

Process Approval and Democratic Legitimacy: How Americans Want Their Elected Representatives to Decide How to Vote

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Abstract

Trust in the institutions of governance is a fundamental element of democratic legitimacy, and contemporary dissatisfaction with such institutions might be a function of perceived gridlock and/or discontent with the nature of laws that have been passed. This paper explores a third possible explanation: public disapproval of the process by which elected officials design their policy-making actions. Two surveys of nationally representative samples of adults (in 2015 and 2017) revealed that Americans want Congressional representatives to make voting decisions by paying the most attention to the preferences of the general public and of the people who feel strongly about the issue. In contrast, Americans perceive that representatives pay the most attention to the preferences of their supporters and campaign donors and economic elites. Republican and Democratic citizens both perceive the same divergence between desires and reality, and this divergence is partly responsible for public dissatisfaction with Congress, with the U.S. government more generally, and with other democracies. An experiment embedded in a national survey demonstrated how explaining the reasons for their voting decisions may be a way for legislators to improve the public's perceptions of the legitimacy of government.

Democracies rely on the participation of their electorates in the governance process, which hinges on public perceptions of legitimacy. And perceptions of legitimacy are no doubt driven partly by the public's observations of the policy-making process. Regardless of whether elected representatives are thought to be trustees of citizens or to be delegates, those representatives are linked to their constituents in a promissory or retrospective fashion (Mansbridge 2003). Unfortunately, widespread dissatisfaction with Congress, hovering near 80% in recent years,¹ suggests a worrisome break in that linkage.

This dissatisfaction might reflect Americans' frustration with gridlock: some observers have said that Congress appears to be committed to preventing the passage of laws whenever possible rather than promoting the passage of legislation. Alternatively, disapproval of Congress may reflect public disappointment with the content of the laws that have been passed recently, such as President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

In this paper, we explore a third potential cause of disapproval of Congress: process disapproval. Process disapproval is a discrepancy between the process that citizens want representatives to engage in when deciding how to vote on a bill and the process that citizens perceive those legislators to have implemented. In other words, process disapproval is the result of a gap between what Americans want and what they get in the decision-making process. For example, if people perceive that economic elites (Gilens 2014) and interest groups (Truman 1981) often compete successfully against the general public in shaping the legislative process (Gilens and Page 2014), citizens may disapprove of the process of decision making if the public wishes for the process to be different.

¹ <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx>.

A great deal of research has explored how representatives actually make policy, examining whether representatives' votes reflect the preferences of their constituents (e.g., Anderson 2011; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Kau and Rubin 1979, 1979; Levitt 1996; Poole and Rosenthal 1996) and illuminating the effects of descriptive representation on legitimacy (e.g., Grissom and Keiser 2011; Scherer and Curry 2010). And some work has explored Americans' desires for policy-making (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). We built on that work when conducting the new investigation reported here, seeking to illuminate how Americans want legislative decisions to be made, how people perceive those decisions to be made, and the consequences of those desired and perceptions.

This paper describes data from two surveys of representative national samples of American adults exploring citizen demands, conducted in 2015 and 2017. Respondents were asked elaborate question sequences to measure how people want legislators to make decisions and how such decisions appear to have been made. The factors that respondents think should most shape representatives' voting decisions - the general public and the issue public (the people who feel strongly about the issue) - are exactly those that they see least in operation. On the other hand, the factors that respondents think should least shape representatives' voting decisions - economic elites and donors - are those who appear to be most consequential. And remarkably, these views are shared by Democrats and Republicans alike. The discrepancies between how respondents want representatives to decide and how people believe those voting decisions are made predict their evaluations of Congress, of government, and of democracy.

An experiment embedded in a national survey shows that explanations of the reasoning behind voting choices can change the public's view of the decision process. Among respondents who read an explanation for voting, approval was highest when the vote was cast in line with the

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preferences of the general public and slightly lower when the vote was cast based on the preferences of the issue public. This evidence documents causal influence of process approval on approval of elected officials. This evidence also suggests that a representative explaining his or her voting decision, either in general terms or by specifically saying that attention to the preferences of the general public was paramount, may be a way for legislators to improve the public's perception of the legitimacy of their government.

Theory

Public displays dissatisfaction with the institutions of governance seems like to have consequences for the functioning of democracy. Legitimacy of the institutions affects willingness to accept public policies (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005) and preferences regarding which institutions are most appropriate to make policy decisions (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007). Disapproval of Congress even discourages individuals from running for office (Fowler and McClure 1990; Theriault 1998). Thus, public dissatisfaction with the U.S. Congress is justifiably a cause for concern (Mann and Ornstein 1992).

Naturally, then, scholars and practitioners are interested in what causes approval or disapproval and have posited three main drivers: approval of the content (output) of the policies a legislative body passes, public satisfaction with the volume of the policies passed, and public satisfaction with the process by which legislators make the policies. Because the primary output of government is policy, liking the pieces of major legislation passed by a Congress seems likely to breed approval of Congress (Jones 2013). Conversely, congressional approval suffers when important legislation diverges from the public's ideological preferences (Ramirez 2013).

Other evidence suggests that perceptions of the amount of policy enacted (what we call policy-making volume) influence congressional approval as well. Gridlock, particularly on

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consensus issues, is a cause of dissatisfaction (Flynn and Harbridge 2015). As Parker and Davidson (1979) said, “The cumbersome legislative process, which often gives the appearance of delay and inaction, ... is not an attribute that appeals to the public.” In an age of polarization (Jacobson 2013), Americans, particularly those with weak party affiliations, have lower confidence in Congress because they observe gridlock in the form of partisan conflict (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Ramirez 2009), especially when they observe elite discourse laced with partisanship in the news (Kimball 2005).

Figure 1 proposes a causal model in which process approval, output approval, and volume approval are posited to cause approval of Congress, which may cause approval of the U.S. government’s functioning, which in turn may shape optimism or pessimism about the future performance of the U.S. government, which in turn might even shape evaluations of democracy generally. This model makes explicit the possible connection between approval of Congress and democratic legitimacy.

Our focus here is on satisfaction with the process of policy-making as the potential driver of Congressional approval. Consider, for example, evidence from Tyler and colleagues (Tyler 1984; Tyler and Caine 1981; Tyler and Folger 1980; Tyler 1990) on approval of approval of trial verdicts. People are more accepting of such verdicts and other outcomes if they approve of the process that generated them. Likewise, Miles (2014) showed that when conservatives perceive the government processes for implementing tax policies to be unfair, they support tax reform. By the same token, perhaps observations of Congressional decision-making process have the consequences proposed in Figure 1.

Some past surveys suggest that Americans have been dissatisfied with the process of lawmaking. For example, when asked by Gallup between 1975 and 2011, “If the leaders of our

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nation followed the views of the public more closely, do you think the nation would be better off or worse off than it is today?”, between 67% and 80% said that more public influence would be beneficial, and similar percentages thought that following the findings of public opinion polls would make the nation better off.² At the same time, most respondents to the American National Election Studies (ANES) since the 1940s have said that government has not been especially attentive to the interests and opinions of the general public. When asked, “Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?”, a slight majority selected the latter option during the 1960s, but in most years since then, the majority said that a few big interests dominated government, with an all-time high of 81% in 2012.³

Similarly, during most years since 1974, a majority of ANES respondents agreed with the statement, “Public officials don’t care much what people like me think”.⁴ And in surveys conducted between 1968 and 1980, a majority of ANES respondents agreed that, “Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly”, reaching a peak in 1980 of 71% (Miller and Traugott 1989, p. 265).^{5,6} In 2017, three in four

² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/149636/americans-leaders-follow-public-views-closely.aspx>

³ http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_2.htm

⁴ http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5b_3.htm

⁵ http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5b_2.htm

⁶ Nonetheless, few Americans have believed that people like them or the public generally have been completely irrelevant to the policy-making process. For example, between 1952 and 2012, almost never has a majority agreed with the statement, “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.” Likewise, in 2012, when asked “How much say do people like you have about what the government does: None, a little, some, quite a bit, or a great deal?”, only 25% of respondents in the General Social Survey said “none” (<https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/variables/3973/vshow>). Similarly, when ANES respondents were asked, “Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what the people think when it decides what to do – a good deal, some, or not much?”, fewer than 30% said “not much” between 1964 and 2004 (http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5c_1.htm). Likewise, when asked, “How much attention do you think most Congressmen pay to the people who elect them when they decide what to do in Congress – a good deal, some, or not much?”, only one quarter or fewer said “not much” in surveys between 1964 and 1980 (Miller and Traugott 1989, p. 267). And in 2004, when asked, “How well do elections ensure that the views of voters are represented by members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate?”, only 27% of ANES respondents said “not very well” or “not well at all” (http://electionstudies.org/CoreUtility/varfiles/Q621_2004.htm).

