The Electoral Security of Party Leaders in Congress:
Has Party Polarization Cost Them Support?

Bradford H. Bishop
Northern Illinois University
bbishop@niu.edu

&

Scot Schraufnagel
Northern Illinois University
sschrauf@niu.edu

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Any biblical connotation notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine it is easy to serve two masters. Yet, elected congressional leaders are arguably forced to do so. As leaders of their parties, they are expected to use their power and influence to further the collective interests of their co-partisans. As representatives of a specific geographic constituency, they are expected to defend the interests of their districts in the legislative process. Leaders therefore serve as agents for two distinct principals, and it is not difficult to imagine that their principals ("masters") may have distinct political agendas or priorities for their agent to consider. As we move through an era of heightened party polarization, defined in part by stronger party leaders (Rohde 1991), one might imagine the folks back home will not always be enamored by the oftentimes partisan nature of leadership behavior. During the first term of George W. Bush's presidency, Senate Majority/Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) arguably served as an effective representative of his party when he worked diligently to block Republican initiatives to cut taxes, restrict abortion, and pack the judiciary with conservative judges. Daschle's actions were well received by his fellow Democrats in the Senate. However, in his 2004 re-election bid the good people of South Dakota did not seem impressed enough to return him to office.

In a not too distant past, leaders were considered champions of one of the most august legislative bodies in the world (Mathews 1960). Today, party leaders are as likely viewed as attack dogs representing and leading a dysfunctional legislative process defined by partisan acrimony and stalemate. Senate Minority/Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has been a prominent player in the partisan fray in recent years, and although he did not meet the same fate as Senator Daschle, he did receive electoral scares in both the 2014 Republican Party primary and the general election. His vote percentage in the primary election was the lowest received by

a sitting Kentucky senator, from either party, in over 75 years.[1] McConnell's primary challenge came from the right, but importantly it came from a candidate (Matt Bevin) who carried a populist anti-establishment message. In the general election McConnell wins quite easily with 56 percent of the vote, but this needs to be understood within an historical context where it was common for congressional leaders to receive only nominal and under-funded electoral challenges.

Seniority has long been recognized as a contributing factor influencing the selection of party leaders (Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee 2010, 185). Consequently, electoral safety has played an indirect role in establishing who leads in Congress. Moreover, it was a standing norm in the mid-19th century Congress that leaders are off limits when it comes to partisan election battles.[2] That sentiment came to a resounding halt when one of the Republican Party's chief campaign strategists, Ed Rollins, went to work and successfully ousted Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA) in 1994.[3] Foley was arguably less "partisan" than either his predecessor Jim Wright (D-TX) or successor Richard Gephardt (D-MO), but 1994 was the year of the historic Republican Revolution and a Democratic Party leader was fair game. Moreover, during the general election campaign season Foley embarked in partisan warfare by filling a lawsuit to overturn Washington State's new law to limit the terms of members of Congress, a policy that had been promoted by the Republican leadership in the state, and this action is argued to have contributed to his defeat.[4]

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[1] http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/smartpolitics/2014/05/mcconnell_records_weakest_kent.php (last accessed March 16, 2015)

[2] *Washington Post*, 2 May 2004, A5.

[3] Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 2 May 2004, http://lmtribune.com/article_d3a7f76d-835b-52cd-9508-6918895084c4.html (last accessed March 16, 2015).

[4] New York Times, 28 September 1994, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/28/us/the-1994-campaign-foley-starts-race-of-his-life-far-away-from-the-crowds.html (last accessed March 16, 2015).

Anecdotes aside, this research investigates the electoral security of congressional leaders, taking special care to separate the relative safety of majority and minority leaders.[5] An emerging consensus among scholarship investigating public opinion on Congress is that the increase in party polarization, and the attendant decline in legislative productivity, has soured the public's view of Congress (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, Ramirez 2009). Because today's majority party rank-and-file expects the leadership to assume a confrontational posture against partisan opponents, we argue that the public is increasingly connecting the leadership to its jaundiced view of the Congress more broadly. This increasing association between the leadership and a disliked Congress may be provoking an electoral backlash against leaders in their home districts, as voters punish the leaders for their role in creating an unproductive and polarized legislative process.

In particular, we claim that leaders, on average, will receive less electoral support under conditions of heightened party polarization. The paper begins with a review of literature which, we hold, supports our contentions that 1) the character and subsequent performance of congressional leaders has changed over the past 60 years and 2) that these changes can reasonably be expected to produce a drop in electoral support for party leaders. We then move to discuss our specific investigation, which assays the effect of an interaction between party polarization and leadership on election outcomes while controlling for other factors. In the end, the research will conclude that variation in party polarization, in both chambers of Congress, is ancillary to majority party leaders becoming electorally more vulnerable.

Congressional Leaders and the Electoral Costs of Party Polarization

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[5] For research that finds majority leaders in American state legislatures receiving an electoral boost as a result of being a leader see Holbrook and Tidmarch (1993).

One of the dominant theoretical accounts of the relationship between the party caucus and the leadership is Conditional Party Government (CPG), articulated in Rohde (1991) and Aldrich (1995). CPG is rooted in principal-agent theory, or the analytical problem of a principal delegating authority to an agent to act upon its behalf. An important problem that principals confront in such a relationship is moral hazard, or the risk that an empowered agent's actions will diverge from the preferences of the principal. For ordinary members of the party caucus, moral hazard could occur through the empowerment of leaders that pursue a legislative agenda that members dislike. According to Rohde (1991), two key conditions lessen members' concerns about the risk of moral hazard by party leadership. First, when preferences within a party become increasingly homogenous, members have greater confidence that the leadership will share their view of good public policy, and will be less likely to use their power to advance a rogue agenda. Second, when policy preferences between the two parties diverge, members are increasingly worried about policy reforms promoted by the opposite party. They therefore are willing to sacrifice elements of their individual lawmaking authority to leadership, with the expectation that leaders will use their power to thwart the legislative agenda of their partisan opponents.

Decades of empirical research into the evolution of congressional organization supports the CPG account. In the mid-20th Century it was widely recognized that leaders were "middlemen" (Truman 1959) and passive stewards of chamber prestige (Mathews 1960; Cannon 1989). In more contemporary times scholars recognize congressional leaders acting as party agents (Sinclair 1999, 423) who are more "extreme" than the rank-and-file (Becker and Moscardelli 2008, 79). Gary Jacobson (2013) writes about the Congress of the pre-reform era (pre-1974): "Party Leaders acted as brokers, deal makers, and coordinators, exerting party discipline, if at all, with a light touch" (117). Talking about the 21st century Congresses he

writes: "Party leaders dominate policymaking at the behest of their caucuses, especially in the House, committees are ignored or circumvented if deemed insufficiently responsive to the majority party" (118). We hold that the altered role and subsequent changed behavior of congressional leaders, described by Jacobson, might be sufficient to produce an electoral backlash in the contemporary period.

