Oversight, Accountability, and Constituency Ignorance*

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Abstract

Low levels of constituent knowledge about roll call voting cause some to question the prospects for Congressional accountability. Others suggest that challengers, interest groups, and other third parties educate constituents about disagreements and reduce the need for active monitoring. This paper examines the prospects for such indirect oversight using an original survey of nearly 13,000 respondents. Contrary to accounts of indirect oversight, we find that disagreement between representatives and their constituents has only a small effect on constituent knowledge about prominent votes in the House of Representatives involving the impeachment charges against President Clinton and the granting of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) to China. We also find no evidence that high-quality candidates are more likely to challenge unresponsive incumbents, or that outside actors publicize highly unresponsive votes in campaign advertising. Despite frequent appeals to the possibility of "fire alarm" oversight, we find little evidence of its presence.

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A well-known fact about the American political system is that citizens rarely know how their representatives vote on the hundreds of issues before Congress. While this pervasive ignorance leads some to question the prospects for accountability (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), others suggest that electoral incentives are sufficient to ensure constituency control, even if constituents do not know how their representatives vote on particular bills. Accountability is possible, the argument goes, if challengers, the news media, and interest groups alert citizens when representatives diverge from constituency preferences (Arnold 1993, Downs 1957).

The notion of "indirect" oversight is made explicit in *Federalist 57*, which discusses the people's ability to control members in the House of Representatives, and it has been extended and refined by many democratic theorists (e.g., Schumpteter (1947), Dahl (1956; 1961), Downs (1957), Schlesinger (1966), and Lipset (1960)). At is core is the claim that political elites have sufficient incentive to publicize issues and events relevant to constituents' well-being so as to ensure that constituents' interests are respected even if constituents are not actively paying attention to the actions of their legislators. Despite frequent appeals to indirect oversight as an excuse for constituency ignorance regarding governmental affairs, we do not know whether poor constituent knowledge suggests a lack of accountability, or whether politically ambitious actors make use of institutional mechanisms and alert constituents to unresponsive representatives.[1]

This uncertainty is largely due to a lack of data. Estimating issue disagreement at the level of House districts requires a large, representative sample of constituent knowledge and opinion on the same scale as representative behavior. Studies of roll call knowledge typically use samples that are too small for estimating district opinion, and they ask questions that are not directly comparable to the issues representatives confront.[2] Studies that do look at the dyadic relationship focus on the Senate (e.g., Hutchings 2003), an institution intended to be more isolated from constituency desires. This has prevented an analysis of the relationship between *district*-level disagreement and constituent knowledge of roll call voting in the institution where an intimate connection was intended. Instead, the literature focuses on the distribution of knowledge across constituents at different levels of education, political interest, and issue engagement, setting aside the question of whether outside groups "check in" when constituents "check out" (e.g., Alvarez and Gronke 1996,

[1] Work that does examine the question focuses primarily on the local level (e.g., Dahl's (1961) examination of local governance in New Haven, CT and Prewitt (1970) study of city council members in the San Francisco Bay Area.

[2] For some of the resulting problems, see Bartels (1986) and Powell (1989).

Hutchings 2003). (See Arnold (2004), however, for a related examination of how press coverage influences constituent knowledge and accountability, as well as Sulkin's (2005) study of how elections create incentives for representatives to partake in "issue uptake.")

In this paper, we ask not only *who* knows about roll call voting, but also *how* they know what they know. Is knowledge produced only by self-motivated oversight, whose high costs are borne by only the most politically engaged constituents? Or do challengers, interest groups, and other third parties inform constituents about votes contrary to district opinion? Distinguishing between these mechanisms is important for applied democratic theory because popular ignorance is necessary, but not sufficient, for an unaccountable political system. So long as electoral competition alerts constituents to incongruent voting, low levels of knowledge may be relatively benign.

To explore these questions, we assess the link between district-level responsiveness and constituent knowledge using an original survey of nearly 13,000 respondents. We focus on knowledge about two important votes in the House of Representatives: the vote to bring impeachment charges against President Bill Clinton (December 1998) and the vote to normalize trade relations with China (May 2000). During the 2000 congressional campaigns, we asked an average of 32 randomly selected constituents in 432 districts how they would vote on each bill and whether they knew how their representatives voted. This comparable and plentiful data lets us examine whether constituents are made aware of unresponsive behavior on the part of their representatives.

We find little evidence of such oversight on either vote, despite the fact that each vote featured high levels of salience and incongruence.[3] Constituents in districts with highly unresponsive incumbents are just as unlikely to know how their representative voted as constituents with highly responsive incumbents. The few constituents who know about either vote are those highly educated constituents who are already interested in politics. Moreover, ignorance is not simply due to high levels of forgetfulness among constituents, but instead reflects low levels of mobilization among challengers and interest groups. High-quality challengers are no more likely to emerge in unresponsive districts, and almost no attention is devoted to either vote in the televised campaign advertising. Substantial disagreement occurred on both votes, but constituents remained largely ignorant. There is little evidence that, at least on these two important issues, that elite behavior

[3]But see work by Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) and Abramowitz (2001) arguing that the impeachment issue did affect the 1998 midterm elections.

served to publicize representatives' activity.

1 Theories of Oversight and Accountability

The relationship between constituency opinion and roll call voting is a classic question that lies at the heart of representative democracy. Many studies find moderate correlations among public opinion, roll call votes, and enacted policies (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963, Bartels 1991, Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995, Clinton 2006). Other studies show that an incumbent's vote share and probability of reelection declines with the extremity of her roll call voting (e.g., Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002, Bovitz and Carson 2006). At the same time, public opinion research reveals that constituents rarely know about particular votes in Congress (e.g., Alvarez and Gronke 1996) and have little detailed knowledge about politics in general (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

The apparent existence of accountability amid widespread constituent ignorance presents a puzzle. Why do representatives vote in ways consistent with constituency control, even when constituents do not seem to know enough for control to occur? Resolutions of this paradox typically rely on accounts of *indirect oversight*. Under indirect oversight, constituents do not need to follow every vote and remember their representatives' decisions, as accounts of *direct oversight* presume. Instead, third parties such as challengers and interest groups alert constituents to prominent disagreements. Before examining the prevalence of direct and indirect oversight, we first outline the logic behind each account.

Direct Oversight

Direct oversight is the most demanding form of oversight. Under direct oversight, constituents actively and independently gather information about their representative's voting behavior, comparing the representative's choice to their own well-defined preferences. If constituents believe their representative has voted unresponsively, they vote against the incumbent in the next election so long as they perceive the issue disagreements to be sufficiently important and the challenger offers a better alternative. Representatives either anticipate future sanctions and vote responsively, or they risk losing office in the next election.

Several scholars develop accounts of direct oversight. Arnold (1993) argues that the "standard control model" ensures accountability if incumbents value reelection, constituents have well-formed preferences over policy options and outcomes, and constituents evaluate incumbents based on their votes (402-403).

The public opinion literature often invokes similar notions of an engaged, informed public which directly monitors the actions of government officials. In this tradition, many studies examine the stability and constraint of mass opinion (Coverse 1964, Feldman and Zaller 1992, Page and Shapiro 1992), the influence of partisan and other elites (Zaller 1992), and the distribution of factual knowledge about American politics and government (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). As Kuklinski and Quirk (2002) note, these studies share a more or less implicit concern with the ability of citizens to *independently* monitor government elites. For example, Gordon and Segura (1997, 127) argue "we cannot expect citizens to control their representatives and the policy-making process if they cannot understand the system, are incapable of holding policy positions, or fail to understand their representatives' actions on any given issue." In perhaps the most extensive study of political knowledge, Delli Carpini and Keeter argue that knowledge about elite actions is a necessary condition for democratic accountability. While the authors do not go so far as to argue "that contemporary democracy requires that all citizens be expert on all facets of national politics," they do claim that "the more citizens are passingly informed about the issues of the day, the behavior of political leaders, and the rules under which they operate, the better off they are, the better off *we* are" (emphasis original) (61).

Although evidence of poor civic competence raises concern in the public opinion literature, Downs (1957) suggests it should not be surprising given the incentives citizens face. The high cost of direct oversight, combined with the small probability that any constituent will be pivotal, suggests that direct oversight will be rare. Only constituents with the necessary skills, interest, and leisure have the incentives to gather information.[4] In practice, this means that knowledge will be concentrated among those with high education, political interest, and socioeconomic status (Bartels 1986; Dalager 1996; Luskin 1990).

"Issue publics" represent an important special case of rational information-seeking (Converse

[4]Delli Carpini and Keeter make similar predictions in their theory of general political knowledge, arguing that a constituent must have sufficiently strong "motivation," "opportunity," and "ability" to gather information about an incumbent's behavior.

1964; Krosnick 1990; Hutchings 2003). If some constituents care intensely about one or two issues, the strength of a constituent's preference may increase her motivation and compensate for the high cost of oversight. Consequently, we should expect higher levels of knowledge among constituents who are members of issue publics on votes of special concern.

