Rhetoric on Representation: Which Members of Congress Portray Themselves as Delegates?

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Abstract: We use the notion of representational style to examine the strategic rhetoric of members of Congress. We show that members are much more likely to send delegate messages if they are serving in their first term, or if their district contains a large percentage of blue-collar workers, senior citizens, or friendly partisan voters. We also find that representatives of majority-minority districts and those who have recently been redistricted into an unfriendly district are much less likely to use delegate rhetoric. Explaining this behavior “in the district” helps us to better understand some of the constraints on representational behavior “in Washington,” including votes cast. In addition, our findings provide insight into how Americans’ views of Congress may be differentially shaped by their representatives.

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From Burke’s famous speech to the electors of Bristol, to Pitkin’s *Concept of Representation* (1967), theorists have addressed the normative aspects of representation. This literature commonly characterizes legislators as either delegates voting as instructed by constituents, trustees casting votes as their conscience dictates, or politicos combining these two. The work that has followed examines the determinants of styles used by members of Congress (for example, see Cavanagh 1982; Davidson 1969; and Gross 1978) and state legislators (Burnside and Hasley Jordan 2003; Cooper and Richardson 2004; Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson 1962). Most of this research has utilized surveys and interviews to explain why legislators choose one style over another. Other studies have demonstrated that representational styles influence the votes that legislators cast, or the ways in which they allocate their resources (Searing 1994). The goal of most of this work has been to provide a measure of the type and quality of representation being provided by individual legislators and the legislative body under study.

The use of representational styles in this manner has not been without criticism. In *Home Style* (1978), Fenno asserts that members don't determine their votes based on a preconceived style, but instead communicate to constituents the representational style that will best help to build trust. This does not mean that we need to abandon the delegate and trustee concepts, but we need to use them in an appropriate manner. Fenno explains,

Unconnected to the explanatory part of the process, the concepts have little behavioral mileage. This realization may help us get more mileage out of a conceptualization that will not die but that has had a low payoff in explaining actual behavior (161-2).
We follow Fenno’s advice and utilize style as a framework for understanding members’ strategic rhetoric. Specifically, we examine representatives’ messages suggesting that they are serving as delegates – that is, casting votes as instructed by their constituents – and we explain the variance among legislators in this choice. We do this by analyzing the newsletters sent to constituents in 100 randomly selected congressional districts over a five-year period. We use the content of these newsletters to test hypotheses developed from assumptions about members’ rational, goal-seeking behavior, and from previous research regarding the representational style preferences of members and constituents. This analysis provides a detailed examination of representational rhetoric and adds to our understanding of members’ home styles by accounting for the differences among legislators in this strategic behavior.

Even though a member’s representational rhetoric may not always accurately describe her decision-making, it can produce constraints on her behavior. We know that when legislators send messages through newsletters (Lipinski 2001) or the mass media (Arnold 2004), citizens show greater recall of these messages. It stands to reason then, if a member purposely builds a reputation as a delegate and then casts a vote that directly contradicts the desires of a large majority of her constituents, she could seriously undermine the trust that she has built. As Fenno explained in *Home Style* (1978), in order to understand a member’s behavior in Washington it is important to understand the constraints generated by her behavior at home. The communication of representational style messages is a very important aspect of a home style that can seriously constrain Washington activities.

In addition to revealing information about members’ strategic communication behavior, this study contributes to a growing literature about how legislators affect public views about the type and quality of representation in America. It is crucial to examine members' portrayals of
representation because of the potential impact that these accounts have not only on constituents’ opinions of legislators, but also their perceptions of the institution. Survey research consistently shows that members’ communication about representation is significant to the public. Indeed, Americans believe that one of the most important duties of House members is to keep them informed about policymaking.¹ In addition, individuals’ views of congressional policymaking are one of the key determinants of their assessments of the institution.² Recent work demonstrates that congressional unpopularity stems from the belief that members make self-interested decisions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; 2002; Hibbing 2002). All of this indicates that members' portrayals of representational styles can have an important influence on the public's judgments of the institution.

