How Partisan Conflict in Congress Affects Public Opinion: Strategies, Outcomes, and Issue Differences

D.J. Flynn[1] and Laurel Harbridge[1]

Abstract
Scholars are increasingly interested in how partisan conflict in Congress affects public evaluations of institutional performance. Yet, existing research overlooks how the public responds to one of the most widely discussed consequences of partisan conflict: legislative gridlock. We develop expectations about how partisan conflict resulting in partisan wins, losses, and gridlock will affect evaluations of Congress, and how these relationships will differ across consensus and non-consensus issues. Results from two survey experiments indicate that partisan conflict resulting in a victory for one's own party boosts approval relative to compromise, but conflict resulting in gridlock substantially damages approval. However, the degree to which gridlock decreases approval hinges on the type of policy under consideration. On consensus issues, citizens reward legislative action by either party—their party *or* the opposing party—over gridlock.

Keywords
Congress, partisanship, gridlock, public opinion

[1]Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:
Laurel Harbridge, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty Fellow, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 601 University Place, Evanston, IL 60208, USA.
Email: l-harbridge@northwestern.edu

To what extent does partisan conflict in Congress affect public evaluations of institutional performance? In recent years, historic levels of party polarization have coincided with some of the lowest congressional approval ratings in decades (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2015; Theriault, 2008). There are several reasons to think that heightened party conflict would have significant effects on approval. In general, a large body of research suggests that governing strategies—and resulting policy outputs—influence public attitudes toward and the perceived legitimacy of political institutions (e.g., Doherty, 2015a; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Partisan conflict in particular plays a central role in governing strategies, affecting both legislative processes and policy outputs. Thus, a growing body of literature seeks to isolate when and why partisan conflict increases or decreases evaluations of Congress, and whether the public prefers bipartisan compromise to partisan conflict (Durr, Martin, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Harbridge & Malhotra, 2011; Harbridge, Malhotra, & Harrison, 2014; Jones, 2013; Ramirez, 2009).

Although illuminating in many regards, these studies tell us little about how the public responds to one of the most widely discussed consequences of partisan conflict: legislative gridlock (see Mann & Ornstein, 2012). Extant studies of partisan conflict and public opinion often overlook the outcome of conflict (Durr et al., 1997; Ramirez, 2009) or explicitly focus on partisan victories (Harbridge et al., 2014). This gap is all the more surprising given recent public and scholarly concern about partisan conflict and legislative productivity (e.g., Binder, 2014; Jones, 2001; Mann & Ornstein, 2006, 2012). In this article, we address this gap by examining how the public responds when partisan conflict results in legislative gridlock.[1]

We argue that the key to understanding the complex relationship between partisan conflict and public opinion lies in considering the implications of partisan conflict for legislative outcomes, in particular whether conflict results in gridlock. When parties eschew compromise, partisan conflict can result in a win for one's own party, a win for the opposing party, or gridlock. Specifically, we suggest that while citizens approve of partisan conflict when it results in a win for their party, they should disapprove when it prevents Congress from performing its basic responsibilities to address national problems (Adler & Wilkerson, 2013; Butler & Powell, 2014; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995). Evaluations of Congress may not only be lower following gridlock than when partisanship results in a win for one's own side, but on issues where the parties disagree over the means but agree on the end goals of policy (i.e., consensus issues), gridlock may be even worse than a win for the opposing side. On more contentious issues, gridlock may still damage congressional evaluations, but may be viewed more similarly to a victory by

the opposing party. We test these expectations with two survey experiments in which we manipulate the consequences of party conflict for legislative outcomes. Our approach varies not just the legislative behavior of the parties (i.e., compromise or partisanship) but also the consequence of partisanship (i.e., a partisan win, partisan loss, or gridlock). As a result, this work speaks to larger questions regarding the relationship between approaches to governing, policy outputs, institutional approval, and legitimacy (Gibson, Caldeira, & Spence, 2005; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001; Tyler, 1994).

We make three novel contributions to the literature on partisan conflict and public opinion toward Congress. First, we test when party conflict is attractive by comparing evaluations of Congressional performance across different legislative strategies—partisanship versus compromise—*and* outcomes of partisanship—a win for one's own party, a win for the opposing party, and gridlock. Second, we investigate whether the effect of gridlock on public opinion depends on whether gridlock is framed as resulting from ideological disagreement versus strategic partisan considerations (e.g., elections). The media regularly invoke both ideological and strategic partisan frames in their coverage of politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Lawrence, 2000), and this distinction may be important for understanding how the public reacts to legislative gridlock. Third, we consider how a critical issue-level factor—the degree of cross-party consensus over policy goals—affects public responses to gridlock. The opposition to gridlock may be much greater when consensus exists on policy goals (even as parties disagree on the means) than when parties disagree over both the means and the goals of policy. Combined, our approach sheds light on the complex relationship between partisan conflict and public opinion, and highlights how public evaluations of Congress rest on considerations that go beyond policy congruence.

The experimental results indicate that citizens approve of how Congress is handling policy making when partisan conflict produces a win for one's own party. However, we also uncover evidence that citizens disapprove when partisan conflict prevents Congress from acting on an important national issue. In fact, on a consensus issue, partisans are more approving of Congress' handling of policy making when a policy debate results in a win for the *other* party than when the debate ends in gridlock. This surprising finding runs counter to the prevailing view of partisans in the mass public as hostile to members of and ideas from the opposing party (e.g., Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). While some research suggests that citizens may endorse a range of policy proposals to deal with national problems (Egan, 2014), that work has failed to link proposals to particular parties (e.g., "Party A suggests Solution *a*, Party B suggests Solution *b*")—arguably the most common format in which policy proposals are described in the real world. We address this gap

and find that people still value action by the opposing party on consensus issues. These results are striking in light of research on partisan cues, which suggests that citizens should move overwhelmingly in the direction of their party's position (Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). Finally, while both frames for gridlock—ideological and partisan—result in lower evaluations of Congress, the evidence is suggestive that approval is lowest when gridlock is attributed to strategic partisan behavior. Citizens are significantly more accepting of legislative inaction when it is characterized as the result of genuine ideological disagreements between the two parties.

Background and Expectations

National polls regularly uncover widespread support for bipartisan cooperation in Congress. For instance, Pew Research Center (2012) reports that 8 in 10 Americans agree with the statement "I like political leaders who are willing to make compromises in order to get the job done." Likewise, 6 in 10 respondents prefer that the majority in Congress tries to pass legislation with bipartisan support as opposed to passing legislation without minority support (CBS News, 2009). Recent increases in party polarization (e.g., McCarty et al., 2006; Theriault, 2008), resulting in both partisan victories and legislative gridlock (Binder, 2003, 2014; Burden, 2011; Jones, 2001), stand in stark contrast to this expectation. Driven in part by this contradiction, in recent years, scholars have begun to re-examine legislators' incentives for bipartisanship, questioning whether citizens actually reward compromise over partisan conflict. For instance, recent work has considered how voters respond to moderation versus ideological extremity (Canes-Wrone, Brady, & Cogan, 2002) and independence versus party loyalty (Carson, Koger, Lebo, & Young, 2010; Harbridge & Malhotra, 2011) in roll-call voting, and to civil versus uncivil discourse in politics more broadly (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Paris, 2015).