The empirical literature on political knowledge largely confirms the expectations of rational information-seeking. Using hundreds of survey questions on political knowledge, Delli Carpini and Keeter find general political knowledge is concentrated among highly educated and politically interested citizens (182-183). The literature on knowledge about particular votes in Congress confirms that the ability to conduct active oversight is limited to the politically engaged. In one of the earliest quantitative analyses, Miller and Stokes (1963) use the 1956-58-60 ANES panel and find only 49% of the public claim to have "read or heard something" about their representatives, and only 12% of the public's likes and dislikes about the two major parties mention issue positions. The last 50 years of ANES data reveal consistently low levels of knowledge about congressional candidates; only 10-15% of the national samples can recall their members' votes on any issue (Jacobson 2004).

More recent studies examine roll call knowledge using the 1988-90-92 Senate Election Study (SES) and the 1994 ANES. These surveys ask roughly 1500 to 2700 respondents whether their Senators voted to authorize the Gulf War in 1991 (Alvarez and Gronke 1996), to nominate Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court justice in 1992 (Hutchings 2001), and to enact the Omnibus Crime Bill in 1994 (Wilson and Gronke 2000). Constituent knowledge on these issues is low and unevenly distributed; only 19% and 23% know their representatives' votes on the war and crime bills, respectively. Constituents who are highly educated, politically interested, and members of issue publics have are more knowledge, particularly when competitive campaigns increase the salience of the votes (Hutchings 2001; 2003).

Indirect Oversight

While many accounts of direct oversight suggest that constituent knowledge is too poor to allow for accountability, accounts of indirect oversight argue that knowledge about roll call voting is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for constituency control. In fact, poor knowledge may actually suggest strong accountability, given the equilibrium behavior of representatives, constituents, and

interested third parties.

Under indirect oversight, constituents do not actively follow roll calls or collect information about their representatives' behavior. Instead, constituents wait for interested third parties such as challengers and interest groups to bring incongruent votes to their attention. Once constituents learn about disagreements, they vote against the incumbent if the disagreements are sufficiently important and the challenger offers a better alternative. Unless incumbents anticipate the intervention of third parties and vote responsively, incumbents risk being replaced in the next election. Accountability can therefore exist even though constituents are typically unaware of their representatives' behavior.

Relying on the political ambitions of others to monitor the actions of current political elites has a long intellectual history in American politics and democratic theory. In its classic analysis, *Federalist 57* suggests that frequent elections are sufficient to provide for accountability, since "the House of Representatives is so constituted as to support in the members an habitual recollection of their dependence on the people" (385).[5] This essential argument is extended in slightly different ways by Schumpteter (1947), Lipset (1960), Downs (1957) and Dahl (1956; 1961), who build on the claim that frequent elections and the competing ambitions of challengers and interests are sufficient to ensure accountability.

Arnold (1993) specifies four conditions that must hold to ensure constituency control (see also Kingdon (1989) and Prewitt (1970)). First, incumbents must value reelection. Second, constituents must have preferences over policy outcomes (e.g., clean water) and be able to develop preferences over policy choices (e.g., sewer regulations). Third, constituents must be able to evaluate incumbents' voting records. Fourth, "the system [must contain] activists who have incentives to monitor what legislators are doing in office and to inform citizens when legislators fail in their duties" (409).

Arnold suggests there are many potential actors who have incentives to highlight incongruent votes. Challengers "have perhaps the strongest incentives," since "[f]ew challengers fail to sift through incumbents' voting records in search of issues that can be used against incumbent legislators" (409). Interest groups want to publicize votes to inform their members of "government errors" (410), and constituents who bear concentrated costs want to "publicize what incumbent legislators

[5] *Federalist 57* goes on to claim that "duty, gratitude, interest, ambition itself, are the chords by which they will be bound to fidelity and sympathy with the great mass of the people" (385), although it is somewhat ambiguous on the importance of each factor.

have done to contribute to their plight" (409-410). Since outside actors must have the incentives and resources to publicize disagreements, indirect oversight will most likely exist on electorally salient issues.

When the conditions for indirect oversight are met, ignorant constituents can control their representatives with threats against incongruent voting. Incumbents "consider the possibility that someone might work to inform their constituents about their policy positions," and minimize the risk by obeying district preferences (410). We might think that indirect oversight should only occur when representatives are out of step on many different issues. Arnold, however, argues that incumbents create responsive voting records "one issue at a time," because this is "the safest way to guarantee that their voting records cannot be used against them in future elections" (410) given uncertainty about which issues may prove salient on Election Day. As it is not unreasonable to expect that what matters is a pattern of failures rather than a single misstep, we interpret our investigation as identifying the marginal impact of voting contrary to constituency opinion holding other behavior constant. We think this is a reasonable interpretation because members willing to vote contrary to district preferences on the salient votes we examine are arguably also likely to vote contrary to district opinion on less salient votes.

1.1 Normative versus Positive Considerations

Questions regarding legislative accountability inevitably involve both positive considerations — what are the actual incentives and behaviors of elites? — and normative considerations — how we would want elites to behave according to some evaluative standard? These are two equally important questions, but we focus on the latter. We examine whether indirect oversight is sufficient to

Investigating the positive behavior requires identifying every issue raised in a previous congress to identify the universe of potential issues that challengers could use in the election, collect constituency information relevant for each of these issues to identify not only constituency opinion on the issue but also the likely salience of the issue to the constituency in the case of more localized issues, and then examine how challengers chose to select issues based on these characteristics. This task is beyond our present inability given the inability to characterize constituency preferences on

the universe of issues before Congress.[6]

Given these difficulties, an alternative research strategy – and one that we adopt – is to identify issues for which we would hope indirect oversight occurs and identify if there is any evidence of its existence. That is, we choose prominent and consequential issues — issues we think ought to be raised in any political system that ensures the accountability of its representatives — and examine the extent to which the issues were used by elites in a manner that would ensure accountability despite the possibility of widespread constituency ignorance.

The standard for accountability that we examine is admittedly high – but not unreasonably so. In an ideal world we would hope that elites would both react to existing constituency preferences and also help identify issues they constituents should care about. Just as constituents may not have the requisite time to follow every decision by the government, they may similarly not fully appreciate the importance of some issues and benefit from a debate over the importance of various issues. A strong interpretation of indirect accountability requires elites to identify issues of possible relevance to voters rather than simply react to constituents' pre-existing impressions of which issues matter. As such, even if an issue is not particularly salient at the time it is passed, a robust conception of accountability would require the issue be raised at re-election time if the representative is out-of-step with their district because of the importance of the issue.

Because this is investigation is motivated by normative considerations, we fully acknowledge that the incentives of challengers may be such that the issues are not actually raised in practice. Even so, this does not mitigate the importance of answering the question: are the incentives such that accountability is possible in the contemporary Congress on a selected set of issues? We do not deny that other forms of accountability may exist and a positive evaluation would require examining possible competing explanations for elite and constituency behavior such as: elites may make their decisions based only on a "string-of-votes" and ignore specific issues, constituents may care only about constituency service or the party of their representative rather that the position of their representative on particular issues not care about the issue position adopted by their, and constituents may simply punish incumbents for bad personal outcomes. We restrict our attention

[6]Collecting only those issues raised by challengers is insufficient because it "samples on the dependent variable." The critical question for the positive investigation of the existence of indirect oversight is whether the issues that are raised by challengers are ones on which oversight is required (i.e., substantial divergence between constituency opinion and representative behavior exists). To do so requires collecting information on those issues that are, and are not, publicized by challengers.

to the question of whether there is any evidence of elites acting in such a way so as to publicize prominent and consequential issues in a manner consistent with the type of accountability that indirect representation might ideally provide.

2 Assessing Constituent Knowledge

In this analysis, we focus on how constituents learn about roll call voting, rather than on electoral support for incumbent representatives. We do so because accountability requires constituents to both realize policy disagreements and then use this information on election day. If constituents are unaware of disagreements, any relationship between policy disagreement and voting behavior is likely to be spurious.

Previous empirical studies of roll call knowledge focus exclusively on direct forms of oversight. In many cases, the analysis consists of estimating the relationships between knowledge and individual characteristics such as education, political interest, and socioeconomic status. In part, this focus is necessitated by the available data. The small number of constituents surveyed by the SES and ANES limits the ability to examine district-level effects. This problem is compounded by the fact that many ANES samples are not representative within districts due to stratified sampling designs (Bowers and Stoker 2002). Moreover, many surveys measure constituent opinion and knowledge on broadly defined dimensions, which are not on the same scale as the actions of legislators.

A second obstacle is the need to unpack equilibrium outcomes. If indirect oversight works effectively, we should see no evidence of its impact. That is, we should see high congruence, poor constituent knowledge, and no third party mobilization precisely because the threat of mobilization is strong. Mobilization and greater constituent knowledge should only occur when incumbents vote against district preferences for whatever reason. That is, indirect oversight, if present, presents a potentially severe endogeneity problem because of strategic candidate entry if the analysis is conducted after the fact. In hindsight, indirect oversight predicts that incongruence and ignorance would not covary precisely because challengers enter and interest groups mobilize on those issues in which there is initially incongruence and ignorance.

We avoid these two obstacles by using an original survey of 13,111 respondents administered between early August and Election Day in 2000. Our respondents are randomly selected from a

panel recruited by Knowledge Networks using random digit dialing.[7] The sample yields unbiased estimates at the district and national levels due to the RDD sampling. Moreover, the size of the sample allows for reasonable inferences at the district level. The average congressional district contains nearly 30 respondents, with district samples ranging in size from 2 respondents to 79 respondents. The average district sample size is 32 among the 386 districts having at least 15 respondents, with a range of 15 to 79.

