

**SOME POLITICS ARE STILL LOCAL:
STRATEGIC POSITION TAKING IN CONGRESS & ELECTIONS**

Rachel Porter

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Approved by:

Sarah A. Treul

Santiago Olivella

John Aldrich

Jason M. Roberts

Marc Hetherington

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ABSTRACT

RACHEL PORTER: Some Politics Are Still Local:
Strategic Position Taking in Congress & Elections
(Under the direction of Sarah A. Treul)

In today’s congressional elections, politicians are increasingly presumed to run on the same party-driven platforms, offering voters the same choices throughout the country. Many argue that “local” issues—policy priorities important to a specific constituency—barely register. My dissertation challenges this expectation. I demonstrate that—even though House elections attend more to national issues than before—candidates still often “go local.” To measure the degree to which a candidate’s campaign is locally-oriented, I employ text data on policy positions extracted from campaign websites for candidates who ran for the U.S. House of Representatives across the 2018 and 2020 elections. Pairing this original data collection with a variety of methods for quantitative text analysis, I show that our theories of strategic candidate behavior must be updated to better reflect what locally-oriented campaigning looks like in today’s era of nationalized politics. I go on to demonstrate that politicians who employ locally-oriented rhetoric in their campaigns carry forward this same position taking behavior into the legislative arena. This finding underscores a critical, but underemphasize, continuity between an incumbent’s electoral and legislative behavior. In sum, this dissertation aims to refocus the discipline’s attention in an era of nationalized expectations back towards local considerations, reminding scholars that local politics are still relevant in modern campaigns.

For Alex & Benji

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1: INTRODUCTION

Heading into 2018, politicians framed the upcoming election much like recent midterms—as a referendum on the president and his party. Contentious national issues, from the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court to the state of the southern border, were at the core of many campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives. On the campaign trail, Republicans touted a healthy economy and record-low unemployment rates while emphasizing the importance of pursuing conservative immigration reform. The Democratic Party, in a year of unprecedented campaign spending, poured nearly \$125 million dollars into party messaging on healthcare alone (Fischer, 2018). Democrats and Republicans alike implored voters to recognize the importance of attaining majority control in Congress, both for achieving their party goals and for assuring the future of the country. These campaign appeals did not fall on deaf ears. According to Pew Research Center (2018), both Democratic and Republican registered voters placed immigration and healthcare among the top issues guiding their vote on Election Day in 2018. Further, three-quarters of registered voters in both parties cited party control of Congress as a major factor in their vote choice. In sum, defining the electoral stakes in terms of contentious, national issues had its desired impact: party issues and party power in Congress were at the forefront of many voters' minds as they headed into the voting booth.

Journalists and pundits alike noted that politicians and their parties were especially successful at “nationalizing” the 2018 midterms, making individual races about collective party positions rather than the people running for office. Such efforts to focus voters' attention on a core set of national issues were by no means incidental. For the past several decades, both major parties have made substantial investments into cultivating a party “brand,” strategically crafting their messaging to define and dramatize their differences for voters (Lee, 2016). These endeavors to unify party messaging have produced their desired effect: America's two major political parties are today perceived to offer voters the same choices throughout the country, with each candidate in each district running on the same party-focused platform. With clearer impressions of both parties' positions, voters increasingly

use party affiliation to inform candidate choice (Levendusky, 2010). As a result, straight ticket voting has reached levels not seen since before the New Deal (Jacobson and Carson, 2016).

Nationalized politics seem to leave little room for former House Speaker Tip O’Neill’s famous assessment that “all politics is local.” For much of O’Neill’s political career, spanning from the mid-to-late-1900’s, congressional candidates won office by claiming credit for their work in Washington, championing district interests, and bringing tangible benefits back home to their constituents. Seminal works by Mayhew (1974) and Fenno (1978) detail elections in this same way, emphasizing the importance of tailoring one’s campaign behavior to district conditions and centering one’s campaign platform around policy priorities important to constituents. The striking differences between this locally-oriented style of elections and our contemporary style of politics have led some to question the extent to which district considerations still factor into politicians’ political calculus (e.g. Grimmer 2013*b*; Abramowitz and Webster 2015; Jacobson and Carson 2016; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2020). Some have even gone as far as to suggest that today’s congressional elections are largely divorced from local concerns (e.g. Gelman and Huang 2008; Hopkins 2018).

In this dissertation, I evaluate whether politics today are indeed as nationalized as contemporary accounts suggest, or if some politics are still local. I argue that—although our political environment has changed—the institutional mechanisms that incentivize locally-oriented politics remain. I go on to explore the kinds of electoral conditions under which congressional candidates might still choose to “go local.” In particular, I demonstrate that politicians have greater motivation to discuss district projects and problems when (1) their election is competitive for both parties, and (2) primary election voters in their district skew ideologically moderate. I go on to propose an update to our understanding of what locally-oriented campaign behavior looks like in modern congressional elections. Pairing an original collection of text data with a novel method for quantitative text analysis, I demonstrate that politicians can exhibit a commitment to their district even if their platform centers on nationally-relevant issues. In what remains of this introduction, I lay out a general theoretical framework that ties together the chapters that make up this dissertation. Next, I provide an overview of each chapter, focusing on the specific questions addressed and findings presented in each. Finally, I outline the importance of locally-oriented elections and the broader consequences of nationalized politics.

1.1 The Rise of Party Messaging & Nationalized Campaigns

In congressional elections, a candidate's primary goal is to win a plurality of votes. Accordingly, incumbents and congressional hopefuls shape their campaigns to appeal to the attitudes and preferences of district constituents, hoping that their actions sway the opinion of enough voters to win the election. Every aspect of a politician's persona—from the way she dresses and the car she drives (Fenno, 1978) to her professional and political career (Canon, 1990; Hansen and Treul, 2021)—can have some impression on voters and, therefore, must be carefully curated. One of the many campaign facets that candidates tailor to voters is their issue agenda—defined as the policies and positions a candidate chooses to run on, often called the “platform.” Although issue positions may not be the only factor guiding a citizen's vote choice, the stances taken up by politicians certainly have some impact in swaying voters' impressions (e.g. Wright Jr. 1978; Bartels 1988; Wright Jr. and Berkman 1986; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Lapinski et al. 2016; Shor and Rogowski 2018). Accordingly, Herrnson (2015) finds that politicians spend a substantial amount of time constructing their platforms, giving careful consideration to the positions they take (see also Petrocik, Benoit and Hansen 2003). Sulkin and Evans (2006) show that candidate issue agendas exhibit a diversity of themes across time, changing with the tides of electoral conditions at the national and local level.

So how do politicians choose which issues to run on? For most of the 20th century, weak American parties meant that candidates could not rely on party labels to inform voters of their policy positions. Instead, individual candidates acted as policy “entrepreneurs,” running on issue priorities unique to their own constituencies. In Fenno's (1978) account of House elections during this era, he observed that members of Congress regularly took credit for local projects as a reliable way to shore up their electoral prospects. Mayhew (1974) viewed voters from this same period as likely to reward politicians for local distributive goods and largely agnostic towards policy proposals about national legislation. Although the choice to run on local issues is generally rewarded by voters, it can also be precarious. Jacobson (1989) notes that—when they choose to run as “local” candidates—politicians must be especially strategic, constantly remaining abreast to the changing winds of voter sentiment about district issues. Diligently tracking constituency opinion is also costly, taking time away from other campaigning activities and contributing to the ever-present resource allocation dilemma candidates face in elections (Bartels, 1985; Herrnson, 2015).

In the presence of weak parties, candidates are left with few options beyond “going local.” Over the last several decades, however, elite polarization has led to the strengthening of party labels. Today, both parties have adopted unabashedly partisan rhetorical strategies (Arbour, 2014), firmly staked out their policy specializations (Petrocik, Benoit and Hansen, 2003), and built the communication infrastructure needed to propagate their partisan messages (Lee, 2016). With strong party labels it is no longer necessary for candidates to be policy entrepreneurs, another option exists: champion now-clarified party positions on national issues-of-the-day. As outlined earlier in this chapter, contemporary accounts of elections suggest that politicians today have eschewed locally-oriented campaigning in favor of partisan messaging. A potential explanation for this elite behavior shift could be rooted in the cost-cutting advantages that ready-made party positions afford. Per Bartels (1985), resource allocation is a major strategic activity in campaigns. Politicians seek to maximize the impact of their finite time and resources by dedicating them to activities that supply the greatest electoral advantage. Running on ready-made party positions conserves precious campaign resources, allowing candidates to reallocate their time to other campaign efforts.

In addition to their cost-cutting advantages, party positions *themselves* can present a number of strategic advantages to congressional candidates. Adopting party positions as their own allows politicians to capitalize on their party’s reputation and “ride the wave” of party popularity within their electorate (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Snyder and Ting, 2002). Additionally, some voters today more readily identify with candidates who run on salient national issues. In response to elite polarization and now-clarified party cues, voters have sorted (Hetherington, 2001; Levendusky, 2009, 2010). As a result, each party’s constituent base has grown distinct along cultural, social, and ethnic lines (Mason, 2018). Today’s electorate is increasingly composed of “loyalists” whose party ties are a result of group attachments rather than ideology (Barber and Pope, 2019). These voters are uninterested in a candidate’s posturing on the issues; instead, they base their vote choice solely on whether a “D” or “R” can be found beside a candidate’s name on the ballot. Primary election voters, conversely, are considered to be both politically sophisticated and engaged. These kinds of voters expect candidates to serve as reliable envoys for the party on salient national issues (Trussler, 2022). In tandem with the rise of mass partisanship, the number of “marginal” districts—where both parties have a competitive shot at winning the general election—have dwindled. The vast majority of congressional districts today are safely partisan; in these races, winning the primary

may be a candidate's only major obstacle to attaining office. This places all the more importance on satisfying primary election voter preferences. By adopting party positions as their own, candidates may endeavor to placate these all-important supporters (Lapinski et al., 2016).

The narrowing of partisan majorities in Congress may also help to explain politicians' turn towards nationalized partisan messaging. From the mid- to late-20th century, the Democratic Party enjoyed a period of nearly uninterrupted majority status in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, since the turn-of-the-century, party control of Congress has changed hands numerous times and the margins for partisan control have often come down to a handful of seats. Whether it be the ability to fulfill legislative priorities (Cox and Mager, 1999; Aldrich and Rohde, 2011), exercise negative agenda control (Gailmard and Jenkins, 2007), or guide the informational environment (Curry, 2015), the spoils of majority party status in Congress are numerous. Rank-and-file lawmakers also benefit greatly when their party is in the majority: they gain access to valuable earmarks (Balla et al., 2002) and have more success raising money from outside their own district (Gimpel, Lee and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2008). If majority party members are especially loyal, they are more likely to find themselves on prestige committees (Heberlig, 2003) and are more likely to see their bills advance through the legislative process (Hasecke and Mycoff, 2007). Those members who fail to fall in line tend to fall out of favor with party elites, facing legislative and electoral consequences (Jacobson and Carson, 2016). These carrot and stick incentives motivate legislators to help their party achieve majority status by promoting a unified party voice (Lee, 2016).

In summary, party "brands" provide clearer signals on policy positions than can individual politicians. What's more, some voters *expect* candidates to parrot their party's policy positions. Aligning their issue priorities with those of the national party can also help politicians demonstrate fealty to party elites; behavior which could be substantially rewarded if their party attains majority control. Perhaps most simply, running on party positions about nationally-salient issues provides politicians with a kind of electoral shortcut. Tailoring one's policy platform to district conditions is time and effort intensive. Adopting ready-made party positions is far less taxing, giving politicians more time to engage in other electoral and lawmaking activities. Taken together, these factors provide ample explanation for the widespread implementation of a nationalized campaign strategy among candidates for Congress. All of this, of course, begs the question: with so many incentives to implement party messaging, why would any modern politician choose to "go local?"

1.2 Local Issues in Modern Congressional Elections

While there is no question that our electoral environment has changed, those institutional mechanisms that incentivize locally-oriented politics have not. It is still the case that representatives are elected to Congress by earning a plurality of votes from their *own* electorate. The advantages afforded by toeing the party line on national issues are only beneficial insofar as they help a candidate win her election. Although party positions are serviceable enough to meet some candidates' electoral needs, I argue that position taking in congressional campaigns is not one-size-fits-all. Indeed, this dissertation is motivated by the theory that running on a purely nationalized platform will not always be enough to sway voters—sometimes local issues are vital to winning over the electorate.

In districts where a strong majority of constituents share a candidate's partisanship, general election victory is all but assured for that party's nominee. Winning the primary election in these safely partisan districts may be a candidate's only obstacle to attaining office. Pleasing primary voters, then, becomes of the highest importance. Brady, Han and Pope (2007) characterize primary voters as politically active, sophisticated, and well-informed. Ideological primary voters tend to weigh partisan purity more heavily in their candidate considerations (Burden, 2004; Lapinski et al., 2016); a nationally-oriented platform should be especially pleasing to them. Conversely, when party margins are close—or perhaps even unfavorable—looking beyond the party base for electoral support becomes far more crucial. An issue agenda that is purely composed of party positions about national issues may alienate other-party voters and fail to persuade undecideds. Indeed, politicians representing competitive districts who become too enthralled with party unity tend to perform poorly in subsequent elections (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan, 2002; Carson et al., 2010). A platform made up of locally-driven issue positions may help distract from a candidate's partisanship. District projects and problems—such as keeping local waterways clean or building a light-rail commuter train—lack the same partisan flavor as hot-button topics like immigration or healthcare (Vavreck, 2001). Running on these kinds of local issues may help candidates distance themselves from their party and win over those voters at the margins who are essential to a general election victory.

Voters today are less knowledgeable than they were in the past about issues affecting them at the local and state-level. Existing research argues that the pervasiveness of party messaging (Lee, 2016), changing media environment (Hopkins, 2018), and expansion of broadband Internet access (Trussler,

2020) have all contributed in some way to this decline in voter knowledge. Although nationalization has most certainly drawn Americans' attention away from local concerns, some district issues are too important to be ignored. According to Parker et al. (2018), voters' opinions about which political issues constitute America's "most important problems" vary across a standard set of predictors, such as partisanship and age, *as well as* between geographic areas, such as states and congressional districts. When voters perceive a problem as especially important to their local community, they are more likely engage in "issue voting"—incorporating a candidate's position on that issue into their voting calculus on Election Day (Grose and Oppenheimer, 2007). Failing to address these kinds of locally-important issues in favor of a purely partisan platform will surely have electoral repercussions. Cobb and Kuklinski (1997) show that when the public views an issue as especially important to their community, they expect a more "local" form of representation—toeing the party line will not suffice. It follows that politicians will be most likely to be held accountable for overly partisan position taking behavior when it concerns issues that matter most to their constituents (Jones, 2011; Carson et al., 2010).

Recall, one of the advantages that national party positions hold over local issues is their convenience. To figure out what district projects and problems matter most to constituents requires a knowledge of local and state political priorities, coupled with an understanding of where public sentiment rests on these issues. The average congressional candidate presumably lacks this depth of knowledge, and the costs of making such associations from scratch would be too high to justify. Only when it is an electoral necessity will these kinds of candidates do the hard work associated with running on local issues, favoring instead low-cost, ready-made party positions. Candidates who are plugged into the local political community, conversely, should be able to take credible stances on district-specific issues without having to expend undue time and effort. In particular, I expect legislative officeholders to be especially likely to take up local issues into their campaign platforms. Legislators have better access to the types of professionalized campaign resources helpful for crafting a localized issue agenda (Maestas et al., 2006). As policymakers themselves, it is these politicians' job to remain abreast on local affairs. Not only do legislators possess greater knowledge about local concerns, they also have a track record of advocating for and legislating on these topics. All of this suggests that legislators should more often speak on local issues than the average candidate.

If, as Mayhew (1974) suggests, politicians are “single-minded seekers of reelection,” then they should tailor their campaign messages to optimize their chances of winning office. Indeed, Sulkin (2005) writes that, “because the size of their [issue] agendas is limited both by time and by resources, legislators should be very sensitive to signals about which issues have potentially high payoffs” (p. 20). To summarize, I expect that a candidate’s likelihood of “going local” will be elevated when her election is competitive for both parties, and when an issue is especially important to her constituency. Under these district conditions, the benefits of engaging with local issues outweigh the costs. Additionally, I suspect that certain candidate characteristics will mitigate the burdens of running on local issues. In particular, I expect that legislators will be more likely to run on local issues than the average candidate because of their existing knowledge of state and local affairs.

1.3 Summary of Data, Analyses, & Findings

In the chapters to follow, I evaluate if and how candidates “go local” in modern campaigns for Congress. To begin, I investigate a critical mechanism that underpins my theory about the relationship between nationalization and locally-oriented campaign behavior. Recall, when party margins are close in an election, I expect that candidates will attempt to distance themselves from their party and will be more likely to adopt local issues into their campaign platforms. During the 1970’s, over 40 percent of congressional districts were considered competitive; presently, a paltry 10 percent fall into this category. Today, for those many politicians who run in districts safe for their own party, winning the primary may be the only obstacle to attaining office. Pleasing ideologically extreme primary voters, then, becomes of the highest importance. When ideological primary voters take priority, locally-oriented issues should fall to the wayside. Instead, I expect that candidates will favor ready-made party positions on national issues-of-the-day because primary voters value this kind of representation (Lapinski et al., 2016). Consequently, I argue that increasingly safe districts are in part to blame for our current state of nationalized American politics.

If this characterization of modern election is indeed accurate, then we should expect politicians to be less likely to run on local issues when their primary electorate is ideologically extreme. While some work is suggestive of such an association (e.g. Brady, Han and Pope 2007), the extant literature has not explicitly tested the relationship between politicians’ position taking behavior and

primary voter ideology. This lack of research is partially attributable to the absence of a district-level measure of primary electorate extremity. To more directly measure this quantity of interest, I produce estimates for the ideology of each party's primary electorate in congressional districts for the most recent redistricting cycle. Coupling a technique for small-area estimation called multilevel regression with synthetic poststratification (MrsP) with the validated voter information for 2.7 million primary election voters, I model constituent ideological extremity as a function of demographic and geographic predictors. My measure improves on existing methods for estimating the ideology of primary electorates by (1) accounting for respondent partisanship in estimations of extremity, and (2) correcting for sampling bias in data on validated voter preferences. While these estimates are not a perfect representation of primary electorate extremity, they offer a more direct, fine-grained measure useful for my analysis of local position taking in congressional elections. Employing these estimates, I show that partisan primary electorate extremity varies across districts and that politicians' strategic behavior is contingent upon the relative extremity of their same-party primary electorate.

The second chapter of this dissertation explicitly assesses how individual candidate characteristics and district-level conditions might affect a candidate's propensity to "go local" in today's nationalized political arena. I expect candidates to be more likely to adopt local issues into their campaign platforms (1) when they face fierce two-party competition in their congressional election, (2) when their same-party primary electorate skews ideologically moderate, and (3) when they themselves have a history legislating on local issues. To examine congressional candidates' position taking behavior, I employ an original data set of text scraped from campaign websites for all congressional candidates in 2018 and 2020 who had an official campaign site. Campaign websites are well-suited for testing my theory because they provide a near complete inventory of the issues important to a candidate's campaign, and are largely representative of the population of campaigns. To compile these data, I developed a flexible web scraper capable of crawling through websites to find and collect candidates' campaign platforms. This text was next cleaned of extraneous code, parsed into individual platform points, and labeled for major topic-area. This collection is the first comprehensive data set of text from congressional campaign platforms and constitutes a major contribution of this dissertation.

Expressing a candidate's likelihood of covering local issues in her campaign platform as a function of individual candidate characteristics and electoral factors, I find support for my hypotheses. Indeed, politicians talk more about district-specific issues when the general election is competitive

for both parties and their same-party primary electorate is ideologically moderate. Following my expectations, I also find that, all else equal, members of Congress and state legislators dedicate a significantly greater proportion of their campaign platforms to local issues than do other candidates.

In my third dissertation chapter, I seek to broaden the definition of what constitutes a local issue beyond those projects and problems unique to a candidate's own constituency. In particular, I investigate how local electoral conditions affect the rhetorical strategies (i.e., issue frames) politicians use to discuss nationally-relevant issues. There are numerous ways a candidate can discuss a single policy. When discussing a national issue, I expect the average congressional candidate to highlight the facets of that issue which best facilitate her own party's messaging priorities. However, some national issues may be of particular importance to a candidate's own constituency. On these issues, voters should possess a higher level of collective knowledge and, therefore, may be more likely to hold politicians accountable for out-of-step or overly partisan position taking behavior. Toeing the party line in these situations is surely not the optimal electoral strategy. Instead, I assert that candidates will try to "go local" by talking about those facets of national policy that most pertain to local conditions in their own district.

In one test of this theory, I assess how politicians communicate with their constituents concerning America's opioid epidemic. In 2020, deaths by opioid overdose reached a record high of 93,331—underscoring the severity of this national addiction crisis. Following work by Carmines and Stimson (1980), I posit that the opioid epidemic constitutes an issue that is both difficult to comprehend and less familiar to the electorate. Explaining the intricacies of America's opioid epidemic to voters not only requires a substantial investment of time and resources, but also exposes voters to the dreaded "sausage-making" policy process. To circumvent these communications costs, I show that the average politician uses the opioid crisis as a catalyst to talk about other symbolic, "party-owned" issues. Only when the opioid epidemic is salient to a politician's *own* local constituency does she make the effort to fully explain her complex and technical policy making decisions as they pertain to her district. This follows my theory about elite behavior and electorate issue competency. When a topic is especially important to voters, candidates will make their position taking more locally-oriented for fear of electoral consequences. I go on to demonstrate that incumbents who talk about the opioid crisis in their campaign platforms using locally-oriented frames carry forward this same rhetorical

strategy into their floor speeches, press releases, and proposed legislation. This finding underscores a critical, but underemphasize, continuity between an incumbent's electoral and legislative behavior.

1.4 The Importance of Locally-Oriented Campaigns

How candidates campaign is important because the positions they take during the election inform how they govern. Politicians follow through on their campaign platforms after attaining office, making good on the promises they made to voters (Ringquist and Dasse, 2004; Sulkin and Swigger, 2008; Sulkin, 2011). A nationalized approach to campaigns will surely affect what types of things politicians try to deliver while in office. Specifically, with campaigns overwhelmingly run on national issues, members of Congress may be less likely to pursue district-oriented policy, instead falling lock-step with the party in order to achieve their nationalized platform.

Although follow-through on a national platform is a virtue of “responsible” parties, it has a normatively troubling quality as well. James Madison himself argued in *Federalist No. 10* that the regional nature of congressional elections was critical to connecting legislators and the interests of their constituents. If every election in every district features the same debate, an important member-constituent link is severed. Diversity in campaigns begets diversity in the legislature, bringing new ideas up for consideration (Sulkin, 2009). While homogeneous campaigns may lead to greater party unity in Congress, this may downgrade the quality of representation constituents receive.

Nationalized campaigns also appear to contribute to polarization and the increasingly confrontational style of partisanship seen in today's politics (Theriault, 2008). By tying themselves to the party's national platform, politicians have incentives to keep up the party brand in order to maximize their electoral benefit (Snyder and Ting, 2002). It follows that these politicians may then be less likely to compromise, instead promoting the new norm of, “half measures, second bests, and just-in-time legislating” (Binder, 2015, p.45). Conversely, a focus on local politics may inspire bipartisanship, for instance motivating candidates to work with the other party in order to win pork for their district.

Although the locally-oriented style of elections from a previous era seem to suggest different and perhaps better consequences for representation, the competitive contests that produce these types of campaigns may present their own roadblocks to lawmaking. Curry and Lee (2019) convincingly demonstrate that legislative failure is often driven by conflict *within* the majority party, not just by

minority party obstruction. I expect that the root of this discord comes from legislators in competitive districts who “go local” when they seek office. These district-focused politicians may push back on the party’s agenda priorities. Because they did not run on the party platform, supporting some of their party’s measures may prove difficult, knowing such votes would put them on bad footing back home in their district (Carson et al., 2010). Moreover, leaders cannot easily ignore the priorities of members in competitive seats because victories in these races are decisive to gaining majority control of Congress. Understanding campaign styles, then, is central to understanding how Congress works.

1.5 Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to reassess our understanding of local campaigns for Congress in two ways. First, I explore the institutional factors and candidate characteristics that motivate elites to “go local.” Second, I seek to broaden our conceptualization of local campaigning to include the kinds of district-oriented frames candidates use to discuss national issues. These analyses by no means cover the full extent of what it means to “go local” in today’s elections. Instead, the chapters that follow aim to refocus the disciplines attention in an era of nationalized expectations back toward local considerations. I hope this dissertation serves as a reminder to scholars that local politics are still relevant in modern campaigns for Congress, especially in the competitive districts that ultimately determine majority party status.

2: ESTIMATING CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY ELECTORATE IDEOLOGY

Primary voters are characterized by many as the ideologically extreme, overtly partisan subset of their party. Research finds that these kinds of voters expect their representatives to be party “loyalists,” acting in predictably partisan ways by toeing the party line on major national issues (Lapinski et al., 2016; Barber and Pope, 2019). However, there is still considerable uncertainty about the extent to which primary voters are ideologically distinct from the broader electorate (e.g., Key 1956; Polsby 1983; Norrander 1989; Abramowitz 2008; Boatright 2014). For example, while some primary constituencies select candidates who hail from the extreme flanks of their party, others nominate moderates—even in the presence of a viable extremist candidate (e.g. Brady, Han and Pope 2007; Hall and Snyder 2015). Indeed, Sides et al. (2018) assert that “primary voters are not demographically distinct or ideologically extreme compared to those who only voted in the general election...the only substantial difference is that primary voters report more interest in politics” (p.679).

These contradictory findings may in part be explained by the lack of a district-level measure for primary electorate extremity. Presumably, the relative extremity of primary voters varies across districts, just like the ideological distribution of general election voters. To reflect this variation, the relationship between primary voters preferences and electoral outcomes should be defined at the district level, with distinct estimates for each party’s primary electorate. Without such a direct measure for primary constituency extremity, accounting for this potential heterogeneity has been challenging. In an attempt to ameliorate measurement obstacles, some scholars have relied on noisy proxy indicators to capture primary electorate extremity.¹ Others have focused their research on aggregate-level questions, assuming that ideological extremity is relatively homogeneous across districts (Abramowitz, 2008; Sides et al., 2018). None of these approaches, however, can match the utility of a direct, district-level estimate for partisan primary constituency extremity.

¹In lieu of a direct measure for primary electorate extremism, the average DIME campaign contribution score within a district, the average self-reported ideology of survey respondents, and presidential two-party vote share have all been used to capture this important quantity. One noteworthy exception, Hill (2015) produces a more direct measure for primary constituency extremity.

For the purposes of this dissertation, accounting for variation in primary electorate ideology is of particular importance. Existing research shows that ideologically extreme primary voters have a strong preference for candidates who match their ideological predilections. According to my theory, a candidate's propensity to take up local issues should vary inversely with electorate extremity—with more ideologically extreme primary constituencies eliciting a less locally-oriented style of representation. Therefore, to assess the kinds of electoral conditions that motivate elites to “go local,” a direct measure for district partisan primary extremity is needed.

In this chapter, I produce estimates for the ideology of each party's primary electorate in congressional districts for the most recent redistricting cycle. Using voter files aggregated by Catalist, LLC, I model constituent ideological extremity as a function of demographic and geographic predictors. Improving on current measures, these estimates are then corrected for sampling bias using an approach introduced by Leemann and Wasserfallen (2017). The stringent data requirements associated with existing methods for sampling bias correction have hindered their broader application, particularly in models that incorporate partisanship or ideology among predictors. This is because the kinds of high-quality, census-level data that are required for MrP rarely include information on individuals' political affiliation. Leemann and Wasserfallen's (2017) extension of MrP called multilevel regression with *synthetic* poststratification (MrsP), however, relaxes these data requirements, allowing for strong predictors like partisanship to be incorporated into postratification.

My estimates demonstrate that primary constituency extremity varies substantially across districts and between parties. Without properly accounting for district-by-district variation in primary voter ideological extremity, current work may underestimate the influence that primary voters have on elite behavior. Indeed, employing my estimates, I show that ideological challengers are more likely to emerge in districts with more extreme primary electorates. I also demonstrate that the relationship between member ideology and primary electorate extremity is weaker when the general election is competitive for both parties. This finding suggests that a lack of general election competitiveness produces conditions that make members of Congress more responsive to primary voters, rather than their electorate as a whole.

2.1 A Need for Electorate-Level Estimates of Ideology

Having a measure of primary electorate ideology is essential to study the effects of constituency extremity on candidate behavior in elections and, further, incumbent behavior in Congress. Such a measure is especially important given ongoing shifts in the dynamics of congressional elections. More so today than in the past, congressional districts favor one party over the other and, with increased frequency, voters are casting partisan ballots (Jacobson and Carson, 2016). In the 2016 general election, just thirteen House seats switched party control and 96% of general election voters selected a presidential and congressional candidate from the same party. General elections have clearly become more consistent in producing predictably partisan outcomes; primary elections, however, have become less predictable. Since 2010, the number of unopposed primary elections has dropped dramatically, demonstrating a shift towards greater intra-party competition (Porter and Treul, 2019). Incumbents from safely partisan districts who would presumably win in the general election now fear losing to an in-party challenger in the primary. For some members of Congress it seems the threat of losing reelection has shifted from the general election to the primary.

Increasingly competitive primaries put incumbents in a tough position because, in today's elections, the average primary voter is thought to be more ideologically extreme² than the average voter in the general election. A sizable literature argues that incumbent behavior is conditional on the preferences and demographics of her constituency (e.g. Fenno 1978). Other work more specifically suggests that an incumbent will use updated information about her constituency to shift her behavior in the ideological direction of her constituents (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Kousser, Lewis and Masket, 2007; Fleisher and Bond, 2004; Sulkin, 2005; Clinton, 2006). However, when the nominating electorate and general electorate are ideologically distinct, tailoring legislative and electoral behavior to the constituency becomes a far more difficult task for incumbents.

Beyond ideological distinctiveness, primary voters present other challenges to an incumbent seeking reelection. For example, primary constituents are more likely to reward or punish an incumbent for her voting record than are general election constituents (Sides et al., 2018). If primary

²My characterization of primary electorate ideology follows current characterizations in the primary electorate literature. I make no underlying assumptions about an individual's placement on a scale from liberal to conservative utilizing policy positions. I am interested in the extremity of an individual's ideology; this could just as well be labeled "partisan extremity."

voters are indeed more attuned to congressional behavior than, perhaps, it is more strategic for an incumbent to align with the primary electorate's ideology—especially in an era where general election voters cast predictably partisan ballots. Faced with divergent constituencies, an incumbent may choose to appeal more heavily to her ideologically extreme primary electorate instead of the moderate general electorate. To the extent that many members of Congress are elected from safe districts, an uncertain or vulnerable primary election makes pleasing primary voters a higher priority. In turn, if an incumbent is trying to win over ideologically extreme primary voters, I expect that she will engage in more ideologically extreme behavior.

A similar argument about strategic behavior can be made for challenger emergence in primary elections. Strategic, politically experienced candidates are more likely to run when national and local conditions are favorable, acutely aware of the costs and benefits to running (Jacobson, 1989; Hetherington, Larson and Globetti, 2003; Maestas et al., 2006). Theories of candidate emergence in the general election have been applied at the primary level finding similar results: candidates run in primary elections when district-level conditions are the most favorable (Thomsen, 2014; Porter and Treul, 2019). If this is the case, then extreme candidates should emerge and succeed more often in districts where they align well with an ideologically extreme primary constituency.

Shifting electoral competition has made understanding the ideological composition of primary electorates an increasingly interesting and important topic of study. Characterizing the preferences of primary voters as more ideologically extreme has provided some insight into incumbent behavior and candidate emergence. However, to measure the electoral influence of primary electorates, it is not enough to know that these voters can be extreme. If elite behavior is conditional on a particular district's ideological composition and the ideological extremity of primary electorates varies across districts, a direct estimate for electorate ideology is necessary to explore this relationship. In the chapter that follows, such an estimate will be needed to pinpoint those districts where a more extreme primary electorate might motivate politicians to eschew local issues in favor of nationalized rhetoric.

2.2 Current Conceptions of Primary Voter Ideology

Conventional methods for estimating public opinion use data on individual-level voter preferences from national surveys. Survey respondents can be disaggregated into smaller sub-samples—for

instance by county or congressional district—to estimate voter ideology at the subnational level (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Gelman and Little, 1997; Leemann and Wasserfallen, 2017). There is very little survey data, however, on primary elections. National surveys such as the American National Election Survey (ANES) and the Cooperative Congressional Elections Survey (CCES) infrequently ask questions regarding primary election vote choice or participation. Additionally, sampling for these large, national-level surveys is not representative of each primary constituency for each party at the congressional district level. Once survey respondents are disaggregated into subnational units, for example the primary constituency for the Democratic Party in a given district, there is a significant small-N problem. Limited survey data on the participation and preferences of primary election voters restricts our ability to use traditional approaches to estimate primary electorate ideology.