These questions are closely related to a long-standing body of literature that connects preferences over styles of governance, policy outputs, and support for political institutions. In general, public support for institutions is driven by a combination of preferences over processes and outputs (Doherty, 2015b; Gangl, 2003; Jones & McDermott, 2010; Ramirez, 2009, 2013; Skitka, Winquist, & Hutchinson, 2003; Tyler, 2001). One way that processes and outputs are connected is through the degree of partisan conflict. The degree of partisan conflict on an issue can shape policy outputs, as one side may emerge victorious with policy reflecting their views on the issue. However, partisan conflict can also shape process by, for example, setting the

tone for congressional debate on an issue and affecting legislators' willingness to work out compromises. Indeed, both members of Congress and the mass public see the degree of partisanship as an important dimension on which to evaluate congressional performance. Members have been known to equate partisan conflict with "bad" policy making and bipartisan cooperation with "good" policy making (Manley, 1965). The polls outlined earlier—as well as the consistent over-time relationship between partisan conflict and institutional approval (e.g., Ramirez, 2009)—suggest that the public sees the degree of partisanship as an important evaluative criterion as well.

The public's resulting evaluations of Congress are important for several reasons. They can affect the reelection chances of incumbents (Born, 1990; Jones & McDermott, 2010), discourage prospective candidates for running for office (Fowler & McClure, 1989), and affect the perceived legitimacy of the institution and its outputs (Gibson et al., 2005; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001; Tyler, 1994). As noted by Durr et al. (1997), "Without the support of the governed, the already difficult legislative process may become even more so, and the policy that emerges may lack a sense of legitimacy" (p. 177). For all of these reasons, it is important to understand the connections between styles of governing, policy outputs, and support for the institution.

Focusing on public preferences over partisanship and compromise, we agree that citizens should prefer party conflict to compromise when it can be reasonably expected to result in a policy victory for one's own party (e.g., Harbridge et al., 2014). However, we depart from existing work by emphasizing another possible result of party conflict: legislative gridlock. Citizens expect their representatives to act as problem solvers and to take action on pressing national problems (Adler & Wilkerson, 2013; Butler & Powell, 2014). Thus, while partisans clearly prefer to see their party's proposals enacted, they may recognize that party conflict raises the specter of gridlock, which is undesirable because it prevents Congress from acting on pressing problems.

When presented with the outcome of party conflict, we expect citizens to act as existing literature suggests and reward (punish) Congress when it takes action that comports (conflicts) with their partisan objectives. We also expect citizens to reward Congress for finding bipartisan solutions (i.e., for "compromising"), but less so than when party conflict produces a "partisan win" for one's own party. Contrary to the existing wisdom, however, we expect citizens to reward Congress for taking action on a pressing problem, even if the result is a "partisan win" for the opposing party. We recognize that this expectation runs counter to the prevailing view of partisans as preferring policies endorsed by their own party (Gerber & Huber, 2010; Lavine, Johnston, & Steenbergen, 2012). However, when there is broad consensus

about policy goals (even as there is disagreement about the means to achieve those goals), citizens may reward action on important problems, regardless of whether policy changes reflect the liberal or conservative position. As Egan (2014) explains, people may have double-peaked preferences—preferring policy change in either ideological direction over the status quo—on issues where there is consensus over goals, where the problem is viewed as serious, and where credible alternatives to the status quo are provided by both parties. While the parties regularly offer competing solutions to problems that are viewed as serious, the extent of agreement over end goals varies substantially. As a result, we contend that on consensus issues (i.e., issues characterized by disagreement over means but agreement over end goals), gridlock will be viewed more negatively than a win by the opposing party, whereas on non-consensus issues, gridlock will be viewed more similarly to a win by the opposing party. In sum, we expect to observe the following relationships across legislative outcomes:

> **Hypothesis 1:** Approval of Congress should be higher when one's own party wins than when the opposing party wins or when the parties reach a compromise.
>
> **Hypothesis 2a (Consensus issue):** On a consensus issue, approval of Congress should be higher when the opposing party wins than when debate ends in legislative gridlock.
>
> **Hypothesis 2b (Non-consensus issue):** On a non-consensus issue, approval of Congress should be no different when the opposing party wins and when debate ends in legislative gridlock.

Types of Gridlock

Until very recently, the dominant explanation for party polarization and legislative gridlock has been rooted in ideological differences between the two parties. However, party conflict need not be based on ideological disagreements (Lee, 2009; Noel, 2013). Strategic politicians may have incentives to engage in party conflict even on issues that do not directly impinge upon ideological principles (Gilmour, 1995), such as good government causes and procedural votes (see Lebo, McGlynn, & Koger, 2007; Lee, 2009).

A large body of research suggests that media coverage of politics regularly includes references to both ideological disagreements and parties' strategic goals (see Aalberg, Stromback, & de Vreese, 2012 for review). The same is true for the media's coverage of legislative gridlock. For instance, a *Washington Post* opinion story about the 2013 government shutdown frames it in terms of "expansive and explosive" ideological differences and "true

believers" who failed to compromise (Samuelson, 2013). In contrast, an opinion story in *The Week* argues that the "government shutdown is being driven by confusion, arrogance, political opportunism . . . It is most definitely not being driven by principle" (Brandus, 2013). As these examples illustrate, citizens are presented with numerous explanations for legislative outcomes, and these varying narratives may affect public opinion differently.[2]

As discussed, we expect citizens to disapprove of congressional performance when debate ends in gridlock. However, we expect citizens' responses to gridlock to vary depending on whether gridlock is attributed to ideological disagreements ("ideological gridlock") or to party strategy ("partisan gridlock"). Some degree of party conflict is inevitable given the nature of American political institutions (e.g., multiple veto points). Moreover, responsible party scholarship suggests that the public should reward parties for differentiating themselves and presenting the public with clear choices (Ramirez, 2009). In reality, however, citizens generally respond negatively to party conflict (Ramirez, 2009, 2013) and take a skeptical view of the parties' motivations in the policy process (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Along these lines, we suspect that attributing gridlock to explicitly partisan goals—such as denying the opposing party a legislative victory in the run-up to an election—will result in lower evaluations than when gridlock is attributed to genuine ideological disagreements. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> **Hypothesis 3:** Approval of Congress should be higher when gridlock is attributed to ideological differences than when it is attributed to strategic partisan fighting.

Study Design

We tested our expectations with two survey experiments in which we manipulated aspects of the legislative process and the outcome of partisan conflict. To understand how reactions to party conflict, compromise, and gridlock vary across issues, the first study focused on energy policy and the second focused on gun ownership. Importantly, these two policies differ on the extent to which both parties agree over end goals. On energy policy, both parties largely agree on the goal of energy independence and lower costs for consumers (i.e., consensus issue), whereas on gun ownership, the two parties disagree over whether gun ownership should be expanded or contracted (i.e., non-consensus issue). On both issues, however, and in both policy descriptions presented to participants, the parties offer different policy solutions to address the issue. That is, the parties disagree on the means of addressing both issues. The consensus/non-consensus distinction is reflected in the

frequency of double-peaked preferences on these issues (Egan, 2014) and is confirmed by a pre-test of the issue descriptions used in our experiments.[3] People are significantly more likely to perceive agreement between the two parties over the end goals on energy policy than on gun ownership.

