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# CHAPTER 1

## CONGRESSIONAL PROCESS AND PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD CONGRESS: AN EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS USING THE C-SPAN VIDEO LIBRARY

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Congress is consistently the least popular branch of government. Nearly a half century ago Ralph Nader called Congress “the broken branch,” and that perception has held firm among the public and the media. Even individual members of Congress take care to distance themselves from the chronically disliked institution by running against the Congress. Scholars have examined a number of factors that have been linked to low mass approval of Congress, including negative reactions to congressional policies (Davidson & Parker, 1972; Fenno, 1975; Parker, 1981; Ramirez, 2013), the state of the president’s popularity (Patterson & Caldeira, 1990), and public perceptions of the current state of the economy (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Ramirez, 2013).

Research has also tied low public approval of Congress to the inability of the membership to live up to the public’s overall expectations (Kimball & Patterson, 1997) and the institution’s tendency to engage in largely

unpopular—although democratic—political processes, such as extensive debate, excessive partisanship, conflict, and compromise (Binder, 2003, 2015; Doherty, 2015; Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2002; Mann & Ornstein, 2006, 2012; Ramirez, 2009; Sinclair, 2011). Also, recent computerized sentiment analysis has linked the decline of prosocial language on the floor to the erosion of congressional approval over time (Frimer, Aquino, Gerbauer, Zhu, & Oakes, 2015).

Outside the arena of policy and process, researchers have pointed at congressional scandals, involving one or more members of Congress, as a major factor in damaging the institution's reputation (Bowler & Karp, 2004; McDermott, Schwartz, & Valleho, 2015; Rozell, 1994; Sabato, Stencel, & Lichter, 2000).

The televised images of Congress in the media are of particular importance in understanding opinion regarding the institution's actions and behavior. While some Americans have experience dealing with their own congressional representatives (see Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Fenno, 1978; Mayhew, 1974), their impressions of the performance of the membership as a whole as well as the institution are grounded primarily in what they have seen on television (Arnold, 2004).

Since 1979, the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) has provided gavel-to-gavel coverage of floor proceedings as well as coverage of congressional committee hearings and press events on television. The C-SPAN Video Library has captured all of this coverage and made it available for public use. The archive, along with its sophisticated online cataloging and indexing system, provides an unprecedented view into the institution of Congress (Browning, 2014; Frantzich & Sullivan, 1996). From a research perspective, C-SPAN's 30 years of archived congressional proceedings constitutes the most complete and publicly accessible accounting of government activity to date. While these data have been used to examine congressional activity and public opinion toward the institution (Morris, 2001; Morris & Witting, 2001), there is still much knowledge that can be gained from the valuable resources provided by the C-SPAN Video Library.

The intent of this project is to use the valuable resource of the C-SPAN Video Library to improve our understanding of how Americans react to Congress on television. Using the C-SPAN Video Library, we construct an experimental analysis that examines how subjects respond to congressional

floor process in the House and Senate. The valuable search and editing tools provided by the C-SPAN Video Library provide a unique opportunity to investigate Congress experimentally—an approach which is seldom employed in congressional research.

Overall, our study is an exploration into the public's reaction to floor activity. Our exploration is grounded in the notion that not all floor activity is the same. Specifically, we focus on two different aspects of the legislative process on the floor: partisanship and legislative maneuvering. Our findings show that subjects react negatively to both types of processes, but the degree of these reactions differs. We discuss our findings in the context of how congressional actors can influence how the institution is perceived by the masses.

## **THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD CONGRESS**

Unlike the presidency, the courts, and even nongovernmental institutions where the deliberative process takes place largely away from public view, the U.S. Congress and its proceedings are relatively wide-open for public display. On any given day on Capitol Hill, committee hearings are open to the public, hours of floor debate are captured on C-SPAN, and dozens of press conferences are held. All of these events work to make the congressional process a virtual open book.

From a public-opinion standpoint, however, this openness has consequences. Past research has claimed that the average American does not respond positively to the sight of gridlock, legislative red tape, or seemingly endless political debate (Binder, 2003, 2015; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995). On the contrary, many Americans often take delight at the thought of benevolent political leaders who take quick, decisive action for the public good (Altemeyer, 1988; Adorno, 1950; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). Congress, however, was designed precisely to thwart such action. Thus, when Congress performs its constitutional role of meticulously debating political issues and events, the American public tends to respond negatively (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997). The institution was designed to promote extensive deliberation and factional conflict. This design makes Congress the most democratic institution in the national government. The research has found that Americans love the idea of democracy in theory, but do not like to see the process play out in action.