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Americans said they had too little power and influence in Washington, while eight in ten perceived wealthy people and more than six in ten said political lobbyists and large businesses had too much power and influence in Washington.⁷

Other work published in scholarly outlets also suggests that the public has generally appeared to prefer a process that incorporates their voices into the decision-making process (Lind and Tyler 1988; Thibault and Walker 1975). For example, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 2001, 2002) reported evidence that the public has wanted more influence over government than it has had and that people believed political parties and interest groups had too much influence.

However, other work suggests some disagreement in the American public on these issues. For example, in a 2001 national survey, 54% of respondents said that “elected and government officials” should follow what “the majority of the public wants”, and 42% should “make decisions about what is the best policy to pursue,” regardless of public opinion (Brodie, Parmelee, Brackett, and Altman 2001). Thus, people were about equally divided in their hopes. Other investigations have yielded apparently mutually contradictory evidence. For example, in one study, 85% of survey respondents agreed that “Members of Congress should do what is best for the entire country, not just their district” (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, p. 64), whereas Doherty’s (2013) experiments indicated that most Americans wanted individual representatives to pay more attention to the residents of their own districts than to the best interests of the nation as a whole. Similarly, when asked whether their own representative in Congress was “more interested in doing what’s best for the country or what’s best for your own congressional district where you live”, 39% of Americans chose the first option, and 46% chose the second option in a 2010 ABC News poll (See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/fedrole.html>). But when asked which of these two considerations should be of

⁷ <http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/Power-and-Influence-in-Washington.aspx>.

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more interest to representatives, 58% chose the first, and 38% chose the second. Thus, whether the American public is unified about desired decision-making process or not seems to vary with how questions were asked in past surveys.

Regardless, however, dissatisfaction with the considerations that shape government decisions is associated with more disapproval of government (of the Congress, the federal government, and the Supreme Court) and of the American political system more generally, as well as with reduced compliance with the law and increased support for reforms, such as banning political parties, increasing the use of ballot initiatives, and devolving power to states (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2001, 2002).^{8,9}

As interesting and provocative as this work is, no study we know of has developed a theoretical framework for the full array of criteria that policy-makers might consider when making voting decisions, and no study has used such a framework to measure public desires and perceptions. We set out to develop and use such a framework, the starting point for which is the literature on how members of Congress do make decisions, which we review next. This work suggests at least six classes of considerations: attention to the general public, attention to the issue public, attention to economic elites, attention to donors and supporters, attention to political parties, and attention to the president.

First, some evidence indicates that legislators attend to the wishes of the *general public*,

⁸ Some evidence suggests that satisfaction with Congress is driven partly by the public's perceptions of changes in macro-level indicators of the quality of life in the country. For example, if the economy grows, and desirable social changes take place, citizens, as "retrospective voters" (Fiorina 1981), may be inclined to reward Congress (Lane 1965). And when quality of life appears to be declining in America, citizens may be more inclined to disapprove of legislators (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001). Thus, what Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) called the "outcomes" of government seem to influence institutional approval.

⁹ Ulbig (2002) reported that people who believed the public had less impact on government policy-making manifested lower trust in government, less behavioral participation in politics, and feelings of less obligation to obey the law. Ulbig's analytic approach presumed that the public's ideal was maximal influence on government, whereas Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (1995, 2001, 2002) evidence suggests that moderate influence might be considered more desirable.

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in their district and in the nation as a whole. Representatives' policy-making efforts are generally aligned with their constituents' preferences, and the aggregation of actions taken by individual representatives yields policies generally in line with public opinion in the nation as a whole (e.g., Bartels 1991; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; Page and Shapiro 1983; Stimson MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; for recent reviews of evidence, see Canes-Wrone 2015; Druckman and Jacobs 2015). And some evidence documents more directly what appears to be causal impact of public opinion on policy-making (e.g., Lax and Phillips 2009). Broadly speaking, scholars concur that the decisions of members of Congress are shaped by constituencies (see e.g., Levitt 1996).

Other work suggests that the legislative decision-making process is sometimes driven by a subset of the general public: the *issue public*. Converse (1964) proposed that each policy issue confronting government is likely to attract attention from and arouse passion among a small set of the population, whom he called the "issue public." Issue publics are examples of subconstituencies (Bishin 2010). Issue public members gather large stores of information about the issue they are about, think and talk often about it, form strong opinions about what government should do and not do on the issue, and express those opinions regularly through their voting and various forms of activism, including letter-writing and financial contributions to lobbying organizations (see e.g., Krosnick, Berent and Boninger 1994). Caring deeply about an issue can motivate even people who do not have the high levels of education and income that often facilitate participation in politics to engage (Han 2009). Most Americans fall into at least one issue public, being passionate about gun control or global warming or abortion or some other such issue, and these individuals signal government in ways that may be successful.¹⁰

¹⁰ According to calculations with the American National Election Studies 2008 Time Series Study (ANES; www.electionstudies.org), 57% of survey respondents considered at least one of the ten issues that were asked about

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Economic elites (Gilens 2014) compete with the American public for influence in the legislative process (Gilens and Page 2014). Whether because wealthy people are more actively engaged (Verba, Scholzman and Brady 1995) or because of bias due to background or information (Butler 2014), the actions of politicians appear to better represent economic elites (Bartels 2010; see also Bonica, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2013). For example, Gilens and Page (2014) found that businesses and wealthy individuals had the most influence on government, and issue public members had weaker but detectable influence, whereas the general public had no detectable influence at all on government decisions.

Representatives no doubt attend to their *donors and supporters* to get elected, a possible fourth source of influence. These donors and supporters might include a representative's re-election constituency (people who did or might vote for the representative in a general election), the primary constituency (people who did or might vote for the representative in the primary), and the personal constituency (people who directly support the legislator's election efforts; Fenno 1978).

Parties constitute a fifth potential source of influence (e.g., Smith 2007, Volden and Wiseman 2014). Either because they control the agenda and content of legislation (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Harbridge 2015; Hartog and Monroe 2011; Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith 2006) or because of the role parties play in assembling a sufficient number of supportive votes to pass a piece of legislation (e.g., Groseclose 1996; Jenkins and Monroe 2012), *party* support is often critical. Therefore, it is advantageous for legislators to pay attention to the preferences of their fellow party members and their party leaders (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge 2016), because the alternative may be countless futile attempts to pass bills. Similarly, fellow partisans

to be "extremely important" to them personally. This percentage is likely to be an underestimate of the true prevalence of issue publics as issue publics may form around more than just these 10 issues.

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in the electorate play an important role in reelection and therefore in voting decisions (Bullock and Brady 1983; Clinton 2006).

Finally, presidents can and do regularly attempt to shape the process of Congressional decision-making (e.g., Cameron 2000) and often succeed. Thus, the president's wishes constitute a sixth criterion with which policy-making decisions might be made.

One way to structure and subdivide these categories of criteria is the following scheme, which assigns 21 total considerations to 6 general classes:

The General Public

The opinions of people living in a representative' state or Congressional District (CD)

The opinions of people living in the U.S.

What the representative thinks is in the best interest of everyone in the U.S.

What the representative thinks is in the best interest of everyone in the representative's state/CD

Issue Public

The opinions of people in the representative's state/CD who feel strongly about the law

The opinions of people in the U.S. who feel strongly about the law

The opinions of people in the representative's state/CD who express those opinions to him/her

Economic Elites

The opinions of wealthy people in the representative's state/CD

The opinions of wealthy people in the U.S.

What the representative thinks is in the best interest of businesses in the representative's state/CD

Donors and Supporters

The opinions of people who voted for him/her

The opinions of people who gave money to the representative's last campaign

The preferences of businesses that gave money to the representative's last campaign

The preferences of lobbying organizations that gave money to the representative's last campaign

Party Loyalty

- The opinions of people with the representative's party identification in the representative's state/CD
- The opinions of people with the representative's party identification in the U.S.
- National leaders of the representative's party
- Other members of Congress of the same party
- Other members of Congress of the other party
- The representative's liberal or conservative philosophy of politics

The President

- The President of the United States

Survey 1

In the first survey described here, respondents indicated how much attention members of Congress have paid and should pay to each of the above considerations when deciding how to vote. The difference between the two yields an index of process dissatisfaction. Respondents also answered questions measuring satisfaction with congressional policy output and policy-making volume. Statistical analyses assessed the predictive power of these criteria regarding approval of Congress and other macro-evaluations of the U.S. government and of the notion of democratic governance.

Sample

Interviews were conducted by NORC with a nationally representative probability sample of 1,021 American adults via the Internet between September 17 and October 19, 2015. Respondents were drawn randomly from the members of NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel, a representative sample of civilian, non-institutional adults (ages 18 and over) living in the United States (see Appendix A for details on the AmeriSpeak Panel and the sampling method used for

the study).¹¹ The questionnaire was administered in English only.¹²

Measures

Decision-making process. Respondents indicated the amount of attention they thought representatives should pay to each of the 21 criteria and the amount of attention that respondents thought representatives had paid to each one during the prior 6 years after reading this introduction: “As you probably know, members of Congress vote often to decide whether or not to create new laws. We’d like to know how you think a member of Congress should decide whether to vote for or against each proposed new law. When deciding how to vote, a member of Congress could pay attention to each of the following:” and then the 21 criteria were listed.