Although these issues fit the consensus/non-consensus distinction well, there may be other issue-level characteristics that could also affect public preferences for partisan conflict, and reactions to gridlock in particular. First, one might worry that the distribution of public preferences on these issues would bias us toward finding greater support for "do something" politics (i.e., legislative action rather than gridlock) on consensus issues. That is, if partisans in the public are substantially more likely to take their party's position on gun ownership than on energy policy, it could predispose us to find a greater preference for action by the opposing party over gridlock on energy than on gun ownership. However, in our own survey of Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants (the same sample population as our studies), we find that, if anything, the partisan divide is greater on energy policy than on gun ownership policy. On energy, there is a 61.5 percentage point divide between the parties, compared with a 58 percentage point divide on gun ownership.[4] Both issues exhibit a substantial partisan divide, and to the extent there are differences across issues, they bias us against finding support for our hypothesis about the nature of consensus issues and a preference for action on energy policy.

Second, the location of current policy, or status quo in the event of inaction, could be relatively more favorable for one party than the other, which could, in turn, affect preferences for action. In our tests of Hypotheses 2a and 2b (preferences for action even by the opposing party over gridlock), we provide robustness checks of the results, showing the patterns hold within both parties, which suggest that the location of the status quo is unlikely to be driving the observed results. As a further check, we also restrict our analyses to participants whose ideology matches their partisan identification, or who can recall the position taken by their party on this issue (see Online Appendix 3 for more details [available at http://apr.sage-pub.com/supplemental]). These restrictions do not change the key patterns, providing further evidence that the status quo is unlikely to be driving our results.

Participants in both studies were recruited via MTurk in 2014.[5] Participants in Study 1 (energy) were recruited between February and March, and participants in Study 2 (guns) were recruited in mid-November. In total, 693 participants in Study 1 and 665 participants in Study 2 completed the survey. The demographics of our two sets of study participants are presented in Appendix A. While MTurk samples are not nationally representative (Berinsky, Huber, &

Table 1. Treatment Conditions (Same in Studies 1 and 2).

Condition	Wording
1. Compromise	Despite their differences, a compromise version of the bill was agreed on by both sides and passed.
2. Democrats win	The final version of the bill that passed favored the Democratic priorities.
3. Republicans win	The final version of the bill that passed favored the Republican priorities.
4. Gridlock (unattributed)	Despite discussion of various proposals, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.
5. Gridlock (ideological)	Despite discussion of various proposals, neither side was willing to sacrifice their principles on the issue. Without this give-and-take, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.
6. Gridlock (partisan)	Despite discussion of various proposals, neither side was willing to hand the other a victory on this issue in the run-up to the next election. Without this give-and-take, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.

Lenz, 2012; Krupnikov & Levine, 2014), the impact of sample characteristics on generalizability hinges on whether we confront homogeneous or heterogeneous treatment effects (Druckman & Kam, 2011). Of particular issue for studies of public opinion are partisanship, age, race, and education, all of which can affect political attitudes. Robustness checks of the main results that follow show little evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects of gridlock across these variables (see Online Appendix 2 [available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental]), suggesting that our findings are likely to generalize beyond this sample population.

In both studies, participants began the survey by answering standard demographic and political questions. For the experimental portion of each study, after reading some background information about either energy policy or gun ownership policy (see Online Appendix 1 for full text [available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental]), participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions, which varied the legislative approach and outcome of policy making: compromise, Democratic win, Republican win, gridlock (unattributed), gridlock (ideological), or gridlock (partisan). Table 1 displays the full text of all treatments.[6] We recoded the second and third treatment conditions to indicate which party won a legislative victory: one's "own party" or the "other party."[7] This re-coding procedure allows us to analyze all participants together (i.e., to pool Democrats and Republicans in the "own party win" and "other party win" conditions). Randomization checks confirm

that conditions were balanced on relevant pre-treatment covariates (see Appendix B).

After reading about the legislative outcome, participants were asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of how Congress is handling [energy policy/the issue of gun ownership]?" with a standard 7-point response scale ranging from *strongly approve* to *strongly disapprove*. We re-scaled responses to range between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating *strongly disapprove* and 1 indicating *strongly approve*. This dependent variable captures issue-specific evaluations of Congress but also has important consequences for broader evaluations of the institution. In particular, approval of how Congress is handling each policy (energy or gun ownership) mediates the relationship between our treatments and overall confidence in Congress. These patterns point to the broader connections between styles of governance, policy outputs, and evaluations of the institution. We return to these results in the following section.

A final point worth considering before presenting our results concerns the internal and external validity of our experiments. Research designs high in internal validity (e.g., experiments) provide a crucial first step in establishing generalizable causal relationships. As explained by McDermott (2011), internal validity does not require that experiments mimic the real world as long as participants experience the relevant forces that investigators want to elicit. In this article, we investigate how people respond to partisan conflict when it is described as resulting in different outcomes, and when gridlock is framed as occurring for different reasons. Both descriptions are common aspects of media coverage, a point to which we return in the concluding section. By contrast, external validity is best achieved by replicating studies across populations, issues, and time periods, and by using a variety of methods (Druckman & Kam, 2011; McDermott, 2011). Nonetheless, we took several steps to boost the external validity of our experiments, such as considering different policy issues, connecting issue positions to parties, and analyzing both issue-specific and overall Congressional evaluations. In the end, our studies are well-positioned to uncover causal relationships, while the generalizability of the broader findings is best addressed by examining these questions in other settings and through alternative research designs.

Results

Policy Outcomes and Congressional Approval

To assess how citizens respond to compromise, party conflict, and gridlock, our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we consider evaluations in the four main conditions: compromise, own party win, other party win, and

gridlock. Given the importance of partisan victories, these analyses focus on partisans in the public (including independent "leaners") and exclude pure independents. Second, we consider whether framing gridlock as ideological or partisan alters evaluations. Here, we bring pure independents back into the analysis. For Steps 1 and 2, we consider differences between consensus and non-consensus issues. Third, we examine the mediational relationship between our treatments, policy-specific approval, and overall confidence in Congress.

Comparing approval of how Congress is handling policy making across our four main conditions, we see that approval hinges on both legislative process and outcomes. Consistent with our first hypothesis, the rank ordering of approval across the four possible policy making approaches and outcomes on energy policy shows the greatest support for Congress when the outcome is "own party win," followed by "compromise," "other party wins," and finally, "gridlock." These patterns are shown graphically by the mean approval in each condition of Study 1 (Figure 1, left-hand panel). Not surprisingly, a win by one's own party is preferred over all other outcomes, and compromise is preferred over a win for the other party or gridlock. The substantive effect of these differences is meaningful. Moving from a win for one's own party to compromise reduces approval by 10 percentage points ($p < .01$).[8] When the opposing party wins, approval drops by 23 percentage points relative to one's own party winning ($p < .001$) and by 13 percentage points relative to compromise ($p < .001$).