Other works recognize change in the behavior of US legislative leaders over time. Barbara Sinclair (1992), in particular, notes the emergence of strong leaders in the House of Representatives during the 1980s. In another work, she finds leadership behavioral change is not linear, is conditioned by context, but nonetheless finds leaders acting as agents of their party caucuses (Sinclair 1999, 447). Others note the rank-and-file will select more extreme party leaders when those leaders redistribute more money than their centrist opponents (Heberling, Hetherington, and Larson 2006, 992), a phenomenon familiar to those who follow the modern Congress closely. In an examination of congressional leaders in the last four decades of the 20th century, scholars find that both Democrats and Republicans select "extremist" leaders (Grofman, Koetzle, and McGann 2002) and others note, more specifically, that the DW-Nominate scores of congressional leaders have been increasingly falling outside a middle range (Harris and Nelson 2008).

Focusing more specifically on changed behavior it is possible to note the work of Dodd and Schraufnagel (2012; 2013) which uses newspaper reporting to determine who among members of Congress is more likely to engage in norm-breaking/uncivil behavior, over a period of eight decades. The work uses newspaper reports of name calling, rabble-rousing, and other sordid behaviors to indicate members who have ramped up the level of personal conflict that exists in Congress. Using their data, and calculating the percentage of individual members who

have been implicated in these behaviors who are House and Senate leaders we learn that in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1970s leaders were a very small percentage of the populations of individuals implicated in uncivil acts in newspapers reports.[6] In all other decades, including the three most recent decades over ten percent of all implicated individuals were congressional leaders. The highpoint is the 1980s when nearly 20 percent of all members implicated in norm breaking incivilities held leadership positions in either the House or Senate at the time of the media report.

Noting that leadership behavior has changed, become more acerbic and partisan, is the first link in our causal claim. But, is there any evidence in previous research to suggest there might be electoral consequences for more "extreme" behavior? Jamie Carson and colleagues (Carson, Koger, Lebo, and Young 2010) would argue there is. Their research claims there are electoral costs associated with party loyalty. Interestingly, the research is able to disentangle partisan from ideological effects and notes that it is partisan behavior that bares the more significant cost. If Sinclair (1992; 1999) is correct and post-reform leaders are agents of their party caucus or conference, then we might expect a similar electoral cost for leaders under conditions of heightened party polarization. Still others find "an increase in partisan influence on legislative voting has adverse electoral costs," noting a "strong link" between party behavior in Congress and electoral outcomes (Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger 2007, 464). Using survey experiments, still other scholars find "that party conflict reduces confidence in Congress among citizens across the partisan spectrum" (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011, 494). Overall there seems to be sufficient evidence that party polarization or more partisan behavior can hurt the electoral chances of leaders.

In any test of this thesis it will be especially important to control for the partisan

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[6] Their leaders are defined as the speaker, majority and minority leaders, and majority and minority whips.

homogeneity of the constituency (Jones 2010). One can imagine that in a heterogeneous electoral setting any electoral backlash for leaders, acting as party stalwarts, will be enhanced. Moreover, it will be necessary to control for a whole host of other variables scholars recognize as influencing election outcomes, not the least of which is the presence of an experienced challenger (Jacobson 1989). Next, we will provide a complete discussion of modeling assumptions including our unique measure of the intersection of party polarization and leadership. We run the same models for both chambers of Congress with the exception that we limit our definition of "leader" in the House to the speaker, majority and minority leaders, first whips (assistant floor leaders), and the chairs and ranking members of exclusive or prestige committees.[7] In the more high profile Senate we use all standing committee chairs and ranking members while adding the president pro tempore.

Party Leadership, Party Polarization, and Election Outcomes

Election data is retrieved from the House Clerk's website, which contains vote totals for House and Senate elections from 1920 to 2012.[8] We begin the data analysis in 1952 to avoid mixing the modern era with the years before and immediately post-Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 because of the manner in which the law significantly shuffled the standing committee structure in both chambers of Congress.[9] By trolling carefully through the House Clerk's website we are able to determine whether an incumbent ran for re-election and whether there was a significant third party challenge.[10] When the incumbent did not run for re-election we

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[7] We consider the prestige committees in the House to be Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means.
[8] http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/ (last accessed March 17, 2015). The website only provides data through 2010. The values for 2012 are available through the Federal Elections Commission (www.fec.gov/.../fe2012/federalelections2012; last accessed march 29, 2015).
[9] When the legislation went into effect at the start of the 80th Congress (1947–1949), the reforms reduced the number of House committees from 48 to 19 and the number of Senate committees from 33 to 15. We start in 1952 to wait for the proverbial dust to settle after the significant shake-up of party leadership.
[10] We define a "significant" third party challenge by any race when minor party candidates, independents, and write-in candidates received a combined total of votes cast that exceeded five percent of total votes cast.

search the World Wide Web to learn if the member voluntarily retired, died, or lost a party primary election. In the end, we use the incumbent party's vote total divided by total votes cast as our dependent variable.

We provide an initial glance at the data in Figure 1, which presents the average percent of the district vote won by incumbents between 1950 and 2012. To better understand the broad trends impacting congressional elections, in general, during this time period, results are presented for four categories: Majority leadership (non-South), Majority leadership (South), Rank and file (non-South), and Rank and file (South).

[Figure 1 here]

Several comparisons are immediately evident. First, incumbent majority party leaders have progressively performed worse at the polls since the 1950s, reaching a low point at the end of the time series (2010). The downward trend is not evident until the 1970s, when a decline in leadership performance continues more or less consistently throughout. The pattern of diminishing success for incumbent leadership occurs for both Southern and Non-Southern leaders, suggesting that the growing electoral weakness of leaders is not necessarily an artifact of the idiosyncratic politics of the Civil Rights Era South.

Second, the more or less linear decline in electoral success among the leadership differs from the trends observed among rank-and-file incumbents. Among the Southern rank-and-file, the graph depicts a sharp negative trend. This is not surprising, as the graph overlaps the politically tumultuous 1960s, when legitimate two-party competition for congressional seats became widespread in the South. Prior to the 1960s, virtually every Southern incumbent was a Democrat who was either running unopposed or facing token competition. Southern incumbents began winning a smaller slice of their districts' votes beginning in 1960, and their overall

performance continued a steady decline through the end of the period. By 2010, the annual mean vote percentage won by rank-and-file Southern incumbents fell below 70 percent, more than 20 points fewer than southern incumbents had garnered a generation earlier.

