

How Partisan Conflict is Better *and* Worse than Legislative Compromise

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Public approval of Congress tends to decline as partisan conflict within the institution increases. At the same time, citizens favor partisanship by members of their own party and outputs that reflect partisan victories. We resolve the lingering puzzle from these two findings by emphasizing the role of legislative gridlock. When the parties eschew compromise, partisan conflict can result in a win for one’s own party, a win for the opposing party, *or* gridlock. We develop expectations about how these different outcomes will affect public evaluations of Congress – and how these relationships will differ across consensus and non-consensus issues – and test them using two survey experiments. We find that partisan conflict resulting in a victory for one’s own party boosts approval of Congress relative to compromise, but partisan conflict resulting in gridlock substantially damages approval. However, the degree to which evaluations drop following gridlock hinges on whether or not both parties agree on the end goals of policy. On consensus issues, citizens prefer legislative action by either party over gridlock. Our results provide a rationale for why institutional approval has declined as party conflict has risen: partisan conflict has resulted in gridlock.

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In recent years, increasing party polarization in Congress (McCarty et al. 2006; Theriault 2008) has coincided with some of the least productive legislative sessions in recent memory (Mann and Ornstein 2012; Mann and Ornstein 2006; Binder 2014). To what extent do these trends affect public evaluations of congressional performance? There is growing evidence that partisan conflict drives down aggregate approval of Congress (Ramirez 2009; Durr et al. 1997). At the individual level, people evaluate Congress more positively when told that the institution is bipartisan rather than partisan (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). These findings suggest a strong negative relationship between partisanship in Congress and institutional approval.

At the same time, however, experimental research suggests that individuals may reward party conflict more than legislative compromise *if* it advances their party's positions (Harbridge et al. 2014). As partisans, people prefer outcomes where their side is advantaged (Jones 2013), even if this entails partisanship in policymaking. Likewise, the evidence for whether members of Congress benefit from compromising rather than engaging in partisanship is mixed (Carson et al. 2010; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Wolack 2013; Paris 2014). Although illuminating in many regards, these individual level findings fail to fully explain why aggregate approval tracks with partisan conflict. Put differently, we lack an understanding of why individuals accept partisan behavior by members and partisanship in the policymaking process, yet disapprove of the institution during periods of partisan conflict.¹

¹ In the aggregate, partisanship in Congress can produce a winning side and a losing side. However, since the proportions of Democrats and Republicans are relatively similar in the public (see, e.g., Pew 2012a), partisanship producing a loss for one side cannot explain the aggregate relationship between partisan conflict and low approval since a roughly equal segment of the population would see the outcome as a win.

We address this puzzle by focusing on the implications of partisan conflict for legislative outcomes. When the parties eschew compromise, partisan conflict can result in a win for one party and a loss for the other, but it can also result in legislative inaction (i.e., gridlock).² We argue that the specter of gridlock is the missing piece of the puzzle and is crucial to understanding why partisan conflict hurts evaluations of Congress.

Specifically, we suggest that while citizens approve of how Congress is handling a particular policy when partisan conflict results in a win for their party, they should disapprove of such behavior when it prevents Congress from performing its basic responsibilities to address national problems (Adler and Wilkerson 2013; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Butler and Powell 2014). Evaluations of Congress may not only be lower when there is gridlock than when partisanship results in a win for one's own side, but on issues where both parties agree on the end goals of policy (i.e., consensus issues), gridlock may be even worse than a win for the opposing side. On more contentious issues, gridlock may still damage congressional evaluations, but may be viewed more similarly to a victory by the opposing party. We test these expectations with two survey experiments in which we manipulate the consequences of party conflict for legislative outcomes. Our approach varies not just the legislative behavior of the parties (i.e., compromise or partisanship), but also the consequence of partisanship (i.e., a partisan win, partisan loss, or gridlock).

Through this research, we make three novel contributions to the literature on

² Our use of the term “gridlock” captures popular understanding of the term: failure to pass legislation on a particular issue (for any reason related to partisan conflict). As such, the term includes instances where individuals with pivotal positions in the institution oppose a proposal over the status quo (Krehbiel 1998), but also instances where parties refuse to accept compromises in order to score political victories or emphasize differences (Gilmour 1995).

partisan conflict and public opinion toward Congress. First, we test when party conflict is attractive by comparing evaluations of Congressional performance across different legislative strategies – partisanship versus compromise – *and* outcomes of partisanship – win for one’s own party, win for the opposing party, and gridlock. These findings highlight when congressional parties have incentives to pursue bipartisan compromises. Second, we investigate whether the effect of gridlock on public opinion differs depending on whether gridlock is framed as resulting from ideological disagreement versus strategic partisan considerations (e.g., elections). The media regularly invoke both ideological and strategic partisan frames in their coverage of politics (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Lawrence 2000), and this distinction may be important for understanding how legislative gridlock affects public opinion. Third, we consider how the degree of cross-party consensus over policy goals affects public responses to gridlock. The opposition to gridlock, and the desire for “do something” politics (Egan 2014), may be much greater when consensus exists on policy goals than when parties disagree over both the means and the goals of policy. Combined, our approach sheds light on the complex relationship between partisanship in policymaking and evaluations of the institution, and points to how public evaluations of Congress rest on considerations that go beyond policy congruence.

We find that citizens approve of how Congress is handling policymaking when partisanship produces a win for one’s own party. However, we also uncover evidence that citizens disapprove when partisan conflict prevents Congress from acting on an important national issue. In fact, on a consensus issue, partisans are more approving of Congress’ handling of policymaking when a policy debate results in a win for the *other* party than

when the debate ends in stalemate. This surprising finding runs counter to the prevailing view of partisans in the public (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2012), but is consistent with arguments that many people want government to “do something” to address problems, regardless of whether policy action reflects the Democratic or Republican position (Egan 2014). Finally, while both forms of gridlock – ideological and partisan – result in lower evaluations of Congress, the evidence is suggestive that approval of how Congress is handling policymaking is lowest when gridlock is attributed to strategic partisan behavior. Citizens are significantly more accepting of legislative inaction when it is characterized as the result of genuine ideological disagreements between the two parties.

Background and Expectations

National polls regularly uncover widespread support for bipartisan cooperation in Congress. For instance, Pew reports that eight-in-ten Americans agree with the statement “I like political leaders who are willing to make compromises in order to get the job done” (Pew 2012b). Likewise, six-in-ten respondents prefer that the majority in Congress tries to pass legislation with bipartisan support as opposed to passing legislation without minority support (CBS News 2009). Recent increases in party polarization (e.g., McCarty et al. 2006; Theriault 2008), resulting in both partisan victories and legislative gridlock (Burden 2011; Binder 2003, 2014; Jones 2001), stand in stark contrast to this expectation. Driven in part by this contradiction, in recent years scholars have begun to reexamine legislators’ incentives for bipartisanship, questioning whether voters actually reward compromise over partisan conflict.

We agree that citizens prefer party conflict to compromise when it can be

reasonably expected to result in a policy victory for one's own party. However, we depart from existing work by emphasizing another possible result of party conflict: legislative gridlock. Citizens expect their representatives to act as problem solvers and to take action on pressing national problems (Adler and Wilkerson 2013; Butler and Powell 2014). Thus, while partisans clearly prefer to see their party's proposals enacted, they may recognize that party conflict raises the specter of gridlock, which is undesirable since it prevents Congress from acting on pressing national problems.

When presented with the outcome of party conflict, we expect citizens to act as existing literature suggests and reward (punish) Congress when it takes action that comports (conflicts) with their partisan objectives. We also expect citizens to reward Congress for finding bipartisan solutions (i.e., for "compromising"), but less so than when party conflict within the institution produces a "partisan win" for one's own party. Contrary to the existing wisdom, however, we expect citizens to reward Congress for taking action on a pressing problem, even if the result is a "partisan win" for the opposing party. We recognize that this expectation runs counter to the prevailing view of partisans as preferring policies endorsed by their own party (Gerber and Huber 2010; Lavine et al. 2012). However, when there is broad consensus about policy goals, citizens may reward action on important problems regardless of whether policy changes favor the Democratic or Republican positions. As suggested by Egan (2014), people may have double-peaked preferences – preferring policy change in either ideological direction over the status quo – on issues where there is consensus over goals, where the problem is viewed as serious, and where credible alternatives to the status quo are provided by both parties. As a result, we contend that on consensus issues, gridlock will be viewed more negatively than a win

by the opposing party, whereas on non-consensus issues, gridlock will be viewed more similarly to a win by the opposing party. In sum, we expect to observe the following evaluations of institutional performance across legislative outcomes:

H1: Approval of Congress should be higher when one's own party wins than when the opposing party wins or when there is legislative compromise.