In lieu of a direct measure for electorate ideology, scholars have used other strategies to identify those districts where one may expect to find an ideological primary electorate. These approaches infer district ideology by looking at the characteristics of primary *elections* that may correlate with the presence of an ideologically extreme primary *electorate*. These kinds of proxy measures for extremity, however, have proven to be inconsistent or erroneous. For example, to determine if primary voters influence candidate behavior, McGhee et al. (2014) compare districts with open primary institutions to more closed systems. They assume that states with exclusionary, closed primaries will have more partisan, ideological primary electorates. The authors find no evidence that incumbent behavior is more polarized in districts with closed institutions. Hill (2015) tests McGhee et al.'s (2014) assumption, finding that the distribution of voter ideology within primary and general electorates does not correlate with a state's type of primary institution. In a similar vein, Lawless and Pearson (2008) find little difference in member behavior when comparing across different levels of primary competition, assuming that highly competitive elections should produce an incumbent behavior shift to accommodate primary voter preferences. Jewitt and Treul (2018) argue that close elections may not lead to changes in incumbent behavior, instead pointing to divisive races—races that are ideological in nature—as the kinds of electoral challenges that produce behavior-altering consequences. Studies such as these demonstrate the ways in which proxy measures for district ideology can mischaracterize the extremity of primary electorates.

Restricted by data availability, our capacity to investigate the electoral impacts of primary voters has previously been limited to these types of approaches. Building on the groundwork laid by

Leemann and Wasserfallen (2017), I employ a new method to measure primary electorate ideology for both parties at the congressional district-level. I demonstrate that the ideological composition of primary election voters does, indeed, vary across districts. My estimates serve to further our understanding of subnational public opinion in the United States and allow for more thorough investigations of primary constituency influence on candidate behavior.

2.3 Data & Methodological Approach

Significant strides in the study of subnational public opinion have been made recently using multi-level regression with poststratification, also known as MrP (Gelman and Little, 1997).³ The utility of MrP comes in part from its ability to produce more precise estimates of subnational public opinion by up-weighting specific demographic groups that may be under-sampled in survey data and down-weighting over-sampled subpopulations. In order to weigh subpopulations, census-level data is used. To be compatible with MrP, census data on demographic characteristics of interest must be available in the form of joint distributions. For example, if gender, education, and age are predictors of interest, census data must provide the proportion of 25 year old men that are college educated who live in a given subnational unit. Providing the *marginal* proportion of residents who are male, the proportion who are 25 years old, and the proportion who are college educated will not suffice. This is problematic for studying primary electorates given that the U.S. census does not release joint distributions that include electoral participation or party affiliation. In other words, the proportion of 25 year old men that are college educated who live in a given subnational unit *who also* voted in the Republican Party primary election is not provided.⁴ This limitation makes it impossible to use traditional MrP models to estimate partisan electorate ideology.

A recent development by Leemann and Wasserfallen (2017) relaxes the necessity of joint distributions in estimating subnational public opinion.⁵ This variation of MrP—known as multilevel

³For a selection of articles employing MrP see: Park, Gelman and Bafumi (2004); Lax and Phillips (2009); Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013); Warshaw and Rodden (2012).

⁴This limitation is not exclusive to examinations of voter participation or partisanship. For example, Warshaw and Rodden (2012) could not use age as a predictor in their MrP model for district level public opinion on individual issue areas.

⁵Before MrsP, scholars attempted to circumvent the limitations of MrP to measure district-level ideology using creative approaches. Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013) use classic MrP to develop ideological estimates of constituents at the congressional district level. Their estimations include all individuals within a district—

regression with *synthetic* poststratification, or MrSP—allows for marginal distributions to be used to impute unknown joint distributions. To compute these missing joint distributions based on marginal information, Leemann and Wasserfallen (2017) propose two approaches. The first simply assumes independence between poststratification variables and imputes joint values by multiplying their marginal frequencies. The second approach, which I adopt here, relaxes the unrealistic assumption of independence, and attempts to capture dependence between poststratification variables using observed covariation between them in the available survey data. More specifically, a multi-step procedure corrects the observed joint distribution of poststratification variables in the survey data to match the target population’s known joints and marginal distributions, and then uses these corrected sample-based joints to impute the population-level distribution of interest.⁶ For my own purposes, I can use the marginal distribution of voters who belong to a district’s partisan primary constituency to impute census-level joint distributions that include primary electorate membership. To define each district’s marginal distribution of Democratic (Republican) primary electorate members, I use total voter turnout for that district’s Democratic (Republican) primary election.⁷

Beyond methodological limitations, a simple lack of survey data on primary election voters also impedes the estimation of primary electorate extremity. As previously noted, questions about primary voter participation are highly infrequent in national-level surveys. For example, the American National Elections Survey only asked about primary election turnout in 1958, 1964, 1966, and 1978. For those few surveys that *do* ask about primary voting, self-reported participation measures often over-report election turnout (Butler, 2009; Sides et al., 2018; Vavreck, 2007). Using validated voter turnout in the CCES resolves this problem, but drastically reduces the already small sub-samples

voters and non-voters—because the census does not include information about electoral participation. Hill (2015) additionally used MrP to create primary and general electorate estimates for each party for each congressional district. Without census-level data to poststratify his predictions, Hill used survey weights. This approach, however, could bias his estimates if survey weights do not accurately capture population characteristics at the requisite level of disaggregation.

⁶Interested readers can refer to Leemann and Wasserfallen (2017) for a more detailed discussion of the two approaches, and their performance vis-a-vis alternative strategies (such as raking).

⁷This approach requires making several assumptions about the “primary constituency.” First, that the types of voters who participate in the primary are consistent from year-to-year and, second, that the primary constituency is defined as only those people who voted in the primary. I address these concerns in greater detail in section 5.1.2 of this chapter’s appendix.

of respondents nested within each party's primary electorate for each congressional district.⁸ Only about twenty percent of those surveyed by the CCES are validated primary voters. The median number of CCES respondents who voted in a party's primary by congressional district is just over 10.⁹ And although combining multiple surveys across elections allows for the estimation of primary electorate ideology at the national level (Sides et al., 2018), the small sample problem persists when disaggregating to partisan subconstituencies in each congressional district.¹⁰

Despite small sample sizes, estimating a model of ideology is still possible with survey data. Limited data at the constituency-level can be overcome by employing a hierarchical model with a random intercept for the partisan primary constituency in each congressional district (Park, Gelman and Bafumi, 2004). This hierarchical intercept parameter allows for the partial pooling of information across partisan primary constituencies; meaning that data from those districts with an adequate number of respondents can be used to make predictions about districts for which there is an inadequate number of respondents. The very shrinkage that makes such predictions possible, however, induces bias that must then be corrected at the poststratification stage. Having a larger probability sample with more observations within constituencies would allow me to take advantage of the regularization afforded by such partial-pooling models without paying too high a price in terms of bias at the lowest levels of data aggregation.

Therefore, in lieu of survey data, I instead use Catalist LLC's Validated Voter Database as a source of primary voter data. Catalist aggregates voter files for all 50 states and draws on external data sources to build individual profiles of voters and non-voters. Using separate samples for the 2012, 2014, and 2016 elections,¹¹ my sample contains over 9 million cases and approximately 2.7

⁸The CCES does not directly ask questions about primary voter participation, but instead validates voter turnout in the primary and general election using voter files. The CCES posed a question about primary turnout in 2008 exclusively. Voter validation with voter files for the CCES is completed via Catalist data.

⁹For many primary constituencies represented in CCES data there are only a handful of respondents, a few have as many as 50, and some districts have no respondents.

¹⁰The pooling of surveys to create what is called a mega-poll across CCES years—similar to the approach used by Warshaw and Rodden (2012)—would not work for my purposes. My poststratification involves using voter turnout for a given election year as the marginal distribution to produce synthetic joint distributions. This marginal distribution, the number of voters in a given district's primary election, would change from year to year and make this approach infeasible.

¹¹In MrP, it is common practice to aggregate multiple data sources in order to produce a single point estimate. I produce separate estimates for each election because voter turnout varies across year.

million primary voters.¹² The Catalist voter file provides some clear advantages: primary election participation is verified, the sample size is large, and all demographic variables common in survey data are present. Using Catalist data allows me to take advantage of partial pooling through hierarchical modeling while also reducing the bias of primary constituency-level estimates substantially.

2.4 Modeling Voter Ideology

Pairing Catalist data with the the MrsP method described above, I generate point estimates for the ideological extremity of each party's primary electorate in congressional districts for the U.S. House of Representatives. To build these estimates I employ a hierarchical linear model. My model specification is similar to those adopted in previous studies examining voter ideological extremity (Hill and Tausanovitch, 2017; Sides et al., 2018). I regress an individual's ideological extremity on a standard set of demographic characteristics including age, gender, education level, and race, which are provided by the aforementioned Catalist data.¹³ My model specification departs from existing models of constituency extremity by including a variable for partisan primary election participation. This allows me to produce separate weighted estimates for Democratic and Republican primary electorates—a key innovation of this analysis. I produce separate estimates for 2012, 2014, and 2016, along with an average estimate across years.¹⁴ All predictors are modeled using random effects except party primary participation modeled using fixed effects.¹⁵ I let my model intercept vary by congressional district and state. Random intercepts are drawn from a zero mean normal

¹²To ensure that Catalist voter profiles are complete, samples for a given election cycle should be taken in the year following the election. Yearly samples represent a random 1% of all Catalist records. In this analysis the sample for the 2012 election was drawn in 2013, the sample for the 2014 election was drawn in 2015, and the sample for the 2016 election was drawn in 2017.

¹³A full discussion of each independent variable is available in section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 of this chapter's appendix.

¹⁴Because my estimation approach relies on voter turnout, if a race is uncontested I cannot produce an estimate for that primary electorate in that year. Combining estimates and taking an average across years produces a more complete set of partisan electorate estimates.

¹⁵I use fixed effects because I assume Democratic and Republic primary voter ideological extremity is not drawn from a common distribution. There is no borrowing of information across groups to inform an individual's level of ideological extremity. The ideology of Democratic and Republican primary voters will be fundamentally different. The omitted category is no participation.

distribution, though the district level random intercept is drawn from a distribution centered on Democratic presidential vote share for that district.¹⁶ The full model specification is outlined below.

$$\begin{aligned}
 Ideology_i &= \beta_0 + \alpha_{race[i]} + \alpha_{gender[i]} + \alpha_{edu[i]} + \beta_{demprimary[i]} + \beta_{repprimary[i]} \\
 &\quad + \alpha_{age[i]} + \alpha_{state[i]} + \alpha_{district[i]} + \varepsilon_{[i]} \\
 \alpha. &\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2) \\
 \alpha_{district} &\sim \mathcal{N}(\gamma_{1PresVote}, \sigma_{district}^2) \\
 \varepsilon_{[i]} &\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_y)
 \end{aligned}$$

To define voter extremity, I rely on Catalist’s predictive scores for individual ideology. This variable is constructed using more than 150 covariates and is generally accepted as a reliable measure for relative ideological extremity between individuals (Hersh, 2015). This synthetic score is scaled from 0-100 with 0 being the most conservative and 100 being the most liberal. To postratify my estimates, I rely principally on joint distributions of voter types (e.g. men who are college education that live in a given subnational unit) provided by the U.S. census. Data from census.gov provides joint distributions that include all but two of the individual-level predictors I specify in the model. For the two predictors not included—age and primary participation—I impute joint distributions using Leemann and Wasserfallen’s (2017) multilevel regression with synthetic postratification (MrsP) methodology. Marginal distributions for age are provided by the U.S. census. To define each district’s marginal distribution of Democratic (Republican) primary electorate members, I use total voter turnout for that district’s Democratic (Republican) primary election.¹⁷ These voter turnout totals are provided by the American Votes book series.¹⁸ Because I define the primary electorate as those who

¹⁶Presidential vote share was calculated as the percent of the two-party vote in a district that went to the Democratic presidential nominee in the previous election year.

¹⁷As previously noted, this approach requires making several assumptions about the “primary constituency.” I address these concerns in greater detail in section 5.1.2 of this chapter’s appendix.

¹⁸A complete discussion of independent variables for which joint distributions were imputed can be found in 5.1.2 of this chapter’s appendix.

participated in the primary, estimates are only produced for those constituencies that had a contested partisan primary in 2012, 2014 and/or 2016.

2.4.1 Evaluating Estimate Validity

While I produce estimates of ideological extremity for all contested partisan primary elections from 2012 to 2016, determining the validity of these estimates presents a challenge. As Hill (2017) notes: “without clear benchmarks, it is hard to evaluate the procedure outside of the statistical theory that demonstrates that both hierarchical models and post-stratification improve the validity of...estimates to corresponding population statistics.” To demonstrate that my measure of partisan primary electorate extremity aligns with other measures for constituency ideology, I compare my estimates to a variety of other measures.

First, I replicate estimation approach using data from the 2012 CCES and compare this measure with my Catalist estimates for primary electorate extremity. I produce these CCES estimates using the same set demographic covariates—age, gender, education, and race—which are self-reported. To determine whether or not respondents participated in their district’s primary election, the CCES validates voter turnout.¹⁹ However, like Catalist, the CCES does not report in which primary a voter participated. I rely on self-reported party affiliation to determine partisan primary participation, placing respondents in the primary that matches their self-reported party.²⁰

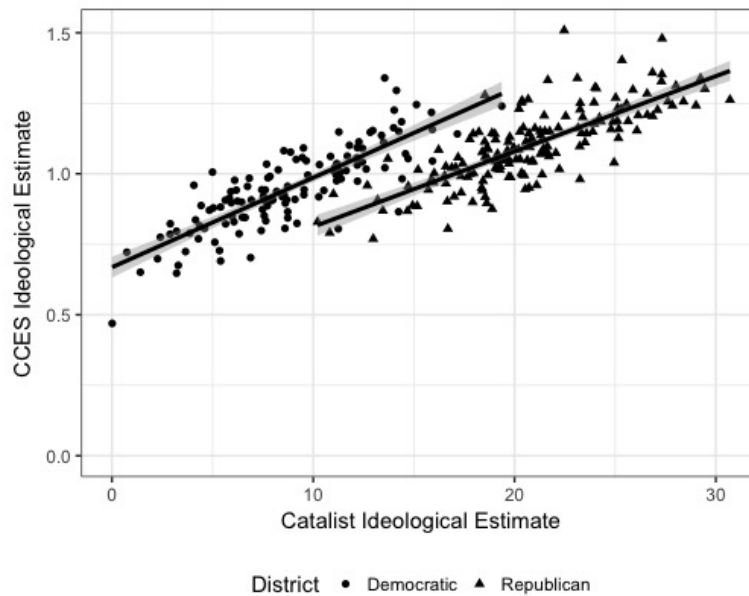
In the CCES, ideology is self-reported on a 7 point Likert scale from very conservative to very liberal. Because these ideological scores are likely reported with error, I employ estimates produced by Hill’s (2017) item-response theory (IRT) model for ideological conservatism to measure CCES respondents’ ideological leanings. The CCES regularly asked respondents how they would vote on a set of roll call votes that were considered by the U.S. House and Senate. Hill (2017) uses these expressed policy preferences to create a measure of conservatism, where a score of 0 is the ideological center, 4 is most conservative, and -3 is most liberal. The clear advantage of these IRT

¹⁹This voter validation is performed using data from Catalist, LLC—the same data I to produce my estimates of voter ideological extremity.

²⁰While this categorization decision could introduce bias into my estimates, Hill (2015) and Sides et al. (2018) demonstrate that the demographic characteristics and ideological predispositions of voters participating in primary elections do not vary widely across years. Per Fenno (1978), primary voters should be the most dedicated individuals within a constituency. Therefore, while there may be variability in turnout, the types of voters participating in the primary should remain relatively consistent.

estimates of ideology is that the summary value produced is constructed using identical schema for each respondent. In other words, Hill's (2017) IRT model for ideology does not succumb to the same measurement error frequent in self-reported measures, where, for instance, a Likert score of "4" may not be conceptualized the same way across respondents. The same post-stratification technique (MrsP) outlined above is applied to the produced CCES estimates.

Figure 2.1: Catalyst vs. CCES Estimates of Ideological Extremity



Plotted districts include only those where estimates were produced using both the CCES and Catalyst data. Using CCES data produced 32% fewer estimates than Catalyst data. For estimates produced using CCES data, only those districts with a sample size of ten or more were included. California, Washington, and Louisiana are excluded from this analysis. For Democratic districts, the correlation is .8262. For Republican districts, the correlation is .7787.

To plot ideological extremity rather than partisan extremity, both sets of estimates are transformed such that 0 is the most moderate and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity. For estimates produced using CCES data, only those districts with a sample size of ten or more were included. Top-two and jungle primary states—California, Washington, and Louisiana—are excluded from this analysis because primary electorate composition is atypical. The CCES estimates are plotted against Catalyst estimates for primary electorate ideology in Figure 2.1. For Democratic districts, the correlation between Catalyst and CCES estimates is .8262. For Republican districts, the correlation between estimates is .7787. Figure 2.1 clearly demonstrates that there is a

strong relationship between Catalist and CCES scores—where both sets of estimates are produced using identical variables and the same poststratification technique but different conceptualizations of ideological extremity. The preceding analysis provides some reassurance that Catalist’s predictive scores for individual ideology are a sound measure of ideological extremity, correlating well with estimates produced using a more traditional measure for ideology.

To further demonstrate the robustness of my estimates, I plot my yearly estimates for partisan district ideology (individual estimates for 2012, 2014, and 2016) against Democratic two-party presidential vote share for each election year. These plots are presented in Figures 5.2 through 5.3 in the appendix for this chapter. Correlation coefficients between Catalist district estimates and presidential vote share are above 0.70 across all election years. I further compare my average estimates of district ideological extremity with Warshaw and Tausanovitch’s (2013) district-level public preference estimates. These non-partisan estimates of district extremity are based on responses to survey questions by 275,000 Americans who participated in the Annenberg National Election Study and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Similar to Hill (2017), Warshaw and Tausanovitch’s estimates are produced using an item-response theory (IRT) model and are weighted using U.S. census data. The correlation coefficients between my Catalist district estimates and Warshaw and Tausanovitch’s estimates—presented in Figure 5.4 of this chapter’s appendix—are, once again, above 0.70. This robustness exercise demonstrates that—at the very least—the face validity of Catalist estimates for partisan primary constituency ideological extremity is strong.

2.5 Descriptive Results

Much of our knowledge about the composition of primary electorates comes from data on election outcomes (see Brady, Han and Pope 2007). While these discussions are valuable, they are limited. The estimates I present in this section offer new insights about primary elections by examining the ideologies of primary voters themselves. For that reason, I begin by presenting descriptive features of my estimates in this section, demonstrating significant variation in primary electorate extremity within states and across parties. I further show that the overall distribution of primary electorate extremity remains relatively consistent across elections.

Aligning with my expectation, I find that the ideological extremity of primary electorates varies substantially between parties and across districts. To illustrate this heterogeneity, Figure 2.2 compares Democratic and Republican primary constituency extremity for congressional districts in North Carolina (2.2a, 2.2b), Indiana (2.2c, 2.2d), and Arizona (2.2e, 2.2f). For clearer comparison, average point estimates of ideological extremity are converted to percentiles, where districts are shaded to reflect extremity relative to the overall distribution of Democratic (Republican) primary electorates.²¹ For both parties, more moderate districts are denoted by the lighter gradient and more extreme districts are denoted by the darker gradient. For example, North Carolina's 12th district and Indiana's 1st district—the darkest shaded districts in Figure 2.2 (a) and (c)—are in the 70th percentile of Democratic districts, making them some of the more extreme liberal primary constituencies in the country. This evaluation seems appropriate given that the NC-12 is a gerrymandered Democratic strong hold predominantly comprised of African Americans. Similarly, the IN-01 has not sent a Republican to Congress in 90 years, electing Obama in 2012 by a twenty-four point margin.

Figure 2.2 notably demonstrates instances of within state variation in same-party electorate extremity. Turning to Republican primary electorates in North Carolina, depicted in Figure 2.2 (b), there is little difference in electorate extremity. All Republican-controlled districts fall between the 70th and 80th percentiles of the overall distribution of Republican primary electorates. Conversely, the extremity of electorates in Arizona, presented in Figures 2.2 (e) and (f), are far less consistent. While Arizona's 1st congressional district is represented by a Democrat, this district narrowly favored the Republican presidential candidate in both the 2012 and 2016 general elections. Accordingly, the Democratic and Republican primary constituencies in AZ-01 skew moderate.²² On the other hand, the AZ-04 and AZ-07 have far more extreme constituencies, both falling in the 70th and 77th percentile of the Republican and Democratic primary electorates, respectively.

Variation in the extremity between parties is explored nationwide in Figure 2.3, depicting an empirical cumulative distribution function of partisan primary electorate ideological extremity. Recall that Catalist scores are scaled from 0-100 with 0 being the most conservative and 100 being the

²¹Percentiles are generated with an Empirical Cumulative Distribution Function (ECDF), where a distribution is produced for each party. Expressed percentiles are proportion of district ideological scores that are less than or equal to that district's score on the partisan ECDF.

²²The Democratic primary constituency for AZ-01 is the 25th percentile and the Republican primary constituency is in the 55th percentile.

Figure 2.2: Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity in Partisan Electorates Across States



Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(a) NC - Democratic Primary Electorates



Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(b) NC - Republican Primary Electorates



Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(c) IN - Democratic Primary Electorates



Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(d) IN - Republican Primary Electorates



Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(e) AZ - Democratic Primary Electorates

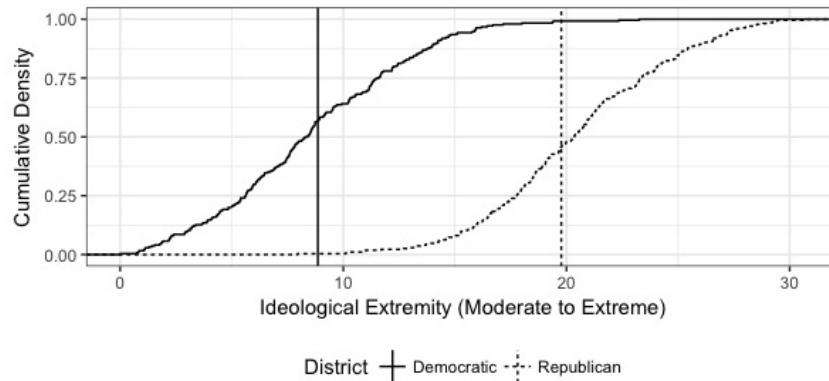


Ideological Extremity
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

(f) AZ - Republican Primary Electorates

Gradient references extremity, with lighter districts being more moderate within the party and darker districts more extreme. White districts have no estimate due to an uncontested primary in 2012, 2014, and 2016. Estimates reflect partisan constituency ideology are pooled across all estimated years.

Figure 2.3: Empirical Cumulative Density Function of Electorate Ideological Extremity



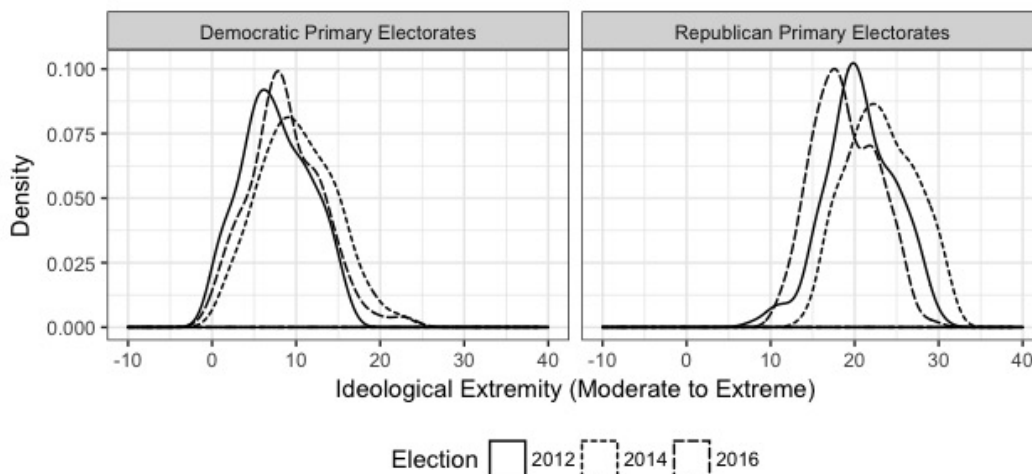
Catalist ideology scores are scaled from 0-100 with 0 being the most conservative, 100 being the most liberal, and 50 being exactly moderate. For comparison, estimates have been transformed such that moderate for *both* parties is 0 and most extreme is 50. Estimates reflect partisan constituency ideology are pooled across all estimated years (2012, 2014, and 2016).

most liberal. In Figure 2.3, these scores have been transformed such that moderate Democrat and Republican constituencies are centered at zero to allow for direct comparisons. Indicated by the vertical reference lines, the median Republican primary constituency is significantly more extreme than the median Democratic primary constituency. Divergence between the ECDFs indicates asymmetric polarization among primary voters—while both parties have a distribution of moderate and extreme electorates, Republican constituencies are skewed more extreme. In sum, Figures 2.2 and 2.3 clearly demonstrate that primary constituency extremity varies within and across states, as well as across parties.

Exploring the ideological extremity of primary electorates further, several noteworthy patterns emerge. In Figure 2.4 point estimates for primary electorate extremity are disaggregated by year to evaluate shifts in primary electorate ideology between presidential and midterm election years. Fenno (1978) and many other scholars suggest that primary electorate voters are among the most dedicated partisans. For that reason, the ideological distribution of partisan primary electorates should—in expectation—remain relatively consistent across time, with the same types of voters showing up year in and year out. However, it could also be the case that primary constituencies are generally more moderate in presidential election years due to higher voter turnout. This question has not yet been addressed at the congressional district level.²³ To conduct this comparison, Catalist

²³ Sides et al. (2018) investigate the ideological consistency of the national primary electorate and find consistency in the types of voters who participate in these primaries.

Figure 2.4: Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity Disaggregated by Year



ideological scores have once again been transformed such that a score of 0 is most moderate and a score of 50 is most ideologically extreme for both parties. Comparing the extent of overlap across all three distributions, I find that the ideological distribution of primary electorates remains relatively consistent across elections, with electorates in the 2014 midterm being slightly more extreme than those in presidential election years.

2.6 Elite Behavior & Primary Electorate Ideology

In the final analysis of this chapter, I assess the relationship between primary electorate extremity and elite behavior. Turning first to candidate emergence, existing theories highlight the polarizing impacts that ideologically extreme primary electorates have on the types of candidates who choose to run for Congress. Thomsen (2014, 2017) demonstrates that moderates increasingly opt-out of running for Congress because they see themselves as out-of-step with ideologically extreme primary electorates and, therefore, perceive their chances of winning as low. This trend may help to explain why so few Republican women choose to run, given that these candidates have historically been positioned to the ideological left of their male counterparts (Thomsen, 2015). Bolstering this finding, Hall and Snyder (2015) find that extreme primary candidates tend to receive more votes and are more likely to win their primary than are moderate candidates. If and when these extremist nominees reach the chamber, they contribute to an ongoing cycle of ideologically extreme member replacement, driving the parties farther apart (Bafumi and Herron, 2010; Theriault, 2012).

These findings are predicated on the idea that ideologically extreme challengers are strategic and, therefore, tend to emerge in districts where they will fit the preferences of an ideologically extreme primary constituency. Such an assumption is less tenuous if primary electorates are homogeneous in their extremity. My preceding analyses, however, demonstrate that primary constituency extremity does indeed vary greatly across districts. Employing my novel measure for partisan primary constituency extremity, I more directly assess extremist candidates' strategic emergence decisions.

To assess ideological primary candidate emergence in congressional elections, I fit a Poisson model where partisan primary elections from 2012-2016 are the unit of analysis. The dependent variable is a count of ideologically extreme primary challengers who emerge in a given partisan primary. Control variables include race-level characteristics that may influence candidate emergence such as primary type, redistricting, and partisan seat-safety. The principle independent variable in this analysis is my Catalist measure for ideological extremity, where 0 indicates the most moderate partisan primary constituency for both parties and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity.²⁴ Politically strategic candidates are most likely to emerge when their chances of success are maximized (e.g. Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Cox and Katz 1996; Maestas et al. 2006; Jacobson and Carson 2016). The following analysis, therefore, examines candidate emergence in open races (i.e. district where the incumbent is not seeking reelection) because strategic and, moreover, successful challenges to sitting incumbents are rare.²⁵

To measure the ideological extremity of primary election candidates, I employ Bonica's (2014) CFscores. This measure uses millions of political contributions to estimate the ideology (liberal vs. conservative) of congressional candidates while also allowing for direct comparisons across actors. Bonica (2019) validates the predictive accuracy of his CFscores, demonstrating that they perform similarly to scaling roll call votes in legislative settings as a means to intuit ideology. This measure is centered around zero with negative integers indicating a liberal candidate and positive integers indicating a conservative candidate. To allow for comparison across parties, CFscore scores have been transformed such that 0 indicates a moderate candidate and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity among both Democrats and Republicans. A CFscore was

²⁴To allow for the maximum number of races to be evaluated—similar to Figure 2.2—a simple average is taken across estimates created for the 2012, 2014, 2016 congressional primary elections.

²⁵Replicating this analysis with all races (against an incumbent or otherwise) produces substantively identical results. See Figure 5.5 and Table 5.1 in this chapter's appendix.

Table 2.1: Ideologically Extreme Challenger Emergence in Primary Elections, 2012-2016

	<i>DV: Count of Ideological Challengers</i>	
	Democratic Races	Republican Races
Primary Type: Closed	-0.318 (0.118)	-0.890* (0.127)
Primary Type: Semi-Closed	-0.088 (0.318)	0.007 (0.262)
Redistricting	-0.368 (0.234)	0.190 (0.205)
Race Type: Partisan Safe-Seat	-0.341 (0.371)	0.309 (0.340)
Race Type: Two-Party Competitive	-0.169 (0.317)	-0.040 (0.389)
Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity	0.114* (0.042)	0.067* (0.033)
Constant	-1.237* (0.548)	-0.861* (0.480)
Observations	85	95
Log Likelihood	-105.864	-125.596
Akaike Inf. Crit.	225.729	265.192

Note: The dependent variable is a count of the number of ideological challengers running in a given partisan primary election from 2012-2016. Independent variables are race-level characteristics that could impact challenger emergence. Candidates are considered “ideologically extreme” if their CFscore is above the average ideological score for co-partisans across the time period of interest (1.266 for Republicans and 1.106 for Democrats). For my analysis, 106 out of 369 Republicans were labeled ideologically extreme and 91 out of 230 Democrats. Coefficient estimates are generated with 95% confidence intervals.

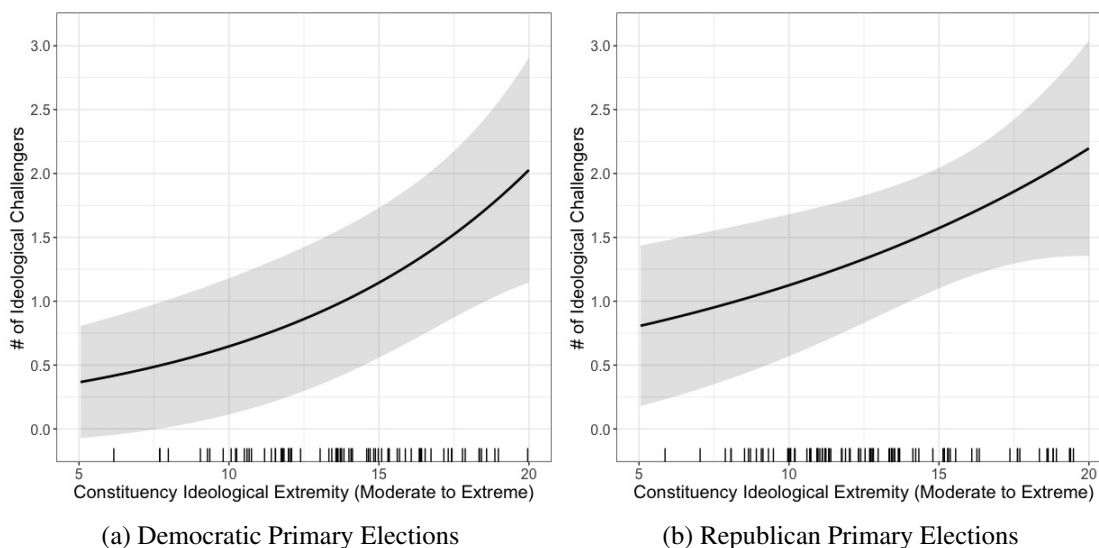
generated for 80% of all primary election candidates from 2012-2016 who garnered more than 5% of the vote-share in their party’s primary election; a CFscore was generated for over 90% of primary election winners. I consider candidates to be ideologically extreme if their CFscore is above the average ideological score for co-partisans across the time period of interest (1.266 for Republicans and 1.106 for Democrats). For my analysis, 106 out of 369 Republicans were labeled ideologically

extreme and 91 out of 230 Democrats. Model results are presented in Table 2.1 with Democratic and Republican races in the left and right columns, respectively. The number of observations indicates that nearly 200 primary races for open seats occurred between 2012 and 2016. For Republican contests, fewer ideological challengers emerge in closed primaries—where only registered partisans can participate—than in contests with open institutions. Among all included variables, primary constituency ideological extremity is the only positive, statistically significant predictor for increased ideological challenger emergence.

