

# Perceived Ideological Distance and Trust in Congress

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## Abstract

Contrary to much of the work built on *Fenno's Paradox*, we argue that citizens perceive of their legislators as agents acting on their behalf and tend to view those members as “the face” of Congress as a whole. Citizens should trust Congress less when they believe that their legislators are ideologically distant from them and will thus act in ways that are incongruent with their preferences. These effects should be stronger among citizens who do not identify with the majority Congressional party than among those who do because the former can only hope to avoid displeasing policy outcomes if their legislators hold similar preferences to their own, and will therefore work on their behalf. We test this conception of trust in Congress using survey data from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study and find support for our theory. Our results suggest that citizens' trust in Congress decreases as they view their legislators as being increasingly ideologically distant from themselves and that these effects are more powerful for people who do not identify with the Congressional majority party.

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Fenno (1978) observed that citizens typically like their legislators while simultaneously holding negative views of Congress as a whole. This finding – often labeled *Fenno’s Paradox* – suggests that citizens tend to view legislators and institutions as disparate entities despite the fact that the former collectively make up the membership of the latter. Some more contemporary research further complicates this paradox by showing that “voters’ displeasure with discord in Congress as a macrolevel institution is due to their support of those same behaviors performed at the microlevel by members of that institution,” (Harbridge and Malhotra, 2011, 507). Because of the assumption that citizens assess legislators and legislatures in vastly different ways, we do not yet know how citizens’ views of the former may condition their attitudes about the latter. How does perceived ideological distance from a citizen’s own legislator affect her trust in Congress?

Much of the recent research on trust has focused on explaining the aggregate-level variation in trust attitudes over time (e.g. Stimson, 2004; Keele, 2007; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2008). In contrast to these aggregate arguments, we offer an individual-level theory positing that citizens’ perceptions of the ideological distances between themselves and their legislators are one of the key determinants of the degree to which they report trusting Congress. Citizens who feel distant from their legislators view themselves as being dissimilar to these legislators and should be less trusting of Congress as a whole. They should do so because they believe that ideologically distant legislators are less likely to behave in accordance with the citizens’ preferences. We further argue that these effects should be stronger among citizens who do not share their party identification with the majority party in Congress than among citizens who identify with the party in power. This is because an ideologically distant legislator may make Congress appear more threatening to citizens who do not share their partisanship with the party in power — who will consistently experience displeasing policy outcomes — than to citizens who identify with that same party — who are likely to experience pleasing policy outcomes.

We test our theory of the formation of trust in Congress with data from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. We find that perceived ideological distance between citizens and their legislators informs citizens' trust in Congress and that this effect is conditional on majority party status. Citizens who are members of the majority party do not alter their degree of trust in Congress in response to their perceptions of ideological distance from their legislators. Those who are *not* members of the majority party, on the other hand, become less trusting of Congress as they perceive themselves and their legislators as being farther apart ideologically. Citizens' views of their Congressional representatives thus appear to condition their trust in the institution as a whole. These findings lead to important implications about representation and the formation of trust attitudes; the connections citizens make between legislators and legislatures; and candidate campaign strategy.

## 1 Political Trust

Scholars typically conceptualize trust as an evaluative orientation directed at the political system as a whole (Stokes, 1962; Easton, 1965). Miller (1974) argued that this evaluation is driven in large part by the normative expectations that citizens hold about how the government has and should operate. Trust can be further divided into political and social trust. The former refers to trust felt towards government, politicians, and institutions while the latter refers to interpersonal trust. We focus on political trust.

Political trust is an important concept for several reasons. First, citizens who feel that the government is trustworthy are more likely to comply with and consent to government actions and regulations (Levi, 1988; Tyler, 1990; Scholz and Pinney, 1995; Scholz and Lubell, 1998*a,b*; Levi, 1997; Tyler, 1998). A government that is not trusted may find its behavior constrained because citizens will not grant it as much leeway. Governments that are trusted, on the other hand, may operate more freely. Trusted governments, then, may be granted more

discretion by citizens in the policy making process. Second, citizens who exhibit low levels of political trust and high levels of political efficacy are more likely to participate in politics than are other citizens (Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1968; Bandura, 1982). Third, distrust tends to generate negative evaluations of incumbents (Sigelman, Sigelman, and Walkosz, 1992; Hetherington, 1998, 2005). It furthermore affects individuals' vote choices by encouraging citizens to support challengers and, when they are electorally viable, third party candidates (Aberbach, 1969; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, 1984; Hetherington, 1999). Additionally, research on descriptive representation implies that when a representative looks like (or shares obvious physical traits with) a constituent, that constituent is more likely to participate in politics (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990) and trust government (Abney and Jr., 1981; Howell and Fagan, 1988; Gay, 2002; Scherer and Curry, 2010). Finally, aggregate levels of political trust in the U.S. are generally low (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) — in part due to low levels of social capital (Keele, 2007) — and views of political institutions, especially Congress, have become increasingly negative over the past several decades (Craig, 1993; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995). Taken as a whole, the existing literature suggests that political trust can affect both the attitudes and the behaviors of citizens.

## 1.1 The Origins of Political Trust

Scholars suggest that feelings of trust in government are influenced by a number of factors. Presidential approval (Hetherington, 1998) and citizens' perceptions of the president's personal characteristics (Citrin and Green, 1986) both contribute to the formation of trust attitudes. Citizens tend to view the president as the face of the national government, so when they approve of the president and attribute positive characteristics to him they also tend to express higher levels of trust in the government as a whole. In addition, higher levels of education appear to encourage people to hold higher levels of political trust (Cole, 1973).

More generally, the behavior of office holding politicians along with the perceptions citizens hold about the performance of government appear to inform the degree of trust citizens feel towards government. The actions taken by both the president and Congress along with the performance of the government affect trust in government at the national level (Erber and Lau, 1990; Craig, 1993; Keele, 2005). Scandals decrease political trust (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn, 2000; Bowler and Karp, 2004), likely in part because of the high levels of attention given to them by the news media (Orren, 1997). The state of the national economy also influences trust; when citizens believe that the economy is strong, trust in government increases (Citrin and Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn, 2000). Trust similarly decreases when citizens become less optimistic about the economy. Finally, higher crime rates also appear to lead to lower levels of trust in government (Mansbridge, 1997).

Citizens should be more likely to express feelings of trust when their preferred party controls the government or an institution such as Congress (Citrin, 1974; Keele, 2005) because they filter information in a partisan manner (Stokes, 1966; Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006) and make use of partisan heuristics. Their trust in Congress appears to be influenced by their ideological perceptions of the Congressional majority party (Jones and McDermott, 2002) and they use both partisan stereotypes and party cues as information shortcuts when forming and altering attitudes about political figures (Page, 1978; Conover, 1981; Wright and Niemi, 1983; Hamill, Lodge, and Blake, 1985; Hurwitz, 1985; Granberg, Kasmer, and Nanneman, 1988; Jacoby, 1988; Riggle et al., 1992; Rahn, 1993). Thus, partisan control of an institution should inform the way citizens view that institution. A citizen whose party controls both chambers of Congress, for example, should trust Congress to a greater extent than should a citizen whose party is in the minority. This is because the citizen whose party is in control can reasonably expect Congress to create policies that are usually congruent with her preferences. A citizen whose party is in the minority, on the other hand, can expect

the legislature to produce consistently displeasing policy outcomes.