H2a (Consensus Issue): On a consensus issue, approval of Congress should be higher when the opposing party wins than when there is legislative gridlock.

H2b (Non-Consensus Issue): On a non-consensus issue, approval of Congress should be no different when the opposing party wins and when there is legislative gridlock.

Types of Gridlock

Until very recently, the dominant explanation for increasing party polarization and legislative gridlock has been rooted in ideological differences between the two parties. However, party conflict need not be based on ideological disagreements (Noel 2013; Lee 2009). Strategic politicians may have incentives to engage in party conflict (Gilmour 1995), even on issues that do not directly impinge upon ideological principles, such as good government causes and procedural votes (see Lee 2009; Lebo et al. 2007).

A large body of research suggests that media coverage of politics regularly includes references to both ideological disagreements and parties' strategic goals (see Aalberg et al. 2011 for review). The same is true for the media's coverage of legislative gridlock. For instance, a *Washington Post* opinion story about the 2013 government shutdown frames it in terms of "expansive and explosive" ideological differences and "true believers" who failed to compromise (Samuelson 2013). In contrast, an opinion

story in *The Week* argues that the “government shutdown is being driven by confusion, arrogance, political opportunism... It is most definitely not being driven by principle” (Brandus 2013). As these examples illustrate, citizens are presented with numerous explanations for legislative outcomes, and these varying narratives may affect public opinion differently.³

As discussed, we expect citizens to be disapproving of congressional performance when debate ends in gridlock. However, we expect citizens’ responses to gridlock to vary depending on whether gridlock is attributed to ideological differences (“ideological gridlock”) or to party strategy (“partisan gridlock”). Some degree of party conflict is inevitable given the nature of American political institutions (e.g., multiple veto points). Moreover, responsible parties scholarship suggests that the public should reward parties for differentiating and presenting the public with clear choices (Ramirez 2009, 683). In reality, however, citizens generally respond negatively to party conflict (Ramirez 2009, 2013) and take a skeptical view of the parties’ motivations in the policy process (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Along these lines, we suspect that attributing gridlock to expressly partisan goals—such as denying the opposing party a legislative victory in the run-up to an election—will result in lower evaluations than when gridlock is attributed to genuine ideological differences. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3: Approval of Congress should be higher when gridlock is attributed to ideological differences than when it is attributed to partisan fighting.

³ We do not mean to suggest that these sources of gridlock are mutually exclusive – that is, it is certainly possible that ideological disagreements *and* strategic partisan considerations can jointly lead to inaction (see Lee 2009). This paper represents a first step toward understanding whether these competing narratives affect public opinion differently.

Individual-level Differences

In addition to expectations about the average effect of each policymaking approach and outcome, we also consider two individual-level variables that may condition citizens' reactions to party conflict: strength of party identification and political knowledge. First, party identification is an important social identity that influences a host of political preferences and behaviors (Campbell et al. 1960). Partisanship is an especially salient identity for strong partisans (Green et al. 2002; Greene 1999, 2004), and strongly identifying with one's party is associated with negative affect toward the opposition (Iyengar et al. 2012). Thus, in general, strong partisans should be particularly invested in seeing their party succeed – and the other party defeated – in the event of partisan conflict. Along these lines, strong partisans should value legislative victories by the opposing party less than weak partisans (i.e., should fail to reward “do something” politics). Additionally, strong partisans may be more approving than weak partisans of gridlock that is attributed to partisan fighting, which they see as a necessary part of the policymaking process (Iyengar et al. 2012).

Similarly, political knowledge may also shape citizens' reactions to compromise versus partisan conflict. People with high levels of political knowledge are likely to understand the parties' positions and may, therefore, perceive higher stakes to partisan conflict. To the extent that they perceive higher stakes, highly knowledgeable citizens may be more understanding – and in some cases desirous – of partisan conflict.

Additionally, in the event that a compromise is reached, these individuals may be better equipped to scrutinize resulting proposals, which necessarily include ideas from the opposing party (e.g., Taber and Lodge 2006; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010). For both of

these reasons, we expect citizens high in political knowledge to reward Congress less for reaching bipartisan compromises, and to be more understanding of partisan conflict.

Study Design

We tested our expectations with two survey experiments in which we manipulated aspects of the legislative process and the outcome of partisan conflict. To understand how reactions to party conflict, compromise, and gridlock vary across issues, the first study focused on energy policy and the second focused on gun ownership. Importantly, these two policies differ on the extent to which both parties agree over end goals. On energy policy, both parties largely agree on the goal of energy independence and lower costs for consumers (i.e., consensus issue), whereas on gun ownership, the two parties disagree over whether gun ownership should be expanded or contracted (i.e., non-consensus issue). These differences are seen in the frequency of double-peaked preferences on these issues (Egan 2014), and are confirmed by a pre-test of our issue descriptions.⁴ People are significantly more likely to perceive agreement between the two parties over the end goals on energy policy than on gun ownership.

Participants in both studies were recruited via the internet in 2014.⁵ Participants in

⁴ For both issues, we pre-tested the policy descriptions provided to survey participants, finding that people viewed both descriptions as ideologically balanced but viewed parties as agreeing on the goals of energy policy while disagreeing on the goals of gun ownership policy.

⁵ Survey participants were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online labor market increasingly used in social science research. Participants in Study 1 (energy) were paid a total of \$0.70 (as this study was part of a longer survey of public opinion) and participants in Study 2 (gun ownership) were paid \$0.50. Berinsky et al. (2012) report that MTurk samples are more representative of the national population than frequently used convenience samples (e.g., students). They also replicate several canonical psychological experiments using MTurk samples. Moreover, Mullinix et al.

study 1 (energy) were recruited between February and March, and participants in study 2 (guns) were recruited in the second week of November. In total, 487 participants in study 1 and 476 participants in study 2 completed the survey and passed manipulation checks.⁶ The demographics of our two sets of study participants are presented in Appendix A.

In both studies, participants began the survey by answering standard demographic and political questions, including a battery of questions that examined their understanding of the policymaking process.⁷ For the experimental portion of each study, after reading some background information about either energy policy or gun ownership policy (see Online Appendix A for full text), participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions, which varied the legislative approach and outcome of policymaking:

Compromise, Democratic Win, Republican Win, Gridlock (unattributed), Gridlock (Ideological), or Gridlock (Partisan) (Table 1 displays the full text of all treatments).⁸ We

(2014) replicate studies fielded by Knowledge Network and find that even with differences in demographics between the two, the results were largely similar (also see Paolacci et al. 2010).

⁶ In both studies we included two manipulation checks to make sure participants were paying attention and correctly understood the legislative outcome and, if there was gridlock, the reason for that outcome. In total, 72.2% of participants in study 1 and 71.7% in study 2 answered both manipulation checks correctly. Analyses using the full sample of participants (even if they got the manipulation checks incorrect) yield substantively similar results to those presented here, although the distinction between ideological and partisan gridlock is less robust.

⁷ We recognize that there are many ways to operationalize and measure political knowledge (e.g., Barabas et al. 2014). We chose to focus on participants' understanding of the policymaking process because this type of knowledge is most instrumental to the task at hand (Lupia 2012) – that is, to evaluating congressional performance in light of a given legislative strategy (i.e., cooperation versus conflict) and outcome (i.e., bill passage or gridlock).

⁸ We designed the compromise treatment to highlight the fact that although the parties have different positions, they were able to reach an agreement. Our description of their positions and the resulting compromise is purposefully vague, and could capture either a “classic compromise” where both sides made sacrifices, or a “consensual compromise” where the parties focused only on places of common ground (Gutmann and Thompson

recoded the second and third treatment conditions to indicate which party won a legislative victory: one's "own party" or the "other party."⁹ This re-coding procedure allows us to analyze all participants together (i.e., to pool Democrats and Republicans in the "own party win" and "other party win" conditions). Randomization checks confirm that conditions were balanced on relevant pre-treatment covariates (see Appendix B).¹⁰

[Table 1 about here]

After reading about the legislative outcome, participants were asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of how Congress is handling the issue of [energy/gun ownership]?" with a standard 7-point response scale ranging from "Strongly Approve" to "Strongly Disapprove." We rescaled responses to range between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating "Strongly Disapprove" and 1 indicating "Strongly Approve." This dependent variable captures policy area-specific evaluations of Congress but also has important downstream consequences for approval of Congress more broadly. In particular, approval of how Congress is handling each policy (energy or gun ownership) mediates the relationship between our treatments and overall confidence in Congress. We return to these results in the following section.