Respondents were asked: “When deciding how to vote on a proposed law, how much attention do you think a member of Congress should pay to whether the new law is favored by:”, and the 21 criteria were presented in an order randomized for each respondent one at a time.¹³ Response choices were: a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or none.¹⁴ Then respondents were asked: “Next, we’d like to know how you think members of Congress decided how to vote during the last 6 years. On the next few screens, please tell us how much attention you think members of Congress paid to each factor when they decided how to vote during the last 6 years.” Each subsequent screen said: “During the last 6 years, when they decided how to vote on proposed laws, how much attention do you think members of Congress paid to ...”, and

¹¹ The rate at which prospective participating households decided to join the AmeriSpeak panel was 36.6%. The household retention rate in the panel after recruitment was 99.4%, and the completion rate for this survey was 32%, yielding a cumulative response rate (AAPOR RR3) of 11.6%.

¹² The survey data were weighted to account for unequal probabilities of selection and to post-stratify in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, race, education, housing tenure, telephone status, and Census Division. The participating sample was similar to the American population before the post-stratification weights were applied and was more similar after the data were fully weighted (see Table S1 in the online supplement). Results reported in this paper were computed using weighted data.

¹³ The distribution of responses of each of the 21 measures did not differ significantly across the 21 possible locations for each question within the set of questions (Table S2 in the online supplement).

¹⁴ Correlations of responses between pairs of the 21 prescribed criteria are shown in Table S3 in the online supplement.

the individual criteria were asked in an order randomized for each respondent.¹⁵

For each of the six sources of influence described above (*general public, issue public, economic elites, donors and supporters, party, and president*), each respondent was assigned a score averaging his or her preferred amount of attention to each factor. If the respondent's average score was greater than 0.5 (the midpoint of the rating scale, meaning more than "a moderate amount"), the respondent was treated as preferring "substantial attention" to that source of influence (see Appendix B for details on the methodology).

Likewise, for each of the six sources of influence, each respondent was assigned a score averaging his or her ratings of how much attention had been paid by members of Congress to each of the factors. If the respondent's score was greater than 0.5, the respondent was treated as saying "substantial attention" was paid to that source of influence.¹⁶

For both prescribed and observed sources of influence, the grouping of factors to characterize each of the six classes of influences was well supported by the data in a confirmatory factor analysis and we conducted robustness checks that suggest that the results are robust to the exclusion of various individual factors from the six sources of influence.^{17,18} In addition, the emphasis on the factors within each source of influence is quite consistent,

¹⁵ Correlations of responses between pairs of the 21 observed criteria are shown in Table S4 in the online supplement.

¹⁶ 8% of the respondents did not answer all of the 21 prescriptive questions; most of these people failed to answer just one of the questions. And 7% of the respondents did not answer all of the 21 descriptive process questions, most of who again failed to answer just one. Each such missing value was imputed by replacing it with the average of the other non-missing values provided by the respondent regarding the other criteria in the same source of influence. Seven or fewer respondents failed to answer all questions about a category of influence, so for these governance sets, these respondents were given a value of 0, meaning no attention should or was paid to that source of influence.

¹⁷ A confirmatory factor analysis positing the six categories of influence in our framework yielded strong support for this structure of the 21 individual measures: RMSEA (root mean squared error of approximation) was .035 (the ideal value is .05 or lower), and CFI (comparative fit index) was .976 (the ideal value is .90 or higher).

¹⁸ Robustness checks suggest that the results reported in this paper are observed when making small changes to the sets of measures used to gauge each component of governance (see Tables S5 and S6 and S7 in the online supplement).

particularly for the prescribed and observed sources of influence that were most often noted.^{19,20}

Process approval. For each of the six categories of influence, the absolute value of the difference between the amount of attention prescribed by a respondent and the amount of attention observed by the respondent was computed. Absolute values of these differences were averaged to yield an overall index of process approval.²¹ This score was multiplied by negative one, and one was added to it, so that the final range of the variable is from 0 to 1, with larger values meaning more approval.

Policy-making output and volume. Respondents rated the quality (*output*) of the laws passed by Congress during the prior 6 years as mostly bad, neither good nor bad, and mostly good and indicated whether the *volume* of laws passed during the prior 6 years was a lot or moderately too high, a lot or moderately too low, or about right.

¹⁹ The proportions of respondents endorsing substantial attention to each of the components of influence were quite consistent within each of the six general categories (see Figure S2 in the online supplement). A little more than six in ten respondents wanted their representatives to pay substantial attention to each of the four sources in *general public* influence (ranging from 62% to 68%). A little less than six in ten wanted representatives to pay substantial attention to each of the three sources in *issue public* influence (ranging from 55% to 59%). Within the *party* source of influence, endorsement was highest for people of the same party living in the district and in the U.S. (32% and 26%), and lower for fellow politicians from the representative's party or the other party. Within the remaining two sources of influence, there was more heterogeneity in the endorsement rates. Within the *economic elites* category, people endorsed substantial attention to the best interests of businesses in the district at a higher rate (40%) than they endorsed attention to wealthy individuals in the district or in the U.S. (14% and 12%). And within the *donors and supporters* category, people endorsed attention to the opinions of people who voted for a representative (40%) more than they endorsed attention to campaign donors or lobbying organizations (12%, 14%, 11%).

²⁰ Consistency again appeared in judgments across the components of the general public and issue public categories (see Figure S3 in the online supplement). About two in ten respondents observed that their representatives paid substantial attention to each of the four sources in general public influence (the percent ranged from 18% to 24%). About two in ten observed their Representatives paid substantial attention to each of the three sources in issue public influence (the percent ranged from 20 to 25%). More heterogeneity was observed among other sources of influence. Whereas about two-thirds of respondents (60% to 66%) said substantial attention was being paid to lobbying organizations, businesses that contributed money, and campaign donors, only 33% of respondents said substantial attention was being paid to the opinions of people who voted for the representative. Likewise, whereas about six in ten (57% and 58%) said substantial attention was being paid to wealthy individuals in the U.S. and in the representative's district, only 37% said substantial attention was being paid to the best interests of businesses in the district. And substantial attention was observed being accorded to groups in the party loyalty governance set by between 32% and 58% of respondents. Specifically, more people perceived substantial attention being paid to the representative's party leaders in and out of Congress, and fewer people perceived substantial attention being paid to members of citizens from the same party and members of Congress from the opposing party.

²¹ Results computed using the Euclidian distance instead of the city-block method were comparable to those reported here and are described in the online supplement. The same measure of process approval computed across the 21 individual sources of influence also yielded similar results, as reported in the same online supplement.

Overall evaluations of Congress, government generally, and other democracies.

Respondents reported their approval of Congress (on a four-point scale ranging from strongly disapprove (0) to strongly approve (1)) and rated the quality of the work done by Congress. They also evaluated the quality of work done by government in the U.S. during the last 6 years, reported expectations of future American government functioning, and evaluated the functioning of other democracies around the world to allow for an assessment of the role of process approval in democratic legitimacy more broadly.

Other measures. Respondents reported their civic participation (attention to politics, voter registration, and frequency of voting), political party identification, and liberal/conservative ideology (see Appendix B in the online supplement for all question wordings and coding).

Results**Process Preferences**

Most respondents wanted representatives to pay substantial attention to the *general public* (80%; see Figure 2; top panel). And a nearly equally large majority, 72%, wanted representatives to pay substantial attention to the *issue public*. More than half of the respondents (57%) ranked the opinions of the *general public* as meriting the most attention of any source of influence (see column 1 of Table S8 in the online supplement). More than one-third (35%) did so regarding the *issue public*.²²

Many fewer respondents preferred attention to the remaining sources of influence. The next most popular source of influence was *party*, eliciting endorsement by just 37% of the respondents. And 26% of respondents endorsed *presidential* influence. Furthermore, the

²² Just 18% of respondents prescribed that substantial attention be paid to only one source of influence. In contrast, 73% endorsed two or more sources of influence.

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respondents signaled that legislators should not be especially responsive to the members of the public whose behavior facilitated the representative being elected. Only 19% wanted representatives to pay substantial attention to *economic elites*, and an equally small minority, 18%, wanted representatives to pay substantial attention to campaign *donors* and people who voted for the representatives.²³

Endorsement of each type of governance was remarkably consistent across demographic and political subgroups of the population (see Table S10 in the online supplement). Perhaps most remarkably, Democratic respondents and Republican respondents differed from one another very little with regard to their preferred sources of influence (see the top panel of Table 1). As compared to Democrats, slightly more Republicans prescribed attention to the *general public* ($\Delta=7$ percentage points), to the *issue public* ($\Delta=7$ percentage points), and to *party* ($\Delta=13$ percentage points). The only sharp difference involved presidential influence – Democrats were 26 percentage points more likely than Republicans to prescribe attention to the *president*, likely because the president at the time of the survey was Democrat Barack Obama (see the first column of Figure S1 in the online supplement). Also striking is the fact that wealthier people were no more likely to prescribe substantial influence by *economic elites* ($b=-.03$, n.s.) and were slightly less likely than others to prescribe substantial influence by *donors and supporters* ($b=.04$, $p<.05$).