FENNO (1978) refers to a member’s activities designed to build the trust of her constituents as her home style. A legislator desires trust because it aids the pursuit of her three main goals – reelection, good public policy, and power (Fenno 1974). If constituents trust their representative, they will not feel the need to constantly monitor policy responsiveness and they will be more accepting of vote explanations (Bianco 1994). This gives the legislator more leeway in casting votes, which in turn facilitates endeavors to achieve policy and power goals. Also, members who have the trust of their constituents will be viewed more favorably and are more likely to be successful in their attempts to get reelected. Therefore, legislators attempt to

¹ In the 1978 NES respondents indicated that the number one job of House members should be “keeping in touch with the people about what government is doing.”
² This can also be seen in the 1978 NES; the most often cited bases for congressional appraisal were general performance on policy, handling of specific issues, and references to the operation of Congress.
foster trust through various activities such as the communication of strategic messages designed
to shape their constituents’ views of them.

Because the popularity of Congress is diminished by public perceptions of members
making self-serving decisions, legislators need to be worried about how constituents view the
motivations for their behavior. After all, Alford and Hibbing’s theory of wary cooperation
(Alford and Hibbing 2004; Hibbing and Alford 2004) suggests that people are unusually tuned in
to the motivation of legislators. When they perceive legislators as selfish, they are unlikely to
approve of their behavior—even if their behavior is in accord with the constituent’s preference
(see also Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Alford and Hibbing explain, “Americans’ primary
source of dissatisfaction with government is not that it makes bad decisions, but rather that it
makes decisions for self-serving rather than common-good reasons” (2004, 712-713). From this,
we can assume that it is advantageous for a legislator to convince her constituents that her
constituents’ preferences, not her own are determining her votes; that is, she is serving as a
delegate. If constituents believe they are being represented by a delegate, they will trust her
when she is casting votes because they will believe that she will be subordinating any personal
agenda to their preferences. This makes choosing delegate rhetoric an attractive choice for
building the trust of constituents. We are not suggesting that sending these messages will
automatically convince constituents that their representative can be trusted to act as a delegate.
Obviously these words can be rejected as “cheap talk,” but we leave this aside for now since our
focus is on explaining the strategic choice to attempt to build this type of reputation.

It is important to add here that we believe that there are few, if any, circumstances in
which trustee language will be helpful in developing trust; therefore we only look for delegate
rhetoric in our analysis. An absence of delegate messages does not imply that the legislator is
suggesting trustee behavior; she is simply not providing any indication of her representational style and is choosing other methods of building trust. In fact, in examining 100 districts over a five year period we found only one instance of a member directly suggesting a trustee style.

Although there is clearly a preference for delegate behavior among at least a plurality of Americans (see survey data reported by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 66; Hibbing 2002, 224), there is some variation on this question. We presume that the people with delegate preferences are not randomly distributed through every congressional district. Thus while all legislators have some possibility of building trust through delegate rhetoric, some can gain more than others through use of this language. The greater the number of constituents in a district who have a robust preference for this behavior, the stronger the incentive for the member to send these messages. But if this conduct has little value to constituents, members will be less likely to choose this strategy. Therefore, each member will take into account the context she faces in her district when deciding whether to portray herself as a delegate.

It is also important to consider that promoting expectations of delegate behavior has some significant drawbacks for all representatives. We assume that the primary goal for members of Congress is reelection, with policy and power as secondary goals (Mayhew 1974). Representatives often need some level of autonomy from constituents’ instructions to allow them to cast votes that will help in the pursuit of these secondary goals. This is especially true when they represent a district whose partisan voting behavior does not appreciably favor the member’s party. For example, a Republican in a Democratic leaning district will likely face some conflicting instructions from constituents and party leaders. Any member in a district with a close partisan split may receive conflicting instructions from constituents. Especially in these environments, a legislator will want to be free to act as a trustee since she will have to vote
against a large minority’s preferences. The problem for a legislator is that when she suggests that she is serving as a delegate, she builds constituents’ expectations about her voting behavior. It is much more difficult for a legislator to explain a vote that goes against the preferences of her constituents when she has made a rhetorical promise to act as a delegate. Raising delegate expectations can result in constraints on behavior that overwhelm the value of any trust that may be gained. Therefore, each member must consider her career context when choosing whether to communicate delegate messages.

**District Contexts**

One way to look for systematic variation across districts in preferences for delegate behavior is to examine the demographic make-up of the legislator’s district. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of recent research examining the representational style preferences of different groups. McMurray and Parson’s (1965) examination of the factors that explain variation in style preferences suggests that blue-collar workers (among occupational categories) are most likely to endorse the delegate orientation (182-3). Levels of family income, however, were not clearly related to preferences for representational style (180-1). McMurray and Parsons explain the desire for delegate behavior among blue-collar workers by saying it “may be a product of their exposure to the common union demand that legislators give attention to the specific demands of labor groups” (183). Districts with larger numbers of blue-collar workers have a culture of democracy, where democratic responsiveness is part of the expectation of government. Representatives are likely to respond to this group by communicating delegate messages.