Among non-Southern rank-and-file incumbents, there is little evidence of a downward trend at all—in fact, the plot bears a stronger resemblance to an upside-down U. The non-Southern rank-and-file plot seems to display two trends. First, non-Southern incumbents do increasingly well in their re-election campaigns after 1950, when incumbents were winning just above 60 percent of the vote. By the mid-1980s, non-Southern incumbents were winning more than 70 percent of the vote (on average), before the pattern reversed itself in the mid-2000s. At the conclusion of the time series, non-Southern incumbents were winning less than 65 percent of the vote, a level of success closer to their performance in the 1950s.

To summarize, a clear negative trend exists for the majority leadership—a trend that is common to both leaders representing the South and the non-South. The negative trend picks up in earnest in the late 1970s, when the first stirrings of the polarized politics characteristic of the contemporary era began to appear. The negative trend impacting the leadership appears to be independent of separate processes influencing the electoral success of rank and file incumbents. Clearly a different dynamic was at play for Southern rank-and-file incumbents, most of whom had to contend with major party opposition in the general election following the Civil Rights Era. And the non-Southern rank and file enjoyed a period of unusually large re-election margins in the 1970s and 1980s that eventually abated; this pattern was not shared with the majority leadership.

An important question posed by the study is whether the "electoral bonus" members once enjoyed has decreased. The pattern of results observed on Figure 1 could have been caused by,

for example, an increasing tendency of parties to select more vulnerable members as leaders. In this study we are interested in the electoral consequences of the leadership position itself. One way to wade into this issue is to compare the mean percent of a district's vote won by leaders prior to becoming a leader with the mean percentage won by the member after becoming appointed to the leadership. The difference, if one exists, could be thought of as a rough electoral bonus (or penalty) that may be attributable to leadership status. We computed the electoral bonus for all members of the House, dividing leaders into two categories: those elevated to leadership status prior to 1980, and those who became members of the leadership after 1980. We calculated group means for all members of the leadership, and a separate row was estimated for non-Southern members of the leadership. Results are presented on Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

As can be seen on the first row of the table, which shows the impact of elevation to leadership status for members from all regions, leadership has never provided much of a systematic boost to members' quest for re-election. Prior to the onset of the polarized post-1980 era, leaders did on average fractionally worse in their re-election efforts than they did prior to becoming leaders. But after 1980, leadership status seemed to carry an electoral cost. Members garnered a mean 3.4 points fewer of the district vote after becoming leaders than they had earned prior to becoming leaders, a statistically significant electoral penalty ($t_{46} = -2.48$, $p < .01$).[11]

The second row, which repeats the analysis for members representing non-Southern states, demonstrates that the pattern of results reported above is not driven by the unique political history of the American South. Prior to 1980, members from the non-South won an electoral *bonus* of about 3 points after being elevated to leadership ($t_{17} = -1.44, p < .10$). This bonus disappeared after the onset of the Reagan years, when non-Southern members began to suffer an

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[11] All reported *p*-values in the text are one-tailed tests.

electoral penalty after gaining leadership status. After 1980, non-Southern members did about

3.7 points worse at the polls after becoming leaders ($t_{33} = -2.09, p < .05$). In general then,

when members became leaders after 1980, they tended to suffer at the polls by a small but

substantively important number. In the case of non-Southern members, this electoral penalty

eliminated an earlier electoral bonus that may have served as a small inducement for members to

consider seeking leadership status during an era less characterized by partisan conflict. To assess

whether partisan polarization indicative of chamber conflict has uniquely influenced the electoral

fortunes of leaders, we develop a multivariate model described in the next section.

Modeling the Electoral Fortunes of Leaders

In order to model the role of polarization on the electoral outcomes of leaders, it is

necessary to account for both contextual forces and factors that affect elections at the district and

Senate seat level in a single model. Our dependent variable is the percentage of the vote obtained

by the incumbent party in House and Senate elections from 1952 to 2012.[12]

As noted above, majority leaders in the House are defined as members of the party

leadership and chairs of prestige committees—Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means. We

define minority leaders as members of party leadership and ranking members of the same

prestige committees.

The models we present employ a series of dummy variables that capture whether the

incumbent member retired, lost in a primary election, and whether there was a third party

challenger. All three race-specific considerations are expected to reduce the incumbent party

vote share. We also added a dummy variable to account for Southern districts prior to 1964, as

the flurry of civil rights legislation that followed the Johnson-Goldwater campaign was

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[12]Cases are dropped from the analysis of the House when a state gains a new district and there is no incumbent party vote percentage to measure. The only cases dropped from the analysis of the Senate were the first contests in Hawaii and Alaska, which did not have an incumbent party vote total to consider.

instrumental in creating two-party competition in the South. We expect this dummy variable to be positive and large in magnitude, as few general election campaigns were competitive in the South prior to 1964. Last, we control for whether the incumbent party was Republican. In an era that saw much Democratic Party success in legislative elections we expect to find a statistically significant negative coefficient.

As alluded to in the Introduction it is also important to control for district partisan homogeneity. To measure partisan homogeneity we use the logic of Partisan Voting Index (PVI) developed by Charlie Cook. The PVI compares the average Democratic Party presidential vote in the two preceding elections to the average district or state Democratic Party presidential vote in those same elections. We use the absolute value of the PVI as our predictor of the incumbent party vote percentage in the subsequent election. For instance, to derive a measure for Senate elections in Alabama in the 2010 election, the average of the nation-wide Democratic Party presidential vote in 2004 and 2008 is used and we learn the average value for those two elections was 51 percent. In Alabama the Democratic Party vote share for president in 2004 and 2008 averaged 37.79. This results in a score of 13.21, indicating that Alabama was 13.21 percent more Republican than the country, on average, going into the 2010 election cycle.[13] Scholars note homogeneous constituencies help the incumbent party (Koetzle 1998) and we hold the indicator of district/state partisan homogeneity will associate positively with the incumbent party vote percentage.

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[13] The variable ranges from "0," which means the state voted for the Democratic Party presidential candidate at the same rate as the nation as a whole. At the other extreme the variable takes on the value of "43" in Mississippi in 1952 indicating that leading up to the 1952 elections in Mississippi voters supported the Democratic Party candidate at a much higher rate than the nation as a whole. The logic we are employing argues that Mississippi in 1952 was a very partisan homogeneous state. Some recent scholarship suggests incumbents will receive more support in ideologically heterogeneous constituencies because they work harder in these districts to cultivate the personal vote (Wichowsky 2012).