Perceptions of Decision-Making Process

Respondents' perceptions of the decision-making process contrast sharply with their wishes. Respondents perceived decision-making to be dominated by campaign *donors and*

²³ Considering each criterion individually yields essentially the same conclusions (see column 1 of Table S9 in the online supplement). The most frequently highest-ranked criteria are from the *general public* and *issue public* categories (the top 7 rows in Table S9 in the online supplement). The criteria least frequently endorsed as deserving attention include people who gave money to the representative's campaign, members of Congress from the opposing party, and wealthy people.

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supporters (70%), *economic elites* (66%), and *party members* (65%, see Figure 2; top panel).²⁴

Only 28% of respondents said that representatives paid substantial attention to the *general public*, the most preferred source of influence by respondents. And only 31% of respondents said that representatives paid substantial attention to the *issue public*.²⁵ 37% of respondents observed substantial attention being paid to the *president*, slightly more than people wanted. Thus, the criteria that people wanted to dominate decision making appeared instead to be minimally influential.

As with prescriptions, perceptions of sources of influence were remarkably similar among Democrats and Republicans (see the middle panel of Table 1) and across demographics. As compared to Republicans, more Democrats perceived substantial influence by *economic elites* ($\Delta=13$ percentage points) and by the *president* ($\Delta=11$ percentage points). Otherwise, similar proportions of Democrats and Republicans perceived substantial influence from each of the other sources (see Table S11 in the online supplement).

Process Approval

Democrats and Republicans were largely in agreement regarding the discrepancies they perceived between prescribed and observed processes of decision-making (see the bottom panel of Table 1). Both groups wanted substantially more attention to be paid to the *general public* ($\Delta=50$ and 58 percentage points) and to the *issue public* ($\Delta=43$ and 45 percentage points).

Likewise, Democrats and Republicans both wanted substantially less attention to be paid to *economic elites* ($\Delta=58$ and 45 percentage points) and to *donors and supporters* ($\Delta=56$ and 62

²⁴ Almost all respondents (82%) perceived legislators to pay substantial attention to multiple considerations.

²⁵ There was similar consensus among respondents about the influence of the 21 categories of considerations. About half the country observed each of the following criteria to be influential: lobbying organizations (54%), businesses that contributed to campaigns (47%), campaign donors (45%), and wealthy individuals in the representative's district (44%) and in the nation (44%). The other criteria were observed to be the most influential by smaller groups of respondents, ranging from 16% to 37%.

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percentage points), though Democrats wanted more of a reduction of elite influence than did Republicans. Similarly, Democrats and Republicans both wanted somewhat less attention to be paid to groups defined by political *parties* and ideology, but Democrats wanted more of a reduction of influence than did Republicans ($\Delta=34$ and 21 percentage points). The only instance of notable disagreement was that Democrats wanted the *president* to have slightly more influence ($\Delta=8$ percentage points), whereas Republicans wanted the *president* to have much less influence ($\Delta=29$ percentage points).²⁶

Policy-Making Output and Volume

The distributions of output approval and of volume approval revealed prevalent public disapproval of congressional output and volume. Just 15% of respondents said that the laws passed by Congress were mostly good, and just 29% said the number of laws passed was about right. About 35% said that the laws passed by Congress were mostly bad, while 50% said the laws were neither good nor bad. Americans were about equally split on whether Congress should have passed more laws (33%) or fewer laws (37%).

Predictors of Approval of Congress

Approval of the decision-making process (i.e., consistency between prescribed and observed sources of influences) was a significant predictor of approval of Congress ($b=.23$, $p<.001$; see column 1 in Table 2).^{27,28,29} A 10 percentage point increase in process approval was

²⁶ Process approval was quite consistent across various subgroups of society (see Tables S12 and S13 in the online supplement).

²⁷ Tables S14 in the online supplement show that these results are essentially the same if process approval is measured across the 21 criteria.

²⁸ Tables S15 in the online supplement show that these results are essentially the same if process approval is measured with squared differences rather than absolute differences. The absolute difference assumes that each additional unit increase in the difference between how representatives should and do make decisions results in the same amount of decrease in process approval. In contrast, the squared distance measure assumes that a one-unit increase in the distance results in a larger decrease in process approval as the distance gets bigger.

²⁹ Respondents reported their emotional reactions when thinking about the Congressional decision-making process - how proud, pleased, angry, and disappointed they felt. Process approval is a strong predictor of emotional reactions

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predicted to yield an increase of 2 percentage points in approval of Congress (the average approval of Congress among survey respondents was fairly low at 22 percent). These results control for output approval and volume approval, both of which have statistically significant coefficients in the expected direction ($b=.24$, $p<.001$, and $b=.07$, $p<.01$; see column 1 in Table 2). When approval of Congress is measured with the rating of the job that Congress is doing, the impact of process approval overshadows the impact of policy (see Table 2). Process approval's regression coefficient is $.40$ ($p<.001$), as compared to $.15$ ($p<.001$) for output approval and $.08$ for volume approval ($p<.001$).

The joint impacts of process approval, output approval, and volume approval on approval of Congress can be demonstrated with a simulation. At the levels of process approval, output approval, and volume approval observed in this survey, 18% of Americans approved of the way members of Congress had been doing their jobs. If process approval is set at its maximum (meaning that all Americans agreed that the laws passed by the Congress were mostly good), and output approval is also set at its maximum (meaning that all Americans perceived that Congress had passed the right numbers of laws), 68% of Americans are predicted to approve of Congress. This 50 percentage-point gain in public approval of Congress, from 18% to 68%, suggests that that rampant disapproval is largely due to disapproval in terms of process, output, and volume.

Process approval most strongly predicted approval of Congress ($b=.32$, $p<.001$) and predicts approval of the U.S. government less well ($b=.27$, $p<.001$). It did not predict expectations of future U.S. government performance or evaluations of democracy (see Table 3). The interim links in the chain in Figure 1 were generally statistically significant and in the expected direction. Approval of Congress was a significant positive predictor of approval of the

to perceptions of Congressional decision-making process ($b=.46$, $p<.01$), much stronger than output approval ($b=.14$, $p<.01$) or volume approval ($b=.09$, $p<.01$). Thus, process disapproval is not a cold, cognitive judgment – it is a hot, emotion-laden assessment.

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U.S. government ($b=.31, p<.001$). And approval of the U.S. government was a significant predictor of expectations regarding future U.S. government performance ($b=.39, p<.001$). However, optimism about future U.S. government performance did not predict evaluations of democracy generally ($b=-.02, n.s.$). Instead, approval of the U.S. government predicted evaluations of democracy ($b=.41, p<.001$). This suggests an amendment to the model in Figure 1, removing expectations of future U.S. government performance.

Mediation tests produced results consistent with the conclusions that (1) approval of Congress mediated the relation between process approval and approval of the U.S. government (indirect effect $b=.10, p<.001$), and (2) approval of the U.S. government mediated the relation between approval of Congress and evaluations of democracy (indirect effect $b=.12, p<.001$).

Survey 2

In 2017, we administered some of the same measures from the 2015 survey to see whether any change had occurred in Americans' views about what considerations should be the focus of substantial policy-maker attention and in Americans' perceptions of the impact of these considerations under President Trump.

As with Survey 1, respondents were randomly selected members of the AmeriSpeak panel, a nationally representative probability sample of 335 American adults who answered questions via the Internet between August 29 and September 8, 2017; none of these individuals had participated in the 2015 survey (see Appendix A for the sampling method used for the 2017 survey).

Americans in 2017 are statistically indistinguishable from Americans in 2015 with respect to their desired and perceive sources of influence in lawmaking. In 2017, a majority of the American public continued to desire the most attention to be paid to the *general public* (82%)

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and to the *issue public* (69%). Minorities continued to want substantial attention to be paid to *party*, the *president*, *economic elites*, and *donors and supporters* (37%, 23%, 21% and 15%, respectively; see Figure 2, bottom panel). Likewise, in 2017, minorities of Americans continued to perceive that substantial attention was being paid to the *general public* (29%) and to the *issue public* (25%), while majorities continued to perceive substantial attention being paid to *party*, *economic elites*, and *donors and supporters* (65%, 60%, and 66%, respectively; see Figure 2, bottom panel).