In short, the public has a lack of appreciation for the legislature's highly deliberative role in the American democratic process. Instead, Americans would prefer a *stealth democracy* where the political process is accessible yet hidden from the public's sight and left to trustworthy leaders (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) sum up this popular perception:

[Americans] dislike compromise and bargaining, they dislike committees and bureaucracy, they dislike political parties and interest groups, they dislike big salaries and big staffs, they dislike slowness and multiple stages, and they dislike debate and publicly hashing things out, referring to such actions as haggling or bickering. (18)

The degree to which the masses respond negatively to process has been debated. Many scholars argue that policy outcomes are the primary indicator of views toward Congress (Easton, 1965; Jones, 2013; Jones & McDermott, 2009; Wlezien & Carman, 2001). For instance, a recent study by Harbridge and Malhotra (2011) finds that public disdain for a bipartisan process is outweighed by individual-level partisan policy preferences. This reflects the larger notion that elite behavior does not have much influence on the views of the mass public (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005).

On the other side of the argument, researchers contend that public reactions to legislative process can actually supersede the policy issues and the outcomes (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995). Ramirez (2009) concluded that the public's desire to mitigate procedural partisan conflict among legislators is more important than the substance of policy actions. Harbridge and Malhotra (2011) find partisan conflict reduces public support for Congress, but also note that the partisan public responds favorably to their own representatives who act in a partisan manner.

Regardless of the degree to which public disdain for legislative process plays a role in shaping mass opinion of Congress, the evidence supports the notion that it is significant. However, what exactly is the legislative process, and how is it measured? While the definitions of the legislative process varies slightly, almost all contain the same core concepts. These concepts include open disagreement of competing interests, compromise, inefficiency, and some degree of adherence to procedural norms (Crick, 1992; Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Ramirez, 2009).

There is, however, a shortcoming in the current understanding of how legislative process is conceptualized and measured. Specifically, the existing studies have not fully examined the notion that legislative process on the floor of Congress can vary dramatically. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 2002) relied primarily on focus groups and cross-sectional survey data to show a general disdain for the process-related issues that are commonplace in Congress. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) used time-series analysis to show that mass support for Congress tends to drop when major legislation is under consideration on Capitol Hill. Their measurement of process, however, was dependent on the number of major bills under consideration in Congress, as well as the number of presidential vetoes and subsequent veto overrides. The assumption was that process issues are visible to the American public during times of action on major legislation. When there is no major legislation under consideration, the assumption was that process issues are off the American public's radar screen. Ramirez (2009) relied strictly on the number of partisan-oriented votes in Congress to determine the visibility of process to the masses.

However, the legislative process is not monolithic, and thus should not be conceptualized or measured as such. Legislative conflict on the floor is not the same as the procedural wrangling that is discussion of committee hearings, markups, and amendments. Who is to say the public's response would be uniform? The most significant shortcoming of earlier studies on public reactions to process is that the nature of the legislative process had been somewhat oversimplified. Likewise, generalizations regarding the public's reaction to process may have been oversimplified as well. A more detailed examination of the specific elements of legislative process in Congress may provide greater understanding of how the American public reacts. Because the research into this topic has mostly examined aggregate opinion of the legislative process, we lack more detailed analysis at the individual level.

We thus propose to examine two unique aspects of the legislative process on the floor of the United States Congress: conflict between parties and legislative maneuvering. While it is clear that conventional wisdom suggests both of these process elements prompt negative responses from the public, they deserve to be examined separately. Likewise, a comparison is warranted. While conflict and legislative maneuvering have been conflated, some content-analysis research suggests that the media cover these process

elements differently (Morris & Clawson, 2005). Specifically, legislative maneuvering is more prevalent in mainstream media coverage (70%) than partisan conflict (33%, categories not mutually exclusive). These elements certainly overlap with frequency, but they are often presented to the masses in different contexts.

