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Preaching To The Choir: Americans Prefer Communicating To Copartisan Elected Officials*

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ABSTRACT

Past work suggests that partisan attachments isolate citizens from encountering elite messages contrary to their points of view. Here, we present evidence that partisan attachments not only serve to filter the information citizens receive from political elites; they also work in the other direction, isolating politicians from encountering potentially contrary perspectives from citizens. In particular, we hypothesized that Americans prefer expressing their opinions to politicians who share their party identification and avoid contacting outpartisan politicians. Three studies—drawing on a mixture of observational, field experimental, and natural experimental approaches—support

this hypothesis: citizens prefer to "preach to the choir," contacting legislators of the same partisan stripe. In light of evidence that contact from citizens powerfully affects politicians' stances and priorities, these findings suggest a feedback loop that might aggravate political polarization and help explain how politicians of different parties could develop different perceptions of the same constituencies.

"The constituency that a representative reacts to is the constituency that he or she sees."

- Richard F. Fenno (1977, p. 883)

Foundational studies of political representation draw a careful distinction between legislators' constituencies as they exist and as legislators see them. Miller and Stokes' analysis of district opinion, for instance, notes a disconnect between the policies constituents say they favor and representatives' perception of the same (Miller and Stokes 1963). Fenno's study of members in their home districts found that representatives perceive a set of sub-constituencies, each important to the representative in different ways (Fenno 1978). As these studies emphasize, because politicians are guided by their perceptions of their constituencies, examining how legislators form such perceptions is central to understanding representation in general.

At least part of legislators' perception of their constituencies appears to arise from individual constituents reaching out and expressing their opinions to legislators directly. Legislators often lack detailed knowledge about their constituents' preferences (Broockman and Skovron 2014; Butler and Nickerson 2011; Miller and Stokes 1963). As such, legislators regularly turn to communication they receive to learn where constituents stand (Congressional Management Foundation 2011; Fowler and Shaiko 1987; Goldstein 1999; Kingdon 1989; Kollman 1998; Lee 2002) and what constituents find important (Miler 2010). Consistent with this notion, studies

that randomize constituent contact find that even a small amount of it can affect how legislators vote (Bergan 2009; Bergan and Cole 2014).

Although contact from citizens appears to powerfully influence legislators' decisions, the volume of research on why citizens contact their legislators pales in comparison to other forms of political participation, such as the decisions to vote or donate money (e.g., Hall and Wayman 1990; Gerber and Green 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wright 1996). What research there is on contacting representatives tends to focus on characteristics of the *citizens* making contact and their life circumstances:[1] for example, there is evidence that traits that have a general bearing on political participation, like wealth and political interest, also influence how likely citizens are to contact legislators (Thomas and Streib 2003; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Likewise, other research finds that contact is a function of citizens' awareness of a social problem and interest in having it addressed (Jones et al. 1977; related, see Thomas 1982).

Here, we examine how one characteristic of *politicians* may influence citizens' choices about whether to contact *them*: shared party affiliation. We hypothesized that citizens prefer to communicate to copartisan representatives based on a rich tradition in the psychology of intergroup relations suggesting that people prefer to interact with ingroup members and avoid interactions with outgroup members (e.g., Allport 1954). In light of evidence that party affiliation constitutes a social identity for many

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[1] An exception to this trend is studies that examine the racial match or mismatch between representative and constituents (Gay 2002; Broockman 2014).

Americans (e.g., Green et al. 2002; Greene 1999; Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyenger and Westwood 2014; Mason 2014), we hypothesized that partisans exhibit these tendencies when considering whether to communicate to elites.[2] We find support for this view across several studies. Rather than readily contacting outpartisan politicians with whom they may be more predisposed to disagree, many citizens appear to eschew contacting outpartisan elected officials and prefer contacting copartisans.

That citizens "preach to the choir" by preferentially contacting copartisans has important implications for the mindsets of elites. As we note above, politicians appear to turn to citizen contact in choosing their issue positions and deciding how to allocate their time. Our findings suggest that politicians turning to such contact will hear disproportionately from citizens in their own party, who will tend to reflect an unrepresentative set of attitudes and priorities. Along with work showing that the citizens most likely to contact their representatives tend to have the most ideologically orthodox views (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), our results highlight how a persistent bias in how citizens express their views could reinforce elite polarization. The findings also add to a growing literature suggesting that partisanship exhibits traits similar to other social identities (e.g., Iyenger and Westwood 2014; Gift and Gift 2014).

As we explain in more detail below, identifying the effect of shared partisanship on citizens' contact decisions presents some challenges, with

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[2] As we discuss in the following sections, there are alternative reasons to expect this effect as well.

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concerns about endogeneity, external validity, and social desirability arising in many readily-available data sources. As such, we report research that investigates the effect of partisanship in several complementary ways. First, we focus on the subset of states with U.S. senators of two different parties and find that citizens in these states prefer contacting a copartisan senator to contacting an outpartisan senator. This difference persists across two samples, and irrespective of whether or not the contact is to be for ideological reasons (Study 1). Second, two field experiments conducted by an interest group show that this explicit preference manifests in real-world behavior. Citizens of these states are also more likely to sign a petition addressed to a copartisan and seek to call a copartisan's office when prompted (Study 2). Finally, employing a regression discontinuity analysis, we find that residents of congressional districts where an outpartisan narrowly won the last House election are less likely to report having communicated to their congressperson than residents of districts where the outpartisan congressperson narrowly lost (Study 3).

We begin with a brief review that grounds our guiding hypothesis in literatures in psychology, partisanship, and rational choice. Next, we present results from three studies and associated robustness checks, with special attention to the weaknesses inherent in each methodological approach that our other studies can help address. We close by considering the implications of this accumulated evidence for elite and mass political behavior.