We focus on a pair votes in the House of Representatives that occurred within two years of the 2000 elections. The first vote gave Permanent Normalized Trade Relations (PNTR) to China and passed 237 to 197 on May 24, 2000. The second vote brought impeachment charges against President Bill Clinton and passed 228 to 206 on December 19, 1998, during a lame-duck session of the 105th House.[8] Useful for overcoming the endogeneity posed by strategic challenger entry is that the PNTR vote was held after the legal deadline for declaring a candidacy in some states, but not others.[9]

Both votes were highly publicized and politically salient. As a crude approximation of salience, a search of the *New York Times* for the calendar year in which each vote was held reveals 314 stories on impeachment and 64 stories on normalizing trade with China—far more than the average roll call. Moreover, the PNTR vote was "scored" by both Americans for Democratic Action (opposed) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (favored). Both PNTR and impeachment were also listed as "key votes" by Congressional Quarterly.

News and polling organizations also conducted numerous polls on both subjects. The iPOLL Databank at *The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research* lists 408 questions about impeachment asked between June 1, 1998 and December 31, 1998. Even on PNTR, there were 35 questions administered on 13 unique polls administered between January 1, 2000 and May 24, 2000. This

[7]KN provided Internet access to all respondents. The average response rate for KN surveys during this time was approximately 65%.

[8]There were actually four votes on impeachment charges, two of which passed. Article I, alleging perjury before a grand jury, passed on a vote of 228-206. Article II, alleging perjury in a civil lawsuit, failed 205-229. Article III, alleging obstruction of justice, passed 221-212. Article VI, alleging abuse of power, failed 148-285. Although we asked respondents about impeachment generically, we believe that it is safe to assume that asking about impeachment refers to the most supported count of Article I. Moreover, given the near-identical voting patterns among legislators, using the other successful vote on Article III yields equivalent conclusions. Although the vote was held in the lame duck session of the 105th Congress, the 2000 election was the first opportunity constituents had to hold their representative accountable for their vote.

[9]This requires assuming that the scheduling decision was primarily a function of the legislative process rather than a decision that was scheduled to encourage or discourage candidate entry.

level of activity suggests that both issues were highly salient and of potential interest to both constituents and organized interests.

Important for our purposes is the fact that if the conditions for indirect oversight are not satisfied for these votes, it is unclear that they are satisfied for the overwhelming number of votes that receive far less attention. Again, it may well be the case that elite incentives are such that these votes are inconsequential in terms of electoral consequences, but this is irrelevant for our purposes. From a normative perspective, if indirect oversight is sufficient to ensure the accountability of representatives to their constituents then we would expect a consequence to representatives' behavior on these consequential votes. Accountability may sometimes require informing voters as to missteps on issues of particular importance even when voters do not themselves initially appreciate the importance of the issue. For some issues this may be an unreasonable standard for accountability, but for the two issues we examine the level of coverage by both journalists and organized interests suggests that the issue was thought sufficiently important so as to warrant extended coverage at the time of the issue's resolution.

Although both votes were salient, the impeachment vote was relatively simple for constituents to grasp and offered strong party cues. Democrats opposed the first impeachment charge by a margin of 199 to 5, while Republicans supported it by a margin of 223 to 7. By contrast, the PNTR vote spanned policy areas that were more complicated and less strongly related to party cleavages. Democrats opposed PNTR by a margin of 138 to 73, while Republicans supported it by a margin of 164 to 58. The timing of the votes also differed; the vote on impeachment occurred almost two years before the 2000 elections, while the vote on PNTR occurred just six months in advance.

We asked respondents four questions to assess their preferences and knowledge of roll call voting, as part of a brief survey on political interest, party identification, and political ideology. After providing a short description of each issue, we asked respondents how they would vote on each bill and how they think their representatives voted. (Appendix A lists the questions in the order they were asked.)

Table 1 presents the bivariate relationship between constituency opinion and representative voting behavior. The raw data provide evidence of substantial disagreement at the individual level. Of those with an opinion, 49.7% (3837/7721) disagree with their representative on PNTR, and

56.4% (6060/10751) disagree on impeachment.

The data also suggest strong face validity for the representativeness of our sample. First, these percentages are similar to the marginals reported by polls conducted close to the actual event. A CBS News/*New York Times* poll of 1,341 respondents conduced December 19, 1998 and December 20, 1998 found 61% disapproving of the impeachment decision. A Gallup poll of 852 respondents conducted at the same time frame similarly found 62% opposing impeachment. Opinion regarding PNTR was more unsettled. only 30 % expressed support to PNTR when polled between April 24th and May 4th, 2000, 25 % favored congressional action when polled by Gallup/CNN/*USA Today* between May 5 and May 7, 2000, and 56% report support in a Gallup poll conducted between May18 and May 21.

Because respondents were randomly selected from the population, the percentage of respondents whose representatives voted yes on each vote should be similar to the vote on the House floor.[10] This is what we observe. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents live in a district whose representative voted for PNTR, compared to 55% of representatives voting for PNTR on the House floor (237 out of 434). Fifty-six percent of the respondents live in a district whose representative voted for impeachment charges, compared to 53% of representatives voting for Article III on the floor (228 out of 434).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

To examine the distribution of disagreement across districts, we aggregate disagreement to the district level. Clearly, our sample size becomes important for this task.

Given the number of respondents without an opinion on each issue—40% on PNTR and 16% on impeachment—several sensible measures of district disagreement exist, depending on how constituents without an opinion are treated. Because representatives are arguably responsive to latent opinion—the opinion that can be mobilized against them (Arnold 1990)—our primary measure of district disagreement imputes opinions for the "don't knows." Specifically, we use individual characteristics to estimate the probability of supporting the bill among those with an opinion, and we use the estimated (parametric) relationship to impute opinions to those without stated opinions.

[10]Since the sample is a national sample rather than a district-by-district sample, the percentage will not be exact due to differences in population size across districts.

(The procedure is similar that used by Berinsky 2004.)[11] District disagreement is measured using the percentage of respondents living in the district with an opinion or imputed opinion contrary to the incumbent's actual vote.

Imputing opinion effectively measures the amount of latent disagreement that could be mobilized against the incumbent, but alternative measures are clearly possible. Most notably, if holding an opinion is a necessary precondition for an issue to be salient in the constituent's voting decision, what matters is the amount of disagreement among those constituents with an opinion on the issue, or else the amount of disagreement among all constituents (including those without an opinion). Although we use the measure that includes imputed opinions in the analysis that follows in the text, we replicate all of the analysis in Appendix B using these two alternative measures of disagreement. Our substantive results are not sensitive to the choice of how we measure disagreement.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 graphs the distribution of disagreement for districts with at least 15 respondents.[12] The solid vertical line in Figure 1 denotes the average amount of disagreement and the vertical dashed line indicates the point at which there is more disagreement than agreement in the district. With perfect accountability, the distribution would be truncated at the vertical dashed line denoting 50%—the maximum amount of disagreement in a district evenly divided on the issue. There are many districts in which more than 50% of constituents express opinions contrary to the votes of their representative in our sample: 58% (222/386) on PNTR and 32% (124/385) on impeachment.[13] Because both issues are sufficiently salient to satisfy Arnold's four conditions for indirect oversight, the existence of substantial disagreement at the district level provides a necessary condition for being subjected to sanctions if the indirect oversight account is correct.

[11] The imputation we perform assumes that the relationship between covariates and opinion is identical across those with and without an opinion and that opinion can be predicted as a function of individual characteristics. If the predicted probability of an opinion exceeds .5 we classify the member as holding that opinion. We acknowledge the strength of these assumptions, but some assumptions are required in order to impute opinions. Table 7 in Appendix B reports the specification we use.

[12] Using the 432 districts that contain at least 2 respondents does not change the results.

[13] The district percentages differ from the percentage of respondents who disagree with their representative reported earlier because the district measure imputes opinions for those without one in Table 2 and because it calculates disagreement at the district-level instead of the individual-level.

Disagreement and Constituent Knowledge

Table 2 begins our analysis of the relationship between district-level disagreement and constituent knowledge. The raw data confirm previous findings about the public's widespread ignorance of roll calls (e.g., Alvarez and Gronke 1996). Eighty-five percent of respondents do not even guess how their representatives voted on PNTR, and 66% do not guess on impeachment. Even assuming that every correct answer reflects knowledge rather than a correct guess, only 8.8% (1126/12745) and 25.2% (3237/12848) of the respondents know their representatives' votes on PNTR and impeachment, respectively. Such low levels of knowledge are not unexpected given prior results, but they remain striking given the importance of the votes. Poor knowledge about impeachment is particularly notable because of the strong party cues and the near-constant media attention on this issue.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The bivariate relationship between constituent knowledge and district disagreement reveals less than unanimous support for the relationships predicted by indirect oversight. More constituents are aware of their representative's vote on PNTR in districts where more than 50% disagree with the incumbent's vote (10.8% versus 5.9%), but there is actually less awareness of the representative's vote on impeachment in districts with a majority opposed to the representatives position (21.5% versus 27.2%). Both differences are statistically distinguishable from zero at conventional levels.

