

Research Statement

Adam Ramey

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Dissertation

My dissertation is a three-paper study aimed at better understanding how various influences on legislators affect the ways in which they make decisions. In a certain sense, this is a very well-traveled research question, one that has been tackled by scholars for decades. Mayhew (1974) famously commented that legislators were “single-minded seekers of re-election” and that this motivation was the driving force in how they behave. More recent scholarship has focused on the resurgent influence of political parties and how their impact is to bring about non-centrist outcomes (e.g. Cox & McCubbins 1993, Cox & McCubbins 2005, Aldrich & Rohde 2000). Other scholars have challenged this line of thinking and have contended that parties are not nearly as powerful or influential as one might think (Krehbiel 1993, Krehbiel 1995, Krehbiel 2000, Krehbiel & Meirowitz 2002).

A major problem in this line of research is that each theoretical perspective tends to focus on just one set of motivations for legislators’ behavior (e.g. either parties or constituency, but not both). Indeed, legislators have multiple goals, multiple audiences, and multiple pressures constantly vying for influence. This observation is not new by any means, with many scholars commenting on the problem in various capacities over the years (Fenno 1973, Smith 2007, Sinclair 1995, Aldrich & Rohde 2000, Clausen & Cheney 1970). Despite this, few scholars have sought to reconcile this fact with their own theoretical and empirical studies of legislative behavior.

My dissertation seeks to address this vacuum in the literature in a few different ways. The first chapter of my dissertation, *Weighing the Alternatives*, formalizes the observations of Sinclair (2002), that legislators’ decisions are a weighted function of various competing

sources of influence. Employing a weighted utility framework, I revise the standard item-response ideal point model and provide scholars with a method to analyze the weights that legislators place on their own preferences, their party, and their general election constituency. I apply the model to the study of the Senate from 1995-2009 and find that, in general, Republican moderates are typically more susceptible to the pulls of party and constituency than their Democratic counterparts. Furthermore, it appears that Republicans are, on average, more ideologically representative of their constituencies than Democrats.

The second chapter, *National Survival and the Confederate Congress*, looks at the effect of externally-induced war conditions on the shifting voting behavior of legislators in the Confederate Congress during the United States Civil War. Since the legislature was non-partisan in nature, the weighted utility framework of Chapter 1 would suggest that only constituency and personal preferences are at play in legislators' decisions. However, as Confederate Congressional districts become occupied, the electoral connection is severed. I hypothesize that the crisis imparted by the occupation of legislators' districts leads them to shift their behavior in favor of strengthening the Confederate government. Evidence from the Bayesian statistical model support this hypothesis.

The third chapter, *Missing in Action*, steps back from legislators' reactions to voters and parties and look at decision-making on the part of voters. While it is undoubtedly important for legislators to be able to pinpoint the ideologies of voters, it is perhaps even more important for voters to be able to identify the positions of their legislators. Unfortunately, voters are not particularly good at this. When voters on the NES and other prominent surveys are asked to place their legislators on a seven-point ideological scale, they frequently skip the question or repond "I don't know." To deal with this, I follow an approach in the marketing literature for modeling this missingness problem as a function of saliency and decisiveness. The results suggest that informational, racial, and ethnic factors are influential in terms of saliency, but that education is a powerful predictor for decisiveness. This chapter currently has *revise and resubmit* status at *Political Analysis*.

Future Work

I am currently engaged in and planning many solo and co-authored projects beyond the dissertation. Two solo-authored projects I am now pursuing are a systematic study of the 2008 bailout votes and a theoretical piece on the informational role of political parties. In the former, I show how the bailout votes reveal behavior on the part of legislators that seems at odds with traditional party theories (Cox & McCubbins 2005, Aldrich & Rohde 2000), as well as preference-based theories (Krehbiel 1993). This ties in with the argument and findings of my dissertation; that is, to understand Congress, multiple sources of influence must be integrated to empirical studies, as well as theoretical accounts.

In the other piece, I present a game-theoretic theory of political parties in legislatures as informational agents of the median voter. This view is fundamentally different from the view that parties produce non-median outcomes. I show that, even if the majority party has agenda control (Cox & McCubbins 2005), so long as there is the opportunity for minority floor debate, political parties can actually induce centrist outcomes in an incomplete information environment.

There are currently four co-authored projects that I am involved in. The first is a paper with Lawrence Rothenberg, in which we use latent variable modeling to study the behavior of NGO's seeking to receive grants by major foundations. To aid in this analysis, we have created an original dataset of over 15,000 observations of Foundation grants to NGO's since the year 2000.

The second project is a paper with Nicole Asmussen, where we use NPAT-based measures of legislator ideology to see whether committee assignments are used as rewards for loyalists. As part of this project, we collected data on all committee assignment requests and outcomes since the 103rd Congress, in addition to the collection and merging of all NPAT questionnaires since 1992.

The third project is co-authored with David Carter. Therein, we analyze how religion acts as the "great equalizer" among minority groups with respect to political participation. The last project is a work in progress with Jeremy Kedziora, in which we develop a statistical model to study how baseball team performance is used as a latent measure of coach quality. We then seek to apply the method to the study of leaders in both the

American and International Relations contexts.

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