Perhaps more surprising, but consistent with our expectation that the public values policy action on consensus issues, people prefer a win by the opposing party over gridlock. Compared with a win by the opposing party, approval of how Congress is handing energy policy drops by 15 percentage points following gridlock ($p < .001$). That is, approval is lower when there is legislative inaction than when the opposing party secures a policy victory. This effect holds *within* participants of each party as well, a pattern that would not be expected if people did not have a preference for legislation action and simply responded to whether they viewed the status quo as favorable for their party (see Online Appendix 3 [available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental]). Interestingly, this preference for legislative action—regardless of the partisan direction—is apparent among both weak and strong partisans. Weak partisans prefer to see policy change in the direction of the opposing party over gridlock (difference = 17 percentage points, $p < .001$), as do strong partisans (difference = 11 percentage points, $p = .09$).[9]

Shifting from a consensus issue in Study 1 to a non-consensus issue in Study 2 changes the results in hypothesized ways. Whereas the general dislike of legislative inaction persists on gun ownership policy, the relative
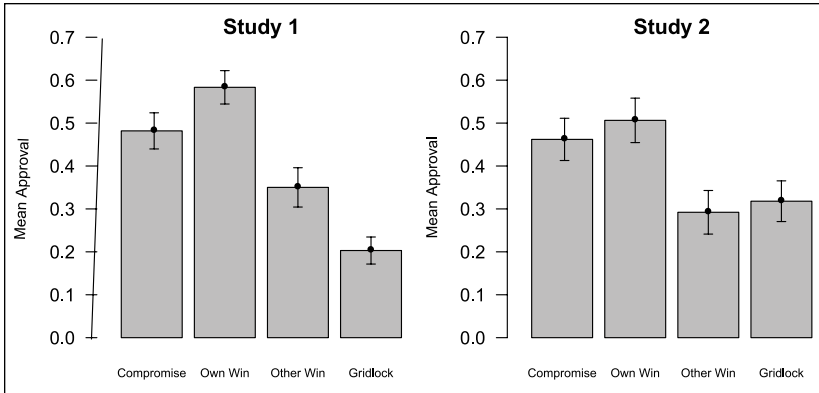
Figure 1. Mean approval of how Congress is handling policy (Study 1 = Energy, Study 2 = Gun ownership).
Note. Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals. Analysis restricted to partisans.

downside of gridlock to a win by the opposing party declines (see Figure 1, right-hand panel). As in Study 1, evaluations are highest when one's own party wins, followed by compromise, although the 4.4 percentage point difference is not significant ($p = .30$). Likewise, evaluations are 21 percentage points higher when one's own party wins compared with when the opposing party wins ($p < .001$), 17 percentage points higher when there is compromise than when the opposing party wins ($p < .001$), and 14 percentage points higher when there is compromise than when there is legislative inaction ($p < .001$). In contrast to Study 1, however, evaluations are statistically indistinguishable when the opposing party wins and when there is legislative gridlock ($p = .54$). When partisan conflict results in gridlock, approval is 2.6 percentage points *higher* than when the opposing party secures a victory. This pattern is similar among Democrats and Republicans, although limited power in analyses of Republican participants does not allow us to rule out the possibility that Republicans actually prefer gridlock over a victory for the opposing party because the status quo is more favorable to Republicans than to Democrats on this issue (see Online Appendix 3 [available at http://apr.sage-pub.com/supplemental]). This pattern is also similar among both weak and strong partisans; neither group favors legislative action by the opposing party over gridlock. As expected, the preference for legislative action over gridlock hinges on issue area, not simply partisanship.

Consistent with our expectation that policy action is valued and gridlock is abhorred when both parties agree on the end goals, but that inaction is more preferable when the parties disagree on end goals, Study 1 yields higher

evaluations when the opposing party wins than when there is gridlock, while Study 2 does not. The significance of this pattern is confirmed in a test of the difference-in-differences between the two: The 15 percentage point difference between the other party winning and gridlock in Study 1 is significantly different from the −2.6 percentage point difference in Study 2 ($p < .001$). Consistent with our expectations, these patterns point to similarities in the relationship between own party victories, compromises, and opposing party victories across these two issues, but key differences in the relationship between opposing party victories and gridlock.

We now turn to examining whether different frames for gridlock alter evaluations of Congress.[10] Here, we find support for our hypothesis in Study 1 but not in Study 2. As shown in the left-hand panel of Figure 2, on energy policy, people prefer gridlock that is attributed to ideological differences over gridlock that is attributed to partisan strategy (difference = 6.6 percentage points, $p = .04$). That is, approval is 6.6 percentage points lower when gridlock is attributed to the parties refusing to grant the opposing side a legislative victory relative to when it is attributed to the two sides having conflicting principles. Moreover, on energy policy, people prefer gridlock that is attributed to ideological differences over the generic form of gridlock that does not explain its cause (difference = 5.2 percentage points, $p = .09$).

Which types of individuals differentiate between ideological and partisan gridlock and adjust their evaluations accordingly? Evidence from Study 1 suggests a potential role for strength of partisanship. Among strong partisans, Congress is rated equivalently under ideological and partisan gridlock (difference = 2.7 percentage points, $p = .70$). In contrast, weak partisans are less tolerant of gridlock that is attributed to partisan fighting, as they rate Congress 6.3 percentage points lower under partisan as opposed to ideological gridlock, a difference that approaches significance ($p = .13$).

However, in Study 2, people react similarly to ideological and partisan gridlock (difference = 0.9 percentage points, $p = .81$). This insignificant relationship holds among both strong and weak partisans, suggesting that strength of partisanship does not affect responses to the two frames of gridlock on this issue. Moreover, the difference-in-difference between these treatments across Study 1 (consensus) and Study 2 (non-consensus) is significant as well (difference = 5.7 percentage points, $p = .03$). These results suggest that issue-based differences affect not only whether gridlock is viewed more poorly than a win for the opposing party but also whether people respond to different framings of gridlock. On a non-consensus issue, people view the two forms equivalently, suggesting that either the commitment to ideological principles does not boost evaluations or efforts to score political points do not harm evaluations; both patterns are possible when people view the parties as
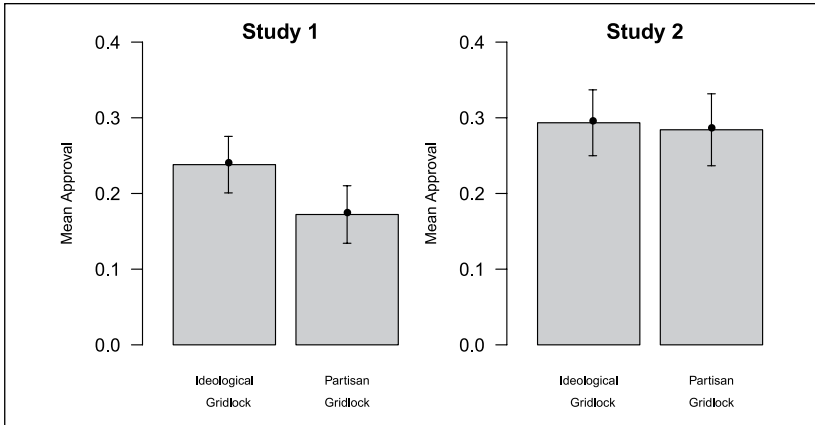
Figure 2. Mean approval of how Congress is handling policy (Study 1 = Energy, Study 2 = Gun ownership).
Note. Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals. Analysis includes partisans and pure independents.

having opposing goals and where gridlock is no worse than a win for the other party. Although the data do not allow us to tease out these differences, it may be that people expect partisan fighting on non-consensus issues (where the parties are unlikely to agree even *sans* strategic partisanship), leading evaluations to be similar across frames of gridlock on gun ownership but different on energy.