2012, 12). The remaining five conditions describe instances in which the two parties engage in some form of non-cooperation.

⁹ Following previous research, independents who indicated that they were closer to one of the two parties were treated as partisans (Keith et al. 1992). In order to include pure independents as well, participants who indicated they were not closer to either party (i.e., "pure independents") but received either the Republican win or Democratic win conditions were randomly assigned to one party or the other as their "own" party. Results comparing the "own party wins" and "other party wins" conditions are similar if pure independents are excluded from the analysis (see Online Appendix 2).

¹⁰ Conditions were balanced both for the full sample and for the subset of respondents who answered the manipulation checks correctly.

Results

Policy Outcomes and Congressional Approval

To assess how citizens respond to compromise, party conflict, and gridlock, our analysis proceeds in four steps. First, we consider evaluations in the four main conditions – compromise, own party win, other party win, and gridlock. Next, we consider whether the framing of gridlock as ideological or strategic partisanship alters evaluations. Third, we examine the mediational relationship between our treatments, policy-specific approval, and overall confidence in Congress. Finally, we consider how individual-level factors affect public preferences for compromise, partisan conflict, and legislative action, focusing on whether some groups of individuals drive the aggregate results. Within each, we consider differences between consensus and non-consensus issues.

Approval of Congress hinges on the outcome of policymaking. Consistent with our first hypothesis, the rank ordering of approval across the four possible policymaking approaches and outcomes on energy policy shows the greatest support for Congress when the outcome is “own party win,” followed by “compromise,” “other party wins,” and lastly, “gridlock.” These patterns are shown graphically by the mean approval in each condition of study 1 (Figure 1). Not surprisingly, a win by one’s own party is preferred over all other outcomes, and compromise is preferred over a win for the other party or policy gridlock.

The substantive effect of these differences is meaningful. Moving from a win for one’s own party to compromise reduces approval by 13 percentage points ($p < 0.001$).¹¹ When the opposing party wins, approval drops by 29 percentage points relative to one’s

¹¹ All reported p-values come from two-tailed tests.

own party winning ($p < 0.001$) and by 16 percentage points relative to compromise ($p < 0.001$). Perhaps more surprising, but consistent with our expectation that the public values policy action on issues where the parties agree on end goals (i.e., consensus issues), people prefer a win by the opposing party over gridlock. Compared to a win by the opposing party, approval of how Congress is handling energy policy drops by 13 percentage points following gridlock ($p < 0.001$). That is, approval is lower when there is legislative inaction than when the opposing party secures a policy victory.¹²

[Figure 1 about here]

The shift between a consensus issue in study 1 and a non-consensus issue in study 2 changes the results in expected ways. Whereas the general dislike of legislative inaction persists on gun ownership policy, the relative downside of gridlock to a win by the opposing party declines (see Figure 2). As in study 1, evaluations are highest when one's own party wins, followed by compromise, although this difference is not significant ($p = 0.62$).¹³ Likewise, evaluations are 19 percentage points higher when one's own party wins compared to when the opposing party wins ($p < 0.001$), 17 percentage points higher when there is compromise than when the opposing party wins ($p < 0.001$), and 17

¹² In order to consider the views of all participants and to conserve power, these analyses include pure independents and randomly assign these participants to either Republican or Democratic partisanship for the "own" and "other" party wins conditions. This procedure should bias the difference in evaluations in the own and other party conditions downward, but could bias the difference in evaluations in the other party wins and gridlock conditions upward. However, robustness checks that exclude all pure independents yield similar results, as do those that omit both pure independents and independent leaners. Even among partisans, a win for one's own party is significantly better than compromise, compromise is significantly better than a win for the opposing party, and gridlock is significantly worse than a win for the opposing party. See Online Appendix 2 for more information.

¹³ When pure independents are excluded, the magnitude of this difference increases (difference=5 percentage points, $p = 0.30$).

percentage points higher when there is compromise than when there is legislative inaction ($p < 0.001$). In contrast to study 1, however, evaluations are statistically indistinguishable when the opposing party wins and when there is legislative gridlock ($p = 0.92$). In both cases, average approval is 0.32, roughly equivalent to answering that you “slightly disapprove” of how Congress is handling the issue.¹⁴ Consistent with our expectation that policy action is valued and gridlock is abhorred when both parties agree on the end goals, but that inaction is more preferable when the parties disagree on end goals, study 1 yields higher evaluations when the opposing party wins than when there is gridlock, while study 2 does not.

[Figure 2 about here]

Turning to the different explanations for gridlock, we find support for our hypothesis in study 1 but not in study 2. As shown in Figure 1, on energy policy, people prefer gridlock that is attributed to ideological differences over gridlock that is attributed to partisan fighting (difference in means = 0.07, $p = 0.04$). That is, approval is 7 percentage points lower when gridlock is attributed to the parties refusing to grant the opposing side a legislative victory relative to when it is attributed to the two sides having conflicting principles. Additionally, people prefer explicitly ideological gridlock over the generic version that does not explain its cause (difference in means = 0.05, $p = 0.09$). Since approval in the generic form is statistically indistinguishable from the partisan form, these results suggest that when people hear about gridlock, they may be assuming that it reflects partisan fighting rather than just ideological differences.

¹⁴ When pure independents are excluded, this difference increases, suggesting that evaluations are *lower* when the other party wins (0.27) than when there is gridlock (0.34), although the difference remains insignificant ($p = 0.17$).

However, in study 2, there is no distinction between evaluations of how Congress is handling gun ownership policies when gridlock is framed as reflecting ideological differences versus strategic partisanship (difference in means=0.009, $p=0.81$). These results suggest that issue-based differences affect not only whether gridlock is viewed more poorly than a win for the opposing party, but also whether people respond to different framings of gridlock. On a non-consensus issue, people view the two forms equivalently, suggesting that either the commitment to ideological principles does not boost evaluations or efforts to score political points does not harm evaluations; both patterns are possible when people view the parties as having opposing goals, and where gridlock is no worse than a win for the other party. Although the data do not allow us to tease out these differences, it may be that people expect partisan fighting on non-consensus issues (where the parties are unlikely to agree even *sans* strategic partisanship), leading evaluations to be similar across frames of gridlock on gun ownership but different on energy.

Combined, these patterns suggest that while partisan conflict resulting in a win for one's own party boosts approval relative to compromise, conflict resulting in gridlock significantly damages approval. Moreover, gridlock that is framed as strategic rather than ideological has the most corrosive impact on approval, at least on some issues. People do not simply have preferences for congressional parties to engage in bipartisanship or partisanship; their preferences are heavily dependent on the outcome of partisan conflict and the type of issue at hand.¹⁵ Thus, party leaders should be wary of pursuing a partisan

¹⁵ In both studies, these results are driven by Democratic participants, as MTurk samples over-represent self-identified Democrats. For more details about MTurk participants, both in our study and in general, see Online Appendix 3.

agenda if the risk of gridlock is high. If confronted with institutional conditions that make gridlock likely, focusing attention on policy compromises may be more likely to garner public support.¹⁶

Policy-Specific Approval Mediates Overall Confidence in Congress

Not only do the strategies and outcomes of congressional politics affect approval of how Congress is handling each policy area, but through this effect, they affect overall confidence in Congress as well. That is, views of how Congress is handling each policy issue mediate the relationship between our treatments and confidence in Congress.¹⁷ We follow the statistical approach described by Imai et al. (2011) to disentangle this relationship. For each study, we compare the effects of each treatment to the compromise condition, and then also compare the effects of gridlock to the opposing party wins condition. In each case, we consider confidence in Congress as the dependent variable and approval of how Congress is handling the policy at hand as the mediator. The results provide strong evidence that policy-specific approval mediates the relationship between

¹⁶ Although in general we advocate against using questions that directly ask about preferences for compromise, as such questions may reflect social desirability bias and/or abstract preferences that are not connected to specific policy contexts, we provide a robustness check of this relationship by varying whether or not gridlock is made salient, and then asking about preferences for compromise. Using another MTurk sample, we provided participants with the same information about energy policy and the parties' positions as in study 1, but then randomized whether they were told that "debate continues on this issue in Congress" (control) or that "debate continues on this issue in Congress. Political observers agree that the risk of legislative inaction on this issue is high" (treatment). We then asked participants whether the Democrats should compromise with the Republicans on energy policy. Support for compromise is significantly higher in the treatment condition (0.69) than in the control condition (0.58) (difference in means=0.11, p=0.04).

