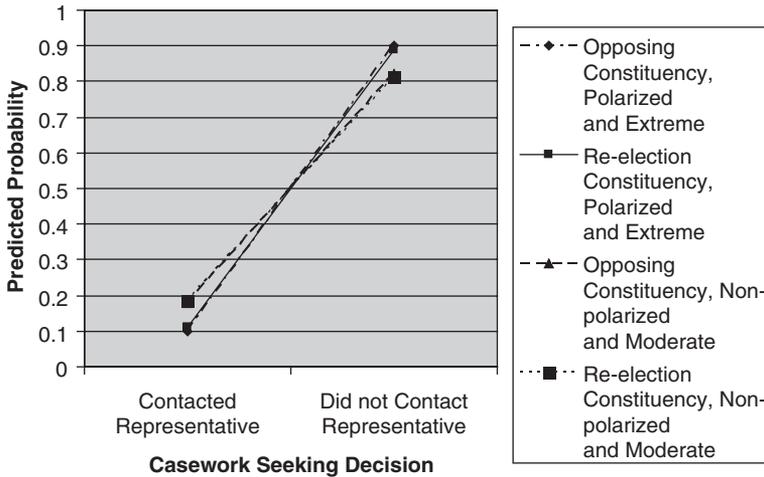
	Contact	Satisfied	Helpful
Opposing constituency	-0.235* (0.136)	-0.598** (0.231)	-0.446** (0.0947)
Extremity of representative	-0.346 (0.222)	-0.217 (0.388)	-0.491** (0.155)
OC × Extremity	-0.28 (0.392)	-0.946 (0.674)	-0.57** (0.265)
Polarization of chamber	-0.681 (0.637)	-1.648 (1.105)	-2.938** (0.449)
Education	0.171** (0.038)	-0.064 (0.061)	-0.019 (0.025)
Race	0.467** (0.112)	-0.098 (0.208)	-0.196** (0.065)
Contacted	1.734** (0.172)	0.244 (0.336)	0.882** (0.668)
Friend contacted	1.522** (0.063)	0.307** (0.11)	0.93** (0.053)
Age	0.049** (0.196)	0.0415 (0.035)	0.234** (0.013)
Region	-0.039 (0.032)	0.076 (0.058)	-0.13 (0.022)

Note: Contact:  $N = 9,511$ ; log likelihood =  $-3,413.86$ ;  $LR\chi^2 = 1,365.3^{***}$ ; pseudo  $R^2 = .17$ . Satisfied:  $N = 1,400$ ; log likelihood =  $-1,369.25$ ;  $LR\chi^2 = 79.64^{***}$ ; pseudo  $R^2 = 0.03$ . Helpful:  $N = 8,574$ ; log likelihood =  $-7,606.93$ ;  $LR\chi^2 = 1,225.57^{***}$ ; pseudo  $R^2 = 0.08$ .

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

Of course, the coefficients reported in the left-hand column of Table 1 do not reveal the substantive impact of membership in the opposing constituency on seeking casework. Thus, I calculated the predicted probabilities that respondents would contact their representatives. Though membership in the opposing constituency is modestly and negatively statistically related to contacting one's representative, the substantive impact is slight at best. When the chamber is polarized and people's representatives are extreme, ANES respondents are not as likely to contact their representatives, regardless of their own party affiliation or the party ID of their representatives. Specifically, those in the opposing constituency have a predicted probability of .10 of contacting their representative compared to .11 for members of the reelection constituency. When the House is not polarized and respondents'

**Figure 2**  
**Predicted Probability That Representatives Were Contacted During Times of Chamber Polarization and Chamber Nonpolarization**



own representatives are moderate, those in the opposing and reelection constituency have a predicted probability of .18 to contact their representatives. In short, there is a significant, substantive difference regarding people’s willingness to contact their representative that depends on the extremity of one’s particular representative and the polarization of the chamber as a whole. As Figure 2 shows, ANES respondents are more willing to contact their representatives when the chamber is not polarized and their own House members are moderates.

Thus, although party matters to a statistically significant but substantively negligible (bordering on nonexistent) degree, chamber polarization and the extremity of one’s representative’s voting record do statistically and substantively affect a constituent’s willingness to seek casework from their representative in Congress regardless of party affiliation.<sup>6</sup>

The middle column of Table 1 reports the results of the *satisfied* model, which examines whether those who did contact their congressperson were satisfied with the result. As hypothesized, membership in the opposing constituency influences whether one is likely to be satisfied with the results of the casework one receives from his or her congressperson.

