PUBLIC PRESSURE AND PUNISHMENT IN THE POLITICS OF CONGRESSIONAL PAY RAISES

SEAN M. THERIAULT
University of Texas at Austin

Congressional pay raises, perhaps better than any other issue, pit members' personal interests against their constituents' preferences. And yet, various studies find that members rarely pay a political price for supporting pay raises. Such findings call into question the mechanism behind the large body of literature tying members' votes to their constituents' desires. Taking the stance that the electoral accountability theory is better than the empirical results, this article tries to uncover an electoral punishment. Three results stand out. First, electorally vulnerable members and members from poor districts are the least likely to vote for pay raises. Second, pay raise supporters suffer systematically lower reelection percentages. Third, members who support pay raises are more likely to lose. The latter two findings do not hold in every case, but rather under systematically special circumstances.

Keywords: *U.S. Congress; congressional pay raises; congressional elections; democratic accountability*

> I would never act or speak with a single eye to popular approbation and favor. But I respect the opinion of the people, as every public agent should do. . . . For, in a Government like ours, particularly, it was in vain to pretend to despise or disregard public opinion. It was not only the tenure by which we held our places, but it is the basis of the Government itself.
>
> —Senator Jeremiah Mason (March 14, 1816)[1]

For more than 200 years, congressional pay raises have been politically explosive issues. James Madison, at the constitutional convention, noted the inherent strife members face in raising their own pay, saying, "There is a seeming impropriety in leaving any set of men, without control, to put their hand into the public coffers, to take money to put in their pockets."[2] Nonetheless, the framers gave the members of

Author's Note: Bill Bianco, Dave Brady, Jennifer Lawless, David Lewis, Roger Noll, Barry Weingast, John Wilkerson, anonymous reviewers, and the *American Politics Research* editor, James Gimpel, have all provided insightful and helpful comments.

AMERICAN POLITICS RESEARCH, Vol. 32 No. 4, July 2004 444-464
DOI: 10.1177/1532673X04263842
© 2004 Sage Publications

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

Congress the right and duty to determine their own pay. The framers, however, did not give members a free ride. By establishing fair and frequent elections, the framers sought to design a system where the represented could restrain their representatives from either reaching into the coffer too much or taking too much with each grab.

The public, from time to time, has protested against enacted pay raises and voted against pay raise supporters. In 1816, the year of Senator Mason's remarks, protesters burned members in effigy after they enacted a congressional pay raise. In the congressional midterm elections of 1874, 86 members lost their seat after not only enacting a 50% pay raise but also making it retroactive to 1872. In 1989, at the prodding of political radio talk show hosts, thousands of constituents sent their members of Congress tea bags attached to their plea, "Read my lips: No pay raises."[3] At least three defeated House incumbents cited their support of the 1989 pay raise vote as the reason they lost.[4] As Bianco (1994, p. 99) explains, "Since the Founding, public opposition to pay raises has been nearly uniform." Journalists, historians, and political elites have appreciated these events more than political scientists.[5]

The public disapproval of congressional pay raises, however, tells only part of the story. In 1866, members increased their pay 33% with little opposition. In 1907, members adopted the same 1874 raise without any public reaction. In 1999, members again reached into the coffer with little public attention. The contrast of the public's response to these pay raises with those described earlier is puzzling. Why are some pay raises adopted with little public reaction while other attempts are onerously criticized? Speculation abounds, but few studies rigorously test the conditions that give rise to public backlash.

For all the public outcry that pay raise attempts can cause, most studies conclude that the pay raises in 1866, 1907, and 1999 are much more typical than the controversial attempts in 1816, 1874, and 1989. Davidson (1980), Weaver (1988), and Wilkerson (1991) search for, but do not find, any evidence that voters systematically punish pay raise supporters in their next elections. These specific findings contradict the large body of literature that places constituent opinion at the heart of members' voting decisions (Arnold, 1990; Bianco, 1994; Key, 1961; Kingdon, 1989; Mayhew, 1974). The electoral connection between members and their constituents is as wide as it is deep. Miller

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

and Stokes (1963), Fiorina (1974), and Kingdon (1989) show, generally, how public opinion data correlate with member roll call behavior. Peltzman (1985), Jackson and King (1989), Bartels (1991), Overby, Henschen, Walsh, and Strauss (1992), and Wlezien (1995) demonstrate, on specific votes, the connection between constituents and their representatives.

The policy subjects in these studies, however, do not have the feature of dividing constituent opinion from member opinion. At the end of the day, we do not know if representatives from military districts support military spending because of their own personal preferences or their constituents' preferences. Because of the observational equivalence generated by these two motivations, we cannot use these votes as conclusive evidence for democratic accountability in the United States. Bernstein (1989) and Arnold (1990) argue that the only cases that can be used are those that divide members from their constituents. Bernstein (1989) maintains, "The key to distinguishing between coincidence and [constituent] control is to observe members of Congress when there is a difference between their own opinion and the opinion of their constituents" (p. 8).

