



Center for Effective Lawmaking

Electable Effectiveness: How the Public Interprets Different Measures of Legislator Effectiveness

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Abstract: What does it mean to be an effective legislator in the eyes of constituents? Voters might prefer legislators who advance legislation through Congress (legislative effectiveness), legislators who secure federal funding for their constituents (distributive effectiveness), or legislators who engage in productive bipartisanship (bipartisan effectiveness). I clarify the link between legislator effectiveness in the US Congress and constituent support through two survey experiments: (1) a forced choice conjoint design to measure public preferences on the three forms of effectiveness, and (2) a vignette design to estimate the effect of real-world legislator effectiveness information on constituent support. Across both experiments, I find that the public similarly prioritizes the three types of effectiveness when evaluating legislators. Respondents rewarded above average effectiveness and were particularly likely to punish below average effectiveness. I conclude that legislator effectiveness functions as a valence issue in American politics. When given effectiveness information, Americans similarly prefer legislators who are effective at legislating, securing funds, and working with their partisan rivals.

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Introduction

“From day one, my focus has been on delivering common sense solutions for the hardworking people of my district. Being recognized as one of the most effective lawmakers in my first term is a reflection of that commitment.”¹

- U.S. House Representative Mike Lawler (NY-17)

“Every corner of Maine, from our smallest towns to our largest cities, has felt the impact of the \$1.5 billion Senator Collins has secured since 2021. By prioritizing everything from community centers and public safety to groundbreaking research and hospital upgrades, these funds are the building blocks of a stronger state.”²

- U.S. Senator Susan Collins (ME)

“I’m proud to be recognized for my bipartisan record, which has always been a priority of mine in the Senate. Michiganders expect me to work with my colleagues – from both parties – to solve problems and deliver results that will benefit our state.”³

- U.S. Senator Gary Peters (MI)

To what extent does legislators’ effectiveness in Congress shape their prospects for reelection? In theory, reelection concerns incentivize legislators to effectuate positive outcomes for the nation and their constituents. Congressional elections provide an accountability mechanism by allowing constituents to reward effective legislators and punish ineffective legislators. In practice, clarifying the relationship between legislator effectiveness and public support is more challenging. Information presents one barrier to this relationship. For legislator effectiveness levels to influence public opinion, voters require accurate and credible information on effectiveness (Butler et al. 2023; Strickler 2024). However, the American public generally pays little attention to the nuances of policy and the policymaking process (Lupia 2016; Achen and Bartels 2017), making it unlikely that legislator effectiveness directly shapes constituent support. Alternatively, effectiveness in Congress might influence elections by presenting legislators with opportunities for credit claiming (Mayhew 1974), but recent research casts doubt on the ability of modern credit claiming strategies to reach the general public (Simas et al. 2025).

Beyond the informational challenge, a conceptual barrier obscures the relationship between legislator effectiveness and constituent support: effectiveness can take on multiple meanings, and members of Congress (MCs) often emphasize different types of effectiveness to their constituents (Hunt

¹ Source: <https://lawler.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3979>

² Source: <https://susancollins.com/track-record/>

³ Source: <https://www.peters.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/peters-again-recognized-by-non-partisan-lugar-center-as-one-of-the-most-bipartisan-senators>

and Miler 2025). Scholarship on the US Congress commonly measures and explores three conceptions of legislator effectiveness: legislative effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, and bipartisan effectiveness. Legislative effectiveness represents legislators' ability to advance policy proposals through the legislative process, and Volden and Wiseman's (2014) legislative effectiveness scores provide an intuitive, credible, and comparable measure of legislator effectiveness. Distributive effectiveness represents legislators' ability to secure geographically targeted particularistic benefits for their constituents, and a longstanding stream of research measures and explores this form of effectiveness (Mayhew 1974; Shepsle and Weingast 1981; Rosenstiel 2023). Bipartisan effectiveness, conceptualized as legislators' ability to productively engage with legislators from the opposing party and measured through the Lugar Center's Bipartisan Index,⁴ offers a third dimension of effectiveness that Americans value (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Westwood 2022).

Researchers have identified potential electoral upside for legislators who excel at each type of effectiveness in Congress (Treul et al. 2022; Butler et al. 2023; Strickler 2024; Grimmer et al. 2014), but the electoral benefits of legislator effectiveness are far from guaranteed. In addition to the informational challenge, both partisanship and ideology condition how voters consider effectiveness in Congress (Butler et al. 2023; Sulkin et al. 2015; Sidman 2019). Further, because existing studies tend to focus on one specific form of effectiveness, little is known about how the public weighs different types of effectiveness. This study provides a unified account of how the American public understands and considers legislator effectiveness in Congress by simultaneously exploring how Americans respond to information on legislative effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, and bipartisan effectiveness.

Using two nationally focused survey experiments, I examine how information on the three types of legislator effectiveness shapes public support for legislators in the US Congress. The first experiment, a conjoint design that asks respondents to choose between two potential legislators, measures the extent to which Americans value the three forms of effectiveness when evaluating potential representatives. Respondents repeatedly chose between potential US senators for their home state that randomly varied in performance on the three forms of effectiveness, as well as party affiliation and gender. I find that respondents similarly prioritize the three types of effectiveness when forming preferences on legislators; they rewarded above average effectiveness and were particularly likely to punish below average effectiveness. The observed penalty for below average effectiveness, as compared to average effectiveness, equates to roughly half of the penalty respondents levied on out-partisans relative to

⁴ Source: <https://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html>

copartisans. In a binary choice environment with clear information on legislator effectiveness, all three types of effectiveness meaningfully impacted respondent candidate preferences.

The second experiment features a vignette design that builds on Butler et al. (2023), who examine the impact of legislative effectiveness information on constituent support for their actual legislative representatives. I extend this design to incorporate all three types of effectiveness, randomizing whether each respondent receives actual information about one of their US senators' level of legislative effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, bipartisan effectiveness, or no effectiveness information. This experiment yields two primary findings. First, the American public is generally unable to identify the effectiveness of their representatives in the US Senate. Absent new information, constituent effectiveness evaluations and overall support are unrelated to senator effectiveness ratings. Second, effectiveness information effectively moves constituent opinion on US senators. Upon receiving information on their senator's effectiveness in Congress, respondents updated their perceptions of senator effectiveness ratings and adjusted their levels of overall support. Information that a senator is below average on any of the three effectiveness types had a particularly strong impact on constituent support, suggesting a potential negativity bias in how constituents interpret information on legislator effectiveness.

This study advances research on legislative representation by examining the functional link between institutional performance and public opinion. Electoral incentives are theoretically key to explaining how individual lawmakers navigate the institution of Congress, from time management to policymaking priorities. I find that legislator effectiveness seemingly functions as a valence issue in American politics. Americans similarly prefer legislators who are effective at legislating, securing funds, and working with their partisan rivals, and these preferences are not conditioned by partisanship. However, without the provision of information, voters are unable to enforce these legitimate preferences in their political behavior.

Legislator effectiveness and reelection support

Effectiveness in Congress is critical to theoretical accounts of representation, accountability, and institutional organization. Electoral pressure provides a compelling incentive for legislators to effectuate change on behalf of their constituents. Effective legislators are likely to be rewarded with reelection, whereas ineffective legislators can be punished by voters and removed from office. Pushed by the proximate incentive of reelection (Mayhew 1974), members of Congress aim to effectuate positive policy outcomes, secure institutional posts that enhance their policymaking power, and communicate their effectiveness in Congress to their constituency (Fenno 1978). Therefore, the connection between legislator

effectiveness and constituency support represents a critical quantity of interest for theories of congressional organization and representation.

Exploring the link between legislator effectiveness and public support requires a measurable definition of effectiveness. Congressional scholars have developed three such definitions – legislative effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, and bipartisan effectiveness. Each dimension of effectiveness includes a broad-based conceptual appeal, measurement strategy, and connection to public opinion and elections.

First, legislative effectiveness represents the capacity of legislators to move legislation through the necessary steps towards passage. At a high level, the appeal of legislative effectiveness is clear; Americans desire a productive Congress and detest congressional gridlock (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Egan 2014; Flynn and Harbridge 2016). Therefore, the public plausibly judges MCs for their level of adeptness at advancing legislation. Legislative effectiveness scores indicate the ability to advance policy proposals through the legislative process, offering an intuitive, credible, and comparable measure of legislative effectiveness (Volden and Wiseman 2014). A fruitful stream of research has emerged from the creation of legislative effectiveness scores, including studies on gender and lawmaking (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013; Schroeder 2026), legislative tools (Lauterbach and Ritchie 2025), and resource allocation in congressional offices (Ommundsen 2025).

Multiple studies have examined the impact of legislative effectiveness on legislator support, revealing a nuanced picture. General election voters have little knowledge of their congressional representatives' lawmaking effectiveness. As a result, effective lawmakers get reelected at similar rates to ineffective lawmakers (Butler et al. 2023). However, the relationship between electoral effectiveness and incumbent electoral security emerges when focusing on primary elections (Treul et al. 2022) and informed voters (Butler et al. 2023, Strickler 2024). Thus, extant findings suggest voters care about legislative effectiveness, but their ability to actively evaluate legislators on this dimension is conditional on information. The work of legislative effectiveness is not immediately visible or tangible to constituents, so legislators aiming to turn legislative effectiveness into electoral support face an uphill messaging challenge.

Second, a longstanding stream of research on the US Congress focuses on distributive effectiveness – legislators' capacity to secure particularistic benefits, often in the form of federal grants or earmarks, for their constituents (Mayhew 1974, Shepsle and Weingast 1981; McLaughlin 2023; Rosenstiel 2023). Rather than pushing legislation through Congress, this form of effectiveness is achieved by

securing federal funding for one's home district. Distributive effectiveness, which is often measured by the amount of federal dollars or projects flowing into each legislator's district, centers on individual constituencies. As such, distributive effectiveness taps into the broad-based ideal of representation (Fenno 1978; McLaughlin and Barron 2026). MCs who excel at this form of effectiveness may be seen as uniquely capable of improving the lives of constituents (Grimmer et al. 2014). Empirical studies have documented a generally positive relationship between distributive effectiveness and electoral returns (Stratmann 2013, Levitt and Snyder 1997), though the relationship is conditional on partisanship (Sellers 1997; Lazarus et al. 2012; Sidman 2019).

A related stream of research on congressional credit claiming sheds light on the potential relationship between distributive effectiveness and constituent support. The distribution of federal funds results in tangible policy benefits that are traceable to legislators' actions, presenting an ideal opportunity for MCs to claim credit for improving the lives of constituents (Mayhew 1974; Arnold 1990). Experimental studies focused on congressional credit claiming for distributive policy benefits find it to be an effective tool for generating support among constituents (Grimmer et al. 2014; Gerber et al. 2022; Barron and McLaughlin 2024). The positive effect of credit claiming for distributive effectiveness is particularly strong when voters are provided with information on their legislator's effectiveness at securing funding relative to other legislators (Gerber et al. 2022). Further, legislators can target their distributive policy efforts to specific constituencies and types of spending, leading to particularly effective credit claiming (McLaughlin 2025). In sum, the tangibility and specificity of distributive policy benefits provide clear opportunities for credit claiming, potentially mitigating the informational barrier between legislator effectiveness and electoral support.

However, the nature of credit claiming for distributive effectiveness does not necessarily lead to more effective legislators being rewarded and less effective legislators being punished. That is, the credit allocation process can be distorted by legislators' credit claiming tactics and constituents' interpretation of credit claiming. For instance, Grimmer et al. (2014) find that legislators can effectively claim credit for bureaucratic grants which they played little to no role in securing. McLaughlin and Barron (2025) find that credibility enhancers in credit claims, such as references to influential committee posts, do not impact the effectiveness of credit claims on the public. Further, modern forms of credit claiming are generally unable to reach, and thereby persuade, the voting public (Simas et al. 2025). In sum, the credit claiming process works imperfectly, where credit allocation is not guaranteed to match legislators' actions.

Finally, bipartisan effectiveness – legislators’ ability to productively engage with legislators from the opposing party – offers a third form of legislator effectiveness. Bipartisan lawmakers are more effective at legislating, so there is some conceptual overlap between bipartisanship and legislative effectiveness (Harbridge-Yong et al. 2023). However, beyond any increase in effectiveness, bipartisan lawmaking is a valued product in American politics. There is broad public support for bipartisanship (Wolak 2020), and candidates often emphasize their bipartisanship in constituent communications (Algara and Ryan 2024). Bipartisan framing increases public support for legislation (Westwood 2022), but the effectiveness of bipartisan framing deteriorates in the face of minority party counter messaging (Case and Ommundsen 2024). Americans broadly value the notion of bipartisan effectiveness, and legislators often aim to present themselves and their legislative actions as bipartisan.

Research on the connection between bipartisanship and congressional elections reveals potential benefits to bipartisan effectiveness. Incumbent legislators face a general election penalty for being too partisan (Carson et al. 2010), and parties lose votes in general elections when they nominate ideological extremists (Hall 2015). Moreover, Strickler (2024) finds that the public punishes legislators who avoid bipartisan lawmaking, while Harbridge and Malhotra (2011) show that independents and weak partisans respond positively to legislators promoting a bipartisan image. Bipartisan effectiveness, therefore, appears to have a generally positive effect on voters’ perceptions of legislators. The Lugar Center provides a measure of bipartisan effectiveness in their Bipartisan Index, which represents “an objective measure of how well members of opposite parties work with one another using bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship data.”⁵ In sum, all three conceptions of legislator effectiveness include rich theoretical backgrounds and empirical measures that allow for ranking MCs based on their effectiveness in Congress.

Theoretical development

The core theoretical quantity of interest in this study is the relationship between legislator effectiveness and constituent support. To what extent, and under what conditions, do constituents reward or punish legislators based on their effectiveness in Congress? In theory, each type of legislator effectiveness taps into widespread beliefs about legislative representation. Legislators should be productive (legislative effectiveness), fight for constituents’ material interests (distributive effectiveness), and be capable of working alongside rivals (bipartisan effectiveness). In reality, the answer to this question is more complex, and existing research provides useful, though disjointed, insights into the relationship between legislator effectiveness and constituent support.

⁵ Source: <https://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html>

Legislator effectiveness, on its own, is unlikely to impact public perceptions of MCs. The public does not pay close enough attention to politics and policymaking to accurately track legislator effectiveness (Arnold 1990; Stein and Bickers 1994; Achen and Bartels 2017). Some form of information provision is necessary for constituents to understand when they have an effective or ineffective legislator.

Credit claiming, wherein MCs highlight their effectiveness, provides an important pathway for information. However, MCs have limited time and aim to optimize their odds of reelection (Mayhew 1974), and recent research casts doubt on credit claiming's capacity to penetrate the voting public (Simas et al. 2025). The time and energy required to be an effective member of Congress and communicate it to constituents takes away from other reelection-focused activities, such as position taking and raising money. Considering the polarized and nationalized era of American politics (Hopkins 2018; Carson, Sievert and Williamson 2023), partisan position taking potentially offers a more promising pathway to reelection for most members of Congress (Grimmer 2013; Dancey et al. 2024). MCs have less incentive to use their time, energy, and office resources on policymaking, which has been shown to directly impact legislative productivity (Ommundsen 2025). In other words, many legislators plausibly see partisan position taking as a more efficient pathway to reelection than the hard work of policymaking. Both legislative effectiveness and bipartisan effectiveness require time, effort, and an uphill messaging struggle to convey detailed policymaking actions to constituents. Such requirements make prioritizing these forms of effectiveness a suboptimal path towards reelection as compared to actions like position taking.

Alternatively, multiple studies find that distributive effectiveness offers an electoral upside (Levitt and Snyder Jr. 1997; Lazarus and Reilly 2010; Stratmann 2013; Crespín and Finocchiaro 2013). The readily available credit claiming opportunities generated by distributive effectiveness provide a plausible mechanism for the positive association between distributive effectiveness and electoral performance. Legislators who excel at distributive effectiveness receive repeated credit claiming opportunities for tangible and visible policies, allowing for an easier conversion of legislator effectiveness into constituent support. A ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of a local health center offers a clearer credit claiming opportunity for MCs than explaining their work to pass complex legislation. Therefore, while the public might similarly value all three forms of effectiveness, the nature of distributive politics potentially allows for more efficient and effective messaging strategies for conveying effectiveness information to constituents.

Based on these principles, I expect information on all three effectiveness measures to sway public support for legislators in the US Congress. The barrier between legislator effectiveness and constituent

support is information, not constituent demand for legislators who excel at legislative effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, and bipartisan effectiveness. When armed with effectiveness information, the public is expected to be more supportive of effective legislators and less supportive of ineffective legislators. In fact, studies focused on individual forms of effectiveness suggest that the public is responsive to information on legislative effectiveness (Butler et al. 2023), distributive effectiveness (Grimmer et al. 2014; Gerber et al. 2022; McLaughlin and Barron 2026), and bipartisan effectiveness (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Strickler 2024). However, little is known about how the public weighs different types of effectiveness.

I argue that effectiveness in Congress operates as a valence issue for the American public, meaning a consensus of Americans recognizes effectiveness in all three forms as a valuable trait for legislators. Each type of effectiveness taps into broad-based ideals of legislative organization and functionality: productivity (legislative effectiveness), representation (distributive effectiveness), and pluralism (bipartisan effectiveness). As such, in an information rich environment, all three forms of legislator effectiveness will influence public preferences on legislative representation:

Hypothesis 1a: Americans prefer representatives who display higher levels of legislative effectiveness – the ability to advance policy proposals through the legislative process.

Hypothesis 1b: Americans prefer representatives who display higher levels of distributive effectiveness – securing particularistic benefits for their constituents.

Hypothesis 1c: Americans prefer representatives who display higher levels of bipartisan effectiveness – legislators' ability to productively engage with legislators from the opposing party.

While the American public is likely to value each type of legislator effectiveness, I argue that the partisan relationship between constituent and legislator likely shapes preferences on legislator effectiveness. Americans represented by a copartisan in Congress plausibly view legislator effectiveness differently than Americans represented by an out-party legislator. This idea stems from research on partisan sorting. The public has increasingly sorted into ideologically distant parties, such that there is little to no cross-ideological party affiliation (Levendusky 2009). Conservatives identify with the Republican Party, and liberals identify with the Democratic Party. As such, the ideological goals of copartisans are likely to align, and the ideological goals of out-partisans are unlikely to align.

I argue that partisan sorting suggests Americans will perceive legislative effectiveness differently than distributive and bipartisan effectiveness. Legislative effectiveness implicitly helps to further ideological policy goals. For a copartisan constituent, legislative effectiveness often means productive policymaking in their preferred direction. For out-partisans, legislative effectiveness often means

productive policymaking in their non-preferred direction. Of course, not all legislation is partisan and ideologically driven, and the value issue of productivity imbued in legislative effectiveness means Americans with an out-party representative may still reward legislative effectiveness. However, due to the alignment of legislative effectiveness with partisan policymaking goals, I argue that constituents with a copartisan legislator are more likely to reward effective lawmakers and punish ineffective lawmakers.

Conversely, I argue that distributive effectiveness and bipartisan effectiveness are particularly appealing to constituents when the legislator and constituent do not share a party affiliation. Working to secure distributive benefits is theorized as particularly helpful for legislators aiming to generate support across party lines (Mayhew 1974; Cain et al. 1987). Whereas copartisan constituents have higher baseline support for their legislators and are likely to support their position taking and lawmaking actions, distributive politics provides a rare pathway for legislators to appeal to independent voters and out-partisans. In fact, prior studies find that credit claiming for distributive politics is a strategy used most often by cross-pressured legislators (Grimmer 2013) and is particularly effective at boosting legislator approval of out-party constituents (McLaughlin 2025). Distributive effectiveness information, therefore, is expected to have a greater impact on out-partisans than copartisans.

Similarly, bipartisan effectiveness signals a capacity and willingness to work with the other party. Existing research shows that Americans are more likely to prioritize legislative compromise when party identification does not align (Bauer, Harbridge-Yong, and Krupnikov 2017). For out-partisan constituents, bipartisan effectiveness complicates the partisan narrative and suggests the MC works on legislation that the constituent might support. For ideologically driven copartisan constituents, this type of effectiveness carries less benefit, because their ideological goals can be taken up by the legislator without bipartisan compromise. In sum, I expect that bipartisan effectiveness is a more impactful variable for out-partisan constituents than copartisan constituents.

Hypothesis 2a: Legislative effectiveness has a greater positive effect on support for copartisan representatives than out-party representatives.

Hypothesis 2b: Distributive effectiveness has a greater positive effect on support for out-party representatives than copartisan representatives.

Hypothesis 2c: Bipartisan effectiveness has a greater positive effect on support for out-party representatives than copartisan representatives.

I explore how voters interpret different types of legislator effectiveness, thereby testing the hypotheses outlined above, through two online survey experiments. The first features a forced choice conjoint design where respondents choose between two hypothetical legislators, and the second uses a

vignette design with real-world data on the effectiveness of respondents' actual legislative representatives in the US Senate.

Experimental #1 Design

To measure how the public differentially values the three types of legislator effectiveness, I use a forced choice conjoint experiment that tasks respondents with deciding between two hypothetical US senators. This type of design, where respondents repeatedly choose between two profiles that differ on several randomly assigned attributes, is well suited for examining public preferences on candidates in an electoral context (Hainmueller et al. 2014; Bansak et al. 2023). The experimental design, hypotheses, and analyses were all preregistered before data collection.⁶ A sample of 1,392 American adults was recruited through the Cint Theorem platform in the summer of 2025 to participate in this experiment.

Respondents repeatedly chose between two hypothetical legislators to represent their state in the US Senate. The hypothetical legislators randomly varied based on the following five attributes: party, gender, lawmaking effectiveness, distributive effectiveness, and bipartisan effectiveness. The three effectiveness attributes conceptually match the effectiveness definitions discussed above, such that analysis of the experimental data is well-suited for empirically testing Hypothesis 1. Party and gender, two characteristics commonly explored in studies on voter preferences, provide baseline preference measures to which legislator effectiveness can be compared for scale. Additionally, the inclusion of party as a randomly assigned attribute allows for conditional analysis to test Hypothesis 2.

Before clicking into the conjoint experiment, respondents read an explanation of the three effectiveness measures. Figure 1 displays these explainers, which come from the Center for Effective Lawmaking (lawmaking effectiveness), the official US Senate description of Community Project Funding (distributive effectiveness), and the Lugar Center (bipartisan effectiveness). All three effectiveness measures use the same relative rankings of the hypothetical senators (Below Average, Average, Above Average), ensuring accurate comparison across measures. The party of the hypothetical legislators varies independently for each option, meaning some matchups feature within party comparisons and some matchups feature between party comparisons. This is a deliberate decision; the statistical power provided by the conjoint design allows for analysis that reflects both general and primary election settings, which might lead to different findings (Butler et al. 2023; Treul et al. 2022). Finally, the order of the effectiveness

⁶ Preregistration plan: <https://aspredicted.org/3vb3-ncp2.pdf>

measures is randomly varied for each respondent to prevent ordering effects, but consistent within each respondent's choice tasks to reduce confusion.

Figure 1: Conjoint explainer

This study is about members of the US Congress and your views on potential legislators. We are going to present eight pairs of hypothetical legislators. For each pair, please indicate which of the candidates you would prefer to represent Alabama in the US Senate. For each legislator, you will be given information on their party, gender, and three measures of legislator effectiveness. The three measures of legislative effectiveness are explained below:

Lawmaking Effectiveness: How effective they are at moving their proposed bills into law.