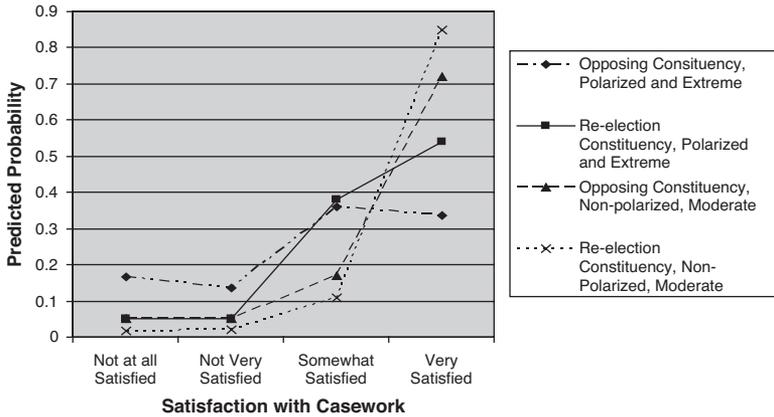
The *opposing constituency* variable is negatively signed and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Given previous explanations of casework as a nonpartisan enterprise, this finding is surprising. Taking into account the increasing partisan polarization and the elite and mass levels, the findings make more sense. The results here suggest that those in the opposing constituency have a qualitatively different casework experience than do those in the reelection constituency.

Though they do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, the interaction of membership in the opposing constituency and the extremity of one's representative ( $OC \times Extremity$ ), and the degree to which Congress is polarized (*polarization of chamber*), have a negative effect on satisfaction with casework ( $p < .15$ ). The only other variable that reaches a conventional level of statistical significance in the model is *friend contacted*, which is positively correlated with one's satisfaction with casework.

Figure 3 provides the results of the predicted probabilities examining how satisfied ANES respondents were with the congressional casework they received. Regardless of the degree of chamber polarization or the extreme policy views of individual representatives, those in the opposing constituency are more likely to say that they were *not at all satisfied* or *not very satisfied* with casework than their counterparts in the reelection constituency. Not surprisingly, though, the differences are most pronounced when the chamber is polarized and constituents' representatives are extreme with respect to Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE scores. When this is the case, those in the opposing constituency are likely to be dissatisfied with casework about 31% of the time compared to almost 10% of the time for those in the reelection constituency. Additionally, there is a 21% difference between the percentage of people in the reelection constituency and those in the opposing constituency who are *very satisfied* with casework during times of chamber polarization coupled with being represented by an extreme member of Congress.

When the House is not polarized and people's representatives are moderate, two conclusions are evident. First, under these circumstances, citizens who contact their congressperson seem to be quite satisfied with the service representation they receive. In all, 72% of the opposing constituency and 85% of the reelection constituency are predicted to be *very satisfied* with the results of the casework they sought from their congressperson. Adding the percentage of respondents predicted to be *somewhat satisfied* with their casework raises the satisfaction levels to 89% for the opposing constituency and 97% for the reelection constituency. These levels comport with traditional explanations of casework as a nonpartisan

**Figure 3**  
**Predicted Probability of Satisfaction With Casework During Times of Chamber Polarization and Chamber Nonpolarization**



activity (Fenno, 1978; Ortiz, Wirz, Semion, & Rodriguez, 2004) that benefits the legislator (Yiannakis, 1981).

Second, even when congressional polarization and member extremity are low, the satisfaction level of those in the opposing constituency and reelection constituency still differ substantively from each other. The predicted probabilities reported in Figure 3 show that 10% of the opposing constituency is predicted to be *not at all satisfied* or *not very satisfied* with casework. Only 3% of the reelection constituency is predicted to express any kind of dissatisfaction with casework when there is little difference between the parties and when members of Congress are moderates. Additionally, opposing constituency members are 13% less likely to be *very satisfied* with casework than reelection constituency members.

Thus, the extremity of one's representative in Congress and the overall policy distance between the Republicans and the Democrats in the House significantly affect the way that people assess how well they are represented by their member of Congress in casework situations. In addition, these differences are exacerbated by membership in the opposing constituency.

The right-hand column of Table 1 reports the results of the *helpful* model. As hypothesized, membership in the opposing constituency has a significant ( $p < .01$ ) and negative relationship with believing that one's

representative in Congress would be helpful if casework was sought. In this case, unlike the contact and satisfied equations, we can be confident that the respondents are discussing their opinions about their current representatives in the year of the survey. This is because the question asks, "If you had (another/a) problem that (the running U.S. House incumbent) could do something about, do you think (he/she) would be *very helpful*, *somewhat helpful*, or *not very helpful*?" Thus, for the equation where helpful is the dependent variable, at least, we can be confident that changes in aggregate answers over time actually directly reflect real changes over time.