Taking the Bernstein challenge seriously requires that a study of democratic accountability analyze issues that divide member and constituent opinion. Given that few political actors are portrayed as instrumentally rational as members of Congress, it cannot be controversial to claim that in a world without other considerations, they would prefer to make more money than less. Indeed, Davidson, Kovenock, and O'Leary (1966) find that almost a quarter of the members they surveyed claimed that their low pay and insufficient resources "prevented the House from operating . . . as it should" (p. 76). Public opinion is more resolute and comprehensive. Congressional pay raise questions appear with some regularity in public opinion surveys. Asked in 1989, 1991, 1995, and 2000, the American public overwhelmingly rejected salary increases for members of Congress. The opposed response was, respectively, 3.4, 7.1, 4.4, and 3.1 times more popular than the support response.[6] The latter two surveys include the responses broken down into more than 30 demographic categories, including gender, race, education, region, partisan identification, ideology, and income. The only group that is less than 2:1 opposed to pay raises are college graduates, and they still oppose pay

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

raises by more than 20 percentage points. Although opinion over congressional pay does not perfectly divide members from their constituents, Weaver (1988) maintains, "There is perhaps no single issue where the personal and policy interests of legislators come into more direct conflict with their political interests than that of congressional pay" (p. 119).

How have members of Congress navigated the tricky waters of congressional pay raises, given that they want pay raises and that their constituents overwhelmingly oppose higher salaries? Congressional scholars have done a thorough job in explaining how members of Congress vote on congressional pay raises. Davidson (1980), Fisher (1980), Weaver (1988), and *Congressional Quarterly* (Congressional Pay and Perquisites, 1992) provide insight into the multifarious strategies members employ in voting on this tricky issue. The most thorough recent studies have come from John Wilkerson (1990, 1991) and William Bianco (1994), both independently and jointly (Bianco, Spence, & Wilkerson, 1996). They show how members have strategically structured the legislative procedures and their relationship with their constituents to increase their salaries without having to cast potentially damaging votes. This manipulation could reconcile the theories behind the electoral connection literature with the results—or nonresults—of the extant pay raise studies. If members can "vote no and get the dough," then their constituents cannot easily hold them accountable for raising their own pay.

This study examines the roll call votes on the floor of the House and Senate in an attempt to evaluate democratic accountability in the United States. By analyzing 25 pay raise attempts since 1970, this study finds that members who support congressional pay raises suffer systematically lower reelection percentages. That punishment is especially pronounced when the public is attentive. The argument that the public maintains power over its members of Congress is presented in two steps. The first section of this article investigates pay raise roll call votes to see if public pressure effects members' votes. It finds that electorally secure members and those from more affluent districts are more likely to support pay raise increases than are their electorally weak and poor-representing colleagues. The second section investigates congressional elections to see if, and under what conditions, the voters systematically punish pay raise supporters. When media cover-

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

age is especially intense, electorates punish reelection-seeking members by as much as three percentage points. The final section concludes.

WHO SUPPORTS PAY RAISES?

Pay raises, unlike almost any other issue confronting members of Congress, divides the represented from the representatives. As such, pay raise votes provide congressional scholars with Arnold's elusive test. Members, indeed, walk a fine line between making their pay commensurate with private sector salaries and appearing judicious in the public's eyes. Given this complicated environment, this section tests to see which members are likely to support congressional pay raises. The next section examines the electorate punishment that may or may not ensue from these pay raise votes.

For a few reasons, I restrict my analysis to the post–Reform Era. First, by the 1970s, all members represent mutually exclusive and roughly population-equal constituencies. Second, the existence of *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports* and the *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs* provides a complete and thorough record for each pay raise episode. Similarly thorough accounts do not exist for earlier periods, especially prior to 1944.[7] Because of the trickiness of congressional pay raises, the impression left by the *Congressional Record* is frequently incomplete, confusing, or purposefully and strategically perplexing. Third, with the 1970s redistricting, good data exists for the district demographics that previously were either incomplete or insufficiently standardized across states. Although the data analysis is restricted to the post-1970s, nothing seems to suggest that the relationship among members, their pay, and their constituents has changed since Senator Mason articulated his thoughtful position in 1816.

Since the 1970s, members of Congress have received 16 pay raises. House members have voted on issues related to pay raises 28 times in nine congresses; senators have had 71 votes in 11 congresses. Instead of analyzing all 99 roll call votes, I have chosen to analyze only the 25 votes that either blocked or accepted the proposed pay raise (see the appendix for a list of all the votes). The explicitness of the votes varies.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

Sometimes, legislators took a vote squarely on the pay raise (like Senate Vote 8). Other times, the decisions were bundled with other provisions (like House Vote 6). On more than one occasion, opponents of pay raises could only use a procedural vote, such as adjourning to voice their opposition to pay raises (like House Vote 4). The common feature across all 12 House votes and 13 Senate votes is that they, more than any other vote in their respective episodes, determined whether members would or would not get a pay raise.