Senior citizens as a demographic group (those over the age of 65) pay considerable attention to politics, turn out to vote at a high rates (Rosenstone and Hanson 1993), and rank
very high in other forms of civic engagement (Putnam 2000), compared to younger Americans. We suspect that higher rates of participation and attentiveness may translate into a greater demand from seniors for representatives to serve as delegates.

We also believe that whether a legislator represents a majority-minority district will influence her choice of representational rhetoric. Because these districts are created to elect a representative of a particular minority group – either black or Hispanic – the person who serves these constituents will almost certainly be a member of that group and will provide descriptive representation. In addition, there is often a belief that a representative of a majority-minority district will also provide good substantive representation because she is a member of that group (Canon 1999). Frequently underlying this is an assumption that these legislators do not have to seek out the opinions of their constituents in order to understand their preferences. If voters accept this, we would not expect to see legislators in majority-minority districts sending delegate messages. Swain’s (1993) study of black members seems to confirm that this is the case. She finds:

Representatives from [historically black districts] sometimes appear to become complacent, not consulting their constituents as frequently as representatives from other kinds of districts do. In adopting this pattern they appear to embrace the point of view of Fenno’s Congressman F, who told him: When I vote my conscience as a black man, I necessarily represent the black community. I don’t have any trouble knowing what the black community thinks or wants (72).

Swain goes on to argue that, “black representatives often see themselves as ‘trustees’ for a prescribed legislative agenda,” while “white politicians…are more likely to see themselves as
We do not examine how representatives “see themselves,” but if black legislators and their constituents share this view we should expect that they are less like to send delegate messages. We also believe that the same holds true for Hispanic legislators representing majority Hispanic districts.4

One last district characteristic that must be considered is the aggregate partisan balance of voters. If a legislator represents a district in which her party is in the minority among voters, she will likely face important conflicts between the preferences of a majority of her constituents and those of her party’s leadership. A member in this situation will not want to suggest that she will behave as a delegate because she knows that these tensions will arise. More prevalent is the circumstance in which a member represents a district that has very close partisan divisions. In this case it is politically risky even to discuss policy positions with constituents, much less claim to act as a delegate. In these competitive districts, many issues will be contentious and the representative will likely choose not to spend much time talking about policies for fear of offending some voters. In both of these cases, members will build support in other ways such as through constituent service. But the greater the relative voting strength of the members’ party in a district, the more homogeneous constituents’ views will be on many important issues. In addition, these preferences will likely coincide with the positions of the representative’s party

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3 One other explanation for this behavior is that in majority-minority districts members feel very secure in their seats. While our results do not indicate that insecure members are more likely to send delegate messages, some may argue that the insecurity variable may not capture the invulnerability felt by members representing majority-minority districts. As noted by Swain:

Electoral accountability is so weak in some historically black districts that one black representative told me unabashedly: “One of the advantages, and disadvantages, of representing blacks is their shameless loyalty to their incumbents.” (1993, 73)

If a member feels so safe that she does not need to be concerned about shaping constituents’ views, she will not put forth the effort to send delegate messages.

4 This also fits with the findings of Johnson and Secret (1996). They conducted interviews with members of Congress to examine whether black and Hispanic legislators perceived their representational styles differently than their colleagues. Their research suggests that legislators in both of these minority groups are less likely to view themselves as delegates.
leadership. In this context legislators will have the opportunity to build their constituents’ trust through their policy rhetoric. This is what Fenno (2000) argues when he says that high levels of partisan homogeneity in a district are likely to result in the representative choosing a more policy-intensive home style. We expect that members in more homogeneous districts will not only focus on policy to a greater extent in their rhetoric, but they will also be more likely to communicate delegate messages since this behavior will raise few conflicts among constituents.

Career Contexts

If a representative is focused on winning reelection, she will be less concerned about achieving her secondary goals. This will make her more likely to engage in behavior that may trade off the latter to secure the former. Legislators who have the highest probability of falling into this category are those who have just entered the House (members in their first term) or have recently had their district’s boundaries significantly altered. Members in their first term need to establish their reputation, so as soon as they enter office they quickly search for ways in which to build trust. We expect that sending delegate messages will be one method that they are likely to choose. But after surviving their first reelection they may feel that they no longer need to use this rhetoric to secure their position.