Citizen Preference for Copartisan Contact

Citizens reach out to their representatives for a variety of reasons, such as to express their views on issues and pending legislation, to raise new concerns, to praise or criticize a representative's actions, and to solicit help with bureaucracies. This ability for people directly to engage the individuals who represent them—to express their views in a way not constrained by the small number of competing electoral choices—is a hallmark of democratic governance (Verba and Nie 1972) and is explicitly enshrined in the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Like so many other decisions, however, the choice of whether or not to participate in politics via direct contact occurs amidst the exigencies of everyday life. At the margin, citizens decide to undertake effortful contact with attention to the benefits and costs—material, psychological, or otherwise (Jones et al. 1977; Thomas 1982).

A number of perspectives suggest that citizens might find contacting a copartisan legislator relatively more appealing. First, a rich tradition in the psychological study of intergroup relations documents that people tend to prefer interpersonal contact with fellow group members and avoid contact with outgroups. For example, many whites tend to avoid interpersonal interactions with blacks and prefer interacting with other whites (e.g., Allport 1954; Blascovich et al. 2001). Moreover, when individuals are forced to interact with outgroup members, they often become anxious (e.g., Plant and Devine 2003), grow weary (e.g., Richeson and Trawalter 2005) and develop

feelings of resentment or hostility (e.g., Enos 2014a; Enos 2014b). In light of research that citizen partisanship sometimes mimics the properties of social identities like race and gender (Green et al. 2002; Mason 2014; Iyenger and Westwood 2014; Theodoridis 2012), we expected partisans in the public might similarly prefer contact with elites in a partisan ingroup relative to a partisan outgroup. Consistent with this view, work on descriptive representation suggests that shared personal traits between politicians and constituents facilitate trust and communication (e.g., Broockman 2014; Gay 2002; Mansbridge 1999). Likewise, partisans seem to prefer encountering information consistent with their partisan proclivities (Ryan and Brader 2013; Stroud 2011; Taber and Lodge 2006).

Second, a blossoming literature in political science documents how citizens seem to show a preference for contact with copartisans in their day-to-day lives. People seem to prefer living in places populated by copartisans (Cho et al. 2013; Hui 2013; Public Policy Polling 2012; but see Nall and Mummolo 2014) and prefer copartisans as mates (Alford et al. 2011; Huber and Malhotra 2012; Klofstad et al. 2012). We similarly expected that, when it comes to the consequential decision of whether to contact their representatives, citizens may exhibit a similar preference for interacting with copartisans.

Finally, we conjectured that citizens might expect copartisans to be more responsive to their concerns. When a citizen is in an elite's winning coalition, she may expect that elite to work harder to maintain her support

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than an elite who is able to win office without her support. Consistent with this view, experiments have found that elites are more responsive to communications from copartisans (Butler and Broockman 2011; Grose 2015). Citizens may also tend to associate some negative traits with outpartisans, such as stubbornness or incompetence, that might lead them to expect contacting outpartisan legislators to be relatively less worthwhile.

The extent to which these expectations would apply to citizens contacting their representatives is unclear a priori. Contacting a representative is typically one-way or impersonal (e.g., email, postal mail) and so may not evoke the same aversion to outpartisans as face-to-face contact or dating decisions. Gay (2002) and Broockman (2014) find that citizens are more likely to communicate to legislators of their race, but partisan identity might not be as potent as racial identity. Moreover, citizens might engage tend to contact legislators mostly about matters of special importance, which could swamp partisan considerations. However, there are few studies of whether partisan identities influence everyday decisions of this sort (Iyenger and Westwood 2014).

Challenges in Identifying A Preference for Copartisan Contact

Comparing how likely citizens are to contact representatives of different parties seems a straightforward task but is fraught with inferential challenges. One tempting approach would be to compare the contact habits of (for instance) Democrats living in areas represented by a Democrat to the

contact habits of Democrats living in areas represented by a Republican, as would be possible with publically available datasets such as the American National Election Study or the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. The concern with this approach is endogeneity: significantly different contact rates could reflect a causal effect of a copartisan representative, but they could also reflect unrelated differences in district characteristics. This is not an idle concern. The possibility that Democrats most predisposed to participate in politics would sort themselves into the kind of areas likely to be represented by Democrats has a ring of plausibility (e.g., Cho et al. 2013). Moreover, districts with the most active Democratic citizens might be more likely to elect Democratic representatives in the first place, leading Democratic legislators to tend to have more active Democratic constituents. Each of our studies thus attempts to isolate the relevant counterfactual— would a citizen's contact decisions have been different if an elected official were of a different party?—in its own way.

Study 1: An Explicit Preference for Copartisan Communication

We begin by examining whether citizens exhibit a preference for communicating to copartisan legislators when they have their choice of a copartisan and an outpartisan, both of whom hold the same office. To do so, we focus on the seventeen states that have one U.S. senator from each of the two major parties. In particular, we compare citizens' self-reported preference for contacting their copartisan senator to the self-reported

preference for contacting their outpartisan senator and find that citizens consistently report greater interest in contacting their copartisan senator. Moreover, consistent with our theory, we find that the preference for contacting copartisans is larger when subjects have information about their senators' party affiliations and persists whether or not ideological considerations are at stake.

Study 1's approach has strengths and weaknesses. Our comparison between citizens' contacting the copartisan rather than the outpartisan senator is not a perfect counterfactual—that could only come from changing the partisanship *of the same politician*—but it does hold constant attributes of citizens and the effects of political office. Moreover, the within-subjects design facilitates well-powered question-wording experiments to probe the resilience of these effects. Nevertheless, the self-reported and hypothetical nature of the dependent variable leaves Study 1 open to demand effects, a pitfall our other studies help address.

Data and methods

Study 1 draws from two distinct samples. First, we fielded a pilot study on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) crowdsourcing service (N=150) (Berinsky et al. 2012). Second, we repeated the study—and replicated the findings—on a larger (N=330) sample collected by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Whereas MTurk is a convenience sample, SSI is a diverse national panel built through targeted recruitment in various online communities that compares

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favorably with Census benchmarks.[3] The MTurk sample was fielded between December 28 to 30, 2013, and the SSI sample was fielded February 21 to 25, 2014.