¹⁷ As a second dependent variable, we asked participants how much confidence they had in the U.S. Congress. Response options ranged from "none" to "a great deal" on a five-point scale. As with other measures, responses were recoded from 0-1, with one indicating the highest level of confidence.

treatments and overall confidence in Congress. Moreover, only in the case of gridlock is there a significant direct effect on confidence in Congress in addition to the mediated effect.¹⁸

For instance, in study 1 (energy), partisan conflict resulting in a win for one's own party increases confidence in Congress by 3.7 percentage points ($p=0.21$) (over compromise), reflecting a significant mediated effect of 6.4 percentage points ($p<0.001$) and an insignificant direct effect of -2.6 percentage points ($p=0.25$). Similarly, a win for the opposing party has a significant negative effect on confidence in Congress (-9.1 percentage points, $p<0.001$), which also reflects a significant mediated effect (-10.2 percent pages, $p<0.001$) and an insignificant direct effect (1.1 percentage points, $p=0.63$). In contrast, partisan conflict resulting in legislative gridlock has both a significant mediated effect (-13.0 percentage points, $p<0.001$) and direct effect (-5.0 percentage points, $p=0.08$) on confidence in Congress. These patterns suggest first, that approval of how Congress is handling each issue is consequential for broader evaluations of Congress, and second, that gridlock is distinct from other consequences of partisan conflict in that it has both a direct and mediated effect on confidence in Congress.

Individual-Level Differences

We do not expect all individuals to respond similarly to partisan conflict or prioritize “do something” politics. We now consider how the individual-level variables discussed previously—strength of party identification and political knowledge—condition citizens' reactions to party conflict, and connect to the differences in results between studies 1 and 2. In our analysis of strength of partisanship, participants who

¹⁸ Complete results of the mediation analysis and accompanying sensitivity analyses are presented in Online Appendix 4.

indicated that they were closer to neither party (i.e., “pure independents”) are excluded. We estimated a series of OLS regression models using indicators for each treatment condition to predict issue-specific approval, and interacted these treatment indicators with indicators for each individual-level variable (see Appendix C). We also considered the difference in means within conditions for each group where applicable. Our focus is on how the two individual-level variables under study affect preferences for compromise, legislative action even from the opposing party (i.e., “do something” politics), and the distinction between partisan and ideological gridlock.¹⁹

Beginning with preferences for legislative compromise in study 1, we find that weak partisans and those low in policymaking knowledge reward Congress for compromising more so than strong partisans and the highly knowledgeable.²⁰ For instance, in study 1 (energy) weak partisans evaluate Congress 9 percentage points higher than strong partisans for compromising ($p=0.05$), and low knowledge individuals evaluate Congress 19 percentage points higher for compromising than high knowledge individuals ($p<0.001$). Interestingly, in study 2 (guns), neither strength of partisanship nor knowledge moderates reactions to legislative compromise, suggesting that on this non-consensus issue, everyone is equally impressed with compromise. For all respondents, however, both compromise and victories for one’s own party are viewed more favorably

¹⁹ Although our focus here is on how individual-level factors affect the key patterns observed above, other evidence suggests that partisans in our sample behave in a manner consistent with theoretical expectations. For instance, in study 1, strong partisans evaluate Congress more favorably after a win by one’s own party (relative to compromise) (difference=24 percentage points, $p<0.001$), while weak partisans do not (difference=8 percentage points, $p=0.14$).

²⁰ We dichotomize participants into strong and weak partisans (the latter includes both weak partisans and independent “leaners”). For policymaking knowledge, we classify participants who gave the median number of correct answers (or more) as high knowledge, and other participants as low knowledge.

than a win for the opposing party. When it comes to preferences for bipartisan compromise, strength of partisanship and knowledge appear critical on consensus issues such as energy policy, but less consequential on non-consensus issues such as gun ownership.

Turning to preferences for “do something” politics in study 1 – that is, a preference for legislative action by either party over gridlock – we uncover a key role for strength of partisanship. The aggregate-level preference for “do something” politics is driven almost entirely by weak partisans, who prefer to see policy change in the direction of the opposing party over gridlock (difference=18 percentage points, $p<0.001$). In contrast, strong partisans rate Congress equivalently under gridlock and a win by the opposing party (difference=2 percentage points, $p=0.68$), suggesting that they value policy action only if it comes from their own party. In study 2, by contrast, neither strong nor weak partisans exhibit a preference for “do something” politics. Interestingly, policymaking knowledge does not affect preferences for “do something” politics in study 1, as both high and low knowledge individuals strongly prefer a win by the opposing party over gridlock (high knowledge: difference=12 percentage points, $p=0.02$; low knowledge: difference=14 percentage points, $p=0.004$).

Which types of individuals differentiate between ideological and partisan gridlock and adjust their evaluations accordingly? Evidence from study 1 again suggests a potential role for strength of partisanship and less impact for policymaking knowledge. Among strong partisans, Congress is rated equivalently under ideological and partisan gridlock (difference=3 percentage points, $p=0.70$). In contrast, weak partisans are less tolerant of gridlock that is attributed to partisan fighting, as they rate Congress 7

percentage points lower under partisan as opposed to ideological gridlock ($p=0.13$). In contrast, both high and low knowledge individuals prefer gridlock that is attributed to ideological differences over gridlock attributed to partisan fighting (high knowledge: difference=8 percentage points, $p=0.03$; low knowledge: difference=8 percentage points, $p=0.10$). Evidence from study 2 suggests that citizens are less concerned with the distinction between ideological and partisan gridlock on non-consensus issues such as gun ownership. Neither strength of partisanship nor level of policymaking knowledge affects responses to the two frames of gridlock.

In sum, while strong partisans prioritize partisan politics over “do something” politics regardless of the issue, weak partisans exhibit a preference for “do something” politics, at least on consensus issues. Weak partisans also appear to drive the distinction on energy policy between ideological and partisan gridlock. Although low knowledge individuals express support for compromise, knowledge does not differentiate preferences for “do something” politics or alternative framings of gridlock. These results suggest that party leaders need to consider both the consequences of partisan conflict – a victory for one side or gridlock – *and* the characteristics of the voters they are courting.

Discussion

Past research on party conflict and public opinion has yielded contradictory results: the public consistently disapproves of congressional performance during periods of party conflict, yet often fails to reward legislators for engaging in bipartisan compromise. The present study addressed this puzzle by emphasizing the implications of party conflict for legislative outputs. The distinction between partisan victories and legislative gridlock is important to understanding this puzzle, as partisan conflict often

results in inaction (Binder 2003). However, previous research has focused on the influence of party conflict in general (e.g., Ramirez 2009), and not on whether the public's response depends on whether conflict prevents legislative action. Our research made three primary contributions to the literature on party conflict in Congress and public opinion.

First, we moved beyond past work by varying both legislative strategy (i.e., cooperation or conflict) *and* its effects on policy outcomes. While our participants acted in line with their partisan allegiances, favoring wins for their own party, we found convincing evidence that citizens respond favorably when Congress acts on a pressing problem—even if that action is contradictory to one's partisan goals. For instance, we found that on a consensus issue where the parties largely agree on the ultimate end goal, citizens evaluate Congress more favorably when partisan conflict results in a victory for the opposing party than when conflict results in inaction. In contrast to scholarly accounts emphasizing the predominance of partisanship, it appears that citizens are not only open to compromise but are even open to policy proposals from the other party (when the alternative is gridlock). This preference for “do something” politics is driven by weak partisans, as strong partisans value an opposing victory and legislative gridlock equivalently. However, when confronted with a non-consensus issue where the parties disagree over the end goal, gridlock and a victory for the opposing party are viewed much more similarly.

Second, we unpacked gridlock by testing the influence of alternate narratives—ideological differences versus party strategy—on public opinion. This distinction was motivated by the increasingly fragmented information environment, in which citizens are

often presented with competing explanations for party conflict and polarization. Consistent with our predictions, we found that on energy policy citizens are more accepting of gridlock when it is attributed to sincere ideological disagreements between the two parties rather than party strategy. This pattern was again driven by weak partisans, as strong partisans appear less concerned by partisan fighting. Although the evidence was weaker on gun ownership policy – where the non-consensus nature of the policy may lead people to expect some degree of partisan strategizing – the results suggest an important role for elites in framing the outcome of policy debates. Levendusky (2013, 36) makes a similar point in discussing the importance of media framing for citizens' understanding of election outcomes. In his discussion of partisan media, he argues that elites can shape important post-election attitudes, such as the perceived legitimacy of a new regime. In the context of the present study, this insight suggests that the public's reaction to prominent cases of legislative gridlock depends in part on which causal explanation for said gridlock prevails in the media.