We also believe that members whose districts were significantly altered by the decennial redistricting prior to the 103rd Congress may be more likely to send delegate messages in order to build trust with the large number of new constituents they represent. We do not expect this relationship to be absolute, however. We believe that the partisan composition of the new district should interact with redistricting. Legislators who are redistricted into a safe district will be more likely to send delegate signals to reassure their new constituents that they are voting as
per their requests—thus building trust. Legislators who are redistricted into unsafe districts, however, are unlikely to send delegate messages as their opinions are in disagreement with their new constituents.

COLLECTING AND CODING MESSAGES

In order to study the representational styles members portray, we conducted a content analysis of all district-wide newsletters that were sent from 1991 through 1995 in 100 randomly selected congressional districts. Because one of the districts did not have a member for one of the years, we have 499 total cases. The unit of analysis throughout the paper is the district in a given year. Because all members are given the same resources to prepare and send mail, this method of communication emerges as one of the best available measures of the messages that members send to constituents. Indeed, Cook’s (1989) study of congressional communication revealed that newsletters and other mass mailings were the most popular direct communication tactics for members of Congress.

Studying statements communicated through the news media would result in skewed measurements since members’ abilities to gain media coverage vary significantly (Arnold 2004; Campbell, Alford, and Henry 1984). Because mailings are targeted directly at constituents and are not mediated, Canon claims that newsletters (along with press releases) “are the best possible sources for understanding the messages that members want to convey to their constituents” (1999, 215). Yiannakis also emphasizes that the “examination of the styles which [members] adopt [in member-initiated communication] can tell us a great deal about what representatives think are the appropriate linkages between themselves and their constituents” (1982, 1050). Newsletters are certainly not the only mechanism that House members use to communicate with
constituents, and we do not expect that all constituents read these. Our expectation is that the messages contained in a legislator’s newsletters are consistent with her overall presentation strategy, a strategy that encompasses all communication ranging from media contacts to town meetings to chance encounters when traveling in the district. In order to collect copies of the mailings sent in these randomly selected districts, we bypassed individual congressional offices and instead went directly to the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards – better known as the House Franking Commission.5

Once all the mailings were gathered, we developed a content analysis protocol to measure which members were sending delegate messages. Two coders (not the authors) conducted the analysis and the intercoder reliability was 94%. Our coding scheme is based on the belief that the explanatory part of casting votes does not include only post-vote justifications given by the member for the position she took on a particular issue. Legislators also send constituents more general suggestions regarding the way in which they make their vote decisions. To study representational rhetoric, we examined surveys that legislators sent to constituents asking their preferences on certain issues. In these questionnaires, legislators ask their constituents to provide their opinions on a variety of issues (usually from one to 20) that Congress may consider. Constituents choose whether they will fill out the survey and pay the postage to mail it back to the representative’s office. During the five year period examined, an average of one in three members in our sample sent a survey during each session. These surveys

5 The commission is required to approve the content of all franked “mass mailings” and keep a copy on file. “Mass mailings” are defined in the rules of the House as “any mailing of newsletters or other pieces of mail with substantially identical content, totaling more than 500 pieces.” This meant that we had access to a copy of every piece of mail sent to 500 or more constituent households by representatives of all 100 districts in the sample during our time frame. This eliminated the problem of response bias.
were not sent in a limited number of districts; at least one survey was mailed in almost 75% of all districts during the five years examined.6

While many different factors will likely be simultaneously at work motivating the choice to send a particular questionnaire, the most popular reason for engaging in this behavior is to communicate the message that the representative cares about her constituents’ preferences.7 But since the purposes of surveys are multiple, we decided to set a more restrictive threshold in order to determine whether a member was engaging in delegate rhetoric. The explanation of the stated purpose of each survey (if there was one given) was examined to determine if the representative was sending a clear delegate message. Every piece of mail with a survey was placed in one of four categories – (1) “tell me what choice to make,” (2) “help me decide what choice to make,” (3) no specific indication of purpose, or (4) no suggested purpose. The first category refers to all mailings in which the member suggested, “tell me what you want me to do and I will do it.” The second category includes suggestions of “tell me your concerns/opinions to help me make my decision/represent you.”8 All surveys that fell into one of these two categories were considered suggestions of a delegate style. These constituted approximately 60% of all the questionnaires,

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6 The average per session is 31.9% and this was spread throughout 73% of the districts in the sample. These numbers do not include obviously “leading” surveys that we eliminated from the sample.