Using predicted probabilities, I explore the effect of primary electorate extremity on ideological candidate emergence in more detail. Data is simulated such that all predictors are held at 0 and district extremity is varied in a sequence from the minimum to the maximum observed value for each party. Separate probabilities are generated for Democratic and Republican primary elections. Predicted counts are presented in Figure 2.5. As district ideological extremity increases so too does the expected count of ideological challengers in a partisan primary, moving from less than one challenger emerging to two or more for both Democratic and Republican races. This is especially noteworthy given the distribution of constituency ideological extremity, displayed in the rug plots in Figure 2.5. Primary constituencies for both parties skew ideological, indicating that more electorates than not have at least one ideological primary challenger. This simulated finding is bore out in the data: over 60% of primary elections saw at least one ideological challenger emerge.

Next, I assess whether more extreme primary electorates elicit more extreme representation from incumbent members of Congress. Since 2010, the number of unopposed primary elections has dropped dramatically, demonstrating a shift towards greater intra-party competition. While incumbent defeats in the primary are still few and far between, noteworthy losses—like Eric Cantor (VA-07) in 2014 and Joe Crowley (NY-17) in 2018—signal to incumbents that winning their party’s nomination is not a guarantee. Theories on representation suggest that an incumbent will be highly responsive to the opinions of her district if she believes that it will win her votes (Erikson, 1978). By this logic, members of Congress have an incentive to better represent those constituents who can help them to get reelected (Fenno, 1978). Griffin and Newman (2005) and Clinton (2006) find evidence of this, demonstrating that member ideology aligns more closely with electorally valuable constituents—like voters and copartisans—than with other constituents in their district. If members

Figure 2.5: Predicted Count of Ideologically Extreme Challenger Emergence, 2012-2016



Predicted probabilities are generated using simulated data where all predictors are held constant at 0 and primary electorate ideological extremity is varied from the minimum to maximum observed value for each party. The x-axis is a normalized average of constituency ideological extremity where a score of 0 indicates “moderate” and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity. The y-axis is a predicted count of the number of ideological challengers in simulated races. Predicted probabilities are generated with 95% confidence intervals.

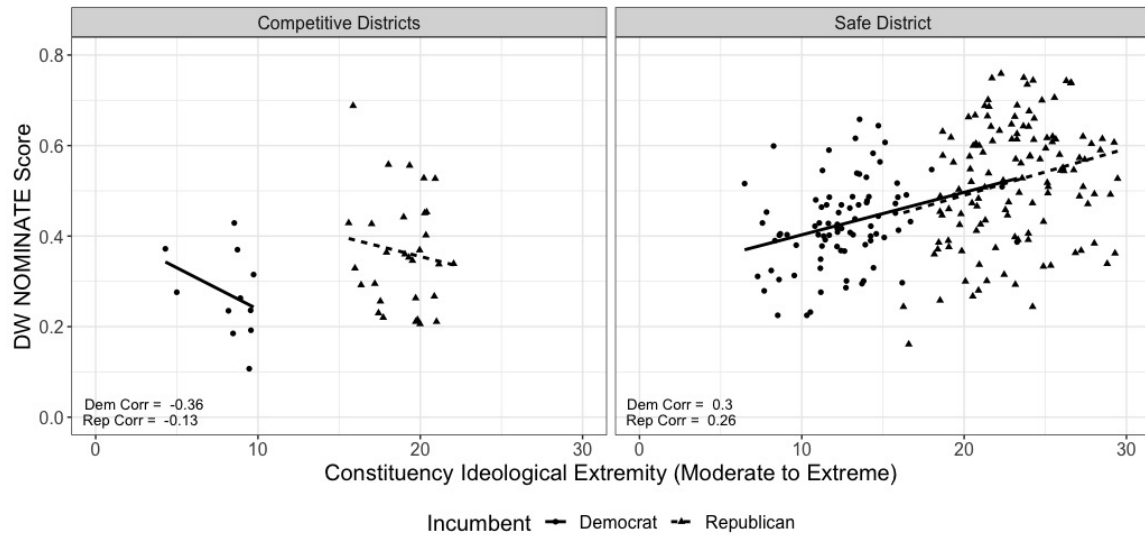
perceive their primary electorate as increasingly important to their bid for reelection, then their legislative behavior may more closely align with the ideology of these voters.

I anticipate, however, that this connection may be mitigated by the prevalence of district two-party competition. In districts that are safe for one party, members may be more representative of their primary voters because—with minimal competition in the general election—winning the nomination may be their only major obstacle to attaining reelection. In districts competitive for both parties, on the other hand, the general election is not a foregone conclusion. In these kinds of districts, incumbents have a greater incentive to represent the broader constituency in order to shore up their chances of defeating an out-partisan in the general. For this reason, I expect to observe a stronger, positive relationship between electorate and incumbent extremity in safe districts.

Figure 2.6 examines the connection between legislator voting behavior and primary electorate ideology conditional on seat safety.²⁶ The right panel assesses this relationship in safe districts, which I define as congressional districts with a 55% or above same-party presidential vote share

²⁶I examine the relationship between members and the primary electorate that shares their partisanship (ie. the Republican primary electorate for a Republican member).

Figure 2.6: Primary Electorate Representation by Seat Safety in the 114th Congress



Plotted points are individual members of Congress. The y-axis is the absolute value of a member’s DW-NOMINATE score in the 114th Congress. The x-axis is the extremity of the incumbent’s same-party primary constituency. To allow for the maximum number of races to be evaluated a simple average is taken across estimates created for the 2012, 2014, 2016 congressional primary elections.

from 2012-2016; the left panel assess this relationship in competitive districts, those district with a same-party presidential vote share below 55% and above 45% from 2012-2016.²⁷ I characterize incumbent legislative behavior using the absolute value of NOMINATE scores. Confirming my expectations, the relationship between incumbent and electorate extremity is conditional on district seat safety. For safe districts, there is a positive relationship between legislator NOMINATE scores and primary electorate extremity. The inverse is true in competitive district, where there is a negative relationship between legislator NOMINATE scores and primary electorate extremity.²⁸

2.7 Discussion & Conclusion

Methodological and data-driven obstacles have previously impeded the development of ideological estimates for partisan subconstituencies. Without a clear measure for electorate extremity, scholars have been limited in their ability to examine the connection between primary constituency ideology and other electoral outcomes. Relying on validated voter data and an extension of MrP, this article

²⁷Characterizing safe and competitive districts using Cook’s Political Report — a similarly restrictive measure — produces substantively similar results.

²⁸The difference in correlation between safe and competitive districts is statistically significant.

presents a new measure for the ideological extremity of primary electorates in congressional districts. My measure improves on existing methods for estimating the ideology of primary electorates by (1) accounting for respondent partisanship in estimations of extremity, and (2) correcting for sampling bias in data on validated voter preferences. The estimates presented here are not a perfect representation of primary electorate extremity but are rather a more direct, fine-grained measure. When employed by researchers, these estimates could serve as an independent or control variable in analyses.²⁹ Furthermore, this analysis serves as a template for other researchers who wish to pair postratification methods for sampling bias correction with data on partisan subpopulations.

These estimates open up the range of questions that Congress scholars can explore regarding the connection between primaries and polarization. To demonstrate the utility of my estimates, I show that primary electorate extremity is highly variable between parties and across districts. These findings suggest that future work should assess the polarizing influence of primary voters conditional on district-level extremity. Second, I illustrate one of the numerous potential applications of this new measure, demonstrating a connection between extreme primary voters and extreme representation conditional on district seat safety. This finding suggests that general election dynamics may, in part, contribute to congressional polarization by producing conditions that make members of Congress more responsive to voters who participate in primary elections.

In the chapter to follow, I will use these estimates to help test my theory regarding the kinds of district conditions and individual-level characteristics that motivate candidates to take up local issues into their congressional campaign platforms. To explore this question properly, it is important to understand what kinds of factors might *suppress* locally-oriented campaign behavior. Per Sulkin (2005), politicians simply do not have enough time or energy to “devote high levels of attention to every issue that might potentially be of interest to them or to their constituents” (p.20). When trying to please ideologically extreme primary voters, I expect that politicians will be less likely to “go local,” dedicating all of their attention to the kinds of nationalized, partisan positions that please these voters. The measure developed here is, therefore, integral to my investigation of locally-oriented campaign behavior in modern campaigns for Congress.

²⁹For election-specific research questions, disaggregated yearly estimates should be used rather than the aggregate point estimates. While estimates have been produced for top-two primary states, caution should be taken in when using the estimates in these applications. Because top-two primaries are not partisan, these estimates draw on a data generating process that is fundamentally different than a traditional primary.

3: LOCAL ISSUES IN MODERN CAMPAIGNS FOR CONGRESS

What does it take to run a successful campaign for Congress? Across the chorus of opinions such a question may rouse, the majority of political strategists agree there are three key ingredients to a strong congressional campaign: candidates should have a willingness to fundraise early and often, be able to maintain a dedicated staff who will work for them tirelessly, and possess a campaign message that resonates with voters (Litman, 2017; Berkowitz and Alcantara, 2019). A candidate's campaign message has many facets, including why she is running for office, how she envisions herself as a representative, and what issues she stands for—commonly referred to as a campaign “platform.” Herrnson (2015) finds that politicians spend substantial time constructing their campaign platforms, and heavily rely on policy matters in their campaign messaging. There is ample evidence suggesting that candidates choose platforms that are responsive to constituency preferences, seeking to win over voters through the issues that they run on (e.g. Burden and Frisby 2004; Brady, Han and Pope 2007; Stone and Simas 2010; Shor and Rogowski 2018). Scholarship has traditionally downplayed issue voting, finding that many voters cast their ballots solely on the basis of partisan attachments (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2000). However, more recent work suggests that politicians' diligent position taking efforts are warranted; politically-engaged voters (Abbe et al., 2003; Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010; Lapinski et al., 2016; Costa, 2021), weak partisans (Herrnson and Curry, 2011), and undecideds (Basinger and Lavine, 2005) are especially attentive to the issues a candidate champions in her campaign when deciding for whom to cast their ballot.

There are no shortage of issues a candidate could choose to take up into her campaign platform. Political strategists and consultants alike highlight national issues, in particular, as electorally beneficial. The digital marketing and campaign company NationBuilder—whose client-base runs the full spectrum of candidates, from local officer-seekers to national politicians such as Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell, and Bernie Sanders—explicitly advises candidates to focus their campaigns on party-aligned, issues-of-the-day in order to engage voters. Work from the Pew Research Center (2021) backs up this recommendation, finding that candidate discussions of hot-button issues are

ted to spikes in voter engagement. Broader scholarship characterizes campaigns in this same way, asserting that, in today's nationalized political environment, "the choices voters face locally mainly reflect national positions of the parties" (Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart III 2001 p. 152).

Notably absent from this narrative are local issues—projects and problems unique to a candidate's own constituency. Discussions of district-specific concerns, such as keeping local waterways clean and funding local infrastructure solutions, were at one time considered a cornerstone of congressional campaign messaging. In modern campaigns for Congress, however, they seem largely absent. Having been brushed over by scholars and strategists alike, it would be easy to conclude that local issues have fallen to the wayside and lack any meaningful relevance in modern-day politicians' position taking calculus. In this chapter, I argue that such a conclusion would be shortsighted. Although candidates today may not "go local" as frequently as they once did, this tactic is by no means obsolete. Indeed, I find that candidates still run on local issues in today's congressional elections, choosing to talk about district projects and problems when the benefits of taking up these issues are maximized and the costs of such positions are minimized. More specifically, I find that candidates are likely to adopt local issues into their campaign platforms when there is strong two-party competition in their election. Pleasing moderate and undecided voters is paramount in marginal districts, and these kinds of voters tend to prefer candidates who place local priorities ahead of party messaging. Additionally, I show that candidates who have a history of legislating on local issues (i.e., members of Congress and state legislators) dedicate a statistically significantly greater proportion of their campaign platform to local topics. Finally, using my estimates from the previous chapter, I demonstrate that candidates are less likely to run on local issues when their primary electorate skews ideologically extreme.

Existing work on campaign issue agendas may overestimate the pervasiveness of nationalization in congressional elections because no comprehensive data collection exists on candidate campaign platforms.¹ To more directly measure if and when local issues are discussed in congressional campaigns, I compiled, cleaned, and coded an original data set of text from candidate campaign websites for the 2018 and 2020 congressional primary elections. These campaign sites usually include

¹Recent work examining campaign issue agendas employs surveys of elites (Shor and Rogowski, 2018), media coverage of campaigns (Hopkins, 2018), and secondhand accounts of candidate behavior (Sulkin and Evans, 2006) to assess campaign position taking. These sources for data do not cover the full breadth of congressional campaigns, biasing towards competitive elections only. Further, these data may not capture the full scope of issues candidates run on in their congressional campaigns (Sulkin, 2005).

a biography, a list of endorsements, and—in particular—a campaign platform. Campaign websites are a data source well-suited for my purposes because they (1) provide a near complete inventory of the issues important to a candidate’s campaign, and (2) are largely representative of the population of campaigns. Through this collection effort, over 10,000 policy positions were hand-coded to determine whether candidates discussed issues in their campaign platforms that pertained to the local qualities and conditions of their own congressional district. Importantly, the text collected from these candidates’ websites constitute the first compilation of campaign issue positions from congressional primary elections, providing a comprehensive and important source for data on campaign behavior.

3.1 Strategic Position Taking in Congressional Campaigns

Politicians spend a substantial amount of time constructing their platforms, carefully considering how their position taking behavior might attract or repel voters (e.g. Adams et al. 2004; Petrocik, Benoit and Hansen 2003; Herrnson 2015). If a politician believes that aligning her issue positions with constituent opinion will win her votes, she will be highly responsive to those sentiments (Erikson, 1978; Bianco, 1994). A politician’s electorate, however, is not uniform; rather it is composed of many different groups of constituents. These “subconstituencies” have disparate issue priorities and ideological predilections (Bishin, 2009). It is often the case that one subconstituency’s position on an issue stands diametrically opposed to that of another. A candidate cannot simultaneously be “for” and “against” an issue. Remaining ambiguous (Cahill and Stone, 2018) or trying to play both sides (Milita et al., 2017) may be worse than taking no position at all. Indeed, diversity in subconstituency policy preferences makes it impossible for a candidate to appeal to her district’s *entire* voting population.

Resource limitations also constrain a candidate’s ability to adopt any and all issues into her campaign issue agenda. Refining position statements, writing policy briefs, and responding to issue-based questionnaires sponsored by interest groups are jobs reserved for the most experienced members of a candidate’s campaign staff (*A Quick Guide to Working on Political Campaigns*, 2022). Dedicating this important human capital to producing position statements on *every* feasible issue would be a poor use of costly and finite resources, especially if these positions have little electoral payoff. Furthermore, politicians who put out clear and consistent campaign messages tend to be more effective at persuading their electorate (Lee, 2016). A platform made up of issues that appeal to

every inch of a candidate's electorate will lack this kind of clarity in messaging. Finally, when voters perceive that a candidate is proficient on a particular issue-area, they are more likely to be receptive to and persuaded by her messaging (Sellers, 1998). If a candidate runs on too many disparate kinds of issues, voters may question the extent to which she can be viewed as "credible" on all of them.

When deciding which issues to take up into their campaign platforms, Sulkin (2005) asserts that politicians are "very sensitive to signals about which issues have potentially high payoffs" (p. 20). Put differently, candidates tend to run on issues that maximize electoral benefits and minimize electoral costs. Given that there are more policies that are important to a candidate's constituency than she could ever hope to address, I expect that politicians will be especially likely to run on those issues that are vital to winning over *electorally important* voters. Existing research has found support for this kind of issue-based responsiveness. For instance, Griffin and Newman (2005) show that senators' roll-call voting is especially responsive to the opinions of voters as compared to non-voters. Clinton (2006) indicates that majority party members of the U.S. House are especially responsive to same-party constituent preferences as compared to out-party constituent preferences. This all suggests that candidates have an incentive to run on those issues that matter most to constituents who are vital to winning her election.

In addition to running on issues that please voters who hold a particular electoral importance, candidates should also be more likely to take up issues for which they have a strong reputation. Petrocik (1996) finds that candidates are especially likely to run on "party-owned" issues—topics which the public believes one party can handle better than the other. For example, voters today see Democrats as better at handling social group interests (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016), while Republicans are perceived to excel on topics related to national defense and international relations (Meeks, 2016). Running on established positions about party-owned issues not only allows candidates to capitalize on their party's reputation, it also conserves precious campaign resources. Instead of formulating their own issue positions from scratch, candidates can simply adopt their party's established rhetoric and reallocate their unspent efforts to other campaign activities.

Reputational issue positions need not always be tied to a candidate's partisanship. Indeed, Sellers (1998) asserts that, "when choosing campaign themes, candidates tend to emphasize [any] issues on which they have built a record that appears favorable to voters" (p. 159). This record or reputation may be tied to a candidate's occupation (McDermott, 2005), history in public service

(McDermott and Panagopoulos, 2015; MacKenzie, 2015), social class (Hansen and Treul, 2021), racial identity (Fairdosi and Rogowski, 2015), or gender (Swers, 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). Running on topics tied to a candidate's own personal identity present similar advantages to that of party-owned issues. Positions grounded in a candidate's own issue reputation garner more favorable voter evaluations than messaging that lacks a personal record (Sellers, 1998). What's more, position taking on reputational issues should be less costly for candidates; they do not have to dedicate the same effort into researching, composing, and refining their issue stances because they already have a strong, personal understanding of these topics.

3.2 “Going Local” in Nationalized Elections

From today's state of nationalized congressional politics, a political folk wisdom has emerged that local issues no longer matter to voters and, therefore, are not integral to electoral success. In this chapter, I push back on that characterization. For much of the 20th century, political scientists observed that “local issues” played a central role in congressional campaigns. The pervasiveness of locally-oriented campaign behavior during this period may be attributable to widespread two-party competition in congressional districts across the country. In competitive elections, moderate and weakly partisan constituents are often decisive to securing victory (Jacobson, 1987). Moreover, without strong party cues to guide candidate choice during the mid-to-late 20th century, many voters were “persuadable” from election-to-election (Fenno, 1978). Weak partisans (Herrnson and Curry, 2011; Grose and Oppenheimer, 2007; Kimball and Burden, 2009) and undecided voters (Basinger and Lavine, 2005; Mayer, 2008) are more likely to be persuaded by candidates who run on policy positions concerning moderate district interests. By running on solutions to district projects and problems, a candidate could work to win over these all-important, persuadable voters.

Throughout the 1970's, both major parties had a viable shot at winning the general election in nearly *half* of all congressional districts. Over the past several decades, however, the number of marginal congressional district has significantly dwindled (Jacobson, 2012, 2015). In 2020, fewer than twenty districts saw a switch in party control. In districts where the majority of constituents share a candidate's partisanship, winning over same-party voters is key. Candidates running in safe seats do not need a local platform to attract copartisans, hence they do not need to do the hard work

associated with running on local matters. In sum, the institutions which incentivize locally-oriented campaign behavior have not changed; what has shifted is the *prevalence* of such electoral conditions. Therefore, in the handful of marginal districts that remain, it is likely that candidates still run on local issues. Moderate and undecided voters—who prize locally-oriented campaign behavior—are still electorally valuable in these competitive races that ultimately determine party control of Congress.

H1: Candidates will be *more likely* to cover local issues in their campaign platforms as two-party competitiveness in their election *increases*.

This not to say that a candidate’s platform in competitive districts will be exclusively composed of local issues. In constructing a campaign platform, I expect that a candidate’s choice to run on national and local policy will not be an “either/or,” but rather a “both.” There is no reason why a politician cannot choose to discuss national party positions in one platform point while highlighting local concerns in another. Candidates running in competitive elections will not want to completely eschew party positions and abandon the partisan base which serves as their backbone of electoral support (Fenno, 1978). Rather, by running on district projects and problems, politicians seek only to mitigate their ties to the party with hopes of pleasing moderates and cross-pressuring other-partisans. Even when a candidate is running in a competitive election, I expect that a greater proportion of her campaign platform will attend to national rather than local issues. Indeed, I expect that the majority of candidates today will not cover local issues in their campaign platforms at all.

To figure out what district projects and problems matter most to constituents requires a knowledge of local and state political priorities, coupled with an understanding of where public sentiment rests on these issues. The average candidate presumably lacks this depth of knowledge, and the costs of making such associations from scratch would be too high to justify. Only when it is an electoral necessity will the average candidate do the hard work associated with running on local issues, favoring instead ready-made party positions. Candidates who are plugged into their local political community, conversely, should be able to take credible stances on district-specific issues without having to expend undue time and effort. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislators should have a particularly strong understanding of politics in their local community. As policymakers themselves, it is these politicians’ job to remain abreast on local affairs. Not only

do legislators possess greater knowledge about local concerns, they also have a track record of advocating for and legislating on these topics. Additionally, legislators have better access to the types of professionalized campaign resources helpful for crafting a localized issue agenda (Maestas et al., 2006). Given legislators' depth and breadth of knowledge about local issues, these candidates should dedicate a greater proportion of their campaign platforms to local issues than candidates who do not possess this same electoral experience.

H2: Members of Congress and state legislators will dedicate *a greater proportion* of their campaign platform to local issues than candidates who lack this same elected experience.

In tandem with declining of district two-party competitiveness, mass partisanship has seen a resurgence (Hetherington, 2001). As a result, Americans today increasingly base vote choice solely on whether a “D” or “R” can be found beside a candidate’s name on the ballot (Jacobson and Carson, 2016). With more voters casting predictably partisan ballots, general elections have become increasingly consistent in producing predictably partisan outcomes. In districts where the majority of voters share a candidate’s partisanship, winning the primary may be the only major obstacle to attaining office—general election victory is all but assured. Pleasing primary voters, then, becomes of the highest importance. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there is significant variability in primary electorate ideology across congressional districts. Although some primary constituencies are ideologically moderate, many skews towards partisan extremes. Importantly, ideologically extreme primary voters *expect* politicians to toe the party line on salient national issues (Lapinski et al., 2016; Costa, 2021) and are more likely to punish politicians for out-of-step position taking (Sides et al., 2018). For those many candidates today who run in safely partisan congressional elections, taking up party positions on nationally-relevant topics like the Affordable Care Act or state of the southern border should be of the utmost priority. Therefore, when a candidate’s primary constituency skews towards ideologically extreme, I expect that her likelihood of “going local” will be suppressed.

H3: Candidates will be *less likely* to cover local issues in their campaign platforms as the ideological extremity of their same-party primary electorate *increases*.

3.3 Local Issues in Congressional Campaigns

In existing literature, local issues are defined as projects and problems unique to a candidate's own constituency. These are the types of topics for which politicians might bring pork back to the district to achieve (Mayhew, 1974) or work with local and state government to enact (Fiorina, 1974). Beyond these characteristics, no working definition for a "local issue" exists. Local issues are difficult to define because they vary district by district; this quality also makes them particularly hard to empirically measure. In the sections that follow, I begin by describing my data collection process. I sketch out the advantages that congressional campaign websites afford as a data source, in particular for measuring locally-oriented position taking behavior. Next, I outline my criteria for determining whether a candidate "goes local" in her congressional campaign platform. Following traditional conceptions, I consider an issue to be "local" in this chapter's analyses if adopting such a position would be nonsensical outside a candidate's own congressional district or broader geographic region. In other words, local issues should have no national appeal. Finally, I outline the obstacles existing research has faced when measuring local issues in congressional elections and present my strategy for identifying locally-oriented campaign issues.

3.3.1 Data: Congressional Campaign Websites

Campaign websites have become a fixture of congressional elections. Typically, these websites have a main menu that directs readers to an "Issues" tab, which explicitly lays out a candidate's policy priorities and positions. I characterize a congressional candidate's campaign platform as the text presented on this "Issues" sub-page. According to Druckman, Kifer and Parkin (2009, p. 345), candidate campaign websites are a uniquely ideal form of data for studying campaign communication because they are "unmediated (i.e., directly from the campaign), complete (i.e., covering a full range of rhetorical strategies), and representative of the population of campaigns." Candidates and their staff spend substantial time crafting their website messaging because these sites serve as an informational "hub" for campaigns. It behooves candidates to paint a complete picture of themselves on their websites because journalists often use this information for their stories, which are then circulated to a broader audience (Herrnson, 2015). These sites are also frequented by electoral stakeholders, like would-be constituents and potential donors (Druckman, Kifer and Parkin, 2009). All of this suggests

that campaign websites are a comprehensive and complete data source for studying congressional candidate position taking behavior.

In past research, television advertisements have been used to examine position taking in congressional campaigns. However, this data source has notable drawbacks—chief among them that television ads bias towards competitive races and their adoption in primaries is nearly non-existent. Campaign websites, on the other hand, have become increasingly commonplace in congressional elections with the vast majority of candidates today employing a website in their campaign. Social media provides another alternative source for data on campaign position taking. These mediums supply researchers with a monumental amount of data on candidate campaign behavior. However, a candidate’s use of social media like Twitter and Facebook depends greatly on her political sophistication (Lassen and Brown, 2011), partisanship (Vogels, Auxier and Anderson, 2021) and intended audience (Das et al., 2022). It is also unclear to what extent a candidate’s social media behavior well-reflects the broader policy focus of her campaign; such uncertainty does not exist with regard to position taking on websites. Existing work compares the stances a candidate lists on her campaign website to her positions taken in other venues (i.e., speeches, debates, and advertisements), finding remarkably consistency in position taking behavior across these sources (Xenos and Foot, 2005; Sulkin, Moriarty and Hefner, 2007*b*). All of this to say, campaign websites are a superior source for data on position taking because they (1) provide a near complete inventory of the issues important to a candidate’s campaign, and (2) are largely representative of the population of campaigns.

It is not as though this research is the first to use websites to explore congressional campaign position taking. My analysis, however, differs from the existing literature in several important ways. First, because of the sheer amount of time involved in compiling and cataloging campaign websites, previous analyses have examined only a sample of campaign sites or restricted their scope to the general election (conversely, see McDonald, Porter and Treul 2020). In order to capture a near complete picture of the types of issues candidates took up in their campaigns, I extracted, cleaned, and parsed the text from campaign platforms for *all* candidates who had an official campaign website that ran in the 2018 or 2020 congressional primary elections. This collection is the first comprehensive data set of website platform text and provides numerous opportunities for future research. Second, by examining primaries rather than just the general election, I extend the scope of observable campaign behaviors in my analysis to better encompass the factors that motivate candidates to behave the

way they do in modern elections. This is of particular importance given my hypothesis about the relationship between primary constituency extremity and candidate position taking behavior

To collect text data from candidate campaign websites, I first identified the names of all major party candidates running in 2018 and 2020 using candidate filings with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) as well as state-level elections websites. Using this list of names, I sought to identify the campaign website URLs for all candidates in each election year by following links from online repositories like Politics1.com, visiting candidates' social media pages, and conducting simple Google searches. This list of campaign websites was next filtered to include only those that contained a platform of policy positions. I next extracted this position taking text using a combination of automated text collection (i.e., extraction with a pre-programmed web scraper) and manual downloading (i.e., copy and pasting). To ensure consistency, text was collected the day before or the day of each candidate's congressional primary.²

Of the 3,384 candidates who ran in the 2018 and 2020 congressional primary elections, 2,444 (72%) had a website that featured a campaign platform.³ Limiting scope to include only politicians who had a reasonable shot at winning, nearly 80% of viable candidates had a campaign website.⁴ A small group of candidates running in the 2018 and 2020 primaries either had no official campaign website or, if they did adopt a website, did not outline any policy positions on that site. To determine if certain kinds of candidates were more likely to adopt campaign platforms than others, I regress policy platform presence on a series of candidate characteristics and election-level covariates. The truncated results of this logistic regression, which are presented in Table 3.1, outline the main predictors for the presence or absence of an online campaign platform. The full model for this analysis can be found in Table 6.1 of this chapter's appendix.

²Per Banda and Carsey (2015), candidates should be uniform in their messaging from the primary to the general election. Porter, Treul and McDonald (2020) quantitatively demonstrate that congressional candidate campaign platforms do not vary widely across the two stages of elections. Therefore, including primary candidates to increase my sample of cases examined should not affect the generalizability of my findings.

³This number excludes individuals who ran in Louisiana, California, or Washington because these states do not hold partisan primary elections and are, therefore, excluded from my analysis.

⁴Following Bonica (2014); Hassell (2016) I define viable candidates as those politicians who raise more than \$0 during their campaign for Congress *and* garnered enough votes to fall within a twenty-point margin of the top vote-getter in their primary election.

Table 3.1: Main Indicators for Missingness in Policy Platform Adoption

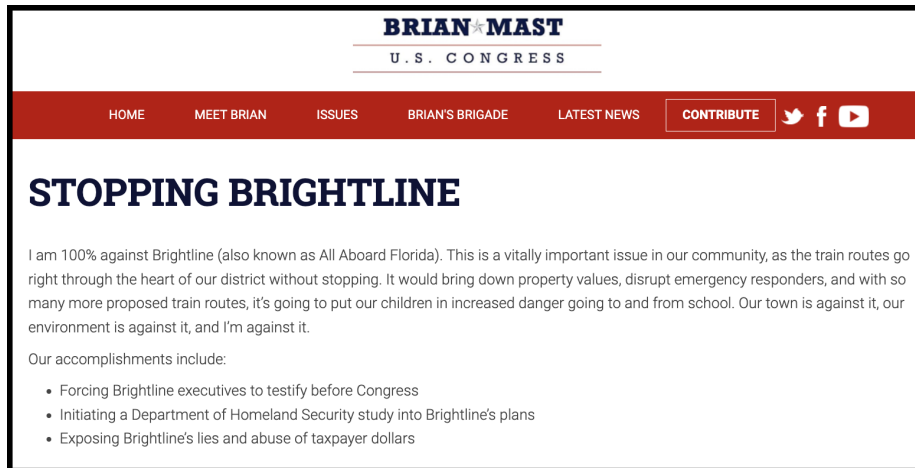
	DV: Presence of Policy Platform
Less Than 5% Vote-Share	-1.016* (0.108)
Past Political Experience: Congressional Incumbent	0.668* (0.142)
Open Race	0.387* (0.098)
District Partisanship: Two-Party Competitive	0.551* (0.117)
Constant	1.229* (0.105)
Observations	3,384
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.05

Similar to Porter, Treul and McDonald (2020), I find that trends in website adoption follow predictable patterns for strategic campaign behavior widely cited in literature on congressional elections. Campaign platform adoption was weakest among candidates who garnered less than 5% of the vote-share in their partisan primary election. Generally, these kinds of poor performing candidates lack any official campaign presence—online or otherwise—so a missing website is not so surprising. Members of Congress were especially likely to have a list of issue priorities on their campaign websites; these incumbent are well-seasoned candidates with abundant electoral resources, so a high rate of web-based policy platform adoption among this candidate group is to be expected. Candidates who ran in open races or contests with steep two-party competition were also more likely to possess a campaign platform. Candidates who emerge in these kinds of races tend to be especially strategic (Jacobson and Kernell, 1983), choosing to run when their chances of electoral success are heightened. Strategic politicians make every effort to professionalize their campaigns, so a higher rate of campaign platform adoption is also to be expected.