After introductory questions collecting subjects' demographic information and issue opinions (part of a separate investigation), subjects were asked about how they might express their political views about the Social Security program. In a baseline version of the question (experimental variations explained below), they were asked:

> *Several government programs pay benefits to many Americans. Social Security is one example of such a program, but there are others. Suppose you heard about a proposal the U.S. Senate was considering to make a change to Social Security that you did not like. How likely would you be to do each of the following?*

There was then a grid with five activities, presented in a random order: "Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper"; "Voice your concerns through social media, such as Facebook or Twitter"; "Encourage your friends and neighbors to sign a petition"; "Contact Senator [Name], a Democrat"; and "Contact Senator [Name], a Republican," where the names were programmed to be appropriate for the respondent's state.[4] The response

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[3] Of course, the sample we report here is not reflective of the national population for the simple reason that our design leads us to focus on respondents in the seventeen states with one U.S. Senator from each party. We report sample demographics in our Supporting Information.

[4] As is evident, the two items focused on contact the senators were our main interest. The other items were included for two reasons. First, we thought including only the items focused on senators would present too stark a comparison. Presenting, as we do, the key items as part of a menu of several actions makes the comparison between the copartisan and the outpartisan more subtle. Second, we conjectured that citizens who are represented by *two* outpartisans (a part of the sample not relevant to our hypothesis here, and thus not reported) would compensate by allocating their contact energies in other ways, but this conjecture was not supported.

options were Certain, Extremely likely, Very likely, Somewhat likely, and Not at all likely.

Our study also included two manipulations that provide robustness checks for our theory of partisan motivated communication. The first of these stemmed from our concern that partisan preference, if found to exist, might be driven by familiarity rather than psychological aversion. By virtue of being on party mail and canvassing lists, or by attending to one's own party primary, a citizen might be more likely to recognize a copartisan's name than the outpartisan's. This familiarity could lead to a greater contact propensity for the copartisan, but would not be a *preference* per se. One implication of our account is that removing party labels should decrease the preference for contacting a copartisan senator, since partisan considerations may grow less salient, and since some subjects will not know which party each senator belongs to. To test whether this pattern holds, we randomly assigned whether senators' party labels were included in the response items.

The second manipulation represents an effort to examine how far-reaching a preference for contacting copartisans might be. One possibility is that citizens have a preference for contacting copartisans when there are ideological considerations in play, but are indifferent between copartisans and outpartisans otherwise. This pattern might emerge, for instance, if the copartisan preference arises from a perception (by citizens) that partisan rifts are insurmountable—that, when it comes to divisive issues with ideological overtones, critical feedback will receive little heed. Our theory, in

contrast, suggests that the preference for contacting copartisans might reach beyond hot-button policy issues. If this preference arises from an aversion to communicating with outpartisan legislators in general, it should emerge in ideological and non-ideological contexts alike.

As a test of whether the copartisan preference is contingent in this way, half the subjects in our sample saw a version of the question where we attempted to minimize ideological considerations. The question focused on constituent services (i.e. "casework"), a realm of activity that legislators like to emphasize precisely because it generally avoids implicating traditional partisan divisions (e.g., Serra and Cover 1992; Butler et al. 2012; Grimmer 2013). Subjects were asked whether they would contact each senator not to express their opinions, but for help dealing with the bureaucracy. To maximize parallelism with the formulation above, we retained the mention of Social Security. The alternative question read:

> *Several government programs pay benefits to many Americans. Social Security is one example of such a program, but there are others. Suppose there was an error and you did not receive a government benefit to which you were rightly entitled. How likely would you be to do each of the following.*

The response items were unchanged in the Casework formulation, although the Casework formulation was fully crossed with the Party Label manipulation, making for a 2×2 factorial design.

Results

The main test statistic for Study 1 is the mean within-subject difference between self-reported likelihood of contacting the copartisan senator and self-reported likelihood of contacting the outpartisan senator. We code each senator as being a copartisan or an outpartisan with respect to the subject,[5] and then define Copartisan Preference as the subject's preference for contacting the copartisan minus her preference for contacting the outpartisan (scaled to run -1 to 1). Thus, subjects who register a stronger preference for contacting their copartisan senator have positive values of Copartisan Preference. Negative values of Copartisan Preference reflect a preference for contacting an outpartisan senator. Values of zero on Copartisan Preference reflect indifference.

Table 1 and Figure 1 report Study 1's main results. In the table, Copartisan Preference is regressed on an intercept (which allows examination of the bias as averaged across experimental conditions). There are also models that regress Copartisan Preference on indicators for each condition and their interaction.[6] In the figure, the y-axis refers to the mean level of Copartisan Preference in each condition.

As can be seen, partisans in both samples tend to show a greater preference for contacting their copartisan senator, consistent with our hypothesis. To convey the basic result in more intuitive terms, we find (in

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[5] Party identification had been previously measured on the same survey using the standard ANES question. Strong partisans, weak partisans, and leaners are all included in the main analyses below. Independents are not, since we cannot define either senator as a copartisan or outpartisan.

[6] The SSI sample is sufficiently diverse that we can generate probability weights to make the sample more reflective of the national population. However, because the study is experimental in nature, here we present the unweighted results. Weighted results, which lead to the same conclusions, are available upon request.

both samples) that more than 23% of respondents report a preference for contacting a copartisan. Less than 7% report a preference for contacting the outpartisan.