As noted above we also control for the presence of a quality challenger, which should reduce the electoral clout of the incumbent party. Researchers have long recognized that incumbents fair less well when they face off against someone with name recognition and experience managing an election campaign (Jacobson 1989). We define a "quality" challenger for the purpose of this research as an opponent with previous experience winning any elected office.[14]

The heart of our analysis concerns the interaction of political context with majority leadership status. Our theoretical perspective is that the changing nature of members' expectations of party leaders has forced them to engage in behavior that pleases the party caucus but is electorally costly, following the logic of CPG. As such, it is necessary for our measure to capture both interparty disagreement and intraparty homogeneity—the two critical "conditions" in CPG—in a single measure. We rely upon a metric developed by Alrich, Rohde, and Tofias (2007), which uses multiple summaries of DW-NOMINATE scores to capture the extent to which the "condition" is met on a single dimension. The interaction of this measure with markers for majority leader and minority leader are our key explanatory variables in the analysis that follows. Figure 2 displays values on the measure of CPG during the time period of this study.

[Figure 2 here]

As is evident from the figure, as partisan conflict has risen, the conditions ripe for empowering the leadership have also increased. The precipitous rise in the second half of the plot begins with the 96th Congress, which was seated during the final two years of Jimmy Carter's presidency. In both the House and Senate, partisan polarization increased steadily from this point onward, as the nature of partisan conflict continually increased the incentives members faced to empower party leadership. In our model, we expect increases in the "condition" to harm the

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[14] We thank Gary Jacobson for supplying the data on challenger quality.

electoral performance of party leaders torn between allegiance to the party caucus and their own district or state level constituencies.

We include other measures of context that have a known impact on the electoral fortunes of members, including presidential approval,[15] midterm election status, and the so-called "Misery" Index—a combination of unemployment and inflation, both of which contribute to economic insecurity in the United States.[16] Presidential approval is expected to have a positive effect on the electoral fortunes of members of the president's party, and a negative influence on the election results of the president's partisan opponents. Midterm elections and the Misery Index are each expected to have a negative effect on the electoral performance on the president's co-partisans. Because our dependent variable is the percent of the vote gained by the incumbent party, it will be necessary to interact these contextual variables with a dummy variable capturing membership in the president's party.

The models we estimate includes repeated observations over a lengthy time period, and as such, it raises two major threats to inference. First, there are likely to be unit effects, meaning that there are general tendencies regarding competitiveness of particular districts throughout the period. This may occur because some parts of the country are inhospitable to one party (i.e., Democrats in Utah, Republicans in Vermont), or because a very popular incumbent serves in a given district for a long period of time. We estimated a simple version of our multivariate model, collected the residuals, and analyzed the variance of the residuals across the relevant units (congressional districts for the House Model and states for the Senate model). There was strong

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[15] Approval is measured via the final Gallup poll available prior to the relevant election. If multiple polls were available during the same month, we relied upon mean approval for that election cycle.
[16] Data for the Misery Index was obtained at http://inflationdata.com/articles/Misery-Index/. Our measure averages monthly readings between July and October of the relevant election year.

evidence of unit effects, so we determined it would be necessary to account for units in a fixed effects model.[17]

Second, there is likely to be time dependence, especially in the House, for the simple reason that in many cases, the incumbent party's candidate in one period is quite likely to be same candidate who ran in that district during the previous period. Because of the similarity of the candidates—and the composition of the district electorate—the electoral outcomes in *consecutive* periods are likely to be quite highly related to one another. In diagnostic tests, we found evidence of autocorrelation in the House model, so we modeled the error using a common AR(1) exponential decay pattern.[18] We find our modeling strategy superior to competing alternatives such as a simpler Ordinary Least Squares model including a lagged dependent variable, as this approach did not eliminate unit effects.

Results

We present model fit statistics, parameter estimates, and standard errors for the House model in Table 2. First, model fit is perhaps best assessed by examining the race-year level residuals. The model prediction misses the in-sample observation by about eight points on average; as this is a model that does not include a lagged term capturing the previous electoral result, and the dependent variable has a standard deviation of about15 points, the model fit is decent. A considerable proportion of the unexplained variance (.28) is accounted for by the unit effects.

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[17] Our *F* statistic int eh House model for the ANOVA was 6.65, under 526 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$). We considered the possibility of accounting for unit effects by estimating a Generalized Least Squares ("random effects") model, which differs from a fixed effects model in that it makes distributional assumptions about the units. Using a Hausman test, we rejected the possibility that coefficient estimates did not differ across the specifications ($\chi^2_{19} = 88.83, p < .001$). This result supports the fixed effects specification.

[18] To detect the presence of autocorrelation, we conducted a visual examination of correlograms for units with long-running incumbents. The decay patterns showed a classic AR(1) pattern: a single spike in the partial autocorrelation function and exponential decay in the autocorrelation function. We then conducted Wooldridge's (2002) test of serial correlation and obtained an *F* statistic of 88.26 under 517 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$), strong evidence of first order autocorrelation.

[Table 2 here]

Most of the district-level covariates are signed in the expected direction, and—not surprising given a sample size of more than 12,000—are statistically significant at conventional levels. First, the district partisanship variable has a large and positive predictive effect: greater levels of partisan dominance in a district predict a greater vote share for the incumbent party. The Republican Party dummy variable is negative, reflecting the historical disadvantage faced by Republicans throughout the first half of this period, particularly in the South. We included a dummy variable to capture the politics of the one-party Democratic South prior to 1964; this variable is positive, and large in magnitude. Running for office as a southerner before 1964, holding other covariates constant, predicted more than seven bonus points on average. Other factors that predicted weaker incumbent performance include the presence of a third party challenger, a challenger with previous experience in elective office, and the previous incumbent lost in a party primary. Each of these is consistent with expectations and previous research.

Understanding the contextual effects requires interpretation of both the interaction terms and their constituent terms as well. First, and most importantly, the coefficient for the interaction between *CPG* and *Majority Leadership* is negative and statistically significant. This means that as the condition is increasingly met, we find a negative impact upon re-election performance among the leadership relative to the rank-and-file. As the coefficient for the constituent *CPG* term is also negative and of borderline significance, this indicates that increasing levels of *CPG* worsen electoral prospects for non-leaders. However, it is the majority party's leadership that appears to particularly suffer; the positive coefficient for the interaction between *Minority Leadership* and *CPG* is positive and statistically indistinguishable from zero.