To examine constituent knowledge in more detail, we estimate the relationships between knowledge and a number of individual and district-level variables. The question is whether knowledge is limited to self-motivated constituents and members of issue publics, as direct oversight suggests, or whether the distribution of knowledge across constituents is consistent with mechanisms of indirect oversight. Because the types of oversight are not mutually exclusive, we may reasonably find evidence of both processes at work.

Indirect oversight predicts we should observe better-informed constituents in districts with highly unresponsive incumbents. Estimating the relationship between disagreement and knowledge is therefore sufficient to validate the *prediction* of indirect oversight, as we can check whether there is more knowledge in districts where representatives vote contrary to district opinion. (In later analyses, we also examine whether several *mechanisms* of indirect oversight—challenger and interest group mobilization—work as predicted.)

Direct oversight suggests that individual differences should explain much of the variation in roll call knowledge. In particular, only characteristics related to the costs and benefits of gathering political information should correlate with knowledge. Existing work interprets variables such as political interest and education in this fashion. If the incentives to gather information depend on issue-specific interests, knowledge should correlate with traits related to issue public membership. For the votes at hand, two plausible issue publics include constituents who belong to a union (PNTR) and constituents with strong opinions about Bill Clinton (impeachment).

Table 3 estimates the probability that a respondent correctly identifies how her representative votes on each issue using a probit regression that controls for several individual- and district-level covariates. (Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 6 of Appendix A.) *PID Proximity* measures the extent to which sharing the incumbent's party affiliation contributes to knowledge, and *PID Proximity*^{2} examines whether extremely similar and dissimilar constituents are more likely to be knowledgeable.[14] *Education* (categorized by level of attainment) and *Interest in Politics* (on a four-point scale) measure the impact of education and interest on knowledge, respectively. *log(Incumbent Tenure)* and *% District Presidential Vote* control for the number of years the incumbent has served in Congress and the partisanship of the geographic constituency respectively (with 50% re-centered at 0). *% District Presidential Vote*^{2} controls for the probability of correctly guessing the answer, as constituents in lop-sided districts may be better able to guess the vote of the representative on the impeachment vote than those in closely-divided districts, given the partisan nature of the vote. To assess issue public oversight, we examine whether people with strong opinions about President Clinton (*Clinton Approval*^{2}) are more knowledgeable about the impeachment vote and whether union respondents (*Union Member Indicator*) are more knowledgeable about the PNTR vote.[15] Lastly, *% District Disagreement* is the percentage of constituents disagreeing with the representative's vote discussed above.

Table 3 presents the probit results for respondents living in the 385 districts containing at least 15 respondents. Robust standard errors clustered by congressional district are reported in

[14]PID proximity is based on a five-point scale of party identification (i.e., strong partisan, partisan, independent), which we then compare to the incumbent's partisanship.

[15]Controlling for the amount of import/export activity in the district to control for the potential saliency of the PNTR vote to district respondents does not affect the estiamtes.

parentheses.[16]

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

As in prior studies, *Education* and *Interest in Politics* are positively correlated with knowledge. When interpreting the marginal effects reported in Table 3, recall that the predicted probability that a constituent with median characteristics knows their representative's position is only .095 for the PNTR vote and .270 for the vote on impeachment. The largest impact is for *Education* and *Interest in Politics*, where a one unit change in political interest level increases the probability of knowing the representative's position by .055 (± .009) on PNTR and .132 (± .014) on impeachment and a one-unit change in education level (e.g., a change from "high school graduate or GED" to "some college") results in a .013 (± .006) increase in the probability of knowing the representative's position on PNTR with China and .005 (± .009) on impeachment. Union membership has no effect on knowledge of the PNTR vote, and the fact that *Clinton Approval*^{2} is positively correlated with knowledge of both votes suggests that it likely proxies for more than just membership in an issue public relevant for the the impeachment vote.

In terms of the evidence consistent with indirect oversight, the critical variable is *% District Disagreement*. If political actors highlight the disagreement of members and their district on these votes, we should observe a positive relationship between the amount of district disagreement and constituency knowledge. Consistent with the bivariate relationship, constituency disagreement is positively related to constituency knowledge of the PNTR vote, but negatively related to knowledge about the vote on impeachment. Moreover, the magnitude of the effects are trivially small. A 1% increase in district disagreement is predicted to increase the probability of a constituent knowing the vote of their representative on PNTR by only .001 (±.0004), and decrease the probability of correctly identifying how the representative voted on impeachment by .0009 (±.0012).[17]

Table 3 provides almost no evidence for indirect oversight on the votes we examine. As disagreement increases at the district level, constituents are very slightly more likely to know about

[16]Estimating a random effects probit and allowing for the possibility of omitted district-level characteristics (which are uncorrelated with included covariates) reveals no reason to reject the assumptions of the pooled regression models reported in Table 3. (The "fixed effects" probit is inconsistent due to the incidental parameter problems.)

[17]This is not a function of sampling-based measurement error in the district disagreement variable; as Table 11 in Appendix B shows, accounting for the error that results as a consequence of sampling district opinion using a bootstrap estimator does not change our substantive conclusions.

their representatives' votes on PNTR with China, but less likely to know about the votes on impeachment. It is not the case that constituents are always made aware of disagreements by external sources such as interest groups, challengers or the news media. The overall level of knowledge is extremely low and the estimated effect size of district disagreement is extremely small relative to individual factors like political interest.

3 Mechanisms of Indirect Oversight

The evidence is not entirely conclusive because constituency awareness is normatively desirable, but it is not a necessary condition for the existence of indirect oversight. Indirect oversight may be present and constituents may nonetheless remain ignorant if either of two countervailing mechanisms are present. First, challengers and interest groups may respond to disagreement by entering the race, even though they may choose not to mobilize opinion on the issues. Second, challengers and interest groups may provide enough information about the incumbent's behavior, but constituents may be unable to absorb the information they are provided.

We conduct two analyses to evaluate these possibilities. First, we examine whether high-quality candidates were more likely to emerge and challenge unresponsive incumbents. Second, we examine whether the challengers and interest groups active in the 2000 campaigns highlighted unresponsive roll call votes in television advertising. If neither occurred, we can explain the lack of indirect oversight on these votes as a failure of third party intervention rather than as a failure of constituents to absorb the information provided.

Candidate Emergence

Prior work suggests that high-quality challengers are most likely to run for office against "vulnerable" incumbents (Stone, Maisel and Maestas 2004, Adams and Squire 1997, Krasno and Green 1988, Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985). High-quality candidates are more likely to accurately gauge incumbent weaknesses and avoid races in which the chance of victory is low. These candidates are also better able to take advantage of incumbent weaknesses once the campaign begins. Accordingly, the literature typically correlates challenger quality with measures of incumbent strength such as the incumbent's previous vote share, the partisan balance of the district (i.e., the "normal vote"),

a measure of general issue agreement with the district, and a measure of national trends in favor of a particular party.

Our innovation is to examine the effect of *issue-specific* vulnerability on the likelihood of challenger entry in addition to these standard variables. Accounts of indirect oversight predict that disagreement on salient issues should increase the vulnerability of incumbents and the chance that high-quality challengers enter the race. We examine the credibility of this threat by estimating whether high-quality challengers are more likely to run in districts with high levels of disagreement on PNTR with China and impeachment. Although it is likely that entry decisions involve far more calculations than the two issues we examine, the investigation can be interpreted as investigating whether aspects correlated with issue-disagreement on these two issues are correlated with the entry decision. That is, if there are dissonances on these two important issues it is not unlikely that there are likely to be other differences as well.

The bivariate relationship can be estimated by comparing the the amount of disagreement in districts with and without high-quality challengers. Although measuring candidate quality is the subject of some debate (Squire and Smith 1996), we adopt the measure used by many previous studies: whether the challenger has previously held an elected political office (e.g., Born 1986, Jacobson 2004, Jacobson and Kernell 1981).[18] Using this measure, eighteen percent of all House incumbents running for reelection faced high-quality challengers in 2000.

Quantile plots and kernel density estimates suggest that the distribution of disagreement is roughly similar in districts with and without high-quality challengers (see Figure 5). Consistent with indirect oversight, the average amount of disagreement on impeachment was 49% in districts with high-quality challengers but 42% with low-quality challengers (standard error of the difference = 2.0, $p = .002$ on a one-sided t-test). On PNTR, however, there was actually *less* disagreement in districts with high-quality challengers (49%) than with low-quality challengers (52%), although the difference is not statistically significant (se = 3.2, $p = .21$). The average amount of disagreement on both issues was 29.5% with a high-quality challenger and 29.2% with a low-quality challenger (se=1.7, $p = .86$). At best, then, high-quality challengers were slightly more likely to challenge incumbents who defied their districts on impeachment, but no more likely to do so on PNTR.

[18] We thank Gary Jacobson for providing these data for the 2000 elections.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

The timing of the PNTR vote provides particularly strong analytical leverage on the question of whether disagreement increases the chance that a high-quality candidate challenges the incumbent. Because the filing deadlines for House candidates vary by state, ranging from December 12, 1999, in California to August 18, 2000, in Louisiana, and because the PNTR vote occurred on May 24, 2000, 101 districts in our sample have deadlines after the vote and 332 districts have deadlines before the vote.[19] As a result, challengers in states with filing deadlines prior to the vote could not base their decisions to run on district congruence with the incumbent's PNTR vote. The effect of disagreement *conditional on the filing deadline* should be zero in districts with an early deadline and positive in districts with a late deadline. Moreover, any non-zero estimate for districts with early deadlines cannot be a causal effect, because district disagreement on PNTR should affect the entry decisions of quality challengers only in the 101 districts whose filing deadlines occur after the PNTR vote.