7 One motivation inspiring surveys is the one usually stated by the member – to get a measure of constituents’ opinions on issues so the representative knows their preferences. While this gauge is very unscientific since respondents are not random, on some issues members may believe that this is a good tool for getting a rough measure of strong opinions. Usually, however, the declared purpose of a survey is not the primary motive. A member may send a survey to seek justification for a position that she has already decided to take. Favorable survey results can be published to indicate that constituents endorse the member’s position. To ensure supportive results, surveys can be written to purposefully lead constituents to particular responses. These “sham” questionnaires are rare, and because they are not suggestive of a representational style we eliminated them from our sample. Because representatives understand that there is a low likelihood that constituents will be swayed by survey results published by the member’s office, it is unlikely that this is a major motivation for sending surveys. One other purpose of surveys is completely unrelated to the questionnaire itself. Every message that comes into a congressional office provides an opportunity to gather the name and address of a constituent who is particularly attentive and is likely will be interested in receiving information from the representative. Thus surveys serve to elicit more information for a congressional office’s constituent database.

8 The third category, “no indication,” included those that suggested, “tell me your concerns/opinions/experience,” but gave no indication of how these responses would be used.
demonstrating that significant variation occurs in the language used to explain the purpose of surveys. These differences indicate clear choices by legislators to send specific messages to constituents. An example of a survey containing delegate language was sent by Rep. Bill Alexander (D-AR); this questionnaire states, “Your views will help guide me as Congress considers reforms in our health care system.” A member who sent at least one survey during a session that contained rhetoric such as this was considered to have sent a delegate message that year.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Using the dichotomous measure of whether or not a member sent at least one survey using delegate rhetoric during a year as our dependent variable, we cast a probit model taking the following form:9

\[
\text{Delegate Rhetoric} = \beta_1 + \beta_2(\text{Percent Over 65}) + \beta_3(\text{Percent Blue-collar Workers}) + \beta_4(\text{Majority-minority District}) + \beta_5(\text{Voting Strength of Member’s Party}) + \beta_6(\text{First Term}) + \beta_7(\text{Significant Redistricting}) + \beta_8(\text{Redistricting*Voting Strength of Member’s Party})
\]

We begin with the district context variables (all variables are described in Appendix A). We expect that the coefficients representing the percentage of district residents over the age of 65 and the percentage of blue-collar workers in the district will be positive because these groups are more likely to place a high value on delegate behavior. We believe representatives will respond to these preferences. We expect that black and Hispanic legislators who represent majority-minority districts will be less likely than other members to send delegate messages. We

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9 We did not use an event count to examine the number of mail pieces sent with delegate messages because we are only using the surveys as an indication of the overall communication strategy of members; these messages are sent in a number of different ways besides mailings. The number of mailings a member sends during a year depends on a number of different factors. Therefore, counting the number of surveys sent containing such language would not
believe that the higher the voting strength of member’s party in her district (operationalized as the average difference in the two-party vote in the previous two presidential elections) the more likely she will be to use delegate rhetoric.

Next we move to factors related to a member’s career context. Our expectation is that legislators serving in their first terms or who were recently redistricted into “friendly districts” will be more likely to communicate delegate rhetoric because they have a particularly strong electoral need to build trust. Significant redistricting is a dichotomous variable; a member who had her district’s boundaries extensively altered was coded as a one for 1993 and 1994 (the first two years after redistricting) and all other observations were coded zero.\footnote{We also estimated the model with a variable representing if the legislator was electorally insecure. This variable was not significant and did not effect any of the other coefficients.}

In an average year about 20% of representatives sent at least one survey suggesting a delegate style. This is a dichotomous dependent variable – a member either did or did not send a delegate message during a year – so we use probit to estimate the model. Since we observe the behavior of some members for more than one year, we assume that these multiple observations are not necessarily independent. In order to correct any resulting problems with heteroskedasticity, we use robust standard errors, clustered around the individual members. As Table 1 indicates, six variables are statistically significant and in the expected direction: the coefficients for first term member (p<0.025), voting strength of the member’s party (p<0.025), percentage of district residents over 65 years of age (p<0.05), and percentage of blue-collar workers in district (p<0.05) are all positive, and the coefficient for the majority-minority district variable (p<0.01) is negative. The interaction for redistricting * partisan strength of member’s party in district is also significant and in the expected direction.