To see this effect more clearly, consider Figure 3, which plots the impact of CPG on the electoral fortunes of incumbents, based upon the parameter estimates reported in Table 2.

[Figure 3 here]

As the plot shows, when the "condition" is not met, a member of the majority party's leadership team is expected to win about 74 percent of the vote. However, as the CPG variable increases throughout its range, the leader's performance worsens. At the right hand extreme of the range—with polarization at its most extreme and members of the leadership most empowered and expected to behave with the party's interests foremost in mind—the electoral advantage of majority leadership status vanishes. From one extreme of the CPG scale to the other, the electoral success of a "typical" majority leader decreases by an expected six percentage points.

Other contextual forces impact members' electoral success in the expected way. Higher levels of presidential approval boost the fortunes of the president's co-partisans; a one point increase in presidential approval boosts co-partisans by about .13 points, while reducing the percent of the vote won by the party opposite the president by about .12 points. Meanwhile, increases to the Misery Index do not appear to harm the president's co-partisans; instead, members of the opposition gain about .12 points for every one unit increase in the Misery Index. While the performance of the economy—variously measured—has a critical impact on the outcome of presidential elections, the substantive impact found by our model is in the expected direction, but somewhat modest.

Finally, the "midterm penalty" is strongly negative for members of the president's party. During off-year elections, a candidate of the president's party does nearly five points worse than an otherwise identical member of the opposite party. Holding all else equal, members of the opposition party do about 2.78 points better during midterms than presidential election years.

While scholars have yet to settle upon the causal mechanism believed to be responsible for the "midterm penalty," its effect is large in magnitude and clearly must be accounted for in models of congressional elections that incorporate political context.

Senate Model

We estimated a parallel model for Senate elections, using the same set of covariates that were described in the previous section. An important difference concerns the definition of majority and minority leaders. For the Senate model, we defined the set of majority party leaders as the Majority Leader, the Majority Whip, and chairmen of all standing committees. Members of the minority party leadership are defined as the Minority Leader, the Minority Whip, and ranking members of all standing committee. The CPG measure is drawn from a collection of indices based upon DW-NOMINATE scores in the Senate rather than the House.

The dynamics of Senate elections differ in two important ways from House elections. A first consideration is constituency. In the House, just one individual represents each district, while in the Senate, two different officials represent the same state. We elected to define the unit as the Senate seat, though other options are available.[19] Second, in most instances, elections for Senate seats are held every six years rather than every two years. This is an important institutional feature to consider when modeling Senate elections because the local political context can be expected to change more after six years than after two years. An election to a House seat can be expected to have a very strong relationship with the election held two years earlier, but in the case of the Senate, the relationship between an election and the prior one held

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[19] An alternative definition of the unit would be the state in which the election was held. We chose not to use this definition because it would have required us to define separate (and arbitrary) units for each special election. A definition of an individual seat allows us to capture the distinctiveness of both the electoral context of constituency and the dynamic properties attached to that seat (for instance, Indiana's class 1 and 3 seats are defined independently). It also allows us to incorporate special elections into the analysis while accounting for the unit properties of those contests. A drawback of this choice is that inclusion of special elections causes unit intervals to be irregularly spaced. We estimated models using an alternative definition of units and obtained results that are comparable to those reported in this section.

for that seat is weaker. For the present purpose, this means that the impact of serial correlation in the Senate model is considerably attenuated in comparison with the House model. We therefore estimated panel regressions with fixed effects,[20] but rather than incorporate exponential decay into the disturbance term we relied upon cluster-robust standard errors to account for the possible presence of weak serial correlation.[21]

Model fit statistics, slope coefficients, and robust standard errors for the Senate model are presented in Table 3. The model fit is moderately strong, as the mean absolute residual is about 6.6, which means that the average in-sample prediction misses the percent of the vote won by incumbents by 6 to 7 points. The overall model R^2 is .37.

[Table 3 here]

The key slope coefficient in the model is the interaction between CPG and Majority Leadership Status. The slope is negative and statistically significant at conventional levels, a result that suggests that as the "condition" is increasingly met, the Majority Leadership's re-election performance is worse than rank-and-file members. The significant and positive slope coefficient for the constituent CPG term indicates that, as the condition is increasingly met, rank-and-file members won a larger share of the vote in their states. The slope for CPG among the majority leadership is -.88, and not statistically significant (s.e. = 1.13; p =.81). As interpretation

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[20] A Hausman Test suggests provides evidence that a "random effects" (GLS) model would provide superior efficiency to a fixed effects specification. The test yielded $\chi^2_{19} = 16.62, p = .30$, insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no systematic differences across coefficient estimates between GLS and fixed effects specifications. We nonetheless chose to estimate a fixed effects model to provide some consistency with the House model. Estimation of a GLS model with robust standard errors yields results substantively comparable to those reported here.

[21] We were unable to test for the presence of serial correlation in the Senate model, as the number of time periods (between 8 and 12) was insufficient for the approach recommended by Woolridge (2002). A model that defines units by state (as described in a previous footnote) does provide sufficient power to administer the Wooldridge test; under this definition of units, there is no evidence of serial correlation. An alternative model specification that incorporates an AR(1) decay pattern in the disturbance term does impact inferences about several key slope coefficients, and will be considered alongside our present results in a future draft. We chose not to rely on this modeling strategy because of the weaker threat to inference from diminished serial correlation. In addition, this model specification requires us to drop about 10 percent of the sample. For these reasons, we regarded the alternative model as a cure worse than the disease.

of models including an interaction term can be complicated, we plot the predictive effects for leadership and rank and file for the CPG variable in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 here]

As can be seen in Figure 4, the impact of CPG has been similar to the effect observed in the House. When the "condition" was not met, and members had fewer incentives to empower leadership to act on their behalf, leaders were more successful in their re-election campaigns than rank-and-file members. However, with increases in interparty difference and intraparty homogeneity, the electoral advantage enjoyed by the majority leadership declined. In the most polarized period in our dataset (the point farthest to the right on the *X*-axis), the percent of the vote won by the majority leadership is indistinguishable from rank-and-file members. In short, with the increase in partisan polarization, the increasing expectation that leaders act with party interests foremost in mind has eliminated any electoral advantage the leadership once enjoyed.