3.3.2 Defining Local Issues in Campaigns Platforms

As traditionally defined, local issues are topics unique to a candidate’s own constituency. Covering district-specific projects and problems, these issues should have no national appeal. Accordingly, I

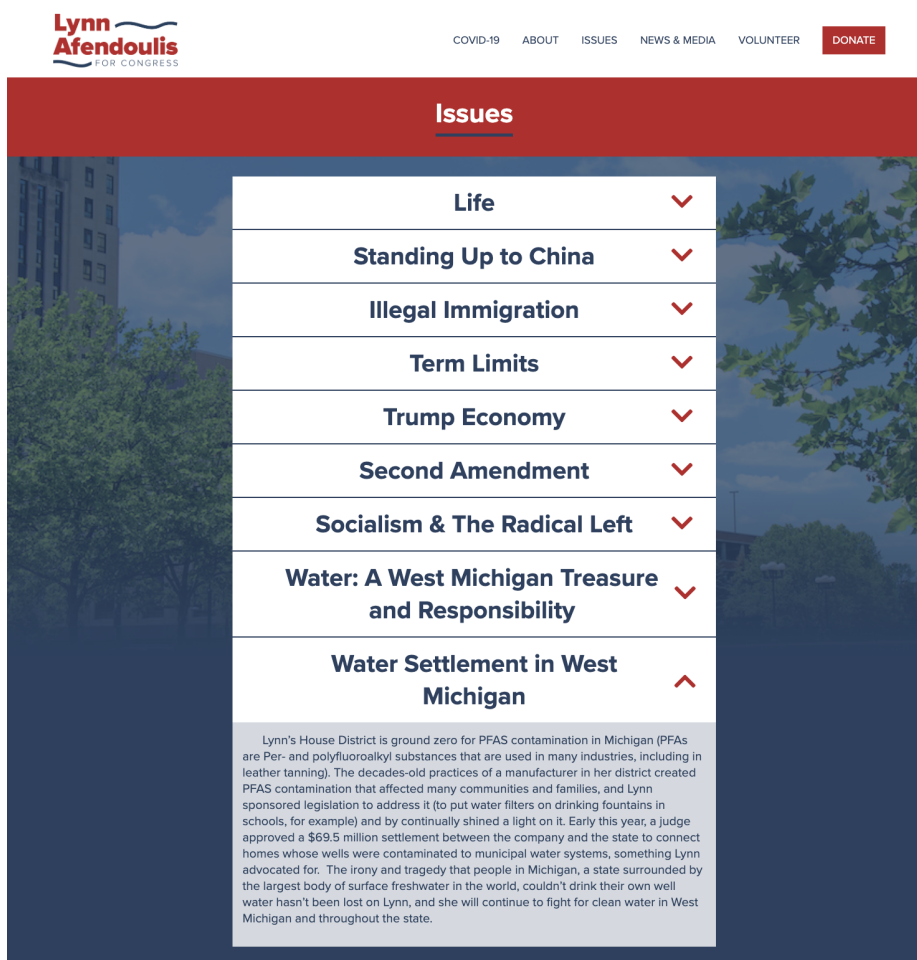
Figure 3.1: “Stopping Brightline” Campaign Position
U.S. House Representative Brian Mast (R-FL), 2018



consider an issue to be “local” if discussions of that topic are generally constrained to a candidate’s own congressional district or geographic region. To illustrate, consider Figure 3.1, which lays out U.S. House Representative Brian Mast’s (R-FL) position on a state transportation initiative called “All Aboard Florida.” First introduced in 2015, this proposed extension to an existing high-speed commuter train called “Brightline” would connect Central Florida to the southern tip of the state in Miami. Upon its announcement, locals down the state’s eastern coast from Vera to West Palm Beach immediately sprang into action, launching a series of lawsuits and founding the “Citizens Against Rail Expansion” or CARE Initiative. The majority of efforts seeking to block Brightline’s expansion originated from Florida’s 18th congressional district, represented by Brian Mast. In the years that followed, Representative Mast pushed back on public funding for the privately-owned commuter rail and sought to revoke Brightline’s tax-exempt status. Mast codified his opposition to the “All Aboard Florida” initiative in his campaign platform, running on “Stopping Brightline” in subsequent elections. Following my theory, it was no coincidence that Mast’s staunchest opposition to Brightline came in 2018, when he faced a strong Democratic challenger in a competitive general election.

Turning to a second example, Figure 3.2 outlines Lynn Afendoulis’ campaign issue agenda as presented on her 2020 campaign website. Following Representative Justin Amash’s (L-MI) decision not to seek re-election, a crowded field of candidates emerged to run for Michigan’s 3rd open seat in what was sure to be a hotly-contested primary *and* general election. Among those who emerged to run in the Republican Party primary was Lynn Afendoulis—a life-long Michigander and two-term

Figure 3.2: “Water Settlement” Campaign Position
 State Representative Lynn Afendoulis (R-MI), 2020



member of the Michigan House of Representatives. During her time in the State House, Afendoulis introduced and successfully passed two extensive, bipartisan bills to address water quality across the state of Michigan. During the mid-2000’s, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) announced that more than 1.5 million state residents had been drinking water contaminated with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. PFAS are a family of chemicals used to manufacture a variety of consumer, commercial, and industrial products that, when ingested, can lead to serious health ailments, including cancer, as well as development delays in infants and children. In 2019, the Detroit Free Press labeled PFAS contamination as Michigan’s biggest environmental crisis in 40 years, underscoring the local salience of this issue. Although PFAS contamination is widespread in Michigan, Afendoulis’ state house constituency and Michigan’s 3rd congressional district were among the areas most afflicted. Like any other Republican running in 2020, State Representative

Afendoulis' campaign platform included national, partisan topics like "Illegal Immigration", "Trump Economy", and "Life." It unsurprising, though, that a sizable proportion of Afendoulis' campaign platform *also* addressed Michigan's water quality issues given her extensive legislative efforts to control PFAS contamination and her would-be district's close proximity to Lake Michigan.

Issues like "Stopping Brightline" in Figure 3.1 and "Water Settlement in West Michigan" in Figure 3.2 are clearly local in nature; these policy proposals and problems are unique to a specific constituency, having little if any national appeal. Just because an issue is local, however, does not mean it will be free of ties to nationalized party politics; occasionally it is the case that, "national issues can be turned into local issues if a smart candidate has the resources to do it" (Jacobson 1989, p. 776). Policies related to infrastructure provide a strong example of such a situation. Both the Democratic and Republican Party agree that America's crumbling roads, bridges, and highways must be improved. In 2016 and 2020, both parties' official platforms included extensive discussions about American infrastructure. Following their parties' leads, many congressional candidates incorporated issue positions concerning infrastructure improvements into their web-based campaign platforms. Although the broad topic of infrastructure has national appeal, I posit that the substantive content of a candidate's position on infrastructure can make this issue "local."

In the examples that follow, two Democratic congressional candidates running in similar districts outside of Chicago discuss policy positions related to infrastructure improvements. Both argue that improving transportation will not only relieve traffic and congestion, it will also spur employment opportunities and economic growth. In her 2020 campaign platform, Robin Kelly (D-IL) states:

Improving transportation in the 2nd Congressional District is key to putting our community on the fast track to economic development...That's why I support plans for the South Suburban Airport and the Red Line Expansion to 130th Street as well as the planned construction of the Illiana Expressway. Its important to me, however that these projects be carried out the right way. And that means using homegrown talent to build hometown projects...I don't want a replay of the CREATE/Metra Englewood Flyover fiasco in which minority-owned firms were virtually cut out of a multi million-dollar construction project in their own backyard. Our infrastructure should be built by our hands, from professional services firms in Chicago to small construction firms in the Southland...

In her platform text, Kelly clearly ties America's need for infrastructure improvements back home to her district. Not only does Kelly cite specific transportation projects to be pursued in her district, she also outlines the ways in which these projects must be structured in order to maximize their local economic impact. To discuss the same topic, Kelly Mazeski (D-IL) takes a different approach:

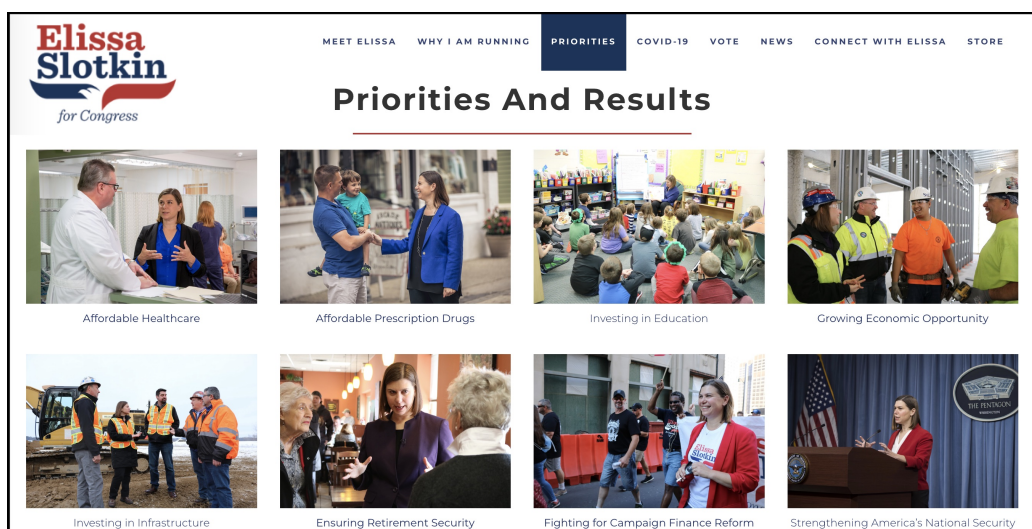
American infrastructure is in disrepair. While countries like China are investing more in their infrastructure, our failure to do so has hurt our economic competitiveness. Most important, ignoring our crumbling roads, bridges, and airports puts public safety at risk...we need to nearly double our investment in infrastructure over the next 10 years. I will support bipartisan efforts to invest in rebuilding and expanding our infrastructure, which will create high-paying construction jobs in the short-term and spur private investment and growth in the long-term...

This campaign text also connects physical infrastructure improvements to economic development, but makes no mention of the local community or greater Chicago area. Indeed, this campaign platform text could feasibly belong to any Democratic candidate running for Congress anywhere in the country. Even though Robin Kelly and Kelly Mazeski's platform texts both seek to convey the same message about economic incentives and infrastructure, only the former would be considered a discussion of local issues according to my definition. In this chapter's analyses, I consider a nationally-relevant topic to be "local" if a candidate explicitly ties it back to conditions in their own district.

3.3.3 Classifying & Measuring Campaign Issue Positions

To classify campaign positions as national and local across large volumes of text, existing work has relied on semi-supervised or fully-automated quantitative methods for topic classification. For example, Das et al. (2022) measure the content of political elites' tweets using a series of topic models; topics estimated from these texts were deemed nationally- or locally-oriented through human inspection post-estimation. The authors label nationally-oriented topics as those including terms such as "American," "tax," "national," and "congress," and consider topics to be locally-oriented if they have terms like "park," "bridge," "police," and "street." These kinds of quantitative models for text analysis generate topics based on word occurrences; unique terms are often dropped from the process of topic formation because they are not present across a critical mass of texts. While automated approaches for topic classification may offer advantages for large-N analyses, there is certainly something lost when sparsely occurring, yet contextually-important words like "Brightline" (Figure 3.1) and "polyfluoroalkyl" (Figure 3.2) are omitted from the estimation of locally-oriented topics. Hopkins, Schickler and Azizi (2022) similarly use an unsupervised topic model to assess the contents of policy positions from state party platforms. Constraining their analysis to a subset of campaign topics, the authors assume that local issues cover content about the economy; national issues, on the other hand, focus on social topics like abortion. For my purposes, such a significant assumption about the data generating process of campaign platform text would overlook the rhetorical

Figure 3.3: Representative Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) 2020 Campaign Platform Webpage



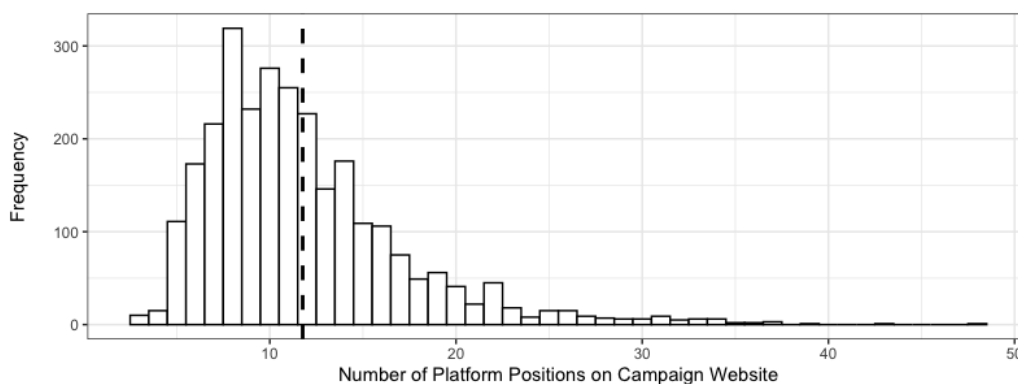
frames that differentiate Kelly Mazeski's national discussion on infrastructure (p.g. 50) from Robin Kelly's locally-oriented position on this same topic (p.g. 49).

Given the complexities endemic to identifying district-specific projects and problems, I rely on human reading and coding of individual candidate platforms to discern local issue coverage. To classify both the presence and frequency of local position taking, several steps were taken. Each platform document was first segmented into individual platform points. Campaign platforms are usually made up of a collection of issues, and these separate positions are commonly identified through subheadings or subpages on a candidate's platform page.⁵ For instance, in Figure 3.3, Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) includes a total of eight issues in her platform, each identified by a different subheading (e.g., Investing in Education, Growing Economic Opportunities, etc.). Per Figure 3.4, congressional candidates, on average, included eleven individual positions in their 2018 and 2020 campaign platforms. The shortest platform included two points, the longest featured nearly fifty.

I identified 734 of 2,444 congressional candidates (30%) as having discussed local issues in their campaign platforms. Of those candidates who discussed local issues, the majority dedicated only a single platform point to local topics; fewer than 10% of candidates incorporated two or more platform segments on local issues. This follows my earlier presumption about the infrequency of local issue uptake in today's congressional campaigns—only a subset of platforms were composed

⁵Those candidates that explain their positions and priorities using an essay format are omitted from my analysis. Their choice of essay formatting prevents their text from being directly comparable to topically-segmented issue pages.

Figure 3.4: Number of Platform Positions on Congressional Campaign Websites, 2018-2020



of local issues, as traditionally defined. In most cases, the remaining positions in a candidate’s issue agenda covered the kinds of nationally-salient issues identified in her party’s official platform.⁶ However, some positions taken by candidates were neither national nor local. Several politicians used space in their platforms to discuss their own personal qualifications for holding office or their views about national political figures (e.g. “for” or “against” Donald Trump, Nancy Pelosi, etc.). Others discussed issues that seemed to have personal significance, rather than local or national salience (e.g., the establishment of permanent daylight savings time). About 50% of candidates included a position in their platform that was neither national nor local in nature; the vast majority of candidates dedicated only a single platform point to these “Other” topics.

When structuring their campaign platforms, candidates tend to nest discussions of issues with similar substantive content within the same platform point. However, in organizing their platforms, some candidates choose to split similar topics across multiple platform points. For example, in Figure 3.3, Representative Storkin discusses “Affordable Healthcare” and “Affordable Prescription Drugs” in different platform planks even though these individual positions share substantively similar content. Another candidate may have easily discussed healthcare and prescription drugs within the *same* platform plank. These disparate approaches to platform composition present an obstacle for measuring the proportion of a candidate’s campaign platform as “local.” If the number of planks in a platform is not a direct indication of the unique topics covered in that platform, then expressing the number of local issues a candidate discusses as a function of total platform planks is meaningless.

⁶For the 2018 election, I defined national issues as those topics discussed in the 2016 Democratic and Republican official party platforms. In 2020, these issues were updated for the Democratic Party; in lieu of an updated Republican Party Platform, the 2016 document was reused.

Table 3.2: Major Issue Categories for Platform Planks on Candidate Campaign Websites

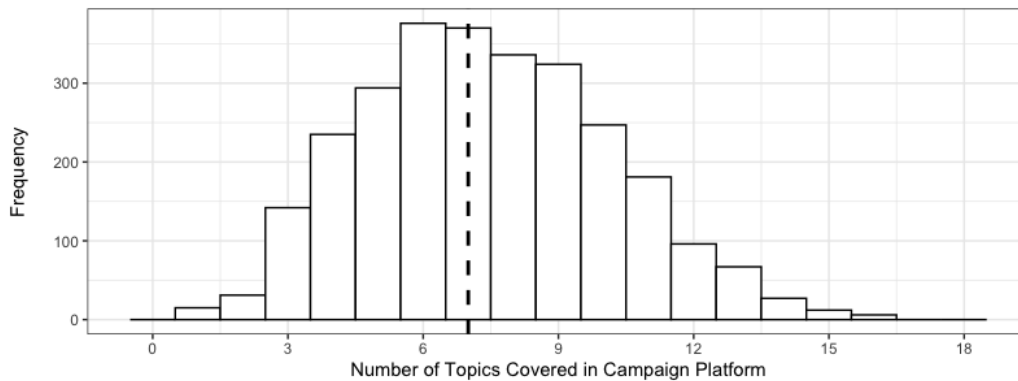
Agriculture (e.g., Subsidies, Trade Protections, Farm Bill)	Economy & Jobs (e.g., Taxes, Minimum Wage, Wall Street, Wealth Gap, Abolish the IRS)
Education (e.g., Higher Education For All, No Child Left Behind, School Choice, Universal Pre-K)	Energy & Environment (e.g., Fossil Fuels, Climate Change, EPA, Paris Climate Accord)
Entitlement Programs (e.g., Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Social Security)	Foreign Policy & National Security (e.g., Terrorism, China, Defense Spending)
Government Reform (e.g., Voting Rights, Term Limits, Balanced Budget)	Group Equality (e.g., Race, Gender, Disability, Seniors)
Gun Rights (e.g., Second Amendment, School Shootings)	Immigration (e.g., DACA, Border Security, Build the Wall)
Infrastructure & Transportation (e.g., Roads, Rural Broadband, Public Transit)	Military & Veterans (e.g., Supporting Troops, Veterans' Affairs)
Local Issues (e.g., investment, district-specific problem, local community characteristics)	Other (e.g. Animal Rights, Corporate Espionage, Deep State, FairTax, Permanent Daylight Savings Time)
Personal Characteristics (e.g., Religion, Leadership Potential, Ideology)	Political Opinions (e.g., Make America Great Again, Bernie Sanders, Constitution)
Public Safety & Crime (e.g., Cannabis Legalization, Criminal Justice System, War on Drugs)	Religion Issues (e.g., Abortion, School Prayer, Protecting Religious Freedoms)

To surmount this impediment to measurement, I tasked a team of research assistants with labeling each segment of a candidate’s campaign platform as belonging one of eighteen categories outlined in Table 3.2.⁷ More detailed coder instructions and reliability metrics can be found in the “Instructions” codebook of this chapter’s appendix. All major topics outlined in Table 3.2, with the exclusion of the Local and Other categories, are considered “national” for my purposes. By classifying platform points across major topic-area, I can more accurately characterize (1) how many issue domains a candidate discussed in her platform, and (2) what proportion of platform text was dedicated to each of these broad topic categories.

Across the 2018 and 2020 congressional elections, candidates discussed in their campaign platforms an average of seven out of the eighteen major topic categories outlined in Table 3.2. Breaking down candidates by partisanship and previous electoral experience does not vary the average number of topical categories covered in platforms. However, variation can be seen in the *types* of topics discussed by candidates of each party. Top topics discussed by Democratic candidates for the 2018 and 2020 congressional elections included Entitlement Programs (98%), Economy & Jobs (89%), Education (84%), Environment & Energy (80%), and Group Equality (72%). Top

⁷Broad categories were based on issue grouping commonly used in candidate campaign platforms and official party platforms. Platform point categorizations are mutually exclusive—issues relating to women’s health, for example, cannot belong to both the “Entitlements” and “Group Equity” topical categories.

Figure 3.5: Number of Major Topics Covered in Congressional Campaign Platforms, 2018-2020



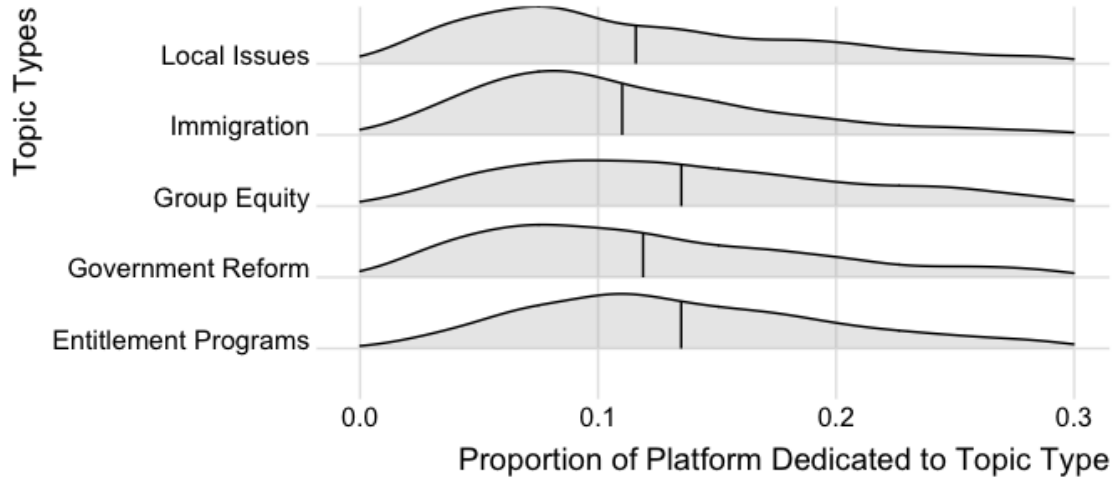
topics discussed by Republican candidates included Economy & Jobs (88%), Immigration (79%), Entitlement Programs (76%), Gun Rights (65%), and Government Reform (62%).

To determine the share of a candidate’s platform as local, I express the total length of a candidate’s text on local issues (i.e., number of words dedicated to *local issue* discussions) as a proportion her platform’s total length (i.e., number of words across *all issue* discussions). The average campaign platform had a total length of about 2,000 words, with an average of 275 words dedicated to any given major topic discussion (i.e., Agriculture, Gun Rights, Local Issues, Economy & Jobs). Figure 3.6 depicts a series of distributions comparing the proportion of local issue text in campaign platforms and the proportion of text allocated to other discussions of major campaign issues. Candidates who discussed local issues dedicated about a 12% of their total platform text to this topics. The median proportion and overall distribution of platform text on local issues tracks well with other major topics, like Immigration (Figure 3.6, Row 2) and Entitlement Programs (Figure 3.6, Row 5). Indeed, Figure 3.6 suggests that when politicians choose to talk about local issues, they dedicate a similar amount of text to this subject as they would to discussions of important, “party-owned” issues.

3.3.4 Modeling Local Position Taking Behavior

To evaluate the relationship between individual-level characteristics, district electoral conditions, and a candidate’s propensity to “go local,” I estimate a set of hierarchical logistic regression with random intercepts by partisan primary election. The units of analysis in my first model (*Full Model*) include all candidates who ran in primary elections for the U.S. House of Representatives

Figure 3.6: Proportion of Campaign Platforms Dedicated to Major Topics Outlined in Table 3.2



across 2018 and 2020.⁸ My second model (*Open Model*) includes only those candidates who ran in vacant or “open” seats. Strategic candidates—who tailor their campaign behavior to electoral conditions—are more likely to emerge in races where the incumbent is not seeking reelection, acutely aware of the overwhelming electoral advantages afforded to incumbency (Jacobson, 1989). “Hopeless” candidates—who run for their own purposes, not necessarily to win (Canon, 1993)—will emerge anywhere and everywhere. Indeed, over half of all candidates included in my *Full Model* fall into this “hopeless” category. Unlike their strategic counterparts, amateurish candidates tend to be agnostic towards their electoral environment, failing to account for factors like two-party competitiveness or district seat-safety in their campaign behavior. I therefore expect the relationship between district conditions, individual candidate characteristics, and locally-oriented position taking to be more pronounced in my *Open Model* because strategic candidates make up a greater proportion of observed units. The outcome variable in both my *Full Model* and *Open Model* is a dichotomous indicator for whether or not a candidate discussed local issues in her web-based campaign platform.

Recall, I expect that a candidate will be more likely to cover local issues in her campaign platforms as two-party competitiveness in her election increases. I base my measure for two-party competitiveness on district previous presidential vote-share.⁹ This continuous measure for

⁸I exclude candidates who ran in Louisiana, California, or Washington because these states do not hold partisan primary elections.

⁹My measure for district two-party competitiveness is based on a district’s previous presidential vote-share. For candidates running in 2018 and 2020, previous presidential vote-share is drawn from the 2016 presidential

competitiveness ranges from 0 to 50, where 0 is the least competitive district and increasingly positive integers indicate greater two-party competition. To account for a district's partisanship, I interact two-party competitiveness with a variable indicating whether the current district incumbent belongs to a candidate's same-party, or if she is a member of the other-party. If a seat is vacant, I employ the partisanship of the incumbent who previously represented that district.¹⁰ To assess whether a candidate is less likely to cover local issues in the presence of an ideologically extreme same-party primary constituency, I employ the measure for primary electorate ideology I developed in the previous chapter. Recall, this continuous measure for ideological extremity ranges from 0 to 30, where 0 is the most moderate primary electorate and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity. Lastly, I include a four-level factor variable indicating a candidate's previous political experience (No Elected Experience, Non-Legislative Elected Experience, State Legislator, or Member of Congress) to account for my hypothesis that legislators will dedicate a greater proportion of their campaign platform to local issues than will the average candidate.

A series of control variables are also included in both models to account for alternative factors that might motivate a candidate's decision to "go local." I include binary indicators for candidate partisanship (i.e., Democrat or Republican), primary election participation rules (i.e., open versus semi-closed/closed), the presence of an incumbent in the race, and the absence of electoral opposition (i.e., opposed versus unopposed primary). I also include a measure for total donations (logged) a candidate received during her primary from donors residing within her own state.

3.4 Results

Model results are presented in Table 3.3 with candidates running in all races (*Full Model*) and open seats contests (*Open Model*) in the left and right columns, respectively. The number of observations indicates that about 2,500 primary election candidates adopted a web-based campaign platform across the 2018 and 2020 congressional elections; nearly 600 of these candidates ran in open seats.

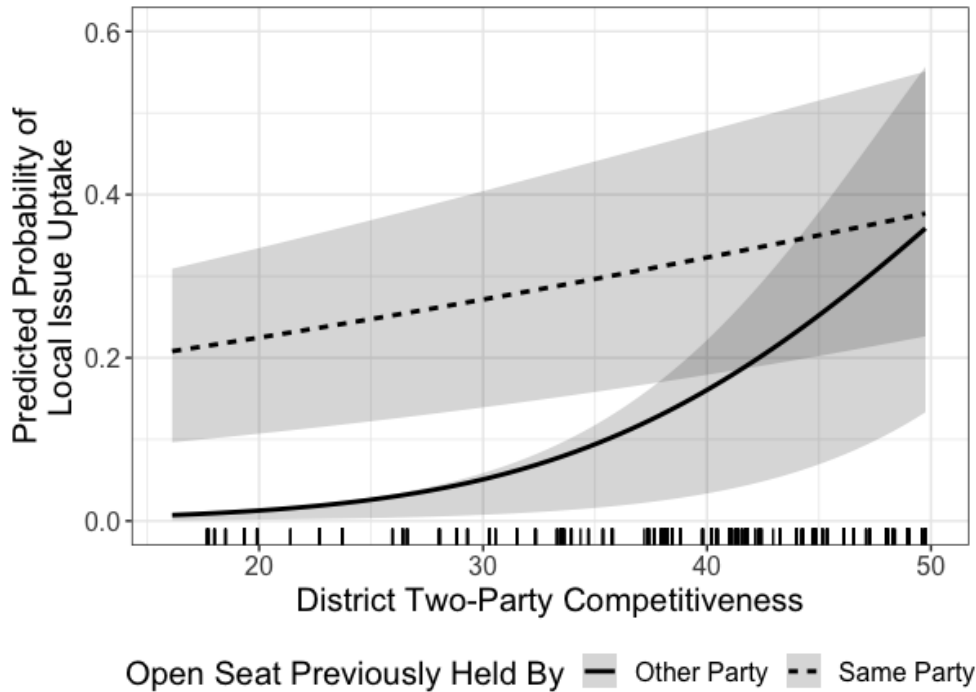
election. Replicating this analysis using the district incumbent's previous electoral vote-share produces substantively similar results. Employing a dichotomous indicator for electoral competitiveness drawn from Cook's Political Report also produces substantively similar results.

¹⁰Because they lack a previous presidential vote-share, districts that were substantially redrawn in Texas between 2016/2018 and in Pennsylvania between 2018/2020 were omitted from my analysis.

Table 3.3: Presence of Local Issue Positions in Congressional Campaign Platforms, 2018-2020

	<i>DV: Presence of Local Issues</i>	
	Full Model	Open Seat Model
Two-Party District Competitiveness	0.082* (0.019)	0.152* (0.048)
Incumbent Partisanship: Same-Party	2.288* (1.037)	4.964* (2.048)
Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity	-0.087* (0.033)	-0.181* (0.060)
Elected Experience: State Legislator Reference: No Elected Experience	0.052 (0.256)	0.562* (0.336)
Elected Experience: Other Elected Reference: No Elected Experience	0.304 (0.253)	0.365 (0.374)
Elected Experience: Current Incumbent Reference: No Elected Experience	0.526* (0.256)	
Unopposed Primary	-0.138 (0.203)	
Primary Rules: Open Primary Reference: Closed/Semi-Closed	-0.367* (0.141)	-0.707* (0.302)
Candidate Party: Republican	0.158 (0.348)	0.027 (0.738)
Fundraising from In-State Donors (Logged)	0.043* (0.017)	0.046 (0.032)
No Incumbent in Race	0.487 (0.371)	
Competitiveness × Same-Party Incumbent	-0.052* (0.023)	-0.122* (0.051)
Primary Ideo. Extremity × Same-Party Incumbent	0.025 (0.025)	0.081 (0.067)
Constant	-3.981* (0.773)	-5.580* (1.781)
Observations	2,444	595
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

Figure 3.7: Predicted Probability of Local Issue Coverage in Open Seats as a Function District Two-Competitiveness & District Partisanship



Note: Predicted probabilities are estimated using those coefficients presented in the right-most column of Table 3.3. Prediction intervals are generated using non-parametric bootstrapping across 1,000 simulations. To produce simulated data, all variables are held at their mean value, with district two-party competitiveness varying from its minimum (17.70) to maximum value (49.75). The dotted line depicts the predicted probability of local issue adoption as a function of district competitiveness, conditional on a candidate’s district currently being held by her *same* party. The solid line depicts the predicted probability of local issue adoption as a function of district competitiveness, conditional on a candidate’s district currently being held by the *other* party. The rug plot along the x-axis displays the distribution of district competitiveness in the original data used to estimate *Open Model* in Table 3.3.

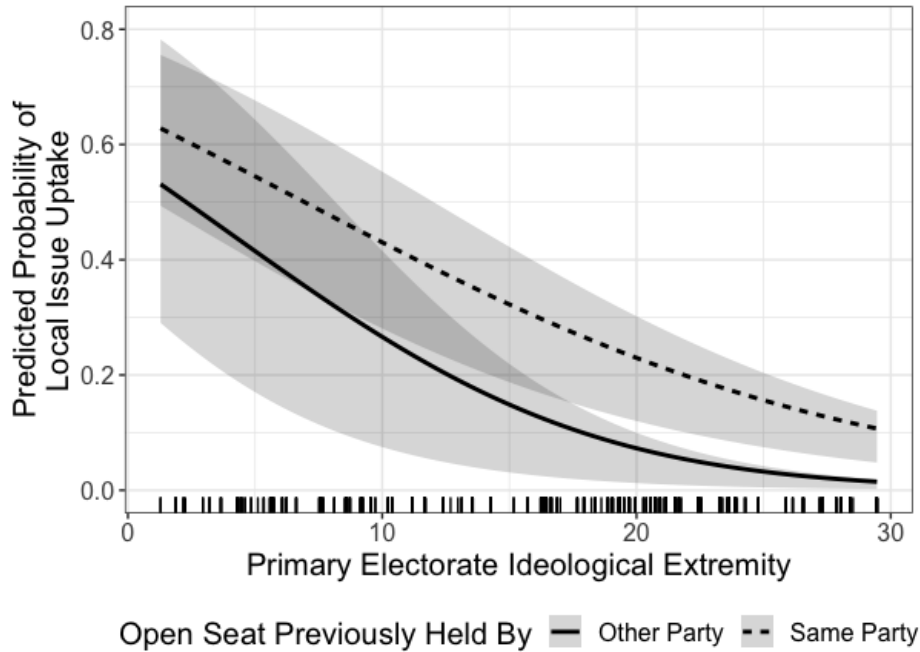
Turning first to district competitiveness, I find support for my hypothesis: as the prevalence of two-party competition in an election increases, so too does a candidate’s likelihood of adopting local issues into her campaign platform. This relationship is statistically significant in both the *Full Model* and *Open Model*. Interestingly, the interaction between district competitiveness and incumbent partisanship is directionally negative; as competition increases, differences in local issue uptake between same-party and other-party candidates decreases. Using predicted probabilities, Figure 3.7 explores this interactive effect in more detail. Data is simulated using those coefficients presented in the right-most column of Table 3.3; all predictors are held at their average value, and district competitiveness is varied in a sequence from the minimum to the maximum observed value. Separate probabilities are displayed in Figure 3.7 for candidates running in districts currently held by

their same-party, as indicated by the dotted line (e.g., Democratic candidate running in an open seat previously represented by a Democrat) and districts held by the other-party, as indicated by the solid line (e.g., Democratic candidate running in an open seat previously represented by a Republican).

According to my theory, when a district is exceedingly safe for a candidate's own party, winning the primary may be the only obstacle to attaining office. In these races, a candidate need not do the hard work associated with running on local issues; winning over weak partisans and swaying undecideds is not necessary for general election victory. As such, a candidate's predicted probability of local issue uptake in safely-partisan, noncompetitive districts should be relatively low. This expectation is borne out in Figure 3.7—a candidate's predicted likelihood of adopting local issues at the minimum value for district competition is about eighteen percent. Moving from the minimum to maximum observed value for district competitiveness increases same-party candidates' likelihood of running on local issues by twenty percentage points. This position taking behavior once again follows my theory: as district competitiveness increases, candidates should become more concerned with the potential for other-party competition and, accordingly, will work to broaden their favorability in the electorate by running on local issues. When a candidate runs in a noncompetitive district that is safe for the *other* party, the election is hopeless—there is no point to running on local issues at all. Once a critical threshold of competitiveness is reached, however, other-party candidates' predicted likelihood of local issue uptake explodes, increasing by forty percentage points. For out-party candidates, cross-pressuring voters and swaying undecided is integral to securing victory—these politicians cannot count on same-party voters alone to win. This electoral need may account for the drastic uptick in out-party candidates' predicted probability of local issue adoption in hotly-contested races.