\footnote{We also estimated the model with a variable representing if the legislator was electorally insecure. This variable was not significant and did not effect any of the other coefficients.}
DISCUSSION

Effects of District Contexts

All four of the district context variables have the expected impact on the probability that a representative suggests that she is serving as a delegate. To measure the substantive effect of the significant factors we calculate first differences using the CLARIFY program in Stata (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). We compute the impact of changes in district factors on a “typical” representative – that is, a multi-term member who has not been redistricted significantly, does not represent a majority-minority district, and serves a constituency that is average on all the measured district characteristics (which can be found at the bottom of Table One). Our results indicate that a member representing a district comprised of 20% senior citizens is 8% more likely to send delegate messages than one representing a district with approximately 10% of constituents over the age of 65. Legislators are responding to greater numbers of senior citizens in their districts by using delegate rhetoric, suggesting that the higher levels of participation and political interest demonstrated by this group can alter the strategic communication behavior of their representatives. Similarly, the higher the percentage of blue-collar workers in a district, the more likely the representative is to communicate delegate messages. A typical legislator representing a district with 9% blue-collar workers is 9% more likely to send delegate messages than a similar member representing a district with 5% blue-collar workers. This fits well with the survey conducted by McMurray and Parsons that indicates that blue-collar workers are more likely to prefer delegate behavior. Legislators are clearly tailoring their rhetoric to these workers’ preferences.
An especially important finding concerns the significantly different representational rhetoric communicated in majority-minority districts. Black and Hispanic representatives of these districts are 18% less likely to send their constituents messages that they are delegates. This high impact is present even when controlling for other factors that distinguish majority-minority districts from others (such as the voting strength of the member’s party).\textsuperscript{11} This fits well with Swain’s (1993) claim that black representatives are less likely than whites to believe that they need to present themselves to constituents as delegates, and demonstrates another representational consequence of the creation of majority-minority districts.

As predicted, the higher the voting strength of a member’s party in her district, the more likely she is to send delegate messages. We should be careful in interpreting this variable, however. Because this is a lower order term which is later interacted with redistricting, this variable does not represent the overall effect of the strength of a member’s party in her district, but rather the effect of the strength of a member’s party in her district when redistricting has not occurred (when redistricting=0). Nonetheless, comparing the behavior of a member representing a non redistricted district with a favorable 60-40 partisan split with one representing a nonredistricted district with a 60-40 split favoring the opposition party yields a significant difference in the likelihood of sending delegate messages.\textsuperscript{12} A member in a relatively homogeneous district with a friendly partisan balance is 3% more likely to send delegate messages. Representatives of these districts are able to work on building the trust of their constituents through this rhetoric without worrying about voter divisions over policy preferences or conflicts arising between constituents’ preferences and the positions of party leaders. Just as

\textsuperscript{11} When a variable was added measuring the percentage of minorities in the district the results did not change appreciably. The added variable was not significant and the dichotomous majority-minority measure was still highly significant.
one-party districts result in representatives using policy-intensive home styles (Fenno 2000), higher levels of district homogeneity also facilitate members setting up delegate expectations with their constituents. This is an especially important finding because the number of one-party congressional districts continues to increase.

The significant impact of the voting strength of a member’s party in her district also demonstrates an important point regarding what the dependent variable is measuring. If the message being sent by these surveys was only that the legislator was listening to constituents but was not promising to follow their preferences, there would be no reason for this variable to be significant. That is, if these messages were not suggesting delegate behavior there would be no reason for representatives with fewer friendly partisan constituents to refrain from this communication. The fact that this variable is highly significant demonstrates that our dependent variable is measuring a rhetorical commitment to act as a delegate. It is important to note that this variable maintains its direction and significance even without the interaction term included.

Effects of Career Contexts

One measure of a member’s career context was found to be significant in predicting whether she sends delegate messages. A representative serving in her first term (sixteen percent of our sample) was 14% more likely than her more senior colleagues to send delegate messages.\(^\text{13}\) This demonstrates that a significant number of members use delegate rhetoric to

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\(^{12}\) This 60-40 split is not an unusually large one. The twenty point partisan advantage is a little less than the average in our sample.