Based on the preceding discussion, our intent is to explore the effect of exposure to congressional partisan conflict as well the effect of exposure to legislative maneuvering. We will investigate how individuals respond to these process elements singularly, and we will examine responses to both elements simultaneously. In the section below, we discuss how we collected samples of congressional partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering from C-SPAN. We will then discuss how these samples were used in a controlled online experiment.

### **CAPTURING PARTISAN CONFLICT AND LEGISLATIVE MANEUVERING ON C-SPAN**

The public availability of video from the C-SPAN Video Library allows the ability to search through congressional floor debate. The indexing tool within each day of coverage allows the ability to search for specific types of floor action, including amendments, motions, and references to committee reports. The same tool also allows the ability to locate usage of unconstrained floor time, which includes one-minute speeches, five-minute speeches, and special orders. Using these tools, we were able to locate an array of floor behavior that exemplified both partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering. The C-SPAN Video Library clipping feature also allows selected video to be captured and downloaded for editing. This gave us the opportunity to peruse a wide array of coverage that typifies both partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering. The sophistication of these online search and editing tools provides researchers a unique ability to acquire footage of the congressional institution in many forms. Certainly, this is ideal for experimental analysis of Congress—an area of research that borders on nonexistent.

From these scores of selected clips, we first settled on six partisan speeches from unconstrained floor time in the U.S. House of Representatives—three from the Republicans and three from the Democrats. These speeches constituted the conflict element of legislative process. Combined, these clips

were 6 minutes and 34 seconds long. In order to control for variations in the demographics of the speakers, we chose to use only clips of White males. Additionally, we chose speeches delivered from the well of the House floor, thus allowing for similar camera angles. Finally, we controlled for substance by including speeches that only spoke of pending budget legislation offered by the House Republicans and Democrats. Below is a transcript of a sample partisan conflict video:

Mr. Speaker, today Americans are working more and earning less. The cost of college is rising, young people are in debt and America's infrastructure is in decay. Mr. Speaker, the Republican budget does nothing to help struggling Americans, it gives tax breaks to the wealthy, ends the Medicare guarantee, makes it harder for Americans to buy a home, and cuts funding for education. Our military leaders even testified that the Republican budget will put the lives of our men and woman in uniform at risk. Mr. Speaker, this is outrageous, the American people elected us, we owe them to pass a budget that addresses their needs, keeps them safe, and gives them the best opportunity possible to live the American dream. Let's focus on creating good-paying jobs, providing universal pre-K, and restoring food stamps programs that have helped many American families through these tough times, and let's ensure that our military has the resources they need to make sure they can fight the fight that America wants. Democrats will keep standing with the American people and do the job they were elected to do on behalf of the American people.

Second, we selected three separate clips of members of Congress discussing legislative maneuvering. These clips made little reference to substantive policy issues. Instead, these were discussions from both the House and Senate floor that were procedural in nature. There was no mention of partisanship, either. The only evidence of partisanship was in the "R" or "D" attached to the name of the speaker on the bottom of the screen. Similarly, policy was only mentioned in the title of the bills and reports discussed. As was the case with the partisan-conflict video, this video contained only White male speakers. In total, the video was 5 minutes and 18 seconds in length. See the following excerpt:



Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only I yield the customary thirty minutes to the gentlewoman from New York, Ms. Slaughter. I yield myself such time as I may consume, and ask unanimous consent to revise and extend my remarks and insert extraneous material in the record.

Speaker: Without objection, so ordered.

During consideration of the resolution, all time is yielded for the purpose of debate only. Last night the Rules Committee met and granted a modified closed rule for H.R. 10, the Comprehensive Retirement Security and Pension Reform Act of 2001. The rule provides for ninety minutes of general debate, with sixty minutes equally divided and controlled by the chairman and the ranking member of the Committee on Ways and Means, and thirty minutes equally divided and controlled by the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Education and the Work Force. Additionally, the rule waives all points of order against consideration of the bill, and against consideration of the amendment printed in the report. The rule provides that in lieu of the amendments recommended by the Committee on Ways and Means and the Committee on Education of the Work Force, the amendment in the nature of a substitute printed in the *Congressional Record* and numbered one shall be considered as adopted. The rule also provides for consideration of the amendment in the nature of a substitute printed in the rules committee report. If offered by Representative Rangel or his designee, which shall be considered as read and separately debatable for one hour equally divided and controlled by a proponent and an opponent. Finally the rule provides for one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