Our key explanatory variables are *% District Disagreement*, a variable indicating whether the district's filing deadline occurs after the PNTR vote (*Late Filing Deadline Indicator*), and their interaction. We also control for covariates common to prior models of challenger quality. *% Incumbent Vote Share* is the incumbent's percentage vote share in the 1998 election. *% District Presidential Vote* is the percentage of the district voting for Al Gore in 2000 (with 50% re-centered at 0), which we interpret as a measure of district partisanship. We also include a quadratic term (*% District Presidential Vote*^{2}) to capture the vulnerability of incumbents in moderate districts. *District Partisan Similarity* is the district mean of the partisan similarity measure (*PID Proximity*) used in Table 3. This variable controls for the distance between incumbent and constituent preferences across many different issues, given the strong correlations among partisanship, roll call voting, and issue opinions. Lastly, *Freshman Indicator* indicates whether the incumbent was elected to the House in the previous election.

Probit estimates and marginal effects calculated at the sample medians appear in Table 4, using the incumbents who voted on impeachment and PNTR and who ran for reelection in the fall of 2000. (Tables 9 and 10 in Appendix B compare the estimated relationships to specifications with

[19] Among those with late deadlines, an average of 49.7 days (sd = 20.6) elapsed between the vote and the deadline. Among those with early deadlines, an average of 93.3 (sd = 55.7) days elapsed between the deadline and the vote.

different measures of disagreement and district sample sizes. None of the alternative specificatins and measures substantially changes our results.)[20]

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The fact that the marginal effect of district disagreement is negative *even in districts with early filing deadlines* (-.0027 ±.0029) suggests that the negative and marginally significant effect of district disagreement on quality challenger emergence cannot be interpreted causally. Challengers in these districts clearly could not have entered the race in response to the incumbent's vote, because the latter had not yet occurred. There is also no evidence of a positive relationship between district disagreement and high-quality challenger entry in districts with deadlines after the vote. In fact, the effect is even more strongly negative ($-.0055 \pm .001\%$).

To examine whether some challengers anticipated the incumbent's vote on PNTR and entered the race based on their expectation about future disagreement, we estimate the effect of disagreement conditional on the number of days between the filing deadline and the vote (May 24). If potential challengers were able to predict the outcome in the weeks before May 24, we should see more high-quality candidates as the time before the vote decreases and disagreement increases. As Model 2 in Table 4 suggests, we find no evidence of this interaction ($p = .776$), and the marginal effect of disagreement is still not positive. In sum, by taking advantage of the timing of the PNTR vote and the variation in the filing deadlines across states, we can conclude that high-quality candidates are not more likely to challenge incumbents who voted in an unresponsive manner.

Campaign Messages

Challenger entry is only one possible mechanism of indirect oversight. It could be that challengers publicize disagreements in campaign messages, but constituents are unwilling or unable to remember the provided information. To explore this possibility, we examine the extent to which challengers, interest groups, and other third parties publicized the votes on impeachment and PNTR for China during the 2000 campaigns.[21]

[20] We also estimated models using logged incumbent vote share, tenure and logged tenure, party affiliation (as a potential correlate of "national trends"), and the incumbent and presidential margin of victory. None of these alternatives significantly improved the fit of the models. Controlling for measurement error in the calculation of district disagreement (Table 12) also fails to change the results.

[21] Examining campaign advertising also addresses a potential objection to our analysis of constituent knowledge. Because our survey went into the field in early August of 2000 and most congressional campaigns do not begin in

Although it is impossible to document every message sent to voters, we can measure television advertising using data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG). CMAG collected data on all network and selected cable television ads broadcast by any political actor in the 75 largest media markets (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002). The breadth of these data lets us say conclusively whether challengers and interest groups talk about impeachment or PNTR on television. Because similar incentives exist in all media markets to publicize disagreements, the selection mechanism of the CMAG sample should be exogenous to our investigation. That is, indirect accounts do not predict that oversight depends on population size. Moreover, scholars using identical or related data argue that campaigns in general (e.g., Franklin 1991), and television advertising in particular (e.g., Freedman, Franz and Goldstein 2004, Abbe, Goodliffe, Herrnson and Patterson 2003), provide vital information about candidates' issue positions.

We acknowledge that the differences between media markets and congressional districts may mean that the majority of candidate communications are conducted in avenues besides television advertising. As such, our conclusion is conditional on television advertising being used in the contest.[22]

Table 5 summarizes the number of ads broadcast by any political actor during the congressional campaign that mention: "China," "trade," "jobs," "Bill Clinton," "impeachment," "Kenneth Starr," and "Paula Jones." The issue coding comes from a secondary analysis of CMAG data conducted by the Wisconsin Political Advertising Project. We confirmed the coding decisions by reading the scripts and storyboards of every ad aired in congressional contests.

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

The CMAG data show very little advertising on issues related to impeachment and PNTR. On average, only .1% and .2% of the broadcasts in each campaign mention China or trade issues, respectively. There are also very few broadcasts on the broader, but less directly relevant, issue of jobs—on average, only 5.8% of the broadcasts in each campaign mention this issue. As the third

earnest until Labor Day, respondents whom we interview early may not have had the chance to learn from challengers and interest groups as indirect oversight predicts. Even if most activity occurs late in a campaign and prior to the interview of some respondents, however, our data show that because almost no advertising occurred on either issue *at any point*, over-time variation in campaign activity cannot affect our analysis of constituency knowledge.

[22] Even if challengers and interest groups discussed the votes in other media (e.g., direct mail), the fact that so few constituents are aware raises significant doubts as to whether the communications we do not examine are consequential for informing constituents about policy disagreements.

and fourth columns of Table 5 suggest, issues related to PNTR are no better represented if we sum across all campaigns. In total, there are only 112 broadcasts (.1%) on China, 482 broadcasts (.2%) on trade, and 10,286 broadcasts (4.3%) on jobs.

Although Abbe et. al. (2003) report that impeachment was an important issue in some 1998 House elections, we find no evidence that outside groups tried to educate the public about the issue in 2000. On average, a mere .04% and .03% of the broadcasts in each congressional campaign mention "impeachment" or "Bill Clinton." Across all campaigns, there are a total of 66 broadcasts (.03%) related to impeachment and only 179 broadcasts (.1%) devoted to Clinton. No broadcasts mention "Kenneth Starr" or "Paula Jones" despite their prominent role in the impeachment controversy.

After reading the story boards of all ads broadcast on the issues of "impeachment," "Bill Clinton," "trade," and "China"—the most clearly relevant categories—we find only one incumbent whose opponent directly mentions either of the two votes: James Rogan (R-CA 27).[23] As a House manager of the impeachment proceedings, Rogan disagreed with 47.8% of constituents by voting in favor of the articles of impeachment (according to our estimates). In the 2000 campaign, Democratic challenger Adam Schiff attacked Rogan's role in the process, as well as his positions on health care, abortion, taxes, and gun rights (Barone and Cohen 2002). Schiff's only televised ad did not mention impeachment, but instead focused on two of the most common issues from the 2000 congressional campaigns: Medicare and a patient's bill of rights. Rogan's only ad responded to Schiff's attacks on impeachment, presumably made in other media.

The California's 27th district is clearly an outlier, and there are several factors that suggest the advertising is not an example of indirect oversight. First, contrary to media portrayals of the campaign, Rogan actually agreed with a majority of his constituents according to our measure (52.2% based on 25 respondents). In fact, there are 186 districts with no advertising on impeachment but at least as much disagreement as California's 27th. Second, Rogan's role as a House manager suggests that the challenger intervened only after a strong and constitutionally unusual form of position-taking. Schiff's messages appear to highlight information that is already salient rather than to raise previously obscure issues as accounts of indirect oversight suggest. Third, Rogan

[23]The remaining ads in Table 5 were false positives of various kinds. For example, one candidate talked about selling water from Lake Michigan to Chinese corporations, and was coded as having talked about "China."

barely won in 1996 and 1998 – never receiving more than 50% of the vote – and the district was becoming steadily more Democratic over time. Considered together, even though Schiff defeated Rogan in 2000 with 57% of the vote in one of the most expensive races in the country, it is difficult to attribute this to the successful operation of indirect oversight.

In sum, the lack of *any* advertising on impeachment and PNTR gives no variation to explain. There is essentially no attempt to inform constituents about either vote using television ads, even though incumbents often significantly departed from constituency preferences. As a result, it is not the case that the lack of knowledge evident in Table 2 is due to constituents forgetting information that challengers and interest groups had highlighted during the campaign. Instead, it reflects the fact that no attempt was even made to highlight the likely disagreements.

4 Caveats

Although we find weak evidence of indirect oversight, we believe these null results are useful for several reasons (see also Gerber and Malhotra 2006). First, given the frequency with which the possibility of indirect oversight is invoked, we offer an important attempt to document its existence. Second, the scarcity of prior investigations is partially, if not entirely, due to the difficulty of investigating indirect oversight. If indirect oversight works as suggested, there should be no observable traits because, in equilibrium, incumbents vote responsively and prevent the mechanisms of indirect oversight from being realized.