Differences across experimental conditions are also consistent with our hypothesis. First, consider the effect of removing party labels. In both samples, Copartisan Preference is stronger when party labels are present which, as we discuss above, is consistent with partisanship itself playing a role in generating copartisan preference. However, Copartisan Preference is also significantly positive (p<.02 in both samples) when party labels are absent, propitious for the generalizability of this effect. Next, the groups of columns in each panel show the effects separately for whether the scripts asked respondents to consider whether the issue at hand concerned a policy or constituency service matter. Here, we find no effect from manipulating whether the contact context concerns a bill versus casework, a result that suggests copartisan contacting preference spills over even into domains where policy concerns should fade into the background. We return to this result in the discussion.[7]

Figure 1. Experimental Results, Study 1

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[7] The unique representational environment in the US Senate also potentially foretells special significance for the effects we uncover in this study and the next. Evidence suggests that US Senators feel special pressure to differentiate themselves from each other as they seek to form a unique reputation in the minds of a shared set of voters (Schiller 2000). Our results suggest that Senators representing the very same states might differ for yet another reason: the different balance of communication they will receive from copartisans and outpartisans.
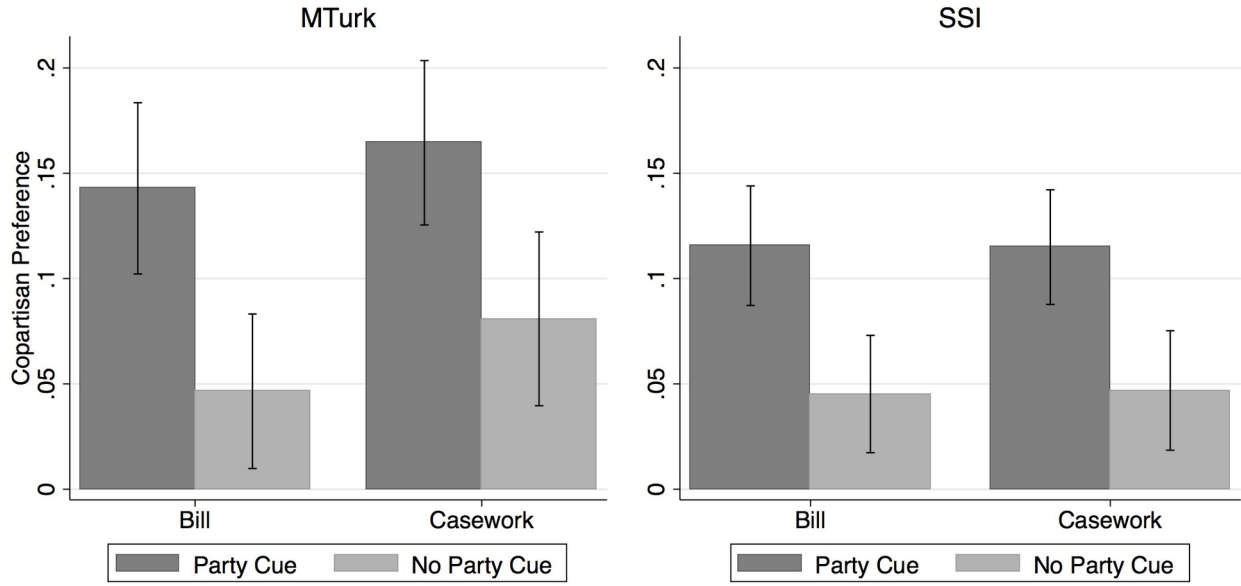
Mean levels of Copartisan Preference, *depending on experimental condition. Whiskers indicate standard errors.*

Table 1. Preference for Copartisan, by condition

	MTurk Sample			SSI Sample		
Copartisan Preference (Intercept)	**0.107****	**0.154****	**0.143****	**0.081****	**0.115****	**0.116****
	(0.020)	**(0.034)**	**(0.052)**	**(0.014)**	**(0.021)**	**(0.028)**
No Partisan Label	--	-0.092*	-0.096	--	-0.069*	-0.070
	--	(0.040)	(0.058)	--	(0.028)	(0.039)
Casework	--	--	0.022	--	--	-0.001
	--	--	(0.068)	--	--	(0.042)
No Label × Casework	--	--	0.013	--	--	0.002
	--	--	(0.081)	--	--	(0.056)
Observations	150	150	150	330	330	330

** = p<0.01, * = p<0.05.

OLS models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. The samples include partisans in the seventeen states represented by one Republican and one Democratic senator. Independents are excluded. The dependent variable is Copartisan Preference, *so positive values equate to a preference for contacting copartisans.*

Study 2: Field Experiments With A Liberal Interest Group

Study 1 presented subjects with a choice in which they directly consider their own likelihood of contacting a copartisan and an outpartisan senator. The virtue of this approach is that, because both senators hold the same office, it allows the influence of copartisanship to emerge clearly. The design, however, also had some weaknesses. Subjects were aware of participating in research, so their responses might be colored by demand characteristics, such as the desire to affirm their partisan leanings (Bullock et

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al. 2013). The dilemma our subjects faced was also somewhat artificial, leaving open the possibility that citizens distinguish between copartisans and outpartisans when the two are starkly presented side-by-side, but not in more typical circumstances, such as when prompted by an interest group. Finally, it queried subjects' hypothetical intentions, which might or might not reflect how they actually would behave.

Our next study considers two field experiments conducted by an advocacy group, data that complement the evidence from Study 1 in two important ways. First, whereas Study 1 relied on responses within an academic survey, the field experiments are more naturalistic: they allow us to observe citizens responding to real-world political stimuli instead of a survey instrument. Second, Study 2 employs a between-subjects design, reducing concern the results reflect demand effects. Finally, the field experiments examine real behaviors instead of self-reported intentions on surveys.

Data and methods

The experiments took place through two organizing campaigns conducted by a liberal interest group. The group maintains a list of several million Americans who have opted in to receive notices about opportunities for political activism. Both campaigns concerned Senator Feinstein's FISA Improvements Act, Senate Bill 1631 in the 113th Senate. Senator Feinstein drafted the bill in response to the revelations of Edward Snowden about the

National Security Agency's surveillance programs. The bill proposed some regulation and oversight of the NSA but also would establish the legality of many of the programs Edward Snowden's summer 2013 disclosures brought to light. The group that conducted the experiment opposed the bill because it would codify many of these NSA programs, to which it objected.