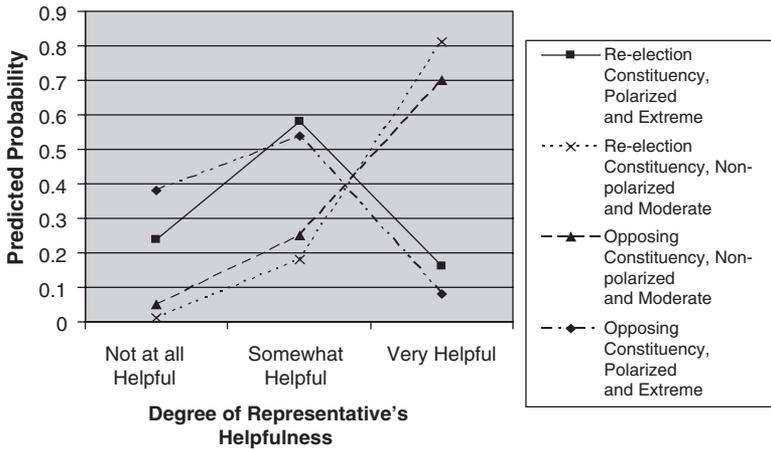
In addition to membership in the opposing constituency, the extremity of one's congressional representative also significantly ( $p < .01$ ) and negatively affects the belief that one's representative would be helpful if contacted. Thus, the more extreme a member's voting record in the House, the less likely that representative's constituents will think the representative would be helpful if contacted. What is more, the coefficient representing the interaction between opposing constituency and extremity of representative is also significant and negative, suggesting that those who are in a different political party than their extreme member of Congress are also less likely to think their representative would be helpful if contacted than would a member of the reelection constituency, all else equal.

The respondent's party identification, the extremity of the representative's voting record in the House, and the interaction between the two are not the only variables that have a negative effect on whether the respondent believes his or her representative would provide helpful casework. Indeed, the polarization of the chamber itself also significantly and negatively affects whether the respondent believes a request for casework will be greeted with a helping hand.

Not surprisingly, several control variables (*contacted*, *friend contacted*, and *age*) all had statistically significant positive relationships with the belief that representatives would be helpful if contacted. *Race* had a significant negative relationship with the *helpful* dependent variable, and *region* did not have an effect different from 0.

Once again, I calculated predicted probabilities regarding respondents' beliefs about whether their representatives in Congress would be helpful if contacted. The results are shown in Figure 4. As was the case with the degree of satisfaction felt by those who did contact their representatives, two main conclusions are evident from the data presented in Figure 4. First, when Congress is polarized and respondents' own representatives are extreme, Figure 4 shows that only 8% of those in the opposing constituency

**Figure 4**  
**Predicted Probability That Representative Will Be Helpful During Times of Chamber Polarization and Chamber Nonpolarization**



are likely to think that their representatives would be *very helpful* if contacted for casework. Under the same conditions, only 16% of those in the reelection constituency believe their representative would be *very helpful* if contacted. Meanwhile, just more than 38% of those in the opposing constituency are predicted to believe that their representatives would be *not at all helpful* if contacted, whereas just more than half, 54%, believe their representatives would be *somewhat helpful* if contacted. On the other hand, when Congress is not polarized and people's representatives are perfectly moderate, the percentage of people in the opposing constituency who think their representative would be *very helpful* jumps 62 percentage points (to 70%) compared to times of polarization and living in the district of representatives who are at the extreme end of Poole-Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE scores. At the same time, the percentage of those in the opposing constituency who think that their representatives would be *not at all helpful* falls from more than 38% to 5%.

House polarization and having an extreme congress member lead to predictions in Figure 4, suggesting that 24% of those in the reelection constituency think that their representatives would be *not at all helpful* compared to only 1% of those in the reelection constituency who would say

the same thing when Congress is not polarized and people's representatives are moderate. In all, 16% of the reelection constituency, during times of polarization and member extremity, think their representatives would be *very helpful* if contacted compared to 81% when elites are not polarized, and a moderate elite is in office.

Second, the clear substantive differences between the opposing constituency and reelection constituency remain. Those in the opposing constituency are 12% more likely than those in the reelection constituency to think that their representatives would be *not at all helpful* when the House is polarized and representatives are extreme policy voters. When the chamber and people's own representatives are moderate, the difference in the predicted probability that respondents believe their representative would be *not at all helpful* is 4%. There is an 8% difference (8-16%) between the two constituencies regarding the belief that their representatives would be *very helpful* when the chamber is polarized and representatives are extreme and an 11% difference (70-81%) when the chamber is not polarized the representatives are moderate.

Clearly, there are significant differences regarding the level of representation that the majority of the public<sup>7</sup> feel they are likely to get from their congressperson that vary as a function of their membership in either the opposing or reelection constituency, the level of their congress member's extremity, and the degree to which partisan elites in the House are polarized.