A third video was constructed as an abbreviated compilation of the preceding videos. This contained four of the six partisan videos (two Democrats, two Republicans) and half of the process-element videos. This clip was 8 minutes long. Each of the three videos can be viewed as edited at the following web locations: <http://www.politicalresearchlab.org/clip1.html>; <http://www.politicalresearchlab.org/clip2.html>; and <http://www.politicalresearchlab.org/clip3.html>

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We used the three videos discussed above to create posttest-only control group experimental analysis, in which subjects watched a video and took a brief on-line posttest questionnaire. Condition One was partisan conflict, Condition Two was legislative maneuvering, and Condition Three was a combination of partisanship and maneuvering. The fourth condition is a control group.

Subjects were recruited into the experimental pool via Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk, which allows requesters (in this case the researchers) to hire workers (in this case the subjects) to complete short tasks, typically for minimal fees. This service has become popular among experimental social scientists for the purpose of subject recruitment beyond the typical usage of voluntary student subjects. While this subject pool lacks the generalizability of randomly selected participants, research has suggested that Mechanical Turk's samples "will often be more diverse than [other] convenience samples and will always be more diverse than student samples" (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012, p. 361; see also Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

Our subjects were paid \$0.50 each for participation in the experiment, and randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. To control for validity, subjects were only permitted to participate a single time in a single condition. Additionally, in order to ensure that subjects assigned to Conditions One through Three actually did experience the experimental stimuli (the video in full), we included two filter questions on the posttest questionnaire. The first question asked, "Where was the video you just watched taking place?" Response options included a sporting event, a music concert, Congress, or a farm equipment convention. Subjects who answered incorrectly were excluded from participation. The second filter question was tied to the content of the videos. Specifically, the last few seconds of the video showed a screen shot that said, "Remember this number: 12." In the survey, subjects were asked, "Which number was shown at the end of the video you just watched?" Subjects who answered incorrectly had the option to go back and watch the video again, and were allowed to continue if they got the question correct on the next chance. In order to prevent subjects from skipping to the end of each video, the videos were posted using technology that prevented subjects from simply skipping to the end and observing the number. In short, we did all we could in order to make certain the subjects did indeed watch the videos they were assigned to watch.

The primary independent variable was the experimental condition to which the subjects were exposed. Additional independent variables were collected from the posttest survey as well. These variables included age, race, gender, education, income, and partisan identification. See the Appendix to this chapter for measurement details.

Multiple dependent variables were collected as well. The first was a general question that assessed the subjects' perception of Congress as a whole: "On a scale of 1–10, how do you feel about the U.S. Congress? The higher the number, the more favorably you feel toward the U.S. Congress. The lower the number, the less favorably you feel toward the U.S. Congress. An answer of 5 would indicate you feel neither favorably nor unfavorably toward the U.S. Congress. Click the number that best corresponds to your feelings." The second set of dependent variables was collected by asking respondents to agree or disagree with a number of statements about Congress, congressional parties, and the ability of the parties and factions in Congress to work together (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = strongly agree). These statements are listed in the Appendix to this chapter. In the following section, we outline the findings from our experiment and discuss the results.

## FINDINGS

Table 1.1 displays a set of ordinary least squares regressions in which the dependent variables are thermometer scores toward Congress, President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party (1 to 10 scale). These models were run only on the control group, and use the following basic predictors of approval: party identification, gender, education, income, ideology, race and age. Unlike feelings toward the president, the Democrats, and the Republicans, it is clear that feelings toward Congress are much less predictable. None of the standard predictors are statistically significant, not even partisan identification or ideology—even though Republicans control both chambers. The low adjusted *R*-squared (.07) compared to the others illustrates this point.

