In Control but Incoherent

Institutional Power, Electoral Politics, and Message Discipline in Congress

Gechun Lin* Benjamin S. Noble†

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Abstract

Parties build electorally beneficial brands by staying "on message." But when can congressional parties exercise message discipline, who contributes, and how do constituents respond? We build on theories of congressional party discipline to develop a set of competing hypotheses: that institutional power could help or hinder messaging, that Republicans are more effective, and that marginal members contribute less. We test these expectations in House and Senate floor speeches (1973–2016) with a novel, direct, and systematic measure of message discipline using a mix of topic models and contextual embeddings. We show that, generally, institutional power weakens message discipline. However, our results are nuanced: House Republicans leverage procedural power to offset this disadvantage, and marginal members are less likely to be on message. Finally, we provide behavioral evidence that message discipline shapes constituency approval of representatives. Our results contribute to the literature on message politics and have implications for legislator orientation and thermostatic backlash.

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*PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science, Washington University in St. Louis. lingechun.github.io. lingechun@wustl.edu.

†Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of California, San Diego. benjaminnoble.org. b2noble@ucsd.edu.

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> "[T]he party which is able to make its definition of the issues prevail is likely to take over the government."
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> —E. E. Schattschneider (1960), 73

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Congressional leaders emphasize the importance of collective action and party unity in passing policy and winning elections. For example, Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) would remind her caucus that "If you don't have 218 votes, you're just having a conversation" (quoted in Lee 2018, 1470). What Pelosi fails to say is that these conversations play out in public—on the floor, online, and in the media. And public debate about policy is not cheap or vacuous: these conversations can impact a party's reputation and its political success. At its best, cohesive party messaging can shape media coverage, boost support for policy, and improve a party's image. At worst, diffuse messaging can do damage: drawing negative news coverage, diluting a party's brand, confusing voters, and even leading to policy failure (Aldrich 1995; Groeling 2010; Lee 2016; Sellers 2009). Despite these risks, rank-and-file lawmakers frequently fail to promote a consistent and cohesive message. One can find numerous examples of the clichéd headlines: "Democrats in Disarray" and "Republican Civil War," highlighting intra-party disagreement. Collective action of this sort is difficult, and individuals face incentives to free-ride on the party's message or even distance themselves from it. Here, we ask: when are parties more likely to exercise message discipline, which rank-and-file members are most likely to contribute, and what effect does message discipline have on public attitudes?

Existing theories of party unity and discipline suggest answers to these questions, but they are wide ranging, and at times, conflicting. For instance, Cartel Theory argues that the majority party controls the agenda, and consequently, can promote issues that are internally unifying, block those that are internally divisive, and split the minority (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). From this theory, we might expect the majority to possess similar messaging advantages relative to the minority. However, theories of message politics

argue the opposite: that parties without power are liberated from policy responsibility and can focus their efforts on crafting a good message. Where the more powerful party (i.e., the majority or presidential party) must debate policy, come to an internal agreement, and sell the policy to diverse constituencies, the weaker party (i.e., the minority or non-presidential party) can simply stand in opposition (Groeling 2010; Lee 2016). Together, these debates lead to competing predictions about message discipline conditional on institutional power. However, other theories focus on the parties themselves. This research argues that the ideologically homogeneous and hierarchical Republican Party is more cohesive than the Democratic Party, a heterogeneous coalition of groups with competing priorities (Freeman 1986; Grossman and Hopkins 2016; Russell 2021), which could give Republicans a messaging advantage. Finally, theories of legislator orientation hold that rhetorical choices are driven by constituency concerns. Lawmakers are more likely to focus on national politics (Grimmer 2013) and the presidency (Noble 2024) when they represent safer seats—those dominated by their own partisans. Thus, we would expect safe seat lawmakers to be more on message than at-risk lawmakers.

We argue that these competing expectations stem from two key sources. First, theories of party unity often begin—and end—with roll call voting. However, these binary choices provide a best-case scenario for party cohesion; they may paper over internal disagreement that reveals itself in the multi-dimensional opportunities offered by party messaging. Second, theories about rhetoric are typically tested on a small set of cases or indirect measures of message discipline, like communications staffing or party-leader references. Without a direct measure of message discipline, it's difficult to adjudicate between these theories. Doing so is important to our understanding of party unity in a polarized era—which political scientists may misunderstand when focusing solely on the roll call record (Lee 2018). To address these concerns, we build on theories of party discipline, extending their implications to rhetorical behavior and testing them with a direct, systematic, text-based measure of rhetorical discipline. We define our key concept of interest, message

discipline, as the similarity between a rank-and-file member's speech and a co-partisan congressional leader's speech on the same topic on the same day. Given leadership's primacy in developing and coordinating messages (Harris 2005; Sellers 2009), we assume that as a rank-and-file lawmaker sounds more like her party's leaders, she is more "on message." To operationalize this understanding of message discipline, we turn to House and Senate floor speeches delivered between 1973–2016 (Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy 2018). We first determine *what* topics lawmakers discuss using a keyword assisted topic model (Eshima, Imai and Sasaki 2023). Then, we determine *how similar* each rank-and-file speech is to their congressional party's leaders speech on the same topic using contextual document embeddings. This process produces a scalar value ranging between -1 and 1, where higher values indicate that the lawmaker's speech is more similar to her leader's, indicative of higher message discipline.

With this measure, we subject the our competing hypotheses to a series of empirical tests. First, we find that lawmakers are less effective messengers when their party holds institutional power (most consistent with Lee 2016, 61). In particular, a Senator is less likely to be on message when her party is in the majority rather than the minority. We bolster this result with a quantitative case study focused on the "Jeffords Switch" (Monroe and Den Hartog 2019). When Republicans unexpectedly lose their majority mid-session, they begin to exercise greater message discipline. Similarly, we show House members exercise weaker message discipline when they are both the majority and presidential party as compared to when they are in the "deep minority" (Green 2015). Beyond this key result, we find several intriguing deviations that accord with the alternative theories—adding nuance to our understanding of party messaging. In the House, a member in the (non-presidential) majority exercises *more* message discipline than when she is in the minority—speaking to the importance of procedural power in promoting collective action (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). However, this result is seemingly driven by House Republicans, who exercise more message discipline with institutional power, whereas

Democrats exercise less, consistent with theories of party differences (Grossman and Hopkins 2016; Russell 2021; Theriault and Rohde 2011). As predicted by theories of legislator orientation (Grimmer 2013; Noble 2024), lawmakers representing marginal seats are consistently less likely to be on message. In addition to these institutional results, we use data from the Cooperative Elections Study to show that message discipline shapes constituents' approval of their representatives. Respondents who pay particular attention to the news—a key mechanism of message diffusion (Groeling 2010; Sellers 2009)—reward co-partisans who stay on message while potentially punishing out-partisans who do the same. These behavioral results underline the key tradeoff members must consider between collective action and individual reputation (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010).

Our novel and systematic measure of message discipline, the first of its kind, allows us to more directly test theories of congressional messaging, identifies theoretically relevant nuance, and opens the door for future research on message politics. Finally, we speculate that the opposition party's asymmetrical messaging strength could be one cause of thermostatic backlash in congressional elections (Grossmann and Wlezien 2024).

Theories of Message Discipline and Party Brands

Members of Congress are motivated by, and take actions to achieve, individual goals: re-election, policy, and institutional power (Fenno 1973; Mayhew 1974). However, lawmakers are also members of a party. Their individual success depends, to an extent, on a common brand they share with other co-partisans (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 110)—and their individual actions can contribute to, or detract from, its value. For congressional parties, core brand attributes include the party's legislative record, its rhetorical self-presentation, and public perceptions (Groeling 2010). The brand is more valuable when it provides differentiated information to voters, which requires that members are

consistent and cohesive in their words and actions. Consistent action, in the form of party cohesion on roll call votes and in rhetorical appeals, maximizes the likelihood that the media will echo, and that voters will receive and understand, what parties stand for and what they would do if given institutional power (Sellers 2009; Lee 2016). As party brands are collective goods, members face incentives to free ride off the efforts of co-partisans without contributing, or by taking inconsistent actions to promote their own distinctive image. To deter these behaviors, party leaders internalize the costs of collective action, crafting messaging campaigns and strategically manipulating the legislative agenda to lower costs and faciliate compliance (Arnold 1990; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Harris 2005; Sellers 2009).

Most studies of party unity and branding focus on voting (e.g. Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), providing an incomplete picture. The roll call record is particularly sensitive to selection effects. Leaders do not propose a random sample of issues. They choose those that maximize intra-party unity and inter-party division, creating a false impression of internal agreement (Lee 2016, 2018). Second, what lawmakers *say* as part of the policymaking process is important to voter perceptions of party unity. Even if voters hold accurate beliefs about how their representatives vote (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010), these beliefs are shaded by how lawmakers rhetorically frame and explain their actions (Cormack 2016; Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2014; Grose, Malhotra and Parks Van Houweling 2015). What lawmakers say is likely more difficult for leaders to control than how they vote. Further, debate over a particular issue can play out over a series of weeks or months, shaping public impressions well before the final up-or-down vote (Harris 2005). Analyzing party messaging, then, can help us develop a more comprehensive view of party discipline.

When it comes to messaging, "leadership's difficult task is to encourage members to invest time and energy to support collective efforts rather than giving a speech on another issue or a district commemoration or concern, or engaging in some other activity

Table 1: Theories of Congressional Behavior and Implications for Message Discipline

Hypothesis	Summary of General Theory	Implications for Message Discipline
Institutional Power		
Cartel Theory	Parties with institutional power control the agenda, select unifying issues.	Institutional power, $\uparrow$
Message Politics	Parties with institutional power must govern, weaker parties focus on messaging and opposition.	Institutional power, $\downarrow$
Chamber Differences	House speeches must be germane, selection of speakers by floor leaders. Senate leaders have less control, minority has more power.	House $>$ Senate
Party Coalitions		
Democrats in Disarray	Republican coalition is ideological and homogeneous. Democratic coalition is heterogeneous, focused on group benefits.	Rep. $>$ Dem.
Legislator Orientation		
Constituency Concerns	Safe seat lawmakers focus on national issues, president. Marginal members prioritize appropriations, local issues.	Safe $>$ marginal

altogether (legislative work, constituent casework, and such) that might advance their own goals" (Harris 2005, 128). Given the importance of party branding, leadership almost always has an incentive to develop and encourage promotion of a party message. For the rank-and-file, however, the opportunity costs of participating may vary. Existing research on collective action in Congress has produced a set of (sometimes competing) theories that could explain this variation. Here, we extend several general theories of congressional behavior and collective action to rhetorical message discipline. We summarize these debates in Table 1.

Institutional Power. The literature on party branding suggests that institutional power (i.e., control of the majority and/or presidency) may either promote or degrade message discipline. On the one hand, Cartel Theory argues that the majority manipulates the legislative agenda to advance issues that feature intra-party agreement and that split the opposition (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). Although primarily a theory of voting,

Cartel Theory has implications for messaging (Sellers 2009). If the majority focuses on internally unifying issues, the rank-and-file should find it easier to cohere around a set of arguments and positions. If the majority simultaneously focus on issues that divide the minority, the latter will find it difficult to advance a unified message. Similarly, the president is a focal point in congressional elections (e.g., Jacobson 2015). Given the strategic incentives to support one's own president (Lee 2009) and the natural ideological affinity between the president and congressional party (Bond and Fleisher 1990), co-partisan lawmakers may find it easier to cohere around the president's agenda. Some out-partisans may feel a need to support an opposite party president, for example, when he is popular in their constituency (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003). Accordingly, the *Cartel Theory Hypothesis* predicts that greater institutional power will be associated with greater message discipline.

On the other hand, theories of message politics suggest the opposite: that institutional power hinders message discipline. Governing is difficult. Even if the majority agrees about broad goals and ultimately votes as a unified block, they must debate the details and build consensus within and across parties. As Lee (2016, 54) writes, "Parties that have more power...expect to be held more accountable for governing failures. As a consequence, they are generally more eager to obtain the bipartisan cooperation...even if it comes at some cost to the clarity of their party's message." They must also sell the policy to their distinct constituencies, which may require the use of distinct arguments (Grimmer 2013). The minority, by contrast, has no responsibility. They do not need to specify concrete alternatives to the majority's agenda. They do not need to sell any policy change to constituents. They can propose pie-in-the-sky bills that would never become law. They can be the party of "no" (Green 2015; Lee 2016). Similarly, the president can place divisive issues on the agenda that his congressional co-partisans will feel compelled to support (Beckmann 2010; Canes-Wrone 2006). Again, the presidential out-party can coordinate around a strategy of opposition to the president (Noble 2024). Thus, the *Message Politics*

Hypothesis holds that greater institutional power will be associated with weaker message discipline.

We also expect to observe differences between chambers with respect to institutional power. Just as the Senate majority has less control over its legislative agenda (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Smith 2007; Smith, Ostrander and Pope 2013; but see Gailmard and Jenkins 2007), we expect Senate leaders to be less effective at controlling the message than House leaders. In the Senate, rank-and-file members have the right to be recognized and speak without interruption, even if topics are not germane. In the House, debate is often "controlled" outside of one-minute or special order periods. Party floor managers choose who will speak in advance, debate must be germane, and speaking time is limited. These procedural powers allow the parties to select for message discipline, and as such, the *Chamber Differences Hypothesis* expects that institutional power will increase message discipline in the House but weaken it in the Senate.

Party Coalitions. Beyond institutional power, the two parties have different coalitions and cultures, which could affect their ability to exercise message discipline. Where the Republican party is hierarchical and ideologically oriented, the Democratic party is pluralistic and heterogeneous (Freeman 1986; Lelkes and Sniderman 2016). This divide dates back to Roosevelt and the New Deal, when several social groups (e.g., African Americans, labor, the urban poor, etc) became core constituencies of the Democratic party—expanding the size of the coalition while complicating the ability to advance a common policy agenda (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). These coalitional differences lead to differences in how parties present themselves and make arguments in public. For example, in presidential campaigns "Democratic speeches discussed the actors involved in campaigns and featured cues of rhetorical coalition building whereas Republican speeches spoke of ideals and employed a more unified style" (Jarvis 2004, 409). To the extent that the Democratic Party focuses on discrete benefits and appeals to identity groups while

the Republican Party appeals to core ideological principles, the *Democrats in Disarray Hypothesis* predicts that rank-and-file Republicans will exercise greater message discipline than Democrats.

Legislator Orientation. When considering costs and benefits of promoting the party message, legislators may also consider their constituency. What legislators say, and in particular how they frame their votes and the kind of representation they provide, has a causal impact on how they are evaluated (Broockman and Butler 2017; Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2014; Grose, Malhotra and Parks Van Houweling 2015; Rogowski and Stone 2020). For legislators representing safe seats, where their party is dominant, there may be little tension between promoting the party message and the message that will perform best in their state or district. Lawmakers representing marginal districts, those where their party is less dominant, may want to downplay their connection to salient, national debates (Grimmer 2013) or the president (Noble 2024). These members may feel that silence, ambiguity, or the promotion of an alternative message is less costly and more beneficial for their electoral prospects. Therefore, the *Constituency Concerns Hypothesis* suggests that safe seat lawmakers will exercise greater message discipline than marginal members.

Measuring Message Discipline in Floor Speeches

To this point, theories of message discipline have generally been tested with indirect measures, including case studies (Harris 2005; Sellers 2009), narrow definitions focusing on references to party leaders (Groeling 2010; Green 2015; Noble 2024), and observable implications like communications staffing (Lee 2016). Here, we develop a systematic, direct measure of message discipline using the text of House and Senate floor speeches delivered between 1973–2016. We focus on floor speeches because what members say on the floor is often germane to the legislation on which they vote. Our corpus, then,

is subject to the same selection biases that affect the roll call record and serve as a more apples-to-apples test of these theories. We expect message discipline to be higher on the floor than in other constituency targeted communications where lawmakers can discuss non-legislative issues, where the issue space is less constrained, and where leaders have weaker influence. Further, floor debate provides an individualized measure of what members prioritize and how they communicate those priorities to other lawmakers, donors, and constituents (e.g., Ban and Kaslovsky 2024; Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Witko et al. 2021). What members say on the floor is often correlated with, and can generalize to, other forms of legislator communication (Grimmer 2013; Noble 2024; Russell and Wen 2021; but see Blum, Cormack and Shoub 2023).

A Novel Measure of Message Discipline

Our corpus of floor speeches comes from Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy (2018), and our time series begins on the first day of the 93rd Congress (January 3, 1973) and ends during the 114th Congress (September 9, 2016, when the authors' data ends).[1] We use this text data to measure message discipline at the speech level, which we define as the degree to which a rank-and-file lawmaker's speech is similar to that of her party leader's speech at the topic-day level. We define party leader broadly to include majority and minority leaders, as well as other sub-leaders as identified by Volden and Wiseman (2014). Here, we are assuming leaders' messages are representative of the messages they would like co-partisans to echo, and we are agnostic to why members appear on message—whether because their preferences mirror those of their leaders or due to direct or indirect pressure.

To make this concept more concrete, we provide an example from debates over the Affordable Care Act in the 111th Congress (2009–2010). On November 3, 2009, Minority Leader Boehner (R-OH) attacked the Democratic plan saying, "The Speaker's 1,990-

[1]We exclude non-substantive speeches (i.e., those with 30 words or less) and speeches given between January 3–20 in a presidential transition year.

page government takeover of health care raises the cost of insurance for American families and it will add to our already exploding debt" (Congressional Record, November 3, 2009, H12211). Echoing the Minority Leader's message, Representative Luetkemeyer (R-MO) said, "as we continue to discuss the health care bill, this monstrous health care bill, one thing is clear: American families simply cannot afford this attempt at a government takeover of healthcare." Although not identical, both statements emphasize the cost of legislation and use the phrase "government takeover of health care" (used 14 other times during that day's debate). Using the measure we describe below (which ranges between -1 and 1), these two statements have a high similarity score of 0.83. Unlike Representative Luetkemeyer, Representative Coffman (R-CO) emphasized a different set of considerations focused on jobs and small businesses, saying "What I think is of concern to those of us from Colorado, and I think many people across the country, is what is the impact upon jobs and employers. There is a concern about small business in particular" (Congressional Record, November 3, 2009, H12261). Although cost is an aspect of the criticism, this message focuses on small business rather than big government, and accordingly, receives a lower similarity score of 0.49.

In line with the example, our measure of message discipline should capture semantic similarity in speeches that discuss the same topic on the same day. To that end, we proceed in two steps. First, we isolate the most prevalent topic of each speech in our corpus using a keyword assisted topic model (keyATM, Eshima, Imai and Sasaki 2023). Unlike unsupervised LDA, keyATM allows researchers to point the model in the direction of a set of topics through the use of keywords, which we defined according to the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) coding scheme (Jones et al. 2023). This global project categorizes objects like bills, party platforms, and news headlines according to 21 major topics including the macroeconomy, health, and foreign affairs. Through this method, we are able to focus on a well-known and stable set of topics that we expect to persist across our time series, facilitating over-time comparisons. To generate our keywords, we downloaded

the Democratic and Republican Party Platforms from 1948–2020, which have been hand-coded at the quasi-sentence level by Wolbrecht et al. (2023) according to the CAP code book. We calculated the tf-idf score of each stemmed word in this corpus within each topic, and we chose the top 15 words in each category as our topic-specific keywords (See Appendix A for the full keyword list). We also used our substantive knowledge to create two additional non-CAP topics specific to our corpus: parliamentary language (e.g., quorum, yield) and uninformative words (e.g., people, think).

After creating the keyword lists, we applied standard pre-processing to our corpus (see Grimmer, Roberts and Stewart 2022).[2] We fit a unique keyATM model to each two-year Congress in each chamber separately. Doing so allows for language to vary across congressional sessions while keyATM stabilized the topics. After fitting these models, we assigned each speech a single topic label according to the most prevalent topic identified by the model. We then dropped all speeches categorized as primarily parliamentary or filler, which could artificially inflate message discipline.

Although topic prevalence provides one measure of message discipline, it is not sufficient, as the selection of issues likely reflects the agenda-setting power of floor leaders. Further, topics themselves are insufficiently granular to understand variation in how members discuss or frame the same topic. We are interested in the similarity of partisan rhetoric *within* issues. Here, we leverage OpenAI's `text-embedding-3-small` model to convert each speech in our model to a high-dimensional numeric vector. Specific details about the model architecture and training processes of OpenAI's embedding models are proprietary and not fully disclosed. To the best of our knowledge, OpenAI's embedding models are built upon transformer architectures closely associated with the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) family large language models (LLM, Yenduri et al. 2024). Considering the length and complexity of congressional speech tran-

[2]We tokenize to unigrams, remove non-text characters, lowercase words, remove a set of stop words (those listed as stop words in the `quanteda` package and a specific set of Congressional Record stop words identified by Ash, Morelli and Van Weelden (2017)) and those with fewer than three characters, stem words, and remove words that appear fewer than 100 times or across fewer than 100 speeches.

scripts, there are two advantages of using LLM-based embeddings. In particular, word embedding models such as word2vec (Mikolov et al. 2013) and GloVe (Pennington and Manning 2014) only assign a fixed, static vector to each word in a vocabulary, whereas `text-embedding-3-small` model provides contextualized vector representations of the whole input text sequence.[3] Due to scaling model size and the massive training corpus of LLMs (Minaee et al. 2024), the `text-embedding-3-small` model is capable of handling longer sequences (8,191 tokens per input)[4] as compared to, e.g., BERT (Devlin et al. 2018) (limited to 512 tokens) and other smaller, pre-trained language models (PLM). In addition, PLMs require task-specific fine-tuning with domain data to achieve better model performance (Wang 2023), but extant literature has demonstrated that LLMs (especially GPT) are effective zero- and few-shot learners (Rathje et al. 2024), possessing the ability to solve unseen tasks based on instructions and prompt engineering (Yang et al. 2023; Zhang et al. 2023). OpenAI's embedding models are versatile and well-suited to our task; the resulting embedding vectors capture within-topic variation driven by semantic similarties and differences in paired speeches.

With these speech-level embedding vectors, we measure the similarity of speech pairs in our corpus by computing their distance using cosine similarity, as recommended in OpenAI's documentation.[5] Here, we pair each speech given by any party leader on a topic with each other speech given by a co-partisan rank-and-file lawmaker on the same topic on the same day. By restricting pairs to the same day, we maximize the likelihood that speeches on the same topic cover the same underlying sub-issue. After constructing these party-topic-day-speech dyads, we compute the cosine similarity of the paired embedding vectors. This method produces a scalar quantity that can theoretically range from -1 to 1,

[3]We alternatively calculate the cosine similarity of speeches based on their GloVe embedding vectors. The correlation coefficients between these two measures in both chambers are small: 0.22 (in the House) and 0.14 (in the Senate). For a comprehensive discussion of the disadvantages of word embedding approaches in measuring text similarity, see Lin (N.d.).

[4]With a window length of 8,191 tokens, the model can encode nearly every speech in our corpus. We drop the 2,770 (0.04%) of speeches that exceed this maximum length.

[5]See: https://platform.openai.com/docs/guides/embeddings/.

which tells us how similar the rank-and-file member's speech is to that given by her party leader. Higher values indicate the two speeches are more related to each other, suggesting that the rank-and-file member is more "on message" than a member with a lower cosine similarity score. Negative values would indicate dissimilar or unrelated inputs, which we don't expect to have in our data consisting of only within-topic comparisons. Our final dataset contains 357,264 speech-pairs in the House and 413,925 in the Senate, and empirically, our scale ranges from 0 to 1.

Validity of Our Measure of Message Discipline

To demonstrate that our measure of message discipline identifies semantically similar speeches, we conduct two validation tests. First, we assess face validity: do speeches appear qualitatively similar as they approach a score of 1? Although important, we note that assessing face validity is not straightforward; speeches are long and similarity can be multi-dimensional. Even so, we feel face establishing face validity is an important first step. To that end, in the supplemental appendix, we present the full text of a series of paired speeches at different cosine similarity thresholds. To choose these speeches, we randomly sample four observations from pairs of speeches where cosine similarity scores fall between (0.2, 0.25), (0.5, 0.55), (0.7, 0.75), and (0.9, 1).[6] In Appendix A.2, we show that the pair of speeches with a cosine similarity score above 0.9 discussed the same event using almost identical language. The one with a cosine similarity of about 0.7 addressed the same subject matter and shared similar policy positions, though they expressed slightly different concerns. Speeches with a cosine similarity around 0.5 were loosely related to the same issue categories but had limited overlap. Finally, the pair with a cosine similarity of 0.2 had completely different focuses and shared little if any common themes or language.

[6]For ease of comparison, we restrict to select speeches less than 500 words. To guarantee replicable results, we use set.seed(999) in R to generate random samples of speeches.

Table 2: Convergent Validity of Message Discipline Measure

	(1)	(2)
Same State Lawmakers	0.028***	
	(0.003)	
Ideological Proximity		0.051***
		(0.008)
Fixed Effects		
Chamber	✓	✓
Congress	✓	✓
Topic	✓	✓
Num.Obs.	770,721	770,721
R2 Adj.	0.201	0.200
R2 Within Adj.	0.001	0.000

Note: The dependent variable in both models is a measure of similarity between two speeches.
Coefficients come from ordinary least squares models with standard errors clustered at the pair-level.

Although this face validity check is reassuring, it is hardly systematic. To that end, we rely on convergent (or hypothesis) validity: whether our measure of speech similarity covaries with other features that we expect to induce similarity between lawmakers. Here we expect that lawmakers' speeches should increase in similarity when they (i) represent the same state and (ii) as they become more ideologically proximate. In Table 2, that is what we find. Controlling for chamber, Congress, and topic fixed effects, we see in column 1 that same-state lawmakers deliver speeches that are about 3 percentage points more similar than pairs who do not hail from the same state. In column 2, we show that when the negative squared distance between two lawmakers decreases by one point on the NOMINATE scale, their speeches are about 5 percentage points more similar. Together, these two tests provide evidence that our scores are a valid measure of message discipline.

Message Discipline over Time

In Figure 1, we visualize message discipline over time. On the x-axis, we plot time in terms of two-year congresses. On the y-axis, we plot the mean level of intra-party message discipline for Democrats (in blue) and Republicans (in red). The background shading indicates which party held the majority during that period. In the top panel, we show this relationship for the Senate, where we find that the Senate minority almost always exercises greater message discipline than the majority. This descriptive result is consistent with the Message Politics Hypothesis and stands in contrast to predictions from the Cartel Theory Hypothesis.

The bottom planel visualizes the same relationship in the House, where we observe a different pattern. Here, there is seemingly no relationship between institutional power and message discipline. Although minority party Republicans were more on message in the 1970s, beginning the 1980s, Democrats began exercising greater message discipline on average. This pattern also conflicts with the Democrats in Disarray Hypothesis, which would predict greater message discipline among Republicans. However, these are party-level averages. Even if House Democrats generally exercise greater message discipline on average, we cannot rule out that individual-level variation is driven by our covariates of interest. We take up this analysis in the following sections.

Empirical Strategy

We define our dependent variable, message discipline, as the cosine similarity between a party leader's speech and a rank-and-file member's speech on the same topic on the same day. To assess the relationship between institutional power and message discipline, we use ordinary least squares to regress this dependent variable on a categorical indicator of a party's degree of institutional power. The baseline category is when a party has no institutional power—they are the chamber minority and their party does

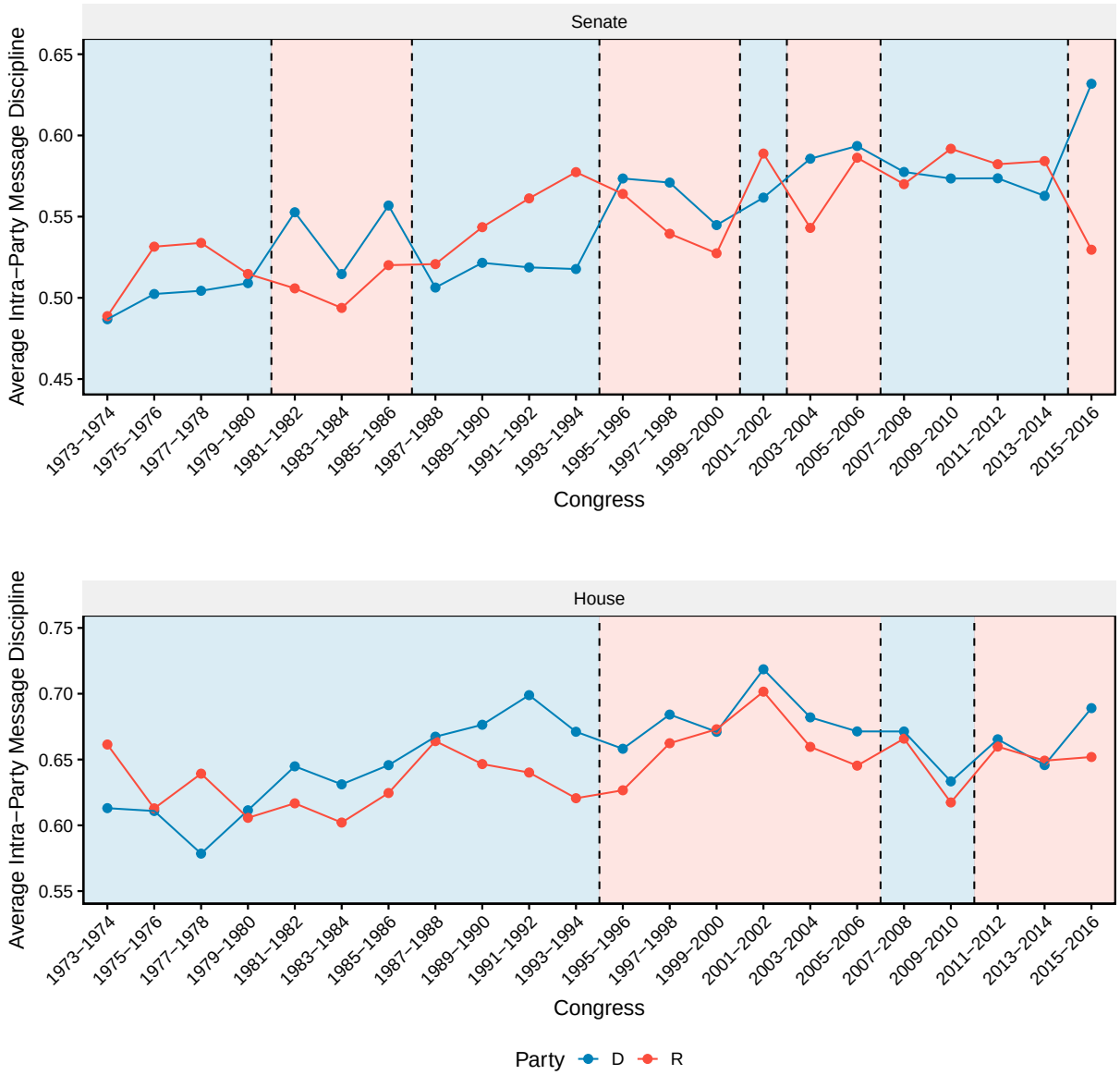

Figure 1: Average intra-party message discipline in the Senate and House for each two-year Congress. Higher scores indicate higher message discipline (i.e., higher similarity between rank-and-file and leader speeches). In the Senate, the minority party almost always exercises more message discipline. In the House, Democrats generally exercise more message discipline than Republicans. Blue (red) shading indicates that Democrats (Republicans) are the majority party during that Congress.

not control the presidency. Other levels of this variable include control of the chamber

majority, control of the presidency, or both.[7] To determine the relationship between party, institutional power, and message discipline, we split our sample by party and run the same specification. Finally, to test our hypothesis about constituency concerns, our independent variable is the standardized constituency-level vote margin of a lawmaker's co-partisan presidential candidate in the previous election. Larger values of this variable imply that a lawmaker represents a constituency composed of a larger share of co-partisans. As Senators may be more sensitive to constituency based on the electoral calendar, we also interact this variable with an indicator of whether a senator's seat is up for election at the end of the two-year period. Given the significant differences between the two chambers, we run separate models for the House and Senate.

Our models also include a series of time-varying controls including a lawmaker's squared NOMINATE distance from the leader, their own previous vote share, whether they are a freshman, a woman, black, latino, a committee chair, or a subcommittee chair, whether the pair includes the primary chamber leader of their party, and whether their party controls the other chamber. We also include topic fixed effects to account for the fact that some topics may naturally produce greater or fewer arguments or contain varying numbers of sub-topics. In our baseline set of models, we pool across the entire party. Coefficients from this model provide information about the relationships between institutional power, constituency fit, and message discipline both between and within lawmakers. However, one potential concern is that majority parties are, by definition, larger. Thus, a larger party may exercise weaker message discipline due to sheer size. Accordingly, we use lawmaker fixed effects in a second set of models to control for this possibility as well as other time-invariant variables unique to each lawmaker. In this specification, the coefficients provide information about within-lawmaker change as an individual gains institutional power or as their constituency fit increases. In all models, we cluster standard errors at the rank-and-file lawmaker-level.

[7] In our baseline analysis, we designate Democrats as the Senate majority during the 107th Congress. However, we explore the change in status fully in our case study.

Institutional Results

We formally test our hypotheses in Table 3. In column 1, we investigate the relationship between institutional power, constituency fit, and message discipline in the Senate. In line with the Message Politics Hypothesis, majority party members are about one percentage *less* on message than comparable minority party members. We find similar results for lawmakers in both the presidential and majority party as compared to comparable senators lacking institutional power. However, we find no difference in message discipline for presidential co-partisan lawmakers compared to those without institutional power. Together, these results are generally consistent with the Message Politics Hypothsis rather than the Cartel Theory Hypothesis. In line with the Constituency Concerns Hypothesis, we also see a positive relationship between constituency partisanship and message discipline. When a senator's presidential co-partisan gains a standard deviation in state vote, that senator is about 0.3 percentage points more on message.

In columns 2 and 3, we re-run this model with lawmaker fixed effects (dropping co-linear variables). Again, we see that the coefficient on majority only and both majority and presidency are negative and statistically significant: as an individual lawmaker gains institutional power, her own level of message discipline decreases. This within-member interpretation rules out the possibility that these effects are simply a consequence of pooling over a larger party-in-government. Here, the effect sizes are modestly larger—a 2 to 2.5 percentage point change. Although it's difficult to interpret substantively, these effects are larger than other seemingly relevant covairates such as whether a lawmaker is a committee chair. The only difference between columns 2 and 3 is that the latter includes an interaction between the president's past vote share in the state and whether a senator's seat is up for election that Congress. The results provide suggestive evidence (i.e., $p < 0.1$) that senators are responsive to constituency concerns, but only when their seats are in-cycle.

We investigate these same relationships in the House in columns 4 and 5. Here, we

Table 3: Relationship Between Institutional Power, Constituency Fit, and Message Discipline

	Senate			House	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Majority Party	−0.013**	−0.021***	−0.021***	0.013***	0.008*
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Presidential Co-Partisan	−0.002	−0.001	−0.001	−0.006*	−0.004+
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Majority Party and Presidential Co-Partisan	−0.020***	−0.025***	−0.025***	−0.001	−0.009**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Own-Party Presidential Vote	0.004*	0.003	0.002	0.005**	0.006**
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
In-Cycle	−0.001	0.001	0.001		
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Own-Party Pres. Vote x In-Cycle			0.003+		
			(0.002)		
Ideological Distance from Leader	−0.109***	−0.001	−0.001	−0.039*	−0.029*
	(0.020)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.012)
Other Chamber Control	0.009*	0.005	0.005	−0.007***	−0.005**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Primary Leader Pair	−0.003+	0.000	0.000	0.028***	0.027***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Republican	−0.004			−0.020***	
	(0.004)			(0.003)	
Previous Vote Share	0.000	0.000*	0.000*	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Freshman	0.006*	−0.001	−0.001	−0.010***	−0.003
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female	0.034***			0.020***	
	(0.006)			(0.003)	
Black	0.021+			0.002	
	(0.012)			(0.004)	
Latino	0.049*			0.010+	
	(0.023)			(0.005)	
Committee Chair	−0.003	0.007*	0.007*	−0.009*	0.008+
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Sub-Committee Chair	−0.007	−0.001	−0.001	−0.008***	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Fixed Effects					
Lawmaker		✓	✓		✓
Topic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num.Obs.	411,126	411,126	411,126	351,299	351,299
R2 Adj.	0.129	0.155	0.155	0.044	0.099
R2 Within Adj.	0.010	0.004	0.004	0.010	0.005

Note: Results are from ordinary least squares models. The dependent variable is a measure of similarity between two speeches—one given by a leader and another given by a rank-and-file member of the same party, on the same topic, on the same day. Standard errors are clustered at the rank-and-file member level.

see one major difference between the Senate and House models: in the House, control of the majority is associated with *more* message discipline. This result is more consistent with the Cartel Theory and Chamber Differences Hypotheses. In the House, unlike the Senate, speeches must generally be germane to legislative issues. Thus, the the majority's influence over the agenda should more naturally extend to what members talk about. Further, party influence over who speaks in the House is much stronger than in the more independent Senate, allowing the House majority to both choose favorable issues and select speakers who will toe the party line.

However, speaker selection cannot fully explain the results we observe. The coefficient on majority in column 5, which includes lawmaker fixed effects, indicates that members themselves are more on message when in the majority as compared to the minority. This result could indicate that the rank-and-file are simply more aligned on the set of issues that come to the floor when they are in the majority or that they are willing to trade discipline for floor time. The negative coefficients on both the presidency and the presidency-majority combination variables lend further support to this interpretation of majority procedural power. The president can place issues on the agenda from the outside (Beckmann 2010; Cohen 2019) even if they are not the issues the majority would have selected absent his influence. In the case where the House party has complete control over its agenda (majority only), institutional power is associated with more message discipline. In cases where the party must compete with the president for agenda control, institutional power is associated with weaker message discipline. These results also support the idea that message discipline is a valuable collective good that parties want to pursue. If it were the case that parties valued a diversity of arguments, we would expect the House majority to exercise the least message discipline. Finally, we observe a positive and statistically significant coefficient on presidents' past vote margin in the district. When a House member's constituency becomes more co-partisan, she exercises greater message discipline, in line with the Constituency Concerns Hypothesis.

Democrats in Disarray?

Interestingly, the chamber differences obscure a more complicated relationship between institutional power and party that speaks to theories of coalitional differences. In Figure 2, we plot the marginal effects of institutional control for each chamber and party separately using the models in columns 3 and 5 (which include lawmaker fixed effects). On left, we plot marginal effects in the Senate, where the results are consistent across parties and with the results in Table 3. For both Republicans and Democrats, holding the majority (with or without control of the presidency) is associated with a decrease in message discipline. However, the results for the House vary by party. Here, House Democrats behave like their Senate counterparts (and as theories of message politics would predict). Holding institutional power is associated with a decrease in message discipline—and especially so when House Democrats hold the majority and presidency. However, the result is reversed for House Republicans: control of institutional power is correlated with an increase in message discipline—especially when the party controls the majority and presidency. Again, these models include lawmaker fixed effects, so the results cannot be driven by differences in who is speaking across configurations of institutional power.

At fist glance, the differences in the House are consistent with the "Democrats in Disarray" hypothesis. House Republicans effectively use institutional power to promote a cohesive message—perhaps one that is ideological and appeals to the broad scope of their policy ambitions. By contrast, when Democrats advance policy, it is possible they appeal to a vast array of arguments that target different constituencies or identity groups that comprise their coalition. However, the fact that these differences do not appear in the Senate contrast with the theory of innate party differences, perhaps pointing to something more fundamental about the interaction between party and procedural power. Testing these propositions empirically lies beyond the scope of this paper, but we encourage scholars to further probe these differences in future work.

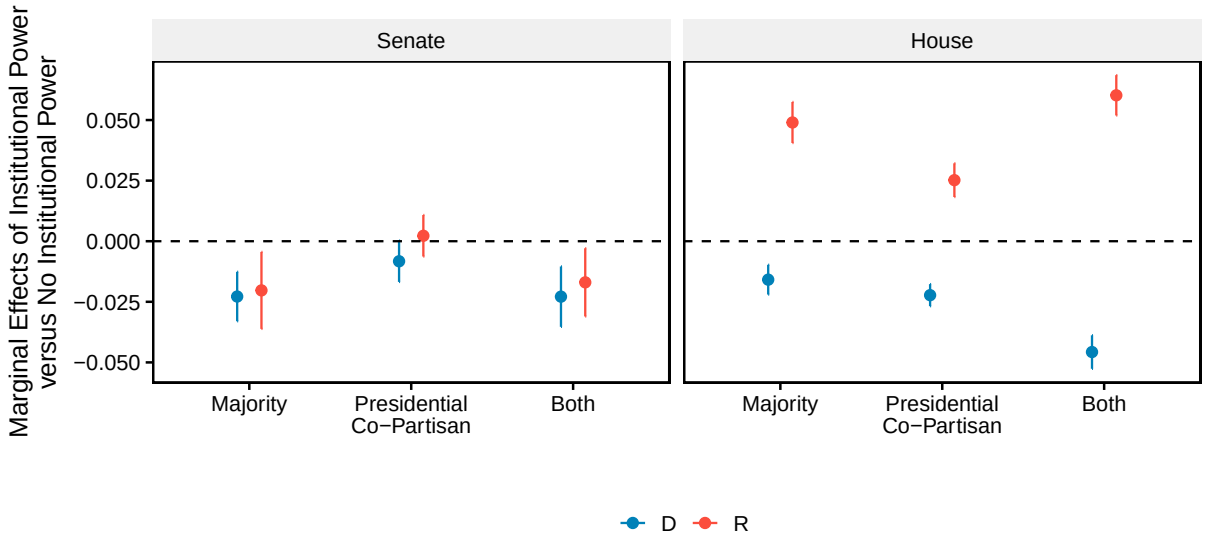

Figure 2: In the Senate, both parties exercise weaker message discipline when in the majority. In the House, Democrats (blue) exercise weaker message discipline when holding power, whereas Republicans (red) exercise more. Marginal effects are generated from the models in Table B1.

Case Study: Jefford's Switch

Theories of message politics argue that institutional power requires parties to take legislative action, and as a consequence, forces them to compromise at the cost of exercising message discipline (Evans 2001; Lee 2016). Although our regression results provide evidence to support this relationship (at least in the Senate), changes in institutional control are neither exogenous nor frequent. They occur at regular intervals and are almost always the consequence of elections that change party membership, party size, and possibly even the agenda. While we account for some of these changes in our regression analysis, especially through the use of topic and lawmaker fixed effects, it is always possible our results are subject to omitted variable bias.

To gain additional leverage on the relationship between institutional power and message discipline, we conduct a quantitative case study of the Jeffords Switch in 2001. When the 107th Congress (2001-2003) began, Democrats and Republicans each held 50 Senate

seats. With Vice President Dick Cheney (R) as the tie-breaking vote, Republicans were designated the chamber majority. However, on May 24, 2001, Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT) unexpectedly announced he would leave the Republican party to caucus with Democrats. On June 6, 2001, Democrats became the majority party with 51 seats. This unexpected, mid-session switch created a "unique instance when [Senate] majority status changed without concurrent changes in other important variables thought to affect legislative decisions: Senate membership remained constant, House membership remained constant, George W. Bush remained president, and political issues remained the same" (Monroe and Den Hartog 2019, 3). Although we do not claim that our investigation is causal, studying changes in party rhetoric before and after the switch allows us to gain additional insight into the relationship between institutional power and message discipline.

The Message Politics Hypothesis leads us to expect that Senate Republicans would exercise greater message discipline *after* Jeffords left the party. However, we cannot simply compare Republican message discipline before and after the switch: the issues under consideration could have simultaneously changed in ways that would depress or increase message discipline across both parties. To account for this possibility, we are interested in the difference-in-differences estimate between the Republican and Democratic parties in the Senate. As the House did not experience a change in majority control, we can also use message discipline among House Republicans and Democrats as an additional variable in a triple-differences framework. Here, we do both. In the first set of models, our key quantity of interest is the coefficient on the interaction between the switch date (June 6, 2001) and party (Republican), which should be positive and statistically significant to support the Message Politics Hypothesis. In the second set of models, we look to the triple interaction between these two variables and chamber (Senate). Again, this coefficient should be positive and statistically significant. Although we refer to these coefficients as difference-in-differences, they should not be interpreted causally; our data fails to meet the parallel trends criteria. Nonetheless, the results can provide descriptive insight into the effects of

Table 4: Relationship Between Jeffords Switch and Message Discipline

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-Jeffords Switch x Republican	0.057**	0.049**		
	(0.019)	(0.018)		
Post-Jeffords Switch x Republican x Senate			0.143***	0.120***
			(0.025)	(0.023)
Lawaker Fixed Effects		✓		✓
Num.Obs.	4,460	4,507	8,215	8,368
R2 Adj.	0.041	0.125	0.169	0.250
R2 Within Adj.		0.029		0.035

Note: Results come from ordinary least squares models. The dependent variable is a measure of similarity between two speeches—one given by a leader and another given by a rank-and-file member of the same party, on the same topic, on the same day. Standard errors are clustered at the rank-and-file member level. The full models can be found in Table B2.

majority control on message discipline.

The results for the coefficients of interest are presented in Table 4 and full models are in Table B2.[8] In models 1 and 2, we focus only on the difference-in-differences estimate in the Senate. Here, we see that the interaction of interest, Post-Switch $\times$ Republican, is positive and statistically significant. As compared to Senate Democrats, Republicans increased message discipline by about 5 to 6 percentage points after becoming the minority party. In models 3 and 4, we focus on the triple interaction between Post-Switch $\times$ Republican $\times$ Senate, which indicates that Republican Senators increased message discipline between 12 and 14 percentage points following the switch as compared to the baseline group, controlling for other groups' behavior. These regression results provide further evidence consistent with theories of message politics. Although Monroe and Den Hartog (2019) find that Republicans lost legislative power—they were more likely to be rolled after the switch—we find that Republicans were able to promote a more cohesive message in the minority following this unexpected, mid-session change in institutional power.

[8]Our data is subset to include dates between January 20, 2001 (when George W. Bush was inaugurated) and September 10, 2001, before the September 11 terror attacks.

Behavioral Results

To this point, we have provided evidence that lawmakers lacking institutional power (especially in the Senate) and representing safe seats exercise more message discipline. However, this theory rests on the idea that lawmakers are rewarded for exercising message discipline, especially by their co-partisans, and punished by the opposition party (cf. Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010). In this section, we test this proposition by examining how lawmakers' approval ratings change when they promote the party message. The results are consistent with this theorized trade off: on message lawmakers are rewarded by attentive co-partisan constituents but punished by attentive out-partisans.

To test this proposition, we turn to the Cooperative Election Study (CES, formerly CCES), an annual survey fielded from September through October. We begin our time series with the first CES survey in 2006 and end our analysis in 2016, when our floor speech data ends. Each year, respondents are asked to rate both of their Senators and their House representative on a five point scale, where higher values indicate higher approval. We theorize that lawmakers' approval ratings are driven, in part, by their level of message discipline in the previous year—which we measure as each lawmaker's average cosine similarity score from August in the previous year through August in the year the survey enters the field. We match each respondent with their respective representatives such that each subject appears in the data three times, rating three different lawmakers with different levels of message discipline. We expect constituent responses to message discipline will vary based on shared partisanship. Co-partisans should approve of on message lawmakers whereas out-partisans should disapprove of them. Therefore, our second independent variable is a respondent's seven-point party identification, which we re-code to take on higher values when the respondent is a stronger co-partisan with respect to the representative of interest.

Here, we acknowledge that few, if any, constituents have knowledge of what their rep-

resentatives are saying on the floor of Congress. We do not presume that any correlation between these variables is driven directly by floor speech discipline. Rather, we argue that floor discipline serves as a proxy for a lawmakers' broader propensity to exercise message discipline. Previous research finds that what members say on the floor is correlated with what they say in other venues (Grimmer 2013; Noble 2024; but see Blum, Cormack and Shoub 2023), and the media is theorized as a key vector through which party messages are transmitted to constituents (Groeling 2010; Sellers 2009). As such, we suspect attention to the media might be an important moderator of the relationship between message discipline, party, and approval. As such, we interact our independent variables with a four-point scale of respondents' self-reported attention to the news. We also control for respondent's five-point ideology, their age, their race (white, black, other), their sex, and their six-point education. We also control for the party's level of institutional power and whether the lawmaker is a Senator or House member. We include lawmaker and year fixed effects. As respondents rate three members each, we cluster standard errors at the subject-level as well as at the lawmaker-level.

We present marginal effects for a one-unit increase in message discipline at various levels of co-partisan identification and news attention in Figure 3. On the x-axis, we plot the strength of the respondent's party identification relative to the lawmaker they are evaluating. The higher (lower) the score, the more (less) aligned the respondent and lawmaker. The point estimates on the y-axis represent the change in approval resulting from a one unit increase in message discipline from the lawmaker. The shapes indicate how attentive respondents are to the news, which we use a proxy for whether or not the individual is likely to be treated. Circles indicate that the respondent hardly pays attention to the news whereas the triangles indicate a respondent pays attention to the news most of the time.

The marginal effects reveal that inattentive respondents are no more or less likely to approve of their representatives based on their level of message discipline. However, the

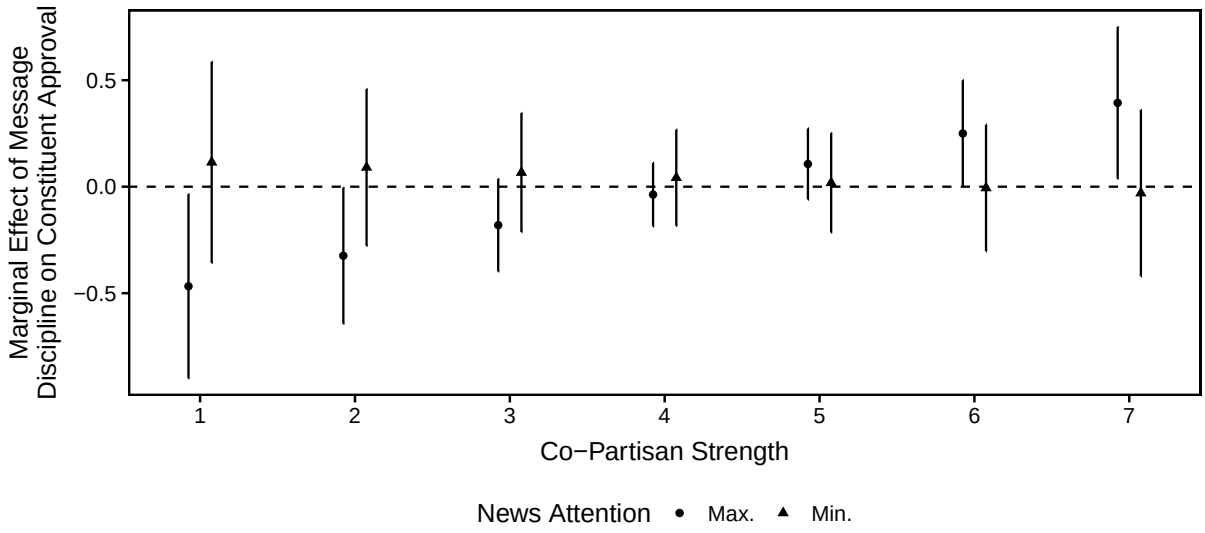

Figure 3: Marginal effect of a lawmaker's message discipline on their approval rating at varying levels of party alignment and news attention of CES respondents. The most attentive respondents reward on-message co-partisans and punish on-message out-partisans. Marginal effects are generated from the models in Table C1.

most attentive partisans *are* responsive to message discipline. Strong co-partisans reward lawmakers who toe the party line, increasing their approval by about 0.04 points. Conversely, strong out-partisans punish on message representatives by a similar magnitude. Substantively, these effects are small. It's possible that message discipline is simply a marginal influence on lawmaker approval ratings. Alternatively, message discipline on the floor could be a correlated but weak signal of the information individuals receive from the news about their lawmaker's partisan behavior.

Further, we highlight the fact that these results are sensitive to the choices we made in modeling this relationship. The approval result for co-partisans is generally robust, but the result for out-partisans is only significant at $p < 0.1$ if we change the time window or collapse party identification to a three-point scale. Larger changes (such as measuring message discipline only in months prior to the survey) can result in instability in the coefficients. Although we believe our modeling choices are theoretically motivated and

sound, we treat this evidence as consistent with, and suggestive of, the trade off lawmakers face when considering whether to go on message. We do not argue that these are dispositive. Rather, future researchers could consider measuring message discipline in other venues or design a survey experiment to test constituent reactions to message discipline causally.

Conclusion

Lawmakers pursue individual goals, but do so as members of a party. A strong party brand increases a lawmaker's odds of winning re-election, achieving policy goals, and gaining institutional power. A weak party brand does the opposite. Although everyone benefits from a strong party brand, it is a collective good, and members face personal incentives to free ride. When are lawmakers most likely to contribute to the party brand through cohesive rhetoric and when are they most likely to defect? Here, we extend theories of party discipline and legislator behavior to rhetorical message discipline, focusing on how institutional power (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Groeling 2010; Lee 2016), party coalitions (Grossman and Hopkins 2016), and constituency concerns (Ban and Kaslovsky 2024; Grimmer 2013; Noble 2024) shape party unity. We then test these hypotheses with a novel, systematic, text-based measure of message discipline at the lawmaker-level using House and Senate floor speeches. We find that, in general, lawmakers with less institutional power are more on message, but that the House majority's procedural power offsets some of these disadvantages, especially among Republicans. We also show that safe seat lawmakers are more consistently on message. Finally, we provide support for some of the behavioral micro-foundations: lawmakers can increase co-partisan approval through message discipline, but at the potential cost of out-party support.

Here, our analysis of message discipline is broad, and we leave several potential

sources of variation open for future research. In particular, we expect time to play a role in this process. At a macro-level, we expect message discipline on the floor to vary over time as polarization and the nature of floor speeches have changed. For example, our time series begins in 1973, before C-SPAN debuted in the House—and well before Newt Gingrich began taking advantage of the cameras to attack the Democratic majority. In the era of social media, floor speeches likely serve a different purpose: online virality. How do these innovations affect message discipline? At a micro-level, the timing of the legislative process likely influences message discipline as well. We might expect discipline to be lower when bills are first introduced versus when they come up for a final vote. Topics could matter as well. Perhaps parties exercise greater message discipline on owned issues (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996). Additionally, we focus only on leader/rank-and-file pairs given our interest in party discipline. However, scholars could investigate similarity among all lawmaker-lawmaker pairs. This broader view would shed light on cohesion among different party factions and message similarity on bipartisan versus messaging bills.

For all our focus on the roll call record (Lee 2018), legislators certainly act like what they say matters as much (if not more) than how they vote. Leaders have increased spending on communications staff at the expense of legislative staff (Lee 2016), and Republicans have gone so far as to claim credit for spending bills they voted against (cf. Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2014). Given that debates are long and frequently circulated through the media (Groeling 2010; Sellers 2009), while voting is short and less visible to constituents (Cormack 2016), a focus on rhetoric is essential for understanding party branding and discipline in the modern era. If voters know more about who wins the debate than who wins the vote, our results could suggest one potential explanation for thermostatic backlash in congressional elections (Grossmann and Wlezien 2024). When governing parties struggle to exercise message discipline in support of policies that disempowered parties effectively message against, it's no surprise that voters turn against

new policies and ultimately change the temperature.

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Online Supporting Information:
In Control but Incoherent

A Measurement of Message Discipline

A.1 Keywords for keyATM Model

In Table A1, we present the set of topics and keywords used to fit our keyATM models. These keywords are the top 15 keywords ranked by tf-idf within the party platforms, treating each topic as a single document. The Parliamentary and Other topic keywords were generated by the authors.

Table A1: Topics and keywords used to fit the keyATM model

Category	**Keywords**
Agriculture	farm, rancher, farmer, ranch, export, commod, agricultur, fiber, grain, embargo, pariti, crop, livestock, food, wheat
Civil Rights	abort, disabl, gender, religi, sex, discrimin, religion, ballot, desegreg, vote, equal, segreg, reproduct, marriag, racial
Culture	art, artist, endow, film, museum, danc, leisur, opera, orchestra, theatr, scholar, heritag, writer, scholarship, music, cultur
Defense	nato, nuclear, missil, weapon, ballist, veteran, iraq, soviet, treati, troop, korea, allianc, deploy, vietnam, arm
Domestic Commerce	antitrust, merger, mortgag, gambl, dodd, lend, patent, sba, theft, conglomer, ftc, frank, consum, small, loan
Education	student, classroom, teacher, math, tuition, parent, read, academ, graduat, teach, elementari, english, childhood, bilingu, secondari
Energy	oil, gas, coal, solar, energi, nuclear, electr, petroleum, atom, geotherm, opec, decontrol, wind, fossil, ethanol
Environment	speci, pollut, emiss, wetland, superfund, toxic, air, carbon, greenhous, esa, soil, brownfield, wildlif, fish, habitat
Foreign Trade	export, trade, tariff, currenc, negoti, textil, reciproc, monetari, bilater, nafta, china, agreement, protectionist, gatt, foreign
Government Operations	postal, district, columbia, lobbi, census, elector, mail, servant, statehood, ballot, incumb, branch, candid, vote, sunset, usp

Health	medicar, medicaid, patient, hiv, healthcar, drug, coverag, nurs, diabet, mental, cancer, medic, prescript, diseas, health
Housing	homeownership, slum, mortgag, fha, rent, rental, urban, tenant, homeless, rural, fanni, freddi, mac, mae, neighborhood
Immigration	immigr, refuge, undocu, deport, visa, alien, reunif, english, amnesti, newcom, flee, asylum, citizenship, illeg, admiss
International Affairs	israel, africa, soviet, taiwan, palestinian, east, arab, cuba, peac, korea, terrorist, ireland, asia, afghanistan, cuban
Labor	overtim, hartley, taft, pension, bargain, picket, employe, bacon, davi, collect, worker, arbitr, autom, osha, union
Law and Crime	gun, crime, crimin, drug, sentenc, offend, firearm, juvenil, polic, prison, victim, narcot, pornographi, traffick, marijuana
Macroeconomics	deficit, inflat, monetari, bracket, spend, debt, incom, wealthi, wealthiest, recess, taxat, loophol, inflationari, estat, code
Public Lands	puerto, indian, rico, guam, forest, nativ, hawaiian, tribal, virgin, samoa, mariana, tribe, miner, park, wilder
Social Welfare	welfar, parent, needi, nutrit, stamp, social, elder, child, recipi, disabl, lunch, older, charit, mother, poverti
Technology	space, nasa, broadband, internet, broadcast, scientif, telecommun, orbit, saturn, spacecraft, satellit, scienc, cyber, entertain, media
Transportation	highway, railroad, merchant, passeng, rail, freight, airport, transport, mode, maritim, congest, traffic, amtrak, marin, truck
Parliamentary	yield, gentleman, consent, amend, time, minut, senat, hous, bill, order, thank, committe, move, vote, quorum, motion, tabl
Other	peopl, go, get, got, laughter, know, thing, want, say, think, thank

A.2 Face Validity of Speech Similarity

The following two speeches have a cosine similarity of more than 0.9 and are coded as about being education. They are almost identical, both express congratulations to Western Kentucky University's team for winning world champions at the international forensic association championship in Vancouver.

Bunning, Jim (KY-Rep, leader) ". i rise today to honor and pay tribute to the william e. bivin forensic society at western kentucky university in bowling green. ky. the western kentucky university forensic team recently defeated forensic teams from all over the world to claim the 2003 international forensic association. ifa. championship in vancouver. bc. led by director of forensics judy woodring. the team of 36 students and eight coaches defeated 87 other universities to win the 2003 american forensic association. afa. national championship and the delta sigma rhotau kappa alpha. dsrtka. national championship earlier this year. the western kentucky forensic team has a long tradition of honors and distinctions. over the programs storied history. it has won four ifa international championships. one afa national championship. five dsrtka national championships. and thirteen kentucky state forensic association championships. i ask my colleagues in the senate to pay tribute to the western kentucky university forensic team of corey alderdice. drew allen. elizabeth au. margaret au. stacy bernaugh. chris blackford. keith blaser. chris brasfield. grace bruenderman. david burns. jenny corum. ashley courtney. justin cress. tony damico. nicole estenfelder. reagan gibson. nicole hawk. adam henze. kate hertweck. ryan howell. lindsey nave. jacob peregoy. jennifer purcell. hanna reliford. alex rogers. nick romerhausen. evelio silvera. rebecca simms. courtney smith. joel smith. jen taylor. katie tyree. jordon wadlington. caleb williams. jeff woods. courtney wright and led by coaches judy woodring. jace lux. bonnie mcdonald. greg robertson. matt gerbig. doug mory. chris grove. and joe day. i am proud of their achievements and admirable representation of western kentucky university and the commonwealth of kentucky.."

McConnell, Mitch (KY-Rep) ". i rise today to express congratulations to all the team members and coaches of western kentucky universitys william e. bivin forensic society. the group recently was named world champions at the international forensic association championship in vancouver. bc. it is my understanding that this is just one of the many titles the team has claimed over the last year. the team won the 2003 delta sigma rhotau kappa alpha national championship. they defeated 87 other universities to win the 2003 american forensic association national championship. and most recently they captured the national forensic association individual events championship. this is an impressive list of victories and a tribute to their hard work and dedication. i wish to acknowledge each of the winning students: corey alderdice. drew

allen. elizabeth au. margaret au. stacy bernaugh. chris blackford. keith blaser. chris brasfield. grace bruenderman. david burns. jenny corum. ashley courtney. justin cress. tony damico. nicole estenfelder. raegan gibson. nicole hawk. adam henze. kate hertweck. ryan howell. lindsey nave. jacob peregoy. jennifer purcell. hanna reliford. alex rogers. nick romerhausen. evelio silvera. rebecca simms. courtney smith. joel smith. jen taylor. katie tyree. jordon wadlington. caleb williams. jeff woods. and courtney wright. i would also like to recognize and thank their outstanding coaches. judy woodring. jace lux. bonnie mcdonald. greg robertson. matt gerbig. doug mory. chris grove. and joe day. who provided leadership to this winning team. mr. president. western kentucky universitys william e. bivin forensic society has both national and international successes to be proud of. on behalf of myself and my colleagues in the senate. i congratulate them on their significant achievements."

The following two speeches have a cosine similarity around of 0.7 and are coded as defense. Both critique the administration's handling of Panama Canal agreements.

Hansen, Clifford (WY-Rep, leader) ". the striking thing about this resolution is that it would seek to accomplish. by way of an amendment to the resolution of ratification. what earlier had been denied those of us who wanted to insure that the united states would be able to take action to restore the canal to operation if those operations were interfered with. or to reopen the canal if it were closed. i cannot see how we can have it both ways. and yet it appears to me that is precisely what the administration is attempting to do. when earlier this same concept was offered as an amendment to the treaty. it was roundly condemned by the administration as bringing on so much trouble for panama that it would not be acceptable and would throw the whole treaty operation into total disarray. now we are told that by taking this particular tack we can give the assurance to americans that. i submit. and most americans submit. is absolutely vital to the continued operation and the neutrality of the canal. and yet. for some reason which escapes me. and a reason which i suspect will escape most panamanians. this does not really constitute any significant amendment to the treaty itself. i think those are essentially the words of the sponsor of the amendment. for whom i have great respect and admiration. the senator from arizona. who says it does not constitute a major amendment to the treaty. if it does not constitute a major amendment to the treaty. then

i submit that all of the rhetoric we heard earlier from the administration was pure hogwash. or this particular tack which is now being taken. i suspect in order to insure 67 favorable votes for the treaty. is a charade. i submit that the people of the united states are going to hold the senate accountable as they ask us what are we doing. it seems to me it has to be perfectly clear that either what was being said earlier was not true. or what is being told us now brings about certain guarantees is not true. i am not satisfied. i support the philosophy of the amendment. but i want to be sure that it accomplishes what the administration seemingly. impliedly. says it does."