Because the dependent variable—that is, support for the public's position—is dichotomous, I use probit regression analysis. The dependent variable is coded "1" if the member voted in accord with constituents' desires against the pay raise and "0" if the member voted against constituents' wishes by supporting the pay raise. In total, I analyze 4,810 House observations and 1,087 Senate observations. The multivariate analysis includes six independent variables in the House and seven in the Senate.

The first four variables—the members' years of service, their majority party status, their partisan affiliation, and their Poole-Rosenthal first dimension DW-NOMINATE score[8]—are control variables.[9] Although we could speculate about their effect on the dependent variable, it would divert us from our central purpose of studying the relationship between representatives and their constituents.

The remaining variables get at the heart of this article's research question. First, the affluence of the member's district acts as a rough proxy for the district's intensity against pay raises.[10] Members from wealthy districts should have more discretion in voting on congressional pay raises than members from poor districts. A $5,000 pay raise is unlikely to cause as much controversy or concern in Manhattan, as it will in Appalachia. Second, the member's previous victory margin is included as another proxy for constituents' scrutiny on members' voting records. Safe members, like members from wealthy districts, are more likely to have more discretion when voting on congressional pay raises.[11] On the other hand, electorally weak members should feel public pressure more acutely. Consequently, the coefficient on electoral margin should be negative.

Because of the nature of Senate elections, an additional variable is included in the Senate analysis. A better measure, perhaps, of senators' electoral vulnerabilities is if they face reelection at the conclu-

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

sion of the current Congress. Senators who just eked out a victory and are not up for five or six years are not as vulnerable as their colleagues who face an imminent competitive election. The imminent election indicator variable should be positively related to voting in accord with their constituents' desires.

The structure of the data requires two additional controls. Because the difference in the vote margins of the individual votes in each chamber can inappropriately bias parametric estimation, I include fixed effect vote indicator variables. Fixed effects corrects for the estimation error that might occur between lopsided votes (e.g., House Votes 9 and 11) and roughly equal votes (House Votes 1 and 8). The second control is a random effects specification to correct for the dependence among the observations. Ted Kennedy's vote, for example, on the 1974 pay raise is not independent from his votes on the 1976, 1980, and 1991 pay raises. As such, a random effects model takes account and corrects for the possible correlation of the errors among those members, like Kennedy, who cast multiple pay raise votes throughout the data set.[12]

Table 1 reports the results for both the House and the Senate. Because of the inclusion of the next election variable in the Senate, the columns are not perfectly analogous. Overall, the models fit the data pretty well. The comprehensive House model correctly predicts 71.4% of the observations (compared to the null model's 55.5%). The Senate model correctly predicts 61.4% (compared to the null model's 52.8%).

Most of the independent variables in both chambers are statistically significant. Additionally, with the exception of the senator's previous electoral margin, all the variables measuring public pressure are statistically significant in the hypothesized directions. But because these coefficients are on the probit scale, their magnitude is difficult to determine. Graphic representations of the effect on voting against a pay raise for all the independent variables with statistically significant coefficients are presented in Figures 1 and 2. The effect is determined for a representative (for Figure 1) and a senator (for Figure 2) who are in all other respects completely average. By changing a particular variable one value at a time, we can determine the variable's overall effect on the probability of voting in accord with a member's constituents.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

TABLE 1
The Influences Behind Congressional Pay Raise Votes, 1974-2001

	House of Representatives		*Senate*	
Years of Experience	–0.047**	(0.004)	–0.029**	(0.01)
Majority party	–0.342**	(0.07)	–0.044	(0.10)
Democrat	0.573**	(0.12)	0.475**	(0.17)
Conservatism	2.293**	(0.19)	0.683**	(0.23)
District wealth	–0.096**	(0.03)	–0.231**	(0.05)
Margin	–0.006**	(0.001)	–0.0001	(0.002)
Next election	0.315**	(0.09)		
Constant	2.326**	(0.12)	0.336**	(0.14)
Vote fixed effects	Yes		Yes	
Member random effects	Yes		Yes	
n	4,810		1,087	
Log likelihood	–2,458		–664	
Percent correctly predicted	71.4		61.4	
Pseudo-r^2	0.256		0.116	

NOTE: Dependent variable coded "1" for a vote in favor of less pay (55.5% of House votes and 52.8% of Senate votes); otherwise, it was coded "0." Standard errors are in parentheses.
*statistically significant at 0.10. **statistically significant at 0.05.

For example, in the first set of bars of Figure 1, an otherwise average representative with no experience (the mean minus one standard deviation of the experience variable) opposes pay raises with a 0.65 probability. When that same representative is given 16 years of experience (the mean years of experience plus one standard deviation), her probability of opposing the pay raise is 0.35. Consequently, transforming a legislative novice into a veteran handily increases the probability of supporting a pay raise.

Minority party members, Republicans, and liberals[13] in the House are significantly more likely to support pay raises than are majority party members, Democrats, and conservatives. Because of the high number of observations, each of these variables achieve statistical significance; however, the individual effect of these variables should be carefully analyzed because of the strong correlation among all three variables. For example, a simple cross-tab shows that Democrats are more likely to support pay raises than Republicans.

The last two sets of bars in Figure 1 show that members from poorer districts and electorally weak members of the House are more likely to

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

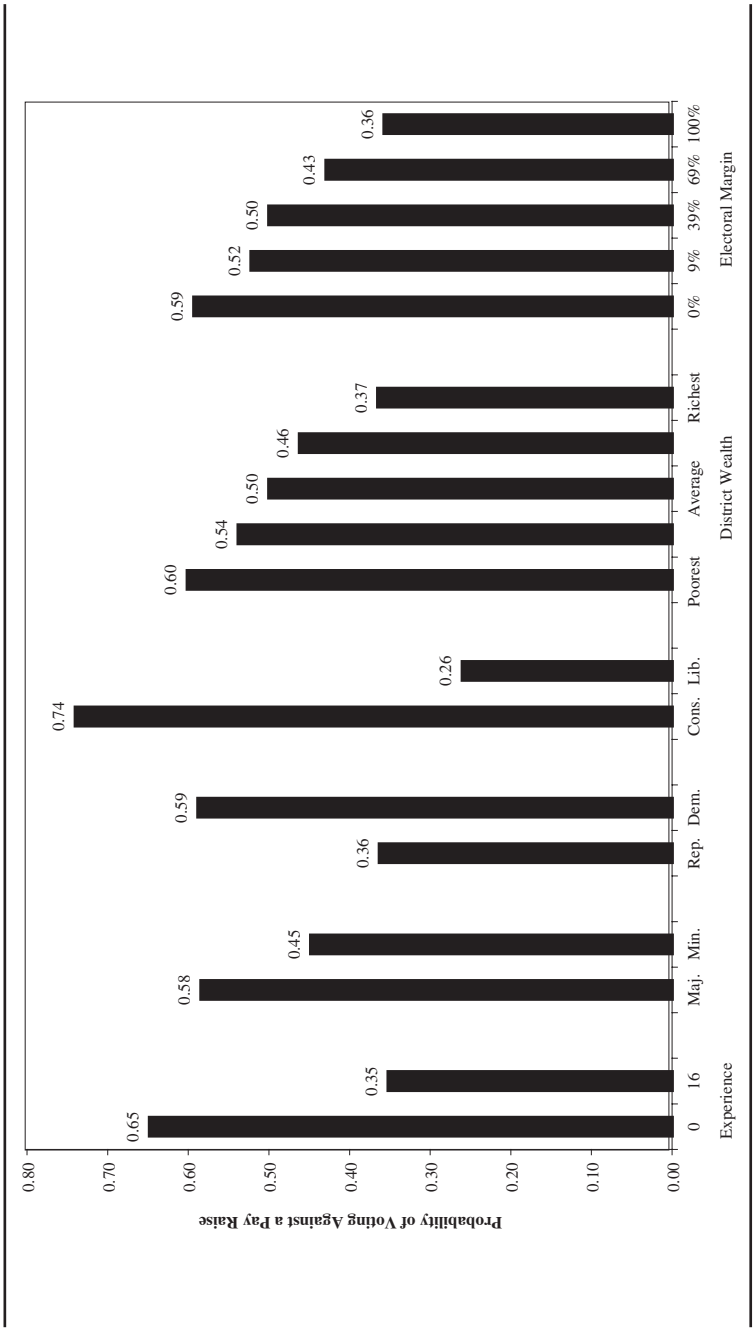

Figure 1: The Independent Variables' Effects on Voting With the Public in the House

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

vote their constituents' wishes than members from rich districts and electorally strong members.[14] Taking a rich district representative to a poor district increases probability that the member will vote in accord with the constituent's wishes by 23 percentage points. Making an immensely strong member weak increases the probability of opposing the pay raise by more than 23 percentage points.

Figure 2 shows the substantive significance of the statistically significant variables in the Senate. The figure does not include either the majority party indicator variable or the margin variable, because neither of these variables achieve statistical significance. Nonetheless, Figure 2 still shows substantial support for the first step in the public pressure argument. First, senators from poor states are much more likely to vote against pay raises than members from rich states—in the extreme, the probability changes 47 percentage points. Second, senators who face imminent elections—regardless of their electoral percentage last time—are about 12 percentage points more likely to oppose pay raises than are members who are not up for reelection.

Systematic analysis of 25 pay raise votes from the post–World War II era show that electorally vulnerable members and members who represent poor constituents are more likely to vote against pay raises. Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 show that weak members fear the public, but is there any evidence that they should? In other words, do the voters ever punish pay raise supporters? The next section addresses this question.