Other coefficient estimates included in the model are largely consistent with the extant literature and the results reported in the model of House elections (Table 2). We find that the midterm penalty boosts the re-election fortunes of members of the party opposite the president, while punishing the president's co-partisans. Higher levels of presidential approval improve the relative circumstances of members of the president's party, while lowering the electoral performance of members of the opposition. Meanwhile, the effects of the Misery Index are signed in the expected direction (worse economic conditions harm the re-election fortunes of the president's party, while boosting the fortunes of the opposite party), but the coefficient for the Misery Index is statistically indistinguishable from zero for both the president's party and the opposition party.

Among the covariates that were included to capture the cross-sectional features of individual campaigns, three factors were statistically significant in our model. First, when members are confronted by challengers with prior experience in public office, they win nearly seven percent less of the state vote, according to the negative coefficient for that variable. Second, when the incumbent is defeated in the primary, the incumbent party is predicted to win 5.5 percent less of the vote. Finally, as expected, Southern incumbents obtained a much larger share of the vote than non-Southerners prior to 1964. Table 4 indicates that pre-civil rights era Southern incumbents won nearly 18 additional points more of the vote. Our model found no significant evidence of impact from the partisan lean of the state, which is somewhat surprising but is likely a function of nearly all Senate races attracting quality challengers and being more competitive. Coefficients for the incumbent Republican and Third Party Challenger dummy variables are in the expected direction (negative) but statistically indistinguishable from zero. It is worth noting that the Senate model has a much smaller sample size than the House model (the n for the Senate model is less than 10 percent of the n for the House model), so the larger standard errors we find in the Senate model are attributable in part to the lesser statistical power of that model.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our research is premised on a simple implication of the theory of Conditional Party Government: the increasing divergence between the two major parties, and the increasing consensus about public policy within the parties, has created a potential cross-pressure for members of the party leadership. In today's polarized era, members of the leadership are expected to take actions that benefit the party—actions that often require a pugilistic and confrontational approach to legislating. This expectation of partisan fealty in leaders by the rank-

and-file may run counter to the collaborative or compromising approach preferred by many leaders' electoral constituencies. Leaders are thus pulled in two directions: they need to conduct themselves as antagonistic agents to satisfy their partisan principals, but this behavior repels the voters back home, and weakens leaders' ability to secure re-election.

Since at least Mayhew (1974), scholars have sought to understand the behavior of members of Congress by unpacking their strategic motives. If members are primarily motivated by the goal of remaining in office, it follows that their choices are best understood as a means of enabling that goal. Fenno's (1973, 1978) view of members of Congress was more complex. He claimed that members were animated by the imperative for re-election, but also had strong commitments to their view of good public policy. He also argues that members were ambitious: independent of their other goals, members wanted to become important decision-makers in the legislative process. Becoming a leader—regardless of the impact on re-election and the direction of public policy—was in a sense its own reward. Scholars have long acknowledged that members' personal views about public policy can be in tension with the goal of re-election (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). Voting in favor of a bill that a member personally supports could jeopardize a member's ability to secure re-election, as many Democratic supporters of the Affordable Care Act could attest after the 2010 midterm elections (Nyhan et al. 2012).

A less explored trade-off concerns the relationship between elevation to leadership status and the likelihood of a member winning his or her re-election campaign. Scholars have been less interested in this conflict, perhaps because in an earlier era, members of the majority party leadership seemed to derive an electoral benefit from leadership status. The leadership team may have been appreciated as important and consequential by their constituents back home, or

perhaps leadership status was valued for its potential to compel federal investment into the home district. But in recent decades, the role of leadership status in promoting re-election has become less clear. While members of the majority leadership team still outperform members of the rank-and-file in terms of their victory margins, the "bonus" of leadership status has disappeared.

Members' changing expectations of leaders, and the electoral consequences of this shift in the behavior of leaders, has several important implications for congressional scholarship. First, if the combative posture of today's leaders is expected to be harmful for leaders' ability to secure re-election, members may have strategic incentives to choose future leaders on the basis of their electoral security. In fact, leaders have become more extreme since the 1950s, both in absolute terms and relative to their party averages (Grofman, Koetzle, and McCann 2002). Some scholarly accounts suggest that members have gravitated toward extreme leaders because they appear to be more effective at fundraising on behalf of their co-partisans (Heberlig, Hetherington, and Larson 2006). Our conclusions suggest another motive: perhaps members are concerned about the increasing electoral cost that is borne by party leaders, as vulnerable members could be less reliable agents for their principals by virtue of their simultaneous need to serve the interests of their electoral constituencies. Members may want to forestall this risk by minimizing the extent to which extreme behavior would antagonize the leaders' constituents; such a motive would cause members to favor ideologically extreme members who represent districts with a friendly partisan composition.

Second, because the potential incongruence between the needs of the party caucus and a leader's constituents may play a role in the growing extremity of leaders, the partisan polarization we observe in the legislative process could become more intractable, and more visible to the public. While members of the two major parties have substantial disagreement in

many areas of public policy, centrist members from the opposite parties probably have fewer personal disagreements on the issues. When ideological extremeness becomes a stronger standard for the selection of leaders, it becomes more likely that the individuals who are negotiating on behalf of their parties will have a greater number of personal disagreements on policy. This policy disagreement could bleed into high-level negotiations between opposing party leaders, making compromise less likely. It could also make partisan disagreement more visible, further diminishing the public's overall perception of the legislative branch.

A final consideration concerns the efficiency of the legislative process. In the American two-party system the scenario which hypothetically results in the most efficient governing process would be one where majority party leaders are electorally secure, while the minority parties' leaders are electorally anxious. This would especially be the case if majority party leaders were safer than other members of the chamber, and if minority party leaders were electorally insecure relative to others. In this situation, the majority leadership might dictate their policy preferences while rank-and-file members would be obliged to follow lest they fall out of favor, possibly compromising further their own electoral safety. Minority party leaders, in part, because of their electoral vulnerability would pose a minimal threat to the whims and wishes of the majority.[22]

Contrarily, one might imagine majority party leaders running scared by virtue of shrinking margins of victory in recent elections. Perhaps decreasing margins have caused well-funded quality challengers to surface who are set to make a run in the next election cycle. It is not difficult to imagine how such a scenario might compromise a majority leader's ability to govern. The workplace environment is changed, rank-and-file members know a chamber leader

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[22] For a discussion of how majority tyranny can occur in democracies see the discussion of Tocqueville in Maletz (2002).

is electorally weak, and may not be around after the next biennial election takes place. Add to this electorally secure minority party leaders and one can easily imagine the ability of the majority party to pass its agenda will be compromised. This scenario points to a policy process that will necessarily decentralize, if anything is to be accomplished, and a policy process where minority voices will need to be heard. This would increase the representativeness of the legislative process, but comes with the cost of increased dysfunction, particularly if the majority is unwilling to compromise and the minority is inclined to obstruction. At the extreme the scenario may lead to a government shutdown.[23]

The two stories outline two unattractive alternatives: Majority tyranny versus an emboldened minority bent on being a nuisance. Real-world conditions may not mirror these extremes. But, it is not difficult to imagine the electoral security of congressional leaders tipping the balance one way or the other causing problems for quality governance. This is the normative backdrop for our study of the electoral fortunes of congressional leaders. We are especially concerned that the modern era's higher levels of party polarization may be hurting the electoral security of majority party leaders in Congress, tipping matters too far in the direction of "representativeness" and stalemate. Empirically, we now know that higher levels of party polarization interacting with a leadership marker associates with statistically significantly lower levels of electoral support.