I additionally find support for my ideological extremity hypothesis in Table 3.3: as a candidate's same-party primary constituency shifts from moderate to extreme, her likelihood of taking up local issues decreases. This relationship is statistically significant in both the *Full Model* and *Open Model*. In Figure 3.7, the relationship between primary electorate extremity and candidate local position taking is expressed using predicted probabilities. These data are generated using the same methodology as described above, with the ideological extremity of a candidate's same-party primary electorate being varied across a sequence of the minimum to maximum observed value. Moving from the most moderate primary electorate to the most extreme decreases a candidate's predicted likelihood of taking up local issue by about forty percentage points. I find no interactive effect between primary

Figure 3.8: Predicted Probability of Local Issue Coverage in Open Seats of as a Function Same-Party Primary Constituency Ideological Extremity

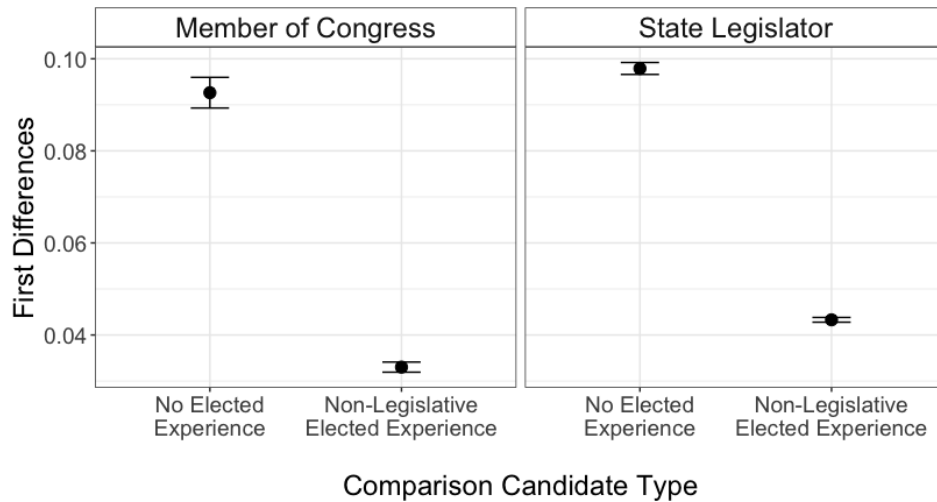


Note: Predicted probabilities are estimated using those coefficients presented in the right-most column of Table 3.3. Prediction intervals are generated using non-parametric bootstrapping across 1,000 simulations. To produce simulated data, all variables are held at their mean value, with primary constituency extremism varying from its minimum (1.29) to its maximum (29.45). The solid line depicts the predicted probability of local issue adoption as a function of same-party primary electorate extremism, conditional on a candidate’s district currently being held by her *same* party. The dotted line depicts the predicted probability of local issue adoption as a function of same-party primary electorate extremism, conditional on a candidate’s district currently being held by the *other* party. The rug plot along the x-axis displays the distribution of primary electorate ideological extremism in the original data used to estimate *Open Model* in Table 3.3.

constituency ideology and district partisanship. Regardless of a candidate’s same-party or other-party status, she is less likely to cover local issue in her campaign platform when her same-party primary electorate skews ideologically extreme.

According to the left column of Table 3.3, members of Congress are statistically significantly more likely to run on local issues than are candidates without any electoral experience. To more clearly interpret this disparity in local issue uptake, first differences in the predicted probability of local issue adoption across candidate types are displayed in Figure 3.9. Per the left facet of Figure 3.9, members of Congress are about nine percentage points more likely to cover local issues in their campaign platforms, as compared to candidates who lack any electoral experience ($t = 73.3$, $p < 0.05$); the magnitude of this difference drops to about three percentage points when comparing members of Congress to candidates who possess non-legislative, elected experience ($t = 67.6$, p

Figure 3.9: First Differences in Predicted Probabilities of Local Issue Coverage for State Legislators & Members of Congress



Note: First difference presented in the left facet were simulated with those coefficients presented in the left column of Table 3.3. First difference presented in the right facet were simulated with those coefficients presented in the right column of Table 3.3. Prediction intervals are generated using non-parametric bootstrapping across 1000 simulations. All variables, with the exception of political experience, were held at their mean value.

< 0.05). Turning next to state legislators, a similar relationship is present in the right column of Table 3.3. According to the right facet of Figure 3.9, states legislator are close to ten percentage points more likely to cover local issues in their campaign platforms, as compared to candidates who lack any electoral experience ($t = 54.6, p < 0.05$); the magnitude of this effect differential drops to just over four percentage points when comparing state legislators to candidates who possess non-legislative, elected experience ($t = 59.1, p < 0.05$).

To investigate my hypothesis about the *proportion* of campaign platform text legislators dedicate to local issues, I estimate a second set of hierarchical models with near-identical specification to those in Table 3.3. The singular change I make is to the dependent variable, which is a continuous measure for the proportion of a candidate’s campaign platform dedicated to local issues. Recall, I express the total length of a candidate’s text on local issues (e.g., number of words dedicated to *local issue* discussions) as a proportion her platform’s total length (i.e., number of words across *all issue* discussions). If a candidate does not speak at all about local issues, the dependent variable’s value is 0; if a candidate dedicates her entire platform to local issues, the dependent variable’s value is 1.

Table 3.4: Proportion of Campaign Platform Text Dedicated to Local Issues, 2018-2020

	DV: Proportion of Platform Text as Local	
	(Full Model)	(Open Model)
Two-Party District Competitiveness	0.003* (0.001)	0.004* (0.001)
Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.004* (0.002)
Elected Experience: State Legislator Reference: No Elected Experience	0.014* (0.008)	0.018* (0.010)
Elected Experience: Other Elected Reference: No Elected Experience	0.004 (0.008)	0.015 (0.011)
Elected Experience: Current Incumbent Reference: No Elected Experience	0.015* (0.007)	
Primary Rules: Open Primary Reference: Closed/Semi-Closed	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.010 (0.010)
Constant	-0.045* (0.021)	-0.077 (0.052)
Observations	2,444	595

Note:

*p<0.05

Table 3.4 displays the truncated results for these model outputs, with all races (*Full Model*) and open seats contests (*Open Model*) in the left and right columns, respectively.¹¹ Although state legislators and incumbent members of Congress do indeed dedicate a statistically significantly greater proportion of their campaign platforms to local issues than do the average candidate, this substantive effect size is small. Members of Congress and state legislators dedicate about three percent more of their campaign platforms to local issues than do other kinds of candidates. District two-party competitiveness and primary constituency extremity also serve as statistically significant predictors in both the *Full Model* and *Open Model* of Table 6.2; however, the substantive effect size for these predictors is once again modest. Moving from the minimum to maximum observed value for district

¹¹The fully specified models can be found in Table 6.2 of this model's appendix.

competitiveness increases the predicted share of a candidate’s platform as “local” by five percentage points. Moving across the range of observed values for primary constituency ideological extremity decreases the local share of a candidate’s platform by about the same magnitude.

3.5 Discussion & Conclusion

In this chapter, I push back on the characterization that all campaigns for Congress today are national—indeed, I find that some contests are still fought over local issues. In particular, I demonstrate that candidates are more likely to adopt local issues into their campaign platforms when (1) they face fierce two-party competition in their congressional election, (2) their same-party primary electorate skews ideologically moderate, or (3) they themselves have a history legislating on local issues. My analysis of locally-oriented position taking in congressional campaigns relies on an original data set of text scraped from campaign websites for all congressional candidates in 2018 and 2020 who had an official campaign site. These web-based position taking texts are not only well-suited for evaluating the *presence* of specific topics in campaign issue agendas, but also the *rhetoric* candidates use to discuss these issues.

There are numerous ways a candidate can discuss a single policy, and these issue “frames” can be exceedingly powerful. By highlighting certain aspects of an issue and downplaying others, candidates can “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient” (Entman 2004, p.417). When discussing nationally-relevant topics, I expect that most candidates will discuss aspects of those issue which best facilitate their party’s messaging goals. However, some national issues may be of particular import to a candidate’s own constituency. On these issues, voters should possess a higher level of collective knowledge and, therefore, may be more likely to hold politicians accountable for out-of-step position taking. Toeing the party line under these circumstances is surely not an optimal strategy. In such situations, I suspect that a candidate will tailor her rhetoric on national issues to the district, employing topical frames that fit local conditions. By breaking with party messaging, I assert that this kind of campaign rhetoric demonstrates a high-level of commitment to one’s own constituency—even if such discussions attend to *national issues*. Indeed, in chapter that follows, I seek to broaden our definition of “going local” beyond district-specific projects and problems to include certain kinds of nationally-salient issue discussions.

4: LOCALLY-ORIENTED RHETORIC IN NATIONAL PLATFORM POSITIONS

Partisan messaging is a staple in today's political discourse. Promoting a policy platform (Pope and Woon, 2009), employing unified rhetoric (Groeling, 2010), and putting the opposition on-the-record through embarrassing "gotcha" votes (Reynolds, 2017) all serve as messaging tactics parties use to differentiate themselves, effectively creating a "brand." Of course, branding by definition involves the promotion of a product to a consumer—in this case, encouraging the electorate to vote for a party's candidate. A bevy of research demonstrates that party brands help voters decide who they should support in elections (e.g., Snyder and Ting 2002; Levendusky 2009; Aldrich 2011). In addition to communicating an informational cue, partisan messaging also energizes the party base. Mason (2018) describes "us versus them" messaging as a key mechanism increasing voter engagement. What's more, Barber and Pope (2019) argue that the electorate today is increasingly composed of "loyalists" whose party ties are a result of group attachments rather than ideology, making party-brand maintenance all the more important to sustaining a reliable base of support.

As exemplified through my content analysis of campaign platforms in the previous chapter, politicians take every available opportunity to engage in partisan messaging (Lee, 2016). Recall, the vast majority of congressional campaign platforms today are composed of partisan positions about national-level issues. Communicating party divisions over these issues, however, is not always easy. "Programmatic" issues, as defined by Carmines and Stimson (1980), present an especially steep messaging challenge. On these issues, politicians cannot employ the kinds of tried-and-true symbolic arguments they would normally use to connect with voters. This is because party cleavages on programmatic issues concern the technical details of public policy formation, which are less familiar to the electorate. Explaining party stances on programmatic topics not only requires a substantial investment of time and resources, but also exposes voters to the dreaded sausage-making policy process. Although position taking on programmatic issues may seem like more trouble than its worth, elites feel compelled to message on salient issues-of-the-day—regardless of the perceived costs and complexities of doing so (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997).

Motivated by this tension, this chapter investigates the rhetorical strategies that politicians employ to reconcile their partisan messaging goals with the high price associated with position taking on programmatic issues. I expect that *local issue intensity* will be decisive in determining *how* elites structure their position taking. To test my theory, I focus in on America’s opioid epidemic. The opioid crisis constitutes a salient and multifaceted “programmatic” issue: partisan differences about how to best manage opioid use disorder concern complex matters of clinical medicine and subtle divisions over the allocation of public health resources. The overwhelming majority of Americans lack a “gut reaction” for party positions on opioid issues. One of the factors that makes opioid addiction an especially unique public health crisis is its heterogeneous spread throughout the United States. I leverage this heterogeneity to assess if and how the epidemic’s local salience impacts the rhetoric politicians use to talk about opioid issues. To evaluate politicians’ positions on the opioid crisis, I employ the original collection of text data from campaign platforms introduced in the previous chapter. Once again, campaign platforms are a data source well-suited for my purposes because they provide a consolidated summary of both a candidate’s issue priorities (Sulkin, Moriarty and Hefner, 2007a) and messaging tactics (Druckman, Kifer and Parkin, 2009).

I find that politicians who ran in districts where the epidemic was *not locally-salient* (i.e., there was a lower rate of district deaths by opioid overdose) used their opioid positions as a vehicle to talk about *symbolic* policies—like immigration (Republicans) or criminal justice (Democrats)—which have familiar partisan divisions that resonate with voters, but only loose ties to the epidemic itself. Conversely, I show that politicians who ran in districts where the opioid crisis was *locally-salient* (i.e., there was an especially high rate of district deaths by opioid overdose) tended to focus their opioid platform text on scientifically-backed solutions for treating and thwarting opioid use disorder. These *programmatic* positions dealt with the nuts and bolts of public health policy, referencing specific legislation or treatment protocols. The opioid epidemic is most certainly an issue of national importance; opioid abuse affects millions of Americans throughout the United States—it is not a “local issue” as traditionally-defined. However, I argue that programmatic rhetorical strategies can demonstrate a similar kind of commitment to one’s community as “going local” through discussions of projects and problems that are district-specific. By eschewing symbolic messaging, politicians who run on programmatic opioid issue frames prioritize locally-oriented representation over party messaging goals. For that reason, I consider *any* programmatic position taking on the opioid epidemic

to be a form of locally-oriented campaign behavior, regardless of whether a candidate referenced solutions to stymieing opioid abuse that were specific to her own constituency.

The implications of my findings stand to have the strongest ramifications if politicians carry forward their *campaign* messaging tactics into their *legislative* communications. Members of Congress' public statements reach much broader audiences and hold greater clout with the public than the average candidate's campaign platform. To broadly assess legislators' position taking on opioids, I analyze the topical content of press releases, floor speeches, and proposed bill summaries from the 115th and 116th Congresses. Measuring similarities in politicians' rhetoric across multiple channels for position taking would ideally involve estimating a single topic model for multiple corpora simultaneously (e.g., include floor speeches *and* policy platforms in a single model). This would ensure that model-identified topics are the same for all document types, allowing for the direct comparison of politicians' opioid messaging across different sources of text. Existing models for topic discovery cannot adequately accommodate this kind of analysis because they should only be estimated over one document type at a time (e.g., include floor speeches *or* policy platforms in a single model). If individual models are estimated for each corpus type, there is no guarantee that generated topics will be consistent enough across models to facilitate content comparisons.

To tackle this limitation, I employ a new method by Porter, Olivella, and Imai (2021) that allows multiple corpora to be employed in a single topic model. Using this method, I show that politicians carry forward their rhetorical strategies from campaigns into their legislative position taking. Incumbents from districts where the opioid epidemic was locally-salient maintained a focus on "programmatic" public health solutions for addiction in their opioid-related text from press releases, floor speeches, and proposed bills . The majority of incumbents, however, continued to employ "symbolic" rhetorical strategies in their opioid-related texts once they reach Congress; these rhetorical frames were most pronounced in press releases, and the least prevalent in floor speeches. If Americans' knowledge about public policy is indeed a reflection of "how those complex debates has been simplified, packaged and translated" (Pollock, Lilie and Vittes 1993, p.33), these results could signal a long road ahead for America's opioid crisis.

4.1 Party Messaging & Political Power

Swaying undecided voters and mobilizing the party base have taken on renewed importance over the past several decades with the narrowing of partisan majorities in Congress. From the mid- to late-20th century, the Democratic Party enjoyed a period of nearly uninterrupted majority status in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, since the turn-of-the-century, party control of Congress has changed hands numerous times and the margins for partisan control have often come down to a handful of seats. Whether it be the ability to fulfill legislative priorities (Cox and Mager, 1999; Aldrich and Rohde, 2011), exercise negative agenda control (Gailmard and Jenkins, 2007), or guide the informational environment (Curry, 2015), the spoils of majority party status in Congress are numerous. Rank-and-file lawmakers also benefit greatly when their party is in the majority: they gain access to valuable earmarks (Balla et al., 2002) and have more success raising money from outside their own district (Gimpel, Lee and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2008). These incentives motivate legislators to help their party achieve majority status by promoting party unity. If majority party members are especially loyal, they are more likely to find themselves on prestige committees (Heberlig, 2003) and are more likely to see their bills advance through the legislative process (Hasecke and Mycoff, 2007). Those members who fail to fall in line, conversely, tend to fall out of favor with party elites, facing legislative and electoral consequences (Jacobson and Carson, 2016). In short, for both individual party members and the party as a collective, promoting the party brand to attain and retain majority status is a critical priority.

Lee (2016) contends that today's explosion in party messaging is a direct result of intensified competition for institutional control. In particular, she highlights the Republicans' "Contract with America" in 1994 and Democrats' "Six for '06" agenda as early signals of a move toward cohesive party branding. Each messaging campaign successfully brought the party together over a slate of common policy ideas and, consequently, flipped majority control in both chambers. Since then, partisan communication has continued to professionalize and modernize. Funds dedicated to public relations and salaries for communications staffers have continued to rise year-after-year, despite congressional office budgetary cuts (Petersen, 2020; Crosson et al., 2020). Today, nearly every member of Congress has adopted some form of social media to ensure their partisan messages reach constituents (Gelman, 2020). Online campaign resources also give congressional candidates easy

access to talking points on national issues and partisan branding materials, further promoting and perpetuating the party image (Litman, 2017).

The institutionalization of political communication has supplied politicians with the motivation and tools they need to doggedly pursue their messaging goals. For issues central to present-day party alignments, defining and dramatizing party differences should be straightforward. Politicians can simply toe the party line using well-worn rhetoric that is familiar to voters. However, on issues for which voters lack a “gut response” about party distinctions, messaging should become more laborious and time intensive. This begs the question: how do politicians define and dramatize party distinctions over issues for which party stances are not immediately clear to voters?

4.2 Symbolic & Programmatic Issue Messaging

“Symbolic” issues, per Carmines and Stimson (1980), are emblematic of party differences, pertain to policy outcomes, and have a long-standing place on the political agenda. Because symbolic issues are deeply familiar, voters typically have “gut reactions” about party positions, no matter these voters’ “level of political sophistication (well-informed or less informed), interest in politics (highly attentive or uninterested), or zeal for voting (active or apathetic)” (Cizmar, 2011). “Programmatic” issues, conversely, deal with the *means* by which a policy goal is achieved, rather than the goal itself. Topics addressing foreign policy, regulation, and matters of the economy often fall under the umbrella of programmatic issues (Bailey and Wilcox 1998). Because policy making is incremental, parties will often have multiple points of disagreement in their deliberations about programmatic issues (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). To complicate matters, these disagreements almost always concern technical details of legislation, and understanding such arguments requires a high level of political sophistication (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997).

For politicians, the most salient distinction between symbolic and programmatic issue types is the value each offers as a conduit for party messaging. Communicating party differences is straightforward with symbolic issues because cleavages exist over well-worn conflicts about policy outcomes. For instance, Americans are all too familiar with party positions about abortion. Politicians can, therefore, simply toe the party line in their abortion rhetoric, which attends to partisan messaging goals by reinforcing the party brand. Symbolic issues most certainly have complex facets, but

politicians' messages need not hinge on these details. On programmatic issues, voters lack an awareness of party divisions, and educating voters about these divisions presents a hefty challenge that runs counter to parties' messaging objectives of clarity and consistency (Sellers, 2009). This is because party cleavages on programmatic issues exist over decisions made during the policy development process—a nuanced phase of lawmaking with which the average American lacks both familiarity and interest (Oleszek and Oleszek, 2012).

Although programmatic issues present significant messaging obstacles, it is not as though politicians can simply remain silent on these issues—especially when they garner national salience. Such behavior would go against their risk-averse inclinations as single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew, 1974). Elites tend to take positions on issues they perceive as important to the American public for fear of electoral consequences (Grose, Malhotra and Houweling, 2015; Highton and Rocca, 2005). For example, Sides (2007) shows that candidates running in the 2000 and 2002 congressional elections were quick to take positions on salient, national issues—even if they were “owned” by the other party. To assess the messaging tactics politicians use to communicate party differences over salient “programmatic” issues, I turn to America’s opioid epidemic.

4.3 America’s Opioid Epidemic

The roots of America’s opioid epidemic can be traced back to physicians who—under pressure from pharmaceutical companies—began by prescribing drugs like OxyContin and Percocet without a full understanding of their addictive qualities. Today, opioid dependence is prevalent across racial, social, and geographic lines, affecting Americans of all stripes. The impacts of the opioid epidemic on American communities have been, and continue to be, far reaching. Per Moffitt (2020), opioids have “impaired economic productivity, strained health care systems, created new demands on the criminal justice system, and burdened family and community networks” (p. 171). Over the past two decades, opioids have claimed over half a million lives in the United States. The CDC estimates that opioids were responsible for over 93,000 deaths in 2020: a grim milestone as both the highest number of deaths by opioid overdose in a twelve-month period, and the largest single-year overdose increase since the crisis began.

The opioid epidemic constitutes a salient and multifaceted “programmatic” issue; both parties agree that steps must be taken to stem the scourge of opioid addiction, but party cleavages exist over the best means to achieve this goal. Republicans maintain that decentralization is crucial to curbing opioid abuse; ensuring that resources are doled out at the state and local level where they are needed most (Republican National Committee, 2016). Democrats, on the other hand, view publicly funded opioid rehabilitation as the most effective means for reducing addiction because it fulfills a public demand for more cost-effective treatment options (Democratic National Committee, 2020). Partisan differences about how to best manage the opioid epidemic concern complex matters of clinical medicine and subtle divisions over the allocation of public health resources; the overwhelming majority of Americans lack a “gut reaction” for party positions on these kinds of “hard” opioid issues. Explaining such divisions to voters would involve a substantial investment of time, effort, and resources. Furthermore, while the parties disagree on some of the finer points of policy, the passage of opioid-curbing legislation has been largely bipartisan. Final votes in the House on major legislative packages aiming to combat the opioid crisis across the 115th and 116th Congresses saw near-unanimous agreement. Such bipartisanship, though, does not fit squarely with party messaging objectives. These obstacles present a dilemma for politicians: how do they maximize the benefits while minimizing the costs associated with position taking on opioid issues?

4.3.1 How Do Politicians Talk About Opioids?

On Thursday October 26th, 2017, President Trump officially declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency, giving the epidemic national-level recognition and placing it among Congress’ top legislative priorities. Since this declaration, numerous bills seeking to stem opioid addiction have been signed into law, including the landmark SUPPORT Patients and Communities Act of 2018. Existing research contends that politicians take public positions on the opioid crisis because it constitutes a salient issue-of-the-day (Weiss and Zoorob, 2021); taking this work a step further, I explore the *contents* of such messaging. I posit that politicians’ rhetoric about opioid issues will be conditional on the intensity of the crisis’s local salience. The local importance of national issues can affect both voter and elite behavior. For instance, Grose and Oppenheimer (2007) show that the local salience of the Iraq War—measured using a count of constituent war deaths—served as a strong predictor for electoral vote shifts in the 2006 congressional election. Moreover, Milita, Ryan and

Simas (2014) find that politicians are more likely to take clear—rather than ambiguous—positions on gay marriage if that topic is especially important to their own constituency.

Figure 4.1: State-Level Opioid Overdose Death Rate, 2017–2020

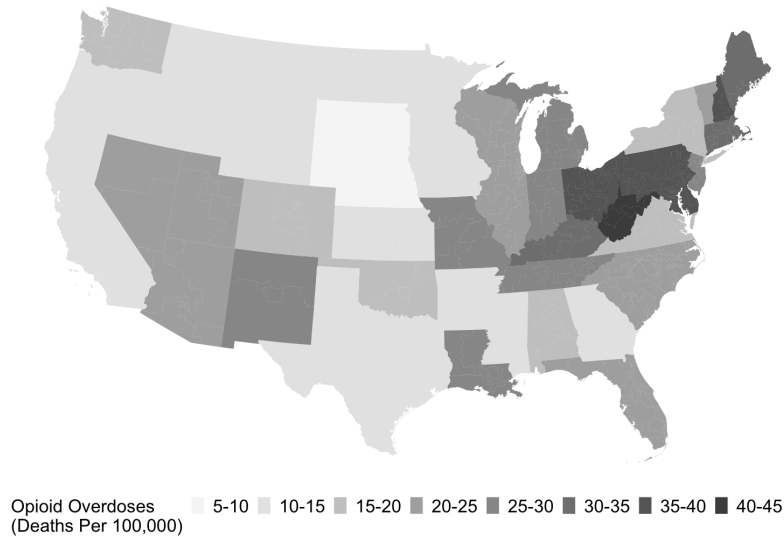
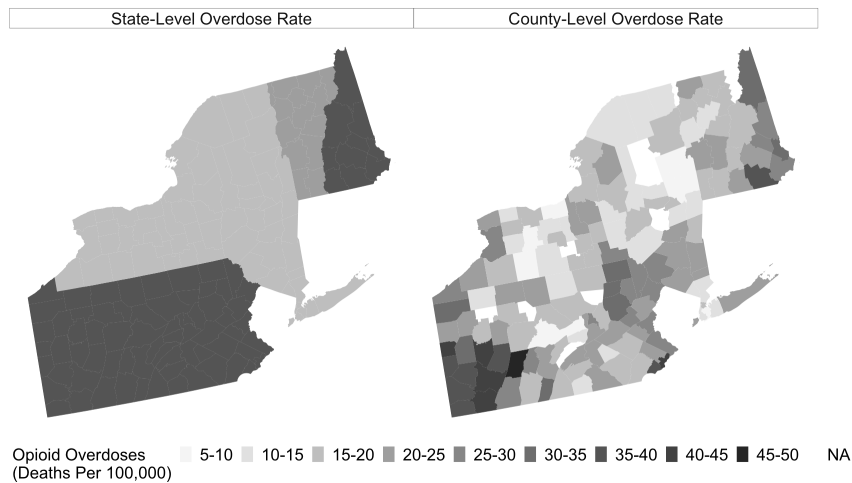


Figure 4.2: State-Level & County-Level Opioid Overdose Death Rate New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont & New Hampshire



Note: Statistics on opioid overdose deaths were drawn from the CDC WONDER online database. Causes of death include death because of a mental or behavioral issue caused by the use of an opioid, accidental poisoning or exposure to an opioid, intentional self-poisoning while using an opioid, and poisoning by an opioid with undetermined intent. Reported state-level death rates are averages that have been produced using data from 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. Counties with no reported opioid overdose rates are denoted in white.

Following this work, I assume that the intensity of opioid issue salience varies conditionally with the rate of overdose deaths in congressional districts. One of the factors that makes the opioid epidemic a unique public health crisis is its heterogeneous spread throughout the United States. The devastating effects of opioid addiction have been felt most strongly in rural areas of the Northeast—although, more recently, hot spots have cropped up in urban communities of color. Figure 4.1 depicts state-level deaths by opioid overdose across the United States. Even between geographically proximate states—for instance, New York and Pennsylvania—there are stark differences in the extent to which opioid addiction has taken root. Figure 4.2 illuminates the scope of within-state opioid overdose variation by contrasting state and county-level overdose rates across New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and New Hampshire. I leverage this depicted geographic heterogeneity in opioid deaths to assess if and how this epidemic’s local salience impacts politicians’ messaging.

Recall, programmatic issues are especially difficult for politicians to communicate because they involve technical, policy-making content with which the average voter is unfamiliar. However, in districts where the opioid epidemic is *locally-salient* (i.e., there is a higher rate of opioid deaths), the public should possess a higher level of acquired knowledge about addiction-related issues (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997). Politicians are also the most likely to be held accountable for out-of-step position taking behavior when it concerns issues that matter most to their constituents (Canes-Wrone, Minozzi and Reveley, 2011; Jones, 2011). This is noteworthy given Gramlich’s (2018) finding that Americans are more likely to label the opioid crisis as a “pressing problem” when they hail from areas where addiction is highest. Anticipating the potential for electoral accountability, I expect politicians from districts where the epidemic is locally-salient to more frequently focus their opioid messaging on programmatic content.¹

H1: Politicians from areas where the opioid epidemic is *locally-salient* will be more likely to employ “*programmatic*” messages in their opioid issue text from campaign platforms

¹I do not assert that voters hold politicians accountable for out-of-step position taking on opioid-related issues. Indeed, there is mixed evidence in the literature concerning to what extent voters hold politicians accountable for their legislative behavior, if at all (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010; conversely, see Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Ansolabehere and Jones 2010). My argument rests on the broadly held assumptions that politicians are risk-averse (Rohde, 1979) and possess deeply-held electoral motivations (Mayhew, 1974). If these assumptions hold true, simply the *potential* for electoral accountability will be enough to motivate the strategic behavior described here.

I consider “programmatic” facets of opioid messaging to be the kinds of topics identified by the CDC and NIH as the most promising strategies for treating and thwarting opioid use disorder; such solutions include improving prescribing practices, increasing access to treatment services, expanding access to Naloxone for rapid overdose reversal, educating the public about opioid misuse, and bolstering local jurisdictions’ public health funding. To illustrate, Barbara Comstock (R-VA) employed this kind of programmatic opioid messaging in her 2018 campaign platform, stating that:

In 2014, more people died from heroin and other opioid prescription drug overdoses than car accidents within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Congresswoman Comstock recognizes the heroin problem in our community and has worked with federal, state, and local officials on the regional Heroin Operations Team with Loudoun County Sheriff Mike Chapman and the Shenandoah Valley Opioid Taskforce with Winchester Police Chief Kevin Sanzenbacher. Congresswoman Comstock is also a member of The Bipartisan Task Force to Combat the Heroin Epidemic in the U.S. House of Representatives. To combat heroin and opioid addiction we must have a community-focused approach from authorities on all levels of government as well as cooperation from the medical community on curbing the prescription of opioid-based pain relief medications, which in many cases begins the cycle of abuse.

In this example, Representative Comstock clearly advocates for a locally-focused approach to curbing opioid addiction that deals with matters of public health policy. Given that Comstock’s congressional district had an especially high rate of opioid overdose death rates in 2018 (36 deaths per 100,000), the text presented here also follows my expectation about the relationship between local issue salience and programmatic opioid messaging.

In districts where the opioid epidemic is *not locally-salient* (i.e., there is a lower rate of opioid deaths), constituents do not possess the knowledge—or, potentially, interest—to hold politicians accountable. Lacking the same accountability structure outlined above, I expect politicians will appraise the cost of making complex arguments about the programmatic aspects of opioid issues as too steep. Instead, they will use opioid position taking opportunities to tie the epidemic back to familiar issues that are symbolic of party values and partisan divisions.

I expect Democrats from constituencies where the opioid epidemic has lower local salience to tie the crisis back to party themes regarding racial equality. Today, the Democratic Party’s core constituency could best be described as a coalition of social groups who possess specific policy preferences, chief among them a demand for government to address institutionalized racial prejudice (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016). With the public spotlight trained on the Black Lives Matter movement, added pressure has been placed on Democrats to make significant strides in

reducing inequality within the criminal justice system. Given its ties to mass incarceration and mandatory minimum sentencing, the opioid epidemic provides Democratic politicians with an excellent opportunity to trumpet party values of racial equity in criminal justice. By using their opioid messaging opportunities to talk about institutionalized racism, politicians can achieve their partisan messaging goals while avoiding the hard work associated with explaining complex policies surrounding opioid issues. It is important to note that—although these discussions have ties to the opioid epidemic—this messaging sits well outside the scope of strategies vital for combating the opioid crisis. These kinds of symbolic, “opioid-adjacent” positions are not intended to advise or educate constituents about public health policy but, rather, serve to fulfill party messaging goals.

H2_a: Democrats from areas where the opioid epidemic is *not locally-salient* will be more likely to employ “*symbolic*” messages—with a particular focus on criminal justice reform—in their opioid issue text from campaign platforms

In her 2020 campaign platform, Haley Stevens (D-MI) exemplified how Democrats running in districts where the opioid epidemic has lower local salience tie the crisis back to racial equality. Stevens expressed that “[an] approach we must take to curb opioid addiction is decriminalizing marijuana for medicinal and recreational use.” She went on to say, “[Marijuana] drug policy and prosecution targets people of color at a disproportionate rate. This form of injustice and inequality is unacceptable...” In this text, Stevens simultaneously takes a position on the opioid epidemic while tying it back to core party values for racial equality. Stevens does not concentrate her messaging on marijuana’s potential for alternative pain management as one might in “programmatic” rhetoric on opioids. Instead, Stevens uses opioids as a catalyst to discuss a topic that is particularly important to her party’s base and differentiates Democrats from Republicans. Stevens’ district in 2020 had an opioid death rate that was just below average (15 deaths per 100,000), tracking with my hypothesis about the relationship between the epidemic’s local salience and politicians’ messaging tactics.

I expect Republicans from constituencies where the epidemic has lower local salience to tie the opioid crisis back to party themes regarding immigration. Blaming Hispanics and other immigrants for America’s problems was a touchstone that defined Donald Trump’s 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns (White, 2016). Party symbols like “Build the Wall” and “America First” harken to values

of American traditionalism that are at the core of the Republican Party (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016; Wallace and Zepeda-Millán, 2020). Party loyalists—who make up a growing proportion of the Republican voter base—tend to gravitate towards issues for which President Trump has taken a strong stance; and they expect other party members to hold the line with their perceived party leader (Barber and Pope, 2019). Framing the opioid epidemic as a problem that can be resolved at the U.S.-Mexico border gives Republican politicians a clear opportunity to demonstrate their party loyalty while avoiding the hard work associated with messaging on programmatic aspects of the opioid crisis. Although “supply-side” solutions to the opioid epidemic may serve to help Republicans achieve their party messaging goals, such approaches have had little impact on turning the tide of opioid addiction in America (Grogan et al., 2020).