The group sent emails to its members asking them to contact their senators and request that they oppose the bill. As part of internal studies of how to increase the effectiveness of their outreach efforts, the group randomly assigned which of each recipient's two senators he or she was asked to contact. Therefore, in the seventeen states with senators of two parties, half the message recipients were asked to contact their Republican senator, and half were asked to contact their Democratic senator. The group conducted two such studies: one focused on generating signatures on petitions addressed to Senators and the other focused on generating phone calls to their offices.

Because the group in question is very liberal in its orientation, and because its mailing list is opt-in on the basis of performing liberal activism with the group, it is safe to assume that the proportion of message recipients who see themselves as Democrats vastly exceeds the proportion who see themselves as Republicans.[8] Therefore, if the outpartisan communication aversion hypothesis holds true, recipients should be more likely to engage in

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[8] Indeed, the group has supported numerous election campaigns seeking to defeat Republican Members of Congress.

activism when the message asks them to contact their Democratic senator than when it asks them to contact the Republican.

Petition Experiment

In the first experiment, the group asked members to sign an online petition. There were 117,984 message recipients in the seventeen split-delegation states, and 13,253 of them signed the petition (11.2%). In Table 2, we regress (OLS) the binary Signed indicator on the treatment indicator for the copartisan condition.[9] The top-left coefficient means that the signing rate was 0.7 percentage points higher in the copartisan condition, a significant difference. The dataset provided to us also includes a small number of covariates, and including them in the model likely sharpens our estimate of the treatment effect, so we present the results accounting for this information as well.[10] As can be seen, this inclusion does not change inferences.

Phone Call Experiment

Signing a petition is an easy task that takes just a few moments. Does the preference for contacting copartisans also apply to more effortful actions? There is evidence that it does. The interest group followed up its

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[9] Our outcome is binary, but we present OLS results, rather than logit or probit, because it is easier to interpret and still leads to consistent inferences (e.g., Freedman 2008). The results are nevertheless robust to using logit and probit models instead and attain the same level of statistical significance with these models.

[10] The covariates are the number of days the message recipient has been on the mailing list, and the (logged) number of previous activities she had completed. Both of these variables are highly significant. We also have information on subjects' zip code, which we enter as fixed effects. (Results available upon request.)

initial solicitation with a second email asking its members to call one of their senators' offices about opposing the bill. Calling merits separate attention because it requires a more substantial time investment and, for this reason, might influence legislators more powerfully (e.g., Kollman 1998; Bergan 2009; Congressional Management Foundation 2011).

As in the Petition Experiment, in the Phone Call Experiment the group contacted its members via email and randomized which senator members were urged to contact.[11] Message recipients expressed a desire to call the senator they were assigned by clicking a link in this email reading "Call Senator [SENATOR]…Click here for the sample script and the number to call." (The full text of the email is shown in the Supporting Information.) When clicked, this link took group members to a web page containing the phone number for the senator's office and sample arguments opposing the policy they could deliver. The outcome variable we analyze is whether recipients sought to engage in this form of contact by clicking the link in order to get information on how to call their senator's office.[12]

Not surprisingly, fewer subjects overall sought to engage in this more effortful form of contact relative to petitions—just 3.13% of those prompted. However, as Table 2 reports, subjects were significantly more likely to do so when asked to call their copartisan senator. Again, this effect is robust to the inclusion of controls.

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[11] The sample sizes for the experiments differ for reasons unrelated to the experiment itself: because the Phone Call experiment occurred in close proximity to other mobilization efforts by the organization and it attempts to limit the number of emails its members receive.
[12] Because the activist organization does not have access to the phone records of its members, it cannot directly measure calls actually placed.

In percentage point terms, the effect we observe in the Phone Call experiment is slightly smaller than in the Petition Experiment, although the baseline is also much lower. Alternatively, when viewed as a percentage increase over the control, the effect is larger than in the Petition Experiment, evidence that the copartisan preference might be more important for this more personal and interactive form of contact. Put differently, in the Phone Call Experiment it appears that about 1 in 7 group members who sought to contact their copartisan senator would not have done so had the group asked them to contact their outpartisan senator instead. In the Petition Experiment this same figure is about 1 in 15.[13]

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[13] As we elaborate in the general discussion, we think this difference could arise for at least three reasons: because phone calls are a more effortful form of contact, because they represent a more personal interaction than signing a petition, or because the effects are greatest among those willing to make calls in the first place. We would welcome more research on the merits of these possibilities.

Table 2. Results from Two Field Experiments

	Petition Experiment		Phone Call Experiment	
	Signed	Signed	Sought to Call	Sought to Call
Copartisan Senator	0.007**	0.005**	0.004**	0.003**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Controls?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	0.109**	-	0.030**	-
	(0.001)		(0.001)	
Observations	117,984	116,599	64,996	63,672

*** p<0.01, * p<0.05, two-tailed tests.*

Notes: OLS models, standard errors in parentheses.

Together with our earlier results, Study 2 increases our confidence that American citizens' stated preference for contact with copartisan representatives translates into their actual participation decisions. However, like all field experiments, Study 2 has important limitations. The results are limited to one group, one population, and one issue. In our view, the most important question is whether the same dynamics would persist when citizens decide whether to contact their legislators organically, and not at the prompting of an interest group. Study 3 attempts to expand the external validity of Studies 1 and 2 in considering this question.

Study 3: A Regression Discontinuity Design in the US House

Our studies so far consider how citizens react when an interest group or survey researchers present them with the opportunity to contact their representatives. However, this approach may not fully capture significance of copartisan preference when citizens choose to contact legislators of their own accord. For example, if citizens find a political issue particularly distressing, they may not be much encouraged or deterred by their representative's party. On the other hand, subjects in the field experiment may also have felt compelled to contact their representative at the interest group's insistence, pressure that could overwhelm many citizens' preference for contact with copartisans. Our studies so far have also been limited to the US Senate, leaving open the question of whether the same patterns would be present in other institutional contexts.