Nonetheless, our results are subject to several caveats. First, our analysis only examines the votes on PNTR with China and impeachment. This limitation is inevitable, given the difficulty and the expense of measuring constituent knowledge and preferences. The heavy media attention given to these issues and their salience in national politics, however, suggests that they are reasonable starting points. Moreover, our data are no more atypical than those used by existing studies. Even though it is reasonable to expect indirect oversight to operate when representatives are unresponsive on a string of votes rather than on a single vote, the evidence we provide shows the marginal effect of voting contrary to district opinion on these two votes conditional on the member's behavior on other votes to be nonexistent.

Second, challengers, interest groups, and other outside actors may not have perceived either

vote to be strategically important enough to mention in campaign messages. We do not deny this possibility, but we would emphasize that our investigation is largely motivated by normative rather than positive considerations. Although the standards for "important enough" are inherently subjective, we note that the PNTR and impeachment votes were objectively among the most publicized votes occurring between 1998 and 2000. Furthermore, if these votes were not perceived to be strategically relevant, this only strengthens our broader conclusion. The vote to impeach President Clinton represented an exceptionally rare and serious act of Congress and the vote to grant PNTR status to China affected the economic interests of both consumers and the millions of people working in industries competing with China. If challengers and interest groups have insufficient incentives to publicize these votes, they assuredly have even weaker incentive to publicize less important votes. If so, this raises serious doubts about the prospects of indirect oversight as a solution to citizen ignorance and as a mechanism to ensure accountability on particular votes.

Even though we might not expect a vote on trade relations with China to be particularly salient given the complexity of the issue, this prior expectation it only strengthens our conclusion regarding the potential inadequacy of indirect oversight from a normative perspective. Indirect oversight is arguably most needed in those cases in which congressional action is consequential for both consumers and producers and in which it is difficult to identify the consequences of congressional action. If such actions are beyond the purview of indirect oversight, it is unclear how accountability on congressional tasks involving complex tasks is even possible. If indirect oversight is only possible on the most obvious and least complicated issues than we may wonder about the ability of the electoral process to function as a mechanism for ensuring accountability.

Third, to identify disagreement we use a measure constructed from a national RDD survey. Even with the sample size of the survey, however, the district-level estimates are based on rather modest samples. Attempts to exploit cross-sectional variation inevitably face a trade-off between the size of the within-district sample and the number of possible between-district comparisons. Our samples are far larger than any other published study on the topic, but we acknowledge that, like most concepts in political science, they are estimates of the true level of district disagreement. Random-sampling ensures that our district level estimates are unbiased, but variability certainly exists in the estimates. Appendix B shows that controlling for the sampling based measurement error and using three different measures fails to change the results. Moreover the examination that

does not depend of the survey-based measure–the amount of advertising on the issues–also fails to provide evidence of indirect oversight.

Fourth, our survey does not measure the intensity of constituent preferences. We can determine which constituents had opinions on the issues and which did not, but our ability to differentiate among intense preferences is rather limited. Apart from indicators of issue-public membership which likely proxy for intense interests (e.g., those with strong opinions regarding President Clinton), our ability to measure preference intensity is limited.

Fifth, one might think that disagreement between an incumbent and his re-election constituency is the relevant explanatory variable. That is, if indirect oversight occurs among a subset of constituents, evidence of indirect oversight at the district level may prove elusive. We acknowledge this possibility, but we note that existing accounts focus on indirect oversight as a way to ensure accountability among all constituents, not only those who support the incumbent. Moreover, replicating the analysis for a subset of voters requires either a much larger sample or a restricted focus on a few large districts. We leave both possibilities for future work.

Finally, the unresponsiveness we uncover, however one sizes its magnitude, does not necessarily mean that the quality of *representation* was poor on impeachment or PNTR. Indeed, incongruence between district opinion and roll call voting may be consistent with *good* representation if constituents have too little information to know what truly serves their interests. Making the determination of whether voting against constituent opinion is actually the best way to represent the district, however, is a difficult question the goes far beyond the limits of our argument. Although we demonstrate that incongruence between representatives' votes and district opinion on the two highly salient issues we examine does not result in the activities predicted by accounts of indirect oversight, the normative implications of this are unclear.

5 Conclusion

Elections have always been the intended instrument for ensuring the accountability of representative to their constituents. Precisely in those circumstances in which elite assistance is most required – on complicated issues of wide-ranging consequences involving difficult trade-offs between the costs and benefits associated with the possible choices – there is little evidence of its presence either

directly or indirectly. For those seeking to ensure that citizens are adequately informed by the political process about the stakes involved, the results are not especially encouraging.

In light of widespread constituent ignorance about roll call voting, some scholars suggest that indirect forms of oversight by challengers, interest groups, and other actors may still permit robust accountability. Using an original survey of 13,111 citizens, we show that only the most educated and politically interested constituents are likely to know how their representatives voted on two recent and prominent bills in Congress. More importantly, there is no evidence that parties, challengers, and interest groups enabled constituency oversight when incumbents voted against district preferences. High-quality challengers were no more likely to enter a race when the incumbent voted unresponsively, and outside groups did not focus on either issue in televised campaign advertising. At the same time, both of the issues we examine featured high levels of salience and incongruence—conditions that should have been ripe for third-party oversight.

Our results suggest that oversight by a significant number of constituents was not possible on votes to impeach the President and to fundamentally change national trade policies. Most constituents did not know how their representatives voted on either issues, despite widespread disagreement. If oversight is unlikely even on such prominent votes, the prospects for accountability on the hundreds of more obscure bills in Congress seem less positive than some have suggested. Representatives may be held responsible if they are "out-of-step" across a series of votes, but disagreement on the two of the most important issues addressed by representatives of the 106th Congress failed to produce evidence of oversight even in the presence of substantial constituency disagreements.

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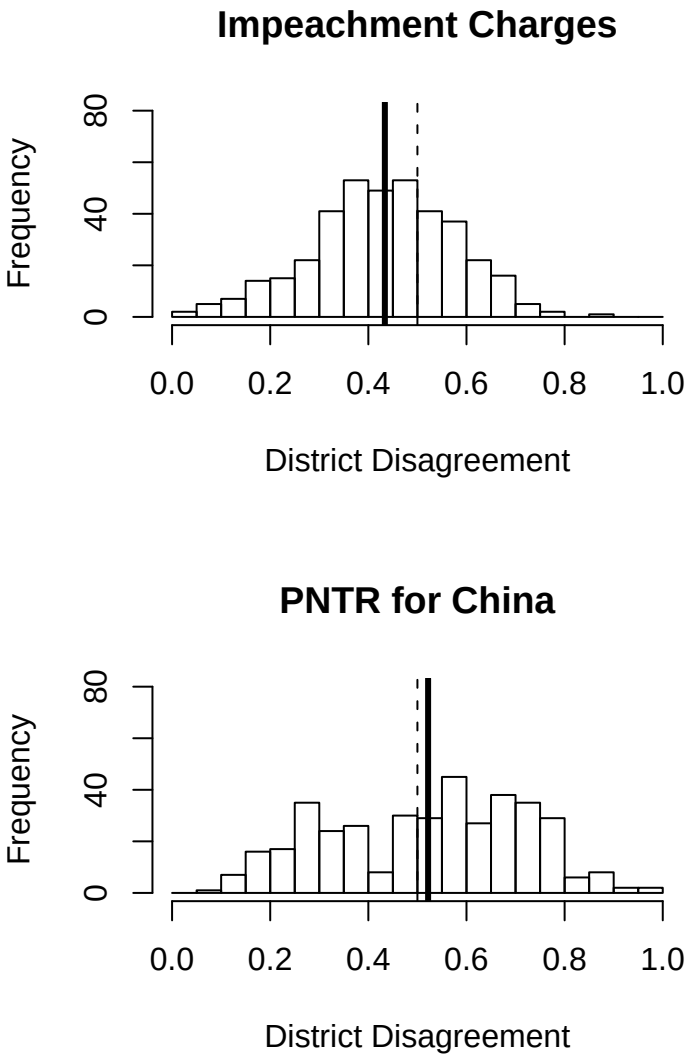

Figure 1: Percentage of District Respondents With an Opinion Contrary to Incumbent's Vote.