Securing Funding: How effective they are securing federally funded projects and programs for their state.

Bipartisan Lawmaking: How frequently they work with members of the opposite party to co-sponsor bills.

In addition to the initial explainer on the three types of effectiveness, the presentation of legislator effectiveness attributes is designed for clear interpretation. Rather than a numeric scale, the effectiveness attributes vary across three intuitive levels: "Above Average," "Average," and "Below Average." Further, the effectiveness levels are color coded, such that "Above Average" is highlighted in green, "Average" is highlighted in yellow, and "Below Average" is highlighted in red. In sum, respondents are tasked with a choice between legislators, where levels of effectiveness on the three major dimensions are randomly assigned and intuitively presented. Figure 2 displays an example of how the task environment appeared to respondents.

The analysis below follows standard protocols for conjoint analysis (Hainmueller et al. 2014). First, I estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE) with OLS regression models, regressing the primary dependent variable (legislator selection) on the five categorical attributes with respondent-clustered standard errors. This analysis sheds light on how the public differentially weighs the three forms of legislator effectiveness.

Second, I follow the suggestion of Leeper et al. (2020) to measure subgroup preferences by unadjusted marginal means. In this case, the subgroups include respondents' partisan relationship with the

hypothetical senators (copartisan / out-partisan). This analysis sheds light on the ways in which partisanship shapes how the public interprets information on each type of legislator effectiveness.

Figure 2: Conjoint task example

This study is about members of the US Congress and your views on potential legislators. Please indicate which of the candidates you would prefer to represent Alabama in the US Senate.

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Party	Democratic	Republican
Gender	Man	Man
Securing Funding	Above Average	Below Average
Bipartisan Lawmaking	Average	Average
Lawmaking Effectiveness	Below Average	Above Average

Experiment #1 Results

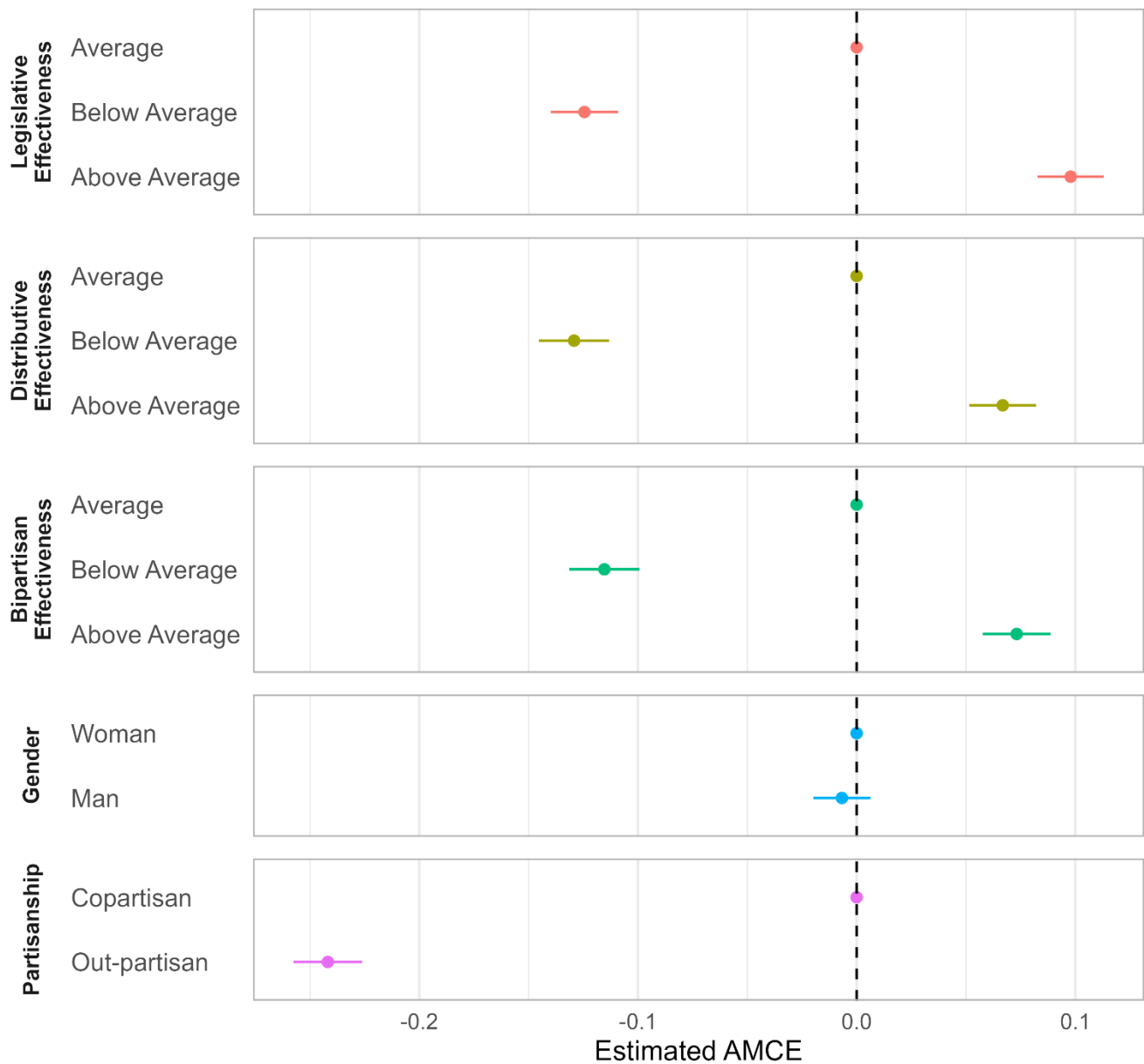
The forced choice conjoint design leads to a binary dependent variable indicating whether each legislator in each task was selected (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). I regress this variable on the experimental attributes using OLS with respondent-clustered standard errors, which yields an Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) estimate for each level of each attribute. Per Hainmueller et al. (2014), the AMCE generated by a forced choice conjoint design represents “the average change in the probability that a profile will win support when it includes the listed attribute value instead of the baseline attribute value” (19). In this case, “win support” means being selected as the respondent’s preferred legislator.

Figure 3 displays the AMCEs generated by this regression analysis, along with 95% confidence intervals for each estimate.⁷ The baseline value for the three effectiveness attributes, indicated by points along the dotted line (zero) in Figure 3, is average effectiveness. The AMCE estimates indicate the average

⁷ See appendix Table A1 for tabular results.

change in the probability of profile selection when a profile changes from average effectiveness to above or below average effectiveness. For instance, the AMCE for above average legislative effectiveness is roughly 0.10, indicating that moving from average to above average legislative effectiveness results in an increase of 10 percentage points in the probability that a legislator's profile is selected. Conversely, changing from average legislative effectiveness to below average legislative effectiveness decreases the probability of profile selection by 12 percentage points, indicated by the -0.12 AMCE estimate.

Figure 3: Average Marginal Component Effects on legislator selection probability



Hypothesis 1 claims that the American public prefers legislators who display higher levels of legislative effectiveness (1a), distributive effectiveness (1b), and bipartisan effectiveness (1c), meaning the three effectiveness attributes are predicted to influence legislator selection probability. The AMCEs displayed in Figure 3 provide evidence in favor of these predictions. For all three forms of effectiveness, below average effectiveness ratings decreased the candidate's probability of being selected relative to average effectiveness, and above average effectiveness ratings increased the candidate's probability of being selected relative to average effectiveness.

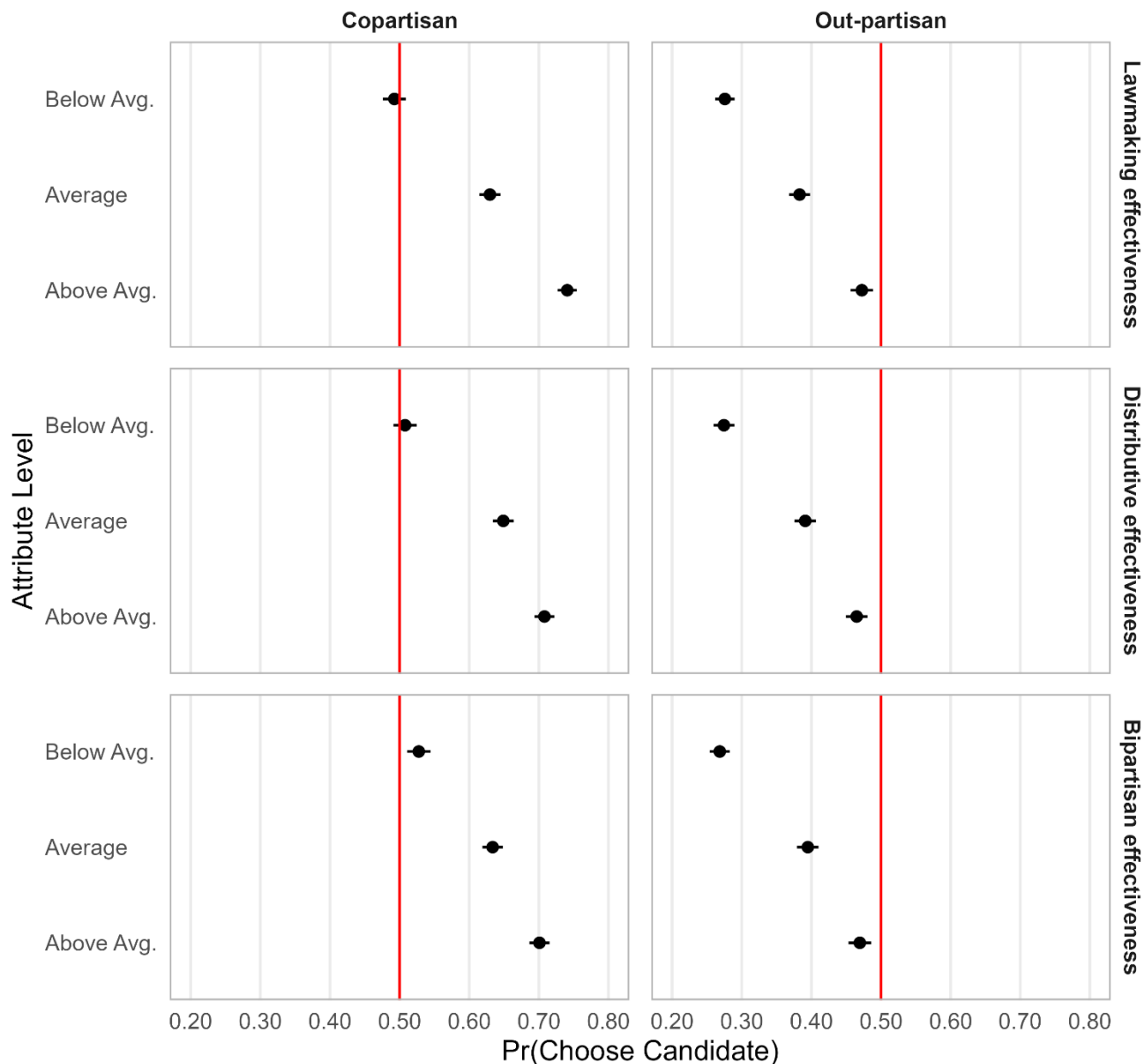
Three insights can be gleaned from the magnitude of the AMCEs displayed in Figure 3. First, participants responded similarly to changes in the three types of effectiveness. The three positive estimates for above average legislative effectiveness (0.10), distributive effectiveness (0.07), and bipartisan effectiveness (0.07) are all close in magnitude, as are the three negative estimates for below average effectiveness (-0.12, -0.13, and -0.12, respectively). Second, the effect sizes are substantively meaningful. The large penalty out-partisans receive relative to copartisans (-0.24 AMCE) reflects a partisan electorate well-established in existing research (Bartels 2000; Abramowitz and Webster 2016), offering a useful baseline for comparing effectiveness estimates. The below average effectiveness penalties, relative to average effectiveness, referenced above equate to roughly half of the penalty for being an out-partisan rather than copartisan to the respondent. Therefore, effectiveness ratings are shown to meaningfully drive respondent preferences for legislative representation. Third, there appears to be a stronger negative penalty for below average effectiveness than reward for above average effectiveness. This insight is exploratory (not a preregistered hypothesis) but comports with prior experimental findings on legislative effectiveness (Butler et al. 2023) and a longstanding stream on negativity bias in political evaluations (Lau 1982; Soroka 2014).

The conditional predictions outlined in Hypothesis 2 argue that respondents' preferences on legislator effectiveness are shaped by their partisan relationship with the prospective legislator. Specifically, I argue that legislative effectiveness has a larger effect for copartisan representatives than out-partisan representatives (Hypothesis 2a), while distributive and bipartisan effectiveness have a larger effect for out-partisan representatives than copartisan representatives. Figure 4 provides an initial examination of these expectations by displaying the unadjusted marginal means for each effectiveness attribute level, subset by respondents' partisan relationship to the legislator.

Each point estimate displayed in Figure 4 represents the proportion of selection when the specified combination of effectiveness attribute level and partisan relationship was shown to a respondent. For

instance, the top left point estimate shows that legislators who were copartisan to the respondent and rated as below average on legislative effectiveness were selected roughly 49% (proportion = 0.49) of the time they appeared in the choice task, whereas the top right point estimate shows that legislators who were out-partisan to the respondent and rated as below average on legislative effectiveness were selected roughly 28% (proportion = 0.28) of the time they appeared in the choice task.

Figure 4: Marginal means for legislator selection, by effectiveness and partisanship



Partisanship clearly influences respondents' legislator preferences. Respondents vastly preferred a legislator from their own party. However, the results displayed in Figure 4 suggest that legislator

effectiveness information effects are uniform across both partisanship and type of effectiveness. The marginal means of selection probability are remarkably similar across the three forms of effectiveness. For out-partisans, displayed on the right side of Figure 4, the three below average means (Lawmaking effectiveness = 0.28, Distributive effectiveness = 0.27, Bipartisan effectiveness = 0.27), average means (Lawmaking effectiveness = 0.38, Distributive effectiveness = 0.39, Bipartisan effectiveness = 0.40), and above average means (Lawmaking effectiveness = 0.47, Distributive effectiveness = 0.46, Bipartisan effectiveness = 0.47) are all substantively equivalent. Copartisan respondents appear to slightly prefer legislators who are above average on legislative effectiveness (0.74) to legislators who are above average on distributive (0.71) and bipartisan effectiveness (0.70), but the difference is substantively quite small. Additionally, there is little divergence in how respondents reward and punish copartisans and out-partisans based on effectiveness levels. For instance, the difference in marginal means between above average distributive effectiveness and below average distributive effectiveness ratings is 0.20 for copartisans and 0.19 for out-partisans, effectively equal. In sum, the marginal means comparisons offer little evidence of the conditional relationships predicted by Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c.

To more formally test Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, I include an *effectiveness X partisan relationship* interaction term in the regression analysis discussed above: legislator selection (0/1) regressed on the experimental attributes using OLS with respondent-clustered standard errors. I do this for each type of effectiveness while retaining the two alternative effectiveness types as controls. As such, this analysis includes three separate models, one for each type of effectiveness. The results of this analysis are displayed in the appendix (Table A3), and I find no evidence of a meaningful interaction between partisan relationship and any type of legislator effectiveness. Against the expectations of Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, the partisan relationship between respondent and legislator does not condition how respondents value legislator effectiveness.

In sum, the conjoint experiment analysis finds that legislator effectiveness predictably influences Americans' representational preferences in an information rich, side-by-side comparison context. Respondents were more likely to choose effective legislators and less likely to choose ineffective legislators. Importantly, I observe no meaningful difference in effect magnitude between effectiveness types – legislative, distributive, and bipartisan effectiveness similarly shape preferences in the conjoint design. Finally, I find no evidence of a partisanship-based effect heterogeneity. Copartisans were far more likely to be selected than out-partisans, but the three effectiveness attributes had comparable effects across partisan relationship.

Experimental Design #2: Vignette Experiment

The conjoint design implemented above sheds useful light on how Americans consider different types of legislator effectiveness when deciding between two anonymous choices and armed with comparable, readily available information on legislator effectiveness. However, the context of the design necessarily deviates from reality, where the public forms opinions with more background information about incumbent legislators and less information about legislator effectiveness. As such, I supplement the conjoint analysis with a preregistered vignette-based experimental design that focuses on the effects of real effectiveness information on constituent evaluations of their actual congressional representatives.⁸ 4,610 respondents were recruited from the Cint Theorem platform in the spring and summer of 2026.⁹

The vignette experiment is tailored to respondents' congressional representation, as respondents' state of residence is used to identify one of their representatives in the US Senate. After a one-sentence introduction to their US senator, respondents are randomly assigned to one of four treatment arms: legislative effectiveness information, distributive effectiveness information, bipartisan effectiveness information, or no effectiveness information (control). The effectiveness information for each type of effectiveness is real, derived from legislative effectiveness scores (legislative), congressional earmarking totals (distributive),¹⁰ and Lugar bipartisan rankings (bipartisan). The information is simplified into below/above average ratings and delivered in an easily interpreted visual, as displayed in Figure 5. In sum, the experimental design leverages actual ranking information to randomly vary whether respondents receive effectiveness information about one of their US senators, as well as the type of effectiveness information.

This experimental design extends the work of Butler et al. (2023), who randomly assign whether respondents receive no information or credible information on their legislator's lawmaking effectiveness scores. I effectively build on this foundation by adding treatment arms for distributive effectiveness and bipartisan effectiveness, both of which draw on credible measures of effectiveness relative to other legislators.

After reading the vignette, respondents answered a battery of questions about the senator. The primary outcome variable, as designated in the preregistration plan, is a 0-100 feeling thermometer, which

⁸ Pre-registration link: <https://aspredicted.org/6qp2b5.pdf>

⁹ The initial sample overrepresented men due to a vendor fielding error, and additional respondents (mainly women) were recruited into the sample to meet the original order requirements after the error was identified. Appendix C describes the issue and reports gender-weighted robustness checks, which do not meaningfully alter the results.

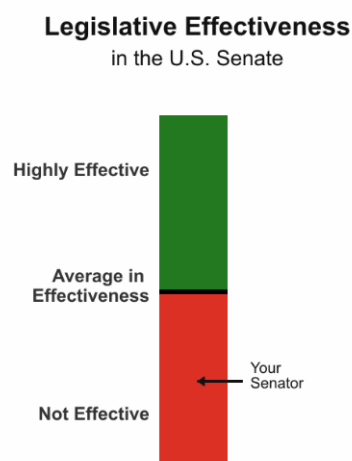
¹⁰ I rank US senators based on both number of projects secured and dollars per capita, and I combine those two metrics to create the ranking used in the experiment.

gauges respondents' overall feeling toward their senator. As secondary outcome variables, respondents also answered a binary senator approval question and a question on how likely they are to vote for the incumbent senator in upcoming elections. Finally, respondents were asked for their perceptions of their senator's effectiveness on all three types of effectiveness. For respondents assigned to the control condition, these effectiveness perception questions are useful for exploring baseline levels of respondent knowledge about senator effectiveness. For respondents assigned to an information condition, this battery provides a manipulation check to ensure respondents read and understand the information treatments.

Figure 5: Vignette example

As you may know, U.S. Senator Katie Britt, a Republican, represents Alabama in the United States Senate.

U.S. Senators differ in how *effective* they are at moving their proposed bills into law. A team of **independent** and **non-partisan** researchers recently found that *Senator Britt* is **ineffective** compared to other senators when it comes to legislative effectiveness.



Though the vignette design provides a very different type of treatment and test than the conjoint design, the primary preregistered hypotheses mirror Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c above. That is, I expect all three forms of legislator effectiveness will influence public preferences on legislative representation. In this case, I expect that effectiveness information will meaningfully impact constituents' evaluations of their representative in the US Senate. Additionally, I preregistered a negativity bias hypothesis, which was an exploratory finding in the conjoint design.

Negativity Bias Hypothesis: There is a bigger penalty for below average effectiveness than reward for above average effectiveness.

In addition to the conjoint experiment findings, a theoretical basis exists for the negativity bias hypothesis. A longstanding stream of research finds that the public exhibits a negativity bias in political evaluations (Lau 1982; Soroka 2014; Ashton and Munis 2021). Additionally, Bulter et al. (2023) observe a larger information effect for ineffective lawmakers than highly effective lawmakers.

Vignette Experiment Results

Before examining whether effectiveness information impacts constituent evaluations of senators, I explore constituents’ perceptions of senator effectiveness. Figure 6 displays the percentage of respondents who believe the senator demonstrates above average effectiveness across effectiveness type and actual senator effectiveness levels. I use the control group to observe whether a detectable association exists between senator effectiveness and constituent perceptions of senator effectiveness. Consistent with Butler et al. (2023), I find no evidence of such a relationship. For all three effectiveness types, effectiveness ratings hover around 50% regardless of actual senator effectiveness. Therefore, constituents appear to have little existing knowledge of senator effectiveness.

Figure 6: Actual and perceived senator effectiveness by information condition

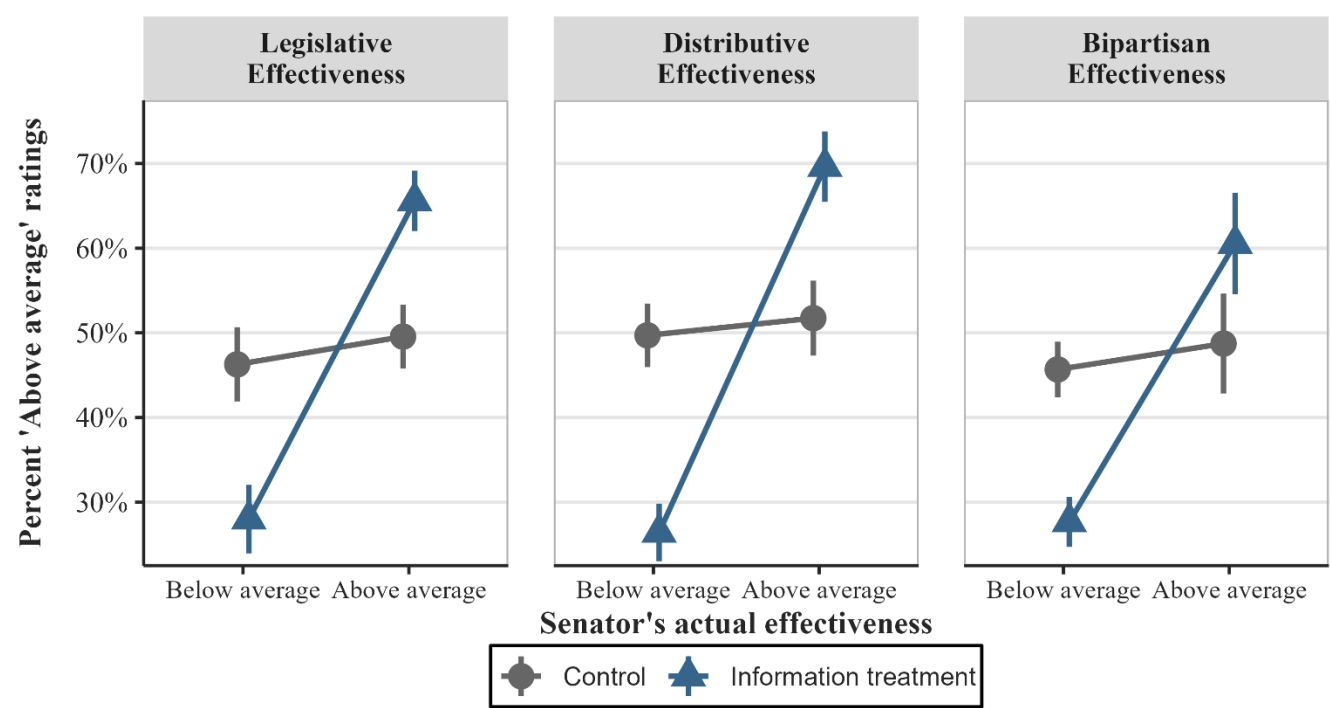
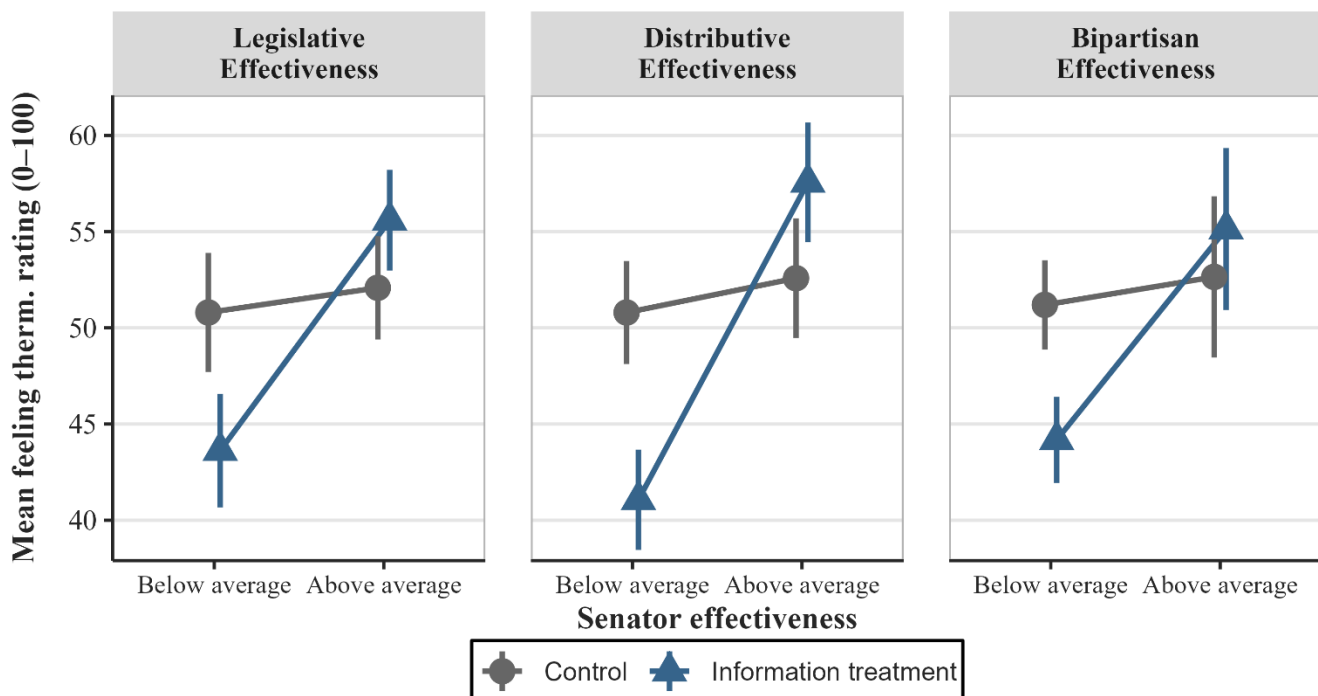


Figure 6 also allows for an exploration into whether respondents assigned to the informational treatments had more accurate perceptions of their senator’s effectiveness on the type of effectiveness to

which they were assigned. I report compelling evidence that the experimental treatments informed respondents about their senator's effectiveness in Congress. Across all three types of effectiveness, the upward trajectory of the blue lines in Figure 6 suggests that the informational treatments led to more accurate perceptions of senator effectiveness for both below average senators and above average senators. This finding provides evidence that respondents read, understood, and internalized the informational treatments.

Figure 7 replicates the structure of Figure 6, but for the preregistered dependent variable – feeling thermometer ratings – rather than perceived effectiveness. Mean feeling thermometer ratings are displayed across information conditions and actual senator effectiveness ratings for each type of legislator effectiveness. The circular grey point estimates, representing respondents assigned to the control condition, display no meaningful pattern connecting senator effectiveness with thermometer ratings. This lack of a relationship makes sense, considering constituents' ignorance of senator effectiveness on display in Figure 6. Absent information on senator effectiveness, constituent support does not appear to increase with actual levels of legislator effectiveness.

Figure 7: Effectiveness information and respondents' feelings toward their senator



The triangular blue point estimates in Figure 7 represent mean thermometer ratings for respondents assigned to the effectiveness information treatments. In line the expectations, a clearly positive relationship emerges between effectiveness levels and constituent support for respondents assigned to

receive effectiveness information. For all three types of effectiveness, respondents in the information condition reported warmer average feelings for effective senators than non-effective senators. Respondents assigned to the distributive effectiveness information treatment gave below average senators a 41.1 mean thermometer rating, more than fifteen points lower than the 57.6 mean thermometer rating for above average senators. These findings comport with those of the conjoint experiment above; constituents display clear preferences for more effective legislators when given effectiveness information.

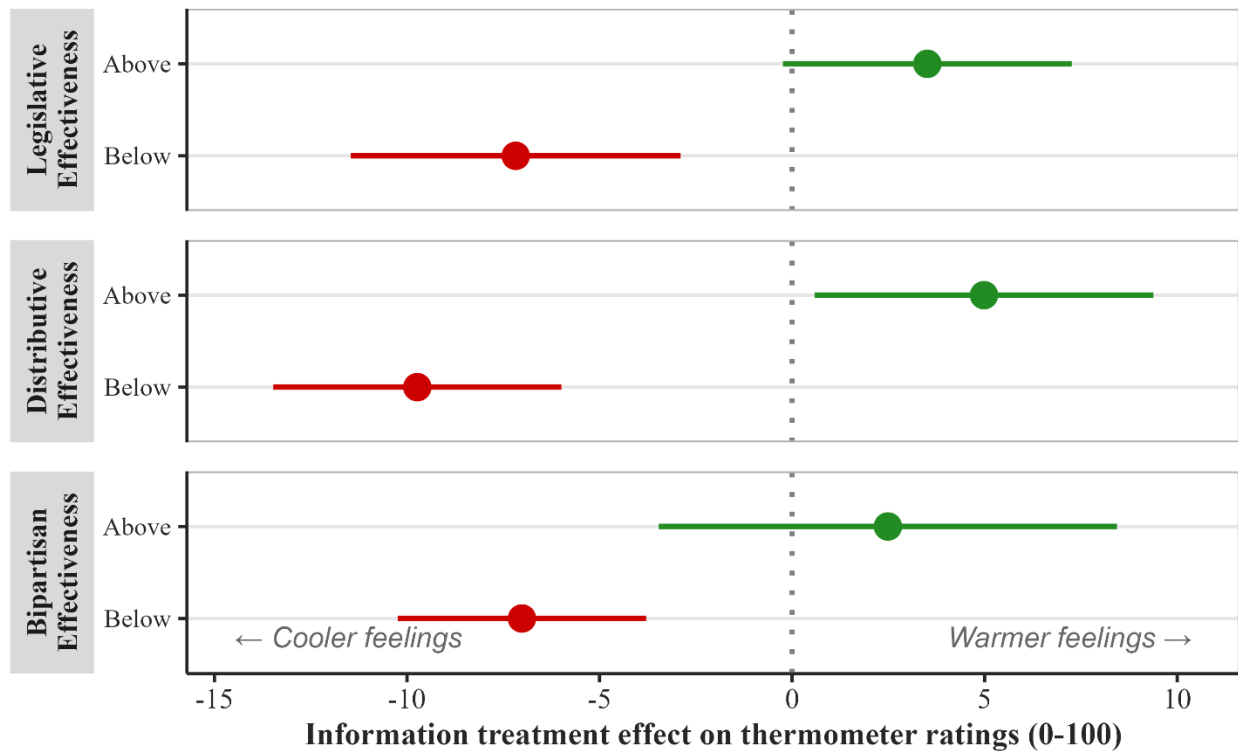
Additionally, the patterns of support displayed in Figure 7 are suggestive of a negativity bias. Relative to the control condition, the penalty for below average effectiveness appears to be greater than the reward for above average effectiveness. For those represented by a senator ranking below average in effectiveness, a clear and substantial gap separates mean thermometer ratings between the control and treatment conditions for all three types of effectiveness: 7.18 points for legislative effectiveness, 9.73 for distributive effectiveness, and 7.01 for bipartisan effectiveness. For those represented by a senator ranking above average in effectiveness, the gap between control and treatment conditions is less distinct, indicated by overlapping 95% confidence intervals, and substantively smaller contrasts: 3.51 for legislative effectiveness, 4.98 for distributive effectiveness, and 2.49 for bipartisan effectiveness. Therefore, respondents' negative response to below average effectiveness seemingly outweighs their positive response to above average effectiveness.

To formally test the comparisons displayed in Figure 7, I use OLS regression to estimate the effect of legislator effectiveness information on constituent support for their US senator. I estimate six separate models, one for each combination of effectiveness (legislative, distributive, bipartisan) and performance (above average, below average). Regression estimates and 95% confidence intervals are displayed in Figure 8. The point estimates represent the effect of information on each type of effectiveness and performance combination.

The findings displayed in Figure 8 confirm the patterns discussed above. Across all three types of effectiveness, the informational treatment led to higher ratings for effective legislators and lower ratings for ineffective legislators. Again, the information effects are clearest for ineffective legislators; the three negative estimates in Figure 8 are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and substantively meaningful. The positive effects for above average effectiveness reach significance in the distributive effectiveness model ($p < 0.05$) and come close to significance in the legislative effectiveness model ($p < 0.10$), but the point estimates are a more modest 4.98 and 3.51 feeling thermometer points, respectively. For bipartisan effectiveness, there is no detectable information effect for above average effectiveness. In sum,

effectiveness information meaningfully impacted constituent evaluations of senators, but the penalty for ineffectiveness appears steeper than the reward for above average effectiveness.

Figure 8: Vignette experiment treatment effects



Finally, I examine the negativity bias hypothesis by formally testing the proposition that the information treatment penalty for below average senators is greater than the information treatment reward for above average senators. I estimate a regression model with an *information treatment X effectiveness rating* interaction term for each type of effectiveness. The results of these regressions are included in the online appendix.¹¹ I then estimate a one-sided linear-combination test to determine whether the penalty for below average is greater than the reward for above average. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2, where the estimates represent the contrast between the negative effect magnitude and the positive effect magnitude.

The point estimates displayed in Table 2 are in the expected direction for legislative effectiveness (-3.305), distributive effectiveness (-4.301), and bipartisan effectiveness (-4.732), meaning respondents reacted to the information treatment more intensely in the negative direction for below average legislators

¹¹ See table B10.

than they reacted in the positive direction for above average legislators. The contrasts for distributive effectiveness and bipartisan effectiveness reach conventional levels of statistical significance in the one-sided test ($p < 0.05$), while the legislative effectiveness contrast falls outside of this range ($p = 0.091$). Additionally, the directional pattern is consistent across dependent variable measures and alternative model specifications, but the contrast's statistical significance is not robust to such variations.¹² Therefore, the general pattern of results across both experiments suggests that the public reacts particularly strongly to information that a legislator is below average in effectiveness, but additional research is needed to conclusively determine the presence of a negativity bias in reactions to effectiveness information.

Table 2: Linear combination test for negativity bias in treatment effects

Effectiveness	Contrast	Estimate	P-value
Legislative	Below penalty > above reward	-3.305	0.091
Distributive	Below penalty > above reward	-4.301	0.038
Bipartisan	Below penalty > above reward	-4.732	0.045
Entries are one-sided linear-combination tests.			