Study 3 helps address these questions by approaching the copartisan preference from an entirely different angle. We take advantage of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a large (N=32,800) dataset collected online by YouGov/Polimetrix in October and November of 2008.[14] Convenient for our purposes, the 2008 CCES asked each respondent whether he or she has contacted his or her current representative in the U.S. House of Representatives.[15] Because the CCES also collects information on subjects' partisanship, it is possible to compare (retrospective) contact of copartisans to contact of outpartisans.

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[14] See http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cces/home for details on the sampling methodology.
[15] The question wording was, "Have you (or anyone in your family living here) ever contacted Representative [House member name] or anyone in [House member gender] office?" We code responses simply as Yes=1, No=0. Unfortunately, this question was not included on subsequent iterations of the CCES.

So far, this approach leaves unaddressed the matters of endogeneity we emphasized earlier. Fortunately, the prodigious size of the CCES sample allows us to carry out a regression discontinuity (RD) analysis geared to address problems of endogeneity.[16] Increasingly common in the study of political representation and behavior (e.g., Eggers and Hainmueller 2009), RD exploits quasi-random assignment of very close US House races to identify the causal effect of electing a legislator of a particular party under fairly weak conditions (Lee 2008). The intuition that underlines the technique is that, while election outcomes are not generally random, the outcome of *narrowly decided* elections is "as good as" random, and thus can serve to identify causal effects of the outcome. Here, we examine whether Americans living in Congressional districts where a copartisan narrowly won the last US House election are more likely to report having contacted their US House member than Americans living in Congressional districts where the copartisan narrowly lost. The assumptions needed to recover unbiased effects are even weaker in our studies than in other applications of RDs, as analyze variation across partisan groups within districts.

To preview our results, we find that copartisans tend to contact their representatives more when copartisan candidates narrowly won the last election than when copartisan narrowly lost. That is, for example, Democratic citizens in districts where Democratic Members of Congress

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[16] A large sample is important because, as one focuses on the subset of cases where the outcome of an election can be deemed "good as random," the useable sample shrinks substantially. Unfortunately, the sampling techniques used by the ANES make it difficult or impossible to conduct an RD analysis.

narrowly won the last election tend to report having contacted their

Members of Congress more often than do Democratic citizens in districts

where Republican Members of Congress were barely elected. These results

are robust to a variety of different modeling approaches.

Data and methods

As described above, our data come from the 2008 CCES. To this dataset, we

append information on the outcome of the 2006 House elections gathered

from the CQ Press Voting and Elections Collection. We also manually

incorporated information on a small number of special elections that

occurred mid-congressional term. We treated the most recent election in a

given district as the election of record. Based on respondents' reported

partisanship (leaners included), we code each as being represented by a

copartisan or outpartisan House member.

As we note above, a number of studies find narrowly determined

House elections—including some of the same elections we analyze here—to

satisfy the requirements for an RD design. Still, because we are using a

subset of the previously used data (i.e., results from a single, rather than

multiple, election cycles), we examine a number of covariates that might

relate to political engagement to determine whether they are balanced in

they way that allows us to recover the effect of being represented by a co-

partisan, rather than an outpartisan, House member.[17] As reported in the

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[17] Independents are removed from the sample as they are ineligible for being represented by copartisans or outpartisans. Including independents does not alter the results.

Supplementary Information, when we examine respondents in districts where congressional races were determined by one percentage point or less, we find only small and insignificant relationships with performance on a political knowledge battery, frequency of church attendance, self-reported attention to politics, and respondents' income. Like previous studies using some of the same data (e.g. Caughey and Sekhon 2011), however, we do not find perfect balance on every covariate. As the Supplementary Information reports, there are moderate relationships with average strength of Democratic Party identification and proclivity to make political donations. For both of these measures, though, the imbalances are in a direction that make our hypothesis tests more conservative: having a copartisan representative corresponds to *weaker* partisan identification and *fewer* political donations. We expect that these relationships would cause us, if anything, to understate the effect of having a copartisan representative on contact, as people whose copartisans narrowly won the last election tend to be slightly less politically engaged in other ways. There is a positive relationship with strength of Republican identification, though it is modest in size and, by a difference of means test, not statistically significant. Still, as a robustness check, we supplement the results of our RD analysis with a flexible matching approach that accounts for remaining imbalances.[18]

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[18] In the Supplementary Information, we also examine how our results differ as the RD window grows larger. The estimated ATE is very stable, and the results generally remain at the same level of statistical significance.

Results

First, we inspect the potential discontinuity in contact behavior visually.

Using kernel-smoothed polynomial regression, we fit lines that illustrate how

citizens' contact behavior depends on their own party's margin of victory

(Figure 2).[19] We fit separate lines on either side of the potential discontinuity.

As the figure shows, there is a marked increase in the likelihood of a citizen

saying she contacted her congressional representative when the citizen's

own party narrowly won the 2006 election.[20]

Figure 2. Effect of a Copartisan Representative

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[19] We use a triangle kernel and set the bandwidth at .074, which is the MSE-optimal bandwidth for our analysis, as calculated from the method in Calonico et al. (2014a; 2014b). Confidence intervals are constructed by estimating the conditional variance at each point along the regression line using the standard Silverman (1986, 48) estimator.