In order to examine the effect of the experimental stimuli on feelings toward Congress, variables for Condition 1, 2, and 3 were added into the model for Congress. Each condition was generated as a dummy variable in which 1 =

**Table 1.1** Thermometer Scores (1–10) Control Group Only

Variable	Congress	President Obama	Democratic Party	Republican Party
Party ID	-.22 (.17)	-.83 (.17)**	-.98 (.16)**	.57 (.15)**
Male	-1.14 (.33)**	-.15 (.33)	-.73 (.31)*	-.57 (.29)
Education	.07 (.14)	.06 (.14)	-.09 (.13)	.12 (.13)
Income	.08 (.07)	.22 (.07)**	.16 (.07)*	.04 (.06)
Conservative/Liberal	-.44 (.26)	.72 (.25)**	.29 (.24)	-.79 (.22)**
White	.10 (.47)	-.71 (.46)	.35 (.43)	.08 (.41)
Age	-.02 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.03 (.01)
Constant	6.67 (1.59)**	5.60 (1.56)**	7.73 (1.46)**	4.60 (1.39)**
N	172	172	172	172
Adj. R-Squared	.07	.53	.51	.48

Note: Cell entries are ordinary least squares coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

**Table 1.2** Thermometer Scores Toward Congress by Experimental Condition

Variable	Thermometer Score (1–10)
Partisan Condition	-.01(.23)
Legislative Maneuvering	.17(.23)
Combination	.07(.23)
Party ID	-.10(.08)
Male	-.64(.16)**
Education	-.07(.07)
Income	.02(.04)
Conservative/Liberal	-.31(.13)*
White	-.38(.21)
Age	-.02(.01)*
Constant	6.54(.82)*
N	694
Adj. R-Squared	.04

Note: Cell entries are ordinary least squares coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

exposure to that condition and 0 = no exposure to that condition. The control condition is the excluded category in the regression. Table 1.2 displays the results. These results show conclusively that neither exposure to partisan conflict nor legislative maneuvering significantly influenced the dependent variable of feelings toward Congress. Table 1.3 confirms these null results in an ordered logistic regression model in which overall approval for Congress was the dependent variable (1 = strongly disapprove; 2 = somewhat disapprove; 3 = neither approve nor disapprove; 4 = somewhat approve; 5 = strongly approve).

**Table 1.3** Overall Approval for Congress by Experimental Condition

Variable	Approval
Partisan Condition	-.12(.20)
Legislative Maneuvering	.06(.20)
Combination	-.11(.21)
Party ID	.02(.07)
Male	-.59(.15)**
Education	-.01(.06)
Income	.00(.03)
Conserv./Liberal	-.17(.11)
White	-.45(.19)*
age	-.02(.01)***
N	694
Constant 1	-2.60
Constant 2	-.88
Constant 3	.16
Constant 4	2.39
Chi-Squared	47.11
Log Likelihood	-853.61

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

What about perceptions of the ability of congressional factions to work together in Washington? Did the experimental stimuli have an influence? We address this question by asking respondents in the posttest to disagree or agree with the following statements: (1) "I believe that the liberals and conservatives in Congress can put aside their differences to do what is best for

America,” (2) “The liberals in Congress don’t seem willing to work with the conservatives,” and (3) “The conservatives in Congress don’t seem willing to work with liberals” (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = strongly agree). These items were regressed against exposure to experimental condition and the control variables in an ordered logit analysis. The results are presented in Table 1.4. As it can be seen, the experimental stimuli did not significantly influence perceptions of the two sides of Congress to work together.

**Table 1.4** Perceptions of Cooperation and Government

Variable	Agree With Statement (1 = strongly disagree . . . 5 = strongly agree)		
	Liberals and conservatives can put disagreements aside	Liberals in Congress don't seem willing to work with conservatives	Conservatives in Congress don't seem willing to work with liberals
Conflict	.04(.19)	-.08(.20)	.02(.20)
Legislative Maneuvering	.24(.20)	.08(.20)	-.09(.21)
Both	.17(.20)	-.21(.20)	-.11(.21)
Knowledge	-.08(.05)	.02(.04)	.16(.05)**
Party ID	-.06(.07)	.30(.07)**	-.06(.08)
Male	-.41(.14)**	-.14(.15)	-.05(.15)
Education	-.08(.06)	-.06(.07)	.00(.07)
Income	.02(.03)	-.02(.04)	.03(.04)
Conservative/Liberal	-.01(.11)	-.62(.12)**	.45(.12)**
White	-.45(.18)*	.22(.18)	.60(.19)**
Age	.01(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)
N	694	694	694
Constant 1	-2.59	-3.96	-1.38
Constant 2	-1.28	-2.48	.21
Constant 3	-.56	-1.68	1.25
Constant 4	.85	.00	2.77
Chi-Squared	29.18**	235.12**	81.49**
Log Likelihood	-1,080.45	-952.58	-854.84

Note: Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

Overall, the results from the first set of analyses reported in Tables 1.1 through 1.4 indicate that exposure to congressional partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering do not significantly impact perceptions of Congress as a whole or the perception of the ability of the membership to work together. But were there other reactions that shed light on the differential reactions to congressional partisanship versus legislative maneuvering? The findings from Table 1.5 demonstrate how exposure to the experimental stimuli influenced individuals' perception of their own understanding of politics and government, also referred to as internal political efficacy (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). The results clearly show that partisan conflict has no effect on internal efficacy, but the legislative-maneuvering condition has a significant negative impact. That is, individuals who witnessed legislative maneuvering were much more likely to agree that "sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's happening." Also, the combination of legislative maneuvering and partisan conflict has the same effect, but to a lesser extent.

While internal political efficacy is an individual's perception of the individual's ability to comprehend politics, external political efficacy is the perception of how political figures react to them (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). In other words, how responsive does an individual feel governmental figures are to the individual's own wishes? In order to measure this concept, we included two items in the posttest that asked subjects to agree or disagree with statements about members of Congress. The first statement read, "I don't think members of Congress care much what people like me think," and the second read, "People like me don't have any say about what Congress does" (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; and 5 = strongly agree). We combined these two responses to create an additive index ranging from 2 to 10. Due to the nature of the measurement, higher values reflected lower levels of external efficacy toward Congress. For ease of interpretation, we reversed the coding so that 2 = lowest external efficacy and 10 = highest external efficacy.

Table 1.6 illustrates the effect of our experimental stimuli on external efficacy toward Congress. If we relax our expectation of statistical significance to  $p \leq .10$ , it can be seen that there appears to be a positive effect when it comes to exposure to partisan conflict and the combination of partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering. In other words, individuals who witnessed partisan

Table 1.5 Internal Political Efficacy

Variable	Agree That Politics and Government Seem Complicated (1 = strongly disagree . . . 5 = strongly agree)
Conflict	.09(.19)
Legislative Maneuvering	1.13(.20)**
Both	.49(.20)*
Knowledge	-.32(.05)**
Party ID	-.01(.07)
Male	-.54(.14)**
Education	-.08(.06)
Income	.07(.03)*
Conservative/Liberal	-.07(.11)
White	-.21(.19)
Age	.01(.01)*
N	694
Constant 1	-2.79
Constant 2	-1.36
Constant 3	-.80
Constant 4	.97
Chi-Squared	117.89**
Log Likelihood	-1,015.77

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

conflict were less cynical about the responsiveness of Congress than those in the control group. The legislative-maneuvering condition, however, failed to reach statistical significance, again illustrating a differential impact across different elements of legislative process.

Were there other differential emotional responses to the experimental stimuli? The findings from Table 1.7 strongly suggest that there is a significant difference. Each participant in Conditions 1 through 3 was asked to report how the videos of Congress made them feel. The response options were (a) interested, (b) uninterested, (c) frustrated, (d) angry, (e) happy, and (f) none of the above. Subjects were permitted to click as many feelings that applied. Table 1.7 shows the effects of the partisan conflict on emotions relative to legislative maneuvering,



Table 1.6 External Political Efficacy

Variable	External Efficacy (2 = lowest . . . 10 = highest)
Conflict	.39(.22)*
Legislative Maneuvering	.36(.22)
Both	.41(.22)*
Knowledge	-.02(.05)
Party ID	-.14(.08)*
Male	-.22(.16)
Education	.01(.07)
Income	.06(.04)
Conservative/Liberal	-.26(.12)**
White	-.38(.21)*
Age	-.00(.01)
Constant	5.72(.79)**
N	694
Adj. R-Squared	.01

Note: Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .10$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

Table 1.7 Emotional Responses to Clips (Partisan-Conflict and Legislative-Maneuvering Groups Only)

Variable	Interested	Uninterested	Frustrated	Angry
Conflict	1.14(.26)**	-2.14(.28)**	1.41(.25)**	1.45(.37)**
Party ID	-.22(.14)	.50(.14)**	-.04(.13)	-.10(.18)
Male	.23(.25)	-.25(.26)	-.29(.24)	.83(.33)*
Education	-.04(.11)	.04(.11)	.16(.11)	.06(.15)
Income	-.10(.06)	.01(.07)	.02(.06)	-.05(.08)
Conservative/Liberal	-.05(.21)	.45(.22)*	.07(.19)	.14(.14)
White	-.45(.30)	.11(.33)	.43(.31)	.42(.42)
Age	-.00(.01)	-.05(.01)	.03(.01)	-.00(.01)
Constant	.57(1.42)	-.94(1.46)	-3.46(1.34)**	-3.64(1.89)
N	349	349	349	349
Chi-Squared	39.40**	99.36**	46.23**	33.61**
Log Likelihood	-199.32	-187.55	-215.88	-131.84

Note: Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

which is the excluded category. The combination condition and the control group were dropped from this analysis. Note that “happy” and “none of the above” are not included due to the extreme rarity of that response (only three respondents reported feeling happy or none of the above). They demonstrate starkly different emotional reactions. In short, partisan conflict drew much more interest from the subjects than legislative maneuvering. At the same time, partisan conflict was significantly more likely to arouse frustration and anger among viewers.

## CONCLUSION

Our study contributes to the current understanding of public responses to Congress by exploring reactions to unique elements of the legislative process on the floor. Although perceptions of Congress as a whole are fairly stable in the face of exposure to congressional partisan conflict and legislative maneuvering on the floor of Congress, we discovered unique emotional responses. While it is not generally thought that exposure to Congress in action on C-SPAN would provoke emotion among viewers, our results suggest otherwise. Legislative maneuvering is associated with decreased external efficacy, but not internal efficacy. Exposure to partisan conflict, on the other hand, generates more interest among viewers and is tied to higher levels of external efficacy toward Congress. This is a compelling result in the context of our findings that exposure to the partisan-conflict condition of our experiment is also associated with much higher levels of anger and frustration.

The idea that exposure to partisanship on the House floor is tied to more positive views toward any aspect of Congress is in contrast to conventional wisdom on the topic (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Ramirez, 2009). Why may this be the case? Perhaps the public is not entirely sure what it wants from government (Ladd, 1983, 1990). This, Everett Ladd argues, sets the stage for a “cognitive Madisonianism” among the masses, where conflict between tenacious actors with divergent views on the role of government is welcomed (1990). Individually, most Americans would decry the perils of a Congress mired in gridlock, but the public as a whole may have a more accommodating view on the matter. David Mayhew (1996) follows this logic and cautiously proposes the notion that Americans as a collective find partisan tension at the federal level comforting.

From this perspective, policy outcomes may not be as important to the public as the image that congressional actors are fulfilling their representative function by engaging in conflict. When conflict is less apparent to the public, larger stereotypes of a do-nothing Congress are more likely to take hold on the masses. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) note, “People want decision making to be a balance between elected officials and ordinary people, but they think they are getting a process dominated by officeholders” (p. 152). In other words, a Congress devoid of conflict is a Congress in collusion with itself and the special interests. While it is unconventional to suggest that Congress may improve its image by conducting more vigorous partisan debate over the issues, our exploration warrants further study. We urge future researchers to at least take this possibility under consideration.

Furthermore, we wish to encourage greater usage of the C-SPAN Video Library as a resource. Experimental research is the key to gaining a more nuanced understanding of how the public feels about the United States Congress. The vast majority of work on public opinion toward Congress has relied on survey data. If we wish to understand the affective responses individuals have to Congress, further experimental studies should be employed. The C-SPAN Video Library is the most valuable resource available to researchers in this regard.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey of Political Attitudes

As a part of a research project we are conducting a brief survey about political attitudes. We ask that you answer the following questions, which should take approximately 3–4 minutes. It is designed to be completely anonymous and confidential. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

1. Where was the video you just watched taking place?

Sporting event

Music concert

The United States Congress (Correct)

Farm equipment convention

2. How did the video you just watched make you feel?

Check as many feelings as you want.

Interested

Uninterested

Frustrated

Angry

Happy

None of the above

3. Which number was at the end of the video you just watched?

57

100

25

12 (Correct)

Please answer the following questions:





8. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

- 1 = Strong Democrat
- 2 = Democrat
- 3 = Independent leaning Democrat
- 4 = Independent/Don't know/Apolitical
- 5 = Independent leaning Republican
- 6 = Republican
- 7 = Strong Republican

9. Did you vote in the 2012 presidential election?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Don't remember

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check only one response for each statement.