H2_b: Republicans from areas where the opioid epidemic is *not locally-salient* will be more likely to employ “symbolic” opioid messages—with a particular focus on U.S.-Mexico immigration—in their opioid issue text from campaign platforms

In his 2018 congressional campaign platform, Raúl Labrador (R-ID) exemplified how Republican politicians from districts with lower opioid salience use the crisis as a vehicle to take symbolic, party positions on security at the U.S.-Mexico border and, moreover, “illegal” immigration—a topic that never fails to rile up the party base. Labrador wrote to constituents that, “the borders are not secure...this dysfunction allows drug smugglers to creep into the U.S. and exacerbate the opioid epidemic.” He went on to discuss how “illegal aliens” take American jobs and “depress wages for workers here at home,” signing off by noting “that is not putting America first.” This messaging behavior follows my hypothesis given that the opioid overdose rate in the Idaho 1st was not especially high in 2018 (17 deaths per 100,000).

What politicians say and how they say it matters. Pollock, Lilie and Vittes (1993) and Grose, Malhotra and Houweling (2015) show that the rhetorical frames elites use to explain their position taking behavior can have strong impacts on constituents’ political knowledge and opinions. In particular, McGinty et al. (2016) find that politicians contribute to the persistent stigma surrounding opioid use disorder and discourage treatment-seeking behavior when they frame addiction as an illegal behavior. Sensationalized messages about the “criminal” aspects of the opioid crisis are also

more likely to be picked up by the media (Russell et al., 2020), perpetuating false stereotypes and spreading misinformation about drug abuse (Lewandowsky, K.H. and JohnCook, 2017). The idea that politicians’ messaging colors public perception—both directly through their own communications and indirectly by way of the media—is worrisome under my theory for opioid issue salience. If politicians do indeed use their opioid position taking opportunities to message on other partisan issues—in particular, criminal justice and border security—this rhetoric could contribute to growing hesitancy towards addiction treatment and further exacerbate America’s opioid crisis.

4.4 Data & Methodological Approach

Politicians today can take positions across any number of traditional or digital campaigning outlets. This makes measuring politicians’ messaging on opioids difficult because elites could bring up opioid issues on one communication platform but fail to mention these same issues on another. To best assess politicians’ opioid positions, I employ the original collection of policy platforms taken from candidate campaign websites that was discussed in the previous chapter.

4.4.1 Identifying Opioid Positions in Campaign Platforms

I consider a candidate to have discussed issues related to the opioid epidemic if the crisis is explicitly mentioned in their campaign platform text. Given that over 75% of drug-related overdoses between 2018 and 2020 involved an opioid, I consider any broad platform discussions of drug addiction to be opioid-related text. I also consider platform points that referenced the trafficking of drugs like heroin or fentanyl to be opioid-related text. Across the 2,444 congressional candidates who had a policy platform on their website, 781 or 32% discussed opioid-related issues. Placing this statistic in perspective, Table 4.1 outlines the proportion of candidates who took up into their platforms a selection of other “symbolic” and “programmatic” issues. There is clear variation in issue uptake within and across policy domains; of particular note are topics like *Infectious Diseases* and *Law Enforcement*. In tandem with these issues’ increased salience from 2018 to 2020, a greater proportion of candidates chose to adopt these topics into their campaign platforms. Overall, the rate at which candidates adopted opioid issues in their online policy platforms tracks well with other nationally-

Table 4.1: Percentage of Candidates Discussing Easy & Hard Issues, 2018–2020

Issue Type	Democratic		Republican	
	2018	2020	2018	2020
Opioid Epidemic	38.1%	31.1%	32.6%	27.3%
Programmatic Issues				
Improvements to American Infrastructure	23.5%	27.3%	14.0%	16.0%
Military Presence in Middle East	28.6%	26.7%	41.3%	29.5%
Infectious Diseases (COVID-19, Ebola, Zika)	23.7%	46.5%	9.2%	30.0%
Symbolic Issues				
Women’s Reproductive Choices	47.1%	45.3%	47.7%	50.6%
Detention & Deportation of Immigrants	40.8%	44.0%	43.3%	49.5%
Law Enforcement & Policing	30.1%	47.4%	21.9%	28.1%

Note: Infrastructure includes statements that explicitly mention physical building or construction. *Middle East* includes statements about U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Infectious Diseases* includes discussions of Covid-19, Ebola, and Zika viruses; it does not include statements about HIV/AIDS. *Women’s Reproductive Choices* includes only explicit stances on abortion constitutionality and access. *Detention & Deportation* deals with the Trump administration’s family separation policy. *Law Enforcement* includes statements about police force training and funding. Example text can be found in section 7.1 of this chapter’s appendix.

salient symbolic and programmatic issues. This suggests that candidates do in fact perceive the opioid epidemic to be an issue that is worthy of public position taking.

To discern whether certain candidates were more likely to adopt opioid positions in their platforms, I regress opioid issue presence over a set of electoral, district, and personal candidate characteristics; these include a candidate’s past political experience, district educational attainment, and district two-party electoral competitiveness. The key independent variable in this model is a measure for the rate of opioid overdose deaths per 100,000 at the congressional district level. Truncated results for this analysis are shown in Table 4.2; the full results for this analysis are presented in Table 7.1 of this chapter’s appendix. I find that a district’s rate of overdose deaths serves as a statistically significant predictor of opioid issue uptake—but this relationship is substantively weak. Moving from the first quartile to the third quartile of the district-level distribution over opioid deaths increases the predicted probability of issue uptake by only 8%. These cursory analyses should assuage concerns about widespread bias in the propensity at which candidates take up opioid issues into their congressional campaign platforms.

To prepare text from congressional campaign platforms for modeling, I took several pre-processing steps standard in text analysis (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). First, I cleaned the text of any HTML tags and extraneous source code. Second, I removed any stop words—commonly used

Table 4.2: Main Indicators for Opioid Issue Adoption on Congressional Campaign Website, 2018-2020

	DV: Presence of Opioid Position
Rate of Opioid Overdose by CD	0.043* (0.006)
Candidate Party: Republican	-0.238* (0.083)
% of Constituency, White	0.014* (0.003)
% of Constituency, 100k+ Household Income	-0.016* (0.004)
Year: 2020	-0.210* (0.090)
Constant	-1.764* (0.641)
Observations	2,444

Note: *p<0.05

words such as “the,” “a,” or “in” that have no substantive meaning but rather serve a purely grammatical function. Next, I discarded punctuation, numbers, and removed capitalization. I additionally simplified my policy platform vocabulary by stemming words, which removes word endings to reduce the dimensionality of text. For instance, using stemming, words like *legislative*, *legislator*, and *legislation* would simplify to *legislat-*. Finally, I removed infrequent words, dropping any terms that did not appear in at least two policy platform documents. Grimmer and Stewart (2013) additionally note that, “discarding text not related to the primary quantity of interest can actually improve the performance of automated clustering methods.” Therefore, policy platform documents in my analysis were trimmed to only include opioid-related text. These pre-processing steps yielded a corpus of 781 documents and a vocabulary with 1,859 unique words.

4.4.2 Method: Keyword-Assisted Topic Model (keyATM)

With the proliferation of easy-to-obtain text data, statistical models have become an increasingly popular way to analyze large document collections. Automated statistical approaches make analyzing text cheaper, more accessible, and less time-intensive (Fan, Han and Liu, 2014). In particular, topic

modeling has become a notable staple among methods for quantitative content analysis. Probabilistic topic models are widely used to uncover or “infer” latent topics within a text. These kinds of fully automated methods for topic discovery provide an efficient means for exploring text when knowledge about the underlying contents is limited. However, as a mode for hypothesis testing, these kinds of “unsupervised” topic models present significant limitations. Model-generated topics often lack interpretability, reflect duplicate textual themes, or combine different themes into a single topic (Chang et al., 2009; Tang et al., 2014). Moreover, no substantive input can be incorporated in the definition of topics to assess the prevalence of specific quantities of interest. When topic models are relied upon for measurement purposes, these obstacles hinder researchers’ ability to explicitly test whether their theoretical expectations are borne out in the data.

For these reasons, I employ a semi-supervised keyword-assisted topic model (keyATM) developed by Eshima, Imai and Sasaki (2021) to conduct my analysis. This method for topic modeling allows for both the exploration of latent topics within a text *as well as* the specification of topics of interest using a small number of keywords. Per Eshima, Imai and Sasaki (2021), this allows for researchers to “analyze textual data to test hypotheses about pre-defined concepts derived from substantive theories empirically” (p.38). Briefly, conventional methods for topic discovery that rely on latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) as a statistical generative model assume that documents convey an admixture of topics, and define each topic as a single distribution over words. In keyATM, topics are, instead, defined as a mixture of *two* distributions: the first is defined over all words in a vocabulary, and the second is defined exclusively over user-defined keywords. These distributions represent the relative frequency of each word within a topic. Given that keywords belong to a much smaller vocabulary, prior means for the frequency of user-selected keywords are greater than those of non-keywords in the same topic. Put plainly, this mixture structure places “greater importance on keywords a priori while allowing the model to learn from the data about the precise degree to which keywords matter for a given topic” (Eshima, Imai and Sasaki 2021, p. 6). Using both qualitative and quantitative metrics, Eshima, Imai and Sasaki (2021) demonstrate that keyATM yields more interpretable topics and achieves a better document classification performance than do LDA-reliant models for topic discovery.

The inclusion of topic-specific keywords is especially important for my purposes because it allows me to directly test my expectations about the prevalence of politicians’ programmatic and

symbolic messaging rhetoric. Recall, I expect candidates from congressional districts where the epidemic is *locally-salient* to focus their opioid issue positions on topics that directly relate to the addiction crisis as it pertains to their own constituency. In contrast, I expect politicians from districts where the epidemic is *not locally-salient* to use their opioid platform text as a vehicle to talk about issues that serve as partisan touchstones—in particular, U.S.-Mexico border security (Republicans) and criminal justice reform (Democrats)—which have only loose connections to America’s opioid epidemic. Pairing keyword-defined topics with a document-level covariate for opioid deaths by congressional district, I evaluate the association between the opioid crisis’s local salience and politicians’ use of symbolic or programmatic opioid issue frames.

To select keywords for topic definitions, I turn to official party platforms from 2016 and 2020. The Democratic and Republican Party both explicitly discussed opioid addiction within dedicated sections of their party platforms.² I identify the most frequently occurring words in these programmatic discussions of the opioid crisis and employ them in my keyword model definitions. For my Democrat “programmatic” opioid frame, keywords include: *public, health, care, and medic-*; for my Republican “programmatic” frame, keywords include: *combat, educ-, local, and resourc-*. These frames align with existing expectations in the literature about partisan differences in messaging on opioids, where Republican see localized opioid resource management as central to resolving addiction and Democrats view publicly funded opioid rehabilitation as the most effective means for reducing addiction. Interestingly, both parties also explicitly reference the opioid crisis in their platform text on criminal justice (Democrats) and U.S.-Mexico immigration (Republicans). Similar to above, I identify the most frequently occurring words in these symbolic opioid texts and employ them in my model keyword definitions. For my Democrat, “symbolic” opioid frame, keywords include: *prison, polici-, justic-, and crimin-*; for my Republican “symbolic” frame, keywords include: *traffick-, border, secur-, and cartel*. The relative prevalences of keywords in my campaign platform corpus are graphically displayed in Figure 7.1 of this chapter’s appendix.

²In 2020, the Republican Party did not ratify a new policy platform and adjourned the RNC choosing, instead, to “strongly” support President Trump’s America First agenda. Because of this, platform text from only the 2016 Republican Party Platform was used to generate possible keywords.

4.4.3 Modeling Opioid Position Taking

The primary predictor in my analysis is a measure for the local salience of opioid issues in congressional districts. I assume that the intensity of the epidemic's local salience varies conditionally with district opioid death rates, where a higher district overdose rate indicates higher local issue salience. Determining the rate of opioid overdoses at the congressional district-level is complicated by incongruent data. The CDC only provides statistics on opioid overdoses at the county-level; in addition, about a quarter of all U.S. counties failed to report opioid death rates from 2018 to 2020. To estimate congressional district-level overdose rates, I pair available county-level data with a method for areal weighted interpolation. This technique uses known quantities (i.e. county death rates) to estimate values for overlapping, but incongruent, polygon features (i.e. congressional districts). I specifically employ intensive areal interpolation, where county data is weighted based its areal intersection with congressional districts.³ Areal interpolation, though, relies on a significant assumption that populations are spread evenly across counties—this does not translate well to real-world contexts because population density can drastically vary within a constrained space. Violating this assumption induces unpredictable statistical bias into my district-level estimates, which could have downstream impacts on the results of hypothesis testing.⁴

To mitigate measurement error, I transform this continuous measure for opioid overdoses into a dichotomous variable; if a congressional district has more than 21 opioid deaths per 100,000 constituents (75th percentile of the 2018-2020 county-level distribution for opioid overdose rates), I consider opioid issues to be *locally-salient* within that constituency. I find that this congressional district categorization varies minimally with alternative measures for the local salience of opioid issues.⁵ These efforts should provide some assurance that estimates produced using areal weighted interpolation present a reasonably accurate picture of congressional district opioid death rates and, moreover, the local salience of opioid issues. In addition to this binary indicator for local issue

³For more details on weighting implementation, see Prener (2020).

⁴The reality that population density varies within counties is problematic for areal weighted interpolation. If density is consistent, then the boundaries of counties are inconsequential to estimations. If density *is not* consistent, then changing county boundaries could yield different district estimates. This dilemma is called the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP). For a more complete description, see Curiel and Steelman (2019).

⁵When classifying districts using estimates generated with only complete counties (i.e., counties that are not intersected by multiple congressional districts), percent agreement across estimate types is 82%. When comparing my district-level classification to state-level overdose rates, percent agreement across is 77%.

Table 4.3: Top Words Associated With Topics Defined by Keyword-Assisted Topic Model

Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics		Model Generated	
Criminal Justice (Opioid-Adjacent)	Treatment (Opioid-Specific)	Border Security (Opioid-Adjacent)	Local Resources (Opioid-Specific)	Topic #1	Topic #2
drug	addict	border	law	marijuana	drug
system	treatment	secur	resourc	legal	need
crimin	health	immigr	enforc	cannabi	problem
war	support	illeg	educ	tax	crisi
justic	prevent	wall	combat	decrimin	epidem
prison	program	southern	local	recreat	famili
reform	access	drug	state	schedul	respons
crime	medic	law	communiti	possess	american
polici	care	traffick	support	prohibit	live
incarcer	patient	america	fund	revenu	help

Note: Word stems were identified as having the highest relative probability of topic association. Bolded stems are keywords specified before model fitting; keywords were identified using national party platform text. Replicating this same topic estimation procedure using a structural topic model, where no keywords are provided, produces less satisfactory topics. Topical differences across my keyATM and alternative STM are available in Table 7.2 of this chapter’s appendix.

salience, I include in my model a measure for candidate past political experience, district proximity to the southern border, percent of population with a high school diploma, and candidate partisanship.

4.5 Results: Opioid Messaging in Policy Platforms

To assess the relationship between the opioid epidemic’s local salience and politicians’ messaging tactics, I estimate a keyword-assisted topic model with four keyword-defined topics and two non-keyword topic.⁶ The word stems that have the highest probabilities of belonging to each of these six topics are denoted in Table 4.3; pre-defined keywords are bolded for reference. Columns 1 through 4 denote keyword-defined topics; columns 5 and 6 denote latent topics identified by the model with no provided keywords. In reviewing platform text classification, I find that documents with high probabilities of specific topic membership do substantively reflect those identified topical themes. For example, Haley Stevens’ 2020 platform text—which used the opioid epidemic to message on racial bias in criminal justice—was identified by my keyword-assisted model as being largely composed of the symbolic *Criminal Justice* topic ($\theta=0.59$). The model similarly identified Raúl Labrador’s 2018 policy platform point on opioid drug trafficking—which morphed into a discussion of U.S.-Mexico

⁶To check model convergence, I assess the log-likelihood of all $\hat{\theta}$ values across 3,000 model iterations; these values indicate convergence to a stationary distribution. I also find that α , the prior for the document-topic distribution, stabilizes across all topics, indicating that my keyATM model is working as expected.

immigration—as chiefly belonging to the symbolic *Border Security* topic ($\theta=0.82$). The fact that these exemplary cases reflect high incidences of pertinent topics provides some base validity for the substantive quality of model topics. A selection of other platform texts that included a relatively high proportion of words associated with each topic can be found in section 7.2 of this chapter’s appendix.

Predicted probabilities with 95% credible intervals for average topical proportions in candidates’ opioid-related text are presented in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. Following my hypothesis, I find that Republican candidates who ran in districts where the opioid epidemic was not locally-salient more often used the epidemic as a vehicle to discuss “illegal” activities at the U.S.-Mexico border and, consequently, the need for more stringent immigration policies. Per the left column of plots in Figure 4.3, these Republican incumbents (+15%) and challengers (+14%) dedicated a statistically significantly greater proportion of their opioid platform text to the symbolic *Border Security* rhetorical frame than their counterparts who hailed from districts where the epidemic had higher local salience. Republicans from districts where the opioid epidemic was locally-salient chose to prioritize discussions of public health funding in their platforms, emphasizing the importance of equipping law enforcement with the vital tools and training they need to handle opioid addiction in local communities. Turning to the right column of plots Figure 4.3, These incumbents (+10%) and challengers (+8%) dedicated a statistically significantly greater proportion of their opioid text to the programmatic *Local Resource* frame than Republicans from districts where the epidemic lacked local salience.

My results in Figure 4.4 indicate a similar relationship between local issue salience and messaging rhetoric among Democratic members of Congress. Democrat incumbents from districts where the opioid crisis was locally-salient dedicated a statistically significantly greater proportion of their opioid platform text to discussions of addiction treatment access. These incumbents employed the programmatic *Treatment* frame (Figure 4.4, middle column, bottom pane) more often than their counterparts (+17%) in districts where the epidemic was not locally-salient. On the other end of the spectrum, incumbent Democrats from congressional districts where the opioid epidemic did not have local salience were statistically significantly more likely (+10%) to employ the symbolic *Criminal Justice* frame; these candidate more often chose to forgo the difficult task of messaging on “hard” opioid issues to, instead, focus their rhetoric on racial inequality within the criminal justice system. Among Democratic challengers, no relationship was identified between local opioid salience and candidates’ rhetorical content in campaign platform text.

Figure 4.3: Predicted Probabilities for Republicans’ Topical Content Proportions in Policy Platform Text on Opioid Issues

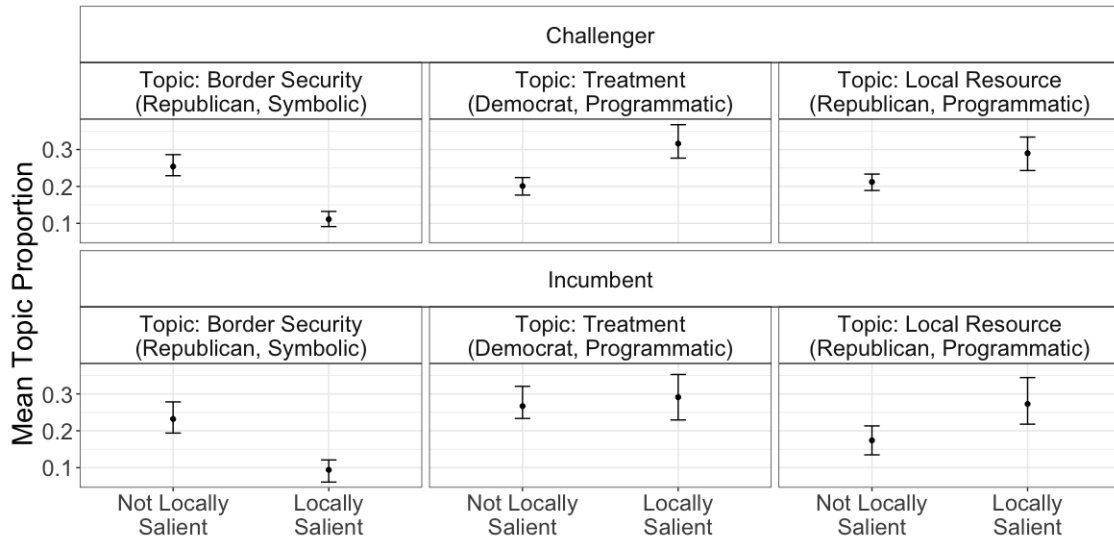
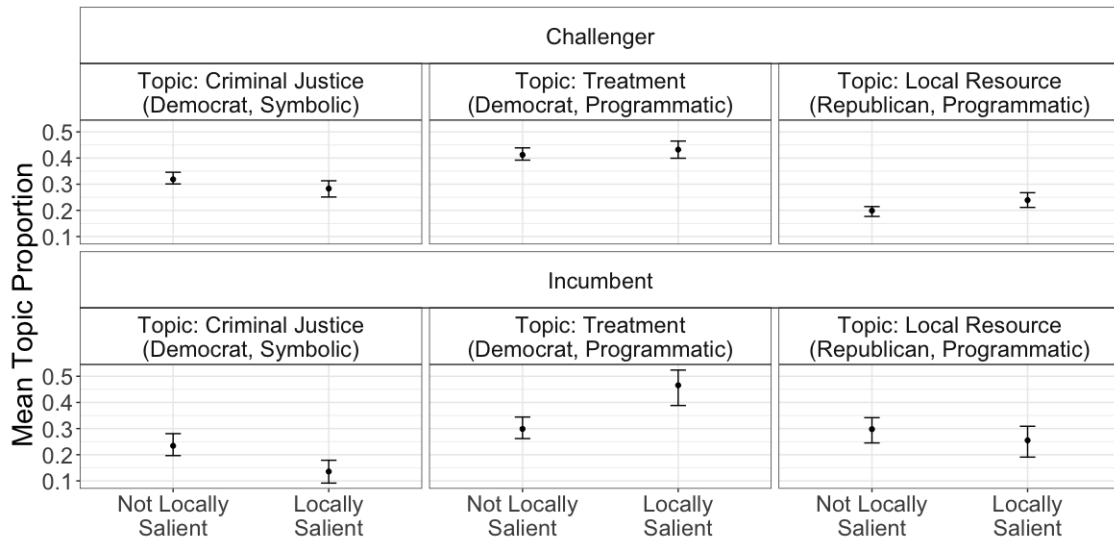


Figure 4.4: Predicted Probabilities for Democrats’ Topical Content Proportions, in Policy Platform Text on Opioid Issues



Note: Districts where the opioid epidemic is “Not Locally Salient” are congressional districts with an opioid overdose death rate of less than 21 per 100,000. “Locally Salient congressional districts are areas with an opioid overdose death rate of greater than or equal to 21 per 100,000. Predicted probabilities for mean topic proportions in platform text were generated using simulated data. Candidate past political experience and local opioid issue salience are varied; all other covariates are held at their mean value. The keyATM model was estimated over both Democratic and Republican policy platform text. Covariates for congressional district opioid salience and candidate type were both interacted with candidate partisanship. Error bars reflect 95% credible intervals. Additional predicted probability plots depicting Democrat candidates’ coverage of all omitted topics are presented in Figures 7.2 and 7.3 of this chapter’s appendix.

These results demonstrate a clear relationship between incumbents' messaging tactics and the local salience of America's opioid crisis. Candidates who ran in districts where the epidemic was locally-salient in 2018 and 2020 tended to concentrate their messaging on the kinds of public health solutions for opioid abuse disorder endorsed by the CDC and NIH. The vast majority of candidates, however, ran in districts where the epidemic was not locally salient and, instead, focused their messaging on party-defining topics with only loose ties to opioids. When elites conflate the opioid crisis with partisan issues—like criminal justice or immigration—they sell short the severity of opioid addiction in America. Moreover, when opioid addiction is framed as an illegal behavior, Americans are more likely to perceive opioid addiction as an illegal activity rather than a treatable health condition (McGinty et al., 2016); such beliefs contribute to a pervasive stigma against addiction treatment, especially among vulnerable populations and communities of color (Lawson et al., 2021).

4.6 Opioid Issue Messaging in Congress

Incumbents' opioid messaging tactics should be most impactful on public opinion if they are echoed in legislative communications. Campaign position taking offers researchers important insight into elites' strategic calculus; but legislative positions have broader, real-world impacts—especially as it pertains to shaping public discourse through the media. With the decline of state and local media organizations, public statements made by legislators have become a go-to source for journalists, who readily employ these texts in their political reporting (Hopkins, 2018; Darr, Hitt and Dunaway, 2018). Grimmer (2013*b*), in particular, finds that local newspaper articles can sometimes constitute word-for-word recapitulations of congressional incumbents' press releases. At the national level, Lawson and Meyers (2020) show that quotes from members of Congress are among the most-cited sources of opioid “expert” opinion in *The New York Times*. Finally, Russell, Spence and Thames (2019) demonstrate that “law and order” frames are most widely adopted in media coverage of the opioid epidemic when they are purported by elected officials. For all these reasons, I turn to legislative position taking text to better grasp the broader implications of my findings.

A large body of scholarship finds that congressional campaign platforms well-encapsulate the scope and depth of issues a candidate covers in her congressional campaign (e.g. Xenos and Foot 2005; Druckman, Kifer and Parkin 2009; Sulkin, Moriarty and Hefner 2007*a*). Unfortunately, no

such equivalent exists for legislative position taking. Members of Congress tailor explanations of their work in Washington to their audience (e.g. Grimmer 2013a). As such, using a single source of text to measure legislative position taking would fail to capture the full scope of rhetorical strategies a politician might use to discuss opioid-related issues. Therefore, to broadly assess the contents of incumbents' legislative opioid positions, I evaluate the topical content of texts from congressional floor speeches, press releases, and bill summaries.

Comparing the contents of different legislative corpora using quantitative approaches is not as straightforward as it may seem. Methodological limitations have impeded researchers' ability to measure common quantities of interest across multiple, large-scale sources of text using topic models. Existing methods for topic discovery assume that all documents employed in a given model's estimation are generated using a common model for language; but such an assumption is not appropriate for many text analysis problems. For instance, although a proposed bill and a floor speech about that same bill concern identical topics, these documents employ language in fundamentally different ways. References to parliamentary procedure common in floor speeches would be uncommon in bill text, and formal citations of United States Code present in bills would be largely absent from floor speeches. Because of their linguistic inconsistencies, employing these texts in the same topic model could yield low quality topics. Estimating separate models for each type of corpora presents its own challenges; in particular, there is no guarantee that generated topics will be consistent enough across models to facilitate content comparisons across texts. This methodological trade-off has deterred researchers from using high volumes of text data to quantitatively assess if and how the contents of politicians' messages vary across avenues for legislative position taking.

4.6.1 Method: Multi-Corpora Topic Modeling (multi-keyATM)

To circumvent obstacles for multi-corpora topic estimation endemic to existing methods for quantitative text analysis, I employ a novel method for topic modeling developed by Porter, Olivella, and Imai (2021). This "multi-keyATM" approach extends the method for keyword-assisted topic modeling employed in my previous analysis. Recall, in keyATM, as proposed by Eshima, Imai and Sasaki (2021), topics are defined as a mixture of two distributions: the first distribution is defined exclusively over user-specified keywords; the second is defined over all words in a corpus vocabulary. Porter, Olivella, and Imai's (2021) multi-corpora topic model adapts this mixture structure, such that

the distribution over *keywords* for a given topic remains *constant* across corpora, and the topic-word distribution over *all words* for that topic *varies* across corpora. This modified mixture structure connects texts from different document collections through a shared topic without forcing that topic’s content to be exactly the same across sources. In this way, multi-keyATM allows for topics to be estimated simultaneously in a single model without making the unrealistic assumption that all sources employed in model estimation have the same data generating process.

To more formally outline the differences between multi-corpora and standard keyATM, suppose we wanted to classify the topical content of two corpora (A and B). To determine topic-word assignment in keyATM, for each word in each document ($w_{d,i}$) a topic is drawn from a categorical distribution ($z_{d,i} \sim \text{Cat}(\theta_d)$). If this topic z is a non-keyword topic, then topic-word assignment follows a routine similar to latent Dirichlet allocation (for a more detailed explanation, see Roberts et al. 2014). If this topic z is a keyword topic, a Bernoulli random variable ($s_{d,i}$) is drawn to determine which of z ’s topic-word distributions word $w_{d,i}$ will be sampled from: the topic’s distribution over *all words* ($w_{d,i}|z_{d,i} \sim \text{Cat}(\phi_{z_{d,i}}^{s_{d,i}=0})$) or the topic’s distribution over *keywords* ($w_{d,i}|z_{d,i} \sim \text{Cat}(\tilde{\phi}_{z_{d,i}}^{s_{d,i}=1})$). Porter, Olivella, and Imai’s (2021) powerful multi-keyATM extension capitalizes on this definition of topics as a mixture to allow for linguistic differences in the content of topics that are shared by corpus A and B . Under multi-keyATM, a topic’s distribution over keywords is identical across corpora ($\tilde{\phi}_{z_{dA},i}$ vs. $\tilde{\phi}_{z_{dB},i}$); this shared distribution allows text from different sources to be estimated across a common space—an approach analogous to scaling methods for ideal point estimation. The second distribution for a topic is defined over the full vocabulary for all corpora *but* probabilities for topic-word assignment are unique to each corpus ($\phi_{z_{dA},i}^A$ vs. $\phi_{z_{dB},i}^B$); this allows for corpus-specific variation in the semantic composition of topics that are shared across corpora, thus accommodating differences in models for language between documents.

4.6.2 Data Preparation & Model Covariates

To maintain continuity, I use the same text pre-processing procedure that was employed in my prior analysis to prepare my legislative text for modeling; these steps yielded a multi-corpus collection of 1,203 press releases, 263 floor speeches, and 324 bill proposals from the 115th and 116th Congresses. To produce the findings presented below, I include two covariates in my estimation for corpora topical content. I include an indicator variable for local opioid issues salience; where opioid issues are

considered to be especially salient within a constituency if that congressional district had more than 21 opioid deaths per 100,000 constituents (75th percentile of the 2018-2020 county-level distribution over opioid overdose rates). This measure for opioid issue salience is interacted with a binary indicator for candidate partisanship. The user-specified keywords that define my programmatic keyword topics (i.e. *Treatment* and *Local Resources*) and symbolic keyword topics (i.e. *Criminal Justice* and *Border Security*) are identical to those employed in my analysis of campaign platform text. In addition to these four keyword topics, I allow for the estimation of two non-keyword, corpus-specific topics in my multi-corpora model.

4.7 Results: Opioid Messaging in Legislative Texts

The word stems that have the highest probabilities of belonging to each of those six topics defined in my multi-corpora model are denoted in Table 4.4; pre-defined keywords are bolded for reference. Columns 1 through 4 denote keyword-defined topics; the set of corpus-specific latent topics identified by my model have been omitted for presentational purposes.⁷ Although incidences of keywords in Table 4.4 are weaker than those in my previous analysis for campaign platform text, broad topical themes regarding criminal justice (column 1), border security (column 2), and opioid use disorder treatment (column 3) are still well-reflected by those word stems outlined in Table 4.4. A lack of support in these legislative text data for the Republican, programmatic *Local Resource* topic is evident through in the absence of model-defined keywords in column 4, and this topic's shifting semantic content across corpora. Nevertheless, those topics defined in columns 1 through 3 provide me with sufficient leverage to assess whether members of Congress from districts with lower local opioid salience are more likely to employ symbolic topics in their legislative messaging text; and, further, if members of Congress from districts with higher local opioid salience more often employ programmatic issue frames.

Predicted probabilities with 95% credible intervals for average topical proportions in candidates' opioid-related text are presented in Figure 4.5 (Republican legislative text) and Figure 4.6 (Democratic legislative text). Plots are faceted by keyword topic to facilitate comparisons in the mean topical content of legislative texts across levels of district opioid salience (denoted by point shapes) and

⁷An extended list of top words and words associated with corpus-specific topics is available in Table 7.3 of the included appendix.

Table 4.4: Top Words Associated With Topics Defined By Multi-KeyATM

Press Releases			
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics	
Criminal Justice (Programmatic)	Treatment (Symbolic)	Border Security (Programmatic)	Local Resources (Symbolic)
law	opioid	border	opioid
polici	health	secur	bill
enforc	support	illeg	act
justic	fund	presid	legisl
marijuana	program	traffick	bipartisan
Floor Speeches			
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics	
Criminal Justice (Programmatic)	Treatment (Symbolic)	Border Security (Programmatic)	Local Resources (Symbolic)
legal	treatment	border	drug
substanc	medic	secur	bill
schedul	program	presid	committe
law	provid	come	chairman
justic	communiti	immigr	legisl
Proposed Bill Summaries			
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics	
Criminal Justice (Programmatic)	Treatment (Symbolic)	Border Security (Programmatic)	Local Resources (Symbolic)
reduc	medic	border	prescrib
establish	program	law	drug
crimin	treatment	traffick	opioid
cannabi	health	secur	requir
schedul	state	hous	bill

Note: Word stems were identified as having the highest relative probability of topic association. Bolded stems are keywords specified before model fitting. An extended list of top words and words associated with corpus-specific topics is available in Table 7.3 of this chapter’s appendix.

corpus type (denoted on the x-axis). Several noteworthy relationships are apparent in these legislative text data. First, with respect to the programmatic *Treatment* topic, floor speech and bill texts generated by incumbents who represent constituencies in “Not Locally Salient” districts are statistically indistinguishable from those text generated by incumbents who represented “Locally Salient.” That is to say, Republican and Democratic incumbents in the 115th and 116th Congresses dedicated similar amounts of their floor speech and bill texts to discussions of opioid addiction treatment. Commonalities in the topical contents of floor speech and bill summary texts for incumbents in both district types are also evident in Republicans’ discussions of *Border Security* (Figure 4.5, left panel) and Democrats’ discussions of *Criminal Justice* (Figure 4.6, left panel).