[20] The main result in Figure 2 is the sharp increase in contact behavior at the point of the discontinuity (the center of the figure). Some might be interested in a separate pattern: the substantial increase in contact probability as outcomes, both wins or losses, become more lopsided. We think this trend might be explained by district characteristics that correlate with having lopsided election outcomes: such districts are more likely to be represented by entrenched, long-serving incumbents who have had ample time to develop relationships and name recognition with constituents, which could lower barriers to citizen contact. It is worth noting that a comparable increase by *both* lines means that the difference between them is roughly constant. (To see this, visualize folding the figure along its vertical midpoint.) Of course, the RD assumptions required to give this difference a causal interpretation become less plausible as districts become more lopsided. Nevertheless, in the Supplementary Information, we show that the difference in contact likelihood is quite constant, and has comparable levels of statistical significance, for regression discontinuity windows between 1 and 20 percentage points (§3.2).
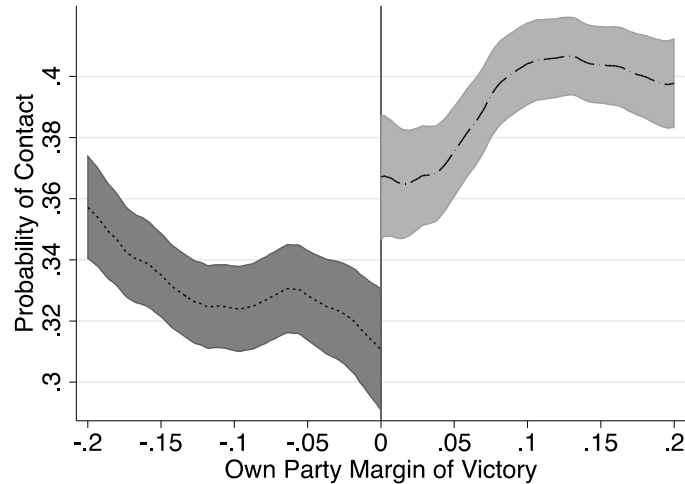
Margin of victory regression discontinuity, as estimated by local polynomial regression (triangle kernel) with MSE-optimal bandwidth. Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals.

For our main statistical analysis, we regress (OLS) self-reported contact on an indicator variable for having a copartisan representative *within the one percentage point RD window described above*. Because our independent variable of interest varies at the district level, we cluster standard errors by district. In Table 3, we present two models: one that includes a fixed effect for each district in the sample, and one that does not. As can be seen, citizens are more likely to contact their representative if a copartisan narrowly won, than if a copartisan narrowly lost—a difference that statistically significant and of a substantively consequential size.[21]

Table 3. Results from CCES Regression Discontinuity Study

	DV = Contacted US House Member		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Copartisan	0.078*	0.072*	0.079*

[21] Given the small number of clusters (districts) in this analysis, we also compute bootstrapped and jackknifed standard errors, with districts are the sampling unit. For both tests, the standard errors are almost identical.

ATE			
SE	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.033)
Method	OLS, no Fixed Effects	OLS w/ Fixed Effects	Genetic Matching
N	1,290	1,290	1,290
# Districts	15	15	15

** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Columns (1) and (2) estimate the effect of a copartisan representative by OLS, within a one percentage point regression discontinuity window. District-clustered standard errors in parentheses. Column (3) estimates the Copartisan ATE by genetic matching within a one percentage point discontinuity window.

For the reasons noted above, we also supplement our RD analysis with a matching analysis that potentially sharpens estimates of treatment effects by comparing observations with similar values on observable characteristics. We use GenMatch (Sekhon 2011), an approach that employs a genetic search algorithm to assign weights to observations so as to maximize covariate balance.[22] To increase the plausibility of the assumption that the treatment variable is independent of subjects' potential outcomes conditioned on observables, we conduct our matching analysis *within* a one percentage point discontinuity window. GenMatch allows us to achieve strong covariate balance (SI, Section 2.1). As reported in Table 2, this estimate of the copartisan ATE corroborates the results from our RD analysis.[23]

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[22] Variables used for matching were those expected to be prognostic of contacting one's legislator: political knowledge, church attendance, Democratic Party ID strength, Republican Party ID strength, age, political activity, interest in politics, and income. Because district fixed effects are included in the models, observable and unobservable attributes of legislators themselves are controlled for, including status as a freshman, tenure in the house, and representational style.

[23] For the matching analysis, standard errors are those proposed by Abadie and Imbens (2006) and calculated by the Matching package for R.

Across all the analyses we employ, the results are strikingly stable. Victory by a copartisan representative appears to increase self-reported contacting of representatives, a result that is significant both statistically and substantively. We take these results as further evidence in favor of partisan motivated communication.

We motivated our discussion of Study 3 by noting that how citizens behave when deciding to spontaneously contact their representatives may differ from how they behave when others prompt them to do so, as in Studies 1 and 2. By contrast, Study 3 asks subjects to report their previous contacting behavior across circumstances, which includes both their own decisions to contact their representatives as well as the mobilized variety of contact we considered in the previous studies.

The results suggest that the total magnitude of copartisan preference across these circumstances is quite sizable. For example, the genetic matching method suggests that the causal effect of being represented by a copartisan on contact is 7.9 percentage points from a baseline of about 31%. This suggests that being represented by a copartisan lead citizens to contact their representatives about 27% more often, the implications of which we expand on in the discussion.

There is one more important takeaway from Study 3. Study 1 leaves open the possibility that copartisan preference does not *decrease* citizen contact of politicians, but rather *displaces* it from an outpartisan to a copartisan. Study 2 does not go far in addressing this possibility because it

focuses on responses to a mobilization campaign. By focusing on members of the House of Representatives, Study 3 gives the strongest evidence that the preference for contacting a copartisan representative silences voices that might otherwise be heard.

Discussion: Preaching To The Choir

Many scholars have worried that partisan attachments serve to insulate citizens from encountering meaningful disagreement with their political views (e.g. Haidt 2012; Mutz 2006; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992). Here, we present evidence that such motivations bear not only on the information citizens receive from elites; they also work in the other direction, isolating elites from hearing the perspectives of the citizens most likely to disagree with them. Drawing evidence from a variety of data, and a mixture of observational and experimental research designs, we found a reliable copartisan preference in communication that manifested in real world participation decisions.

Although not dispositive about the size of this effect in all circumstances, our evidence suggests it can be substantively significant. In Study 1, over 25% of respondents reported a preference for contacting a copartisan. In the Phone Call field experiment, 13% of group members who sought to contact a copartisan senator would not have done so had the senator been an outpartisan instead. On the other hand, the effect size we found in our petition experiment was somewhat smaller. But in Study 3—

arguably the most helpful for contemplating broader effects—the effect is quite large: a 27 percent increase.[24] As we elaborate below, this variation is fruitful topic for future research. Nevertheless, we see consistent evidence that, under a variety of circumstances, it can be quite sizable.