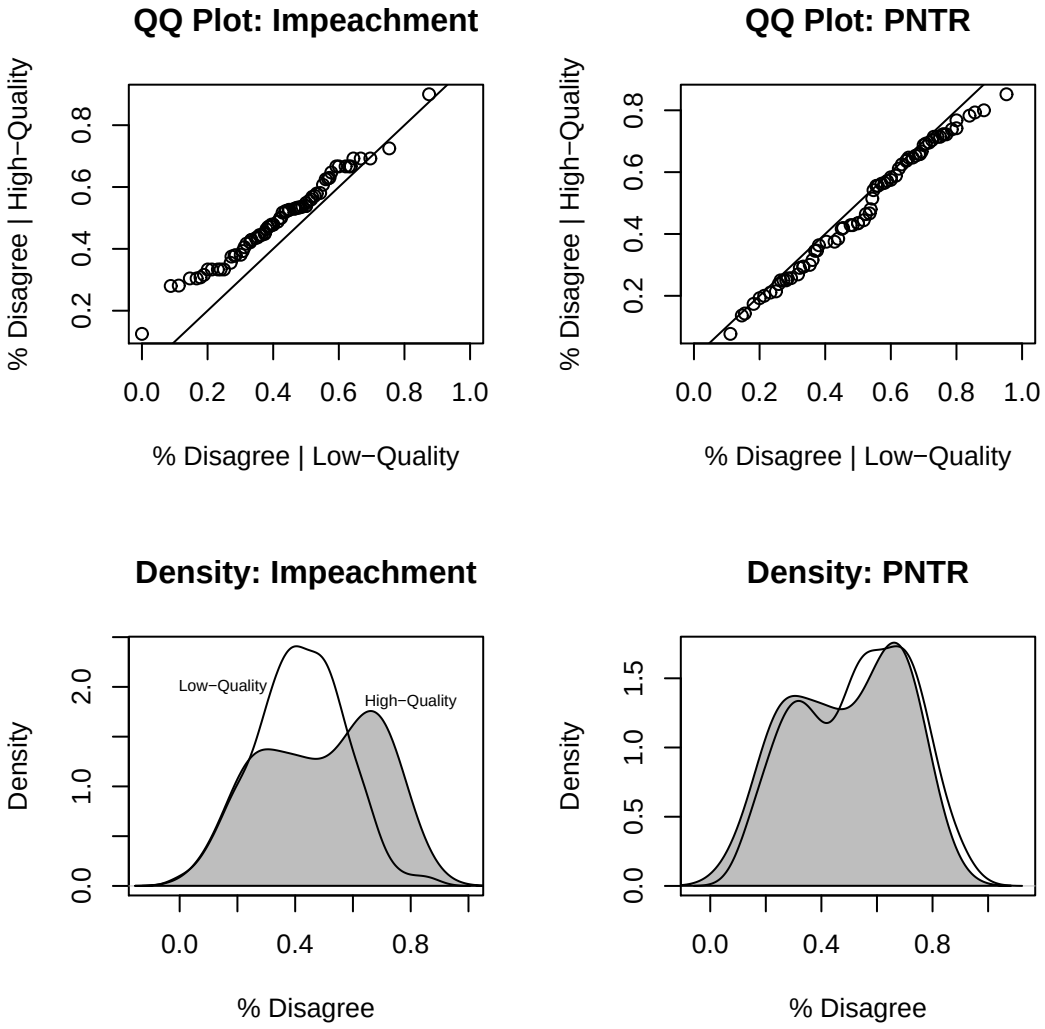

Figure 2: The Distribution of Disagreement by Challenger Quality

Table 1: Constituent Opinion & Representative Voting

	PNTR			
	Constituent Supports	Constituent Opposes	Constituent Doesn't Know	Total
Rep. Votes Yes	2582	1821	2950	7353
				(.573)
Rep. Votes No	2016	1302	2167	5485
				(.427)
Total	4598	3123	5117	12838
	(.358)	(.243)	(.399)	(1.00)
	Impeachment			
	Constituent Supports	Constituent Opposes	Constituent Doesn't Know	Total
Rep. Votes Yes	2880	3216	1108	7204
				(.561)
Rep. Votes No	2844	1811	989	5644
				(.439)
Total	5724	5027	2097	12848
	(.446)	(.391)	(.163)	(1.00)

Table 2: Constituent Knowledge of Roll Call Voting

	PNTR			
	Constituent Thinks Yes	Constituent Thinks No	Constituent Doesn't Know	Total
Rep. Votes Yes	861	254	6181	7296
				(.572)
Rep. Votes No	599	265	4585	5449
				(.428)
Total	1460	519	10766	12745
	(.114)	(.041)	(.845)	(1.00)
	Impeachment			
	Constituent Thinks Yes	Constituent Thinks No	Constituent Doesn't Know	Total
Rep. Votes Yes	1739	711	4754	7204
				(.561)
Rep. Votes No	430	1498	3716	5644
				(.439)
Total	2169	2209	8470	12848
	(.169)	(.172)	(.659)	(1.00)

Table 3: Correlates of Constituent Knowledge

Variable	**PNTR**	**dy/dx**	**Impeach**	**dy/dx**
Constant	-2.929*		-2.135*	
	(.140)		(.124)	
Education (1-5)	.079*	.013	.145*	.048
	(.020)	(.003)	(.015)	(.005)
Interest in Politics (0-3)	.327*	.055	.398*	.132
	(.029)	(.005)	(.020)	(.007)
PID Proximity (-2-2)	.014	.002	.069	.023
	(.012)	(.002)	(.011)	(.004)
PID Proximity^2 (0-4)	.037*	.006	.078*	.026
	(.011)	(.002)	(.010)	(.003)
Clinton Approval (-2-2)	-.039*	-.007	-.045*	-.015
	(.011)	(.002)	(.010)	(.003)
Clinton Approval^2 (0-4)	.043*	.007	.073*	.024
	(.011)	(.002)	(.009)	(.003)
Union Member Indicator (0,1)	.035	.006	-.018	-.006
	(.055)	(.010)	(.042)	(.014)
% District Presidential Vote (-50-50)	.00005	.00001	.0001	.00003
	(.002)	(.0003)	(.002)	(.0006)
% District Presidential Vote^2 (0-2500)	-.0001	-.00002	.0002*	.00007
	(.0001)	(.00002)	(.0001)	(.00002)
log(Incumbent Tenure) (years)	.007	.001	-.053	-.018
	(.028)	(.005)	(.030)	(.010)
% District Disagreement (0-100)	.008*	.001	-.003	-.0009
	(.001)	(.0002)	(.002)	(.0006)
N	10728		9594	
Pseudo R^2	.075		.118	
Log-Likelihood	-3063		-4968	
Null Deviance	6626.7		11257.9	
Residual Deviance	6126.9		9935.3	
AIC	6150.9		9959.3	

Note: Entries are probit coefficients, with robust standard errors clustered by district in parentheses. Entries in the *dy/dx* columns are the predicted change in the probability of having a high-quality challenger due to a one-unit change in the variable indicated. Standard errors of the marginal effects are in parentheses. Both models exclude districts with fewer than 15 respondents. * denotes significance at .05 using a two-tailed test.

Table 4: Correlates of Challenger Emergence

Variable	**Model 1**	**dy/dx**	**Model 2**	**dy/dx**
Constant	-7.255		-7.375	
	(4.729)		(4.704)	
% Incumbent Vote Share, 1998	-.013*	-.003	-.011	-.0024
	(.008)	(.002)	(.008)	(.0019)
% District Presidential Vote	.314	.078	.317	.069
	(.180)	(.053)	(.178)	(.048)
% District Presidential Vote^2	-.003	-.0008	-.0037	-.0007
	(.002)	(.0005)	(.0017)	(.0005)
District Partisan Similarity	-.99*9	-.250	-.976*	-.214
	(.394)	(.098)	(.395)	(.088)
Freshman Indicator	.896*	.306	.884*	.280
	(.286)	(.109)	(.282)	(.104)
Late Filing Deadline Indicator	.216	.060		
	(.765)	(.231)		
Late Filing Deadline (days)			.0011	.0002
			(.0038)	(.0008)
% Disagreement Impeachment	-.0039	.0010	-.0031	-.0007
	(.0110)	(.0027)	(.0110)	(.0024)
% Disagreement PNTR	-.0106	-.0027	-.0163*	-.0036
	(.0059)	(.0015)	(.0081)	(.0016)
% Disagreement PNTR * Late Filing Indicator	-.0111	-.0028		
	(.0147)	(.0038)		
% Disagreement PNTR * Late Filing (days)			-.000047	-.00001
			(.000069)	(.00001)
N	252		252	
Pseudo R^2	.206		.204	
Log-Likelihood	-87.590		-87.802	
Null Deviance	220.5		220.5	
Residual Deviance	175.2		175.9	
AIC	195.2		195.9	

Note: Entries in the "Model" columns are probit coefficients, with robust standard errors, clustered by district, in parentheses. Entries in the *dy/dx* columns are the predicted change in the probability of having a high-quality challenger due to a one-unit change in the variable indicated. Standard errors of the marginal effects are in parentheses. Models exclude districts with fewer than 15 respondents. * denotes significance at .05 using a two-tailed test.

Table 5: Campaign Advertising on PNTR and Impeachment

	Avg. Number of Broadcasts	Avg. Percentage of Broadcasts	Total Number of Broadcasts	Total Pct. of Broadcasts
China	.66	.1%	112	.1%
Trade	2.85	.2	482	.2
Jobs	60.9	5.8	10,286	4.3
Bill Clinton	1.06	.03	179	.07
Impeachment	.39	.04	66	.03
Kenneth Starr	0	0	0	0
Paula Jones	0	0	0	0

Note: The first two columns contain the average number and average percentage of ads broadcast on each issue across all campaigns. The last two columns contain the total number and total percentage of all ads broadcast on each issue.