Figure 4.5: Republican Legislative Text on Opioid Issues, Predicted Probabilities for Topical Content Proportions

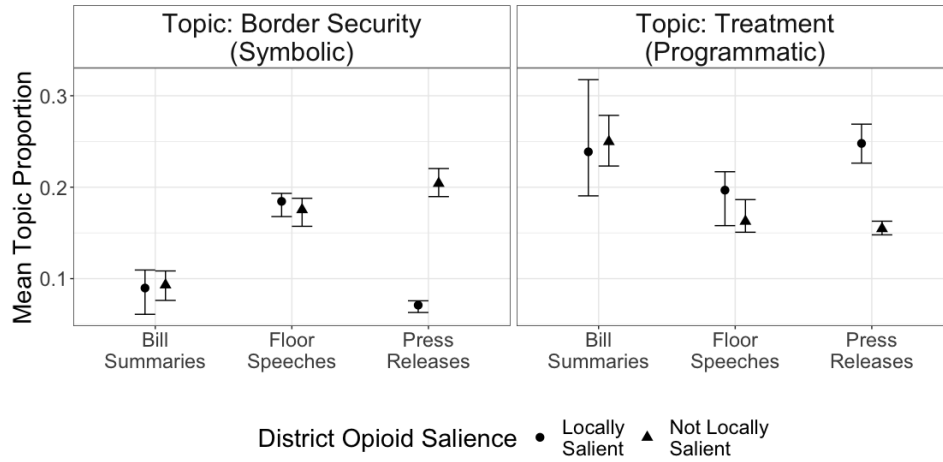
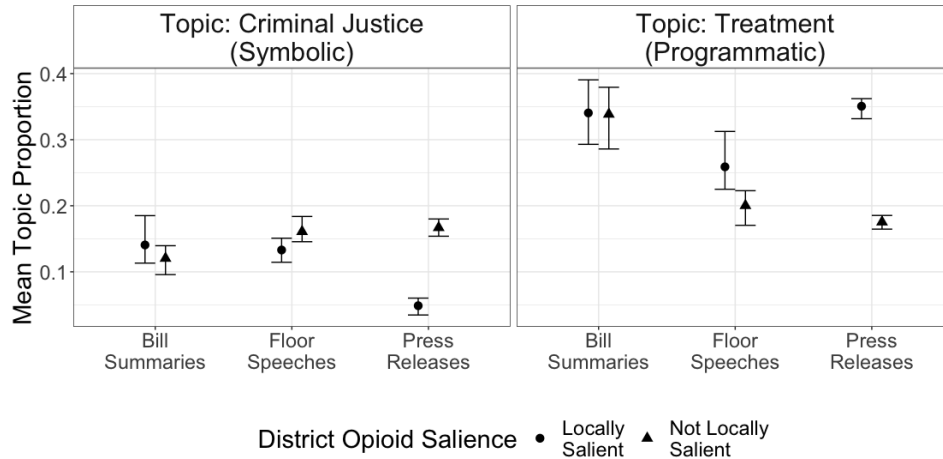


Figure 4.6: Democratic Legislative Text on Opioid Issues, Predicted Probabilities for Topical Content Proportions



Note: Predicted probabilities for mean topic proportions of topical content in incumbents’ legislative texts were generated using simulated data. Error bars reflect 95% credible intervals. Districts where the opioid epidemic was “Not Locally Salient” include congressional districts with an opioid overdose death rate of less than 21 per 100,000; “Locally Salient” congressional districts are those with an opioid overdose death rate of greater than or equal to 21 per 100,000.

Divergence in the topical content of legislative position taking texts are most evident in members’ press releases. Democratic incumbents representing constituencies where the opioid epidemic was not locally salient employed symbolic discussions of *Criminal Justice* significantly more often (+12%) than incumbent Democrats representing districts with high rates of opioid overdose deaths. Similarly, Republican members of Congress representing constituencies where opioid issue had

lower local salience employed symbolic discussions of *Border Security* significantly more often (+13%) than incumbent Republicans from districts when the epidemic was locally-salient. Moreover, Democratic (-18%) and Republican (-9%) legislators representing lower salience constituencies dedicated statistically significantly less of their campaign platform texts to programmatic discussions surrounding the *Treatment* topic than did their counterparts representing constituencies where the opioid crisis is locally salient. These findings suggest that politicians deliberately re-frame their position taking on opioids in legislative texts are the most public-facing. Given press releases' deep ties to journalists' accounts of political news, the implications of my findings paint a grim picture for the role elites play in perpetuating harmful stigmas about addiction.

4.8 Discussion & Conclusion

Pairing quantitative methods for content analysis with original collections of text data on elites' campaign and legislative position taking behavior, I find that the local salience of the opioid crisis is highly predictive of politicians' messaging behavior. I demonstrate that candidates from districts with a relatively high rate of opioid deaths tend to focus their opioid issue positions on CDC-endorsed public health solutions for opioid use disorder; alternatively, candidates from districts with a relatively low rate of opioid deaths use opioid messaging opportunities as a vehicle to purport party-defining issues that have only loose ties to the opioid crisis. Drawing on an extensive public health literature about addiction, I argue that, by conflating the opioid crisis with partisan issues like criminal justice or immigration, politicians perpetuate stereotypes about Americans struggling with opioid use disorder. Such stigmas have been shown to discourage treatment seeking behavior, especially among vulnerable populations (James and Jordan, 2018; Saloner et al., 2018; Moffitt, 2020).

From 1999 to 2019, nearly half a million Americans died from an overdose involving any opioid, including prescription and illicit opioids (Saloner et al., 2018). This past year, opioid overdoses claimed more lives than did car accidents and gun deaths combined.⁸ Although the genesis of America's opioid addiction can be clearly traced to drug manufacturers like Purdue Pharma, questions remain over the types of societal factors that continue to perpetuate opioid addiction. Despite fierce

⁸ Josh Katz and Margot Sanger-Katz. "Its Huge, Its Historic, Its Unheard-of: Drug Overdose Deaths Spike." The New York Times. 14 July, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/07/14/upshot/drug-overdose-deaths.html>

national, state, and local efforts to stem drug abuse, opioid deaths exponentially increased in 2020. When it comes to opioid addiction, knowledge is power. Testa, Moffitt and Schenk (2020) show that access to information about opioid addiction is critical to increasing individuals' willingness to pursue treatment. This follows Jerit et al.'s (2006) finding that information access elevates citizen knowledge about political issues. Elites play a pivotal role in disseminating information about policy debates (e.g., Grimmer 2013*b*). However, my analysis demonstrates that many politicians use their opioid messaging opportunities to talk about issues related to immigration and criminal justice, which are inconsequential to curbing America's opioid epidemic. When they engage in this kind of messaging behavior, politicians misrepresent the scope and severity of the opioid crisis. Moreover, when addiction is framed using a "law-and-order" lens, Americans are more likely to perceive it as an illegal activity rather than a treatable health condition (McGinty et al., 2016); such stigma-building messages disincentive treatment-seeking behavior. When politicians forgo discussions of policy debates about opioids to message on other issues, they rob citizens of the information they need to evaluate the world around them (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Normatively this means that, in districts where the epidemic *currently* has low local salience, citizens may lack the preventative knowledge about addiction they need to tackle opioid abuse if and when the crisis comes to their own community. Indeed, when politicians use symbolic rhetorical frames to talk about opioids, they are placing the party they belong to ahead of the people they want to represent.

Traditionally, "local issues" have been conceptualized as those projects and problems unique to a candidate's own constituency. This definition captures one aspect of locally-oriented position taking behavior, but—as this chapter demonstrates—does not capture the full scope of what it means to "go local." When a candidate employs programmatic frames in their discussions of opioid issues, they are clearly placing local representation above party messaging goals. Such a commitment to one's district is surely a strong indicator for "locally-oriented" campaign behavior. Indeed, I argue that our definition of what it means to "go local" need not be constrained to only those discussions of district-specific issues. Per Jacobson (1989), "national issues can be turned into local issues if a smart candidate has the resources to do it" (p. 776). I suspect that, by broadening our conception of local campaign behavior, nationalization in today's political arena will surely seem less extensive than contemporary accounts of elections have made it out to be.

5: CHAPTER TWO APPENDIX

5.1 Primary Electorate Extremity Model

$$\begin{aligned} Ideology_i &= \beta_0 + \alpha_{race[i]} + \alpha_{gender[i]} + \alpha_{edu[i]} + \beta_{demprimary[i]} + \beta_{repprimary[i]} \\ &\quad + \alpha_{age[i]} + \alpha_{state[i]} + \alpha_{district[i]} + \varepsilon_{[i]} \\ \alpha. &\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2) \\ \alpha_{district} &\sim \mathcal{N}(\gamma_{1PresVote}, \sigma_{district}^2) \\ \varepsilon_{[i]} &\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_y) \end{aligned}$$

Predictors of interest include race, gender, education, primary participation, age, voter state, and voter district. Variables are indexed by individual (i) and congressional district ($district$). All predictors are modeled using random effects (α) except party primary participation modeled using fixed effects (β). I use fixed effects because I assume Democratic and Republican primary voter ideological extremity is not drawn from a common distribution. There is no borrowing of information across groups to inform an individual's level of ideological extremity. The ideology of Democratic and Republican primary voters will be fundamentally different. I let my model intercept vary by congressional district and state. Random effects are drawn from a zero mean normal distribution, though the district level covariate is drawn from a distribution centered on Democratic presidential vote share for that district. Presidential vote share was calculated as the percent of the two-party vote in a district that went to the Democratic presidential nominee in the previous election year.

5.1.1 Independent Variables with Known Joint Distributions

Gender

This dummy variable equals 1 if the respondent is female, 0 otherwise. Data on respondent gender provided by Catalist is drawn from state voter files.

Education

State voter files do not include information about an individual's education level. Based on geographic information, consumer information, and other covariates, Catalist, LLC creates a propensity score for a respondent's likelihood to have a Bachelor's Degree. Individuals are coded for having a bachelor's degree if their propensity score is greater or equal to 50.

Race

The race variable provided by Catalist, LLC—which is drawn from state voter files—includes more detailed race and ethnicity categories than those provided in U.S. census data. In order to weight model predictions in the poststratification stage of MrsP, the race and ethnicity Catalist categories are

binned to match those in the census data. Race categories include Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, and Other.¹

5.1.2 Independent Variables with Imputed Joint Distributions

Age

Only individuals in the voting age population are included in the analysis. Data on respondent age provided by Catalist is drawn from state voter files. However, as previously stated, the U.S. census factfinder does not include age in reported joint distributions. To produce an adjusted synthetic joint distributions for age, I use the marginal distribution for age provided by the U.S. census.

Primary Election Participation

Catalist provides verified information on individual turnout from state voter files. These voter files, however, do not always specify in *which* party's primary a voter participated. Data availability on partisan primary participation varies with each state's type of primary electoral institution. States with closed and semi-closed primary institutions require voters to register with a party to participate in the primary election. For these states, I can assign voters to the partisan primary constituency matching their party registration.

For independents in semi-closed systems and all voters in open systems, it is impossible to know for certain in which party's primary a voter participated. Additionally, several states with semi-closed systems do not disclose party registration information in their voter files. In these instances, I assume a voter participates in the party primary matching their party registration. In the absence of party registration, I use the Catalist partisanship propensity score as a substitute. Much like the ideological extremity score, the partisanship propensity score uses covariates in the Catalist, LLC database to predict an individual's partisan affiliation. I assume a voter participates in the party primary most closely matching their party propensity score.

The census provides no partisan or voter participation information in open-access data files, therefore I cannot use data from the U.S. census to weight my estimates. In lieu of census data, I characterize the marginal distribution for the Republican (Democratic) primary electorate as the total number of voters who participated in the Republican (Democratic) primary. Using voter turnout as my marginal distribution could be problematic for several reasons. First, if a race is unopposed, there is no recorded vote total in that party's primary. Therefore, no marginal distribution exists for voter turnout and no ideological estimate can be produced in that district for the party's primary constituency. On one hand, this could indicate that a representative matches her constituency well; on the other, it may simply be that no challenger decided to run. Regardless, this limits the explanatory power of my estimates. Second, voter turnout in elections fluctuates year-to-year, therefore the marginal distribution for primary election voters fluctuates year-to-year. While this could introduce bias into my estimates, Hill (2015) and Sides et al. (2018) demonstrate that the demographic characteristics and ideological predispositions of voters participating in primary elections do not vary widely across years. Per Fenno (1978), primary voters should be the most dedicated individuals within a constituency. Therefore, while there may be variability in turnout, the types of voters participating in the primary should remain relatively consistent.

¹This other categories matches the Other race category in the census; it includes Asian Native-American / Pacific Islander.

5.2 Model Robustness

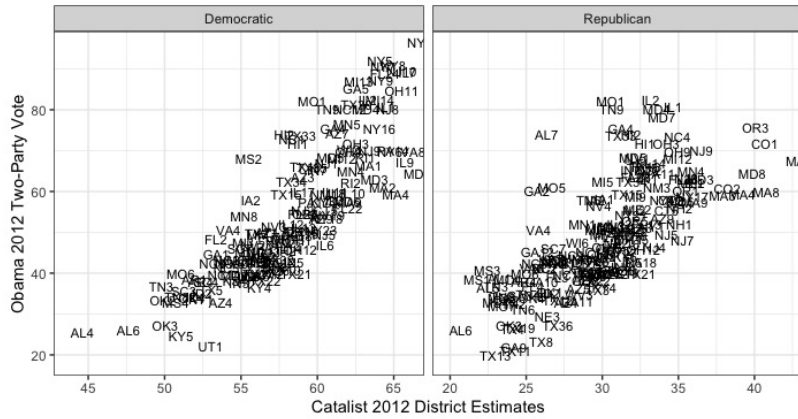


Figure 5.1: 2012 Catalist Estimates vs. 2012 Dem. Presidential Vote Share

Plotted districts include only those where Catalist estimates were produced for the 2012 election year. The x-axis is the post-stratified 2012 electorate ideology, the y-axis is Democratic presidential two-party vote share. For Democratic districts, the correlation is 0.845. For Republican districts, the correlation is 0.715.

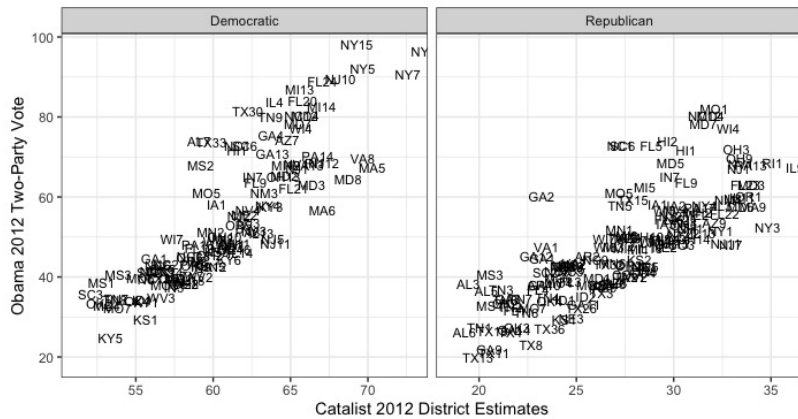


Figure 5.2: 2014 Catalist Estimates vs. 2014 Dem. Presidential Vote Share

Plotted districts include only those where Catalist estimates were produced for the 2014 election year. The x-axis is the post-stratified 2012 electorate ideology, the y-axis is Democratic presidential two-party vote share. For Democratic districts, the correlation is 0.849. For Republican districts, the correlation is 0.789.

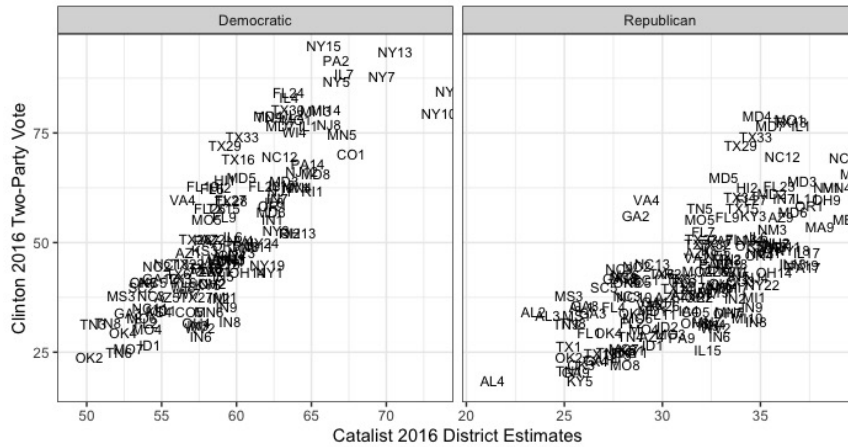


Figure 5.3: 2016 Catalist Estimates vs. 2016 Dem. Presidential Vote Share

Plotted districts include only those where Catalist estimates were produced for the 2016 election year. The x-axis is the post-stratified 2012 electorate ideology, the y-axis is Democratic presidential two-party vote share. For Democratic districts, the correlation is 0.830. For Republican districts, the correlation is 0.707.

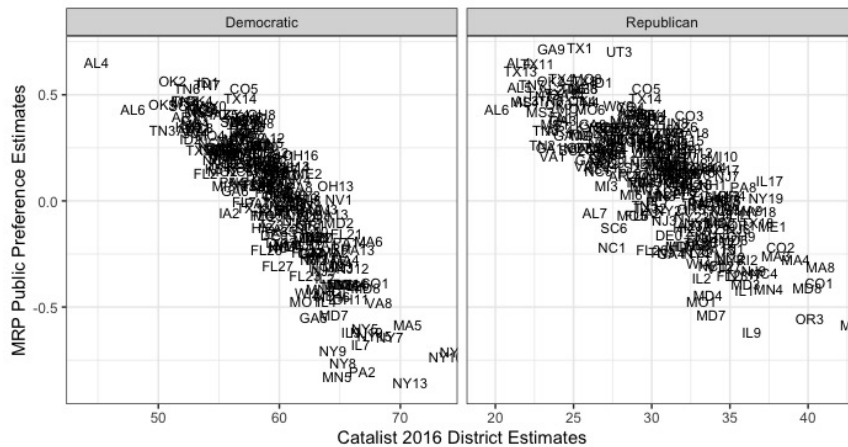
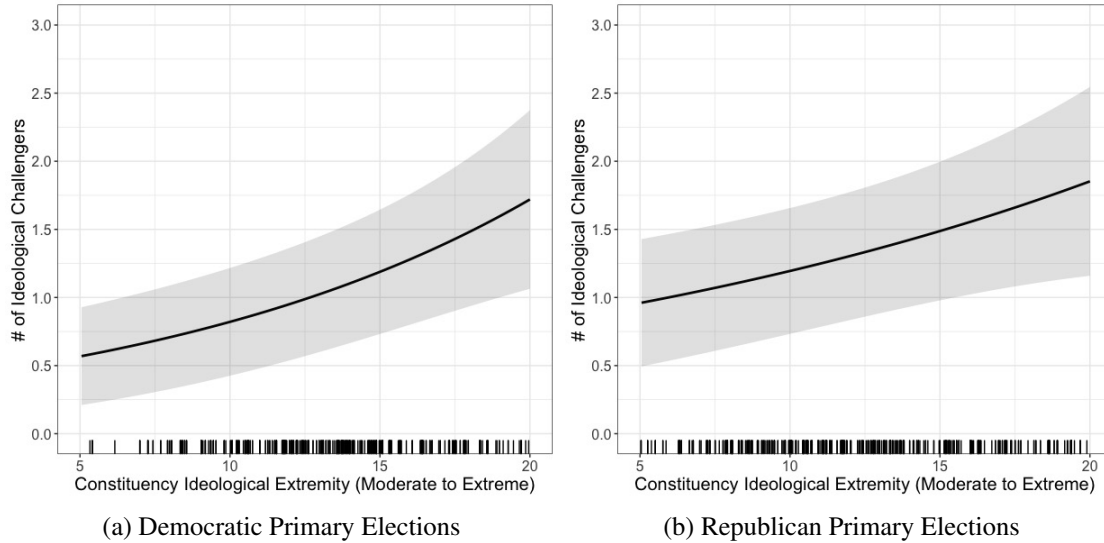


Figure 5.4: Average Electorate Estimate vs. MrP Public Preference Estimates

Plotted districts estimates are the average ideological extremity of partisan primary elections across the 2012, 2014, and 2016 elections. The x-axis is the post-stratified average electorate ideology, the y-axis is MrP public preference estimates produced by Warshaw and Tausanovitch for the *American Ideology Project*. For Democratic districts, the correlation is -0.830. For Republican districts, the correlation is -0.707.

5.3 Alternative Specification: Candidate Emergence

Figure 5.5: Predicted Count of Extreme Challenger Emergence: All Races, 2012-2016



Predicted probabilities are generated using simulated data where all predictors are held constant at 0 and primary electorate ideological extremity is varied from the minimum to maximum observed value for each party. The x-axis is a normalized average of constituency ideological extremity where a score of 0 indicates “moderate” and increasingly positive integers indicate greater ideological extremity. The y-axis is a predicted count of the number of ideological challengers in simulated races. Predicted probabilities are generated with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 5.1: Ideologically Extreme Challenger Emergence: All Races, 2012-2016

	<i>DV: Count of Ideological Challengers</i>	
	Democratic Races	Republican Races
Primary Type: Closed	-0.088 (0.121)	-0.529* (0.129)
Primary Type: Semi-Closed	-0.075 (0.153)	-0.200 (0.146)
Redistricting	-0.066 (0.109)	0.066 (0.102)
Race Type: Partisan Safe-Seat	-0.069 (0.217)	0.284 (0.193)
Race Type: Two-Party Competitive	-0.121 (0.140)	0.134 (0.171)
Race-Type: Incumbent in Same Primary	-1.166* (0.238)	-0.405* (0.173)
Race-Type: Open Seat	-0.061 (0.141)	0.016 (0.163)
Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity	0.074* (0.021)	0.044* (0.017)
Constant	-0.868* (0.258)	-0.545* (0.208)
Observations	440	475
Log Likelihood	-489.115	-544.054
Akaike Inf. Crit.	996.230	1,106.108

Note: The dependent variable is a count of the number of ideological challengers running in a given partisan primary election from 2012-2016. Incumbents are not included in challenger counts. Independent variables are race-level characteristics that could impact challenger emergence. Candidates are considered “ideologically extreme” if their CFscore is above the average ideological score for co-partisans across the time period of interest (1.266 for Republicans and 1.106 for Democrats). For my analysis, 413 out of 955 Republicans were labeled ideologically extreme and 91 out of 230 Democrats. Coefficient estimates are generated with 95% confidence intervals.

6: CHAPTER THREE APPENDIX

Table 6.1: Main Indicators for Missingness in Policy Platform Adoption

	<i>DV: Presence of Policy Platform</i>
Candidate Party: Republican	-0.492* (0.078)
Past Political Experience: Held Office	0.137 (0.128)
Past Political Experience: Congressional Incumbent	0.668* (0.142)
Primary Type: Open Primary	-0.158 (0.0879)
Primary Type: Closed Primary	-0.164 (0.131)
Open Race	0.387* (0.098)
District Partisanship: Safe, Same-Party	0.127 (0.102)
District Partisanship: Two-Party Competitive	0.551* (0.117)
Year: 2020	0.074 (0.077)
Less Than 5% Vote-Share	-1.016* (0.108)
Unopposed Primary	-0.063 (0.121)
Constant	1.229* (0.105)
Observations	3,906

Note:

**p<0.05

**Primary Elections Issue Coding
Codebook
Updated 01/27/2020**

Biography or “About Me” Pages

These types of pages include biographical text about the candidate. Look on the menu of a candidate’s webpage for any of the following:

- Bio or Biography
- About Me
- Meet the Candidate
- My Story
- Who is BLANK?

What if there is no dedicated biography page: Check to see if there is any descriptive information about the candidate on the website’s homepage. If there is still no text available, select “No” for this Qualtrics question

What if there is only a video on the bio page: Check to see if there is any descriptive information about the candidate on the website’s homepage. If there is still no text available, select “No” for this Qualtrics question

What if there is text but it is a picture (i.e. cannot be copied or pasted): If there is only certain text that is an image, leave this text out and proceed forward. If the majority of text is an image, flag this candidate in red and check with a coding supervisor.

What if I see a button that says “Read More” on a candidate’s biography: Your goal is to collect all the text from a candidate’s webpage. Please ensure you click the “read more” or “+” to reveal all text and copy/paste that into the Qualtrics form.

Examples of Bio or “About Me” pages can be found here:

<https://chiproy.com/meet-chip/>

<https://www.carl4congress.com/biography>

<https://www.brucefornc.com/about>

Platform or “Issues” Pages

These types of pages include information on. Look on the menu of a candidate’s webpage for any of the following:

- Bio or Biography
- About Me
- Meet the Candidate
- My Story

What if the issue page has only videos: Select “No” for this Qualtrics question

What if there is text but it is a picture (i.e. cannot be copied or pasted): If there is only certain text that is an image, leave this text out and proceed forward. If the majority of text is an image, flag this candidate in red and check with a coding supervisor.

What if there is text but it is all one paragraph: Select “No” for this Qualtrics question

What if there is text but there are no sub-headings to copy/paste: Copy and paste the body text into the Qualtrics form, select a main heading category, and leave the sub-heading category blank.

What if the sub-heading appears to be about a different topic than the text? For example, the sub-heading is “foreign policy” but the text is about immigration: Always label a topic’s “main heading” based on *your* best judgement. While we want to try to make the main heading and sub-heading match to capture a candidate’s intentions, sometimes a candidate will intentionally *mislabeled* a topic. For example, if a Democrat is running in a conservative district, she may label a topic about abortion “Protecting Your Rights” or “Healthcare Alternatives.” In these cases, it is best to assign a main heading that best fits the text.

What if a platform point is about multiple things? Like Medicare and Social Security or Foreign Policy and Military: Candidates will often house multiple topics under one heading. If this occurs, just pick the topic that you think best fits the text. Be aware, we plan to group many of these topics together in our analysis – don’t fret too much about choosing the topic category for the following pairs of issues:

- Abortion and Healthcare
- Group issues and Seniors, Advocacy for Vulnerable Pop.
- Military and Support Troops / Veterans
- Foreign Policy and Military
- Support the Troops / Veterans and Foreign Policy
- Personal Characteristics and Political Opinion
- Energy and Environment
- Medicare and Social Security
- Medicare and Healthcare

If you are torn between two issues that are not listed above, ask a coding supervisor

What happens if I run out of room on my survey: If you find that an issue goes beyond 20 items (the maximum allotted on the Qualtrics form), submit your filled survey and start a second one. Copy and paste the candidate's name, select "No" for biography text, and make your 21st issue the first issue on the new survey.

What if I see a button that says "Read More" for candidate issues: Your goal is to collect all the text from a candidate's webpage. Please ensure you click the "read more" or "+" to reveal all text and copy/paste that into the Qualtrics form.

What if there are downloads about candidate issues: Contact a coding supervisor

Issue Examples by Category

Abortion

- Stance on pro-life / pro-choice
- Reproductive rights
- Access to contraception
- If topic also talks about Women's Rights more broadly, label as "Group Issue"

Agriculture

- Help farmers, farming subsidies
- Trade protections for farmers
- Supporting domestically-grown produce

Economy / Jobs

- Net neutrality, access to broadband
- Taxes
- Small business support
- Trade

Education

- Higher education for all
- Free Pre-K
- No Child Left Behind

Energy

- Oil and gas
- Renewable energy

Environment

- EPA
- Climate change

Foreign Policy

- Any issue that talks explicitly about the how the US interacts with other countries or the world more broadly
- Thoughts / opinions on Russia, Iran, North Korea
- National Security
- Terrorism
- “We can’t be the world’s police”
- “We must leave the UN”
- “We must continue protecting our interests abroad”

Government

- Campaign finance reform
- FEMA or other elements of the bureaucracy
- Scope of government (cut back big government)
- Term limits
- Budget
- Enact a balanced-budget amendment
- The government must prevent a shutdown

Group Issues (i.e. Women, LGBT, Civil Rights)

- Women’s Rights
- Voting Rights
- Civil Rights
- Minority Rights
- Native American Rights
- LGBTQ Rights

Guns

- Second amendment
- Keep guns out of schools / school shootings
- No-Fly list

Healthcare

- Affordable Care Act
- Mental Health
- Medicare / Medicaid

Immigration

- DACA
- Build the Wall
- Abolish ICE

Infrastructure / Transportation

- Rebuild America’s roads

Local Issues

- Text that is exclusive to the candidate’s district
- Cannot be replicated anywhere else
- Just because text says “local words” does not make it a “local issue”
- See the following examples:

- Recovering from Hurricane Harvey
 - Kevin is working to ensure Texans get the help they need and to prevent this devastation from happening again. Pass legislation to build a third reservoir for flood control and to protect our neighborhoods Coordinating with state and federal officials to help our families get the support they need Supporting Judge Ed Emmett's flood mitigation plan Supporting the Lake Houston Area Chamber of Commerce's Plea for Three initiatives As YOUR VOICE in Congress, Kevin will lead the effort to help our families recover and build the infrastructure we need to prevent massive flood damage in the future Work with President Trump to deliver the major infrastructure projects necessary to support the families of America's fourth largest city. Relentlessly demand action, funding, and support from federal and state agencies. Our families need support NOW! Our communities are strong, resilient, and undeterred in our efforts to recover but we deserve to see action and progress that has been promised. I will fight every day to make sure we receive the help we need to recover and build the infrastructure we need to prevent this kind of tragedy from ever happening again.
- Envisioning the Cross Harbor Freight Tunnel
 - Next time you're stuck in traffic on the interstate highway, imagine how quickly traffic would flow if half the trucks were suddenly removed from the road. Imagine replacing them with freight trains, moving safely along the rails, making it cheaper to move goods and reducing the carbon footprint of all that freight. The Cross Harbor Freight Tunnel would help us accomplish just that. At present, the only place a freight train can cross the Hudson River and pass into New England is near Albany, NY. But a Cross Harbor Freight Tunnel through New York Harbor would help us move goods more cost-effectively and reduce highway congestion. I have joined other Members of Congress, mostly from the Northeast, to push for this tunnel to be built. It's a bold vision, but it's a vision I embrace, as it will benefit the people of our district immeasurably.
- Flood Protection
 - Our region is blessed to sit at the confluence of two great rivers the American River and the Sacramento River. These rivers bring many opportunities, but they also make us one of the highest risks of flooding in the country. Flood protection remains one of my top priorities, as it is key to the safety and economic vitality of our region. I am working every day to see that our flood protection priorities get the federal attention and funding they require, and to ensure that flood insurance rates remain affordable for all Sacramento residents. We must finish the new spillway at Folsom Dam, improve the American and Sacramento River's Levees, and complete the South Sacramento Steams Group Project. In 2014 our region saw an important victory for our flood protection goals. Legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama included language I authored authorizing the Natomas Levee Improvement Project. Natomas levees protect more than 100,000 Sacramento residents and billions of dollars of property and infrastructure. This important authorization will allow work to continue on strengthening these levees, making sure they are secure for years to come.
- Fort Bliss
 - As the nation's second largest Army installation, Fort Bliss is an essential part of our nation's defense. Fort Bliss serves and supports all branches of the military and provides both economic and intangible benefits ranging from training troops and maintaining military equipment to caring for our wounded and overseeing defense contracts. With the situation of current world event coupled with the political climate in Washington, it is very unlikely that Fort Bliss will be downsized anytime soon. However, let us not forget that not too long ago, Fort Bliss was a base that was being considered for downsizing and budget cuts which would have been a disastrous blow to El Paso.

Military

- Increase spending on the military
- Renew American military strength
- Cut the budget on military spending
- Increasing / decreasing the size or scope of the military
- Authorization Acts

Personal Characteristic (I am...)

- Values (progressive, family, etc.)
- BEING religious
- Identity not political stance
- I was a mayor and did a great job...
- I am from this community...
- I am a conservative

Political Opinions (on Trump, Bernie, Obama etc.)

- Drain the Swamp
- Anti-Congress
- Make America Great Again
- I support Trump / Bernie / AOC

Public Safety / Crime

- Cannabis legalization
- War on Drugs
- Criminal justice system
- Death penalty

Religion

- Protecting religious freedoms
- School prayer

Seniors, Advocacy for Vulnerable Pop.