## 1.2 Political Trust and Representation

Elected officials are charged with representing their constituents before government, but they also symbolize government to their constituents. That is, for many constituents in a district or state, their elected officeholder is one of the primary people they associate with government generally and the institution of which the officeholder is a part specifically. As a citizen views an officeholder as representing to a greater extent her interests, the more she should trust the construct the officeholder embodies.

We begin by assuming that the legislator-constituent relationship is similar to a traditional principal-agent relationship. That is, principals (citizens) elect an agent (legislators) to act on their behalf. These agents wield expertise the principal cannot, but are subject to monitoring and performance evaluations from the principal in the form of elections. The agent in this circumstance has many principals, but each grants her a great deal of discretion. Because monitoring costs are high, people pay little attention to politics (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964) and generally do not understand political debates (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), but agents who behave against the wishes of the principal are often punished electorally (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan, 2002), perhaps because their incongruent behavior is communicated to citizens by the news media and the officeholders' political opponents.

This implies that principals invest agents with some degree of discretion, allowing them to act without being directly monitored at all times. Constituents elect legislators to represent their policy concerns before government and develop an expectation that the legislator will do just that. This further implies that agents who are perceived to have satisfied those expectations more frequently are more likely to earn trust from their principals. In other

words, legislators who are perceived as being more ideologically proximal to their constituents should be trusted to a greater extent by those constituents.

We assume that citizens express their trust in an institution as a function of their prospective evaluations of that institution. Citizens trust a government institution to the degree that they expect that said institution will implement policies those citizens prefer moving forward. These prospective evaluations then suggests that citizens' trust in Congress is strongly influenced by their expected utility from Congressional policy making. Because citizens so strongly relate their expected utility from an institution to the behavior of their own representative, citizens' expected utility from Congress becomes a question of their expected utility from their own representative. These sort of forward-looking expectations about individual representatives are typically assumed to be a decreasing function of the distance between a citizen's ideal point and her perception of the ideal point of her representative on the liberal-conservative spectrum (Downs, 1957; Jacobsmeier, 2014). For a citizen, the representative who maximizes her expected utility (and thus is most trustworthy), is the one whose ideal point most closely matches her own.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we argue that the ideological distance citizens perceive between themselves and their legislators should affect those citizens' expected utility from Congress itself, which in turn influences the degree to which they trust Congress. Citizens who feel that their interests are being represented, i.e. those who feel they are close to their legislators, should express higher levels of trust than should those who feel their interests are not being represented. In other words, the level of trust in Congress expressed by a citizen should increase as the ideological distance they perceive between themselves and their legislator decreases. This leads to the following hypothesis:

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<sup>1</sup>Downs' argument, however, hinges on the notion that citizens are attentive enough to know both their own ideologies and those of the candidates or parties between which they are tasked with choosing. Ansolabehere and Jones (2010) show that citizens' views of their legislators' roll-call voting behavior is powerfully driven by the votes those legislators actually cast (see also Jones, 2011). Thus, it appears that citizens can form reasonable views of the ideological outlook of legislators.

*H<sub>1</sub>: As the perceived ideological distance between citizens and their legislators increases, citizens' levels of trust in Congress will decrease.*

We further argue that the relationship between citizens' perceived ideological distances from a legislator and citizens' trust in Congress is conditional on party control of the Congressional chambers. Citizens whose party controls Congress as a whole should express higher levels of trust in it even if their legislators are ideologically distant from them. This is because citizens whose party controls Congress should have generally higher expected utility from Congress, even without a proximate representative. For example, a Democratic citizen's preferences will likely differ sharply from those of a Republican legislator, but this divergence may not inform the trust felt by the citizen for Congress if the Democratic Party is in control. Even though the Republican legislator is unlikely to promote the preferences of the Democratic citizen, the institution itself is extremely likely to promote those interests. A citizen whose preferred party holds the majority of seats in a Congressional chamber can use the belief that her party is in control as a heuristic that encourages her to trust the institution as a whole. This allows her to give less consideration to her own representative's ideological disposition, thus simplifying the formation of a trust attitude.<sup>2</sup>

Citizens whose party does not control Congress, on the other hand, should be more responsive to their perceptions of the ideological distance between themselves and their legislators because they cannot rely on the institution as a whole to reliably produce satisfying policy outcomes. A conservative Republican citizen, for example, will likely hold a very different ideological disposition than a liberal legislator. If the Democrats are in power, we should expect this citizen to exhibit low levels of trust in Congress because her preferred party is out of power and she hold a sharply divergent ideological disposition relative to

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<sup>2</sup>This conditional argument rests on the notion that citizens know who the majority party of Congress is. In the 2008 CCES survey, only 8.9% of respondents incorrectly identified the Republican Party as being in charge of the House, and only 8.7% of respondents incorrectly listed the Republican Party as the majority in the Senate.



her legislator, who is viewed symbolically as the face of the institution. If this same citizen had a *conservative* legislator, her view of the institution as a whole may differ. She should still distrust the institution because the Democrats control it, but her representative is less ideologically divergent from her. She may, therefore, trust the institution more than she otherwise would have because she believes that her representative will attempt to produce more pleasing policy outcomes than the chamber as a whole. Perceptions of ideological congruence, then, may not influence feelings of trust as much for citizens whose parties are in control as they do for those whose party is not in control. In other words:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Trust attitudes will be more responsive to citizens' perceptions of the ideological distance between themselves and their legislators among those who identify with the Congressional minority party than they will among those who identify with the Congressional majority party.*

## 2 Research Design

We use data from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to test our theory. These data come from the University of Missouri “team content” module of 1,000 CCES participants (see Richardson Jr., Konisky, and Milyo, 2012). The CCES is a large internet-based political survey is administered by YouGov/Polimetrix, which constructed a nationally representative sample of respondents using matched random sampling. Due to this method of respondent recruitment, the CCES includes sampling weights. We use these weights in all of our analyses.

Respondents were asked to answer a variety of questions about trust in government including the degree to which they trusted the U.S. Congress. Responses were categorized into four levels ranging from zero to three in which the lowest levels of trust in Congress

were represented by the lowest numerical value.<sup>3</sup> The CCES asked respondents to place themselves on a zero to one hundred point scale with 0 representing extremely liberal and 100 representing extremely conservative. The survey also asked respondents to place a variety of political figures on this scale including their members of the U.S. House and their Senators. We used these scales to measure respondents' perceptions of ideological distance between themselves and their legislators. Our measure of perceived ideological distance is the absolute difference between a respondent's self placement and her placement of her legislators. This measure ranges from zero — perfect congruence — to one hundred — absolute incongruence.