Given how closely elected officials appear to watch the communication they receive from constituents (e.g., Bergan 2009; Congressional Management Foundation 2011; Miler 2010), these findings have important implications for understanding the mindset of elites. As an illustration of one such possibility, consider a simple analysis from the CCES. For Members of Congress who "just won" the 2006 election,[25] 50% of the citizens who reported contacting them were copartisans, compared to only 40% who were from the other party. (The remaining 10% do not state a party identification.) Such a disparity suggests that even legislators making their best effort to represent their constituencies faithfully may place too much weight on the views and priorities of their copartisans. Such implications need not be limited to citizens' policy preferences per se: given evidence that partisan citizens often seem hostile to elite compromises (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Ryan 2013) this bias might also discourage elite cooperation.[26]

Our results also raise an intriguing possibility about the sources of rising partisan polarization. A number of studies show that politicians of

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[24] Note that this paragraph discusses all effects within percentage terms, not percentage point terms. Percentage point differences can be found in our discussion of each Study's results earlier in the paper.

[25] Within 1 percentage point. Results are similar with other windows.

[26] Consistent with this possibility, Broockman and Skovron (2014) find that two candidates running to represent the same district tend to overestimate the degree to which the same voters agree with (divergent) positions.

different parties tend to represent and perceive the very same constituents quite differently (Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Broockman and Skovron 2014; Fiorina and Abrams 2009; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009). This is crucial, for it means that some differences between how Democratic and Republican elites behave do not arise solely from differences in the citizens they represent. Recognizing this, some scholars have turned to institutional factors, such as enhanced tools to enforce party discipline, to explain this representational disconnect (e.g., Theriault 2008). We do not take issue with findings that stress the role of elites, but we note that our results point to a potentially prominent role for citizens in contributing to differences in elite behavior.

The patterns we identify also bear on a number of broader questions. First, although not dispositive, our results are consistent with other research that finds partisanship can behave like a social identity, "spilling over" into behaviors other than vote choice (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyenger and Westwood 2014; Klofstad et al. 2012; Mason 2014). The behavioral patterns we found do not seem to represent mere cheap talk on surveys (e.g., Bullock 2013), but are consistent with the view that partisanship can affect ancillary behavior (e.g., Gerber and Huber 2009; Gift and Gift 2014). To be sure, our results cannot definitively establish what aspect of partisanship leads Americans to prefer contacting copartisans. For instance, we cannot distinguish whether people assume that the outpartisan will not respond to their requests or instead attempt to avoid negative feelings that come from

communicating with an outgroup. However, our results further underline that partisanship's influence is far-reaching.

In addition, the preference for contacting copartisans we find bears on the strategies that interest groups will find attractive as they seek to mobilize supporters. Political outcomes frequently turn on interest groups' ability to manage the scope of conflict (Schattschneider 1960), and observers often welcome the idea of a more energetic and participatory electorate (e.g., Verba et al. 2012). As Study 2 illustrated most vividly, our results suggest that interest groups seeking to drum up the maximum volume of correspondence directed at an elected official might see benefits in urging citizens to contact copartisans. As such, our results resonate with other findings that suggest some strategies which make the electorate more participatory can also exacerbate political ills (e.g., Enos et al. 2014). Making partisan considerations focal in grassroots campaigns might be an effective way to increase citizens' involvement, but it might also serve to further distort legislators' perceptions of their constituencies. Indeed, in Study 1, we found that reminding citizens of their Senators' partisan affiliations made them less interested in contacting outpartisan Senators relative to copartisans.

Our results also point to a number of possible extensions. First, even when citizens are contacting a copartisan, their messages can be supportive ("Keep up the good work"), critical ("You are out of line"), or merely directive ("I want you to support this bill"). Studies 1 and 2 above fit most comfortably

in the directive category, while Study 3 lumps all types of contact together. This combination of approaches requires us to be measured in how much we can conclude about the extent to which the bias we identify causes elites to entrench in their current issue positions versus prognosticate what partisan voters will want. Future work could more systematically examine the content of citizens' contact efforts.

Second, one could imagine the extent of the copartisan bias depending on institutional factors. For instance, the preference for contacting copartisans might be attenuated for state-level offices, where partisan considerations and rhetoric is sometimes subdued. For another possibility, representatives from single-member districts (e.g. the House) might seek to downplay partisanship relative to dual-member districts (e.g. the Senate), since senators are eager to differentiate themselves from each other (Schiller 2000).

Third, our theoretical focus on social identity leads us to think that the extent of bias might depend on the mode of contact. In particular, it is possible citizens exhibit a greater copartisan preference when it comes to especially intense or personal forms of contact, such as speaking to a representative at an event, the very kinds of interactions that research suggests weigh most heavily in legislators' minds (Congressional Management Foundation 2011). Consistent with this potential, the differences we uncover in Study 2 are larger (in percentage terms) when it comes to phone calls—a relatively personal and effortful form of contact—

than for signing a petition. We cannot conclusively establish a relationship between the preference for copartisan contact and how personal this contact is with our data, however, and we would welcome more on the matter.

Despite our general leeriness of a tendency for politicians to live in bubbles, isolated from the views of citizens they are supposed to represent, we can close on a cautiously optimistic note. Across many settings, one of the best ways to address biases in behavior and decision-making is to make individuals aware of the biases in their behavior (e.g., Monteith 1993). For example, sports referees who exhibited racial bias when allocating points and fouls adjusted their behavior once made aware of it (Pope et al. 2014). Likewise, making politicians aware that the balance of communication they receive from constituents is skewed by partisanship might help reduce their misperceptions of their constituents' views and encourage moderation, to the extent politicians wish to do so (Butler and Nickerson 2011).[27] Citizens could benefit from a reminder, too. Divisions are deep; political animosities are rife. But the folks on the other side just might listen.

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[27] Other work suggests that the most effective solution would not be to correct representatives' understanding of the base rate, but rather to highlight exemplars of citizens who do not share their partisanship (Zillmann 1999).

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