- Human trafficking
- Affordable housing
- Homelessness / poverty

Support Troops / Veterans

- Overhaul the V.A.
- PTSD for Veterans
- Veterans mental health
- Veterans homelessness

Social Security

Unknown / Other

- Random policy priorities
- One-off issue positions
- Opioid Epidemic

Table 6.2: Full Model: Proportion of Campaign Platform Text Dedicated to Local Issues, 2018-2020

	DV: Proportion of Platform Text as Local	
	(Full Model)	(Open Model)
Two-Party District Competitiveness	0.003* (0.001)	0.004* (0.001)
Primary Electorate Ideological Extremity	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.004* (0.002)
Elected Experience: State Legislator Reference: No Elected Experience	0.014* (0.008)	0.018* (0.010)
Elected Experience: Other Elected Reference: No Elected Experience	0.004 (0.008)	0.015 (0.011)
Elected Experience: Current Incumbent Reference: No Elected Experience	0.015* (0.007)	
Primary Rules: Open Primary Reference: Closed/Semi-Closed	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.010 (0.010)
Candidate Party: Republican	0.006 (0.012)	-0.015 (0.026)
Fundraising from In-State Donors (Logged)	0.001* (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Unopposed Primary	0.003 (0.007)	
No Incumbent in Race	0.020 (0.013)	
Incumbent Partisanship: Same Party	0.071* (0.028)	0.158* (0.063)
Competitiveness <i>times</i> Same-Party Incumbent	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.003* (0.002)
Primary Ideo. Extremity <i>times</i> Same-Party Incumbent	-0.0005 (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.002)
Constant	-0.045* (0.021)	-0.077 (0.052)
Observations	2,444	595

Note:

7: CHAPTER FOUR APPENDIX

7.1 Example Position Taking Text for Symbolic & Programmatic Comparison Issues

Below are example policy platform positions on easy and hard comparison issues taken from congressional campaign websites across 2018 and 2020. These nationally salient example issues references those introduced in Table 1 on page 16 of the main paper text.

7.1.1 Programmatic Issues

Improvements to American Infrastructure

Our region of upstate New York presents countless opportunities for investment in infrastructure. Im committed to helping our communities obtain federal funding to finance local construction projects that will create both short-term and long-term jobs, and improve the lives of those who live here. The President has talked tough about pushing for a bipartisan infrastructure bill, but has indicated that he intends to offer tax breaks for privatized projects rather than funding public works. I oppose such a giveaway to corporations, which favors corporate profits over community needs, and incentivizes companies to build as little as possible rather than undertaking the robust development that we need here in our region. We need to bid those contracts out in a fair process that lets small businesses actually compete and results in lasting improvements to our shared facilities and services...

—*Incumbent Antonio Delgado D-NY, 2020 Campaign Platform*

Whether Republican or Democratic, most politicians find safety and comfort in the familiar promise that they support investments in infrastructure to support job creation in their districts. I too stand among that number; guilty as charged. The difference, however, is found when you look into the specificsthe detailsthat follow the well-worn promise. All too often we see that the promise of infrastructure improvements is just an election year pledge that stands alone, absent any real connection to remedying current problems or addressing strategic concerns...The U.S. is in need of a long-range strategic plan for infrastructure development that can address current problems and anticipate the needs of the next generation in commerce and transit. Estimates of the current U.S. population hover at about 320 million and that number is expected to reach 400 million within the next thirty-five years...

—*Candidate Junius Rodriguez D-IL, 2018 Campaign Platform*

Military Presence in Middle East

As a former combat soldier based in Afghanistan, I have seen the enemy face to face. I also know the war we are in is not only a war of military force; it is a war of ideology. ISIS seeks to destroy western civilization and our very way of life. President Obamas half-hearted, inconsistent policy failed, which is why we are working to quickly rebuild our military and put our troops on the front line in the best possible position to succeed. As a Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I know we must also work to combat aggression from Iran, North Korea, Russia, and other adversaries who work to undermine global security. I strongly opposed the Iran Nuclear Deal and commend President Trump for withdrawing from it. Thats why Ive voted to institute new sanctions on Iran, as well as North Korea and Russia...

—*Incumbent Brian Mast R-FL, 2020 Campaign Platform*

I support ending the war in Afghanistan and bringing our troops home as soon as safely possible. The goals of expelling al-Qaeda and overthrowing the Taliban were accomplished years ago. It took about a thousand Special Forces troops to overthrow the Taliban in 2001. Why do we need a hundred times that number now to keep them out? Instead of spending billions on the other side of the world, we can spend that money here to rebuild America. We simply can no longer afford these wars. The American people are tired of wars that do not make us safer.

—*Incumbent Alan Grayson D-FL, 2018 Campaign Platform*

Infectious Diseases (COVID-19, Ebola, Zika)

We need to respond to COVID-19 with permanent systems and structures so that we never find ourselves in this fragile position again. Our broken healthcare system made this novel coronavirus exceptionally crippling. Now, because our health insurance is tied to our job, over 30 million Americans are facing not only unemployment but losing their health insurance too. As we begin to reopen, we have to ask ourselves what our new normal should look like. If you lose your job, you shouldn't lose your healthcare too. And if you get sick, you shouldn't be put under a mountain of debt. Medicare for All guarantees healthcare to everyone, curbs costs, and improves long-term health...

—*Incumbent Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez D-NY, 2020 Campaign Platform*

The Trump Administration tried to gut the funding, and thankfully Congressman Delaney was able to save it. But we need to be vigilant to make sure that the funding does not find its way back to the chopping block. Global pandemics like Zika and Ebola are also serious threats to our national security. I support doubling the budget of NIH to do more research into combating the spread of deadly diseases. I support net neutrality. Internet providers and telecom-companies should not control the speed that consumers can access the Internet. Net neutrality makes good business sense. It gives startups, consumers, and broadband giants an equal playing field. We should treat Internet access like any other utility, so that businesses and consumers have access to the same speeds at a low cost.

—*Incumbent David Trone D-MD, 2018 Campaign Platform*

7.1.2 Symbolic Issues

Women's Reproductive Choices

When our Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they enshrined some of our God-given rights into law. Too often, those rights are under attack. Chuck will always fight to preserve our conservative values to ensure that the America we know and love remains for generations to come. All human life has value and is sacred, and Chuck believes that life begins at conception. He strongly opposes using taxpayer money to fund abortions, and Planned Parenthood. He is deeply troubled by the radical Left's promotion of abortion, and even infanticide. Chuck will always stand up for our most vulnerable.

—*Incumbent Chuck Fleischmann R-TN, 2020 Campaign Platform*

Oregonians can always count on me to stand up for reproductive rights and work to increase access to family planning and health care services for all women, particularly low-income women and those with geographic barriers. Sadly, under the new administration, Congressional Republicans who are determined to roll back women's reproductive rights, defund Planned Parenthood, and block access to health care. They refuse to acknowledge that access to contraceptives and reproductive health care are proven to reduce health costs for individuals and the health care system as a whole, as well as reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

—*Incumbent Suzanne Bonamici D-OR, 2020 Campaign Platform*

Detention & Deportation of Immigrants

I strongly support President Trumps border wall and voted to provide over \$1.6 billion to begin its construction. I swore an oath to protect and defend the American people and an unsecure border undermines that promise and their safety. Thats why I have led the effort in Congress to ensure refugees from terrorist hotbeds are fully vetted, deport criminal aliens, and cut off taxpayer funding for sanctuary cities that threaten our nations immigration laws.

—*Incumbent Brian Babin R-TX, 2018 Campaign Platform*

Undocumented immigrants live under the constant threat of deportation, especially with the increase in ICE operations since Trumps inauguration. These immigrants work hard in their communities to provide for themselves and their families, and are excluded from access to public services. Mary Gay will work to provide a path to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants. For decades, genocide, war, famine, and other human rights crises have forced millions to flee their home countries. Families have been separated, generations devastated; entire regions crippled financially, structurally and emotionally. For generations, resourceful and hopeful refugees have looked to America as a beacon of freedom and land of opportunity, and they have enriched our country with their resilience, their work ethic, and their talents. We must ensure that refugees fleeing violence and persecution have the opportunity to seek asylum in America.

—*Incumbent Mary Gay Scanlon D-PA, 2018 Campaign Platform*

Law Enforcement & Policing

Hiral believes it is our duty as a nation to address the systemic racism and generations of inequities and discrimination that have held back our Black and Brown communities. This includes not only reforming our criminal justice system to end racial profiling, discriminatory policing, and police brutality, but broader initiatives that work toward a level playing field that ensures equal economic and educational opportunity, access to quality and affordable housing, eliminating health disparities, and so many other critical issues.

—*Candidate Hiral Tipirneni D-AZ, 2020 Campaign Platform*

As Chairman of the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee Pete King works closely with the NYPD and the Nassau and Suffolk County Police Departments. Congressman King has obtained millions of dollars in Homeland Security funds for these departments.

—*Incumbent Peter King R-NY, 2018 Campaign Platform*

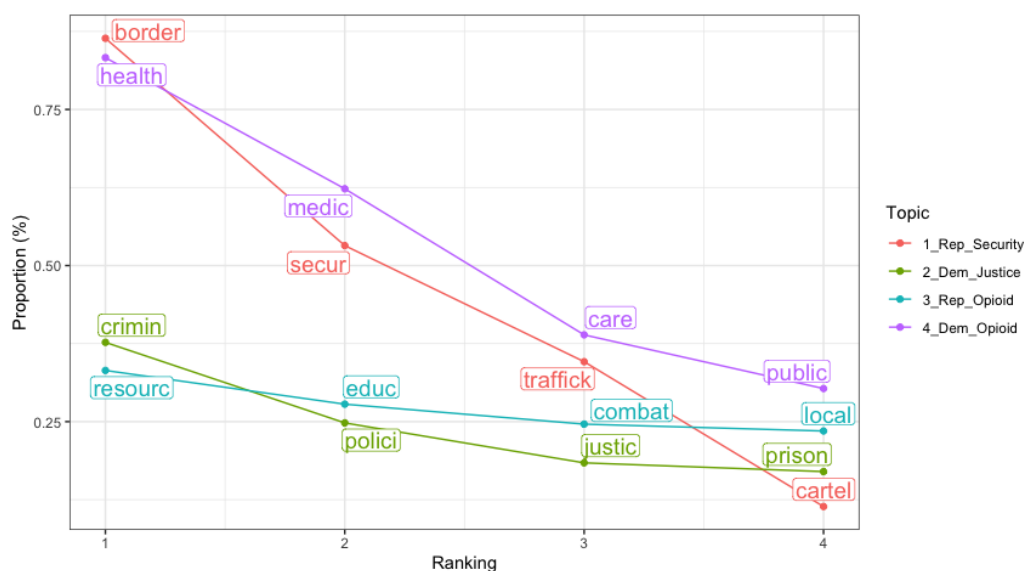
Table 7.1: Full Model: Main Indicators for Opioid Issue Adoption
on Congressional Campaign Website, 2018-2020

	<i>DV: Presence of Opioid Position</i>
Rate of Opioid Overdose by CD	0.043* (0.006)
Candidate Party: Republican	-0.238* (0.083)
District Partisanship: Safe, Same-Party	-0.009 (0.112)
District Partisanship: Two-Party Competitive	-0.098 (0.111)
Open Race	0.170 (0.132)
Past Political Experience: Held Office	-0.354* (0.136)
Past Political Experience: Congressional Incumbent	0.283* (0.113)
Primary Type: Open Primary	-0.119 (0.101)
Primary Type: Closed Primary	0.106 (0.133)
% of Constituency, No High-school Diploma	5.478 (5.036)
% of Constituency, White	0.014* (0.003)
% of Constituency, 100k+ Household Income	-0.016* (0.004)
Year: 2020	-0.210* (0.090)
Constant	-1.764* (0.641)
Observations	2,444
Log Likelihood	-1,760.226
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,548.452

Note:

*p<0.05

Figure 7.1: Topic-Specific Keyword Proportions Across Campaign Platforms, 2018-2020



Proportion displayed here are defined as a number of times a keyword occurs in the corpus divided by the total length of documents. Per Eshima, Imai and Sasaki (2021), keywords should appear reasonable times (typically more than 0.1% of the corpus) in the documents to serve as informative in model estimation.

7.2 Validation Text for Keyword Assisted Topic Model

Below are randomly sampled policy platform positions on the topics generated for the keyword assisted topic model outlined in pages 20-21 of the main body text. Each of these validation opioid texts were identified by my keyword assisted topic model as having content that principally belonged to one topic (i.e. topical proportion for the topic of interest was 0.50 or greater).

7.2.1 Keyword Topic: Republican-Immigration (Symbolic)

The Tucson, AZ border sector is one of the busiest for illicit activity. Arizona families deserve to be safe in their communities. Illegal Immigration, Human trafficking, sex trafficking, coyotes. Flow of illegal drugs across our borders, including heroin cocaine, marijuana, and counterfeit opioids. In 2016, 64,000 Americans died by opioid overdose, a dramatic increase from 2003 ”The solution is to control the border by establishing a layered defense, as well as working with our neighbors to the south as equal partners against crime and violence.” John Kelly, White House Chief of Staff & Former DHS Secretary General. We need to build the wall.

—Brandon Martin (R-AZ), 2018 Campaign Platform

We need to secure our borders and build the wall on our southern border to stop the influx of illegal aliens, drugs, and criminal enterprises. The Mexican cartels are bringing tons of heroin and cocaine through our porous borders. They deliver it all throughout the United States. Violent gangs have infiltrated every state of the union, and more of them come through each year. It is time to take this issue seriously and stop using it as a political football each election season.

—Keith Swank (D-WA), 2020 Campaign Platform

We need to strengthen borders to keep illegals, drugs and terrorists out. America will be safe with a strong military, and strong state and local law enforcement. We must stand by our police and fire and first responders,

who are on the frontlines. Attacks on these safekeepers of society must be dealt with swiftly and severely. The illegal drug and opioid crisis must be handled thru a combined approach of cutting off the sellers, and finding compassionate, but strong, treatment for the users to free them of addictions.

—*Krishna Bansal (R-IL), 2020 Campaign Platform*

During the year of 2005 there were 4 to 10 MILLION illegal aliens that crossed our southern border also, as many as 19,500 illegal aliens from terrorist countries. Millions of pounds of drugs, cocaine, meth, heroin and marijuana, crossed into the U.S. From the Southern border.

—*Mark Reed (R-CA), 2018 Campaign Platform*

The greatest responsible of our national government is to defend its citizens. The threat of terrorism and another horrific terrorist attacks looms large. In Congress I will do whatever I can to help ensure our military, border security and law enforcement have the resources and support to keep our citizens safe. This starts by supporting so many of the men and women in our district who are working as defense contracts in important industries. National Security includes stopping illegal immigration and dangerous drug dealers at our border. It is absolutely pathetic that a nation with such wealth, sophistication and technology cannot secure our border. I first learned of the horror of illegal drugs from my older brother who was a drug abuse counselor. Today, almost every single one of us knows a person or family who is suffering from the opioid crisis. I strongly support efforts of law enforcement and counselors to address this crisis. I also believe we need to demand that the government of Mexico do more to destroy opium crops at their source and will make this a priority in Congress.

—*George Phillips (R-NY), 2020 Campaign Platform*

7.2.2 Keyword Topic: Republican-Opioid (Programmatic)

If elected, I will push for national comprehensive legislation that addresses the opioid crisis by curbing the supply of opioids and provide substantially greater support for treatment. I will be a vocal champion in Congress to bring drug companies to account if they engage in predatory and misleading practices that contribute to this national epidemic. Its no secret we have a national emergency going on with opioid addiction, which today is the leading cause of death for Americans under 50. In Michigan, opioid overdoses now claim more lives than car accidents, including hundreds of deaths each year in communities here in our district. It is the responsibility of our elected officials to address the opioid epidemic head on and take real action. In addition to pushing for real federal action, if elected I would use my position as a member of Congress to bring the stakeholders of our communities together from high schools, firefighters, police and first responders, community coalitions, treatment programs, nonprofits and hospitals to draft a community action plan that tackles this issue at home. I have already begun meeting with community members to learn all that I can about how we are fighting this epidemic here in our district. Pharmaceutical companies have a vested interest in keeping profits sky high, and we cannot be complacent this is a fight we must address head on.

—*Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), 2020 Campaign Platform*

As a leader in supporting our local police officers and protecting the citizens of Northwest Indiana, Pete promotes initiatives to ensure that law enforcement officials have the tools they need to keep themselves safe and our communities secure. After learning that police officers did not have funding to purchase bulletproof vests, and that they were combating criminals who were wearing bulletproof vests, Pete took decisive action to create the federal Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program. This program helps local law enforcement departments purchase life saving protective vests for their officers. Further, Pete is a strong advocate of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area that provides federal resources to support Lake and Porter County police departments to combat regional threats to our communities.

—*Pete Visclosky (D-IN), 2018 Campaign Platform*

The opioid epidemic has been affecting every person and household across the country. According to the CDC, roughly 115 people die each day from an opioid overdose in the United States. From an economic standpoint, prescription opioid and illicit drug abuse costs the U.S. more than \$272 billion per year. The House has passed more than 70 bills that fight the opioid crisis. These are bills that support treatment and recovery, educate on prevention, protect our communities by supplying law enforcement with the resources they need, and fight against fentanyl. This is the largest federal response to a U.S. drug crisis in the history of our country. I have supported many pieces of legislation and sponsored bills like the STOP OD Act, which would extend grants to expand opioid addiction prevention education programs and training for law enforcement and first responders to treat an overdose directly in our communities. This epidemic is sweeping through our nation like a natural disaster and it is time we start treating it like one. I have, on many occasions, called on the administration and Congress to send emergency relief funding directly to our communities like we do when there is a natural disaster in this country. Lives are being lost every day, families are being broken apart, and we need to do something about it now.

—David Joyce (R-OH), 2020 Campaign Platform

Prevention and treatment programs and additional behavioral health professionals are in desperate need across Alaska. We must comprehensively address the opioid crisis and strengthen access to treatment and recovery services. We must change from the current system that compensates providers based on the volume of services they perform and move to one that compensates based on healthcare outcomes. I support federal policies that make it easier for people to get primary and preventative care to stay healthy. Everywhere I go in Alaska, I hear from people that they feel unsafe in their homes, in their businesses and their communities. Anchorage is battling violent crime and property crime like never before. Rural Alaska is struggling to keep our communities safe without adequate law enforcement officers. The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis that's driving up crime. Globally, we lack a foreign policy that makes Americans feel secure and well protected. Finally, our financial well being is threatened by proposed cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Alaska needs more from our leaders to strengthen our safety and security. The ravaging effects of opioid addiction are tearing through our families and communities. Alaska has the country's highest percentage of teen drug users and the second highest percentage of adult users. In Congress, I will fight to put an end to this epidemic and get support for Alaskans whose lives have been devastated, including: * Better funding for treatment and recovery programs * Strengthening re entry support for people who have completed treatment, are returning to their communities, and need help to stay employed, sober and stable * Expanding access to mental health services to help people before they turn to self medication as a way to deal with their suffering * Supporting solutions like Project Hope and recommendations of the Alaska Opioid Task Force to provide these folks with the attention and support they need to help everyone who needs it * Improving research and treatment of intergenerational trauma, which too often leads to drug abuse, violence, and suicide unless the cycle is broken

—Alyse Galvin (R-AK), 2018 Campaign Platform

Fred understands how out of control opioid abuse has gotten in our community and across the country. As part of Fred's landmark 21st Century Cures Act, the federal government has allocated \$1B in funding to states to prevent and fight opioid addiction. In the first round of funding, Michigan received \$16 million in grants. These resources will make a big difference. Fred continues to work directly with Southwest Michigan law enforcement, medical and education communities, and families to address the tragic epidemic of prescription drug and heroin abuse. Fred has also worked on bipartisan legislation to promote cooperation among the private sector and government agencies to encourage prevention and treatment to help patients. Drug abuse doesn't discriminate, and Fred knows we need to work together to solve this crisis sweeping through our communities. As a result of Fred's bipartisan leadership, individuals facing addiction and their concerned families have more hope they can overcome the life threatening challenge of drug addiction.

—Fred Upton (R-MI), 2018 Campaign Platform

7.2.3 Keyword Topic: Democratic-Criminal Justice (Symbolic)

Our prisons and jails are full of nonviolent drug offenders and people who are incarcerated because they cant afford a fine or bond. This overburdens our criminal justice system and disproportionately impacts communities of color. We must reform sentencing, ensure those who are incarcerated are rehabilitated and prepared to reenter society, reduce recidivism and end the 50 year failed war on drugs, which has treated a medical problem with a criminal justice solution.

—*Sri Preston Kulkarni (D-TX), 2020 Campaign Platform*

The impact of the opioid epidemic on our communities has been devastating. Opioid dependency does not discriminate, and I have heard countless stories of painful addiction and heartbreaking loss from people of all backgrounds, income levels, race, and age. One in four New Yorkers knows someone who has died after overdosing on opioids and more than half have been directly touched by opioid abuse. With rates of overdose in our region continuing to rise and more and more lives being stolen each day, there is no denying that this is an urgent crisis and one that requires us to forge solutions by working together. The first change must come from us all we must remove the stigma of judgment and punishment that burdens so many struggling with opiates and instead shift towards a compassionate focus on treatment and reform. Im committed to fighting for policies that promote treatment over incarceration, appropriate federal dollars for programs oriented towards delivering addicts to detox centers, and ensure Medicaid funding for drug treatment facilities. We must also hold drug manufacturers accountable for knowingly marketing these highly addictive substances which directly contributed to their overprescribing and abuse.

—*Antonio Delgado (D-NY), 2020 Campaign Platform*

Our country wastes huge amounts of money on imprisoning a huge human resource, especially when we are crying for workers. This is closely tied to much needed drug policy reform. We need to work with addicts to prevent them from reentering the prison system by expanding drug courts and providing needed resources. We need to take on the Opioid Crisis head on and help the people who are addicted rather than throwing them in jail and hoping for the best.

—*Chuck Eddy (R-KY), 2020 Campaign Platform*

Hold doctors liable for over prescription of Opioid drugs. * Allow for varying levels of coverage from emergency care to premium plans. * Eliminate mandates, such as prenatal coverage for senior citizens. * Triple the budget for fraud prevention and prosecution of fake doctors or unauthorized health clinics. We also need to come to the realization that medical marijuana must be taken off the list of Schedule 1 drugs to allow for testing and use by our military veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The cost benefit would surely bolster our failing health care system until reforms are enacted. If we can get past the infighting, I am sure we can get past the problems to fix this broken system that is failing all citizens.

—*Steve Vargas (R-CA), 2018 Campaign Platform*

Drugs like opioids represent a public health crisis, not a criminal crisis, and should be handled through our medical system instead of our prison system. When sick and poor families are riddled with problems like addiction; when those struggling with debilitating pain put themselves at risk of overdosing; when the distribution of drugs represents one of the few economies in struggling areas, we should see drugs as symptoms of deeper, societal issues, instead of a moral failing of individual people. Since the War on Drugs has started, weve seen a 500% increase in imprisonment rates, and now, almost half a century later we must ask ourselves: has drug use stopped? Have drugs disappeared from our communities? Are our communities healthier when so many of our youth are put into the system? My answer is no. If something weve tried for decades has yet to work, its time to find better solutions that reflect the growing cost of criminalizing sickness through our prisons.

—*Audri Williams (D-AL), 2018 Campaign Platform*

7.2.4 Keyword Topic: Democratic-Opioids (Programmatic)

Ohio is second in the nation for Opioid related overdose deaths. Based on the most updated numbers, over 70,000 families suffer from opioid related loss each year. Life expectancy in the US went down in 2018 for the first time since World War 1 because it was negatively affected by drug overdoses. Alaina's father was a physician. Before his death in 1999, he was absolutely outraged when doctors began to prescribe Oxycodone. He said that due to an opioid's addictive nature, the drug should only be prescribed to people with terminal illnesses, period. Alaina believes pharmaceutical companies knew this fact and yet continued to flood the markets with these dangerous drugs. Today, they all need to be held accountable. Alaina would support legislation prohibiting the distribution of opioids to patients unless it is being prescribed to medicate pain during a terminal illness. Opioid addiction is a national crisis. Addiction is a disease and should be treated as such. We need to treat the problem holistically, including early prevention in at-risk communities, intervention and harm reduction for those addicted, and long-term care for those recovering from addiction. We need to expand mental health services for those affected in order to mitigate the effects of addiction for current/former addicts and their loved ones.

—*Alaina Shearer (D-OH), 2020 Campaign Platform*

Investing in comprehensive mental health care. Like many communities across the country, the 14th has been impacted by the opioid epidemic. This problem will not be solved by law enforcement solutions alone; addressing the underlying behavioral health components of addiction is critical. To tackle this crisis, we need everyone to come to the table to implement a fully funded, comprehensive solution that will address prevention, treatment, and recovery. We must curb future addictions, but we also cannot forget those who are currently struggling without access to much-needed treatment. We need to pass legislation that will reduce cost barriers to treatment, and that will ensure Medicaid and health insurance cover both detox and rehab. Inaction on this issue is not an option.

—*Lauren Underwood (D-IL), 2018 Campaign Platform*

The opioid epidemic has stolen more than one person from us per day in Maine, and scarcely a community in our state doesn't have a personal story about how this crisis has affected them. We need to take serious action to support long-term public health infrastructure and help people get back on their feet. There's no one solution to this epidemic, but the answers are there if we have the political will. Increasing access to treatment is critical to reaching people with substance use disorder, many of whom don't have the means to afford private programs. That's why Chellie has fought for and won increased funding for addiction treatment in Maine.

—*Chellie Pingree (D-ME), 2020 Campaign Platform*

A Solution for Mental Health and the Opioid Epidemic Opioid overdose deaths in Missouri continue to rise. This is largely due to limited options for treatment and extravagant initial costs for care of this and other mental health programs. This plan would remove those costs and expand program availability for all who desperately need it.

—*Dennis Oglesby (D-MO), 2020 Campaign Platform*

Substance abuse has been an American crisis for decades, and while opioid abuse may be new to the media, it is all too common for millions of Americans, including countless Ohioan families. In fact, the State of Ohio has the unfortunate distinction of having the most opioid-related overdoses than any other state in the nation. Joyce is dedicated to helping individuals struggling with substance abuse disorders by breaking down barriers and increasing access to proven treatment options.

—*Joyce Beatty (D-OH), 2020 Campaign Platform*

Table 7.2: Top Words Associated With Topics Defined by KeyATM vs. STM

Top Words: Keyword Assisted Topic Model					
Democratic Topics		Republican Topics		Model Generated	
Racial Justice (Easy Message)	Opioid Issue (Hard Message)	Border Security (Easy Message)	Opioid Issue (Hard Message)	Topic #1	Topic #2
drug	addict	border	opiod	marijuana	drug
system	treatment	secur	resourc	legal	need
crimin	health	immigr	enforc	cannabi	problem
war	support	illeg	educ	tax	crisi
justic	prevent	wall	combat	decrimin	epidem
prison	program	southern	local	recreat	famili
reform	access	drug	state	schedul	respons
crime	medic	law	communiti	possess	american
polici	care	traffick	support	prohibit	live
incarcer	patient	america	fund	revenu	help
Top Words: Structural Topic Model					
drug	addict	border	opiod	<i>opiod</i>	drug
<i>marijuana</i>	treatment	secur	<i>help</i>	<i>crisi</i>	need
crimin	health	immigr	<i>introduc</i>	<i>prescript</i>	problem
war	support	illeg	<i>cosponsor</i>	<i>overdos</i>	<i>work</i>
justic	<i>mental</i>	wall	<i>hous</i>	<i>medic</i>	<i>polic</i>
prison	<i>profession</i>	<i>countri</i>	<i>legisl</i>	<i>pain</i>	<i>address</i>
<i>cannabi</i>	access	drug	<i>bill</i>	<i>death</i>	<i>abus</i>
crime	<i>need</i>	law	<i>act</i>	<i>compani</i>	<i>nutrit</i>
<i>state</i>	<i>program</i>	traffick	<i>sign</i>	<i>pharmaceut</i>	<i>intens</i>
<i>feder</i>	<i>lack</i>	<i>american</i>	<i>congression</i>	<i>naloxon</i>	<i>dealer</i>

Figure 7.2: Topical Content for Republican Policy Platform Text on Opioid Issues

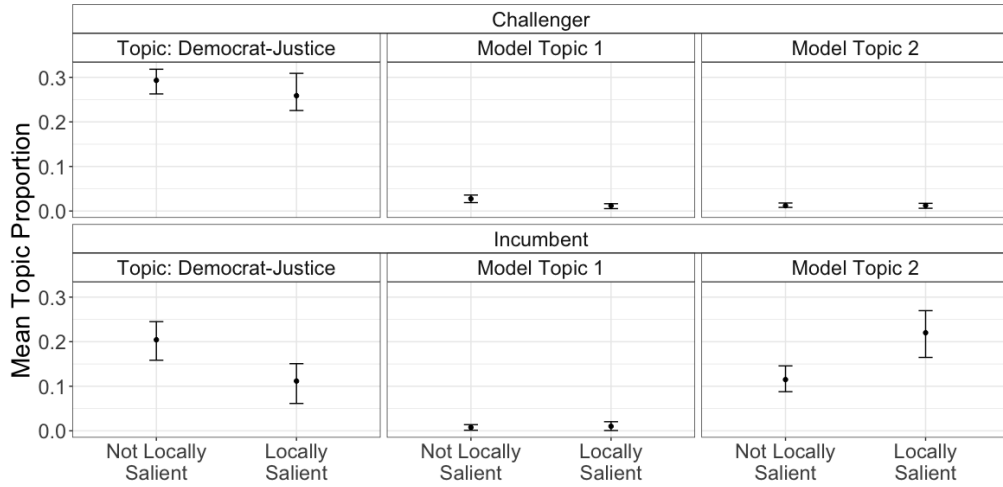
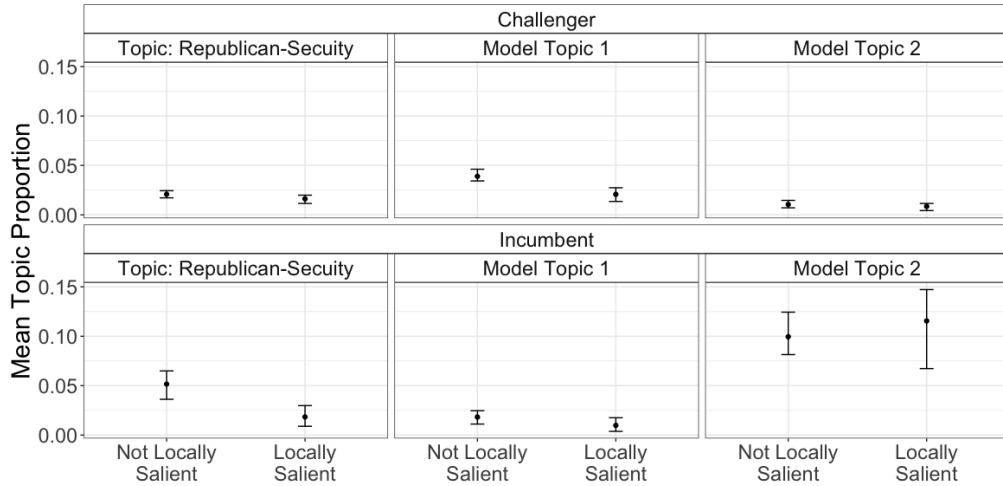


Figure 7.3: Topical Content for Democratic Policy Platform Text on Opioid Issues



Predicted probabilities for mean topic proportions in candidate platform text were generated using simulated data. Candidate past political experience and local opioid issue salience are varied; all other covariates are held at their mean value. The keyATM model was estimated over both Democratic and Republican policy platform text. Covariates for congressional district opioid salience and candidate type were both interacted with candidate partisanship.

Table 7.3: Top Words Associated With Topics Defined Multi-KeyATM: Full List

Press Releases					
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics		Model Generated	
Opioid-Adjacent (Criminal Justice)	Opioid-Specific (Treatment)	Opioid-Adjacent (Border Security)	Opioid-Specific (Resources)	Topic #1	Topic #2
law	opiod	border	opiod	communiti	drug
polici	health	secur	bill	district	fentanyl
enforc	support	illeg	act	issu	death
justic	fund	presid	legisl	congressman	combat
marijuana	program	traffick	bipartisan	state	crisi

Floor Speeches					
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics		Model Generated	
Opioid-Adjacent (Criminal Justice)	Opioid-Specific (Treatment)	Opioid-Adjacent (Border Security)	Opioid-Specific (Resources)	Topic #1	Topic #2
synthet	treatment	border	drug	crisi	right
substanc	medic	secur	bill	nation	number
schedul	program	presid	committe	year	state
law	provid	come	chairman	million	time
justic	communiti	immigr	legisl	death	even

Proposed Bill Summaries					
Democratic Party Topics		Republican Party Topics		Model Generated	
Opioid-Adjacent (Criminal Justice)	Opioid-Specific (Treatment)	Opioid-Adjacent (Border Security)	Opioid-Specific (Resources)	Topic #1	Topic #2
reduc	medicar	border	prescrib	control	manufactur
establish	program	law	drug	substanc	drug
includ	treatment	traffick	opiod	administr	use
cannabi	health	secur	requir	amend	relat
schedul	state	hous	bill	purpos	implement

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