Research Statement | Carlos Algara

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My research agenda centers on the capacity of citizens to evaluate the ideological representation provided by their political elites (the U.S. Congress, electoral candidates and political parties) and how these evaluations influence the institutional behavior of these elites, notably in the context of the United States Congress. In particular, my research assesses the role ideological policy preferences plays in citizen evaluation of individual and collective political actors, from the perspective of citizen satisfaction of the collective Congress to individual vote choice in congressional elections. These topics have critical implications for the quality of democratic governance in the United States and the capacity of citizens to fulfill their responsibility as the principals within the republican framework.

The U.S. Congress & Citizen Perceptions of Representation

While there is broad consensus among scholars that contemporary American political parties do provide the public with a polarized set of policy, the literature is relatively silent on the implications this collective ideological representation has for citizen political evaluations. Traditionally, scholars tend to evaluate the quality of democratic ideological representation in the United States in dyadic terms. While this focus on dyadic local representation yields important insight into how well members of Congress represent the policy preferences of their constituents, this scholarly treatment ignores the nature of ideological representation provided by American legislative parties.

In my dissertation, I tackle this blind spot in the representation literature by focusing on how citizens evaluate the ideological representation provided by Congress and how these evaluations shape the political preferences of individual citizens. In the first chapter, currently under review, I explore the ability of citizens to evaluate congressional performance in ideological terms. I develop a theoretical framework positing that citizens are not only aware of the ideological difference between the congressional majority and minority party, but they take into account these difference and their own ideological preferences (in addition to partisanship) to evaluate congressional job performance. Using various policy and perceptual based latent scaling methods placing citizens and every member of Congress in the same ideological space, I find that not only do citizens have coherent ideological preferences, they use these preferences to evaluate their Congress. I find that, independent of partisan preference, citizens closer to the majority party in ideological proximity are more likely to approve of congressional job performance. These findings indicate that citizens, particularly those with a high degree of political sophistication, possess the capacity to evaluate their collective legislatures in ideological terms and that a key source of citizen discontent with their Congress is rooted in rational dissatisfaction with the ideological nature of public policy. This chapter also highlights methodological strategies that can be used in the evaluation of representational theories placing citizens and elites (parties, legislators) in the same ideological space.

In subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I turn to how perceptions of collective congressional performance influence citizen electoral preferences and individual propensity to participate in the electoral process. Building off the framework presented in the motivating chapter, I present a *collective accountability* model positing that citizen approval of Congress translates to electoral gains for the majority party congressional candidates. Presented at the 2017 APSA dissertation workshop on U.S. Congressional politics, I find evidence that citizen approval of Congress translates to electoral gains for the majority party congressional candidates at the individual and aggregate level. Moreover, I find

that positive assessments of congressional job performance provide increased electoral support for majority party candidates among minority party co-partisans and voters closer to the minority party in ideological proximity. In the third empirical chapter of the dissertation, I turn to how congressional approval shapes citizen participation in the electoral process, the key mechanism driving democratic accountability. Using survey data, I find that congressional approval takes on a form of *negative voting*, with congressional approval promoting a decline in voter turnout during midterm election cycles. I confirm this *negative voting* at the aggregate-level using congressional district-level turnout data and dynamic MRP (multilevel regression with post-stratification) estimates of district congressional approval.

This dissertation is in the beginning stages of a book-length manuscript that builds on the findings presented in the dissertation. I plan to further explore the causes of congressional approval using conjoint experimental methods. This experimental design will allow for exploration of the thesis that public disapproval of congressional job performance is rooted in legislative gridlock and lack of low valence evaluations of legislative transparency (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 1995) .[1] Other chapters will focus on the implications of *collective accountability* for candidate and party committee electoral strategies. Using data on campaign advertisements, I plan to explore the extent to which parties and individual candidates run for Congress by "running with Congress" (Lipinski & Work 2003) is a function of citizen satisfaction with congressional job performance.[2] This book project will further our understanding of how citizens perceive the quality of ideological representation provided by Congress, a form of representation understudied in the literature, influences citizen political attitudes and the electoral positioning of political elites.