We control for respondents' sex using a dummy variable coded one if the respondent was female and zero if they were male, age in years, religiosity using a six point ordinal scale for which higher values indicated higher levels of religiosity, expectations for the national economy — a five point scale — for which higher values indicate worsening economic perceptions, education using a six point ordinal scale in which higher values indicate higher levels of educational achievement, race and ethnicity using dummies indicating whether or not a respondent identifies as black or Latino, and respondents' degree of political interest using a three point scale on which higher values indicated higher levels of interest. We also include the ideologies of respondents as measured by a five point scale on which higher values indicate increasing levels of ideological conservatism. Finally, we control for respondents' party identities and the partisanship of their legislators. The focus of our theory is on perceived ideological distance, which should be correlated with co-partisanship, thus we include an interaction term that estimates the effect of party identification when a respondent and her representative are of the same party. Table 1 provides summary statistics for each of our

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<sup>3</sup>The stem of the question read “How much of the time do you think you can trust each branch of government? Please answer for each branch of the Federal or your state government listed below.” Responses were coded 0 for “hardly ever,” 1 for “some of the time,” 2 for “most of the time,” and 3 for “just about always.” While some scholars use multiple items to generate measures of political trust (e.g. Hetherington, 1998), we rely on the aforementioned single question because it is the only item available in the CCES data.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Ideological Placement, Trust in Congress, and Control Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>N</i>
<i>Trust in Congress</i>	1.684	0.680	861
<i>Ideological distance to House Member</i>	32.349	27.489	495
<i>Ideological distance to senior Senator</i>	33.727	28.154	483
<i>Ideological distance to junior Senator</i>	34.370	28.695	513
<i>Age</i>	47.5	16.14	893
<i>Religiosity</i>	2.246	1.695	889
<i>Education</i>	3.363	1.494	1000
<i>Interest in politics</i>	1.401	0.615	885
<i>Expectations for the national economy</i>	4.505	0.669	889
<i>Self-reported ideology</i>	3.195	1.195	840
<i>Respondent is black</i>	0.061	0.239	1000
<i>Respondent is Latino</i>	0.063	0.243	1000
Representative is a Democrat			
<i>House Member</i>	0.529	0.499	918
<i>Senior Senator</i>	0.502	0.500	910
<i>Junior Senator</i>	0.513	0.500	897

Note: There were 454 women in the sample and 439 men. There were also 448 Democrats and 410 Republicans. There were 107 independents/non-partisans in the sample. *N* represents the number of respondents who provided usable responses.

variables of interest.

The dependent variable in our analysis is our four category measure of trust in Congress for which higher values indicate higher levels of political trust. We model political trust in Congress using ordered logistic regression. Ordered logit includes “cutpoints” that provide unique intercepts based on the probability that an observation will fall into each of the observable categories. Thus, a negative coefficient in an ordered logistic regression implies that the as an independent variable increases, the probability that a respondent falls into the lowest category of the dependent variable also increases, while the probability of a respondent falling into the higher categories of the dependent variable decreases.

### 3 Results

Table 2 presents results from an ordinal logistic regression predicting respondents' degree of trust in the U.S. Congress. This first set of results allow us to examine the degree to which perceived ideological distance between a respondent and her legislator informs her level of trust in the U.S. Congress. The first column presents results using the perceived ideological distance between a respondent and her House member as a predictor of trust in Congress. The second and third columns use the distance between a respondent and her senior and junior Senators as predictors, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

In each of the three models, the effect of a respondent's perceptions of the distance between herself and her legislator is negative and significantly related to trust in the U.S. Congress. This indicates that as a respondent perceives of a greater distance between herself and her member of Congress, she expresses lower levels of trust in Congress. In addition to our measure of ideological distance being negatively related to trust in Congress, our results also indicate that majority party — Democratic — respondents are more likely to report trusting Congress. We also find evidence that an increasing interest in politics is related to a decrease in Congressional trust, and that increasingly conservative ideologies are associated with less trust in Congress. Interestingly, the coefficient on the majority party respondent-Democratic representative interaction term was consistently negative across all three models. This indicates that the positive effect of being a Democratic respondent on trust in Congress is muted by also having a Democratic representative, though this interactive effect is only significant in one of the three models.

Ordinal logistic regressions predict the probability of a response falling into each of the

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<sup>4</sup>Despite the Missouri team CCES module containing 1,000 respondents, our models report less than 1,000 observations. This is because a number of respondents failed to locate their legislators on the ideological scale. Using a logistic regression to predict whether or not respondents provided ratings of their legislators' perceived ideologies, we find that women were less likely to provide ideological ratings, as were younger respondents, those with low interest in politics, and Republican respondents.

Table 2: Trust in the U.S. Congress as a Function of Perceived Ideological Distance from a Legislator

	U.S. House Member	Senior Senator	Junior Senator
<i>Ideological distance to legislator(s)</i>	-0.016* (0.004)	-0.012* (0.004)	-0.011* (0.004)
<i>Majority party respondent</i>	1.422* (0.388)	1.634* (0.353)	1.746* (0.402)
<i>Respondent is female</i>	0.319 (0.194)	0.259 (0.189)	0.271 (0.193)
<i>Age in years</i>	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
<i>Religiosity</i>	0.063 (0.062)	0.099 (0.062)	0.064 (0.061)
<i>Interest in politics</i>	-0.515* (0.189)	-0.470* (0.180)	-0.505* (0.191)
<i>Education</i>	-0.033 (0.064)	-0.050 (0.062)	-0.022 (0.063)
<i>Expectations of the national economy</i>	-0.050 (0.165)	-0.158 (0.152)	-0.144 (0.155)
<i>Respondent's ideology</i>	-0.317* (0.118)	-0.306* (0.116)	-0.352* (0.118)
<i>Respondent is black</i>	0.832* (0.421)	0.720 (0.413)	0.928* (0.425)
<i>Respondent is Latino</i>	0.603 (0.479)	-0.122 (0.412)	0.298 (0.454)
<i>Representative is a Democrat</i>	0.617* (0.304)	0.348 (0.319)	0.261 (0.318)
<i>Majority party respondent X Democratic representative</i>	-0.834* (0.415)	-0.753 (0.458)	-0.681 (0.482)
<i>Cutpoint 1</i>	-0.139 (1.603)	-0.909 (0.981)	-0.580 (1.020)
<i>Cutpoint 2</i>	2.591* (1.067)	1.705 (0.982)	2.264* (1.023)
<i>Cutpoint 3</i>	5.341* (1.169)	4.551* (1.093)	5.242* (1.165)
<i>N</i>	503	493	519
<i>Pseudo R-Squared</i>	0.554	0.547	0.555

Note: Cell entries are estimated coefficients generated by an ordinal logit model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Results were generated using sampling weights.

\* p-value  $\leq 0.05$  (two-tailed test)

observable set of categories in the dependent variable. The baseline rates of falling into each category are determined by the model's cutpoints. Since these nuances can be hard to interpret numerically, we provide predicted probability plots for the lowest level of trust in Congress as the respondent's perceptions of the ideological distance between her and each of her Representatives increases. Respondents falling into the lowest category of trust in Congress reported that they "hardly ever" trust the U.S. Congress. Figure 1 presents these predicted probabilities for a white, male, Democratic respondent with a Democratic representative. The respondent's age, interest in politics, education, expectations of the national economy, and religiosity were all kept at their mean values. The top left panel shows the changes in predicted probability as ideological distance from a respondent's House member increase. The top right panel shows the analogous plot for a respondent's senior Senator, and the lower plot shows the changes in predicted probabilities as a function of a respondent's ideological distance to her senior Senator. As the figure shows, an increase in the perceived ideological distance between a respondent and her House member from its minimum observed value to its maximum observed value results in an increase in the the probability that that respondent will report "hardly ever" trusting the U.S. Congress increases from 0.28 to 0.54. The range of the predicted probabilities generated for the senior and junior Senator models is substantively identical across the observed range of perceived ideological distance.