Conclusion

This project develops a more comprehensive understanding of how the public understands and values legislator effectiveness in the US Congress. Legislators operate with limited time, resources, and political capital. Where and how they focus their policymaking efforts has important ramifications for both constituents back home and legislative institutions. As such, it is critical to understand the lens through which voters understand legislator effectiveness. I combine a forced choice conjoint experiment using fictional legislators and a vignette experiment with real legislators and effectiveness information to shed light on how voters perceive different forms of legislator effectiveness. The findings from these studies contribute to three overarching insights.

First, Americans value legislator effectiveness. Information on legislator effectiveness meaningfully shaped survey respondents' preferences between hypothetical legislators and evaluations of

¹² See appendix tables B11 and B12 for a comparison of results across dependent variable measures and between a one-sided and two-sided test of the linear combination.

their actual legislative representatives in the US Senate. Above average effectiveness is generally rewarded, and below average effectiveness elicits a particularly strong and consistent negative effect on legislator support.

Second, legislator effectiveness functions as a valence issue, eliciting similar responses across type of effectiveness and partisanship. Americans similarly prefer legislators who are effective at legislating, securing funds, and working with their partisan rivals. I argue that this similarity stems from the fact that each type of effectiveness taps into broad-based ideals of legislative organization: productivity (legislative effectiveness), representation (distributive effectiveness), and pluralism (bipartisan effectiveness). Additionally, while respondents clearly preferred copartisan legislators in the conjoint experiment, they similarly rewarded and punished copartisans and out-partisans based on effectiveness levels. Combined, these findings suggest that the value of effectiveness is relatively universal in American politics.

Third, the public has little awareness of any type of legislator effectiveness. Across all three types of effectiveness, I find no relationship between actual effectiveness levels and constituent perceptions of senator effectiveness. In other words, constituents are generally unable to accurately determine whether their US senators are effective at lawmaking, securing district funding, or bipartisan coalition building. As such, I also find that baseline constituent support for US senators is unrelated to effectiveness performance. Without the provision of effectiveness information, voters are unable to enforce their preferences for more effective legislators.

This study sheds light on how the American public understands and values legislator effectiveness in its three most common forms, but additional research is needed to clarify the connection between legislator effectiveness and constituent support. Both experiments use summative measures of effectiveness, but future research might instead compare public reactions to instances of effectiveness. For instance, how does the public respond to credit claims for sponsoring a passed legislative initiative, securing a distributive project, and announcing a bipartisan deal? Additionally, future research might explore the limits of legislator effectiveness as a reelection tool. For instance, do the effects found above decrease in the heat of partisan elections or amongst affectively polarized voters? Finally, additional research might focus on interventions aimed at enhancing public awareness of legislator effectiveness. The public appears willing to hold legislators accountable for their levels of effectiveness in Congress but is unable to do so due to a lack of information. Therefore, the communication of effectiveness information represents a promising venue for both academic research and practical initiatives to strengthen democracy.

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Appendix A: Conjoint Experiment Results

Table A1: Average Marginal Component Effects (Figure 3 in the manuscript)

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Legislative effectiveness: Below average	-0.12***	0.01	[-0.14, -0.11]
Legislative effectiveness: Above average	0.10***	0.01	[0.08, 0.11]
Distributive Effectiveness: Below average	-0.13***	0.01	[-0.15, -0.11]
Distributive Effectiveness: Above average	0.07***	0.01	[0.05, 0.08]
Bipartisan effectiveness: Below average	-0.12***	0.01	[-0.13, -0.10]
Bipartisan effectiveness: Above average	0.07***	0.01	[0.06, 0.09]
Man	-0.01	0.01	[-0.02, 0.01]
Out-partisan	-0.24***	0.01	[-0.26, -0.23]
Profile observations	22,242		
Choice tasks	11,121		
Respondents	1,392		

Entries are OLS estimates of average marginal component effects (AMCEs). CR2 standard errors are clustered by respondent. Reference categories are Copartisan, Woman, and Average for each effectiveness attribute. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Table A2: Unadjusted marginal means by partisan match (Figure 4 in the manuscript)

Effectiveness level	Copartisan		Out-partisan	
	Mean	95% CI	Mean	95% CI
Lawmaking effectiveness				
Below Average	0.49	[0.48, 0.51]	0.28	[0.26, 0.29]
Average	0.63	[0.61, 0.64]	0.38	[0.37, 0.40]
Above Average	0.74	[0.73, 0.75]	0.47	[0.46, 0.49]
Distributive Effectiveness				
Below Average	0.51	[0.49, 0.52]	0.27	[0.26, 0.29]
Average	0.65	[0.63, 0.66]	0.39	[0.38, 0.41]
Above Average	0.71	[0.69, 0.72]	0.47	[0.45, 0.48]
Bipartisan effectiveness				
Below Average	0.53	[0.51, 0.54]	0.27	[0.25, 0.28]
Average	0.63	[0.62, 0.65]	0.39	[0.38, 0.41]
Above Average	0.70	[0.69, 0.72]	0.47	[0.45, 0.49]

DV: Candidate selection. Entries are unadjusted marginal means calculated using `cregg::mm()`. 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered by respondent.

Table A3: Effectiveness × Partisan Match Interaction Models

	Legislative effectiveness	Distributive Effectiveness	Bipartisan effectiveness
Out-partisan	-0.243***	-0.253***	-0.234***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Man	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Legislative: Below average	-0.137***	-0.124***	-0.125***
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Legislative: Above average	0.109***	0.098***	0.098***
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Distributive Effectiveness: Below average	-0.129***	-0.141***	-0.129***
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Distributive Effectiveness: Above average	0.067***	0.061***	0.067***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Bipartisan: Below average	-0.115***	-0.115***	-0.103***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.011)
Bipartisan: Above average	0.074***	0.073***	0.072***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Out-partisan × Legislative: Below average	0.026		
	(0.015)		
Out-partisan × Legislative: Above average	-0.022		
	(0.015)		
Out-partisan × Distributive Effectiveness: Below average		0.023	
		(0.015)	
Out-partisan × Distributive Effectiveness: Above average		0.012	
		(0.015)	
Out-partisan × Bipartisan: Below average			-0.025
			(0.015)
Out-partisan × Bipartisan: Above average			0.002
			(0.015)
Num.Obs.	22242	22242	22242
OLS linear probability models with CR2 standard errors clustered by respondent. Average effectiveness, Copartisan, and Woman are reference categories.			

Appendix B: Vignette Experiment Results

Table B1: Effectiveness perceptions by treatment condition and level of effectiveness (manuscript Figure 6)

Effectiveness type	Senator's actual effectiveness	Information condition	N	Percent above average	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Legislative effectiveness	Below average	Control	497	46.3%	41.9%	50.7%
Legislative effectiveness	Above average	Control	676	49.6%	45.8%	53.3%
Legislative effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	475	28.0%	24.0%	32.0%
Legislative effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	683	65.6%	62.0%	69.2%
Distributive effectiveness	Below average	Control	684	49.7%	46.0%	53.5%
Distributive effectiveness	Above average	Control	489	51.7%	47.3%	56.2%
Distributive effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	647	26.4%	23.0%	29.8%
Distributive effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	471	69.6%	65.5%	73.8%
Bipartisan effectiveness	Below average	Control	891	45.7%	42.4%	49.0%
Bipartisan effectiveness	Above average	Control	277	48.7%	42.8%	54.6%
Bipartisan effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	889	27.7%	24.7%	30.6%
Bipartisan effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	256	60.5%	54.5%	66.5%

Entries report the percentage of respondents who rated the senator as above average on the specified effectiveness type. Confidence intervals are 95% intervals.

Table B2: Thermometer ratings by treatment condition and level of effectiveness (manuscript Figure 7)

Mean Feeling Thermometer Ratings by Information Condition						
Effectiveness type	Senator effectiveness	Information condition	N	Mean thermometer rating	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Legislative effectiveness	Below average	Control	498	50.80	47.71	53.89
Legislative effectiveness	Above average	Control	677	52.08	49.40	54.77
Legislative effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	480	43.62	40.67	46.57
Legislative effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	685	55.60	52.98	58.21
Distributive effectiveness	Below average	Control	686	50.80	48.12	53.47
Distributive effectiveness	Above average	Control	489	52.58	49.47	55.69
Distributive effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	650	41.07	38.46	43.67
Distributive effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	472	57.56	54.45	60.67
Bipartisan effectiveness	Below average	Control	896	51.19	48.88	53.51
Bipartisan effectiveness	Above average	Control	279	52.65	48.46	56.84
Bipartisan effectiveness	Below average	Information treatment	892	44.18	41.94	46.42
Bipartisan effectiveness	Above average	Information treatment	256	55.14	50.93	59.34

Entries report mean feeling thermometer ratings on a 0–100 scale. Confidence intervals are 95% intervals.

Table B3: Mean contrasts (manuscript Figure 7)

Mean Feeling Thermometer Ratings by Information Condition				
Effectiveness type	Senator effectiveness	Control mean	Information treatment mean	Treatment-control gap
Bipartisan effectiveness	Below average	51.19	44.18	-7.01
Bipartisan effectiveness	Above average	52.65	55.14	2.49
Distributive effectiveness	Below average	50.80	41.07	-9.73
Distributive effectiveness	Above average	52.58	57.56	4.98
Legislative effectiveness	Below average	50.80	43.62	-7.18
Legislative effectiveness	Above average	52.08	55.60	3.51
Entries are mean feeling thermometer ratings. Treatment-control gap equals information-treatment mean minus control mean.				

Table B4: Regression estimates of information effects (manuscript Figure 8)

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	3.511+	-7.176**	4.983*	-9.731***	2.488	-7.015***
	(1.913)	(2.184)	(2.244)	(1.909)	(3.034)	(1.644)
Intercept	52.084***	50.799***	52.581***	50.797***	52.649***	51.194***
	(1.357)	(1.530)	(1.573)	(1.331)	(2.099)	(1.161)
Num.Obs.	1362	978	961	1336	535	1788
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

Figure B1: Effectiveness information average effect on thermometer ratings, with party match covariate

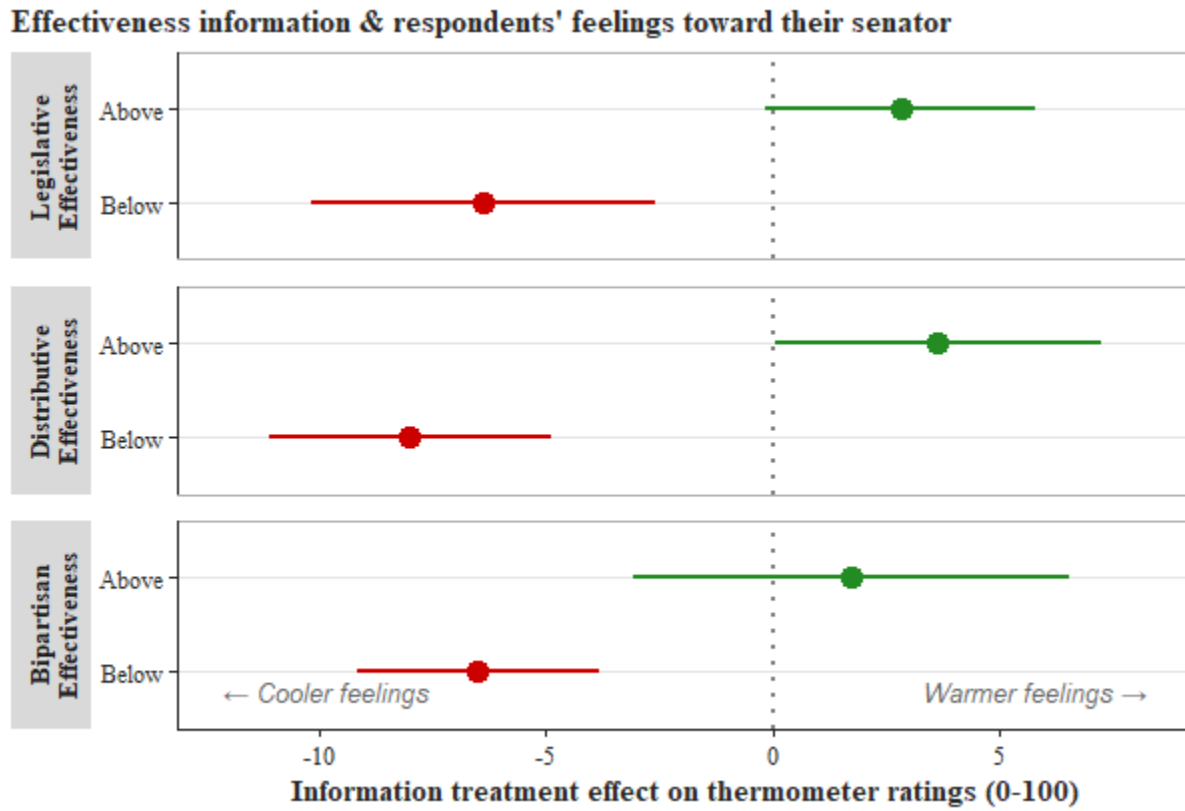


Table B5: Regression estimates of information effects, with party match covariate

