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Bernard Grofman; Robert Griffin; Gregory Berry

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BERNARD GROFMAN
ROBERT GRIFFIN
University of California, Irvine
GREGORY BERRY, Esq.
University of Michigan

House Members Who Become Senators: Learning from a 'Natural Experiment' in Representation

Using AFL-CIO COPE roll-call voting scores, we show that the voting behavior of a House member who moves to the Senate is virtually indistinguishable from the voting behavior of both the mean House member and the incumbent senator from the new senator's state and party, and that the representative's voting behavior exhibits little systematic change after moving from the House. Moreover, what change there is cannot generally be interpreted as a move in the direction of the state's median voter. However, the directionality of our results is consistent with the Glazer and Robbins (1985a) finding that when their constituencies change, Democrats are likely to be unresponsive to a change in constituency policy preferences unless it involves a shift to the left, while Republicans are likely to be unresponsive to a change in constituency policy preference unless it involves a shift to the right.

To better understand the nature of representation in the U.S. Congress, we use several types of natural experiments as do Elling (1982), Thomas (1985), Wright and Berkman (1986), Bernstein (1988), Glazer and Robbins (1985a, 1985b), Poole and Daniels (1985), and Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer (1990, 1991).¹ Also using this approach are various studies of retiring members of Congress that look at changes in members' voting behavior immediately prior to their retirement (what economists refer to as the last period problem, e.g., Lott and Reed 1989; and Vanbeek 1991; and Zupan 1990), or prior to their seeking election to higher office (Hibbing 1986). We compare the voting records of House members who have won Senate seats with the voting records of members of the House delegation they leave behind; the voting record of the incumbent Senate member from the new senator's state; and the member's voting pattern after joining the Senate. Such direct comparisons help us to better understand the relationship between constituency, party, and ideology.

A substantial number of senators—presently about a third—have served previously in the House. In examining the voting behavior of both House members who moved on to the Senate and members who did not, we look for evidence that the representatives who won Senate office are ideologically distinct from their colleagues. Because of the evidence on policy divergence between U.S. senators from the same states who are of opposite parties, and on the importance of party as a determinant of voting behavior in the House in districts that change party control (e.g., Bullock and Brady 1983; Fiorina 1974; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; Poole and Rosenthal 1984; Shapiro et al. 1990), we focus primarily on intraparty comparisons.

From a Downsian perspective, however, we still might expect that House members who are far from the state's median are less likely to be elected. This is because the simple Downsian model views the electorate as arrayed on a left-right continuum. In this model, political victory belongs to the one nearest the political center. Thus, extremely liberal Democratic candidates or extremely conservative Republican candidates, well suited to homogeneous congressional districts, should not be well suited to face the less ideologically skewed statewide electorate. Therefore we hypothesize that House members elected to the Senate will be closer to the overall median voter in the state than other members of their party delegation.

In looking at new senators with prior House service, we also examine whether or not their voting behavior can be distinguished from that of the party incumbent senator from their state. Previous work has shown a remarkable continuity in the policy positions of representatives from a given constituency once we control for party (see, e.g., Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; Poole and Daniels 1985). It seems plausible that a new senator would behave much like the party incumbent from his or her own state. Because the incumbent senator has already demonstrated the ability to be elected by the state, a House member whose voting record mirrors that of the successful senator can reasonably expect to be selected as a party candidate for senator, and to be elected to office.

Except for states with single at-large representatives, because House districts divide states into geographically contiguous territories, an individual district is almost invariably at least somewhat more homogeneous in their demographic and SES characteristics than is the state as a whole, especially given the constraints of redistricting (Poole and Daniels 1985; Schwab 1988). For example, a state's urban population will be concentrated in urban districts, and rural populations will be concentrated in rural districts. Moreover, districts with

black and Hispanic majorities have been drawn in recent decades, especially in the South and Southwest (Grofman 1996 forthcoming; Handley and Grofman 1994), which increases the homogeneity of House districts.

Thus, in moving from the House to the U.S. Senate, the new senator will most likely be moving to a more heterogeneous constituency. Because House districts tend to be more homogeneous than Senate constituencies, in states with multiple districts, political competition within districts should occur in a narrower band of voter attitudes than political competition on the statewide level. Moreover, theories of representation often posit that representatives drawn from large-scale units will be less particularistic than those from smaller constituencies.

Even more importantly, it is very unlikely that the median voter in the new senator's constituency will be located at the same point in the ideological spectrum as the median constituent in the House district from which the senator came. In some districts the distribution of voter preference will be skewed to the left, with a 'hin tail trailing off to the right; the median voter there, and hence the chosen representative, should be quite liberal. In others the distribution will be skewed to the right; the median voter there will demand a conservative representative. Voter distribution in a few districts may be similar to voter distribution in the state, but even in this case, the range of voter preferences in the district should be somewhat more narrow. Thus, liberal House members will tend to serve districts with a median voter to the left of the statewide median voter and, conversely, conservative House members will tend to serve districts with a median voter to the right of the statewide median voter.²

Using Anthony Downs' (1957) model of the democratic process, if representatives and senators adapt to the views of their electorates, in multiseat states we should expect that the voting behavior of House members who are elected to the Senate will change. Moreover, a Downsian approach leads us to expect that, given the political context, in order to increase their election or reelection potential, Democratic members of the House will tend to move to the right upon entering the Senate, while Republican members of the House will tend to move to the left.

In looking at House members who were elected to the Senate both at the end of their House service and at the beginning of their Senate service, we seek to determine whether changes in their electoral bases affect their voting behavior. We are especially interested in comparing the Downs-inspired hypothesis of a systematic shift toward the

center once an individual has moved to the Senate with a competing hypothesis, inspired by the work of Glazer and Robbins (1985b). Drawing on findings on the changes in the voting behavior of House members whose districts have changed as a result of redistricting, Glazer and Robbins (1985a) posit that legislators are blind in one eye, i.e., that, when their constituencies change, Democrats are likely to be unresponsive to a change in constituency policy preferences unless it involves a shift to the left, while Republicans are likely to be unresponsive to a change in constituency policy preferences unless it involves a shift to the right.

In testing these rival hypotheses we replicate and extend earlier work by Poole and Daniels (1985) who, in looking at 38 House members who moved on to the Senate in the 1960s and 1970s, found a substantial amount of stability in interest group scores (generated by a metric unfolding procedure) before and after the shift.

Data

We compiled data on the voting records in both the House and the Senate of the 54 former members of the U.S. House of Representatives who served in the Senate at any time during the 97th through 102d Congresses.³ The majority moved straight from the House to the Senate. A small number were out of Congress for a period before they were elected to the Senate. The complete list appears in Table 1.

The 54 senators represent 34 states, from every region of the country. There are 27 Democrats and 27 Republicans. Predictably, the House is a better training ground for future senators in the smaller states.⁴ The 10 states with the lowest populations in the 1990 census sent 16 representatives to the Senate. In contrast, the 10 biggest states sent only seven. None came from California or New York. Six last served in the House as representatives for states with single congressional districts. The overwhelming majority, however, represented a larger, presumably more heterogeneous constituency when they moved to the Senate.

We measure ideology of representatives and senators with a well-established interest group rating: COPE scores, produced by the AFL-CIO.⁵ These scores measure primarily the domestic policy issues that underlie the theoretical left-right spectrum in which we place competing candidates.⁶ The impact of constituency characteristics on the behavior of members of Congress is likely to be best seen in terms of the sets of issues that are politically salient and easily visible.⁷ The

higher the COPE score, the more liberal the representative or senator is on the social, economic, and labor issues that are important to the AFL-CIO and to organized labor.

Data Analysis

Are House Members Elected to the Senate Ideologically Distinct from the Members They Leave Behind?

The simple Downsian model predicts that legislators will be responsive to the median voter in their constituency and would suggest that as House members move to the Senate they will shift in the direction of the median voter statewide. However, not only is the simple Downsian model at odds with the empirical evidence (Bullock and Brady 1983; Fiorina 1974; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; Poole and Rosenthal 1984), it also has the theoretical problem of failing to take into account such complications as party primaries and the role of party activists (Aranson and Ordeshook 1972; Coleman 1971, 1972; Grofman 1993). The more complex institution-rich model argues that legislators will be most responsive to the median voter in their party constituency (Shapiro et al. 1990; see also Austen-Smith 1986; Wright 1989). Even under this model there should be some differences between the policy preferences of the median party voter within the districts controlled by a given party and the policy preferences of that party's median voter statewide, with the policy preferences of the latter less extreme than those of the former. The left-wing party is most likely to win seats in districts where the median voter is on the left. Thus, both models suggest that House members chosen for the Senate will be at least somewhat less extreme than their party's typical House member.

Table 2 pools the data to compare the representatives from each state who moved to the Senate with the rest of the party's delegation.⁸ The data presented in Table 2 allows us to reject the claim that Democratic representatives who moved to the Senate were more conservative than their state's party delegation. If anything they were marginally more liberal. While the Republicans who went on to the Senate were marginally more liberal than the members they left behind, the differences were minor and not statistically significant. When we look at the 17 Democrats, 12 (71%) were more liberal than the House delegations they left behind, and only three (18%) were more conservative. In contrast, when we look at the 20 Republicans, 11 (55%) were more

TABLE 1
Senators with Prior House Service,
97th–102d Congresses

State	Senator	Party	House Service	Senate Service
AL	Shelby	D	1979–86	1987–present
AZ	McCain	R	1983–86	1987–present
AR	Pryor	D	1965–72	1979–present
CO	Armstrong	R	1973–78	1979–90
CO	Wirth	D	1975–86	1987–92
CO	Brown, H.	R	1981–90	1991–present
CT	Weicker	R	1969–70	1971–88
CT	Dodd	D	1975–80	1981–present
DE	Roth	R	1967–70	1971–present
FL	Mack	R	1983–88	1989–present
GA	Fowler	D	1977–86	1987–present
HI	Inouye	D	1959–62	1963–present
HI	Matsunaga	D	1963–76	1977–89
HI	Akaka	D	1977–90	1990–present
ID	McClure	R	1967–72	1973–1990
ID	Symms	R	1973–80	1981–92
ID	Craig	R	1981–90	1991–present
IL	Simon	D	1975–84	1985–present
IN	Quayle	R	1977–80	1981–88
IN	Coats	R	1981–88	1989–present
IA	Grassley	R	1975–80	1981–present
IA	Harkin	D	1975–84	1985–present
KS	Dole	R	1963–68	1969–present
LA	Breaux	D	1971–86	1987–present
ME	Cohen	R	1973–78	1979–present
MD	Mathias	R	1961–68	1969–86
MD	Sarbanes	D	1971–76	1977–present
MD	Mikulski	D	1979–86	1987–present
MA	Tsongas	D	1975–78	1979–84
MI	Riegle	D	1967–76	1977–present
MS	Cochran	R	1973–78	1979–present
MS	Lott	R	1973–88	1989–present
MT	Melcher	D	1969–76	1977–88
MT	Baucus	D	1975–78	1979–present
NV	Reid	D	1983–86	1987–present
NH	Smith, R.	R	1985–90	1991–present
NJ	Williams	D	1954–56	1959–82
ND	Burdick	D	1958–59	1960–92
ND	Andrews	R	1963–80	1981–86
PA	Heinz	R	1971–76	1977–91
SD	Pressler	R	1975–78	1979–present
SD	Daschle	D	1979–86	1987–present

TABLE 1
(continued)

State	Senator	Party	House Service	Senate Service
SD	Abdnor	R	1973–80	1981–86
TN	Gore	D	1977–84	1985–92
TX	Bentsen	D	1947–54	1971–present
TX	Gramm	R	1979–84	1985–present
VT	Stafford	R	1961–70	1971–88
VT	Jeffords	R	1975–88	1989–present
VA	Trible	R	1977–82	1983–88
WA	Jackson	D	1941–52	1953–83
WA	Adams	D	1965–77	1987–92
WV	Randolph	D	1933–47	1959–84
WV	Byrd	D	1953–58	1959–present
WI	Kasten	R	1975–78	1981–92

Note: Senator Gramm shifted parties (from Democrat to Republican) in 1983. For the years analyzed in this article, COPE treated him as a Republican.

liberal than the House delegations they left behind, but nine (45%) were actually more conservative.

We also looked at the distribution of voting scores on a state-by-state basis for the 25 cases where at least two other representatives were from the same party as the prospective senator. Here we plotted the distributions and calculated descriptive statistics for a control group for each state: the House members who did not move on to the Senate. We found that prospective senators tended to fall right in the middle of their states' control group.

For Democrats, in 11 of 14 cases the future senators' scores over their last term in the House were within one standard deviation of their control groups' means. In two cases the prospective senators were somewhat more liberal than the control groups, and in one case the individual was somewhat more conservative. But none fell more than two standard deviations outside the means of the control groups. For Republicans the pattern was similar, although a bit more cloudy. In six of 11 cases, the future senators' scores were within one standard deviation of their control groups' means. Three individuals were somewhat more conservative than the control groups; one was somewhat more liberal. One future senator, John McCain of Arizona, scored more than two standard deviations higher than the mean of his colleagues. However, this was due to his colleagues' consistency (hence, a very low standard deviation), rather than a shift to the left by McCain in preparation for a Senate campaign.⁹

TABLE 2
Mean COPE Scores for House Members, 97th–102d Congresses

Party	Members Who Moved to the Senate	Members Who Did Not Move to the Senate	Difference	t-value
<i>Democrats</i>	N = 17	N = 79		
2d Last Year	82.4	77.7	4.7	0.9
Last Year	77.9	74.9	3.0	0.6
Average	80.1	76.3	3.8	0.9
<i>Republicans</i>	N = 20	N = 57		
2d Last Year	24.3	17.8	6.5	1.0
Last Year	24.0	22.7	1.3	0.3
Average	24.1	20.2	3.9	0.7

Note: No t-values are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Are House Members Elected to the Senate Ideologically Similar to Their Parties' Incumbent Senators?

Table 3 pools data to compare the COPE scores for senators who have just arrived from the House to same-party incumbents from their states, for states where such an incumbent exists. We test the hypothesis that House members elected to the Senate vote similarly to the incumbents of their party. For neither party is there evidence that the new arrivals vote any differently from the incumbents.¹⁰ Of the 13 Democrats cited in Table 3, five (38%) are to the left of the Democratic incumbent, and seven (54%) are to the right. Similarly, for the 13 Republicans, seven (54%) are to the left of the Republican incumbent, and six (46%) are to the right.

Looking at the data on individual senators, we find that Democrats moving from the House to the Senate receive virtually the same voting scores as the Democratic incumbent senators in each case. Among Republicans, only Roth of Delaware, Abdnor of South Dakota, and Dole of Kansas entered the Senate with much more conservative voting records than their states' incumbent senators. The other Republicans voted virtually identically to their same-state colleagues.¹¹

Do House Members Who Move to the Senate Change Their Voting Patterns after Joining the Upper Chamber?

The Downsian expectation is that when legislators move from small and relatively homogeneous districts to serve larger and more

TABLE 3
 Mean COPE Scores for New Senators with Prior House Service
 and Same-Party, Same-State Incumbent Senators
 (first two years of Senate service)

Party	N	New Senator	Incumbent Senator	Difference	t-value
<i>Democrats</i>					
1st Year	13	87.3	86.2	1.1	0.3
2d Year	13	78.8	80.2	-1.5	-0.3
Average	13	83.0	83.2	-0.2	-0.0
<i>Republicans</i>					
1st Year	13	18.1	21.4	-3.3	-0.5
2d Year	13	24.8	31.8	-6.9	-0.7
Average	13	21.5	26.6	-5.1	-0.7

Note: No t-values are significant at the .05 level.

heterogeneous statewide constituencies they should adapt by shifting toward the median voter in the new constituency. For example, a Democratic member of the House who aims to satisfy constituents in an urban area might not be effective when competing for votes in a state with a large number of rural and suburban voters. Similarly, in a statewide race, a Republican House member with a consistently anti-urban voting record might please voters in a conservative, suburban district, but might lose urban votes.

Table 4 shows the pattern of individuals' COPE scores for both years of their final terms in the House, and for each of their first two years in the Senate. For neither party is there support for the hypothesis of policy moderation. Rather, if anything, individuals appear to move toward the extremes when they enter the Senate—opposite to the direction their new constituencies should demand. However, the effects are small and not statistically significant.¹² If as Hibbing (1986) suggests, House members were to moderate their stances during their last year in office in anticipation of a run for the Senate, we might see them shift back toward an extreme after winning the election. We compared representatives' voting scores in the year immediately preceding the Senate election to the prior year. No statistically significant differences were found.¹³ However, although the differences are not statistically significant, Table 4 shows that both Democrats and Republicans shifted, on balance, toward their extremes, i.e., Republicans to the right, Democrats to the left. Moreover, when we look at the 23 Democrats listed in

by policy preferences of their own, we might expect little or no change in a legislator's voting habits even after a change (or anticipated change) in the characteristics of the legislator's constituency. Moreover, if legislators' concerns do influence their vote choices, we can account for the findings of Glazer and Robbins (1985a), and for our own related but not statistically significant results that only when a constituency shifts to the left do Democratic House members change their voting patterns, and only when the shift is to the right do we find much movement among Republican House members.

A second possible explanation is simply that the expected effects are quite small and thus easy to miss. In this context, Bernstein (1991, 270) makes the important point that "[t]here are many constraints on strategic shifting, suggesting that the magnitude of the shifts will be quite small. . . . Dramatic shifts in any direction are constrained because they can open a campaign to charges of inconsistency. Dramatic shifts toward the opposition while already on their turf are especially constrained because they tend to create disaffection among a party's traditional supporters."

Hibbing (1986) suggests a third explanation namely that representatives of districts that are experiencing dramatic shifts in constituency characteristics (primarily representatives from large states) are most likely to change their voting patterns. Such specific results are apt to be missed by our aggregated analyses.

Our findings suggest a fourth explanation: House members who are elected to the Senate are similar to other members of their House delegation, and their behavior while in the Senate is virtually indistinguishable from the behavior of their party's incumbent senator. Logically, both of these findings can be true only if the typical member of a party's House delegation has a voting record very similar to that of the U.S. senators from his or her party. If, in a given state, the voting behavior of the senators from one party is roughly the same as the voting behavior of the median House member of the same party, and if the House members are not ideologically distinct from one another, it is not surprising that House members who move to the Senate continue to vote in ways that closely mirror the voting behavior of their party's incumbent senator.

Even if we accept one of these explanations of our largely no-difference results, we are still left with an important unexplained puzzle: In a given party, why should a senator, who represents a statewide and generally heterogeneous electorate, vote like the typical House member, who most likely represents a more homogeneous and ideologically skewed constituency?

One possible answer is suggested by the work of Shapiro et al. (1990) who, in a study of U.S. senators, show that legislators vote largely in concordance with the views of the median party voter in their constituency but also partly in response to the independent voters in the constituency. Thus, the location of the overall median voter becomes less critical than the location of the party median voter. For example, while the median Democratic voter in a Democratically controlled congressional district tends to be to the left of the overall median voter statewide, that same voter may not be far from the median Democratic voter statewide.¹⁴ If this is true, then the House member who becomes a senator will vote a lot like the median House member in his or her state's party delegation.

Alternatively, we might hypothesize that the median party voter statewide really is less extreme than the median party voter in the median party-controlled House district but that party activists play a more important role at the state level for Senate elections (including primaries) than they do at the district level for House elections.¹⁵ Thus to win election to the Senate a Democrat must be to the left of center (vis-à-vis his or her state party constituency); but the typical Democratic representative will be exactly such a Democrat. Similarly, to win election to the Senate a Republican must be to the right of center (vis-à-vis his or her state party constituency); but the typical Republican representative will be exactly such a Republican.

Still another potential explanation has been suggested by Richard Anderson (personal communication 1993), a former congressional staffer. He has suggested that many House members see themselves as potential senators and adjust their voting behavior accordingly (as best they are able) from very early on in their House careers.

These explanations are only suggestive. What is clear is that we need a coherent story of party competition that acknowledges that the quest for support from the overall median voter in a constituency is only one aspect of politics, and not the most important aspect.

Bernard Grofman is Professor of Politics, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California 92717. Robert Griffin is Pre-Doctoral Fellow, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California 92717. Gregory Berry, Esq. is a lawyer and Pre-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1045.