## Discussion

During the past several decades, the American party system has undergone a fundamental transformation. The ideological differences between the two parties include both cultural and economic issues, with the Republican Party asserting conservative cultural and economic issue positions and the Democratic Party professing equally liberal positions on the same collection of issues. How has the public responded to these changes? How have these changes influenced the level of representation perceived by the American citizenry?

This article has offered an additional way that scholars can think about representation in the United States by asking, (a) How well is the opposing constituency represented by their congressperson? and (b) How does partisan polarization and member extremity influence citizens' behavior and perceptions regarding casework? The analyses presented here provide

two main conclusions. First, those in the opposing constituency are less likely to be satisfied with casework they receive, less likely to think their representatives would be helpful if contacted, and slightly less likely to contact their representative than those in the reelection constituency; indeed, they are more likely to exhibit these effects in times of partisan polarization than those in the reelection constituency. Second, and perhaps more important, when Congress is polarized and individual representatives display extreme issue positions, even those constituents who are in the same party as their congressperson express dissatisfaction with casework, seek it less often, and believe a casework experience would not be very helpful. These conclusions run counter to previous work depicting casework as a nonpartisan enterprise.

One implication of the evidence presented here is consistent with Fiorina's (1999) warning of a "dark side" to civic engagement, where only the most extreme citizens choose to participate, giving them an overrepresented voice in the American political system. In this era of polarized parties in Congress, some citizens have become equally polarized (Hetherington, 2001), whereas others remain steadfastly moderate in their views (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005). When Congress is polarized and members are extreme, the citizens most likely to engage in the system may well be an extreme, vocal minority, potentially muting the preferences and needs of political moderates.

As such, future work may examine whether the policy representation received by a district more closely mirrors the preferences of those citizens who are most likely to participate or those who represent the district's mean preferences. For instance, Johannes (1983) uses a measure of legislative activity in his account of congressional casework styles. It could be that the amount of legislative activity or activity on a particular issue (or set of issues) engenders increased casework demands from citizens. Additionally, the findings presented here beg the question whether congress members' view of casework has changed in an era of elite, and indeed, some mass, partisan polarization. Finally, future work could examine whether those citizens that do seek casework continue to be a "grateful electorate," translating casework experiences into votes for the incumbent.

## Appendix

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From 1978 to 1994 these key questions were asked in the American National Election Study (ANES):

VAR CF0950—*contact* Have you (or anyone in your family living here) ever contacted <running U.S. House incumbent> or anyone in his or her office?

VAR CF0955—*satisfied* How satisfied were you with the response: *very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied*?

VAR CF0959—*helpful* If you had (another/a) problem that <running U.S. House incumbent> could do something about, do you think (he or she) would be *very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not very helpful*?

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## Notes

1. For an alternate view, see Johannes and McAdams (1981).

2. A member of Congress is believed to think of his or her district in concentric circles consisting of the primary, the reelection, the personal, and the geographic constituencies (Fenno, 1978).

3. It is important to note a particular shortcoming in the ANES survey questions for the purposes of this study. Two of the major questions (contact and satisfied) do not distinguish between years. Therefore, for example, whether one contacted one's representative in the year of the survey or in another year is in dispute. This actually makes it less likely to find the hypothesized relationships described above providing a more stringent test.

4. It is important to keep in mind that polarization of chamber measures the distance between each major party's roll-call voting record in the House of Representatives whereas extremity of representative measures the distance between particular congress members' voting record and the records of their colleagues in Congress. DW-NOMINATE scores were downloaded from Keith Poole's Web site.

5. As Meirowitz and Tucker (2007) argue, it is possible that the ANES respondents provided strategic poll responses to questions about their casework experiences. For example, members of the opposing constituency could be satisfied with their casework but would prefer to convey a message of dissatisfaction to send a signal to readers of the ANES or even congress members themselves that the respondents are displeased with partisan polarization, member extremity, or a dearth of policy representation. On the other hand, Meirowitz and Tucker focus on strategic voting (where a signaling vote is cast for a weak institution race and a vote for the respondent's preferred party is cast in a strong institution race) and not on a survey response, which might be considered a less efficacious way of signaling dissatisfaction. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this issue.

6. Additional tests were done to ascertain whether the above results hold true for both the major political parties. The results of logit equations for Model 1 that also included Party (1 = *Democrat*, 0 = *Republican*) found that there is virtually no difference between political parties regarding this question. The probabilities of contacting were .002 different from each other. In other words, it does not make a difference if the member of the opposing constituency is a Republican or Democrat when it comes to the decreased likelihood that they will contact their representative.

7. I say "the majority of the public" here as referring to those people that do not contact their representative (and thus, answered the question that makes up the helpful variable).

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**Michael W. Wagner** is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware.