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Comparing Competing Theories on the Causes of Mandate Perceptions

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Abstract

The discussion of presidential mandates is as certain as a presidential election itself. Journalists inevitably discuss whether the president-elect has a popular mandate. Because they see elections as too complex to allow the public to send a unitary signal, political scientists are more skeptical of mandates. Mandates, however, have received new attention by scholars asking whether perceptions of mandate arise and lead representatives to act *as if* voters sent a policy directive. Two explanations have emerged to account for why elected officials might react to such perceptions. One focuses on the President's strategic decision to declare a mandate, the second on how members of Congress read signals of changing preferences in the electorate from their own election results. We test these competing views to see which more accurately explains how members of Congress act in support of a perceived mandate. The results indicate that members respond more to messages about changing preferences than to the president's mandate declaration.

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Scholars for decades have thought of electoral mandates as the intention by voters to use their votes to send a message about their policy preferences. A second question has emerged more recently: Do politicians *receive* messages about voter intention -- perhaps even some never consciously sent by voters -- and then act on them? If so, then the behavioral consequences of perceiving a message in an election are quite real, whatever was or was not in the minds of voters. Those behavioral consequences have now been demonstrated (Peterson et al. 2003). There remains a question unresolved: From where do the perceptions arise? We consider two leading -- and conflicting -- possibilities, (1) that mandates are generated by presidents to serve their strategic needs, and (2) that members of Congress respond instead to evidence they have personally witnessed and, in particular, the evidence of their own electoral experiences and those of colleagues.

The initial question asked of mandates centers on their existence and has intrigued scholars for decades (Dahl 1990; Edwards 1989; Fiorina 1989; Hershey 1994; Kelley 1983; Stimson 1999; Weinbaum and Judd 1970; and Wolfinger 1985). The standard question, typically asked is "Do mandates exist? Can one find a directive for policy change in presidential election results?" The standard answer is no. Voters are too uninformed, unopinionated, and uninvolved for there to be a clear policy signal. Given the large number of issues in the campaign and the single choice between two candidates, it is virtually impossible to determine the issue or issues unequivocally responsible for victory. Despite scholarly skepticism, however, popular commentators on politics continue to discuss mandates as if they did exist.

Given the difficulty and importance of the mandate concept, several scholars have attempted to reconceptualize it. Edwards (1989) argues that scholars should turn their attention from whether or not a mandate exists to whether or not a *perception* of a mandate exists. "[p]erceptions," he argues, "are often more important than reality, because it is how political elites interpret the presidential vote that affects how they respond to the president and his proposals" (148, 1989). The question that remains is where do these perceptions come from.

Two recent works offer differing sources of these mandate perceptions. Conley (2001) develops a "President Driven" model of mandates (our term). She argues that a president's claim to a mandate is an element of a strategic interaction between the president and Congress. The president is likely to claim a mandate, and Congress is likely to act as if there is one, when either the president is popular or the president is unpopular but Congress' preferences are in line with the president's. Members of Congress, then, react to these perceptions of mandate elections because they fear retribution from a popular president.

In Peterson, Grossback, Stimson, and Gangl (2003), we develop a separate "Public Driven" model of mandates. We demonstrate that members of Congress use election results and elite interpretation of the results in the media as signals about the changing preferences of their constituents. Mandate elections (in our previous work, the contests of 1964, 1980, and 1994) serve as clear messages that public opinion has moved and that this movement has electoral consequence. The social construction of election interpretation, primarily within the Washington community, drives elite perceptions of a mandate. The interpretation centers on the perceived state of public opinion. Mandates, according to the Public Driven model, are unambiguous messages that the preference of the country has moved. Members of Congress react because they share the view that public opinion has made a dramatic (and unexpected) move in one direction.

The two explanations thus suggest that members of Congress respond to different stimuli. In Conley's theory, members of Congress respond to the president. If the president is popular and

claims a mandate, then Congress will adopt the president's policy regardless of the state of public opinion. In our theory, members of Congress respond to perceived changes in public opinion. If members of Congress see a shift in their constituents' preferences, they will adopt policies to reflect these changes regardless of the popularity of the president. These are very different views of congressional responsiveness. In the President Driven model, Congress capitulates to the mandated president, almost abdicating its role in the separation of powers.[1] In the Public Driven model, Congress acts as a representative body, rapidly reflecting the policy preferences of the voters.

In this article, we develop a test of both explanations to see which better accounts for the observable patterns of mandate reactions in Congress. Because both works are limited in the strength of their conclusions, we extend both theories to new areas. Conley's theory relies on the institutional balance between the president and Congress. Her empirical test, however, focuses on presidential action and not the reaction of Congress. In Peterson et al., we focus our analyses only on the years declared as mandates. While that decision is appropriate for the research question of that article, one cannot look solely at positive cases to explain why elections are interpreted as mandates. Here we extend both works (1) by offering a first test of several claims from each model and (2) by extending the test to all national elections -- observing mandate reaction both where the claim of a mandate might be believed and where it is not.

Congressional Response to Mandates

It is important to be clear about what we mean by mandates. Most scholarly work on the topic addresses their presence or absence (or possibility or impossibility) in elections. Instead, we are focusing on the elite interpretation of, and reaction to, elections. The central question addressed is, what leads members of Congress to interpret an election as carrying a mandate? It is a fundamentally different approach than asking if one occurred, but an approach that is becoming more common. The earlier voting behavior research regarded the mandate as a mental state of voters. The issue was whether or not they consciously shaped their votes to send a message about preferred policies. How and whether that message is received are questions beyond the scope of that scholarship. The newer research, which we build upon, addresses the question of reaction to the electoral message. If the reaction is real, i.e., observed in behavior, then no matter the intent of the voters, a mandate, (albeit of a new form), has occurred.

The two existing theories explaining how elites respond to mandate signals offer different pictures of American politics. In the President Driven model, the interpretation of the election centers on the amount of support for the president's agenda. In it, elites ask whether the election signals that the president has the overwhelming support of the public. The focus is on how members of Congress perceive election results as signals of presidential influence. If the election signal implies that the president is popular, then Congress passes the president's policies. If the election does not support the perception of a popular president, then Congress follows its own course.

The Public Driven model suggests that members of Congress see elections as signals of changes in public opinion. Elections, *if one-sided,* may serve as unambiguous signals of the preferences

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[1] Dahl (1990) asserts that the presidential claims to a mandate and Congress' acceptance are at the heart of the growth in the power of the presidency and, for him, the breakdown of popular control over government. President driven mandates, Dahl argues, unbalance the separation of powers and threaten government responsiveness to public opinion.

of the voters for a more conservative or liberal government. Members of Congress who wish to be reelected adjust their policy positions to reflect the new perception of public opinion.

The Public Driven account differs from the President Driven model in three ways. First, the models differ fundamentally in the character of the reelection concerns of members of Congress. In the President Driven model, members of Congress fear resisting a popular president. In the Public Driven model, members of Congress fear being out of touch with the preferences of their constituents. While these two are often synonymous, they need not be. In 1984, for instance, Ronald Reagan's landslide reelection signaled a very popular president. It did not, however, send a signal of a move to the right by the American electorate.[2] Second, the Public Driven model centers on members' own electoral interests, not on their relationship to the White House. While the popularity of the president may matter in this calculation, it matters only if the president can use his public standing to affect the next election. Third, the Public Driven account centers on change in perceptions about public opinion. In Conley's theory, a president being re-elected by a large margin should carry a mandate. In the Public Driven model, members of Congress are likely to have already incorporated the president's public standing into their voting patterns before the election. Richard Nixon's landslide in 1972, for example, provided little new information to members of Congress. Members (and everyone else) knew that Nixon was popular, at least relative to his opponents, and the expected election outcome should not have led them to alter that perception.

The Elements of a Mandate Reaction

Our comparison of the President Driven and Public Driven models of mandates begins with what we believe is the common ground. First, mandates are about elections. While this seems obvious, it nonetheless provides a starting point of a test. It implies that the best place to look for responses to the mandates is in the immediate aftermath—the start of the newly elected Congress.

The fact that mandates center around elections implies a second commonality. There can be only one winner. It makes no sense for there to be a mandate for both the right and the left, or both for and against the president. Thus, if we are looking for evidence of a reaction to a mandate, we know in which direction this reaction should be. For presidential elections, the party of the victorious candidate is the party that can more reasonably claim a mandate. For off-year elections, the party that gained the most seats in Congress has the stronger claim to a mandate.[3]

A third commonality is that both theories hold that mandates are about policy. What separates a mandate from a non-mandate is the policy message that is included in the election results. In the President Driven model, the president's strategic claim of a mandate is an attempt to get Congress to adopt his policy agenda. In the Public Driven model, the elections are a mandate when the interpretation of election returns sends a signal about the changing policy preferences of the electorate. In both cases, the force behind the mandate is a call for policy change.

Both theories suggest finally that members of Congress react to mandate claims. Conley argues that when a president successfully claims a mandate (successful in that Congress accedes to the president's views), Congress will agree with his proposal, change roll call voting patterns, and adopt the president's policies. Her argument is actually more substantial, suggesting that a

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[2] In fact, the electorate moved significantly to the left during Reagan's first term (Stimson 1999).

[3] The one troublesome case is 1962 where the Democrats lost 4 seats in the House and gained 4 in the Senate. Because we have to declare a direction for our test and because the House loss was unusually small for a midterm election, we code this as a Democratic victory.

mandate interpretation of an election "affects how members of Congress construct their policy agendas, committee preferences, staffs, and provisions of constituency services" (2001 p. 7). Electoral interpretations shape every action taken by a member of Congress. If the interpretation supports a mandate claim, then he or she will deviate from normal actions to adapt to the new understanding of politics. While Conley's empirical work focuses on presidential claims of mandates, she does test congressional reactions, linking the claim of a mandate to changes in presidential support in the year following the election.

We are more explicit in our expectations of congressional reaction. If a member of Congress perceives change in constituent preferences, then that member should react by altering his or her votes. Assuming that member voting strategies are a compromise between electoral expediency (perhaps the moderate views of the median constituent) and members' own (and primary electorate's) more extreme views, members of the party favored by the mandate should be emboldened and become more extreme. Members of the disadvantaged party should be threatened and moderate their roll call votes. In both theories, if a member of Congress perceives a mandate, the member's voting should be different from when there is no such perception.

We now have the makings for a comparative test of both theories. Both theories expect members of Congress (1) to vote for policy that they would not have otherwise supported, (2) at the start of the session following the election, and (3) with the direction of this change in voting favoring the party presumed to have won the mandate. Thus, we have the basis for a measurement strategy of presumed mandate reactions.

Measuring Congressional Reactions to a Mandate
Our measurement approach is the same used in Peterson et al. (2003). The procedure has three steps. First, we categorize every vote as liberal, conservative, or non-ideological based on the mean ADA score of the members of Congress voting "yea" and "nay." If the split between the average ADA scores of "yeas" and "nays" is less than 30 points, the vote is treated as non-ideological and omitted from the analysis. Second, we calculate each member's "equilibrium liberalism" by taking the proportion of ideological votes cast during the first year of the session that are liberal. Finally, all of the ideological roll calls are divided into blocks of ten votes. After each block of ten votes, each member's liberalism up to that point is compared to his or her equilibrium value. If this running vote tally is more than one standard deviation away from the equilibrium, in the direction of the mandate, then the member is declared to be affected by the mandate. We use the same scheme here, but instead of measuring the length of time that a member deviates from his or her normal voting pattern, we categorize whether or not the member responds to the mandate at all. We include every congressional session since 1960.[4] While this yields a measure for every member in every session, we are initially concerned with the consensus view within the entire Congress as to whether or not the election was a mandate. Thus, our initial dependent variable is the number of members who react to a mandate at the start of each session. When members deviate in the expected direction, we shall say that they "react to a mandate."

We seek to explain the aggregate number of members affected for two reasons. First, Conley treats Congress as a unitary actor, thus it is a fairer test of her theory to look at a congressional level response. Second, aggregating to the Congress level will rid our measure of some of the

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[4] We start at 1960 because the number of ideological roll calls in previous years is too small to generate reliable estimates.

noise in the dependent variable. Members may deviate from their normal voting pattern for reasons other than a perceived mandate. We expect these deviations to be idiosyncratic and thus generally random across years. By aggregating, we minimize the randomness, leaving only meaningful responses in years in which many members respond in the same direction.

The result of this coding process is reported in Table 1. The first column lists the party that has a stronger claim to a mandate for each election based on the criteria above. The next two columns report the count of members who demonstrate mandate voting behavior for the House and Senate respectively. The fourth column indicates the total number of members affected by the mandate, the phenomenon to be explained in the first set of analyses.

[Table 1 here]

While the Congress level measure allows for a direct test of the two theories, the individual level data provides a better test of the broader arguments. The Congress level data could be the result of two processes. These data could be the result of national level interpretations of elections and assessments of presidential standing with the public. They could also represent the aggregation of 535 individual members responding to signals sent by their own individual constituencies. Both theories of mandate suggest that a national level message drives the process, not individual members' election results. We use the individual level data on members of Congress, then, to see if the national factors will change the likelihood that a member will react even after controlling for individual level predictors of this behavior.

What Drives Congressional Reactions?

What conditions induce change in congressional behavior? Every president (and every majority party in Congress) would like to be able to claim a policy mandate from the electorate. At the same time, the defeated party has an incentive to deny the existence of a mandate. While these interpretations are open for political debate, there are certain facts that may enhance or dampen the persuasiveness of the mandate claim. The two theories offer different explanations for the variation in mandate effects across years, differences that allow for a clear comparison.

The next two sections of the paper develop the empirical implications of each model. Given the number of hypotheses developed, we look at each model in turn. We first discuss each model's main predictions and test them individually in a bivariate framework to emphasize the support for each hypothesis in turn. We then turn to a multivariate test of the individual theories. We conclude our look at the aggregate data by estimating a single model that combines the predictors from both theories.[5]

President Driven

According to Conley, mandates are important because of their role in the strategic interaction between the Congress and the president. Presidential decisions to claim a mandate are "strategic calculations based on expectations about congressional responses to the president's initiative and on forecasts about voter reactions in the future" (Conley 2001, p. 6). While the president has an

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[5] There is also a potential regional difference—members from the South may interpret and react to elections differently during presidential elections during the issue evolution on race (Carmines and Stimson 1989). We have attempted to uncover a regional pattern in these results and adding whether or not the member was from the South does not improve the model. This should not be surprising since the issue evolution on race was not a regional change, but a change that affected every portion of America (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

incentive to claim a mandate, members of Congress in the opposing party have an incentive to resist such claims. Assuming that there is a cost to claiming a mandate, and an even greater cost to having Congress reject the claim, the president should claim a mandate only if he or she can get Congress to agree. Members of Congress, it follows, should accept the claim of a mandate if either (a) they agree with the policy preferences of the president (i.e., are of his party) or (b) think that the opposition party will lose when the president takes the claim to the voters. Conley provides evidence in support of these claims. She finds that presidents are likely to declare a mandate when their support is high (they win by a landslide), when they are of the majority party within the party system, and when opposition in Congress is expected to be low. It appears, then, that presidents follow this reasoning when making their declarations. How Congress reacts remains untested.

Operationalizing the President Driven Theory
Conley's theory suggests three explanatory variables for a model of congressional response. The first is the president's margin of victory. The larger the new president's victory, the stronger is the claim to a mandate. A new president will have a more difficult time selling a close election, or one where he receives less then fifty percent of the popular vote, as a mandate for change. In the analyses that follow, this is operationalized as the difference between the percent of the popular vote the victor won, minus the percent won by losing major party.[6] We expect a positive relationship, the larger the margin of victory the greater the number of members who will act as if a mandate exists. A bivariate test does not support the theory. The relationship is negative (-3.12), and nonsignificant ($p>0.25$).[7]

Conley's second expectation is that a president will be more likely to claim a mandate if he is of the majority party in the electorate (because he is more likely to win the backing of the public). Given our reading of the aggregate level partisanship of the electorate, we interpret the majority party as the Democratic Party for the entire period studied here (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002).[8] The expectation of Conley's model is that if the mandate party is the majority party, Congress should be more likely to respond out of the fear that the president will gain power if he goes public with his agenda. Thus, the indicator of majority party status should be positively related to the number of members affected. It is not. The coefficient is negative (-17.71) though insignificant ($p>0.57$).

The third hypothesis is that the president should claim a mandate despite only moderate support from the public so long as he has the support of Congress. Moderate public support is defined as those instances where the president receives less than fifty percent in the presidential election (the criterion used by Conley), and congressional support is the number of chambers controlled by the president's party. Because the expectation is conditional and congressional support matters only when electoral support is moderate, our measure is an interaction between the number of chambers controlled and a dummy indicating whether the president received less than a majority of the popular vote. This coefficient should be positively related to the number of members affected by the mandate perception. Again, the data do not support the President

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[6] Conley uses several measures of presidential support. This one is best behaved in the analyses.
[7] The coefficients reported are regression coefficients. The interpretation, then, is the change in the number of members affected for a one percent change in the margin of victory.
[8] Conley defines the majority party as the Democratic Party from 1960 to 1980 and the Republican Party thereafter. The results of the test of the majority party hypothesis are the same regardless of the criterion chosen.

Driven model. The coefficient on the interaction term is positive (7.89) but nonsignificant (p>0.84).

Table 2 presents a multivariate test of the theory. The model includes as explanatory variables the president's margin of victory, an indicator of the president receiving less than 50% of the popular vote, whether or not the mandate party is the majority party, the number of chambers of Congress controlled by the mandate party, and an interaction between the president not receiving a majority and the number of chambers the party controls.[9] Because this number is a count (a non-negative integer) the model is estimated with a Poisson regression. Again, the expectations from Conley's model are that larger margins of victory, receiving over 50% of the vote, and being in the majority party should boost responses to a mandate claim. The president's party's control in Congress should matter when the president is weak. Thus, the chamber control variable should be insignificant and the interaction term should be positive—control matters when the president is unpopular.

<div align="center">[Table 2 here]</div>

The multivariate model offers some support for the President Driven model, though the results are mixed. The estimate tapping when the president does not receive a majority is significant and correctly signed. More members of Congress react to a mandate when a president wins a majority of the popular vote than when he wins with a minority. Both the margin of victory and the majority party indicator are significant and *incorrectly* signed. In this analysis, the larger the margin of victory the president receives, the *less* likely members are to behave as if there were a mandate. In addition, if it is the majority party that gains a mandate, *fewer* members respond to it. (We demonstrate shortly that these counter-intuitive results stem from an underspecified model). Finally, the interaction between a minority president and the number of chambers the president's party controlled is positive and significant as expected. The size of the coefficient, however, is small (0.14) compared to the main effect of being elected with a minority of the votes (-0.56). In combination, this suggests that being elected with a minority of votes suppresses the congressional reaction. This effect, however, is mitigated by the number of chambers the party of the president holds. Thus, the evidence that mandate perceptions stem from a strategic interaction of the branches is mixed.

Public Driven
The Public Driven model of congressional reaction is based upon members' concerns about reelection. Members attend to signals from the public in an effort to balance their own policy preferences with those of their constituents, and thus reduce the possibility of defeat in the next election. If they get a signal that the electorate has moved, they react by moving quickly in the same direction as the public. Mandate elections are uniquely informative signals of change in the policy preferences of voters. They combine a clear, shared interpretation of the election as a signal of preference change and they provide decisive evidence that the change has electoral implications. Presidents matter in this model only to the extent that they are one among many politicians swept along by the tide of changing opinion. However, they need not matter at all. What matters is that the member of Congress perceives change in the minds of the voters.

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[9] In her analyses, Conley uses the percent of seats controlled by the president's party instead of the number of chambers. An alternative model was estimated with that measurement technique and it performed much worse.

Operationalizing the Public Driven Theory
The Public Driven theory explains the duration of individual member response to electoral signals following elections where a near unanimous press calls a mandate. To make a set of predictions comparable to the President Driven model, we need to reformulate the research design to examine whether a member responds following all elections (including the large number of contests in which there is no press consensus of mandate). We end up with elements of our original theory, but a research design that is different. The difference is that members are now conditioning their response on the implications that national electoral trends may have on their personal electoral conditions rather than on the more direct change in personal circumstances.

The Washington community's construction of the meaning of the election is a central factor in the Public Driven model. Such a consensus is found for 1980 and 1994, but for no other years in the brief span, 1980-1996, that we examined. Given the importance we place on how these elections are perceived in the media, the obvious choice for a predictor of congressional reactions would be the content of the media depiction of the election. However, the limited availability of electronically archived media sources (and the resulting inability to compare content analyses) leaves us unable to include this variable. The lack of electronically available archives of media coverage prior to 1980 however, means that one cannot compare the pre-1980 coverage to that after 1980. If we were to limit our analyses to only the years where electronic archives were available, we would shrink our already small number of elections by half. Instead, we look to other evidence that members of Congress may have of changes in public opinion, most notably the signals from the election itself. What electoral information might serve as a signal of changing public opinion? We begin with a signal ignored in the President Driven model (and most other discussions of mandates), congressional elections. Two aspects of such elections might serve as indicators of opinion change and thus influence members' mandate perceptions. The first is a change in partisan control of one of the chambers of Congress. Given the importance of party control, a change in the majority in a chamber should signal a desire for change within the electorate. The second indicator is the number of seats gained by the mandate party. While a change in the control of a chamber may be more visible, members of Congress care about their *own* electoral fortunes. How their colleagues fare may be a sign of what they can expect in the next election. The change in control of a chamber and the number of seats gained by the mandate party should both be positively related to the number of members affected.

Bivariate tests support both hypotheses. Both the number of seats that change (β = 1.65, $p<0.05$) and the change in control of a chamber ($\beta = 94.90$, $p<0.05$) are positively related to the number of members who act as if they were responding to a mandate. The aggregate changes in congressional fortunes influence those members of Congress who survive the election.

A presidential election can also signal change in voter preferences. We again expect that both a change in the party in power and the size of the victory will shape the reaction of members of Congress. The Public Driven theory centers on members of Congress perceiving a *change* in the ideological preference of the nation and their own constituents. An election where a president is reelected, or equally where a vice president succeeds a president, will not contain the same message as an election where the party in office goes down to defeat. We account for this by including a dummy variable that indicates a change in the party controlling the presidency. We expect the coefficient to be positive—change in the party control creates perception of preference change, which, in turn, leads to more members affected.

The Public Driven model also suggests that the president's margin of victory matters. A larger margin is a stronger signal. Unlike the President Driven model, however, the effect of the margin of victory should depend on whether or not there is a change in the party of the presidency. In other words, Richard Nixon's election in 1968, or Reagan's in 1980, should have been a stronger message for change than either president's reelection four years later, despite the much larger margins in the reelection victories.[10] Thus, our analyses include a variable that interacts the victory margin and party change. This, too, should be positively related to the number of members affected.[11]

Initial tests support these hypotheses, though the situation is a bit more complex than with our previous results. As noted in the discussion of the President Driven model, the margin of victory variable was not significant in the bivariate test. Similarly, the change in the party of the president was not significant in a bivariate analysis ($\beta= 14.93$, $p>0.67$). When both terms, and the interaction of them are included together, things change. The main effects are both insignificant (β for margin of victory = -5.03, $p>0.06$, the change in the party of the president $\beta = -54.26$, $p > 0.22$). The interaction term, however, is positive and significant ($\beta= 17.59$, $p < 0.05$). The initial conclusion, then, is that the margin of victory matters when the party of the president changes. A *change* that comes with a large victory gets a sizeable reaction from members of Congress. Without the change in the party of the president, the margin is irrelevant.[12]

Finally, the position of the winning party in the electorate should matter in the Public Driven model. Where the President Driven model sees majority status in the electorate as a factor that would bolster a mandate claim, the Public Driven model sees little informational value in an election where the majority party retains its status. If the majority party wins, the consensus view of politics works; nothing has changed. However, if the minority party wins, this can be a sign of changing electoral fortunes. Thus, the two models have conflicting expectations. If the Public Driven model is correct, the majority party indicator should be negatively related to mandate perceptions. As reported above, the bivariate results do not support this hypothesis.

We now turn to the multivariate model suggested by the Public Driven model of mandates. Again, the dependent variable is the number of members who react as would be expected if they had perceived a mandate. The explanatory variables are the numbers of seats gained by the party that could claim a mandate, an indicator of change in control if a chamber, the president's margin of victory, an indicator of change in the party of the presidency, an interaction between these last two, and the majority party indicator. These results are generally supportive of the Public Driven model. Both the number of seats gained by the mandate party and the change in the control of a chamber of Congress are positive and significant effects. While the change in the party of the president is not significant, the interaction with the victory margin is positive and significant. If the party of the president changes, and the vote margin is large, members react. Interestingly, the

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[10] The key theoretical difference is the role of expectations in the Public Driven model. Unexpected outcomes are signals to members that their understanding of politics may be faulty. An expected outcome, no matter how lopsided, is in contrast a confirmation that prior understandings were correct, not in need of revision.

[11] It should be noted that this alters the interpretation of the "margin of victory" variable. The direct margin of victory term now refers to the effect of the president's margin of victory when the party of the president does not change.

[12] The effect is close to significant ($p<0.06$). Given the small N (20), this conclusion may seem hasty. The direction of the effect, however, fits the theory.

main effect of the president's margin of victory is significant, but negative. If the election does not signal a shift in public opinion as evidenced by a change in the ruling party, the president's margin of victory does not induce members to support the president. It actually is associated with less support of the president. Finally, the majority party indicator remains statistically insignificant.

[Table 3 here]

To this point, we have presented parallel analyses testing the two theories. Now we let them compete in the same analysis. We conclude our aggregate analyses by estimating a full model of mandate reactions—one that includes the predictors for both the President Driven and Public Driven models. The results in Table 4 support the Public Driven model. None of the President Driven model's main predictions is supported. Unlike the expectation of the President Driven model, the effect of the president's victory margin is conditional on whether or not the party of the president changes. If the presidency changes party, the margin of victory has essentially no effect. If the party does not change, the larger the margin of victory the more muted the reaction—the opposite of what the President Driven model suggests. Second, the status of the party in the American electorate is unrelated to the congressional reaction. The effect is positive, but insignificant. Finally, while a minority president shrinks the congressional reaction, this effect does not depend on the standing of the president's party in Congress.

[Table 4 Here]

In contrast, the Public Driven model fares well. We have already noted the conditional effects of the margin of victory. Moreover, the change in the party of the president is also significant and positive—if the party of the president changes, more members of Congress react as if there were a mandate. Most importantly, both of the Congress measures are positive and significant. The more seats the mandate party picks up, the more members react as if there were a mandate. If these seat gains culminate in a change in one of the chambers of Congress, the effect is even stronger. In short, the size of the congressional reaction to the election depends on the strength of the signal for change in both the congressional and presidential election results.

The estimates in the second column of Table 4 present a rough picture of the effects of our predictors on the number of members who react to the perceived mandate. We know the statistically significant predictors and we know their direction of influence. What we do not yet know is how substantively important these effects are. Fortunately, we can convert these coefficients to substantive effects. The third column of Table 4 presents the expected change in the number of members affected when we make changes in the values of each significant variable and hold the remaining variable at their typical value.[13] For the dichotomous variables (a chamber changing control, the party of the president changing, and the president being elected with less than 50 percent of the vote) we report the effect of a dichotomous change. For the other variables, we report the effect of moving from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile. All of the variables have large effects. A change in the control of a chamber in Congress results in almost 19 more members supporting a mandate. A change in the seats gained by the mandate party -- moving from the 25th to 75th percentile, about 45 seats-- results in 36 members changing their roll call voting. A change in the party of the presidency leads to 40 members deviating from their equilibria at the start of the session, while a change in the president's margin of victory suppresses the congressional reaction by 24 members. Finally, if the president is elected

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[13] The expected change in the number of members affected was calculated using CLARIFY (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2003).

with less than 50 percent of the vote, the expected congressional reaction is reduced by almost 45 members. These are substantively important; each represents a sizable block of votes. The signals of change in public opinion have the potential to change substantially the outcome of roll calls in the new Congress.

Individual Level Evidence

At this point, the evidence is supportive of the Public Driven model of mandate perceptions among members of Congress. The aggregate level patterns suggest that members of Congress react to the signals of change in public opinion that come from the national elections. This is one plausible interpretation of the results. A second interpretation could be that the patterns observed so far are not the result of some national level factors, but the aggregate of 535 individual members reacting to their own individual election signals. Members may not be attending to the national level patterns at all, but to their own election results. If the national patterns reflect the individual results that members of Congress see (and if we know anything about congressional elections, we know that the local and national tides are often connected), then what we may be uncovering here is not the reactions to mandate elections, but individual members of Congress responding to their own constituents. With these coarse aggregate counts of the numbers of members affected by a mandate, we cannot assess these competing interpretations. A micro-level analysis permits such an assessment.

We now ask whether the national factors contribute to the explanation of who responds as if a mandate occurred once we include relevant individual level predictors. If national factors continue to matter, then the patterns we observe are not merely the aggregation of individual level patterns, but are indicative of members of Congress responding to a national signal -- and implicitly to national media -- about the state of public opinion. The key, then, is to identify the relevant individual level predictors. To do that, we return to our previous work.

The key individual variables reflect the strength of the signal that members receive and the necessity for the member to respond. Change in the member's margin of victory is central our theory. If members are responding to their own districts, then national election interpretations are superfluous. And if a member were merely responding to his or her constituents, and not the nation, then we would expect to see that only district-level election results matter. Our theory points to asymmetry between losses and gains. Stable outcomes confirm the member strategic understanding and should produce continuity. Gains present an opportunity to take a more extreme stand for the advantaged side, but also tend to reassure the member about electoral strategy. Losses are disconfirming, a warning to the surviving member that future elections also may pose electoral hazards. Losses (of any size) demand changed behavior. Thus we model these effects by including separate measures indicating the size of the loss or gain for the individual member.

Member ideology informs us about the necessity for change. Members perched near the middle of the ideological spectrum tend to represent closely divided districts that are sensitive to member voting records and hard to hold. We expect strong responses from them. More extreme members tend to represent districts that are safe for their party and present records so far from moderation as to make the attempt to moderate useless. Thus, we include the ideological extremity of the member, coded as the absolute value of the folded ADA score ($|ADA - 50|$), expecting a negative relationship.

Seniority, we have argued, should insulate members from the over-interpretation that is common for one-sided elections. They have seen it before. Our analyses, however, have usually not supported this expectation. And it is natural also to control for party, given its central role in

roll-call voting, even though we have no prior expectation on which party, advantaged or disadvantaged, is likely to respond more.

Whether or not the member of Congress deviates from his or her equilibrium at the start of the session is the issue to be explained. Because it is binary, we estimate a logit model, where positive coefficients indicate a greater likelihood of reacting to a mandate. The model contains the micro-level predictors outlined above and election specific factors. We include a dummy variable indicating whether the member was in the House to control for any differences across the chambers. We use robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity induced by the pooling across elections. The estimates appear in Table 5.

[Table 5 Here]

Although the focus of analysis is different -- in Peterson et al. (2003) we modeled mandate duration and here we are predicting whether or not a member was affected -- the results for the individual level variables are similar. Members of the mandate party are more likely to respond than are out party members. The change in the member's margin of victory also matters. Members who lose vote share are significantly more likely to deviate from their equilibrium voting strategy than members who gain vote share, and the greater the loss, the greater the impact. Seniority, ideological extremity, and a gain in vote margin are not significantly related to reacting to a mandate.

The national level factors shape individual level decision making too, even when we control for the individual level influences. The patterns mirror those of our count models and support portions of the two original theories. The impact of the president's margin of victory does not depend on a change in the party of the presidency. The remaining variables of interest are all significant. A president from the majority party, a president receiving less than half of the popular vote, or a president with a large margin of victory all suppress the likelihood that a member reacts. A change in the party of the presidency, or a gain in either the number of seats or the control of the chambers in Congress increases the likelihood that a member will react. Finally, the negative influence of electing a minority president is mitigated by the president's party's status in Congress. The interaction effect of a minority president and the number of chambers controlled by the president's party is positive and significant, but its magnitude (0.28) is substantially smaller than that of the main effect of having a minority president (-1.00). Minority presidents suffer in Congress, but they suffer less if their party controls Congress.

The third column of Table 5 gives some substantive meaning to these results. Here we report explanations of the predicted probability that a member reacts as if a mandate existed. The effects for dichotomous variables are the predicted change in probability between the categories. For continuous variables, the effect is the difference between the 25th and 75th percentiles. We start our discussion with the member specific predictors which provide a benchmark for comparing the effects of the national election-level predictors. The two statistically significant predictors have relatively small effects. Switching from the disadvantaged party to the mandate party increases the probability of responding by 0.09 while the change to a larger decrease in victory margin increases the probability of reacting by 0.05. The national election-level factors have more sizable effects. If the election changed the control of a chamber of Congress, the probability that a typical member reacts increases by 0.09. The hypothetical seat change has an even larger effect—the change in seats produces a 0.12 increase in the probability that a typical member reacts. The change in the party of the presidency has the largest effect—increasing the probability by 0.14. Finally, if the election supports the current majority party, members are only slightly less likely to respond (a change of -0.06). The president's margin of victory also

has a modest negative effect (-0.05) on the probability that a member responds. Overall, the pattern is clear: signals of *change* in the national election results are important predictors of an individual member's decision to respond to the perceived mandate, perhaps more important than the signals the member received from his or her own constituents.

Agenda or Ideology?

Before concluding, we wish to address one lingering issue. Our approach to members' reaction assumes that the changes that occur stem from changes in their ideological voting strategies and not from the content of the roll call votes they face. An alternative explanation to the patterns we find is that members of Congress are reacting to changes in the policy agenda, and in particular the agenda pushed by the President. The idea that members might respond to the President, or the content of a limited number of specific bills is a serious challenge to our theory. Ultimately, we believe, given our measurement strategy, that this alternative explanation is implausible and that it is inconsistent with the evidence.

Our measure of a member of Congress' reaction to the election is susceptible to changes in the Congressional agenda. Our measurement strategy assumes that the agenda is largely constant—a liberal vote at the start of the session is the same as a liberal vote at the end. If this measurement assumption is incorrect, if the agenda changes the content of the roll calls, then the measures of Congressional reaction may be biased. The *direction* of this bias, however, depends on how the agenda shifts during the Congress.

Consider the most common understanding, that mandate elections produce an early session agenda shift in the direction of the mandate. If, contrary to our theory, member voting strategies were then constant, the agenda shift would produce movement *away from the mandate* in the early session, the opposite of both our theoretical claim and our empirical findings. Agenda shift is not a competing explanation then. It explains not the effects we see, but the opposite. It should suppress mandate influence, not account for it.

The only way that changes in the agenda could drive the effects we observe would be if the agenda moved in the opposite direction. A strategic leadership would have to propose more moderate legislation at the start of the session and then become extreme as time progresses. This would require party leaders to forego the advantage of the election for cherished policy goals and instead compromise where it would seem unnecessary. It is much more likely that leaders of the party that gained from the election will use the gains to attempt to influence public policy. They will propose legislation that is less moderate not more. Thus, the measurement scheme may create a bias, but it is a conservative one.

The empirical results present a more forceful answer to agenda change as competing theory. Changes in the agenda could produce reactions that might appear to be a reaction to a mandate. But the agenda change explanation cannot explain why it is specific members, those who receive strong signals from their constituents, who respond. The results presented here further discredit the agenda change explanation. If it is agenda change in the early session that drives apparent mandate effects, these changes should be largely unpredictable across years. Their magnitude, as captured in the number of members who are affected, should not vary with the strength of the signal for change found in the election. While many theories could explain why we see the changes in member roll call votes that we do, the only one consistent with both the micro and macro level results we present is one that stems from the construction of the meaning of the election. The predictability both of which members alter their voting and in which years suggests that only the members' construction of the meaning of the election can be behind this process.

Conclusions

Our results demonstrate the importance of the policy message members of Congress take from election returns. While scholars may disagree over the possibility of finding a policy mandate in election results, given the right circumstances, members of Congress have little difficulty finding one. More importantly, they quickly adjust their behavior to reflect the electoral signal. For some members it is a means of insulating themselves from the changing electoral landscape. Their response to the mandate election is an attempt to stave off the possibility of electoral defeat. For others the mandate provides new opportunities to vote their ideological preferences, perhaps more brazenly.

The results also speak to the debate about how members of Congress perceive mandates. Members of Congress behave as if a mandate occurred only when election results suggest a shifting electorate. Conley's argument about mandates is well reasoned and her focus on the exchange between the president and Congress is an important step in reconceptualizing and testing new theories of electoral mandates. The results presented here, however, indicate that the key mechanism behind change in Congress lies in member perceptions of a changing electoral landscape and *not* in presidential declarations. Members of Congress attend to and react to signals about how well they reflect the changing views of their constituents.

We conclude with a question: what do these models tell us about the workings of our democracy and system of representation? Dahl (1990), in what is the definitive critique of the standard conception of mandates, argues that presidents' use of mandates is harmful. The president uses rhetoric and executive powers to manipulate public opinion and to influence Congress, excessively in Dahl's view. The dilemma is that this more democratic presidency has weakened the ability of Congress, the body most closely linked to the people, to oversee the president and direct policy debates. Dahl sees a system with less public consideration of candidates and less review of elites by their peers. The mandate claim in this view has emboldened the presidency and brought increased conflict with, and domination over, Congress. This has eroded meaningful deliberation, eliminated constructive compromise, and created gridlock.

The President Driven model of mandates implies precisely these problems. Illusory support creates a weapon that the president can use to force Congress to accept his agenda. Congress, in this depiction essentially abdicates its constitutional role as a balancing institution and merely serves to pass the president's proposals.

The Public Driven model of mandates suggests a different role for Congress. Instead of capitulating to a powerful president, Congress reflects what it believes are the preferences of the electorate. Congress is then highly responsive; passing measures that it thinks the public supports. While such support may be as illusory as the popularity of the president, the intention of members of Congress is to react to the public's policy preferences. Mandates, then, are not tools used to upset the institutional balance, but examples of rapid and (perhaps at times misguided) representation.

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Table 1. The Number of Members of Congress who React to the Election, by Chamber and Year

Year	Favored Party	House Members Affected	Senators Affected	Total number of Members Affected
1960	Democrats	68	19	87
1962	Democrats	87	13	100
1964	Democrats	53	25	78
1966	Republicans	179	29	218
1968	Republicans	104	10	114
1970	Democrats	27	28	55
1972	Republicans	44	28	72
1974	Democrats	177	27	204
1976	Democrats	126	17	143
1978	Republicans	61	18	79
1980	Republicans	218	39	257
1982	Democrats	219	38	257
1984	Republicans	51	23	74
1986	Democrats	186	27	213
1988	Republicans	132	17	149
1990	Democrats	66	33	99
1992	Democrats	67	38	105
1994	Republicans	122	40	162
1996	Democrats	26	21	47
1998	Republicans	62	25	87

Table 2. Number of members affected by mandate, President Driven model
(Poisson regression)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote	-0.03[w]	0.004
President elected less than 50% of popular vote	-0.56[*]	0.08
Advantaged party is the majority party	-0.23[w]	0.04
Number of chambers of Congress mandate party controls	-0.003	0.02
Interaction: Number of chambers times president received less than 50% of popular vote	0.14[*]	0.06
Constant	5.19[*]	0.04

N = 20.
* indicates p<.05
w indicates wrong signed, p<.05

	Coefficient	Standard Error

Table 3. Number of members affected by mandate, Public Driven model
(Poisson regression)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote	-0.03[*]	0.01
Party of the president changes	0.03	0.08
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote when the party of the president changes	0.06[*]	0.01
Number of seats gained by advantaged party	0.01[*]	0.001
Chamber of Congress changes party control	0.17[*]	0.06
Advantaged Party is the majority party	0.05	0.05
Constant	4.65[*]	0.0

N = 20.
 * indicates p<.05

Table 4. Number of members affected by mandate, Full model
(Poisson regression)

	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Expected change based on changes in Independent variables, CLARIFY estimates. (Standard error of estimate)
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote	-0.03[*] (0.01)	-23.9 (3.3)
President elected less than 50% of popular vote	-0.44[*] (0.11)	-44.5 (7.3)
Advantaged party is the majority party	0.04 (0.05)	-
Number of chambers of Congress mandate party controls	-0.01 (0.03)	-
Number of chambers * president received less than 50% of popular vote	0.06 (0.06)	-
Party of the president changes	0.28[*] (0.10)	40.5 (14.6)
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote when the party of the president changes	0.03 (0.01)	-
Number of seats gained by advantaged party	0.01[*] (0.001)	36.1 (5.2)
Chamber of Congress changes party control	0.14[*] (0.07)	19.3 (7.6)
Constant	4.71[*] (0.07)	-

N = 20. * indicates p<.05

Column thee illustrates the expected change in the number of members affected based on changes in the value of the independent variable listed and typical values for all other variables. For all dichotomous variables the effect is the expected difference between zero and one for that variable. For the continuous variables the effect is between the 25th and 75th percentiles.

Based on 1000 simulations of the model.

Table 5. Likelihood member of Congress is affected by a mandate (Logit model).

	Coefficient (Robust Standard Error)	Expected effect, CLARIFY estimates. (Standard error of estimate)
Individual level controls		
Ideological extremity	-0.01 (0.01)	-
Member is of advantaged party	0.46* (0.05)	0.09 (0.01)
Seniority	0.001 (0.003)	-
Gain in victory margin	0.06 (0.12)	-
Loss in victory margin	-0.43* (0.14)	0.05 (0.02)
House Member	0.03 (0.07)	-
Electoral factors		
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.05 (0.01)
President elected less than 50% of popular vote	-0.80* (0.19)	-0.14 (0.03)
Advantaged party is the majority party	-0.30* (0.06)	-0.06 (0.01)
Number of chambers of Congress mandate party controls	-0.05 (0.03)	-
Number of chambers * president received less than 50% of popular vote	0.20* (0.09)	0.05 (0.02)
Party of the president changes	0.63* (0.15)	0.14 (0.04)
Presidential margin of victory in popular vote when the party of the president changes	0.004 (0.02)	-
Number of seats gained by advantaged party	0.02* (0.002)	0.12 (0.01)
Chamber of Congress changes party control	0.42* (0.09)	0.09 (0.02)
Constant	-1.34* (0.019)	0.19

N = 9432   * indicates p<.05

Column three illustrates the change in the probability a member will react to the election based on changes in the value of the independent variable listed and typical values for all other variables. For all dichotomous variables the effect is the expected difference between zero and one for that variable. For the continuous variables the effect is between the 25th and 75th percentiles.

Based on 1000 simulations of the model.