Appendix A

The questions measuring issue preferences and knowledge of roll call voting are reproduced below in the order asked:

> In 1998, the House of Representatives impeached President Clinton, leading to his trial in the U.S. Senate. If you could have voted directly on impeaching President Clinton, would you have...
>
> voted FOR impeachment
> voted AGAINST impeachment
> don't know
>
> Did your Congressional representative vote for or against impeaching President Clinton?
>
> representative voted FOR impeachment
> representative voted AGAINST impeachment
> don't know
>
> Earlier this year the House of Representatives voted to grant China "most favored nation" status, easing restrictions on trade and commerce between China and the U.S. If you could have voted directly on this issue would you have...
>
> voted FOR giving China "most favored nation" trading status
> voted AGAINST giving China '"most favored nation trading status
> don't know
>
> Did your Congressional representative vote for or against giving China "most favored nation" trading status?
>
> representative voted FOR giving China "most favored nation" status
> representative voted AGAINST giving China "most favored nation" status
> don't know

Appendix B: Reviewer's Appendix

Table 6: Summary of Knowledge Covariates

Variable	**Observations**	**Mean (sd)**	**Range**
Know PNTR	12838	.088 (.284)	[0,1]
Know Impeachment	12848	.252 (.434)	[0,1]
Education	12834	3.908 (.987)	[1,5]
Age Group	12770	3.647 (1.685)	[1,7]
Political Interest	12571	1.823 (.918)	[0,3]
Party ID	11717	-.142 (1.366)	[-2,2]
PID Proximity (to incumbent)	11717	.202 (1.367)	[-2,2]
PID Proximity^2	11717	1.907 (1.673)	[0,4]
Church Attendance > once a week	10722	.136 (.343)	[0,1]
Work in Manufacturing	8345	.087 (.282)	[0,1]
Union Member	12526	.129 (.335)	[0,1]
Clinton Favorability	12287	-.009 (1.553)	[-2,2]
Clinton Favorability^2	12287	2.411 (1.737)	[0,4]
% District Presidential Vote	12886	2.715 (12.597)	[-24.755,42.412]
% District Presidential Vote^2	12886	166.034 (303.268)	[0,1798.764]
log(Tenure, Impeachment Rep.)	11577	2.259 (.673)	[0,3.829]
log(Tenure, PNTR Rep.)	12886	2.150 (.733)	[0,3.829]
% Disagreement PNTR	12233	52.760 (19.604)	[0,95.238]
% Disagreement PNTR$_2$	12233	50.592 (16.351)	[0,93.750]
% Disagreement PNTR$_3$	12233	25.464 (10.538)	[0,62.500]
% Disagreement Impeachment	12227	44.547 (13.782)	[0,85.714]
% Disagreement Impeachment$_2$	12227	43.546 (13.782)	[0,90.909]
% Disagreement Impeachment$_3$	12227	36.789 (12.117)	[0,71.429]

Note: % District Disagreement is the measure used in the text. % District Disagreement$_2$ and % District Disagreement$_3$ are discussed in footnote 8 and calculated using only respondents living in districts with at least 15 respondents.

Table 7: Opinion Imputation Model

Variable	**PNTR**	**Impeach**
Intercept	-.864	-.144
(Stnd. Err.)	(.084)	(.089)
Education (1,5))	.162	.002
	(.012)	(.020)
Interest in Politics (0,3)	-.026	.009
	(.020)	(.023)
PID (-2,2)	.024	.294
	(.015)	(.017)
PID Proximity (-2,2)	.003	.011
	(.011)	(.015)
PID Proximity^2 (0,4)	.014	.028
	(.010)	(.012)
Clinton Approval (-2,2)	.152	-.686
	(.013)	(.014)
Union Member Indicator	-.366	.032
	(.048)	(.055)
Ideology (-2,2)	-.102	.202
	(.021)	(.026)
Age Group (1,7)	.013	-.015
	(.010)	(.011)
% District Presidential Vote	.002	-.004
	(.001)	(.002)
N	6780	9350
Pseudo R^2	.049	.547
Null Deviance	9159.0	12926.1
Residual Deviance	8710.5	5858.4
AIC	8732.5	5880.4

Table 8: Robustness of Knowledge Specification

Variable	**PNTR** (A1)	**PNTR** (A2)	**Impeach** (A3)	**Impeach** (A4)	**PNTR** (A5)	**Impeach** (A6)
Union Member	.024	.021				
	(.054)	(.054)				
Work in Manufacturing					.082	
					(.083)	
Clinton Approval^2			.072	.073		.078
			(.009)	(.009)		(.010)
Attend Church > Once a Week						.011
						(.048)
% Disagreement					.007	-.003
					(.001)	(.002)
% Disagreement$_2$	.005		-.002			
	(.001)		(.002)			
% Disagreement$_3$		.0005		-.002		
		(.002)		(.002)		
N	10728	10728	9628	9594	6967	8219
Pseudo R^2	.069	.066	.117	.117	.078	.113

Note: Entries are probit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients are estimated from models that include all variables in Table 3, except for different measures of disagreement (Models A1-A4) and issue public membership (Models A5-A6). % District Disagreement$_1$ is the imputed measure. % District Disagreement$_2$ excludes respondents with no opinions, while % District Disagreement$_3$ includes these respondents.

Table 9: Alternative Models of Challenger Emergence

Variable	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Constant	-5.213	-4.903	-26.239	-4.951
	(2.837)	(2.948)	(11.141)	(2.966)
Incumbent Vote Share, 1998	-.021	-.020	-.019	-.021
	(.006)	(.006)	(.013)	(.006)
% District Presidential Vote	.219	.221	1.038	.227
	(.103)	(.109)	(.424)	(.110)
Presidential Vote^2	-.002	-.002	-.009	-.002
	(.001)	(.001)	(.004)	(.001)
Party Similarity (-2,-2)	-.518	-.489	-1.815	-.470
	(.220)	(.258)	(.665)	(.259)
Freshman (0-1)	.477	.517	1.459	.521
	(.231)	(.235)	(.441)	(.236)
Late Filing Deadline {0-1}				-.133
				(.558)
% Disagree Impeachment		.0015	-.0072	.0013
		(.0075)	(.0172)	(.0075)
% Disagree PNTR		-.0071	-.0131	-.0071
		(.0041)	(.0086)	(.0045)
% Disagree PNTR * Late Filing {0,1}				.0008
				(.0098)
Pseudo R^2	.158	.165	.398	.166
Log-Likelihood	-160.742	-159.099	-38.746	-158.989
N	405	403	151	403

Note: Entries are probit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Model 3 excludes all districts with less than 20 respondents. All other models contain all districts, regardless of sample size.

Table 10: Robustness Analysis

Model	**PNTR**	**Impeachment**
All Districts		
Exclude Don't Knows		
Model 2	-.0093 (.0045)	.0011 (.0068)
Model 4	-.0095 (.0050)	.0008 (.0068)
Include Don't Knows		
Model 2	-.0081 (.0101)	.0066 (.0097)
Model 4	-.0043 (.0106)	.0070 (.0099)
Districts with $N \geq 20$		
Exclude Don't Knows		
Model 2	-.0128 (.0104)	.0011 (.0168)
Model 4	-.0107 (.0112)	.0006 (.0171)
Include Don't Knows		
Model 2	-.0107 (.0277)	.0093 (.0263)
Model 4	-.0065 (.0296)	.0134 (.0269)

Note: Entries are probit coefficients for disagreement on PNTR and impeachment in the models indicated. Disagreements is measured in percentage points. See Table 9 for complete specifications. The coefficients for Model 4 are for only those districts with early filing dates.

Table 11: Constituency Knowledge Models (Table 3) with Measurement Error

Variable	**PNTR**	**Impeach**
Intercept	-2.855	-2.470
(95% C.I.)	[-2.918,-2.801]	[-2.563,-2.378]
Education (1,5))	.079	.0861
	[.077,.081]	[.0856,.0865]
Interest in Politics (0,3)	.326	.0314
	[.324,.328]	[.3131,.3138
PID Proximity (-2,2)	.013	.010
	[.012,.014]	[.008,.012]
PID Proximity^2 (0,4)	.037	.0381
	[.037,.038]	[.0379,.0383
Clinton Approval (-2,2)	-.0395	-.0394
	[-.040,-.039]	[-.0396,-.0392]
Clinton Approval^2 (-2,2)	.0439	.042
	[.043,.045]	[.0422,.0426]
Union Member Indicator	.036	.031
	[.031,.040]	[.029,.033]
% District Presidential Vote	-.0005	-.0027
	[-.001,.0002]	[-.0029,-.0025
% District Presidential Vote^2	-.0001	-.000011
	[-.00013,-.00008]	[-.0001,-.00002]
log(Incumbent Tenure) (years)	.005	-.013
	[-.002,.013]	[-.016,-.010]
% Disagreement .0064	.0001	
	[.006,.007]	[-.002,.002]

Table 12: Challenger Entry Model (Table 4) with Measurement Error

Variable	**Point Estimate**	**95% CI**
Constant	-7.180	[-7.817,-6.583]
% Incumbent Vote Share	-0.013	[-0.014,-0.012]
% District Presidential Vote	0.302	[0.263,0.345]
% District Presidential Vote^2	-0.0030	[-0.0033,-0.0025]
District Partisan Similarity	-0.962	[-1.230,-0.739]
Freshman Indicator	0.884	[0.817, 0.971]
Late Filing Deadline Indicator	0.142	[-0.457,0.750]
% Disagreement Impeachment	-0.002	[-0.014,0.010]
% Disagreement PNTR	-0.009	[-0.013,-0.005]
% Disagreement PNTR * Late Filing Indicator	-0.010	[-0.023,0.002]