Combined, these patterns suggest that while partisan conflict resulting in a win for one's own party boosts approval relative to compromise, conflict resulting in gridlock significantly damages approval. Moreover, gridlock that is framed as strategic rather than ideological has the most corrosive impact on approval, at least on some issues. People do not simply have preferences for congressional parties to engage in bipartisanship or partisanship; their preferences are heavily dependent on the outcome of partisan conflict and the type of issue at hand. Policy outputs and styles of governance are both important for understanding evaluations. Thus, party leaders should be wary of pursuing a partisan agenda if the risk of gridlock is high, particularly on consensus issues. If confronted with institutional conditions that make gridlock likely, focusing attention on policy compromises may be more likely to garner public support.

Although these studies utilized a convenience sample (MTurk), the observed patterns are likely to generalize beyond this population. Robustness checks exploring the possibility of heterogeneous treatment effects by party,

age, race, and education yield few significant interaction terms (see Online Appendix 2 [available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental]). Across the two primary relationships presented above (i.e., preference for action by the opposing party over gridlock, and preference for ideological over partisan gridlock), two studies, and four variables, we find only two significant interactions. In both studies, Republicans are significantly more supportive of partisan gridlock (relative to ideological gridlock) than Democrats and Independents. Given that our sample over-represents Democrats, this significant interaction suggests that the preference for ideological over partisan gridlock may be limited to other Democrats and Independents. In contrast, we found no evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects by party, age, race, or education on the preference for action by the opposing party over gridlock, or by age, race, or education on the preference for ideological over partisan gridlock. Combined, these patterns suggest a highly homogeneous effect of gridlock relative to the other side winning, and a potentially more heterogeneous effect of the framing of gridlock.

Partisan Conflict, Issue-Specific Approval, and Confidence in Congress

To this point, we have considered the effects of our treatments on issue-specific approval of Congress. We now briefly consider the implications of these effects for broader evaluations of Congress. In particular, we focus on the extent to which issue-specific approval mediates the effect of our treatments on overall confidence in Congress.[11] Put differently, we consider whether our treatments affect issue-specific approval, which then, in turn, affects overall confidence in Congress. We turn to causal mediation analysis to disentangle these relationships (Imai, Keele, Tingley, & Yamamoto, 2011). Causal mediation analysis entails decomposing the overall effect of a treatment (e.g., a victory for one's own party) on an outcome (e.g., confidence in Congress) into *indirect effects*, which represent the mechanism of interest (e.g., issue-specific approval), and *direct effects*, which represent all other mechanisms (Imai et al., 2011). More generally, this approach allows us to consider the relationship between legislative strategies and outcomes, issue-specific approval of Congress, and overall evaluations of the institution.

For each study, we focus on the first four treatments, again using the subsample of partisans and independent "leaners." We compare the effects of each treatment relative to the compromise condition, and then also compare the effects of gridlock relative to the opposing party wins condition. In each case, we consider confidence in Congress as the dependent variable and

issue-specific approval as the mediator. The results provide strong evidence that issue-specific approval mediates the relationship between our treatments and overall confidence in Congress, pointing to the importance of these relationships for understanding broader evaluations of the institution. Interestingly, among the possible outcomes of party conflict, only gridlock exerts a significant direct effect on confidence in Congress in addition to the mediated effect.[12]

For instance, in Study 1 (energy), partisan conflict resulting in a win for one's own party increases confidence in Congress by 2.1 percentage points over compromise ($p = .39$), reflecting a significant mediated effect of 4.8 percentage points ($p < .001$) and an insignificant direct effect of -2.6 percentage points ($p = .23$). Similarly, a win for the opposing party has a significant negative effect on confidence in Congress relative to compromise (-8.6 percentage points, $p < .001$), which also reflects a significant mediated effect (-7.9 percentage points, $p < .001$) and an insignificant direct effect (-0.007 percentage points, $p = .76$). The observed preference for legislative action over gridlock in Study 1 is also seen in aggregate congressional approval. The total effect of -6.6 percentage points ($p = .01$) reflects a significant indirect effect of gridlock relative to the other party winning (-5.5 percentage points, $p < .001$) and an insignificant direct effect (-1.1 percentage point, $p = .62$). In contrast, partisan conflict resulting in gridlock has both a significant mediated effect (relative to compromise) (-10.9 percentage points, $p < .001$) and a significant direct effect (-4.5 percentage points, $p = .08$) on confidence in Congress.

These patterns—which are similar in Studies 1 and 2—suggest two important points. First, issue-specific approval is consequential for broader evaluations of Congress. Second, gridlock is distinct from other consequences of partisan conflict (i.e., partisan wins and losses) insofar as it has both direct *and* indirect effects on confidence in Congress. Although more research is needed to disentangle why gridlock is distinct in this regard, the results are suggestive that gridlock can decrease confidence in Congress, even absent people considering how Congress is addressing a particular policy.

Discussion

Past research on party conflict and public opinion has yielded contradictory results: The public consistently disapproves of congressional performance during periods of party conflict, yet often rewards legislators for engaging in partisanship. The present study speaks to this puzzle by emphasizing the implications of party conflict for legislative outputs. The distinction between

partisan victories and legislative gridlock is important to understanding this puzzle, as partisan conflict often results in inaction (Binder, 2003). However, previous research has focused on party conflict in general (e.g., Ramirez, 2009) or on conflict resulting in partisan victories (e.g., Harbridge et al., 2014). We extended this line of inquiry by examining whether the public's response depends on whether conflict prevents legislative action. Our research made three primary contributions to the literature on party conflict in Congress and public opinion.

First, we moved beyond past work by varying both legislative strategy (i.e., cooperation or conflict) *and* its effects on policy outcomes. While our participants acted in line with their partisan allegiances, favoring wins for their own party, we found convincing evidence that citizens respond favorably when Congress acts on a pressing problem—even if that action is contradictory to one's partisan goals. For instance, we found that on a consensus issue where the parties agree on the ultimate end goal, citizens evaluate Congress more favorably when partisan conflict results in a victory for the opposing party than when conflict results in inaction. In contrast to scholarly accounts emphasizing the dominating influence of partisanship, it appears that citizens—strong and weak partisans alike—are not only open to compromise but are even open to policy proposals from the other party (when the alternative is gridlock). However, when confronted with a non-consensus issue where the parties disagree over the end goal, gridlock and a victory for the opposing party are viewed much more similarly.

Second, we unpacked "gridlock" by testing the influence of alternate frames for gridlock—ideological disagreements versus party strategy—on public opinion. This distinction was motivated by the increasingly fragmented media environment, in which citizens are often presented with multiple explanations for party conflict and polarization. Consistent with our predictions, we found that on energy policy, citizens are more accepting of gridlock when it is attributed to sincere ideological disagreements between the two parties rather than party strategy. This pattern was driven by independents and weak partisans, as strong partisans appear less concerned by strategic aspects of partisan fighting. Although the evidence was weaker on gun ownership policy—where the non-consensus nature of the policy may lead people to expect some degree of partisan strategizing—the results suggest an important role for elites in framing the outcome of policy debates. Levendusky (2013) makes a similar point in discussing the importance of media framing for citizens' understanding of election outcomes. In his discussion of partisan media, he argues that elites can shape important post-election attitudes, such as the perceived legitimacy of a new regime. In the

context of the present study, this insight suggests that the public's reaction to legislative gridlock depends in part on which explanation for gridlock prevails in the media.