As in 2017, Democrats and Republicans were remarkably alike in their process preferences. No significant differences appeared between Democrats and Republicans in the amounts of attention they prescribed to each source of influence in 2017 (see Figure 3; p -values $>.12$). Small partisan differences emerged moving from 2015 to 2017. Not surprisingly, Democrats wanted more attention to be paid to the President when the President was a Democrat (in 2015) than when the President was a Republican (in 2017). And Republicans wanted more attention to be paid to the President when the President was a Republican (in 2017) than when the President was a Democrat (in 2015). But the gap between Republicans and Democrats in desired attention to the President was actually smaller in 2017 than it was in 2015.

In 2015, more Republicans than Democrats said substantial attention should be paid to the *general public* and to *party*. In 2017, this reversed: more Democrats than Republicans said substantial attention should be paid to the *general public* and to *party*. But the partisan gaps were always small.

Likewise, Democrats and Republicans in 2017 did not differ significantly from one another in perceived attention to any source of influence (Figure 4; p -values $>.11$), except for *economic elites* ($p=.03$), where the difference was small, and the *President*. The partisan gap

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reversed with regard to perceived attention to the *President* ($p=.01$). Small partisan differences emerged from 2015 to 2017: in 2015, more Republicans than Democrats perceived substantial attention being paid to the *President*, whereas in 2017, more Democrats than Republicans perceived substantial attention being paid to the *President*.

As in 2015, process approval in 2017 was positively associated with approval of Congress and was still the most powerful predictor of congressional evaluation, manifesting more influence than output approval and volume approval (Column 4, Table 2).

Survey Experiment

Although we posited that the association between process approval and overall Congressional approval were due to the influence of the former on the latter, the reverse is possible. Specifically, perhaps people who approve of Congress rationalize that approval by claiming that Congress is paying appropriate amounts of attention to the various criteria we explored. In order to test our causal presumption more directly, we conducted a survey experiment in which respondents read a hypothetical Senator's description of the process by which he/she makes policy decisions. Each respondent was randomly assigned to read one of various descriptions, corresponding to the six criteria, or to read no explanation. Respondents then evaluated the hypothetical Senator and reported his/her likelihood of voting for the person. This design offered the opportunity to test the causal claim that constitutes the first link in the chain connecting disapproval of the process to disapproval of Congress (Figure 1).

Experimental conditions. To test whether descriptions of the rationale for voting shape views of the legislators, respondents were told "Here is what a United States Senator might say to explain how he or she decides how to vote on proposed laws:" Then each respondent read one

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of seven statements about the lawmaking process.^{30,31} Each statement described one of the seven sources of influence on decision making in a positive light. For example, the *issue public* statement read:

“When I decide how to vote on a proposed law, I think a lot about what people living in my state who feel strongly about the law, either in favor of it or opposed to it, want me to do. Although many of my constituents don't care much about what I do on an issue, there is usually a group of people who care a lot. These people call, write letters, and send emails to let me know what they believe and what they want me to do, so it makes sense for me to pay special attention to their advice. If I conclude that most people living in my state who feel strongly want me to vote for the law, that's what I do. If I conclude that most people living in my state who feel strongly want me to vote against, I do that.”

The control statement emphasized taking seriously the decision process without specifying sources of influence.³²

Outcomes. After reading an explanation of how the Senator decided to vote, respondents were asked whether the decision-making process was a good or bad idea (on a seven-point scale), whether they approved or disapproved of the way the Senator does his/her job (on a five-point scale), and how likely the respondent was to vote for or against the Senator (on a seven-point scale). These three evaluations were summed into a single index, scaled to range from 0 to 1 (question wordings and codings of all measures are in Appendix C).³³

Sample. The respondents were U.S. adult members of the Toluna panel who had volunteered to complete online questionnaires in exchange for compensation (see Table S17 in the online supplement; see Appendix C for panel recruitment methods). Data collection occurred between May 17 and May 28, 2016, from 2,425 American adults who passed an attention check.

³⁰ Each respondent read a total of seven hypothetical statements, but here we analyze their responses to only the first hypothetical statement to which they were exposed.

³¹ The distribution of demographics, party identification, and ideology did not differ across the conditions (Table S16 in the online supplement).

³² Appendix C lists the statements used in the experiment.

³³ Results obtained using latent variables and or analyzing each measure separately are very similar to those reported here.

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The data were post-stratified to match the U.S. adult population in terms of age (6 groups), sex (2 groups), ethnicity (2 groups), race (3 groups), education (4 groups), and Census region (4 groups) using ANESrake (Pasek 2016).³⁴

Results. As expected, the *general public* process statement yielded the most favorable attitudes among all process statements (see Figure 5). Each of the other statements produced attitudes to the Senator that were statistically significantly less positive. The *issue public* process statement produced the second most favorable attitudes (.63), followed by the *party* and *donors* process statements (.56 and .54, respectively), which did not differ significantly from one another (see Figure 5). The least favorable attitudes were produced by the *elites* and *president* process statements (.39 and .37, respectively), which did not differ significantly from one another (see Figure 5).³⁵

Democrats, Republicans, and Independents reacted similarly to the various statements, only manifesting differences in response to two of the process descriptions: the *general public* and the *president* (see column 1 in Table S20 in the online supplement). Republicans had more positive attitudes toward the Senator than Democrats when the Senator said he/she paid substantial attention to the *general public*. And Republicans had more negative attitudes toward the Senator who said he/she paid substantial attention to the *president* than did Democrats (at a time when the president was a Democrat). Independents also had more negative attitudes than did Democrats toward the Senator who paid attention to the *president*.

These results suggest that perceptions of process were influential. Respondents who read the explanations of voting that were less favored (*economic elites* and *donors*) evaluated the

³⁴ Results were substantially similar when the data were not weighted and when the data were weighted to post-stratify in terms of demographics and party identification, because the sample overrepresented Democrats and underrepresented Independents (see Table S17, S18, S 19, and S20 in the online supplement).

³⁵ The same patterns of results were obtained through regression (see Table S19 in the online supplement).

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Senator more negatively than people who read explanations emphasizing attention to the *general public*, which Americans consistently said should play a large role in governance.

Discussion

This study contributes to our understanding of how Americans want their elected officials to decide how to vote and how Americans perceive that decision-making. A gap between those two appears to be partly responsible for current historically low approval ratings of Congress. Process disapproval is emotional for many Americans, and this offers an opportunity for Congress to reconsider its decision-making strategies and to consider routinely explaining the rationales for their votes and adjusting those rationales to come into line with public preferences.

This investigation supports the following conclusions. First, *Americans want their elected officials to pay substantial attention to what the general public and the issue publics want* when making policy decisions. People overwhelmingly prefer these sources of influence to other possible sources. Moreover, the survey experiment shows that explaining voting as resulting from attention to the *general public* yields the highest approval, and proclaiming attention to the *issue public* is a close second.

The respondents' signal that they want substantial attention to be paid to both the *general public* (in the district and the nation) and the *issue public* (in the district and in the nation) may sometimes confront legislators with a challenge. On some issues, majorities of the public and issue public seem to agree on a preferred policy. For example, according to data from the American National Election Studies 2008 Time Series Survey, the majority of the general public and the majority of the issue public in the nation agreed in their opinions about government services, defense spending, national health insurance, and abortion (see rows 1-4, Table 4). On the other hand, notably larger majorities of the issue publics favored no path to citizenship for

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illegal immigrants, stricter gun control, government provision of prescription drug coverage, and strengthening greenhouse gas emissions restrictions (see rows 5-8 of Table 4). For example, only 24% of the general public favored no path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, but 52% of the issue public favored no path to citizenship. These discrepancies between the general public and the issue public suggest that citizens at times place their representatives in an inescapable bind where they are asked to take into account both the general public and the issue public. Where the general public and the issue public disagree in this way or when the public's preference conflicts with what the representative believes is in the best interest of the district or the nation, the survey described here does not allow us to understand how respondents would prefer that a representative weight the conflicting considerations. Our findings suggest that future research could fruitfully explore the tradeoffs that inevitably arise in making policy decisions.

Second, this investigation sends the clear signal that *Americans have not been getting what they want* with regard to the criteria they believe should most influence legislators' voting. Specifically, in the eyes of Americans, the criteria that should have been receiving the most attention were receiving the least attention. In 2015, whereas 80% and 72% of respondents said they wanted substantial attention to be paid to the *general public* and to the *issue public*, respectively, only 28% and 31% said they observed substantial attention being paid to those considerations.

To be fair to representatives, it is important to acknowledge that they usually have no way to reliably gauge the policy preferences of members of the general public and the issue public in their district or even in the nation. National surveys are sometimes conducted on policy issues just before the time when representatives must cast a vote, but this is not true for most issues confronting Congress. And state- or district-level surveys are much rarer. Indeed, some

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work suggests that elite perceptions of the public may often be quite off target (e.g., Broockman and Skovron 2014). When provided, district-specific poll results shape legislators' subsequent voting decisions (Butler and Nickerson 2011), suggesting that legislators' failure to heed public opinion may be a function of their ignorance about it, not a reluctance to use it. Perhaps it is unfair to blame legislators for ignoring the preferences of the general public and the issue public if those preferences are in no way reliably illuminated for legislators on most issues.