Thurmond, J. Strom (SC-Rep) "i thank the senator from utah for those kind remarks. and i commend him for his outstanding leadership in this fight. he is a very able man. he has presented his arguments well. he is dedicated. he loves his country and he follows a course of action here which i think is for the best interests of america. now. mr. president. i congratulate the proponents of the treaty who attained victory today. but i do not feel that their victory is going to be in the best interests of america if the second treaty is also ratified. i think it will be a costly mistake. however. the second treaty that will come up will be the main treaty. those of us who opposed the first treaty have lost the first battle but we have not lost the war. and we feel that there is a chance to defeat the second treaty. which is the important treaty. and we hope to be able to do so. now. mr. president. this treaty fails to provide clear. unequivocal authority to the united states to intervene as it deems necessary or to base troops in panama after 1999. further. the push by the administration to win passage of this treaty exceeds any such efforts that i have witnessed in my 24 years in the senate. future generations will pay the consequences of todays vote in the senate of such an inadequate treaty. if the second treaty is also confirmed. the lack of clarity of the treaty that was ratified today will actually cause it to promote the problems which it purports to prevent. but the senate can still correct todays mistake by voting no on the main treaty. mr. president. there are many senators here who worked valiantly and fought hard against these panama canal treaties. i would specially single out the able senator from alabama who has fought here day after day. spoken day after day. offered amendment after amendment and has done such a fine job against this treaty. in my opinion. the able senator from alabama is the most distinguished parliamentarian that has served in this senate since i have been a member here. i would also like to commend others who have been active in opposing the treaty that was rati-

fied today. and i am sure will be active in opposing this second treaty that will come up. the panama canal treaty. the main treaty. the senator from oklahoma . the senator from virginia"

The following two speeches have a cosine similarity around of 0.5 and are coded as being about macroeconmics. While both discuss budget allocation, the first prioritizes defense, and the second emphasizes veterans' program funding.

Tower, John (TX-Rep, leader) ". i yield myself such time as i may require. i think the senator from oklahoma is not aware of the nato task force reports that recently have been completed. which indicate a requirement for a substantial additional expenditure for nato. i have said in my remarks that. in fairness to the budget committee. they were not aware of these reports at that time. we have some serious problems in nato that need to be solved in communications. in command and control. and we have to spend money to do it. we will have to encourage our allies to spend it. likewise. i point out that while our real increase in spending is around 1.8. two of our principal allies in nato have increased theirs in real spending terms by more than 3 percent. merely saying that you raise the defense budget is not enough. we have to consider what is adequate to meet the threat. if we get to the point where our national defense. whatever it costs. is too costly for the protection of our national interests. or such that we value spending on other matters more than we do on national defense. then we will be second best. and ultimately we will find ourselves perhaps economically and politically isolated and not possessed of the resources to take care of the socially and economically disadvantaged."

Domenici, Pete (NM-Rep) "yes. this will be on my time. i will say. mr. president. the current policy for veterans would be $20.5 billion in budget authority and $20.2 billion in outlays. the current policy would mean we would keep every program as we have it in existence. and provide the requisite expected inflation for that program. the budget committee recommended $21 billion and $20.8 billion. which is substantially higher than current policy. the president of the united states recommended a figure that is lower than our figure. $19.1 billion and $19.3 billion. which is lower than current policy and lower than the figure which would result with my cuts. which would bring them to $20.8 billion and $20.7 billion."

Finally, these speeches have a cosine similarity of about 0.2 and are coded as being

about international affairs. These speeches differ considerably in both regional and topical focus.

> **Byrd, Robert (WV-Dem, leader)** ". the amendment i have offered would express the sense of the congress that negotiations toward normalization of relations with cuba should be conducted in a deliberate manner and on a reciprocal basis. the important factor here is that the many differences between the united states and cubaand there are important differences–cannot be resolved in the absence of direct communication. it is also important. as this amendment states. that the vital concerns of the united states. with respect to the basic rights and interests of u.s. citizens whose persons or property are the subject of such negotiations. be protected. the establishment of a u.s. interests section in the swiss embassy in havana and the cuban interests section in the czech embassy in washington is a first step in the possible reestablishment of normal relations between the two nations. however. as the amendment states. and as i strongly believe. negotiations toward the normalization of relations must be conducted in a careful and deliberate manner with serious attention to the problems which hinder a normal relationship. not the least of which is the continuing presence of cuban military personnel in angola and elsewhere in africa. i believe that this amendment leaves little doubt about the need for carrying out these negotiations with great care. and keeping in mind the factors that i have clearly delineated in the amendment. the amendment underscores the fact that such negotiations must be reciprocal. there must be quid pro quos. there must be an indication on the part of the cubans that they are negotiating in good faith. the recent release of some of the americans being held in prison in cuba is perhaps a hopeful sign. but there is obviously much more that must be done in this regard. i would urge the senate to support this amendment. i believe it reflects a cautious but logical and proper approach to our relations with this neighboring nation."

> **Nunn, Samuel (GA-Dem)** "i cannot specifically answer the senators question. i have not been briefed on that particular warning time in the last few weeks. i imagine that would be a classified item. but i can say that the very heart of the south korean economy and industry is located. of course. in seoul. seoul is located very near the north korean border."

Additional Results

Table B1: Relationship Between Institutional Power, Constituency Fit, and Message Discipline Separated by Party

	Senate		House	
	D	R	D	R
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Majority Party	−0.023***	−0.020*	−0.016***	0.049***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Presidential Co-Partisan	−0.008+	0.002	−0.022***	0.025***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.004)
Majority Party and Presidential Co-Partisan	−0.023***	−0.017*	−0.046***	0.060***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Own-Party Presidential Vote	0.002	−0.001	0.010***	0.000
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
In-Cycle	−0.001	0.001		
	(0.002)	(0.002)		
Ideological Distance from Leader	0.117*	−0.033*	−0.074***	−0.014
	(0.056)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.018)
Other Chamber Control	−0.017***	0.025***	0.009***	−0.026***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Primary Leader Pair	0.005**	−0.005*	0.026***	0.026***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Previous Vote Share	0.000	0.000*	0.000**	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Freshman	0.003	0.001	−0.001	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Committee Chair	0.010*	−0.004	0.003	0.006
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Sub-Committee Chair	0.004	−0.004	−0.001	0.003
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Fixed Effects				
Lawmaker	✓	✓	✓	✓
Topic	✓	✓	✓	✓
Num.Obs.	191,054	220,072	227,647	123,652
R2 Adj.	0.164	0.153	0.108	0.096
R2 Within Adj.	0.005	0.005	0.009	0.015

Note: Results come from ordinary least squares models. The dependent variable is a measure of similarity between two speeches—one given by a leader and another given by a rank-and-file member of the same party, on the same topic, on the same day. Standard errors are clustered at the rank-and-file member level.

Table B2: Relationship Between Jeffords Switch and Message Discipline

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-Jeffords Switch	−0.066***	−0.068***	−0.010	−0.004
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Republican	−0.015		0.029**	
	(0.019)		(0.009)	
Senate			−0.094***	
			(0.012)	
Post-Jeffords Switch x Republican	0.057**	0.049**	−0.090***	−0.071***
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Post-Jeffords Switch x Senate			−0.055***	−0.063***
			(0.015)	(0.015)
Republican x Senate			−0.029	
			(0.022)	
Post-Jeffords Switch x Republican x Senate			0.143***	0.120***
			(0.025)	(0.023)
Own-Party Presidential Vote	0.004		−0.001	
	(0.006)		(0.005)	
Ideological Distance from Leader	−0.368**	0.034	−0.158*	−0.145*
	(0.124)	(0.286)	(0.066)	(0.068)
Primary Leader Pair	−0.004	0.008	0.020**	0.024***
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Previous Vote Share	0.002		0.001*	
	(0.001)		(0.000)	
Freshman	0.018		0.016+	
	(0.015)		(0.010)	
Female	0.006		0.006	
	(0.019)		(0.009)	
Black			−0.004	
			(0.013)	
Latino			−0.007	
			(0.013)	
Committee Chair	−0.008		−0.009	
	(0.017)		(0.012)	
Sub-Committee Chair	−0.010		0.006	
	(0.011)		(0.009)	
Intercept	0.517***		0.630***	
	(0.052)		(0.027)	
Lawaker Fixed Effects		✓		✓
Num.Obs.	4,460	4,507	8,215	8,368
R2 Adj.	0.041	0.125	0.169	0.250
R2 Within Adj.		0.029		0.035

Note: Results come from ordinary least squares models. The dependent variable is a measure of similarity between two speeches—one given by a leader and another given by a rank-and-file member of the same party, on the same topic, on the same day. Standard errors are clustered at the rank-and-file member level.

B Behavioral Results

Table C1: Relationship Between Message Discipline, Co-Partisanship, News Attention, and Lawmaker Approval

	(1)
Message Discipline	0.389
	(0.371)
Co-Partisan Strength	0.013
	(0.050)
News Attention	−0.378***
	(0.067)
Message Discipline x Co-Partisan Strength	−0.080
	(0.081)
Message Discipline x News Attention	−0.250*
	(0.106)
Co-Partisan Strength x News Attention	0.078***
	(0.016)
Message Discipline x Co-Partisan Strength x News Attention	0.056*
	(0.025)
Respondent Ideology	−0.061**
	(0.019)
Majority	−0.230***
	(0.023)
Presidential Co-Partisan	−0.139***
	(0.024)
Majority and Presidential Co-Partisan	0.181***
	(0.034)
Senate	−0.125**
	(0.043)
Age	0.002***
	(0.000)
White	−0.018
	(0.012)
Black	0.141***
	(0.018)
Female	0.095***
	(0.005)
Education	0.003
	(0.003)
Lawmaker Fixed Effects	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓
Num.Obs.	664,025
R2 Adj.	0.359
R2 Within Adj.	0.344

Note: Results come from an ordinary least squares model. The dependent variable is a measure of approval of the lawmaker. Standard errors are clustered at the lawmaker and respondent level.