Third, we emphasized that reactions to legislative strategies and outcomes are contingent on issue area. Public evaluations of Congress fall much more considerably when partisan conflict results in legislative gridlock on a consensus issue than on a non-consensus issue. On the former (e.g., energy policy), people prefer a win by the opposing party over legislative gridlock. On the latter (e.g., gun ownership policy), people evaluate the two outcomes similarly. Thus, the potential downsides to party conflict—especially when it results in gridlock rather than a victory for one party—are larger on some issues relative to others.

Our results are all the more surprising since we explicitly connected policy outcomes to wins for a particular party. In actual campaigns and policy debates, arguments and outcomes are typically clearly linked to political parties (e.g., Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). However, while citizens sometimes endorse a range of policy solutions to pressing national problems (Egan, 2014), it was unclear from existing work whether this finding holds when proposals are clearly linked to parties. To address this gap, and to boost the external validity of our own experiments, we clearly linked policy outcomes to a particular party and found that citizens are in fact open to proposals from the opposing party (on consensus issues).

Moreover, our studies reflect how policy making, including partisan conflict and gridlock, is often discussed in the media, bolstering the experimental realism of our treatments and the external validity of our findings. Political communication research suggests that the media often eschew detailed coverage of policies in favor of "game framing," which highlights the "winners and losers" of policy making (Aalberg et al., 2012). As Lawrence (2000) points out, game framing is especially likely when policy makers engage in legislative conflict.

While some issues produce disagreement over who emerged victorious, on many issues, there is widespread agreement about which party secured a legislative victory. For instances, the Affordable Care Act was described as "a historic victory" for Democrats (Murray & Montgomery, 2010), while "fast track" trade authority was described as a Republican victory (Babington & Espo, 2015). Other issues, including cap-and-trade policies for energy (Walsh, 2010) and reforms to background checks on gun purchases (Madison, 2013), were described as clear instances of gridlock. Moreover, many news stories on both energy and gun ownership provided an explanation for gridlock similar to the ideological and partisan explanations found in our treatments. Journalists spoke of "myriad interests and

views" as a recipe for gridlock on energy reform (Koss, 2008), and a "false sense of ideological purity" driving gridlock on gun ownership (Katz, 2013). They also referenced "partisan gridlock" resulting from politicians trying to "ram through sweeping measures" on carbon emissions (Broder & Krauss, 2010), and "the partisan gridlock that has paralyzed Washington" (Nagourney, 2014). Likewise, the failure of background check legislation was attributed to "hyper-partisanship and its [Congress'] own self-imposed rules" (Lesley, 2013). As these examples illustrate, our treatments capture many of the same elements of how gridlock is framed in actual media coverage.

To be sure, this is not to suggest that our experiments capture all the complexities of the contemporary media environment. For instance, our design does not incorporate competing explanations for gridlock nor does it allow participants to self-select into certain types of media coverage. Competition and choice can moderate media effects on political attitudes (Busby, Flynn, & Druckman, in press; Druckman & Lupia, in press), and future research should incorporate these realities into studies of partisan conflict and public opinion.

Our scholarly contributions come with important lessons for practitioners of legislative politics. Recent years have seen historically high levels of party conflict and historically low levels of public approval of Congress. Our work suggests an important corollary to the party conflict-approval link: the role of legislative outcomes. Legislative gridlock, such as the 2013 government shutdown, can damage congressional approval (Newport, 2013). Thus, when crafting legislative strategies, electorally minded leaders need to consider the likely outcome of party conflict (i.e., partisan win vs. gridlock) *and* the type of issue at hand. To the extent that members of the majority party are affected electorally by institutional approval (Jones, 2010), majority party leaders have greater incentives to ensure the passage of legislation, including bipartisan compromises, when the risk of gridlock is significant. Ensuring legislative action—from either party—is all the more important on consensus issues. When faced with divided government, proposals that can garner bipartisan support may be required on these issues. In contrast, if parties focus on non-consensus issues—such as gun ownership, abortion, and the place of religion in the public sphere—gridlock may be less costly to leaders, and they may be able to safely pursue legislation that achieves partisan "position taking." Thus, better understanding the relationships between party strategies, legislative outcomes, and public opinion across issues is important not only for scholarly theories of parties and representation, but for party leaders as well.

Appendix A

Sample Demographics

Table A1. Sample Demographics.

	Study 1 (Energy)	Study 2 (Gun ownership)
Mean age	33.9	33.9
Mean ideology	3.40	3.30
% Democrat (including leaners)	61.0	51.0
% White	79.5	77.8
% Male	60.5	58.9
% College degree+	56.7	54.6

Appendix B

Randomization Check

Table B1. Randomization Check of Treatments (Study 1).

	Compromise	Democrats Win	Republicans Win	Gridlock	Ideological Gridlock	Partisan Gridlock
Gender						
Female	35.8%	37.4%	35.9%	37.4%	42.1%	48.7%
Male	64.2	62.6	64.1	62.6	57.9	51.3
$\chi^2(5) = 6.1, p = .30$						
Race						
Non-White	22.8	21.3	25.2	13.1	18.4	21.7
White	77.2	78.7	74.8	86.9	81.6	78.3
$\chi^2(5) = 5.9, p = .32$						
Education						
High school or less	8.9	9.9	7.8	9.3	9.6	8.7
Some college	30.1	41.2	35.0	29.9	37.7	30.7
Bachelors	52.0	36.6	41.7	49.5	35.1	43.9
Graduate degree	8.9	12.2	15.5	11.2	17.5	16.7
$\chi^2(15) = 15.6, p = .41$						
Party identification						
Democrat	68.8	59.3	56.7	64.0	66.7	50.5
Pure independent	9.8	13.0	13.4	13.0	14.8	21.6
Republican	21.4	27.6	23.0	23.0	18.5	27.9
$\chi^2(10) = 14.5, p = .15$						

Table B1. (continued)

	Compromise	Democrats Win	Republicans Win	Gridlock	Ideological Gridlock	Partisan Gridlock
Age						
18-29	52.0	55.0	38.9	44.9	47.4	46.1
30-44	28.4	27.5	44.7	31.8	34.2	28.7
45-59	16.3	11.5	13.6	15.0	12.3	23.5
60+	3.3	6.1	2.9	8.4	6.1	1.7
$\chi^2(15) = 25.6$, $p = .042$						
n	123	131	103	107	114	115

Table B2. Randomization Check of Treatments (Study 2).