The survey respondents also said that the considerations they believe dominate legislators' decision-making are those that should receive the least attention. In 2015, whereas 66% and 70% of Americans said that legislators paid substantial attention to *economic elites* and *donors and supporters* respectively, only between 19% and 18% wanted that much attention to be accorded to those factors. Likewise, whereas only 37% of respondents favored substantial attention being paid to colleagues and citizens of the legislator's political *party*, 65% of people perceived substantial attention being paid to these criteria.

Third, one of the most important findings here may be the degree to which *Democratic and Republican citizens agree* on how they want their representatives to make decisions and how they believe representatives have been doing so. In an age when the country appears to be split 50-50 on so many policy issues and in elections, the convergence of opinions observed here is strikingly unusual. And this level of agreement is fortunate, in the sense that the public seems to be sending a unified signal to government about how they want decision-making to be accomplished and how decision-making processes should be changed in order to match public demands.

Fourth, *preferences about how the representatives should and perceptions of how they do make decisions transcended administrations*. The public vision for the congressional lawmaking

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process was essentially identical across time periods when the president was a Democrat and when the president was a Republican, and across times when government was divided and when it was not. In this age of attention to the replicability of social science findings, this evidence is reassuring.

Finally, *these perceptions of how legislators make decisions are consequential for Congress and democratic legitimacy.* The larger the discrepancy between the way a citizen wants these decisions to be made and the way she thinks they've been made, the less likely she is to approve of Congress and the less likely she is to give high marks to recent U.S. government performance more generally. Furthermore, the survey data are consistent with a causal chain where process approval influences approval of Congress, which influences approval of the U.S. government overall, which influences attitudes toward democracy as a form of government. Thus, process approval is key to shaping citizens' perception of the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

In addition to evidence that process approval drives approval of Congress, we also saw that such approval is partly driven by approval of the policies that Congress has enacted and by approval of the volume of policy-making that has been accomplished. The former has been shown in other past investigations (see, e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). But ours may be the first evidence showing that process approval, output approval, and volume approval each contributes uniquely in shaping approval of Congress overall. Thus, if Congress wishes to improve its standing in the eyes of the public, it can do so by enacting policies the public likes, by enacting the right number of policies, and by implementing decision-making processes that place weight where citizens want it placed.

This raises questions about how members of Congress might explain to the public the

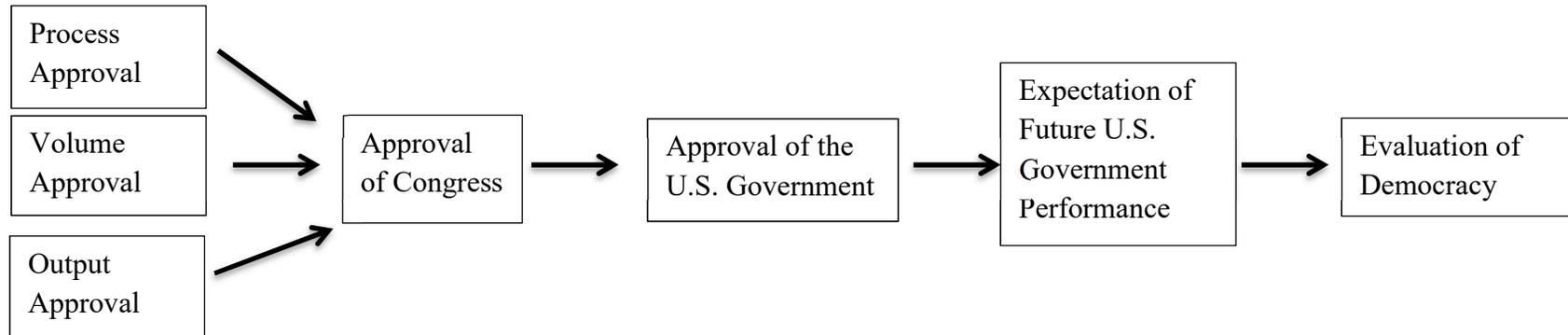
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rationale for their votes on a piece of legislation. Although we know of no systematic evidence documenting the frequency with which various types of explanations are offered to the public, we suspect that such explanations are offered only rarely, which itself may cause Americans to perceive a distasteful lack of public accountability for members of Congress. They are neither routinely held accountable for voting at all nor for explaining the rationale for their votes.

Some past studies suggest that such explanations can be consequential in ways convergent with the present study's findings. For example, public acceptance of a policy outcome is enhanced if politicians are shown to have listened carefully to public preferences on the issue and to have taken those preferences into account when voting (Esaiasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2016). On the other hand, telling people that wealthy individuals have disproportionate influence on policy-making substantially decreased perceptions of the fairness of the government decision-making (Miles 2014)..

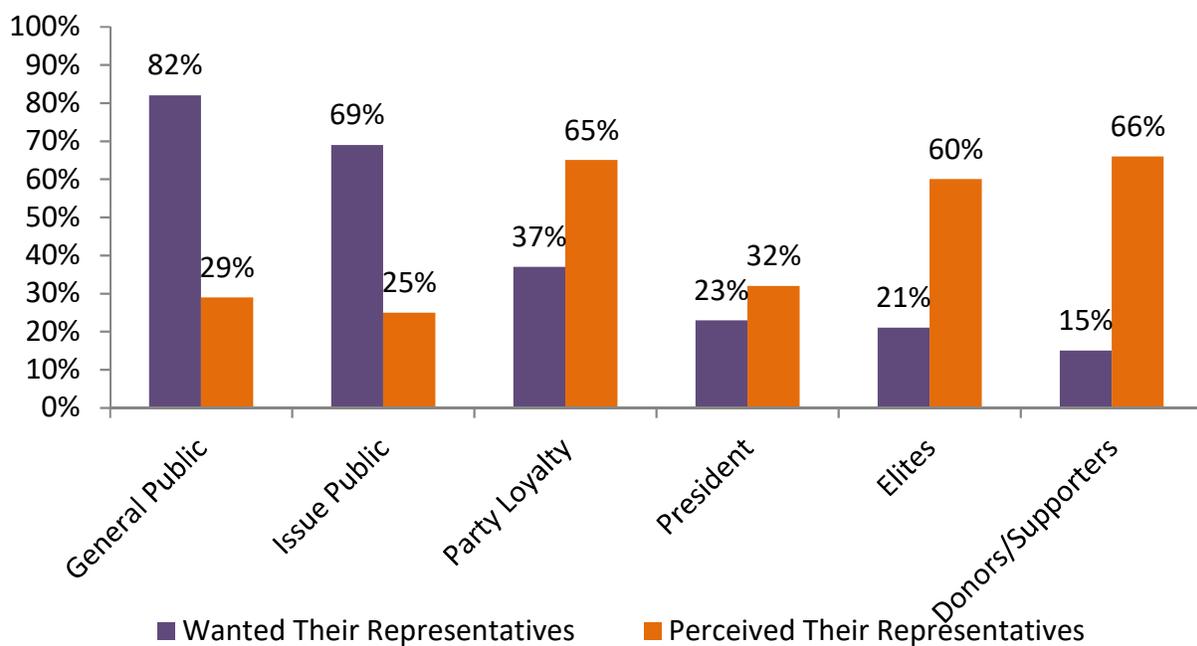
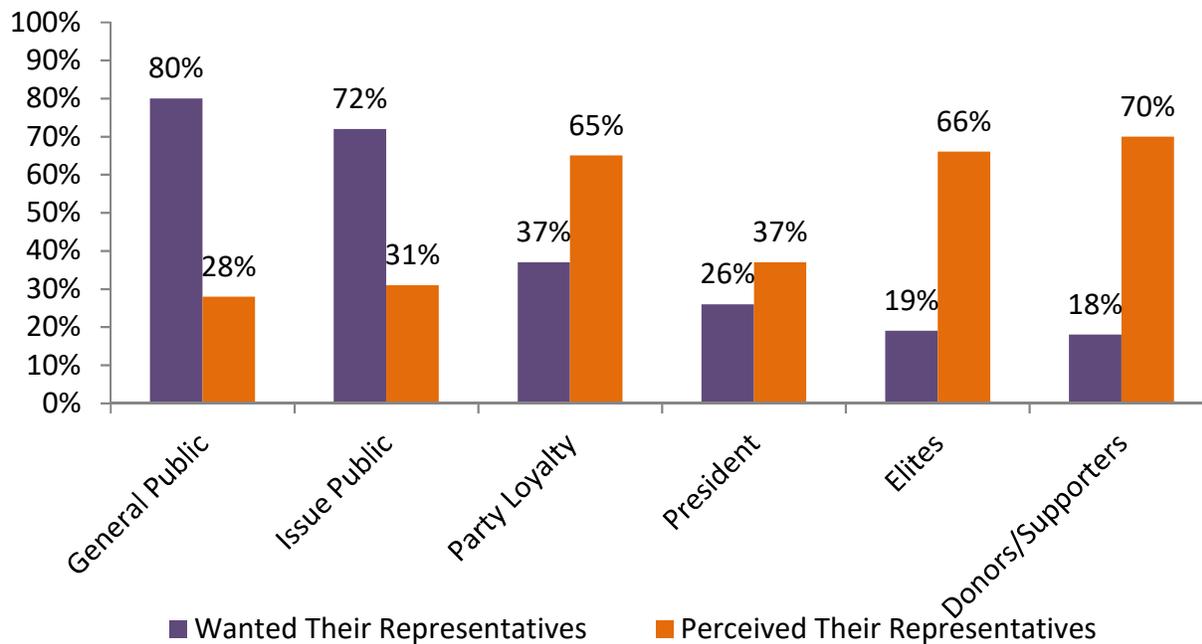
The evidence here suggests that if representatives were to routinely explain to the public why they voted as they did and to invoke accurately-measured public opinion in the district and in the nation as considerations that got attention, even if they didn't determine the final vote, constituents might be more understanding when a legislator votes in a way inconsistent with a citizen's personal preference regarding a bill. Elected officials who can honestly report attention to the general public may find it useful to do so, because it may distinguish them from peers who attend to the other considerations that are less appealing to constituents.