On the whole, these results suggest that citizens feel lower levels of trust in Congress as they perceive greater ideological distance between themselves and their members of Congress. While this may seem intuitive, the bulk of research on trust in government institutions has focused on the performance of government in structuring citizens' trust attitudes, and the research that has focused on representation's effect on trust has focused exclusively on descriptive representation. Here we report evidence that perceived dyadic ideological distance plays a key role in the development of trust attitudes, and that representation

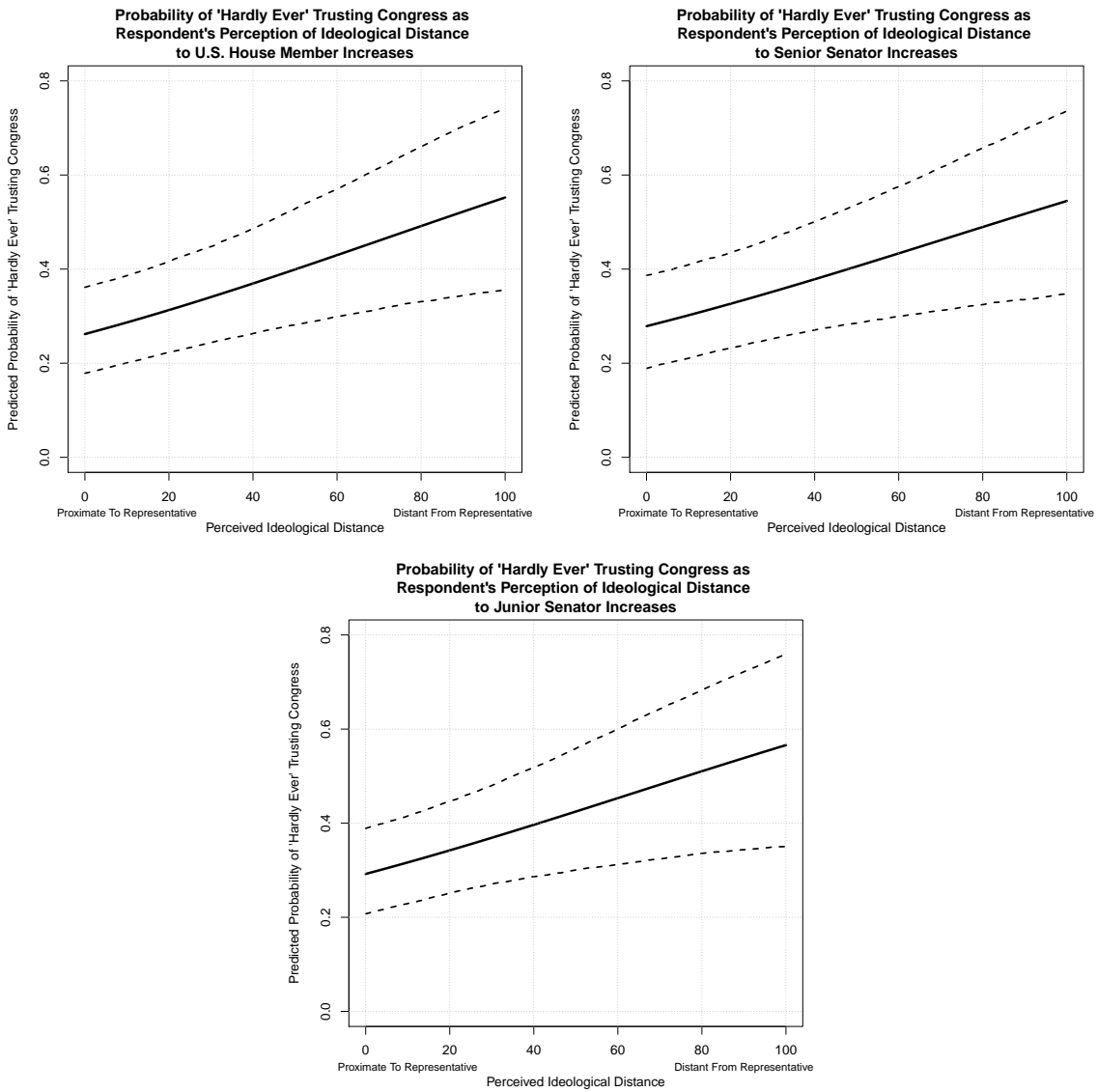


Figure 1: Predicted Probability of “Hardly Ever” Trusting Congress for White, Male, Democrat as Perceived Ideological Distance Increases. Dotted Lines Represent 95% Confidence Intervals.

can influence trust in Congress even when perceptions of the economic conditions — i.e. government performance — are poor.

### 3.1 The Conditioning Effect of Majority Party Status

Our theoretical development suggests that the effect of ideological divergence on trust in Congress will be weaker for citizens who share their party identification with the majority party of Congress. That is, citizens are less concerned about the behavior of their own representative when their party controls the legislature. The Democratic Party controlled Congress at the time these data were collected. Thus, we expect that as ideological divergence increases, trust in Congress will decline for all respondents, and this effect will be stronger for out-party — non-Democratic — respondents than for in-party — Democratic — respondents. In order to test this hypothesis, we interact our measure of ideological distance between a survey respondent and her legislators with a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is a Democrat. Table 3 presents results from an ordinal logistic regression predicting respondents' degree of trust in the U.S. Congress. Our models are exactly the same as those reported in Table 2 except for the inclusion of the new ideological distance-majority-party affiliation interaction term.