Third, we emphasized that reactions to legislative strategies and outcomes are contingent on issue area. Public evaluations of Congress fall much more considerably when partisan conflict results in legislative gridlock on a consensus issue than on a non-consensus issue. On the former (e.g., energy policy), people prefer a win by the opposing party over legislative gridlock. On the latter (e.g., gun ownership policy), people evaluate to two outcomes similarly. Thus, the potential downsides to party conflict – when it results in gridlock rather than a victory for one's own party – are larger on some issues relative to others.

These scholarly contributions come with important lessons for practitioners of

legislative politics. Recent years have seen historically high levels of party conflict and historically low levels of public approval of Congress. Our work suggests an important corollary to the party conflict-approval link: the role of legislative outcomes. When crafting legislative strategies, electorally minded leaders need to consider the likely outcome of party conflict (i.e., partisan win versus gridlock), the type of issue at hand, *and* the characteristics of voters they wish to court. To the extent that members of the majority party are affected electorally by institutional approval (Jones 2010), majority party leaders have greater incentives to ensure the passage of legislation, including bipartisan compromises, when the risk of gridlock is significant. Ensuring legislative action—from either party—is all the more important on consensus issues. However, party leaders may be able to avoid compromise if they focus on a base strategy, courting strong partisans rather than weak partisans. Legislative strategies that are beneficial among general electorates are not necessarily those that play well among primary electorates. Thus, better understanding the relationships between party strategies, legislative outcomes, and public opinion is important not only for scholarly theories of parties and representation, but for party leaders as well.

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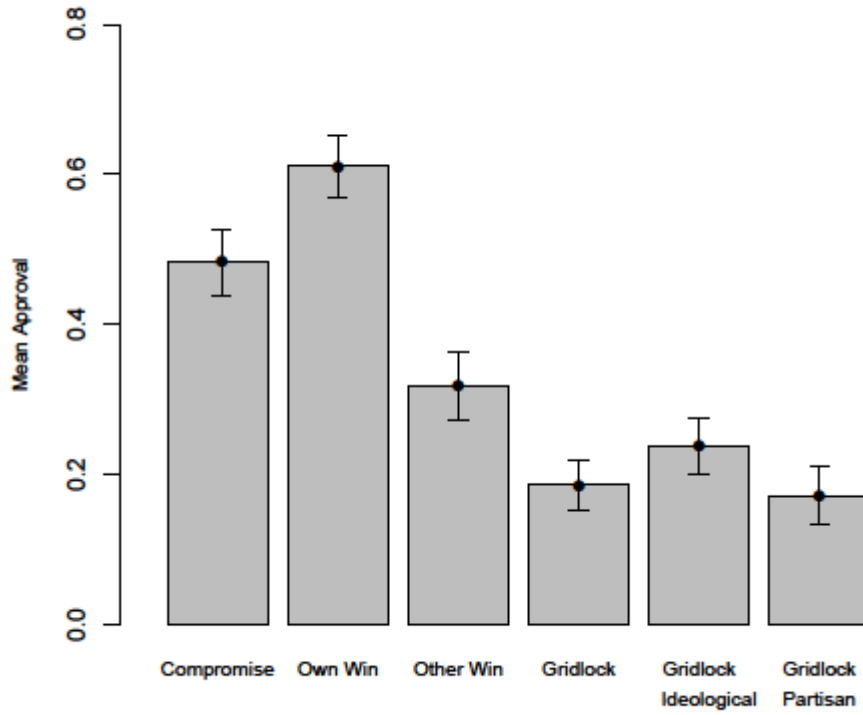
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Table 1: Treatment Conditions (same in Studies 1 and 2)

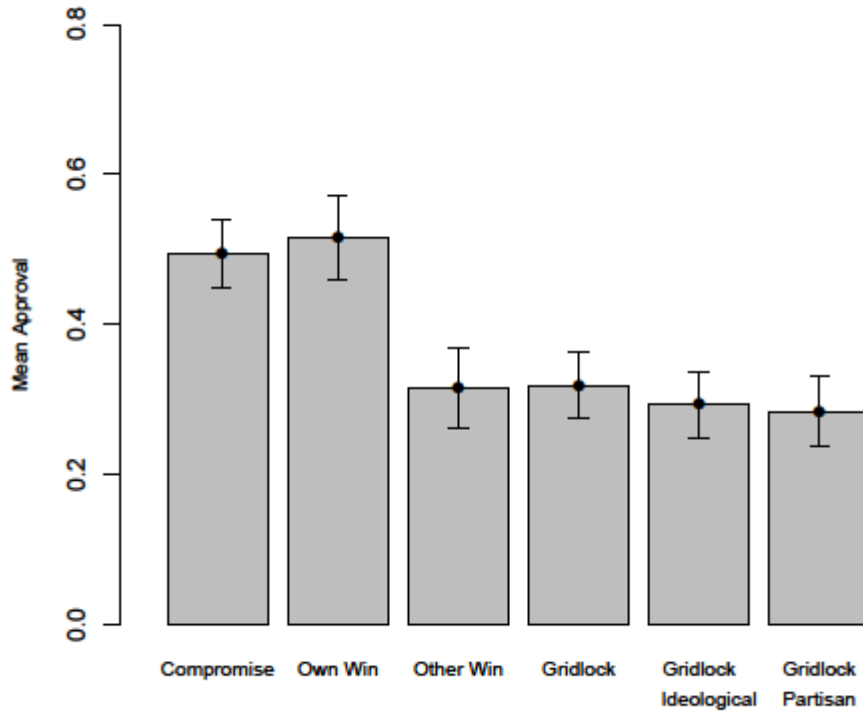
Condition	Wording
1. Compromise	Despite their differences, a compromise version of the bill was agreed on by both sides and passed.
2. Democrats Win	The final version of the bill that passed favored the Democratic priorities.
3. Republicans Win	The final version of the bill that passed favored the Republican priorities.
4. Gridlock (unattributed)	Despite discussion of various proposals, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.
5. Gridlock (ideological)	Despite discussion of various proposals, neither side was willing to sacrifice their principles on the issue. Without this give-and-take, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.
6. Gridlock (partisan)	Despite discussion of various proposals, neither side was willing to hand the other a victory on this issue in the run up to the next election. Without this give-and-take, the legislation died in Congress and no bill was passed.

Figure 1: Mean Approval of How Congress is Handling Energy Policy (Study 1)



Note: Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals.

Figure 2: Mean Approval of How Congress is Handling Gun Ownership Policy (Study 2)



Note: Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals.

Appendix A: Sample Demographics

Appendix Table A1: Sample Demographics

	Study 1 (Energy)	Study 2 (Gun Ownership)
Mean Age	34.5	35.6
Mean Ideology	3.38	3.29
% Democrat (including leaners)	63.2	49.6
% White	80.1	79.8
% Male	60.4	59.0
% College Degree+	59.2	55.0

Appendix B: Randomization Check (Participants Who Answered Manipulation Checks Correctly)

Table B1: Randomization Check of Treatments (Study 1)

	Compromise	Own Win	Other Win	Gridlock	Ideological Gridlock	Partisan Gridlock
<u>Gender</u>						
Female	38.1%	39.3%	34.2%	35.9%	46.4%	45.0%
Male	61.9	60.7	65.8	64.1	53.6	55.0
$\chi^2(5) = 3.9, p=0.57$						
<u>Race</u>						
Nonwhite	22.7	21.3	26.6	11.5	20.2	16.7
White	77.3	78.7	73.4	88.5	79.8	83.3
$\chi^2(5) = 6.6, p=0.26$						
<u>Education</u>						
HS or less	8.2	9.0	7.6	7.7	9.5	6.8
Some College	30.9	36.0	31.6	29.5	35.7	32.3
Bachelors	51.5	40.4	48.1	50.0	39.3	44.1
Graduate Degree	9.3	14.6	12.7	12.8	15.5	16.9
$\chi^2(15) = 6.0, p=0.98$						
<u>Party Identification</u>						
Democrat	53.9	46.1	39.2	49.3	50.1	40.4
Independent	29.2	33.7	36.7	35.2	36.7	42.1
Republican	16.8	20.2	24.1	15.5	12.7	17.5
$\chi^2(10) = 8.1, p= 0.62$						
<u>Age</u>						
18-29	50.5	48.3	40.5	43.6	45.2	41.7
30-44	25.8	32.6	44.3	32.1	36.9	30.0
45-59	20.6	14.6	8.9	16.7	11.9	26.7
60+	3.1	4.5	6.3	7.6	5.9	1.7
$\chi^2(15) = 19.1, p=0.21$						
N	97	89	79	78	84	60