Figure 1. Model of Process Approval and Its Effects



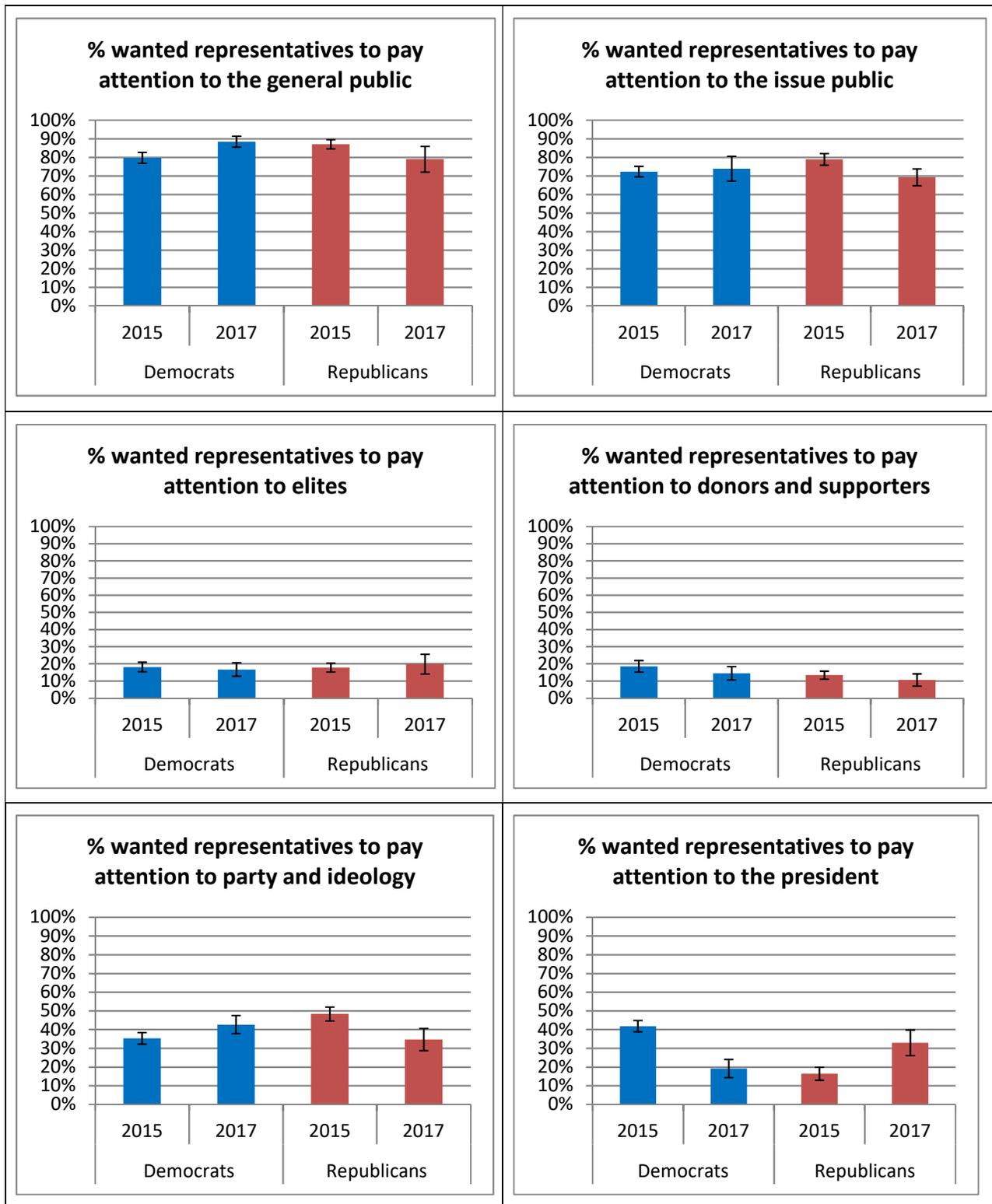
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Figure 2. Percent of Americans Who Wanted Their Representatives to Pay More Than Moderate Attention to, and Percent of Americans Who Perceived Their Representatives Pay More Than Moderate Attention to the General Public, Issue Publics, Elites, Donors & Supporters, Parties, and the President in 2015 (top panel) and 2017 (bottom panel)



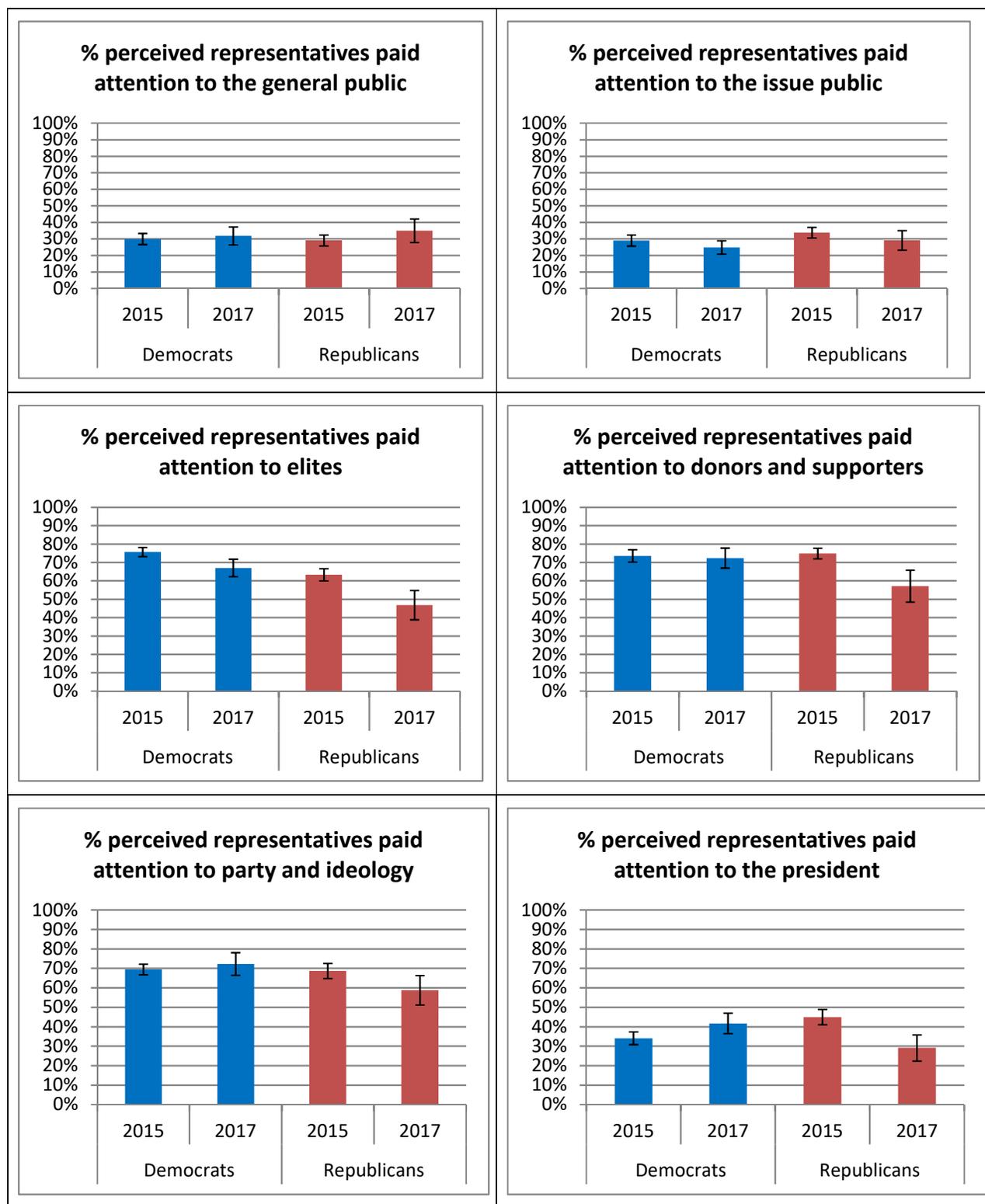
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Figure 3: Percent of Democrats and Republicans Who Wanted Their Representatives to Pay More Than Moderate Attention to the General Public, Issue Publics, Elites, Donors & Supporters, Parties, and the President, in 2015 and 2017