As the results reported in Table 2 show, the effect of perceived ideological distance for out-party respondents (the coefficient on ideological distance alone) is negative and significant in all three of the presented models. This indicates that for out-party respondents, when the perceived ideological distance between a respondent and her legislators increases, the level of trust in the U.S. Congress that she expresses on average decreases. The interaction term is positive in all three models, indicating that the effect of perceived ideological distance on trust in Congress for in-party respondents — those who identified with the Democratic Party — is smaller (closer to zero), though the effects among in-party respondents do not



Table 3: Trust in the U.S. Congress as a Function of Perceived Ideological Distance from a Legislator Conditional on Majority Party Status

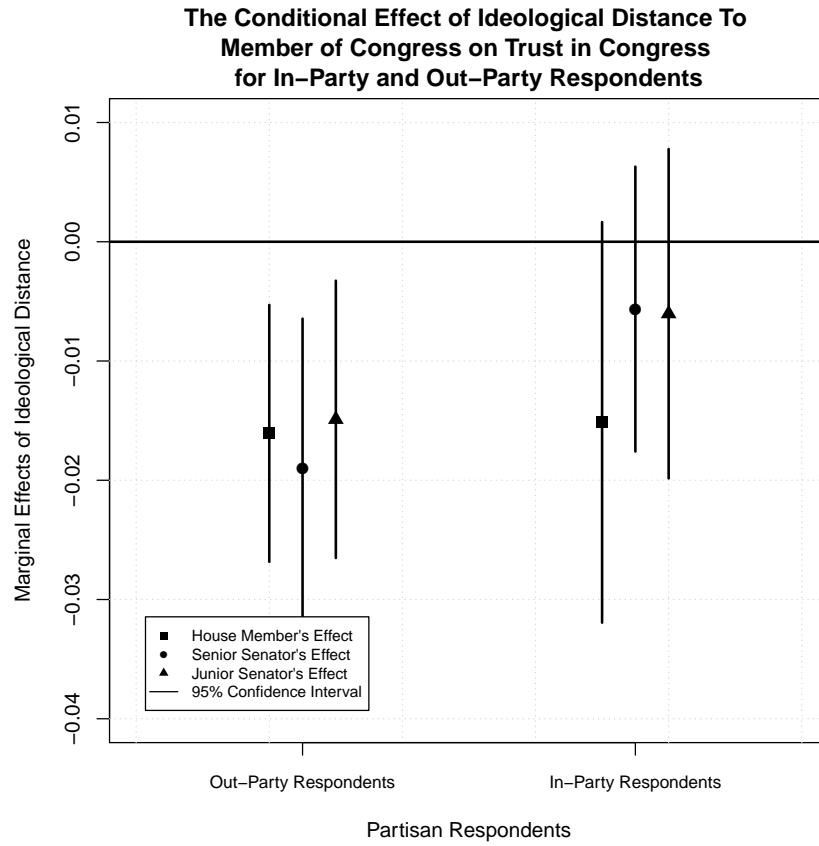
	U.S. House Member	Senior Senator	Junior Senator
<i>Ideological distance to legislator(s)</i>	-0.016* (0.005)	-0.019* (0.006)	-0.015* (0.006)
<i>Majority party respondent</i>	1.402* (0.447)	1.361* (0.399)	1.494* (0.483)
<i>Majority party respondent X Ideological distance</i>	0.001 (0.010)	0.013 (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)
<i>Respondent is female</i>	0.319 (0.194)	0.253 (0.191)	0.253 (0.195)
<i>Age in years</i>	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
<i>Religiosity</i>	0.062 (0.062)	0.103 (0.062)	0.067 (0.061)
<i>Interest in politics</i>	-0.519* (0.189)	-0.462* (0.181)	-0.506* (0.191)
<i>Education</i>	-0.034 (0.064)	-0.058 (0.062)	-0.029 (0.064)
<i>Expectations of the national economy</i>	-0.052 (0.167)	-0.180 (0.154)	-0.158 (0.156)
<i>Respondent's ideology</i>	-0.315* (0.121)	-0.245 (0.123)	-0.321* (0.123)
<i>Respondent is black</i>	0.835* (0.423)	0.724 (0.414)	0.937* (0.426)
<i>Respondent is Latino</i>	0.603 (0.479)	-0.152 (0.412)	0.272 (0.455)
<i>Representative is a Democrat</i>	0.621* (0.306)	0.618 (0.371)	0.365 (0.337)
<i>Majority party respondent X Democratic representative</i>	-0.841* (0.415)	-0.871 (0.467)	-0.626 (0.486)
<i>Cutpoint 1</i>	-0.148 (1.068)	-0.903 (0.988)	0.236 (1.289)
<i>Cutpoint 2</i>	2.582* (1.073)	1.705 (0.988)	3.079* (1.294)
<i>Cutpoint 3</i>	5.332* (1.174)	4.546* (1.099)	6.055* (1.409)
<i>N</i>	503	493	519
<i>Pseudo R-Squared</i>	0.554	0.548	0.555

Note: Cell entries are estimated coefficients generated by an ordinal logit model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Results were generated using sampling weights.

\* p-value  $\leq 0.05$  (two-tailed test)

differ significantly from those for out-party respondents in any of the models we report. However, direct interpretation of interaction terms generally requires a marginal effects plot to determine when a marginal effect of an independent variable is significantly different from zero (Brambor, Clark, and Golder, 2006). Figure 2 presents this marginal effects plot using the coefficients in each of the three models of Table 3 along with their 95% confidence intervals. These suggest that the effect of perceived ideological distance is negative and significantly different than zero for out-party respondents, but not statistically different from zero for in-party respondents. Thus, as the perceived ideological distance between an out-party respondent and that respondent's set of legislators increases, that respondent's level of trust in Congress declines. The same is not true for in-party respondents, whose trust in Congress is not statistically significantly affected by the perceived ideological distance between themselves and their set of legislators. This matches our expectations well, as it indicates that respondents who share party affiliation with the majority party of Congress are less influenced by the distance between themselves and their own legislators when forming their trust attitudes.

Rather than just relying on the marginal effects plots to convey the magnitude of these coefficients, Figure 3 presents the predicted probability of falling into the lowest levels of trust in Congress (hardly ever trusting Congress) as perceived ideological distance between a respondent and her set of legislators increases for both in-party and out-party respondents. Again, as the perception of ideological distance between a respondent and her set of legislators increases, the predicted probability of falling into the lowest category of trust in Congress increases, but this effect is much stronger for out-party respondents. Indeed, as the ideological distance between an out-party respondent and her senior Senator increases from its minimum to its maximum, the predicted probability of "hardly ever" trusting Congress increases from 0.551 to 0.877, a jump of more than 32 percentage points. Alternatively, as the ideological distance between an in-party respondent and her senior senator moves from



*Note: As the perception of distance increases, out-party respondent's level of trust in Congress decreases. In-party respondents do not exhibit a statistically significant relationship between perceived ideological distance and trust in Congress.*

Figure 2: The Marginal Effect of Perceived Ideological Distance to House Member on Trust in Congress

its minimum to its maximum, the predicted probability of “hardly ever” trusting Congress moves from 0.243 to 0.462 a jump of just over 11 percentage points, or an effect less than half the size of the out-party respondent’s change.

It is worth pointing out here that our analysis does not simply assert that out-party respondents trust Congress less. Our analysis bares this out, but also implies that out-party respondents are more sensitive to their perceptions of their own legislators’ level of ideological congruence with themselves. Trust in Congress is influenced by ideological distance for both in and out-party respondents, but the effect of citizens’ perceptions of the quality of their representation on their trust in Congress is much stronger for the latter than the former. While our analysis is limited to 2008 due to the lack of surveys from different time periods that ask about trust in Congress specifically, these results do support our expectation that in-party respondents’ trust in Congress is less influenced by ideological distance than out-party respondents.

### **3.2 Projection, Endogeneity, and Roll Call Voting**

The key finding of our analyses is that citizens’ trust in the U.S. Congress is related to the degree of ideological distance they perceive between themselves and their representatives. What if citizens project their own ideological positions onto legislators that they trust (e.g. Brent and Granberg 1982; Conover and Feldman 1982, 1989, but see Krosnick 1990)? This suggests that a possible endogenous relationship may exist between trust in Congress and citizens’ perception of the ideological distance between themselves and their legislators. If this is the case, our results are suspect.