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[23] For a discussion of how representativeness leads to obstruction see Krehbiel (1985).

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Table 1: Electoral "Bonus" for Majority Party Congressional Leaders, 1950-2012

	1980 and earlier (n)	After 1980 (n)	Difference (SE)
All Leaders	-.25 (27)	-3.39 (47)	-3.14 (2.38) †
Non-Southern Leaders	3.04 (18)	-3.65 (34)	-6.7 (2.85) *

Note: † *p* < .10; * *p* <. 05

Table 2: The Effect of Leadership and Party Polarization on Incumbent Party Vote Percentage: US House Elections 1952-2012

| Variable	Coefficient (standard error)
Incumbent Retired	-9.17 (.33) *
Incumbent Lost Primary	-5.30 (.92) *
Third Party Challenger	-6.27 (.52) *
South – pre 1964	7.09 (.77) *
Republican	-1.38 (.32) *
District Partisan Homogeneity	.20 (.02) *
"Quality" Challenger	-6.38 (.25) *
Conditional Party Government (CPG)	-.29 (.17) †
Majority Leader * CPG	-2.34 (.98) *
Minority Leader * CPG	.67 (.58)
Presidential Approval	-.12 (.01) *
President's Party * Presidential Approval	.26 (.02) *
Midterm Election	2.78 (.23) *
President's Party * Midterm Election	-4.92 (.34) *
Misery Index	.13 (.04) *
President's Party * Misery Index	.02 (.05)
R^2 (overall)	.30
Number of Groups	520
N	12694

Note: † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$

Table 3: The Effect of Leadership and Party Polarization on Incumbent Party Vote Percentage: US Senate Elections 1952-2012

| Variable	Coefficient (robust standard error)
Incumbent Retired	-6.28 (.78)*
Incumbent Lost Primary	-5.48 (1.59)*
Third Party Challenger	-2.62 (1.69)
South – pre 1964	17.68 (2.21)*
Republican	-1.15 (.79)
State Partisan Homogeneity	-.05 (.07)
Quality Challenger	-6.89 (1.15) *
Conditional Party Government (CPG)	1.42 (.54)*
Majority Leader * CPG	-2.42 (1.12)*
Minority Leader * CPG	.36 (.92)
Presidential Approval	-.10 (.04)*
President's Party * Presidential Approval	.17 (.06)*
Midterm Election	2.92 (.74)*
President's Party * Midterm Election	-4.61 (1.14)*
Misery Index	.09 (.12)
President's Party * Misery Index	-.21 (.14)
R^2 (overall)	.37
Number of Groups	100
N	1074

*Note: † p < .10; * p <. 05*
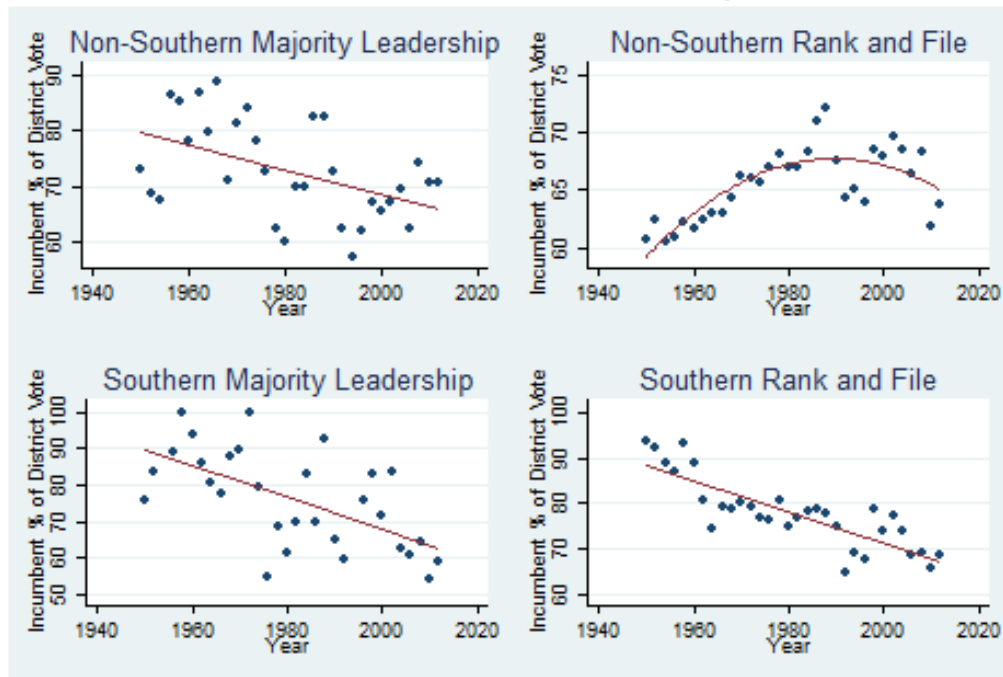
Figure 1: The average percent of the district vote won by House incumbents between 1950 and 2012.
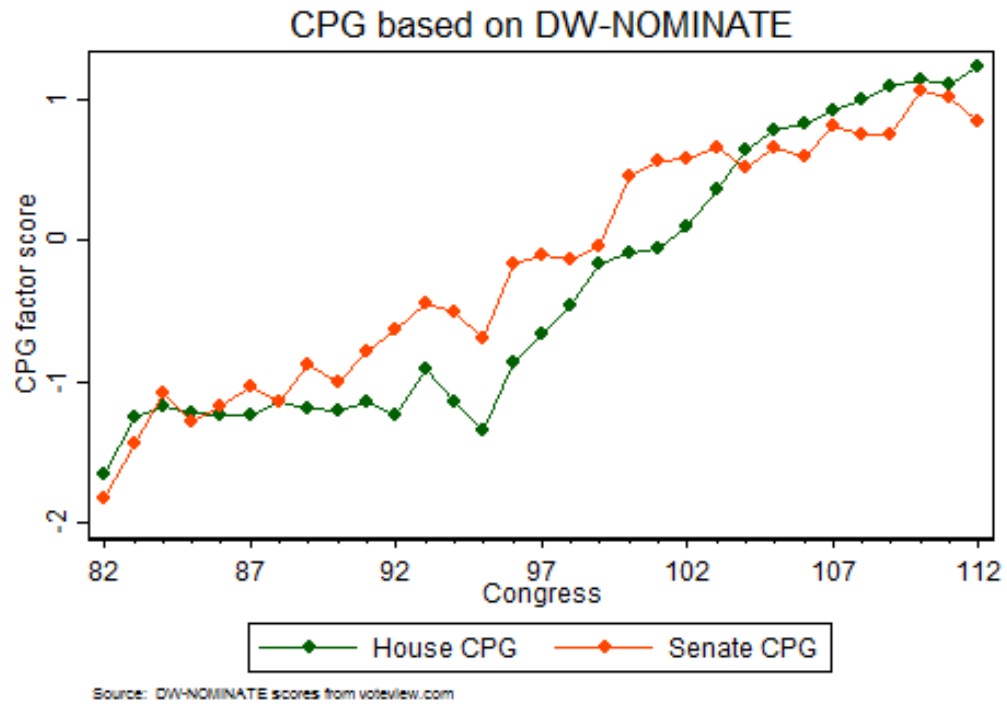
Figure 2: The extent to which the "condition" in Conditional Party Government has been met between 1950 and 2012.