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	2.835+	-6.379**	3.652*	-7.983***	1.730	-6.490***
	(1.520)	(1.937)	(1.838)	(1.582)	(2.455)	(1.353)
Partisan match	43.004***	31.725***	40.037***	39.246***	41.235***	39.612***
	(1.524)	(1.943)	(1.841)	(1.585)	(2.455)	(1.358)
Intercept	29.407***	33.280***	32.112***	28.943***	31.662***	29.532***
	(1.344)	(1.729)	(1.595)	(1.412)	(2.108)	(1.210)
Num.Obs.	1362	978	961	1336	535	1788

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure B2: Effectiveness information average effect on all DVs, without party match covariate

Effectiveness information treatment effects across outcomes

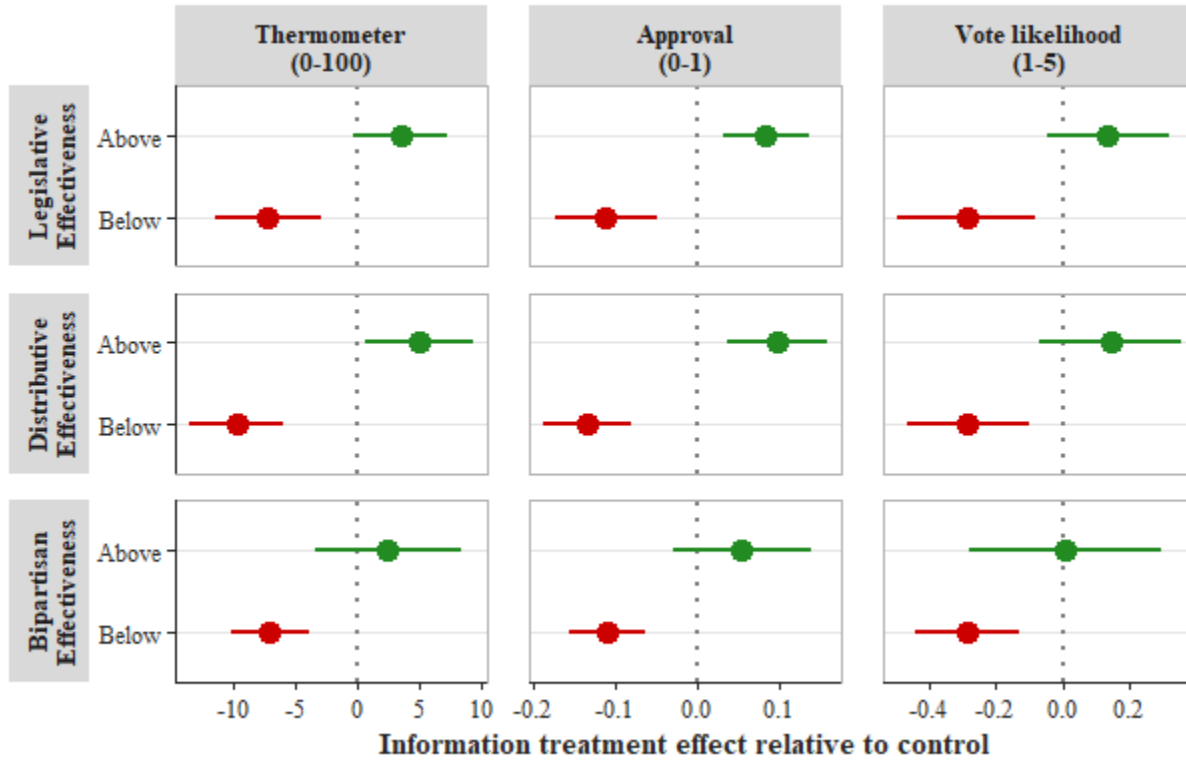


Table B6: Regression estimates of information effects on *senator approval* (0/1)

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	0.084** (0.026)	-0.110*** (0.032)	0.098** (0.031)	-0.133*** (0.027)	0.054 (0.043)	-0.110*** (0.024)
Intercept	0.576*** (0.019)	0.556*** (0.022)	0.595*** (0.022)	0.548*** (0.019)	0.559*** (0.030)	0.570*** (0.017)
Num.Obs.	1362	978	961	1336	535	1788
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

Table B7: Regression estimates of information effects on *vote likelihood* (1-5)

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	0.135	-0.286**	0.143	-0.282**	0.006	-0.285***
	(0.093)	(0.105)	(0.108)	(0.092)	(0.146)	(0.080)
Intercept	3.161***	3.088***	3.215***	3.070***	3.158***	3.122***
	(0.066)	(0.074)	(0.075)	(0.064)	(0.101)	(0.056)
Num.Obs.	1361	978	961	1335	535	1786

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure B3: Effectiveness information average effect on all DVs, with party match covariate

Effectiveness information treatment effects across outcomes

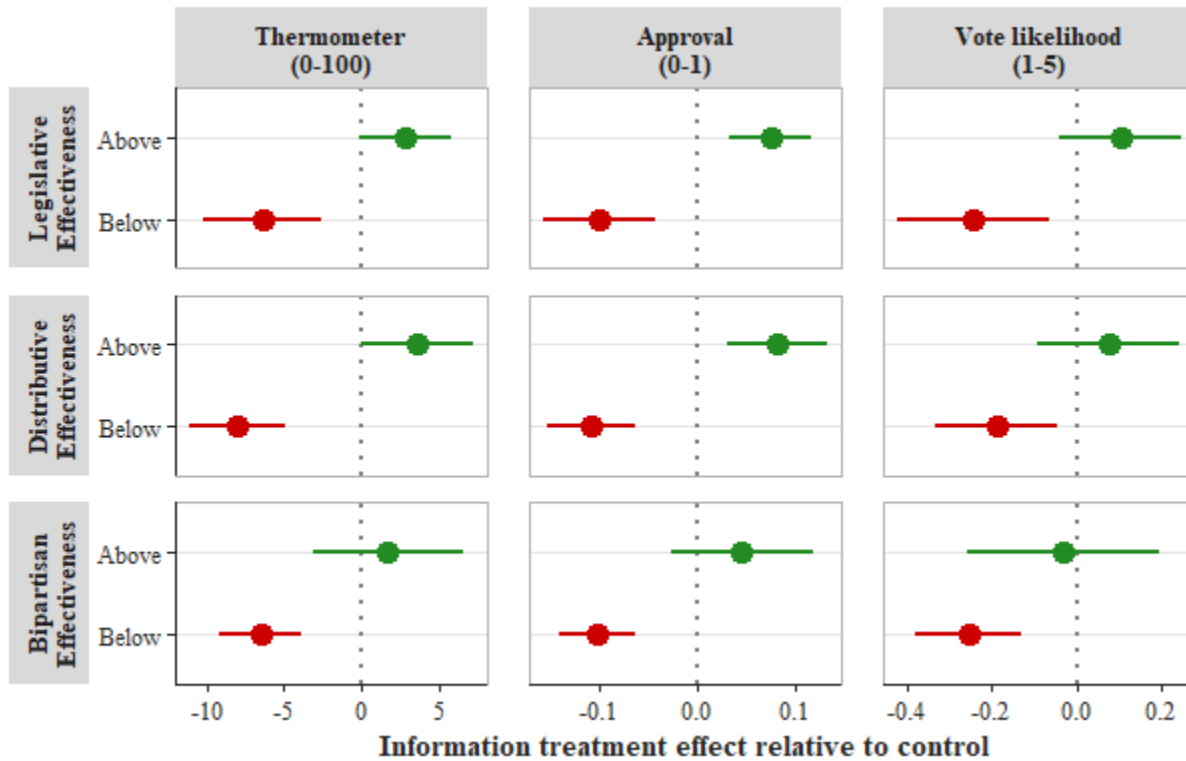


Table B8: Regression estimates of information effects on *senator approval* (0/1), with partisan match covariate

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	0.075***	-0.100***	0.081**	-0.109***	0.045	-0.102***
	(0.021)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.037)	(0.020)
Partisan match	0.569***	0.421***	0.502***	0.544***	0.493***	0.550***
	(0.021)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.037)	(0.020)
Intercept	0.276***	0.324***	0.338***	0.245***	0.308***	0.270***
	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.032)	(0.018)
Num.Obs.	1362	978	961	1336	535	1788
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

Table B9: Regression estimates of information effects on *vote likelihood* (1-5), with partisan match covariate

	Legislative Effectiveness: Above	Legislative Effectiveness: Below	Distributive Effectiveness: Above	Distributive Effectiveness: Below	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Above	Bipartisan Effectiveness: Below
Information treatment (vs control)	0.103	-0.244**	0.076	-0.189**	-0.032	-0.255***
	(0.073)	(0.091)	(0.085)	(0.073)	(0.114)	(0.063)
Partisan match	2.143***	1.688***	2.037***	2.055***	2.100***	2.049***
	(0.073)	(0.091)	(0.085)	(0.073)	(0.114)	(0.064)
Intercept	2.030***	2.156***	2.173***	1.924***	2.089***	2.000***
	(0.064)	(0.081)	(0.074)	(0.065)	(0.098)	(0.057)
Num.Obs.	1361	978	961	1335	535	1786
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

Table B10: Regression estimates used to construct linear combinations for negativity bias test

	Legislative	Distributive	Bipartisan
Information treatment	2.909+	3.667*	1.753
	(1.526)	(1.836)	(2.444)
Below-average senator	-2.238	-3.588*	-2.971
	(1.755)	(1.732)	(2.027)
Information treatment × below-average senator	-9.123***	-11.635***	-8.238**
	(2.477)	(2.426)	(2.795)
Partisan match	38.295***	39.578***	39.987***
	(1.224)	(1.212)	(1.197)
Intercept	31.890***	32.347***	32.297***
	(1.328)	(1.527)	(1.901)
Num.Obs.	2340	2297	2323
R2	0.311	0.341	0.337

Dependent variable is feeling thermometer rating (0–100). Entries are OLS estimates with HC2 robust standard errors in parentheses. Above-average senator is the reference category for senator effectiveness. The information-treatment coefficient is the effect of the information treatment among respondents assigned to above-average senators. The interaction term indicates how the information effect differs for below-average senators.