DO ELECTORATES PUNISH PAY RAISE SUPPORTERS?

To see if the voters hold their representatives accountable for their roll call decisions on pay raise votes, I test the electoral consequences that the 12 House votes on congressional pay have on the member's reelection margin. I test this argument only with the House because the staggered elections and longer terms in the Senate hopelessly complicate the analysis. The dependent variable is each member's reelection percentage.[15] The control independent variables are the number of years served in the House, a majority party indicator, a Democratic party indicator, the member's Poole-Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE score, and the member's electoral percentage from the

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

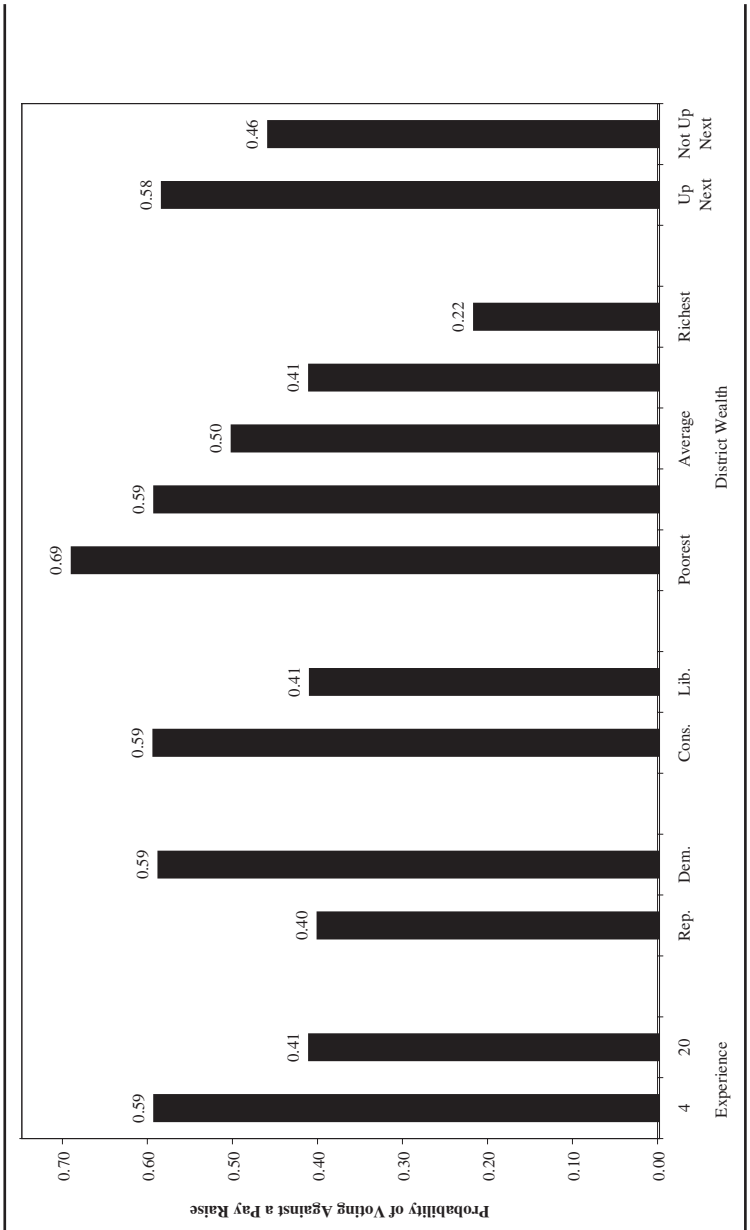

Figure 2: The Independent Variables' Effects on Voting With the Public in the Senate

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

TABLE 2
The Electoral Punishment for Supporting Pay Raises on Reelection Margin

	All 12 House Votes		*Wilkerson's Obvious Votes*		*Most Visible Votes*	
Anti–pay raise vote	–0.259	(0.40)	1.382**	(0.79)	2.801**	(0.79)
Years of experience	–0.094**	(0.03)	–0.143**	(0.05)	–0.107*	(0.06)
Majority party	–0.643	(0.56)	3.538**	(1.52)	1.685	(1.63)
Democrat	5.185**	(1.10)				
Conservatism	5.077**	(1.82)	5.621**	(2.70)	4.646	(2.93)
Margin	0.167**	(0.01)	0.215**	(0.01)	0.193**	(0.01)
Constant	61.895**	(0.77)	60.426**	(1.21)	61.071**	(1.35)
Member random effects	Yes		Yes		Yes	
N	4,317		1,433		1,360	
r^2 between	0.463		0.377		0.336	
r^2 overall	0.291		0.248		0.242	

NOTE: The dependent variable is the member's reelection rate in the next congressional election. Standard errors are in parentheses.
*statistically significant at 0.10. **statistically significant at 0.05.

last election. The variable testing the electoral effect of supporting congressional pay raises is the actual pay raise vote coded "1" if the member supported the constituents' position against the pay raise and "0" otherwise. As with the roll call analysis, we cannot assume that all of the observations are independent. Newt Gingrich's reelection percentage in both 1984 and 1990 are related. As such, the results presented in Table 2 again control for the random effects introduced by the dependence among the observations from the same member.