Table B2: Randomization Check of Treatments (Study 2)

	Compromise	Own Win	Other Win	Gridlock	Ideological Gridlock	Partisan Gridlock
<u>Gender</u>						
Female	48.7%	47.4%	39.0%	37.8%	36.8%	36.1%
Male	51.3	52.6	61.0	62.2	63.2	63.9
$\chi^2(5) = 4.9, p=0.42$						
<u>Race</u>						
Nonwhite	23.7	13.0	24.4	8.5	22.9	31.1
White	76.3	87.0	75.6	91.5	88.1	68.9
$\chi^2(5) = 15.8, p=0.007$						
<u>Education</u>						
HS or less	13.0	6.4	11.0	8.5	16.8	6.6
Some College	32.5	35.9	31.7	43.9	33.7	26.2
Bachelors	46.8	46.2	43.9	35.4	38.9	45.9
Graduate Degree	7.8	11.5	12.4	12.2	11.6	21.3
$\chi^2(15) = 17.6, p=0.29$						
<u>Party Identification</u>						
Democrat	33.8	32.1	43.9	29.3	27.4	40.0
Independent	55.8	57.7	41.4	58.5	60.0	55.0
Republican	10.4	10.3	14.6	12.2	12.6	5.0
$\chi^2(10) = 11.6, p= 0.32$						
<u>Age</u>						
18-29	45.5	42.3	46.3	36.6	50.0	39.3
30-44	30.0	35.9	34.1	46.3	29.2	42.6
45-59	19.5	12.8	14.6	11.0	12.5	16.4
60+	5.2	9.0	4.9	6.1	8.3	1.7
$\chi^2(15) = 14.4, p=0.50$						
N	77	78	82	82	96	61

Appendix C: Regression Models

Table C1: OLS Regressions of Approval of How Congress is Handling Energy Policy (Study 1)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Own Party Win	0.128*** (0.033)	0.072 (0.044)	0.040 (0.046)
Other Party Win	-0.164*** (0.034)	-0.162*** (0.046)	-0.245*** (0.047)
Gridlock	-0.297** (0.034)	-0.345*** (0.045)	-0.388*** (0.049)
Gridlock (Ideological)	-0.245*** (0.033)	-0.277*** (0.045)	-0.288*** (0.051)
Gridlock (Partisan)	-0.311*** (0.037)	-0.340*** (0.050)	-0.375*** (0.049)
Strong Partisan		-0.096* (0.049)	
Strong Partisan x Own Party Win		0.167** (0.069)	
Strong Partisan x Other Party Win		-0.011 (0.076)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock		0.143* (0.077)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock (Ideological)		0.075 (0.077)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock (Partisan)		0.111 (0.084)	
High Knowledge			-0.186*** (0.045)
High Knowledge x Own Party Win			0.186*** (0.065)
High Knowledge x Other Party Win			0.174** (0.067)
High Knowledge x Gridlock			0.193*** (0.068)
High Knowledge x Gridlock (Ideological)			0.123* (0.068)
High Knowledge x Gridlock (Partisan)			0.131* (0.073)
Constant	0.483*** (0.023)	0.523*** (0.031)	0.570*** (0.031)
Observations	487	403	483
R ²	0.350	0.386	0.373

Note: Dependent variable is rescaled 0-1. Omitted reference group is compromise. Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Table C2: OLS Regression of Approval of How Congress is Handling Gun Ownership Policy (Study 2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Own Party Win	0.021 (0.042)	0.078 (0.059)	0.008 (0.060)
Other Party Win	-0.178*** (0.042)	-0.190*** (0.059)	-0.143** (0.061)
Gridlock	-0.174*** (0.042)	-0.151** (0.060)	-0.180*** (0.061)
Gridlock (Ideological)	-0.200*** (0.040)	-0.218*** (0.057)	-0.220*** (0.055)
Gridlock (Partisan)	-0.209*** (0.045)	-0.208*** (0.066)	-0.183*** (0.065)
Strong Partisan		-0.049 (0.073)	
Strong Partisan x Own Party Win		-0.104 (0.106)	
Strong Partisan x Other Party Win		-0.104 (0.098)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock		-0.058 (0.105)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock (Ideological)		0.007 (0.101)	
Strong Partisan x Gridlock (Partisan)		-0.076 (0.111)	
High Knowledge			-0.021 (0.060)
High Knowledge x Own Party Win			0.013 (0.085)
High Knowledge x Other Party Win			-0.066 (0.084)
High Knowledge x Gridlock			0.015 (0.084)
High Knowledge x Gridlock (Ideological)			0.042 (0.081)
High Knowledge x Gridlock (Partisan)			-0.058 (0.091)
Constant	0.494*** (0.030)	0.523*** (0.043)	0.504*** (0.043)
Observations	476	343	471
R ²	0.117	0.200	0.122

Note: Dependent variable is rescaled 0-1. Omitted reference group is compromise. Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Supporting Materials

Online Appendix 1: Full Text of Study Questions

Policymaking Knowledge Scale Questions

[Question order was randomized. Correct answer is in bold.]

1. When a member of Congress agrees to propose legislation on behalf of constituents, he/she becomes a(n)

- patron*
- sponsor***
- advocate*
- writer*
- don't know*

2. Based on the issues addressed in a bill, it will be referred to a particular ___ and placed on its calendar.

- committee***
- panel of experts*
- chamber of Congress*
- bureaucratic agency*
- don't know*

3. If a committee chairperson doesn't act upon a bill, then

- the bill is automatically reintroduced in the next congressional term*
- another member of the committee may call it up for consideration*
- the bill is referred to a different committee*
- the bill is effectively killed***
- don't know*

4. When the House or Senate passes a bill, it is referred to the other chamber, which may do all of the following EXCEPT ___.

- approve the bill*
- reject the bill*
- change the bill*
- refer the bill to the executive***
- don't know*

5. A bill is passed onto the president for his signature or veto when

- a congressional committee can't reach resolution*
- the bill is passed in identical forms in both chambers***

- the second chamber voting on the bill rejects it*
- a sufficient majority in both chambers can't be reached*
- don't know*

6. *A presidential veto may be overridden with*

- a 2/3 majority in both houses*
- a simple majority in both houses*
- a 2/3 majority in the Senate*
- a simple majority in the Senate*
- don't know*

Study 1

Background Information on Energy Policy (all participants)

Energy policies have important implications for many economic, environmental, and social issues. In a recent session of Congress, legislation was discussed that sought to address many aspects of energy policy by developing a more comprehensive national energy plan. While the proposals from both the Democratic and Republican parties aimed to create jobs in the energy sector, cut costs for consumers, and make America more energy independent, the two parties differed on some aspects of the legislation and in the priority they placed on the various components of a national energy policy.

Republicans favor continued support of existing energy sources, notably oil and gas. With respect to renewable energies, Republicans favor letting market-based forces determine the viability of new energy technology. In contrast, Democrats favor greater restrictions on oil and gas production, particularly where the environmental risks are uncertain, and greater government incentives to promote the development of renewable energy technologies.

[TREATMENT]

Study 2

Background Information on Gun Policy (all participants)

Gun ownership is an important policy area with wide-reaching consequences for our society. In a recent session of Congress, legislation was discussed that sought to address many aspects of gun ownership. Proposals from the Democratic and Republican parties differed in many respects.

Republicans favor preserving gun rights so that law-abiding citizens can protect themselves against criminals and participate in sporting activities requiring firearms (e.g., hunting). In contrast, Democrats favor greater gun regulation in order to keep weapons out of the hands of criminals and others who are incapable of using firearms responsibly.

[TREATMENT]

Dependent Variable Wording

Based on what you just read, how much confidence do you have in the U.S. Congress?

a great deal

a lot

a moderate amount

a little

none

Do you approve or disapprove of how Congress is handling [energy/gun ownership] policy?

