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## Partisanship and Constituency Influences on Congressional Roll-Call Voting Behavior in the US House

### Abstract

This research examines the factors that influence how members of the US House of Representatives vote. Party affiliation of the legislator and constituency interests will be the two main independent variables. The district's constituency characteristics are represented by constituency ideology ('96 Presidential vote for Clinton), percent non-white, region, and the median household education. Three models are used to measure congressional voting behavior. The first of which is measured by the rating of the member's vote with the Christian Coalition. The second and third models are derived from the National Journal Ratings of social and economic liberalism of the member's vote.

**Greg Crowe and Elizabeth Ann Eberspacher**  
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**Literature Review**

Two of the main factors influencing the vote of legislators are party ties and constituency interests. Many scholars have examined the influence of both of these factors. Most have agreed that party is the strongest predictor of member's voting behavior, however, some have focused on the cleavages among different policy dimensions based on partisan influences. Aage Clausen (1960) found that party is a consistently strong predictor in the areas of government management, agricultural assistance, and social welfare; party is a weak predictor of international involvement and levels of support for civil liberties. This research will examine the cleavages among social liberalism, economic liberalism, and the Christian Coalition ratings.

Robert Erikson and Gerald Wright (1992) found that House members; depart considerably from party norms. They concluded that members hold onto their seats by offering their constituencies ideological representation, even when it conflicts with their party's positions. They assumed that the district presidential vote would reflect the constituency's ideology. William M. Leogrande and Alan S. Jeydel (1997) did find district presidential election results to be the best proxy for constituency ideology. Erikson and Wright's research showed that as the district vote for the '88 Democratic presidential nominee Dukakis increased, the liberalism of the representative also increased.

Other constituency characteristics have also been found to influence the voting behavior of members. Charles S. Bullock (1995) looked at the interaction between changing racial composition of districts and legislative behavior. He found that legislators from districts that had a higher percentage of Blacks in the 102nd Congress were less conservative than the previous

Congress. David Holian, Timothy Krebs, and Micheal Walsh (1997) analyze the effect constituency opinion and Ross Perot had on the roll-call vote for NAFTA in the US House. Their results showed that as levels of income and education increased, support for NAFTA increased. I expect these constituency characteristics (race, income, and education) to have a positive impact on social and economic liberalism ratings and a negative impact on the Christian Coalition scores.

Tricia Dailey (1996) examined the incumbent's party, 1988 district-level presidential vote, race, education, and income to "analyze their independent and collective effect on the representative's frequency of supporting the Christian Coalition agenda" (23). She found that party affiliation was an extremely important factor. Also, most of the independent variables had a significant impact on the dependent variable. However, race was found to be statistically insignificant,

### **Hypotheses**

In this analysis, the following hypotheses are tested:

H 1: Democrats will have higher social and economic liberalism ratings than Republicans, while the opposite will be true for the Christian Coalition ratings.

H 2: As the 1996 district Presidential vote for Clinton increases, the social and economic liberalism ratings will also increase and the tendency to vote with the Christian Coalition will decrease.

H 3: As the percentage of non-Whites in a district increases, the social and economic liberalism ratings will also increase and the probability of voting with the Christian Coalition will decrease.

H 4: The higher the percentage of median college-educated individuals within a district, the higher the social and economic liberalism rating and the more likely the representative will not vote with the Christian Coalition agenda.

H 5: Representatives from districts of states in the Midwest and Northeast will have higher social and economic liberalism ratings and will be likely to vote along Christian Coalition lines than in the West and South.

### **Data**

A multiple regression model is employed using the impact of seven independent variables (partisanship of the representative, region, percent non-White, median education, and 1996 district Presidential vote for Clinton) on three dependent variables (social and economic liberalism and the Christian Coalition ratings). *National Journal* ratings for the social and economic liberalism of each representative (based on a scale from 0-100) were obtained from *The Almanac Of American Politics*. The *National Journal* rates each

congressman's social and economic liberalism based on overall roll-call voting. The Christian Coalition rating is also measured on a scale from 0-100 and is based on the member's voting frequency of supporting the Christian Coalition agenda.

The measurement of partisanship, as an independent variable, was the only member-specific variable. Each representative was coded 0 for Republican and 1 for Democrat.

All of the socio-economic characteristics of the districts were obtained from *The Almanac of American Politics*. The percentage of non-Whites in the district was obtained by subtracting percent White in the district by 100. The median college educational level of the district is also included in the model. Median income of the district was obtained for this research, but because of a high correlation with education level (.73) it was left out of the final model. Also, when included in the multiple regression models, it was not significant at the .10 level. Region was broken down into four areas (Midwest, Northeast, West, and South) with the South as a dummy variable. The final constituency characteristic is the ideology of the district. To represent the ideology of the district, the percent votes for Clinton was divided by the sum of percent votes for Clinton and Dole to obtain the percent district vote for Clinton absent third-party candidates.