	Compromise	Democrats Win	Republicans Win	Gridlock	Ideological Gridlock	Partisan Gridlock
Gender						
Female	48.1%	47.0%	37.0%	39.8%	38.4%	35.4%
Male	51.9	53.0	63.0	60.2	61.4	64.6
$\chi^2(5) = 6.4$, $p = .27$						
Race						
Non-White	25.0	21.6	23.0	14.2	20.6	30.0
White	75.0	78.4	77.0	85.8	79.4	70.0
$\chi^2(5) = 8.5$, $p = .13$						
Education						
High school or less	11.9	8.6	10.0	8.0	17.6	5.0
Some college	33.0	36.2	32.0	46.0	32.0	30.0
Bachelors	46.8	38.8	48.0	34.5	39.2	50.0
Graduate degree	8.3	16.4	10.0	11.5	11.2	15.0
$\chi^2(15) = 24.8$, $p = .052$						
Party identification						
Democrat	54.6	52.6	58.0	44.6	45.6	52.0
Pure independent	26.9	24.1	24.0	32.1	30.4	28.6
Republican	18.5	23.3	18.0	23.2	24.0	19.4
$\chi^2(10) = 7.0$, $p = .72$						
Age						
18-29	42.2	47.9	44.0	45.1	51.6	49.0
30-44	34.9	35.9	33.0	37.2	29.4	37.0
45-59	18.3	11.1	12.0	11.5	12.7	12.0
60+	4.6	5.1	11.0	6.2	6.3	2.0
$\chi^2(15) = 13.6$, $p = .55$						
n	109	117	100	113	126	100

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Our use of the term *gridlock* captures popular understanding of the term: failure to pass legislation on a particular issue (for any reason related to partisan conflict). As such, the term includes not only instances where individuals with pivotal positions in the institution oppose a proposal over the status quo (Krehbiel, 1998) but also instances where parties refuse to accept compromises to score political victories (Gilmour, 1995).
2. We do not mean to suggest that these sources of gridlock are mutually exclusive—that is, it is certainly possible that ideological disagreements *and* strategic partisan considerations can jointly lead to inaction (see Lee, 2009). This article represents a first step toward understanding whether these competing narratives affect public opinion differently.
3. For both issues, we pre-tested the policy descriptions provided to survey participants, finding that people viewed both descriptions as ideologically balanced but viewed parties as agreeing on the end goals of energy policy while disagreeing on the goals of gun ownership policy.
4. When asked which position on energy policy comes closest to their own view, 87% of Democrats and 74.5% of Republicans took their own party's position. On gun ownership, 79.5% of Democrats and 78.6% of Republicans took their party's position.
5. Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is an online labor market increasingly used in leading political science research (see Online Appendix 2 for more details [available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental]).
6. We designed the compromise treatment to highlight the fact that although the parties have different positions, they were able to reach an agreement. Our description of their positions and the resulting compromise is purposefully vague

and could capture either a "classic compromise," where both sides made sacrifices, or a "consensual compromise," where the parties focused only on places of common ground (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012, p. 12). The remaining five conditions describe instances in which the two parties engage in some form of non-cooperation.

7. Following previous research, independents who indicated that they were closer to one of the two parties were treated as partisans (Keith et al., 1992). Given our interest in comparing outcomes that favor one's own party or the opposing party, pure independents are excluded from the primary analyses but included in subsequent analyses that consider the framing of gridlock because independents are an important component of the electorate.

8. All reported *p* values come from two-tailed tests.

9. Although our focus here is on how individual-level factors affect the key pattern observed above, other evidence suggests that partisans in our sample behave in a manner consistent with theoretical expectations. For example, strong partisans significantly prefer a win by their own party over compromise, while weak partisans view these two outcomes similarly.

10. Because we are interested in the effect of the treatments on the treated, we drop participants in these conditions who failed a series of manipulation checks at the very end of the survey designed to capture whether participants were paying attention and understood the legislative outcome and the explanation provided. While the preference for action over gridlock in Study 1 holds regardless of participant attentiveness, preferences for ideological gridlock over partisan gridlock hold only among attentive participants who recognized the distinction between these two frames. See Online Appendix 4 (available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental) for more details and, following Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances (2014), treatment effects across various thresholds of attentiveness and demographic predictors of passing the manipulation checks.

11. As a second dependent variable, we asked participants how much confidence they had in the U.S. Congress. Response options ranged from *none* to *a great deal* on a 5-point scale. As with other measures, responses were recoded from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest level of confidence.

12. Complete results of the mediation analysis and accompanying sensitivity analyses are presented in Online Appendix 5 (available at http://apr.sagepub.com/supplemental).

Supplemental Appendix

The supplemental appendix for this article is available on Sage's website. Replication files are posted on the Open Science Framework.

References

Aalberg, T., Stromback, J., & de Vreese, C. H. (2012). The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations, and key findings. *Journalism*, *13*(2), 162-178.

Adler, E. S., & Wilkerson, J. D. (2013). *Congress and the politics of problem solving*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Babington, C., & Espo, D. (2015, June 24). *Republican-led Congress hand Obama major win on trade*. Associated Press. Retrieved from http://news.yahoo.com/senate-poised-hand-obama-big-victory-negotiating-trade-071058503–finance.html

Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, *20*, 351-368.

Berinsky, A. J., Margolis, M. F., & Sances, M. W. (2014). Separating the shirkers from the workers? Making sure respondents pay attention on self-administered surveys. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*, 739-753.

Binder, S. (2003). *Stalemate: Causes and consequences of legislative gridlock*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Binder, S. (2014). *Polarized we govern?* Brookings Institution. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/05/27-polarized-we-govern-binder/brookingscepm_polarized_figreplacedtextrevtablerev.pdf

Born, R. (1990). The shared fortunes of Congress and congressmen: Members may run from Congress, but they can't hide. *Journal of Politics*, *52*, 1223-1241.

Brandus, P. (2013, September 30). *Who will "win" in the government shutdown?* Retrieved from http://theweek.com/article/index/250355/who-will-win-the-government-shutdown#axzz33armcb4u

Broder, J. M., & Krauss, C. (2010, January 27). Advocates of climate bill scale down their goals. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/27/science/earth/27climate.html

Brooks, D. J., & Geer, J. G. (2007). Beyond negativity: The effects of incivility on the electorate. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*, 1-16.

Burden, B. C. (2011). Polarization, obstruction, and governing in the Senate. *The Forum*, *9*(4). Retrieved from http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/for.2011.9.issue-4/1540-8884.1480/1540-8884.1480.xml

Busby, E., Flynn, D. J., & Druckman, J. N. (in press). Putting framing effects in their place: When frames (may) matter. In P. D'Angelo (Ed.), *Doing news framing analysis II*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, D. M., & Powell, E. N. (2014). Understanding the party brand: Experimental evidence on the role of valence. *Journal of Politics*, *76*, 492-505.

Canes-Wrone, B., Brady, D. W., & Cogan, J. F. (2002). Out of step, out of office: Electoral accountability and house members' voting. *American Political Science Review*, *96*, 127-140.

Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spirals of cynicism: The press and the public good*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Carson, J. L., Koger, G., Lebo, M. J., & Young, E. (2010). The electoral costs of party loyalty in Congress. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*, 598-616.

CBS News. (2009, July 13). President Obama, the economy, and foreign affairs. *CBS News Poll*. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/poll_Obama_071309.pdf

Doherty, D. (2015a). How policy and procedure shape citizens' evaluations of senators. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *40*, 241-272.

Doherty, D. (2015b). Perceived motives in the political arena. *American Politics Research*, *43*, 363-393.

Druckman, J. N., & Kam, C. D. (2011). Students as experimental participants: A defense of the "narrow data base." In J. N. Druckman, D. P. Green, J. H. Kuklinski, & A. Lupia (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of experimental political science* (pp. 41-57). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Druckman, J. N., & Lupia, A. (in press). Preference change in competitive political environments. *Annual Review of Political Science*. Retrieved from http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~jnd260/pub/Druckman%20Lupia%20Preference%20Change.pdf

Druckman, J. N., Peterson, E., & Slothuus, R. (2013). How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation. *American Political Science Review*, *107*, 57-79.

Durr, R. H., Martin, A. D., & Wolbrecht, C. (1997). Explaining congressional approval. *American Journal of Political Science*, *41*, 175-207.