We report a series of instrumental variables regressions that guard against the possibility of such endogeneity influencing our results. The key to instrumental variables designs is for analysts to leverage a high quality, exogenous instrument for the potentially endogenous

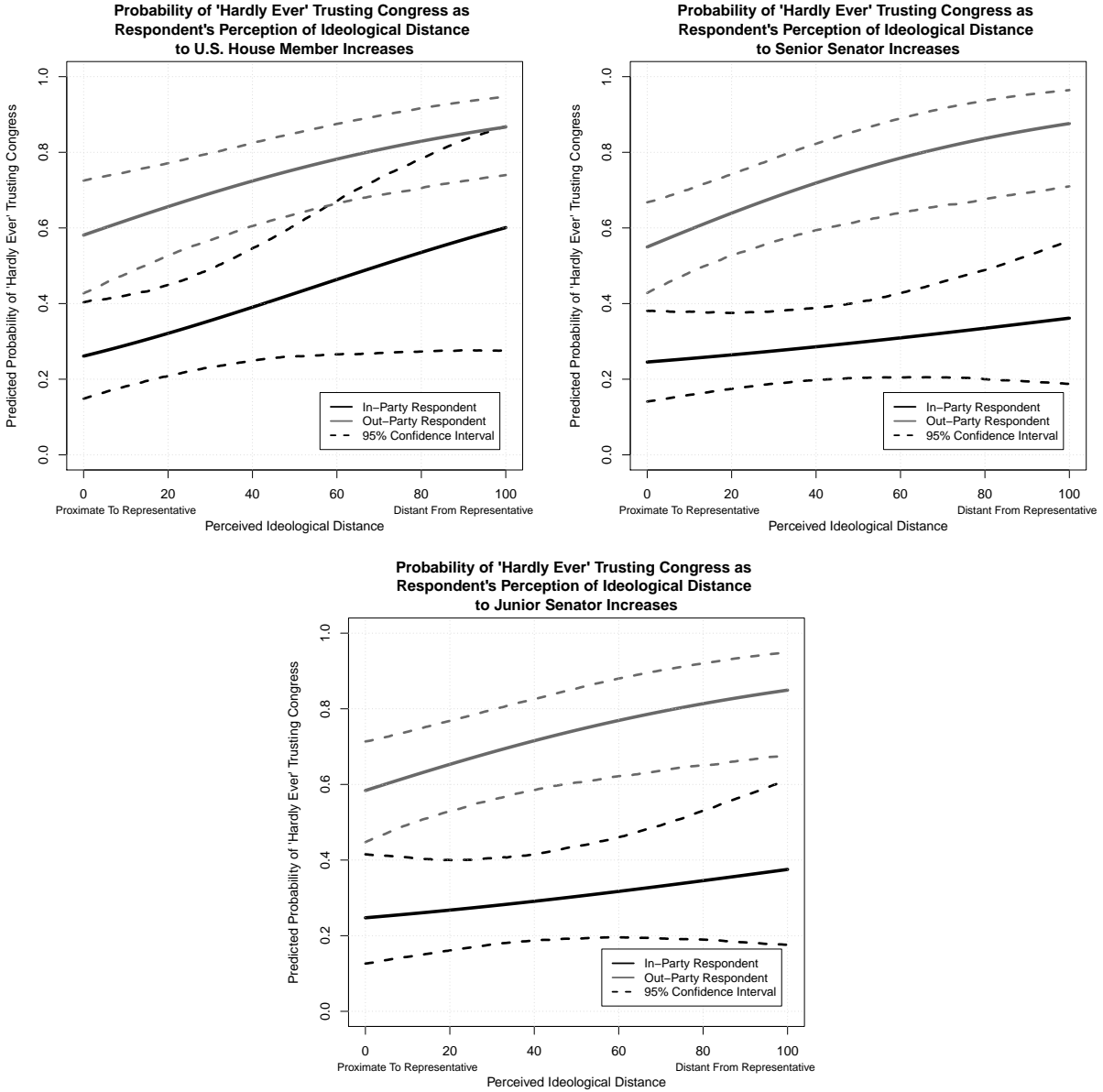


Figure 3: The Conditional Predicted Probability of “Hardly Ever” Trusting the U.S. Congress. As average perceived ideological distance to respondent’s set of legislators increases the probability of a respondent being in the lowest category of trust in Congress increase, while the probability of being in the higher categories decreases. This effect is much stronger for out-party respondents than in-party respondents.

regressor of interest. We use a measure of roll-call divergence between a CCES respondent's preferences and their legislator's actual behavior in Congress. The 2008 CCES asked respondents their positions on eight salient roll call votes that took place in the prior session of U.S. Congress. To measure roll call divergence, we simply add up the number of times a respondent's preferences failed to line up with her legislator's voting behavior. We then divide that sum by the number of roll call questions that the respondent answered. This gives us a proportion of roll call divergence in which high values represent high levels of actual policy incongruence and low values represent low levels of policy incongruence. Because the legislators' votes were cast before the CCES was administered, legislators' votes are fully exogenous to CCES responses. This provides us with a measure of ideological distance fully exogenous to trust in Congress that can serve as an instrument for respondents' perceived levels of ideological distance. For our sample, the average proportion of roll call divergence was 0.546 with a standard deviation of 0.283. Thus, the average respondent disagreed with her representative on roll call votes about 54% of the time.

We first estimate the perceived ideological distance between respondents and their legislators as a function roll call divergence along with all of the other control variables, as is appropriate in the first step of two-stage least squares. We extract the fitted values from this first stage regression and use them as instruments for respondents' perceived ideological distances from their legislators in a second stage ordinal logit model predicting trust in Congress. The results of these models appear in Tables 4 and 5. The former provides the first stage results while the latter provides the second stage results.

As Table 4 indicates, roll call divergence is a significant predictor of perceived ideological congruence across all three models.<sup>5</sup> That is, respondents' perceptions of the distance between themselves and their representatives is strongly correlated with the roll call-based

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<sup>5</sup>It is considered best practice to include all non-endogenous regressors from the second stage of a two stage model as regressors in the first stage of the model.

distances between their representatives and themselves. This suggests that respondents' perceptions of the ideological congruence they share with their representatives is tied to actual behavioral differences between what their representatives are doing and what respondents would have preferred those representatives to do. This mirrors similar results uncovered by Ansolabehere and Jones (2010), who find that many citizens have relatively accurate perceptions of how their legislators voted on recent key pieces of legislation.

There are several important things to note about these first stage models. As we have already pointed out, roll call divergence is a strong predictor of perceived ideological congruence. The roll call divergence-majority party respondent interaction term is also negative in each of the models. This indicates that roll call divergence is a weaker predictor of perceived ideological congruence for majority party respondents (in this case Democrats). Additionally, roll call divergence seems to be the strongest predictor of perceived ideological congruence for a respondent's senior senator, though comparing the magnitude of coefficients across models should be done with some caution. Finally and most importantly, the  $R^2$  values from our models are all quite high for cross-sectional survey research, which in turn suggests that we have a strong instrument for our potentially endogenous variable.