Table B11: Linear combination test for negativity bias in treatment effects (all DVs)

Effectiveness	DV	Contrast	Estimate	P-value
Legislative	Thermometer	Below penalty > above reward	−3.305	0.091
Legislative	Approval	Below penalty > above reward	−0.022	0.272
Legislative	Vote likelihood	Below penalty > above reward	−0.131	0.130
Distributive	Thermometer	Below penalty > above reward	−4.301	0.038
Distributive	Approval	Below penalty > above reward	−0.029	0.201
Distributive	Vote likelihood	Below penalty > above reward	−0.114	0.154
Bipartisan	Thermometer	Below penalty > above reward	−4.732	0.045
Bipartisan	Approval	Below penalty > above reward	−0.058	0.082
Bipartisan	Vote likelihood	Below penalty > above reward	−0.286	0.014

Entries are one-sided linear-combination tests. A negative estimate indicates that the below-average penalty is larger than the above-average reward.

Table B12: Two-sided Wald test for negativity bias in treatment effects (all DVs)

Effectiveness	DV	Estimate	Wald F	P-value
Legislative	Thermometer	−3.305	1.786	0.182
Legislative	Approval	−0.022	0.368	0.544
Legislative	Vote likelihood	−0.131	1.270	0.260
Distributive	Thermometer	−4.301	3.156	0.076
Distributive	Approval	−0.029	0.702	0.402
Distributive	Vote likelihood	−0.114	1.042	0.307
Bipartisan	Thermometer	−4.732	2.871	0.090
Bipartisan	Approval	−0.058	1.936	0.164
Bipartisan	Vote likelihood	−0.286	4.812	0.028

Entries are two-sided Wald/F tests using HC2 robust standard errors. A negative estimate indicates that the below-average penalty is larger than the above-average reward.

Respondents' perceptions of non-assigned types of effectiveness

I explore the diffusion of effectiveness perceptions by testing whether information that a senator is above (below) average on one type of effectiveness increases (decreases) constituent perceptions of alternative types of effectiveness. The information treatment has a detectable and meaningful effect on perceptions of alternative types of effectiveness, but only in the negative direction. Information that the senator is below average on one type of effectiveness leads to lower respondent evaluations of the alternative types of effectiveness. Conversely, information that the senator is above average does not have a statistically detectable effect on alternative effectiveness evaluations.

Table B13: Information effects on perceptions of non-assigned types of effectiveness

	Source below average	Source above average
Information treatment	-0.084*** (0.015)	0.047** (0.018)
Target dimension is actually above average	0.031* (0.013)	0.021 (0.015)
Partisan match	0.382*** (0.015)	0.425*** (0.018)
Source type: Distributive Effectiveness	-0.015 (0.014)	0.020 (0.015)
Source type: Bipartisan Effectiveness	0.011 (0.014)	0.009 (0.019)
Target type: Distributive Effectiveness	0.037*** (0.010)	0.034* (0.013)
Target type: Bipartisan Effectiveness	0.015 (0.012)	-0.030* (0.013)
Intercept	0.234*** (0.022)	0.262*** (0.021)
Num.Obs.	8172	5700
Std.Errors	by: Responseld	by: Responseld

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Models include source-effectiveness and target-effectiveness fixed effects. Reference categories are legislative source type and legislative target type. Standard errors are clustered by respondent.

Appendix C: Addressing the Oversampling of Men in the Vignette Experiment Survey

A vendor error in survey distribution led to men being dramatically overrepresented in the original sample. After the issue was identified, 1,450 women were recruited into the sample to fulfill the original order requirements. As a result, the sample used in the primary analysis above is larger than that in the preregistration plan, with an oversampling of men. The results displayed in the manuscript match the analysis declared in the preregistered plan. This Appendix section is designed to highlight the oversampling and mitigate the concern that it distorts the primary findings. Tables C1 and C2 display the sample gender composition and treatment assignment by gender. Tables C3, C4, and C5 use gender-based weighting to regenerate treatment effect estimates; primary findings reported in the manuscript do not meaningfully change. Finally, Tables C6, C7, and C8 display regression results with an interaction term for *respondent gender X effectiveness information* treatments, exploring heterogeneous treatment effects according to respondent gender. I find no evidence that any of the experimental treatments are conditioned by respondent gender.

Table C1: Gender composition across survey waves

Fielding Wave	Men	Women	Non-binary / not reported
Original fielding	3100 (98.9%)	31 (1.0%)	5 (0.2%)
Supplemental women fielding	18 (1.2%)	1450 (98.4%)	6 (0.4%)
Total	3118 (67.6%)	1481 (32.1%)	11 (0.2%)
Entries are N, with row percentages in parentheses.			

Table C2: Treatment-Arm Balance by Gender

Gender	Treatment arm	N	Percent
Male	Control	801	25.7%
Male	Legislative information	758	24.3%
Male	Distributive information	785	25.2%
Male	Bipartisan information	774	24.8%
Female	Control	372	25.1%
Female	Legislative information	402	27.1%
Female	Distributive information	335	22.6%
Female	Bipartisan information	372	25.1%
Non-binary / not reported	Control	2	18.2%
Non-binary / not reported	Legislative information	5	45.5%
Non-binary / not reported	Distributive information	2	18.2%
Non-binary / not reported	Bipartisan information	2	18.2%
Percentages are calculated within gender group.			

Table C3: Gender Poststratification Weighting

Gender	Unweighted N	Unweighted share	Weighted N	Weighted share	Mean weight
Male	3,118.00	67.8%	2,299.50	50.0%	0.74
Female	1,481.00	32.2%	2,299.50	50.0%	1.55

Table C4: Gender-Weighted Information Effects on Feeling Thermometer Ratings

Effectiveness	Senator effectiveness	Estimate	Std. Error	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	P-value	N
Legislative	Above average	3.574	2.057	−0.458	7.607	0.083	1,359
Legislative	Below average	−7.641	2.317	−12.183	−3.100	0.001	974
Distributive	Above average	4.181	2.413	−0.548	8.911	0.083	960
Distributive	Below average	−10.484	2.005	−14.414	−6.554	0.000	1,333
Bipartisan	Above average	2.047	3.200	−4.225	8.318	0.523	534
Bipartisan	Below average	−7.310	1.738	−10.717	−3.904	0.000	1,785

Entries are weighted OLS estimates. Weights give male and female respondents equal total influence. Standard errors are HC2 robust.

Table C5: Gender-Weighted Negativity Bias Tests for Feeling Thermometer Ratings

Effectiveness	Contrast	Estimate	P-value	N
Legislative	Below penalty > above reward	−3.636	0.083	2,333
Distributive	Below penalty > above reward	−5.015	0.024	2,293
Bipartisan	Below penalty > above reward	−4.753	0.056	2,319

Entries are one-sided linear-combination tests from interaction models. A negative estimate indicates that the below-average penalty is larger than the above-average reward. Models use 50/50 male/female poststratification weights with HC2 robust standard errors.

Table C6: Legislative effectiveness info treatment X respondent gender interaction

	Above average	Below average
Intercept	30.182***	33.639***
	(1.608)	(2.189)
Information treatment	2.230	-5.133*
	(1.841)	(2.475)
Female respondent	-2.753	-0.671
	(2.425)	(2.772)
Partisan match	43.032***	31.637***
	(1.553)	(1.961)
Information treatment × Female	2.246	-3.541
	(3.297)	(3.991)
Num.Obs.	1359	974
R2	0.371	0.223

Entries are unweighted OLS estimates with HC2 robust standard errors in parentheses. Male respondents are the reference category for Female respondent. The information-treatment coefficient is the treatment effect among male respondents. The interaction term tests whether the information treatment effect differs between female and male respondents.

Table C7: Distributive effectiveness info treatment X respondent gender interaction

	Above average	Below average
Intercept	31.518***	30.567***
	(1.965)	(1.735)
Information treatment	4.421*	-7.945***
	(2.196)	(1.965)
Female respondent	2.549	-3.991+
	(2.865)	(2.325)
Partisan match	39.914***	38.949***
	(1.865)	(1.596)
Information treatment × Female	-2.912	-1.118
	(4.006)	(3.292)
Num.Obs.	960	1333
R2	0.334	0.331

Entries are unweighted OLS estimates with HC2 robust standard errors in parentheses. Male respondents are the reference category for Female respondent. The information-treatment coefficient is the treatment effect among male respondents. The interaction term tests whether the information treatment effect differs between female and male respondents.

Table C8: Bipartisan effectiveness info treatment X respondent gender interaction

	Above average	Below average
Intercept	30.897***	30.708***
	(2.508)	(1.513)
Information treatment	1.249	-6.139***
	(2.962)	(1.670)
Female respondent	3.205	-3.488+
	(3.887)	(2.040)
Partisan match	40.800***	39.545***
	(2.495)	(1.368)
Information treatment × Female	1.400	-1.083
	(5.271)	(2.840)
Num.Obs.	534	1785
R2	0.349	0.332

Entries are unweighted OLS estimates with HC2 robust standard errors in parentheses. Male respondents are the reference category for Female respondent. The information-treatment coefficient is the treatment effect among male respondents. The interaction term tests whether the information treatment effect differs between female and male respondents.

Appendix D: Sample Demographics

Table D1: Conjoint experiment sample demographics

Respondent demographic characteristics, analytic sample (N = 1,396)	
Characteristic	N (%) / Mean (SD)[†]
Age	48.2 (18.0)
Gender	
Male	654 (46.8%)
Female	738 (52.9%)
Other / prefer not to say	4 (0.3%)
Race / ethnicity	
White	943 (67.6%)
Black	169 (12.1%)
Hispanic / Latino	211 (15.1%)
Asian	48 (3.4%)
Other	25 (1.8%)
Education	
High school or less	404 (28.9%)
Some college / associate / vocational	501 (35.9%)
Bachelor's degree	320 (22.9%)
Graduate degree	164 (11.7%)
Other	7 (0.5%)
Household income	
Less than \$50,000	709 (50.8%)
\$50,000-\$99,999	446 (31.9%)
\$100,000-\$149,999	142 (10.2%)
\$150,000 or more	99 (7.1%)
[†] Mean (SD); n (%)	

Table D2: Conjoint experiment sample political identification

Respondent political characteristics, analytic sample (N = 1,396)	
Characteristic	N (%) [†]
Party identification	
Democrat	476 (34.1%)
Independent	434 (31.1%)
Republican	486 (34.8%)
Political ideology	
Liberal	414 (29.7%)
Moderate	505 (36.2%)
Conservative	477 (34.2%)
[†] n (%)	

Table D3: Vignette experiment sample demographics

Respondent demographic characteristics, analytic sample (N = 4,610)	
Characteristic	N (%) / Mean (SD)[†]
Age	58.7 (16.0)
Gender	
Male	3,118 (67.6%)
Female	1,481 (32.1%)
Non-binary / not reported	11 (0.2%)
Race / ethnicity	
White	3,707 (80.4%)
Black	415 (9.0%)
Hispanic / Latino	209 (4.5%)
Asian / Pacific Islander	122 (2.6%)
Other / multiracial	157 (3.4%)
Education	
High school or less	1,133 (24.7%)
Some college / vocational / associate's	1,660 (36.1%)
Bachelor's degree	1,118 (24.3%)
Graduate / professional degree	682 (14.8%)
Household income	
Less than \$50,000	1,981 (43.0%)
\$50,000–\$89,999	1,403 (30.5%)
\$90,000–\$159,999	912 (19.8%)
\$160,000 or more	311 (6.8%)
[†] Mean (SD); n (%)	

Table D4: Vignette experiment sample political identification

Respondent political characteristics, analytic sample (N = 4,610)	
Characteristic	N (%) [†]
Party identification	
Democrat	1,463 (31.7%)
Independent	1,381 (30.0%)
Republican	1,766 (38.3%)
Independent lean	
Leans Democratic	728 (52.7%)
Leans Republican	653 (47.3%)
Political ideology	
Liberal	1,255 (27.2%)
Moderate	1,546 (33.5%)
Conservative	1,809 (39.2%)
Partisan relationship with assigned senator	
Partisan match	2,458 (53.3%)
No partisan match	2,152 (46.7%)
[†] n (%)	
Party identification collapses strong and not-very-strong identifiers. Independent lean is shown only among respondents who initially identify as independent.	