\(^{13}\) We also substituted a seniority variable (operationalized as the log of the number of terms a legislator had served) for the dichotomous “first term” variable. The seniority variable was negative (as would be expected) and significant, but only at the p<0.10 level for a one-tailed test. In addition, the model fit was better when the dichotomous variable was included instead of the continuous measure. We also ran the model (with “freshman”) adding a “sophomore” variable and found that this term was not significant. This suggests that the most significant
build the trust of their constituents when they first get to Congress, but they change their behavior when they reach their second term. After the first reelection, many legislators decide that sending delegate messages is not the best strategy. This is consistent with work by Hibbing (1991) which suggests that legislators spend more time in their district in their first term than at any other point in their career. The “sophomore surge” in the vote a representative receives in her first reelection likely removes some of the electoral incentive and with experience members discover better methods of building trust. Fenno (1978) discusses how members generally move from an expansionist to a protectionist stage of their district career after they have served for some years. In this second stage representatives are no longer working on building trust, but maintaining it. While Fenno does not suggest that the conversion to the protectionist stage occurs after only one term, our results demonstrate that representational rhetoric is one aspect of a member’s presentation that does change from the first to the second term.

Our model also includes an interaction term for redistricting * voting strength of member’s party in district. The coefficient and standard error of this variable indicate that the relationship is positive and significant, suggesting that redistricting has differing effects depending on whether a legislator is redistricted into a friendly or non-friendly district. Legislators who are redistricted into friendly partisan districts are much more likely to send delegate messages to send a signal to their new constituents. Recent work (Ai and Norton (2003; Norton, Wang and Ai 2004) suggests that this simple interpretation can be misleading for interaction terms in nonlinear models, however. Instead, of relying on the coefficient on the interaction term, a proper interpretation of interaction in non-linear models requires calculation of “the cross derivative of the expected value of the dependent variable. The test for the
statistical significance of the interaction effect must be based on the estimated cross partial derivative, not on the coefficient of the interaction term” (Norton, Wang and Ai 2004, 3). Using Norton Wang and Ai’s inteff command in STATA, we calculated the interaction effect correctly and present these results in Table 2. The first row of data includes data about the interaction effect. The second row presents the results about the standard errors and the third row describes results about the z statistic. This table suggests that at the mean level, the interaction is positive and significant (z=2.40), supporting the traditional interpretation of interaction, presented in Table 1.

[Table 2 About Here]

To get a better feel for the entirety of the effect, figure 1 presents the graph of the z statistics of the interaction effect at different probabilities of sending a delegate message. Dots above or below the lines at +/- 1.96 indicate statistically significant results. Dots which fall between the lines suggest results that are not significant. This figure suggests that the effect is generally, although not uniformly significant. At low probabilities of sending a delegate message, the interaction is comparatively less likely to have an impact. Past a .2 probability, however, almost every case is statistically significant.

[Figure 1 About Here]

Figure 2 displays the magnitude of the interaction effect at various probabilities of sending a delegate message. The solid line represents the incorrect marginal effect—the marginal effect that we would find if we were to use the coefficient on the interaction term to calculate the size of the interaction effect. As you can see, traditional means of assessing the interaction effect would underestimate the effect at each point in the distribution, but particularly...
for members with relatively high probabilities of sending a delegate message. This figure also suggests that the interaction effect is positive in all cases except one.

In all, these results strongly suggest that when legislators are redistricted into safe districts, their probability of sending delegate messages increases. Further, when other conditions suggest that the member is already more predisposed to sending messages, the effect is even greater. Given that the latest redistricting after the 2000 census reduced the number of competitive districts and produced even more one-party districts (Benenson, Giroux, and Allen 2002), it appears that the number of representatives who will be communicating delegate messages will increase.

[Figure 2 About Here]

CONCLUSION

When the concept of representational style is utilized in an appropriate manner, it can help us to better understand the legislator-constituent connection. By looking at proclamations of delegate behavior as rhetoric rather than reasoning in decision-making, we learn more about strategic communication decisions that representatives make to try to impact constituents’ perceptions of them. Members’ behavior suggests that they believe using delegate rhetoric is a good method of building trust in certain district contexts. If a significant portion of the district’s residents highly value the delegate style – such as when there are large numbers of senior citizens or blue-collar workers – the legislator is more likely to send delegate messages. If a district has a higher level of partisan homogeneity – as is becoming more common in recent redistricting – the representative is more likely to use delegate rhetoric. In addition, in majority-minority districts legislators do not feel the need to communicate such messages to constituents.
on account of the unique relationship shaped by these districts. Redistricting produces differing
effects depending on whether the legislator is redistricted into a friendly or unfriendly district.