The second step in our instrumental variables design is to extract respondents' predicted values of perceived ideological distance from the first stage regression in Table 4, and use those values as our key regressor in an ordinal logit model predicting trust in Congress. The results of this analysis appear in Table 5. As expected and reported in our earlier models, the ideological distance instrumental variable is negatively signed in all three models and is statistically significantly different from zero in two of the three models. This indicates that for minority party respondents, when their instrumented ideological distance increases, their trust in Congress declines. Recall that in this model, ideological distance is fully exogenous to respondents' trust in Congress, so the potentially endogenous role of projection in our model is eliminated. Additionally, in all three models, the interaction term between instrumented

Table 4: First Stage OLS Regression Predicting Respondents' Reported Level of Ideological Congruence with Their Members of Congress

	U.S. House Member	Senior Senator 2	Junior Senator
<i>Roll Call Divergence</i>	24.36*	40.90*	28.44*
	(5.56)	(5.67)	(5.50)
<i>Majority Party Respondent</i>	-10.44	33.26*	24.76*
	(5.64)	(5.07)	(5.60)
<i>Majority party respondent X Roll Call Divergence</i>	-22.21*	-21.89*	-16.56
	(7.69)	(8.59)	(8.47)
<i>Respondent is Female</i>	1.30	0.96	5.76*
	(1.88)	(1.93)	(1.89)
<i>Age</i>	-0.00	-0.02	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
<i>Religiosity</i>	0.65	0.59	-0.54
	(0.61)	(0.63)	(0.59)
<i>Interest in Politics</i>	-1.54	-2.72	-3.80*
	(1.71)	(1.77)	(1.74)
<i>Education</i>	1.96*	0.63	0.24
	(0.59)	(0.60)	(0.59)
<i>Expectations for the national economy</i>	-2.56	-3.38*	-0.74
	(1.50)	(1.47)	(1.47)
<i>Respondent's Ideology</i>	2.31*	-1.19	1.04
	(1.06)	(1.15)	(1.09)
<i>Respondent is black</i>	-6.86*	-14.23*	-7.24*
	(2.95)	(3.29)	(3.10)
<i>Respondent is Latino</i>	3.42	1.01	5.84
	(3.97)	(3.73)	(3.85)
<i>Representative is Democrat</i>	4.01	34.35*	27.01*
	(2.97)	(2.94)	(2.98)
<i>Majority party respondent X Democratic representative</i>	-6.63	-52.05*	-50.34*
	(4.61)	(4.07)	(4.52)
<i>Intercept</i>	26.88*	19.51*	10.28
	(9.66)	(9.86)	(9.87)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.44	0.45	0.47
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.44	0.46
Num. obs.	511	500	527

Note: Cell entries are estimated coefficients generated by an OLS model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Results were generated using sampling weights.

\* p-value  $\leq 0.05$  (two-tailed test)



ideological distance and the majority party respondent dummy variable is positive, indicating that the roll of instrumented ideological distance in predicting trust in Congress is weaker for majority party respondents. This again mirrors our results using self-reported perceptions of ideological distance in Table 3.

In order to make our conditional results clearer, Figure 4 plots the marginal effect and 95% confidence interval around that effect of instrumented ideological distance on trust in Congress. For out-party respondents, increases in the instrumented ideological distance measure to both a respondent's senior Senator and House member significantly ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) decrease trust in Congress. Unlike the results we reported earlier, instrumented ideological distance between a respondent and her junior Senator plays no statistically discernable role in trust in Congress. This suggests that perceptions of ideological distance to junior Senators may suffer from more projection issues than those to House members or senior Senators. For members of the Congressional majority party, the effect of ideological distance is statistically insignificant for both Senators and is positive and significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) for House members.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the relationship between ideological distance and trust in Congress mirrors our theoretical expectations, even when we account for the potentially endogenous relationship between distance and trust for four of the six estimated effects. Out-party respondents's views about the distance between themselves and their representatives condition their trust in Congress, but in-party respondents have higher levels of trust in Congress regardless of their congruence with their own representative.

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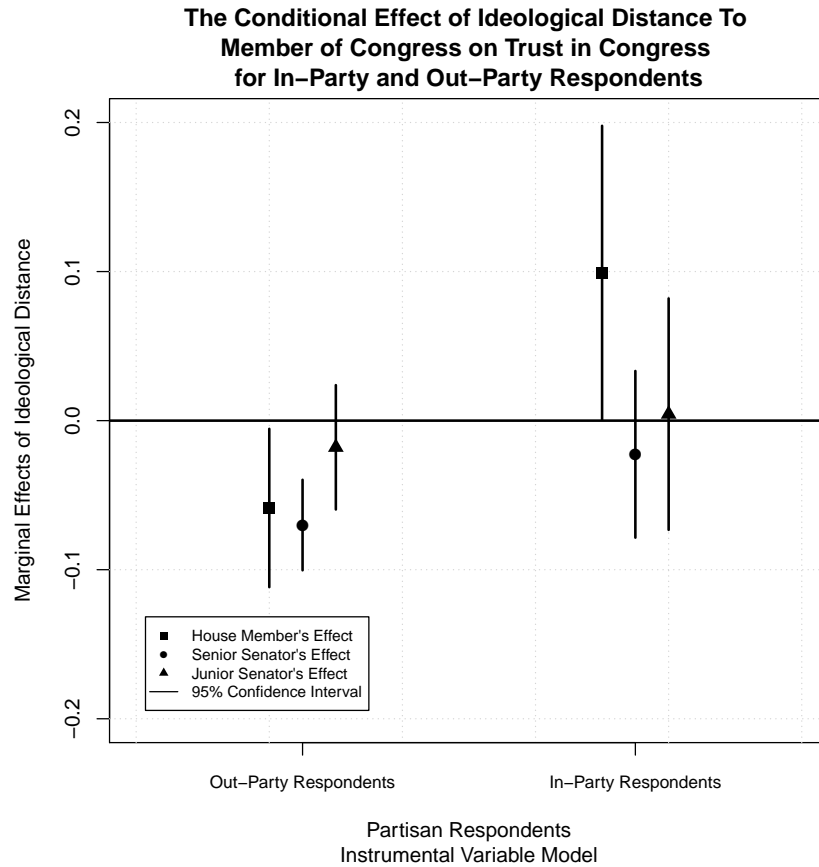
<sup>6</sup>Neither our theoretical setup, nor any other theoretical account of political trust would posit a positive relationship between instrument ideological distance to a respondent's House member and that respondent's trust in Congress. Thus, this may be an artifact of the instrumental variable design of this particular analysis, but may warrant further investigation in future research.