Egan, P. J. (2014). "Do something" politics and double-peaked policy preferences. *Journal of Politics*, *76*, 333-349.

Fowler, L. L., & McClure, R. D. (1989). *Political ambition: Who decides to run for Congress*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fridkin, K. L., & Kenney, P. (2011). Variability in citizens' reactions to different types of negative campaigns. *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*, 307-325.

Gangl, A. (2003). Procedural justice theory and evaluations of the lawmaking process. *Political Behavior*, *25*, 119-149.

Gerber, A. S., & Huber, G. A. (2010). Partisanship, political control, and economic assessments. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*, 153-173.

Gibson, J. L., Caldeira, G. A., & Spence, L. K. (2005). Why do people accept public policies they oppose? Testing legitimacy theory with a survey-based experiment. *Political Research Quarterly*, *58*, 187-201.

Gilmour, J. B. (1995). *Strategic disagreement: Stalemate in American politics*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (2012). *The spirit of compromise: Why governing demands it and campaigning undermines it*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Harbridge, L., & Malhotra, N. (2011). Electoral incentives and partisan conflict in Congress: Evidence from survey experiments. *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*, 1-17.

Harbridge, L., Malhotra, N., & Harrison, B. F. (2014). Public preferences for bipartisanship in the policymaking process. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *39*, 327-355.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (Eds.). (2001). *What is it about government that Americans dislike?* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (1995). *Congress as public enemy: Public attitudes toward American political institutions*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Imai, K., Keele, L., Tingley, D., & Yamamoto, T. (2011). Unpacking the black box of causality: Learning about causal mechanisms from experimental and observational studies. *American Political Science Review*, *104*, 765-789.

Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *76*, 405-431.

Jones, D. R. (2001). Party polarization and legislative gridlock. *Political Research Quarterly*, *54*, 125-141.

Jones, D. R. (2010). Partisan polarization and congressional accountability in house elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*, 323-337.

Jones, D. R. (2013). Do major policy enactments affect public evaluations of Congress? The case of health care reform. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *38*, 185-204.

Jones, D. R., & McDermott, M. L. (2010). *Americans, Congress, and democratic responsiveness: Public evaluations of Congress and electoral consequences*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Katz, C. (2013, April 17). Reaction roundup: Manchin-Toomey gun check amendment fails in Senate. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/reaction-roundup-manchin-toomey-gun-check-amendment-fails-senate-blog-entry-*1*.1694324

Keith, B. E., Magleby, D. B., Nelson, C. J., Orr, E., Westlye, M. C., & Wolfinger, R. E. (1992). *The myth of the independent voter*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Koss, G. (2008, March 31). All sides gird for cap-and-trade fight. *Roll Call*. Retrieved from http://www.rollcall.com/issues/53_111/-22702-1.html

Krehbiel, K. (1998). *Pivotal politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Krupnikov, Y., & Levine, A. S. (2014). Cross-sample comparisons and external validity. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *1*, 59-80.

Lavine, H. G., Johnston, C. D., & Steenbergen, M. R. (2012). *The ambivalent partisan: How critical loyalty promotes democracy.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Lawrence, R. G. (2000). Game-framing the issues: Tracking the strategy frame in public policy news. *Political Communication*, *17*, 93-114.

Lebo, M. J., McGlynn, A. J., & Koger, G. (2007). Strategic party government: Party influence in Congress, 1789–2000. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*, 464-481.

Lee, F. E. (2009). *Beyond ideology: Politics, principles, and partisanship in the U.S. Senate*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lesley, B. (2013, April 22). Gun safety, gridlock, and the demise of Congress. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-lesley/gun-safety-gridlock-and-t_b_3133220.html

Levendusky, M. (2013). *How partisan media polarize America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Madison, L. (2013, April 18). Background checks voted down; Senate gun bill in peril. *CBS News*. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/news/background-checks-voted-down-senate-gun-bill-in-peril/

Manley, J. F. (1965). The house committee on ways and means: Conflict management in a congressional committee. *American Political Science Review*, *59*, 927-939.

Mann, T. E., & Ornstein, N. J. (2006). *The broken branch: How Congress is failing America and how to get it back on track*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mann, T. E., & Ornstein, N. J. (2012). *It's even worse than it looks: How the American constitutional system collided with the new politics of extremism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

McCarty, N., Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (2006). *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

McDermott, R. (2011). Internal and external validity. In J. N. Druckman, D. P. Green, J. H. Kuklinski, & A. Lupia (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of experimental political science* (pp. 27-40). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Murray, S., & Montgomery, L. (2010, March 22). House passes health-care reform bill without Republican votes. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/21/AR2010032100943.html

Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, *99*, 1-15.

Nagourney, A. (2014, January 15). After flurry of changes, some states ease up. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/15/us/politics/after-flurry-of-changes-some-states-ease-up.html

Newport, F. (2013, October 7). *Congress' job approval falls to 11% amid gov't shutdown*. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/165281/congress-job-approval-falls-amid-gov-shutdown.aspx

Noel, H. (2013). *Political ideologies and political parties in America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Paris, C. (2015, April). *Costs nothing and buys everything: Incentives for congressional civility.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.

Pew Research Center. (2012). *Trends in American values: 1987–2012*. Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/06-04-12%20Values%20Release.pdf

Pew Research Center. (2015). *Congressional favorability*. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/data-trend/political-attitudes/congressional-favorability

Ramirez, M. D. (2009). The dynamics of partisan conflict on congressional approval. *American Journal of Political Science*, *53*, 681-694.

Ramirez, M. D. (2013). The policy origins of congressional approval. *Journal of Politics*, *75*, 198-209.

Samuelson, R. J. (2013, October 6). Robert Samuelson: The shutdown is a triumph of ideology. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.

com/opinions/robert-samuelson-the-shutdown-is-a-triumph-of-ideology/2013/1
0/06/1bc17054-2d4c-11e3-97a3-ff2758228523_story.html

Skitka, L., Winquist, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2003). Are outcome fairness and outcome favorability distinguishable psychological constructs? A meta-analytic review. *Social Justice Research*, *16*, 309-341.

Slothuus, R., & de Vreese, C. H. (2010). Political parties, motivated reasoning, and issue framing effects. *Journal of Politics*, *72*, 630-645.

Theriault, S. M. (2008). *Party polarization in Congress*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tyler, T. R. (1994). Governing amid diversity: The effect of fair decisionmaking procedures on the legitimacy of government. *Law & Society Review*, *28*, 809-831.

Tyler, T. R. (2001). The psychology of public dissatisfaction with government. In J. R. Hibbing & E. Theiss-Morse (Eds.), *What is it about government that Americans dislike?* (pp. 227-242). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Walsh, B. (2010, July 22). Cap and trade is dead (really, truly, I'm not kidding). Who's to blame? *Time*. Retrieved from http://science.time.com/2010/07/22/cap-and-trade-is-dead-really-truly-im-not-kidding-whos-to-blame/

Author Biographies

D.J. Flynn is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University. His research focuses on public opinon, political psychology, representation, and quantitative research methodology.

Laurel Harbridge is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and a Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research, both at Northwestern University. Her research interests include the United States Congress, political parties, public opinion, and representation. Her work has appeared in journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science, Legislative Studies Quarterly*, and the *Public Administration Review*.