The aggregate results from all 12 pay raise votes are not encouraging in reconciling pay raise votes with the electoral connection literature. Pay raise supporters fair no worse in their ensuing elections than pay raise opponents. These results encompass not only the simple and straightforward pay raise vote in 1982 but also the vote in 1977 that actually decided adjournment and only served as de facto pay raise votes.

Column A of Table 2 includes all pay raise votes. I propose two tests that better answer the electoral punishment question. First, Wilkerson (1991) maintains that constituent rewards and punishments should be greatest when three conditions are fulfilled. First, the vote should be fairly simple to understand. An actual vote to increase

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

pay is more obvious and more easily understood by the public than a vote to adjourn. Second, the vote should not bundle congressional pay increases with other federal employee raises. If the vote decides not only a congressional pay raise but also a raise for the Capitol Hill police, the member can explain a yes vote not in terms of his or her pay but as motivated by other considerations. Last, constituents are most likely to inflict punishment when the pay raise attempt succeeds. When the pay raise is defeated, constituents are less likely to seek retribution. Constituents' memories last longer when their side loses than when they win. Only 4 of the 12 bills meet all three requirements.[16]

When the analysis is restricted to the four House votes that surpass the Wilkerson test, we find that pay raise opponents receive a statistically and substantively large 1.38 percentage point bonus from their constituents. This change in reelection percentage increases a member's margin by more than 2.5 percentage points—taking a 51 to 49 race to a 52.4 to 47.6 race. Almost 3% of all congressional candidates win with less than 51.38% of the two-party vote.

The second test analyzes only the pay raise votes from the pay raise episodes that generated the most attention in the national news media. Regrettably, full text search and retrieval for the *Washington Post* has existed only since 1977. The nine votes taken on the floor of the House since 1977 have led to an average of more than 15 stories per episode.[17] The episodes with the most attention from the *Washington Post*—and, presumably, the people—were the 1989 votes (56 stories for the February vote and 21 stories for the November vote). The only other episodes that generated more than 10 articles came in February 1977 (19 stories) and September 1979 (16 stories).

If we restrict the analysis only to these four most public votes, the results became even more crystallized than the votes surpassing Wilkerson's test. Members receive, *ceteris paribus*, a 2.80 percentage point bonus for opposing a congressional pay raise. This large bonus transforms a 51 to 49 nail biter to a comfortable 53.8 to 46.2 percentage point victory. Almost 5% of congressional incumbents win with less than 52.8% of the vote. These electoral punishments are in the same range that Jacobson and Dimock (1994) find in examining the check-bouncing scandal in the 1992 elections. Also, this margin is similar to Marjorie Margoles-Mezvinsky's electoral punishment for supporting Clinton's 1993 tax package.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

TABLE 3
The Electoral Punishment for Supporting Pay Raises on Winning or Losing

	All 12 House Votes		*Wilkerson's Obvious Votes*		*Most Visible Votes*	
Anti–pay raise vote	0.419**	(0.15)	1.238	(1.42)	0.739**	(0.34)
Years of experience	–0.096**	(0.02)	–0.081	(0.08)	–0.041*	(0.02)
Majority party	–0.516**	(0.24)	0.816	(0.95)	–0.773	(0.52)
Democrat	1.048**	(0.37)				
Conservatism	0.468	(0.51)	1.866	(1.97)	–0.511	(0.91)
Margin	0.043**	(0.005)	0.128*	(0.09)	0.051**	(0.01)
Constant	2.859**	(0.45)	1.625**	(0.73)	2.045**	(0.62)
Member random effects	Yes		Yes		Yes	
N	4,317		1,433		1,360	
Pseudo-r^2	0.251		0.279		0.199	

NOTE: The dependent variable is whether or not an incumbent member of Congress won their election after a pay raise vote. Standard errors are in parentheses.
*statistically significant at 0.10. **statistically significant at 0.05.

Before we can conclude that members, under these specific conditions, suffer when they support pay raises, we must ask one additional question: Do members ever lose when they support pay raises? The reason that the relatively small electoral punishment that Margolies-Mezvinsky received was so dramatic was because she went from barely winning in 1992 to barely losing in 1994. The results in Table 2 show us that members suffer reduced margins when they support pay raises, but we do not know if this reduced electoral margin causes them to lose. It could be that the results from Table 1 and Table 2 work together—that is, those members with huge winning margins are responsible for supporting pay raises, sparing their vulnerable colleagues from casting an unpalatable vote. During the next election, the vulnerable members who were spared by the safe members win, and the safe members who sacrifice for the weak members get 72% of the vote instead of 75%.