NOTES

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1. Elling (1982), Thomas (1985), Wright and Berkman (1986), and Bernstein (1988) compare the voting records of senators at various times during their service to see if the approach of an election campaign leads to a change in voting behavior. Thomas (1985) also looks for changes in the voting behavior of retiring senators and senators who are not retiring. Glazer and Robbins (1985a) compare differences in senators who are up for reelection and those who are not. Glazer and Robbins (1985b) look at changes in the voting behavior of House members whose districts are changed through redistricting. Poole and Daniels (1985) look at voting records of House members who become senators. Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer (1990) compare voting records of senators from the same state. Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer (1991) compare the voting behavior of House members and senators from states that elect a single member to the House. Also relevant are Brady and Lynn (1973) who look at congressional seats that change party control, Glazer and Grofman (1987) who compare mean years of service in the House and Senate and reelection probabilities in the two bodies, and Shipan (1992) who looks at the relationship between institutional position and congressional voting behavior.

2. That we are assuming a unidimensional continuum does not mean we are assuming that each state's median voter is located at 50. States, of course, will differ considerably in how liberal the median voter in that state is.

3. The four senators whose previous House service ended before 1957 were dropped from the analyses because of the absence of COPE scores for this period.

4. Rohde (1979), drawing upon and expanding the work in ambition theory first begun by Schlesinger (1966), posits, *inter alia*, that House members who run for the Senate should share the following attributes: they come from smaller states; they possess low seniority; and they are likely to win the election because either no incumbent is running or the state historically has been safe electorally for his or her party. Additionally, members of Congress who are risk takers are more likely to run for higher office than are those who are more risk-adverse (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1987; Copeland 1989; cf. Fowler and McClure 1987). Ambition theory emphasizes the opportunity structure open to the candidate, while this paper focuses on ideological preconditions for senatorial success.

5. Before 1967, AFL-CIO COPE scores were issued for two-year periods, so we substituted these for the annual scores.

6. Poole and Daniels (1985) show that the usual roll-call scores correspond to the first dimension uncovered by their multidimensional scaling procedures.

7. Despite the narrowness of the topics they claim to cover, COPE scores are very highly correlated with other, more general congressional ratings that may tap a richer definition of liberal and conservative, such as ADA scores, perhaps the most

widely used ideological ratings (Smith, Herrera, and Herrera 1990). ADA scores suffer from a defect which made them undesirable for our analyses. Unlike COPE scores, ADA scores penalize individuals for missed votes. A representative who is seeking election to the Senate and is busy with campaign activities may miss more votes than representatives who are not running or representatives who are running in very safe districts. Nonetheless, we replicated some of our analyses using ADA scores, and found the results generally matched the results we obtained using COPE scores.

8. In some states, including, of course, states with a single member of Congress, there are no other members of the party delegation.

9. Of course because we look only at House members who go on to the Senate, our small sample size makes statistically significant differences hard to obtain. This is especially true since, in recent years, House members of a given party from a given state are not that ideologically distinct from one another. For example, looking only at states with at least two members of a given party, in 1985 the mean standard deviation within a Democratic state delegation in the House was 12.6; for Republican state delegations in the House, the standard deviation was only 8.5.

10. If there were Downsian pressure for newly elected senators to move from the party median in their former district constituencies toward the statewide median, such pressures should be strongest in politically competitive states. Thus, even if we did not find an ideological difference between the average Democratic representative and the average Democratic senator in most states, with the latter more conservative, we might still expect to find such differences in politically competitive states. We did not find them.

11. We also looked at the individual-level correlations between the AFL-CIO scores of House members newly elected to the Senate and the scores of incumbents of the same party by regressing the former upon the latter. However, because of space constraints, we have not presented our results.

12. In contrast, other authors have found statistically significant changes in voting behavior among senators as their reelection campaigns approach (Bernstein 1988; Elling 1982; Thomas 1985; Wright and Berkman 1988).

13. However, Hibbing (1986) found the strongest changes occurring during the last few months of the House career.

14. This would be true, for example, if the differences in the location of the district's median voter were based primarily on the proportion of Democratic voters found in them, not on how liberal, on average, such Democratic voters were.

15. The importance of party activists is consistent with ideas in Aldrich (1983) as well as in other Public Choice approaches (see e.g., Aranson and Ordeshook 1972; Austen-Smith 1986; Coleman 1971, 1972; and review in Grofman 1993 of neo-institutionalist approaches to party competition; cf. Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1989; Wright 1988).

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