Strongly Approve

Somewhat Approve

Slightly Approve

Neither Approve Nor Disapprove

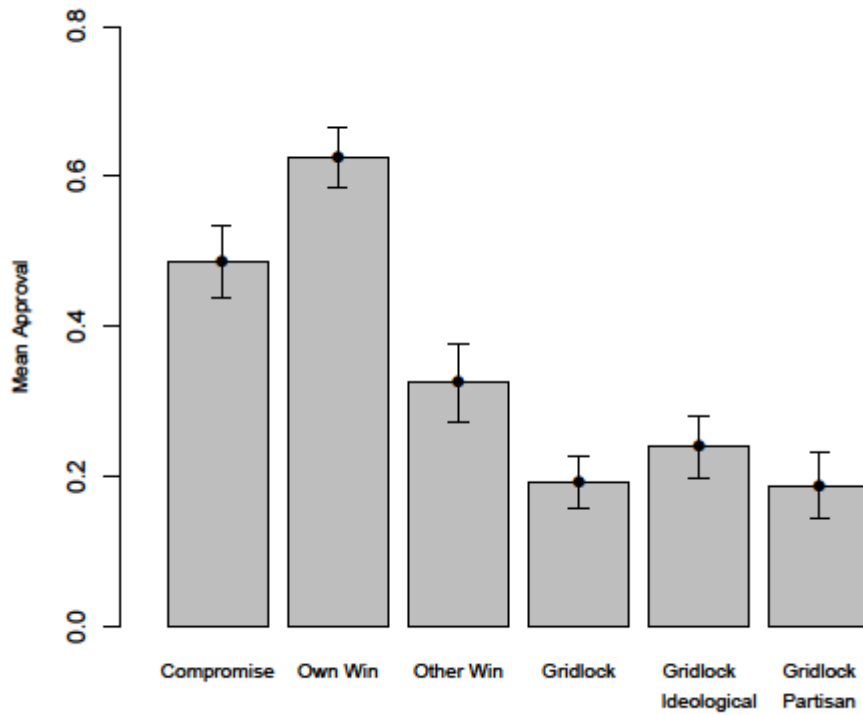
Slightly Disapprove

Somewhat Disapprove

Strongly Disapprove

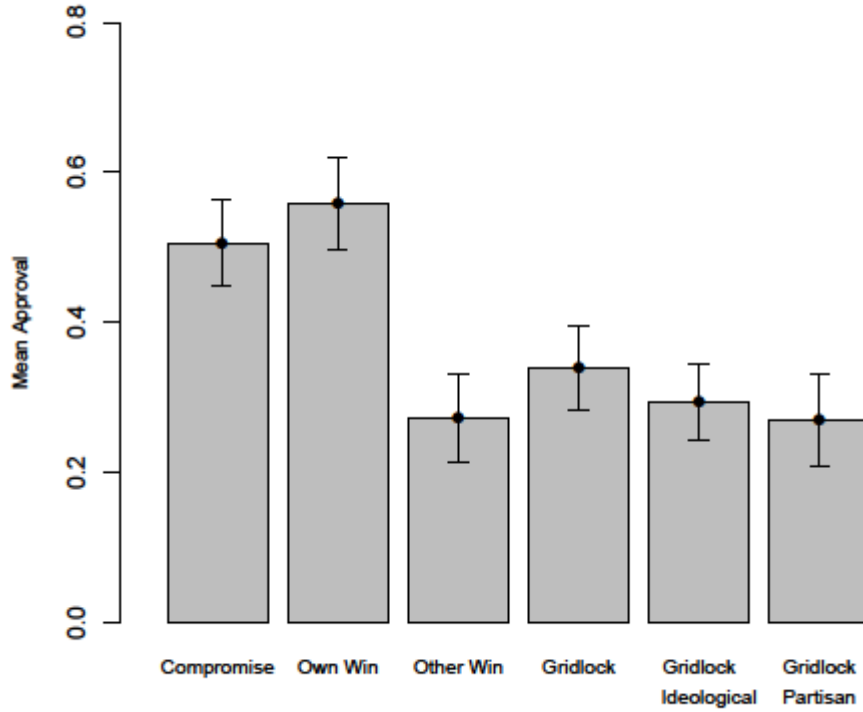
Online Appendix 2: Results Excluding Pure Independents

Figure O1: Mean Approval of How Congress is Handling Energy Policy (Study 1)



Note: Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals.

Figure O2: Mean Approval of How Congress is Handling Gun Ownership Policy (Study 2)



Note: Brackets contain 90% confidence intervals.

Online Appendix 3: Partisan Differences of MTurk Participants

Compared to national samples (American National Election Study, Knowledge Networks, etc.), Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants tend to over-represent the young, students and those with college degrees, liberals, and self-identified Democrats; and to under-represent minorities, and those who own their own home (Mullinix et al. 2014). However, MTurk participants tend to produce as high quality data as other internet samples like Knowledge Networks (Mullinix et al. 2014). Clifford and Jerit (2014) find that several common indicators of data quality—including correct responses to manipulation and attention checks, and the reliability of multi-item scales—compare favorably across laboratory and MTurk samples. Important for the present study, past research has found that framing effects operate similarly across nationally representative and MTurk samples, especially when important moderators are taken into account (Berinsky et al. 2012; Leeper and Mullinix 2014). In general, most differences on political issues among MTurk participants can be explained by these demographics and partisanship, though some find that self-identified Republicans on MTurk are more socially liberal than otherwise expected.

In our own samples, Democrats outnumber Republicans by at least two to one. As a result, these participants, who generally look like traditional Democratic partisans, drive the main effects in our studies. Although significance levels decrease given the lower power, the key findings within and between the two studies are evident even among just the Democratic participants. Among Republican participants, patterns in study 1 are consistent with “do something” politics, but there is no evidence of differences in responses to ideological and partisan gridlock. In study 2, patterns among Republican

participants are similar to Democrats participants for the other party wins versus gridlock comparison (e.g., no evidence of a preference for “do something” politics), and again yield no differences between ideological and partisan gridlock.

Table O1: Difference in Means among Democratic Participants (Study 1, Energy)

	Own Win	Other Win	Gridlock	Gridlock Ideological	Gridlock Partisan
Compromise	(0.48, 0.67) p<0.001	(0.48, 0.23) p<0.001	(0.48, 0.17) p<0.001	(0.48, 0.26) p<0.001	(0.48, 0.17) p<0.001
Own Win		(0.67, 0.23) p<0.001			
Other Win			(0.23, 0.17) p=0.14		
Gridlock				(0.17, 0.26) p=0.011	
Gridlock Ideological					(0.26, 0.17) p=0.034
Gridlock Partisan					

Cells contain: (mean in row, mean in column), with p-value on difference below.

Study O2: Difference in Means among Democratic Participants (Study 2, Guns)

	Own Win	Other Win	Gridlock	Gridlock Ideological	Gridlock Partisan
Compromise	(0.53, 0.55) p=0.75	(0.53, 0.24) p<0.001	(0.53, 0.28) p<0.001	(0.53, 0.30) p<0.001	(0.53, 0.21) p<0.001
Own Win		(0.55, 0.24) p<0.001			
Other Win			(0.24, 0.28) p=0.45		
Gridlock				(0.28, 0.30) p=0.73	
Gridlock Ideological					(0.30, 0.21) p=0.12
Gridlock Partisan					

Cells contain: (mean in row, mean in column), with p-value on difference below.