Table 3 parallels the analysis in Table 2 except that the dependent variable is transformed from the linear reelection percentage to a dichotomous win/loss variable. For all 12 House votes and for the most obvious votes, the pay raise vote has little effect on a member's

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

probability of reelection. For all pay raise votes, the variable is statistically significant but substantively small. For just the Wilkerson votes, the variable is statistically insignificant but substantively large. In column C, however, the effect is both substantively and statistically significant. If a weak member who was as likely to lose as to win the next election voted against a pay raise, the probability of winning would increase to 0.63. If, instead, this member voted for the pay raise, it would fall to 0.34.[18] On the most visible votes, when their constituents are most likely to be attentive to their roll call actions, members need to tread carefully or else they could lose.

As the numbers from Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate, even small constituent rewards and punishments can have dramatic effects on members' reelections. Such clear findings call into question the conclusion reached in so many of the pay raise studies that "there is an absence of convincing systematic evidence that supporting a raise can hurt members electorally" (Wilkerson 1991, p. 13).

The difference in the results among all pay raise episodes, Wilkerson's most obvious episodes, and the most publicized episodes in Tables 2 and 3 suggests that congressional procedures and practices and public attention have important implications for the electorate. When pay raises were bundled, hidden, or unsuccessful, the public reacted differently than when they were obvious, clear, and successful. This finding provides concrete evidence for the arguments made by political scientists—primarily Sinclair (1997)—that the process behind congressional decision making is important, as is the legislative outcome. Policy, as well as process and attention, matter.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I analyze the causes and consequences of member voting for congressional pay raises. The argument proceeds in two steps. First, when members of Congress vote on their pay, they fear their constituents' reprisals. Electorally vulnerable House members and senators with looming elections as well as representatives and senators from poor districts and states were more likely to vote in accord with their constituents' wishes than were their counterparts. The second step shows that representatives who ignore their constitu-

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

ents' wishes not only suffer an electoral punishment at the ballot box but also can potentially lose. This effect is particularly acute for members on visible pay raise votes. These findings reunite the electoral connection theory with the practice of voting on congressional pay raises.

These findings are important not only for what they illustrate about congressional pay raises but also, and much more so, for what they tell us about the relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. When the public is paying attention, members of Congress respond in kind even if that response is diametrically opposed to their personal preferences. If, however, the public is neither "manly" nor "vigilant," members of Congress, not unexpectedly, structure the system and their pay to serve their personal interests.[19] When members get caught with their hand in the public coffers, they suffered reduced reelection margins and, under intense media scrutiny, lost in succeeding elections.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

APPENDIX
Twelve Key House Votes and 13 Key Senate Votes

Date		*Description*	*Outcome*	*Against Pay Raise Vote*	*Total Vote* *Yes*	*No*
The House of Representatives						
1.	July 3, 1975	To pass a COLA bill	passed	no	214	213
2.	October 1, 1975	A procedural vote to disapprove a pay raise	passed	no	278	123
3.	September 1, 1976	To deny members the COLA for the year	passed	yes	325	75
4.	February 17, 1977	To adjourn and bypass a pay raise vote	failed	no	109	224
5.	June 29, 1977	To rescind the pay raise passed in March	failed	yes	181	241
6.	June 13, 1979	To pass legislative appropriation including a pay raise.	failed	no	186	232
7.	September 25, 1979	To pass continuing appropriation including a pay raise	passed	yes	208	203
8.	December 14, 1982	To increase pay	failed	yes	208	208
9.	February 6, 1989	To adjourn, thus accepting a pay raise	failed	no	88	233
10.	November 16, 1989	To prohibit honoraria, increase pay, and revise ethic rules	passed	no	252	174
11.	July 16, 1996	To block a COLA increase	passed	yes	352	67
12.	September 30, 1997	To pass a conference report that raises pay	passed	no	220	207

The Senate

1.	March 6, 1974	To agree to the resolution denying pay raise	passed	yes	71	26
2.	July 29, 1975	To increase pay	passed	no	58	29
3.	September 18, 1975	To disapprove a 5% pay raise	failed	yes	30	57
4.	September 7, 1976	To provide a COLA	failed	no	25	46
5.	February 2, 1977	A procedural vote to disapprove a pay raise	passed	no	56	42
6.	October 12, 1979	To table resolutions denying pay raise	passed	no	43	42
7.	September 10, 1980	To deny a pay raise	passed	yes	78	13
8.	June 16, 1983	To increase pay	passed	no	49	47
9.	January 26, 1984	To reduce members' pay	passed	yes	66	19
10.	January 29, 1987	To deny members a pay raise	failed	yes	27	66
11.	July 17, 1991	To increase pay and prohibit honoraria	passed	no	53	45
12.	October 1, 1997	To adopt a conference report that includes a pay raise	passed	no	55	45
13.	December 7, 2001	A procedural vote to deny a COLA	failed	yes	33	65

NOTE: COLA = cost-of-living allowance.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

NOTES

1. The quote is converted from third person to first person (see U.S. Congress, 1816, p. 200).

2. Quoted in the *1989 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1989, p. 58).

3. Quoted in the *1989 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1989, p. 56).

4. See "Anti-Incumbency: 16 on the Voters Hit List; Incumbent Advantage Shrinks," (1990).

5. Several noteworthy exceptions are Bartlett (1979), Bianco (1994), Bianco, Spence, and Wilkerson (1996), Hibbing (1983), and Wilkerson (1991).