Table 5: Second Stage Ordinal Logit Models Predicting Respondents' Trust in Congress

	U.S. House Member	Senior Senator	Junior Senator
<i>Instrumental Variable: Ideological distance</i>	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.07* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
<i>Majority Party Respondent</i>	-2.17* (1.04)	1.19 (1.20)	1.14 (1.61)
<i>Majority party respondent X Ideological distance</i>	0.16* (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.04)
<i>Respondent is Female</i>	0.29 (0.21)	0.26 (0.20)	0.21 (0.25)
<i>Age</i>	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
<i>Religiosity</i>	-0.03 (0.07)	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)
<i>Interest in Politics</i>	0.32 (0.20)	0.28 (0.18)	0.40 (0.22)
<i>Education</i>	-0.18 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)
<i>Expectations for national economy</i>	-0.02 (0.18)	-0.17 (0.17)	-0.14 (0.16)
<i>Respondent's Ideology</i>	-0.01 (0.15)	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.13)
<i>Respondent is black</i>	1.24* (0.43)	0.45 (0.48)	0.84* (0.42)
<i>Respondent is Latino</i>	-0.12 (0.47)	-0.38 (0.40)	-0.45 (0.47)
<i>Representative is a Democrat</i>	1.11* (0.41)	2.99* (0.70)	0.44 (0.76)
<i>Majority party respondent X Democratic representative</i>	-0.72 (0.56)	-3.44* (1.04)	-0.66 (1.53)
<i>Cutpoint 1</i>	-2.028 (1.143)	-1.645 (1.112)	-0.778 (1.156)
<i>Cutpoint 2</i>	0.515 (1.431)	0.756 (1.107)	1.730 (1.156)
<i>Cutpoint 3</i>	2.716 (1.466)	3.093* (1.150)	4.138* (2.135)
<i>N</i>	439	444	450
<i>Pseudo R-Squared</i>	0.582	0.564	0.574

Note: Cell entries are estimated coefficients generated by an ordinal logit model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. The instrumental variable in the model is respondents' predicted level of perceived incongruence from the first stage of the regression in Table 4. Results were generated using sampling weights.

\* p-value  $\leq 0.05$  (two-tailed test)



*Note: As the perception of distance increases, out-party respondent's level of trust in Congress decreases. In-party respondents do not exhibit a statistically significant relationship between perceived ideological distance and trust in Congress.*

Figure 4: The Marginal Effect of Perceived Ideological Distance to House Member on Trust in Congress using Instrumental Variables Approach

## 4 Conclusion

In this research, we argue that trust in Congress is formed in part as a response to the principal-agent relationship between citizens and their legislators. As legislators are perceived as being more faithful agents before Congress, their principals trust the institution of Congress more. When those agents are perceived as poor representatives, principals trust the institution less. We also hypothesized that this relationship was conditional. Citizens of the party controlling Congress have no real concerns over the behavior of their principals because the institution is likely to produce outcomes they prefer regardless of the behavior of their principals. Citizens not aligned with the majority party, however, only have a chance at having their voices heard and preferences enacted so long as they have faithful agents in the institution. In 2008, this means that perceptions of ideological distance should play a stronger role in the development of trust in Congress for Republican and independent citizens, but not Democratic citizens.

Empirical evidence from the 2008 CCES generally corroborates our expectations. As a respondent's perception of ideological distance between herself and her legislators increases, her trust in the U.S. Congress decreases. This relationship holds whether our analysis employs any of a respondent's legislators in the U.S. Congress, and appears to have conditional support from models controlling for potentially endogenous elements of the relationships. These findings contrast with the traditional understanding of the relationship between citizens' views of members of Congress and Congress as a whole driven by Fenno's Paradox. Our results suggest that citizens' views of the institution of Congress are tied to their perceptions of their legislators, at least when it comes to trust attitudes. Fenno's Paradox, then, may not apply to all types of attitudes. This suggests that future research should examine the relationships between legislators and legislatures that have been previously ignored.

These findings further suggest that it may behoove legislators to advertise legislative

activities that reflect the preferences of their constituents, especially for those legislators whose party affiliations do not match the majority of their constituents. Legislative behavior may influence trust in Congress, but only if citizens are aware of how congruent that behavior is with citizens' preferences. Legislators facing reelection may have an incentive to devote a portion of their campaign agendas to discussing their legislative activities when those activities match up with the preferences of potential voters.

Prior research on trust in government has focused largely on the macro-level and centered on trust in the federal government as a whole. Our research suggests that trust in government institutions respond to predictable stimuli. Thus, this indicates that trust in Congress, the President, the Supreme Court, and the federal government more generally are all connected in fundamental ways, but still harbor distinct and important variance. Our results also suggest that trust in these governmental institutions may increase if citizens believe their representatives are more ideologically proximal to them, especially for citizens who do not identify with the majority party in the U.S. Congress.

Our analysis is limited in that these data are only available from a single year. The conditional portion of our theory focuses on how majority party status leads citizens to respond to their perceptions of their ideological distance from their legislators differently than do citizens who are not members of the majority. Our data only allow us to examine these effects at a single time point during which the Democratic Party controlled both the U.S. House and the Senate. Future work might investigate these effects under different circumstance such as unified Republican control of Congress or divided party control of Congress. Additionally, our instrumental variables analysis did not comport with our theoretical expectations perfectly. That analysis suggests that citizens' use their evaluations of their junior Senators quite differently than they do their evaluations of their senior Senators when forming trust attitudes in the U.S. Congress. We also observe some weak evidence that majority party respondents might treat ideologically incongruent representatives in the House as more trust-

worthy agents. Whether this is a function of that particular analysis, our particular sample, or is a genuine empirical pattern is certainly worth further research.

We must also note that the CCES surveys respondents during campaign season. Given that many politicians run for national-level offices by “running against Washington” (Fiorina, 1977, 3), these kinds of campaign environments may lead people to feel less trusting of government and government institutions, at least for as long as they are being primed to do so. Future research might examine citizens’ attitudes towards Congress and other political institutions using data gathered in between campaign seasons.

Moving forward, a number of potential extensions and further tests are worth considering. For example, we rely on survey respondents’ perception of ideological distance to their legislators. Experimental work revealing the actual behavior of legislators may help further isolate the causal effects of perceptions of ideological proximity, legislative behavior, and updates to perceptions of ideological behavior on trust attitudes for Congress rather than simply relying on respondents beliefs about that proximity. Macro-level public opinion work (e.g. Stimson, 2004) seems to imply that there are few systematic differences between trust in the branches of government and approval of the branches of government. It would be of interest to scholars of public opinion and representation to determine whether or not this remains true at the micro-level.

Research on representation and district makeup has consistently shown that homogeneous legislative districts are easier for legislators to represent and that the preferences of citizens from homogeneous districts are better reflected in the behavior of their legislators (Gerber and Lewis, 2004; Buchler, 2005). Our research in turn shows that the level of policy congruence between legislators and their constituents has important implications for trust in Congress. This research combined with the aforementioned studies suggest that constructing homogeneous, uncompetitive Congressional districts is one way to increase citizens’ trust in

Congress. Citizens in homogeneous districts would be more likely to be well-represented by their legislators on matters of public policy, and by extension, would be more likely to trust Congress. Finally, if legislators are aware of how ideological distance affects citizens' evaluations of their chamber, it would be of interest to scholars of legislative politics to observe how changes in trust and approval of Congress are answered by legislative activity.

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