The Impact of Conditional Party Government
On Majority Leaders' Re-election Performance
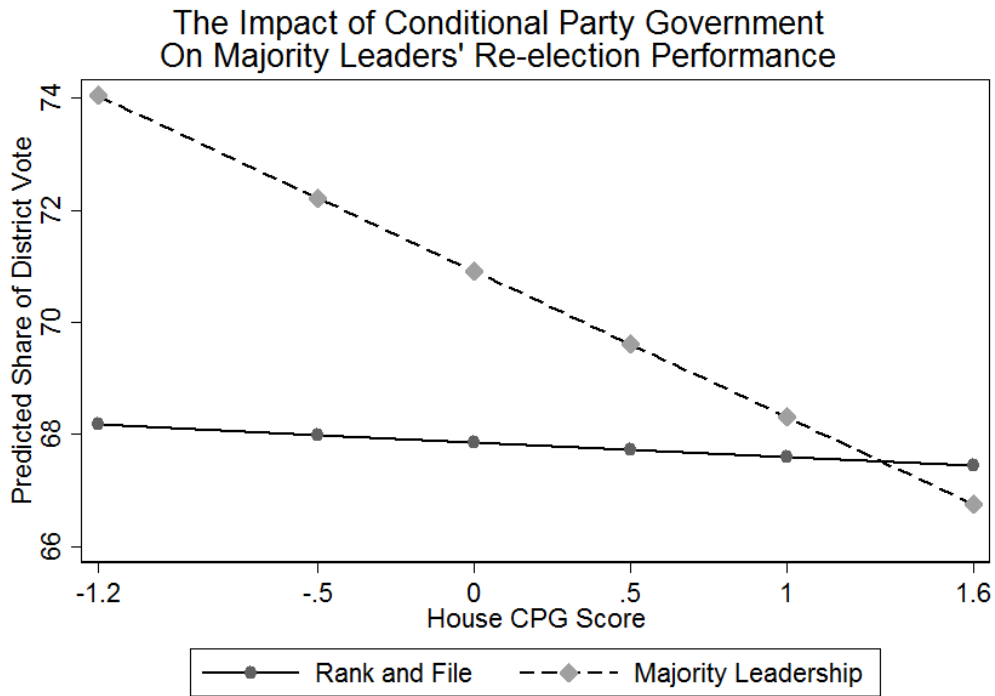
Figure 3: A comparison of the predicted impact of CPG on electoral success among majority leadership and the rank-and-file in the House of Representatives.
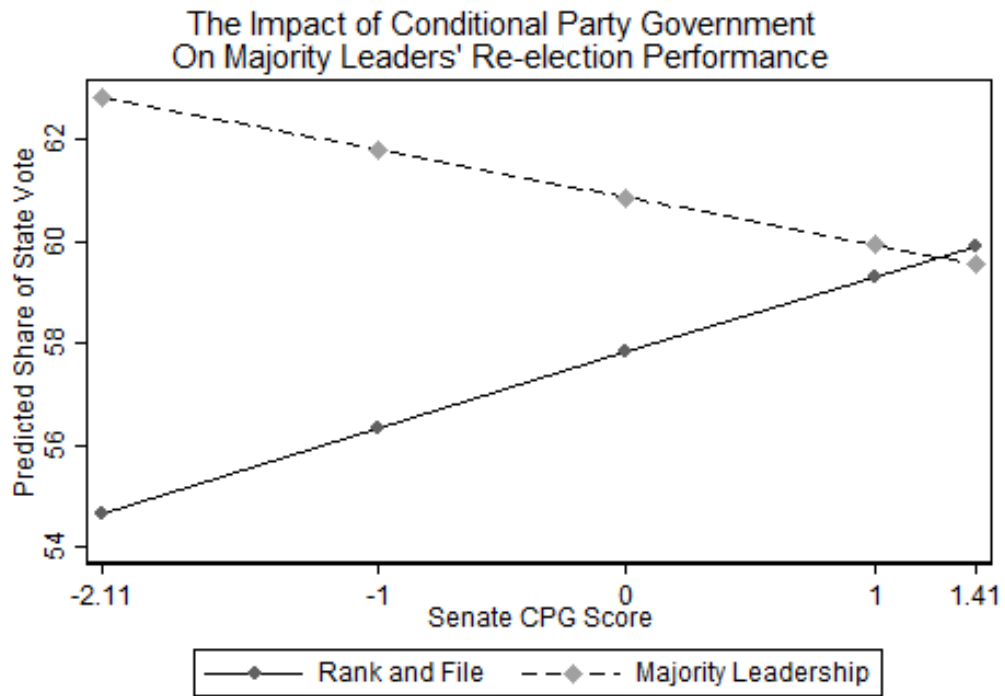
Figure 4: A comparison of the predicted impact of CPG on electoral success among majority leadership and the rank-and-file in the Senate.