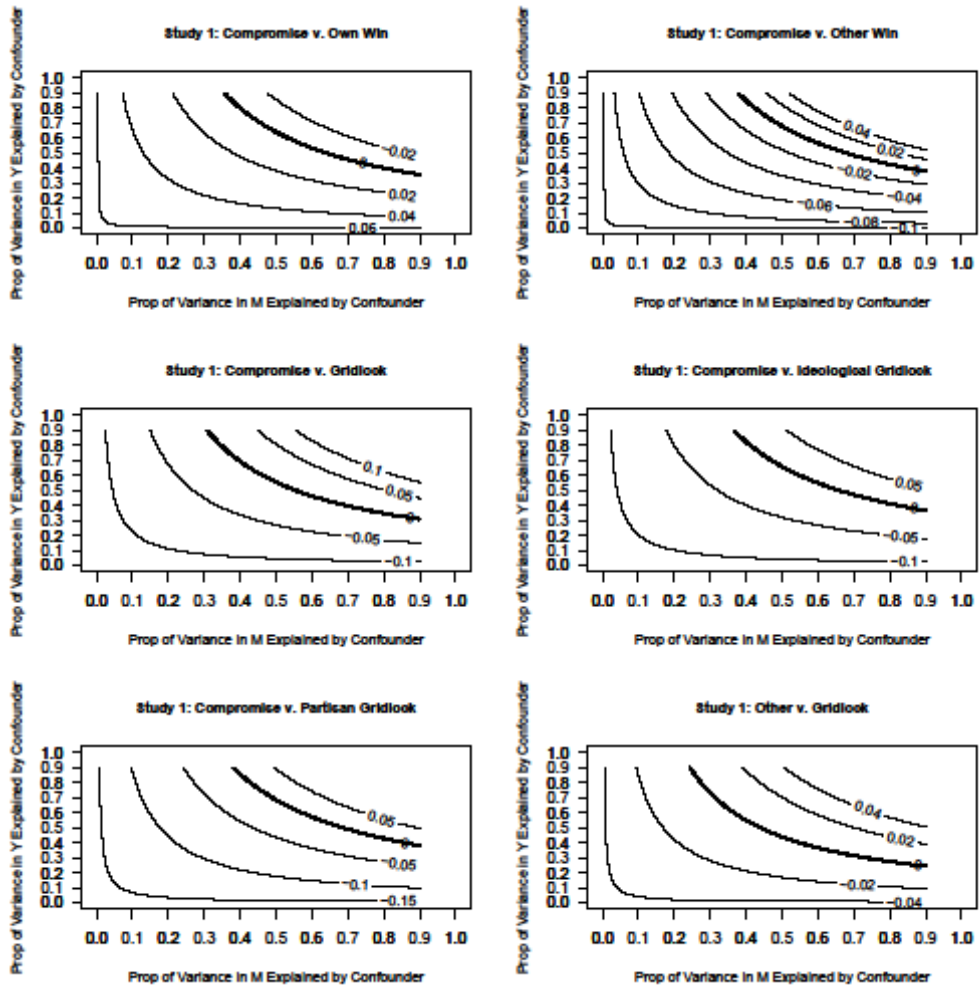
Online Appendix 4: Causal Mediation Analysis

Table O3: Mediation Analysis for Study 1 (Energy)

Control	Treatment	ACME	ADE	Total Effect
Compromise	Own Win	0.06 (p=0.00)	-0.03 (p=0.25)	0.04 (p=0.21)
Compromise	Other Win	-0.10 (p=0.00)	0.01 (p=0.63)	-0.09 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Gridlock	-0.13 (p=0.00)	-0.05 (p=0.08)	-0.18 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Ideological Gridlock	-0.12 (p=0.00)	-0.02 (p=0.38)	-0.15 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Partisan Gridlock	-0.17 (p=0.00)	-0.002 (p=0.92)	-0.17 (p=0.00)
Other Win	Gridlock	-0.10 (p=0.00)	-0.05 (p=0.04)	-0.10 (p=0.00)

Note: The mediation analyses leverage the approach outlined by Imai et al. (2011). In each case, the outcome of interest is confidence in Congress and the mediator is approval of how Congress is handling energy. The average causal mediation effect (ACME) refers to the effect of the treatment through the mediator, and the average direct effect (ADE) refers to the effect of the treatment on the outcome through other mechanisms.

Figure O3: Sensitivity Analysis for Study 1 (Energy)



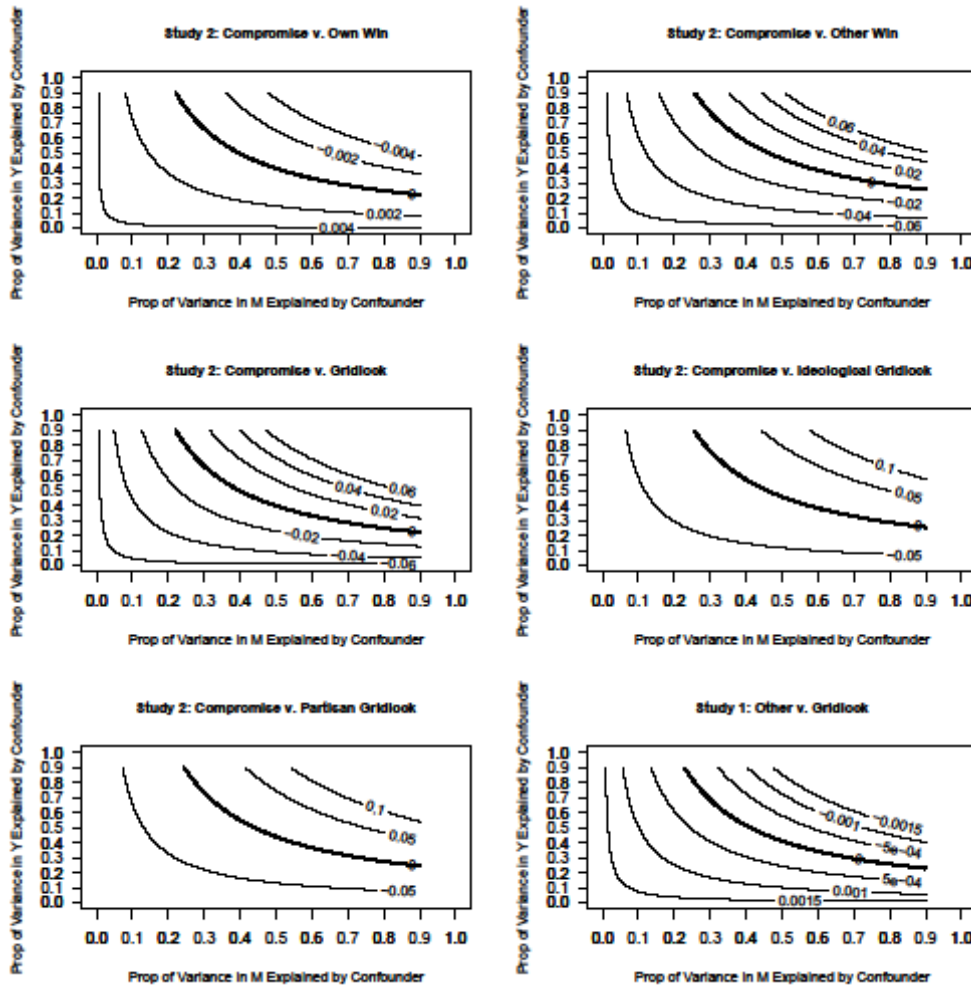
Note: The figures report sensitivity analyses from the mediation analyses showing how much variance an omitted variable needs to explain in both the outcome and mediator variables to overturn the results. The contours of each plot represent the values of the average causal mediation effect (ACME) for different combinations of the mediation R-squared and outcome R-squared values. The bold-faced line indicates the combinations of variance explained by an omitted variable (in the outcome and mediator variable) that would lead to a change in the sign of the mediated effect.

Table O4: Mediation Analysis for Study 2 (Guns)

Control	Treatment	ACME	ADE	Total Effect
Compromise	Own Win	0.004 (p=0.84)	-0.04 (p=0.26)	-0.03 (p=0.41)
Compromise	Other Win	-0.07 (p=0.00)	-0.02 (p=0.55)	-0.09 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Gridlock	-0.07 (p=0.00)	-0.05 (p=0.08)	-0.12 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Ideological Gridlock	-0.09 (p=0.00)	-0.05 (p=0.1)	-0.14 (p=0.00)
Compromise	Partisan Gridlock	-0.10 (p=0.00)	-0.07 (p=0.03)	-0.17 (p=0.00)
Other Win	Gridlock	0.002 (p=0.88)	-0.03 (p=0.19)	-0.03 (p=0.31)

Note: The mediation analyses leverage the approach outlined by Imai et al. (2011). In each case, the outcome of interest is confidence in Congress and the mediator is approval of how Congress is handling energy. The average causal mediation effect (ACME) refers to the effect of the treatment through the mediator, and the average direct effect (ADE) refers to the effect of the treatment on the outcome through other mechanisms.

Figure O4: Sensitivity Analysis for Study 2 (Guns)



Note: The figures report sensitivity analyses from the mediation analyses showing how much variance an omitted variable needs to explain in both the outcome and mediator variables to overturn the results. The contours of each plot represent the values of the average causal mediation effect (ACME) for different combinations of the mediation R-squared and outcome R-squared values. The bold-faced line indicates the combinations of variance explained by an omitted variable (in the outcome and mediator variable) that would lead to a change in the sign of the mediated effect.