10. I don't think members of Congress care much what people like me think.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

11. People like me don't have any say about what Congress does.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

12. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's happening.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

13. I believe that the liberals and conservatives in Congress can put aside their differences to do what is best for America.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

14. The liberals in Congress don't seem willing to work with the conservatives.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

15. The conservatives in Congress don't seem willing to work with the liberals.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

16. The Democratic Party is too liberal.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

17. The Republican Party is too conservative.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Check only one response for each statement.

18. Liberals want to raise taxes on hard-working Americans and give it to lazy people who can't keep a job.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

19. Conservatives only care about the rich.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

20. I trust the media to cover political events fairly and accurately

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

21. It is possible that I would vote for a presidential candidate from a political party different than my own.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

22. Congress is too heavily influenced by interest groups when making decisions.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

23. Members of Congress should do what their district wants them to even if they think it's a bad idea.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

For each of the following please indicate if you watch it, listen to it, or read it regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never.

24. Watch MSNBC?

- 4 = Regularly
- 3 = Sometimes
- 2 = Hardly Ever
- 1 = Never

25. Watch the Cable News Network (CNN)?

4 = Regularly

3 = Sometimes

2 = Hardly Ever

1 = Never

26. Watch the Fox News Channel?

4 = Regularly

3 = Sometimes

2 = Hardly Ever

1 = Never

27. Watch C-SPAN?

4 = Regularly

3 = Sometimes

2 = Hardly Ever

1 = Never

28. Read a daily newspaper?

4 = Regularly

3 = Sometimes

2 = Hardly Ever

1 = Never

Please answer the following questions:

29. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

1 = Strongly Disapprove

2 = Somewhat Disapprove

3 = Neither Approve nor Disapprove

4 = Somewhat Approve

5 = Strongly Approve

30. Overall, how would you rate the ability of Congress to work with the president of the United States in passing laws?

- 1 = Poor
- 2 = Only Fair
- 3 = Good
- 4 = Excellent

31. Overall, how would you rate the job the federal government as a whole is doing?

- 1 = Poor
- 2 = Only Fair
- 3 = Good
- 4 = Excellent

Answer each of the following to the best of your ability:

32. Who is the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?

- John Boehner (Correct)
- Steve Scalise
- Paul Ryan
- Barack Obama
- Nancy Pelosi
- Don't know

33. Do you know which party has a majority in the House and Senate of the U.S. Congress?

- Republicans (Correct)
- Democrats
- The Democrats control the House and the Republicans control the Senate
- The Republicans control the House and the Democrats control the Senate
- Don't know

34. Who is the Chairperson of the Federal Reserve Board?

- Joe Biden
- Richard Cheney
- Carly Fiorina
- John Kerry
- Janet Yellen (Correct)
- Don't know

35. Which of the following individuals is a Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court?

- John Roberts (Correct)
- Ben Carson
- Newt Gingrich
- Steny Hoyer
- John Kerry
- Don't know

36. Who is the Secretary of State?

- Joe Biden
- Ben Carson
- Ashton Carter
- Nancy Pelosi
- John Kerry (Correct)
- Don't know

37. What is your gender?

- 0 = Female
- 1 = Male

38. What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?

- 1 = None, or grades 1–8
- 2 = High school incomplete (grades 9–11)
- 3 = High school graduate (grade 12 or GED certificate)
- 4 = Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school

5 = Some college, no 4-year degree (including associate degree)

6 = College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)

7 = Postgraduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g., toward a master's degree or Ph.D.; law or medical school)

Missing = Don't know

39. Last year, that is in 2014, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

1 = Less than \$10,000

2 = \$10,000 to under \$20,000

3 = \$20,000 to under \$30,000

4 = \$30,000 to under \$40,000

5 = \$40,000 to under \$50,000

6 = \$50,000 to under \$75,000

7 = \$75,000 to under \$100,000

8 = \$100,000 to under \$150,000

9 = \$150,000 or more

Missing = Don't know

40. In general, would you describe your political views as . . .

1 = Very Conservative

2 = Conservative

3 = Moderate/Don't know

4 = Liberal

5 = Very Liberal

41. How old are you?

42. What is your race?

1 = Caucasian

2 = African American

3 = Non-White Hispanic

4 = Asian

5 = Other