## Results

Table I shows the results for the three models (social and economic liberalism and the Christian Coalition). The three models explain similar percentages of the variation. For economic liberalism, 79% of the variation is explained versus 78% of the variation for social liberalism and 81% for the Christian Coalition. The strongest variable in all three models is the party affiliation of the legislator and it is significant at the .001 level. However, the partisanship variable is stronger in the economic liberalism model (.69) than in the social liberalism (.59) or Christian Coalition model (-.65). Also, the beta weights for the rest of the constituency characteristic variables are greater for the social liberalism and Christian Coalition models than the economic liberalism model. The only other variable statistically significant in the economic liberalism model is the '96 presidential vote, while all the variables are significant to at least the .05 level for the social liberalism and Christian Coalition models. Party affiliation is a stronger predictor in the economic liberalism model than in the other two models (relative to the other variables) while constituency characteristics are explaining more of the variation in the social liberalism and Christian Coalition models than in the economic liberalism model.

Looking closely at the constituency characteristics further shows differences between the models. First, constituency ideology, the 1996 Clinton

Table I  
**Party Affiliation and Constituency Influences on Representatives'  
 Voting Behavior**

Economic		Social	Christian
<b>Liberalism</b>		<b>Liberalism</b>	<b>Coalition</b>
Adjusted R square	0.79**	0.78**	0.81**
F value	195.260	185.440	
Partisanship	0.69**	0.59**	-0.65**
'96 Clinton Vote	0.24**	0.34**	-0.29**
% Non-white	0.050	0.07*	-0.09*
Education	0.000	0.14**	-0.14**
Midwest	0.040	0.10**	-0.05*
Northeast	0.050	0.14**	-0.11**
West	0.000	0.04	-0.030

\*Significant at the .05 level

\*\*Significant at the .001 level

Note: The Coefficient listed for each of the variables is the standardized regression coefficient (beta weight).

vote, is significant at the .001 level for both the social liberalism and economic liberalism models and the Christian Coalition model. Also, it is the second strongest variable for all of the models. As the district vote for Clinton in the 1996 election increases, the social and economic liberalism of the representative increases and the likelihood of voting with the Christian Coalition decreases. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported. However, constituency ideology's beta weight is greater for social liberalism (.34) than the Christian Coalition (-.29) and economic liberalism (.24). Representatives are more likely to respond to constituency ideology and go against their party affiliation for social issues than economic issues and the Christian Coalition agenda.

The data for race supports hypothesis 3. The percentage of non-Whites in the district is significant at the .05 level for social liberalism and the Christian Coalition. The beta weights are not very strong relative to the other variables in the equation for social liberalism (.07), the Christian Coalition (-.09), or for economic liberalism (.05).

The third strongest variable in the social liberalism and Christian Coalition model is the percent college educated in the district, which is significant at the .001 level. The beta weight is the same for both social liberalism (.14) and Christian Coalition (-.14) except in opposite directions. The data also shows that education has no statistically significant impact upon economic

liberalism. The data for the other two models indicates support for the hypothesis. The higher the percentage of college-educated constituents, the lesser the likelihood that their representative will vote with the Christian Coalition **and the** greater the likelihood they will have a higher social liberalism rating.

In the social liberalism model, both the Northeast and Midwest regions are significant at the .001 level with beta weights of .14 and .10 respectively. The West is not significant at the .10 level and has a smaller beta weight than the Northeast and Midwest with .05. In the Christian Coalition model, the Midwest and Northeast regions are both significant at the .05 and .001 level respectively. The beta weights are slightly less than in the social liberalism model with the Midwest at -.05 and the Northeast at -.11. These findings fit with the fifth hypothesis: representatives from the Northeast and Midwest will have higher social liberalism ratings and will be less likely to vote with the Christian Coalition agenda than those from the West and South. Additionally, representatives from the Northeast have the highest ratings, while those from the South have the lowest. In the economic liberalism model, the Northeast also has the largest beta weight among the regional dummy variables (.05). However, it is not significant at the .10 level. In fact, the Midwest region is also not significant at the .10 level. In other words, the data shows that region has no statistical significance on economic liberalism among representatives,

### **Conclusion**

Representation is a complex phenomenon. It is difficult to sort out the voting behavior of legislators. One question asks whether or not members are following their constituency opinions. Another asks whether or not voters are selecting for constituency characteristics in the first place. In all three models the party affiliation variable was the greatest predictor, followed by constituency ideology, and finally by the socio-economic characteristics of the district. After party affiliation, representatives respond to constituency ideologies and then to their social makeup.

Partisanship of the member and constituency variables have differing effects on the social and economic liberalism and Christian Coalition models. For economic liberalism, the only variable besides partisanship of the member that is significant is the district vote for Clinton in 1996. The social liberalism model and the Christian Coalition model are also strongly associated with partisanship. The constituency characteristic variables are all significant at the .001 level except percent non-Whites, which is significant at the .05 level. Consequently, the social liberalism model and the Christian Coalition model, more than the economic liberalism model, suggest a greater influence of constituency interests on the member's votes. Members cater to constituency preferences the most when dealing with social issues.

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