Fenno (1978) explained that one of the most important reasons for considering a
member’s home style is to learn about the constraints that this behavior places on her activities in
Washington. While a member’s rhetoric does not reveal a preconceived style used for making
vote decisions, the message itself may produce constraints on her behavior. When a
representative suggests that she will act as a delegate, her constituents may hold her to this
standard when they consider her voting record. This may not be a significant problem if her
personal preferences, the preferences of her constituents, and the preferences of her party are
largely congruent. However, if these preferences diverge, the member is placing herself in an
even more difficult situation when she sets her constituents’ expectations for her to act as a
delegate.

These findings also provide valuable insights into the variation in the messages that
Americans are receiving from their members concerning how they are being represented in
Congress. Some Americans are much more likely than others to be told by their representative
that she is serving as a delegate. By knowing these variations we may be better able to
understand the differences in Americans’ attitudes regarding not only Congress, but government
in general. This should spur further study of the impact that representatives have on public
opinion regarding the institution in which they serve.
APPENDIX: INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Summary Statistics for Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Term Member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Strength of Member’s Party in District</td>
<td>-44.5</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Over 65</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Blue-collar Workers</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Redistricting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority-Minority District</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistricting*Voting Strength of Member’s Party in District</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>12.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=499 for all variables

First Term Member: Coded 1 for first term members, 0 otherwise.

Voting Strength of Member’s Party in District: Measured by taking the average vote difference between the two parties in the last two presidential elections. If the partisan vote balance favors the member’s party this number is positive, otherwise it is negative.

Significant Redistricting: A dichotomous variable, coded 1 for 1993 and 1994 if the district underwent significant redistricting before the 1992 election, 0 otherwise. This variable was constructed using Gary Jacobson’s (Jacobson and Dimock 1994) coding of redistricting. A district was coded as significantly redistricted if Jacobson coded it as having undergone minor or major change.

Majority-minority District: A dichotomous variable, coded 1 if representative is an African-American or Hispanic representing a majority-minority district, 0 otherwise.

Percentage Over 65: Percent of district residents that are over 65 years old. These figures are from Gottron (1983) and Preimesberger and Tarr (1993).

Percentage Blue-collar Workers: Percent of district residents that are blue-collar workers as defined by the US Census Bureau. These figures are from Gottron (1983) and Preimesberger and Tarr (1993).
REFERENCES


Table 1. Factors Predicting Delegate Rhetoric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Probit Coefficient (SE)</th>
<th>First Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Over 65</td>
<td>.028* (.013)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Blue-collar workers</td>
<td>.079* (.039)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority-Minority District</td>
<td>-1.11*** (.255)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Strength of Member’s Party in District</td>
<td>.010** (.004)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Term Member</td>
<td>.415** (.182)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Redistricting</td>
<td>-.102 (.211)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistricting*Voting Strength of Member’s Party in District</td>
<td>.017** (.007)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.98*** (.402)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 499
Wald Chi$^2$ 29.56****
% Correctly Predicted 81.16%

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors with clustering on the member. The first difference was calculated as the change produced in the dependent variable by holding first term at 0, percent safe at 14.95, percent over 65 at 14.75, percent blue collar at 6.98, redistricting at 0, majority-minority district at 0 and redistr*voting strength at 3.45, while varying the dichotomous variables from 0 to 1 and the interval level variables from one standard deviation below to the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.

*** Significant at p < 0.01 for two-tailed test
**  Significant at p < 0.025 for two-tailed test
*   Significant at p < 0.05 for two-tailed test
Table 2. Estimates the Interaction Effect by calculating the cross derivative of the expected value of the dependent variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Dev</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Effect</td>
<td>.0047</td>
<td>.0021</td>
<td>-.0005</td>
<td>.0085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>.0019</td>
<td>.0007</td>
<td>.0007</td>
<td>.0035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z Score</td>
<td>2.4012</td>
<td>.5773</td>
<td>-.4085</td>
<td>3.0127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Calculated using the inteff command in STATA as per Norton, Wang and Ai (2004)
Figure 1. Z-Statistics of Interaction Effects After Probit
Figure 2. Interaction Effects After Probit