Electoral Behavior & Congressional Elections

In addition to my dissertation research on citizen responses to polarized congressional parties, my research pipeline also includes projects relating to citizen electoral behavior and the changing determinants of congressional election outcomes. Past scholarship on congressional election outcomes stresses the importance of *candidate-centered* considerations, such as incumbency and candidate quality, rather than *partisan-centered* factors. While recent work on post-war U.S. House election outcomes are becoming more nationalized and dependent on partisan differences rather than candidate-centered variables, the more candidate-centered and high-information electoral context of the U.S. Senate has escaped similar scholarly attention. In a manuscript, currently under revise & resubmission at *Electoral Studies*, I explore how partisan polarization in Congress conditions the role of incumbency and state partisanship on Senate election outcomes using originally collected data on all Senate elections during the direct-election era. I find that while greater partisan polarization increases the role of partisanship in determining Senate election outcomes, greater polarization also provides Senators representing states with an electoral preference towards the opposing party an opportunity to cultivate a greater incumbency advantage by carving a distinct personal brand. I confirm these aggregate findings using survey data from two distinct periods of Senate elections provided by the 1988-1992 American National Election Senate Study and the 2006-2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Moving forward, I plan to use this unique dataset on Senate elections in a project assessing the changing salience of candidate and partisan-centered variables in U.S. House and Senate elections during the twentieth century. In doing so, I explore whether the nationalization of congressional elections is a twenty-first century phenomenon or has roots during the pre-war period. I approach this question us-

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1. Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes toward American Political Institutions.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

2. Lipinski, Daniel, William T. Bianco, and Ryan Work. 2003. "What Happens When House Members 'Run With Congress?' The Electoral Consequences of Institutional Loyalty." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 28(3): 413-29.

ing a unified model accounting for candidate-centered (incumbency, individual candidate quality) and partisan-centered variables. This project leverages the first dataset containing candidate quality of all major party Senate candidates during the direct-election period. I also plan to extend this inquiry into the nationalization of elections to the gubernatorial domain and have collected preliminary data to that end.

Another facet of my research pipeline on electoral behavior is the ability of voters to engage in spatial ideological voting (in the Downsian tradition) and how non-policy political attitudes may bias this type of policy voting in contemporary elections. In a paper, currently under revise & resubmission at *Electoral Studies*, I explore the nature of spatial voting across the differing levels of electoral competition (presidency, House, Senate) during the 2016 cycle and how racial resentment may have biased this type of voting. Using Aldrich-McKelvey scaling to place voters and every major-party congressional and presidential candidate in the same ideological policy space, I find that while voters did generally cast votes for candidates closest to their ideological policy preferences, racial resentment distorted ideological voting among liberal voters predisposed to voting Democratic. Moreover, greater racial resentment among conservative voters increased the salience of policy voting across all levels of 2016 electoral competition. I hope to build on these findings to further explore how other non-ideological political attitudes, such as views on moral traditionalism and economic egalitarianism, may distort policy-based decision making by voters. I am also involved in a working project (with Christopher Hare) on the specification of voter utility functions in spatial voting models and how these utility functions may change over time.

Institutional Behavior & Representation

My research agenda also focuses on the second stage of legislative representation by considering the institutional behavior of elected elites, particularly in the relatively understudied context of the U.S. Senate. One such paper, currently under revise & resubmission at *American Politics Research*, explores the extent to which Senators react to electoral incentives and defect from their party on legislative obstruction preferences. I find evidence that Senators, especially those in the minority, are responsive to electoral incentives and defect from the party line on legislative obstruction. These Senators that respond to electoral incentives are also rewarded with higher electoral support than their co-partisan colleagues that toe the party line. I plan to continue this line of inquiry of legislative obstruction through the perspective of citizens by using new data, from a collaborative 2017 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) module, measuring citizen attitudes on various forms of legislative obstruction.

In addition to assessing individual legislative behavior, I also look at how legislators collaborate together in their institutional context. I approach this institutional study of legislative collaboration through the perspective of social network theory and analysis. One such project uses this perspective to examine whether members of Congress that share a geographic border and represent similar districts collaborate (as measured by bill sponsorship) together on particularistic and ideological policy. Another project, to be presented at the 2018 APSA meeting, uses social network analysis to explore how Senators publicly collaborate on policy issues over time. This project, in its first iterations, uses a novel dataset of high cost legislative collaboration, as measured by Senator involvement in shared press events, and sheds light on the influence of shared constituency on strategic policy collaboration. My research interests in social network analysis, particularly in collaboration with the *UC Davis Social & Political Interacting Networks Group*, also extends to the methodological and cross-disciplinary realm. I am involved in a project (under review with Dr. George Barnett) assessing the properties of network stability and nodal structural equivalence using a "big data" approach to large datasets of global daily website traffic. I plan to continue this collaboration focusing on methodological properties of networks and the implications of these properties on applied social network analysis in political science.