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Figure 4: Percent of Democrats and Republicans Who Perceived Their Representatives to Pay More Than Moderate Attention to the General Public, Issue Publics, Elites, Donors & Supporters, Parties, and the President, in 2015- 2017



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Figure 5. Attitudes toward the Hypothetical U.S. Senator Who Disclosed the Voting Process by Various Process Statements

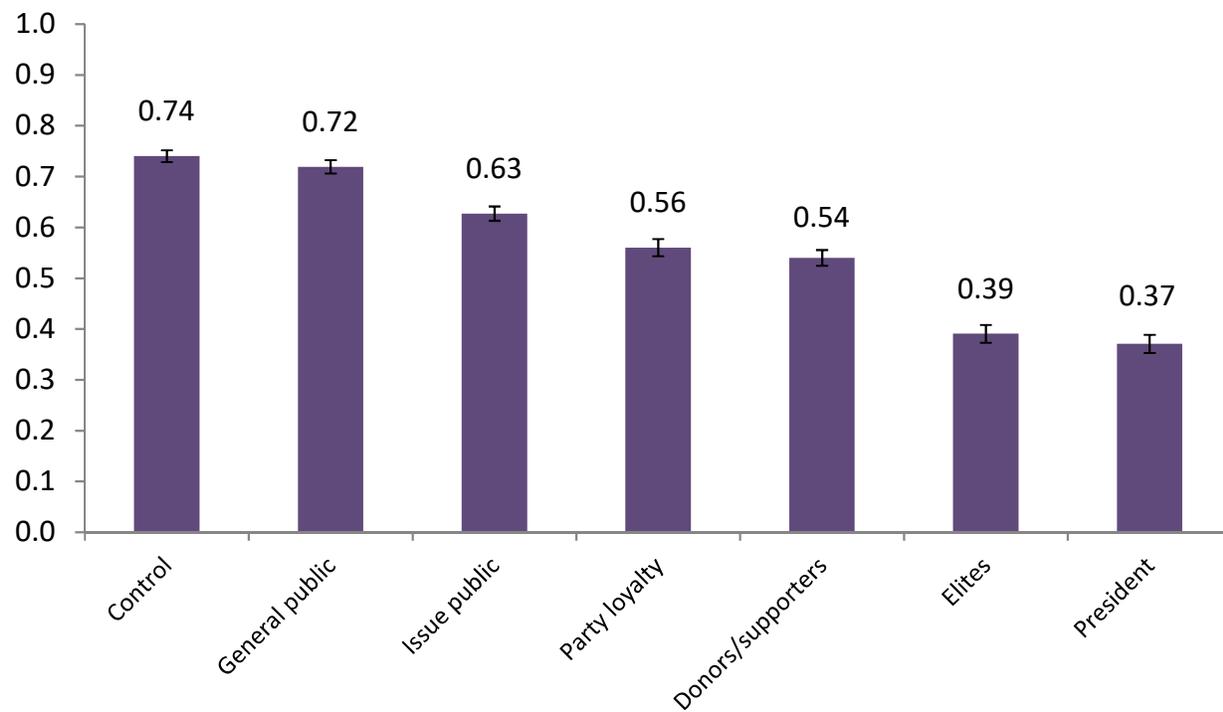


Table 1: Partisan Differences in Preferred and Observed Governance

Respondent Group	General Public	Issue Publics	Party Loyalty	President	Elites	Donors & Supporters
<u>Preferred</u>						
Democrats	80%	72%	35%	42%	18%	18%
Republicans	87%	79%	48%	16%	18%	13%
Difference	-7%*	-7%*	-13%***	26%***	0%	5%
<u>B. Observed</u>						
Democrats	30%	29%	69%	34%	76%	74%
Republicans	29%	34%	69%	45%	63%	75%
Difference	1%	-5%	0%	-11%**	13%***	-1%
<u>C. Preferred vs. observed gap</u>						
Democrats	50%***	43%***	-34%***	8%*	-58%***	-56%***
Republicans	58%***	45%***	-21%***	-29%***	-45%***	-62%***
Difference	-8%	-2%	-13%**	37%***	-13%**	6%

Notes: Cell entries are percent of Democrats or Republicans who reported their Representatives should pay and observed their Representatives did pay substantial attention to each of the six governance sets. Cell entries in the Difference rows are the difference between Democrats and Republicans.

***p<0.01 **p<0.05 *p<0.1

Table 2. Predicting Approval of Congress, Rating of Congress on Its Job, and Emotional Responses with Process Approval, Volume Approval, and Output Approval

Predictor	Dependent Variable			
	Approval of Congress	Rating of Congress on Its Job	Emotional Reactions to Congressional Decision-Making Process	Approval of Congress (Replication)
Process approval	0.23*** (0.05)	0.40*** (0.05)	0.46*** (0.04)	0.39** (0.11)
Output approval	0.24*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.26*** (0.05)
Volume approval	0.07** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.16** (0.05)
Democrat	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)
Republican	0.01 (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.06 (0.05)
Liberal	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Conservative	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.07* (0.03)
Engagement	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.03)	-
Frequency of voting	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)	-
Registered voter	0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.05)
Male	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.04)
Age 18 to 24	0.15*** (0.04)	0.07** (0.03)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)
Age 25 to 34	0.09** (0.04)	0.06** (0.03)	0.04* (0.02)	0.15** (0.05)
Age 35 to 44	0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.09 (0.07)
Age 45 to 54	-0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.19** (0.06)
Age 55 to 64	-0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.07 (0.04)
Hispanic	0.07** (0.03)	0.04** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.07 (0.04)
Non-Hispanic	0.04	0.05*	0.05*	-0.07

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black				
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Non-Hispanic	0.07	0.04**	0.01	0.07
other race				
	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)
Some college	-0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)
College graduate	-0.04*	-0.02	-0.00	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)
Married	0.04**	0.02	-0.02	-0.08*
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)
Working	0.00	-0.01	-0.00	-0.07
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)
Income (log)	-0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.04
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Northeast	0.01	0.03	0.04*	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)
Midwest	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.00
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)
West	0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.06
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.04)
Own home	-0.06**	-0.04*	0.01	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.04)
Metro area	0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Internet access	-0.08*	-0.03	-0.00	0.12
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.07)
Constant	0.06	0.08	0.00	-0.05
	(0.14)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.20)
N	1,019	1,021	1,003	355
R ²	0.312	0.363	0.450	0.349

Notes: Cell entries are the coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) from OLS regressions.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 3. Predicting Approval of Congress, Approval of the U.S. Government, Expectations of Future U.S. Government Performance, and Evaluation of Democracy Using Process Approval, Volume Approval, and Output Approval

Predictor	Dependent Variable			
	Approval of Congress	Approval of the U.S. Government	Expectations of Future U.S. Government Performance	Evaluation of Democracy
Approval of Congress		0.31*** (0.04)	0.13** (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
Approval of the U.S. Government			0.39*** (0.06)	0.41*** (0.04)
Expectation of Future U.S. Government Performance				-0.02 (0.03)
Process Approval	0.32*** (0.06)	0.27*** (0.06)	0.07 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.05)
Output Approval	0.25*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)
Volume Approval	0.07* (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)
N	1,015	1,015	1,015	1,015

Notes: Cell entries are the coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) of structural equation model (SEM) regressions.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 4: Policy Preferences of the General Public and Issue Publics in 2008

Policy	% of the General Public Favoring the Policy	% of the Issue Public Favoring the Policy
<i>Instances in which the general public and the issue public send similar signals</i>		
Government Should Provide Many More Services	16%	32%
Increase Defense Spending	8%	26%
Government Should Provide Health Insurance	19%	36%
Restrict Access to Abortion	15%	34%
<i>Instances in which the general public and the issue public send different signals</i>		
No Path to Citizenship for Illegal Immigrants	24%	52%
Stricter Gun Control	47%	61%
Government Should Provide Rx Drug Coverage	56%	91%
Restrict a Great Deal the Emissions by Power Plants of Gasses that Cause Global Warming	39%	73%

Source: The American National Election Studies 2008 Time Series Study (ANES; www.electionstudies.org).

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