6. The Gallup Organization commissioned the 1989, 1995, and 2000 polls. The *Washington Post* commissioned the 1991 poll. All four polls are archived at the Roper Center. The Americans' distaste for congressional pay raises does not appear to be time bound. As early as 1954, the Gallup Poll found that Americans disapproved more than three times as much as they approved of raising congressional pay.

7. For each *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, I searched and read every entry involving congressional pay. From these stories, as well as the indices from the Congressional Record, I developed a comprehensive list of pay raise episodes.

8. See Poole and Rosenthal (1997).

9. Another control variable that could have been used is member wealth. Regrettably, the financial disclosure forms are not particularly forthcoming, because they include such huge ranges for members' assets and liabilities. A back-of-the-envelope analysis, however, suggests that wealth is unrelated to votes on pay raises. Each year since 1990, *Roll Call* has developed a list of the 50 richest members. Comparing their list to the roll call votes for the 1997 pay raise (the only year after 1990 in which both the Senate and House voted on pay raises) shows that rich members are only slightly more likely to support pay raises than their poorer colleagues. Whereas 58% of the senators supported the pay increase, only 54% of the 81 senators not on the richest list supported the pay raise. In the House, 55% of the 29 members on the richest list voted for the raise compared to 51% of the 398 members who were not on the list. None of these differences is statistically significant at the conventional level.

10. The median family income is taken from *Congressional Quarterly*'s "Congressional Districts in the 1970s" (1973), "Congressional Districts in the 1980s" (1983), and "Congressional Districts in the 1990s" (1993). The median income is then standardized within each decade, such that a value of "1" for this variable from the 1975 pay raise vote and the 1989 pay raise vote means that the districts' median family income was one standard deviation above the average of all districts' median family incomes.

11. Jacobson and Dimock (1994) show how nicely this proxy works for the check-bouncing scandal in the 1992 congressional elections.

12. This more sophisticated model does not radically change the results. Under the simpler specifications, the same variables are statistically significant.

13. For purposes of Figures 1 and 2, liberals (conservatives) are defined as having one standard deviation below (above) the Poole-Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE score.

14. In Figures 1 and 2, district wealth and electoral margin are calculated at the variable's minimum, one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, one standard deviation above the mean, and the maximum.

15. As such, it does not include the members who retired, who sought other office, who were defeated in the primaries, or who died.

16. House Votes 1, 5, 7, and 10.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

17. I used Nexis/Lexis searching for "Congress" and "pay raise" within the headline and lead paragraph for a 6-week period. I wanted to capture any stories leading up to the vote (up to 1 month) as well as any stories analyzing the vote publicity after the vote (up to 1 week).

18. This situation is a bit contrived. Few incumbents, at least statistically, are as likely to win as they are to lose. If, instead, we evaluated the effect for a member who had the mean values for all the other independent variables, the pay raise supporter's probability decreases to 0.950. By voting for the pay raise, the probability jumps to 0.981. Although this vote change results in a tiny reelection probability increase (0.031), the near certainty of reelection skews the effect. Viewing these numbers in an alternative frame can, perhaps, demonstrate the magnitude of this effect. A pay raise–supporting member who is already likely to win can cut the probability of losing by more than three fifths by voting in line with his or her constituents' preferences on pay raise votes. Instead of a 0.050 probability of losing, it can be reduced to 0.019.

19. Madison in *Federalist 57* (1788 as quoted in Wills, 1982) writes that the "vigilant" and "manly" American spirit will keep the representatives loyal to their constituents.

REFERENCES

Anti-incumbency: 16 on the voters hit list; incumbent advantage shrinks. (1990, November 8). *USA Today*, p. 11A.

Arnold, R. D. (1990). *The logic of congressional action*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bartels, L. M. (1991, June). Constituency opinion and congressional policy making: The Reagan defense build up. *American Political Science Review*, *85*, 457-474.

Bartlett, R. V. (1979). The marginality hypothesis: Electoral insecurity, self-interest, and voting behavior. *American Politics Quarterly*, *7*, 498-508.

Bernstein, R. A. (1989). *Elections, representation, and congressional voting behavior: The myth of constituency control*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bianco, W. T. (1994). *Trust: Representatives and constituents*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Bianco, W. T., Spence, D. B., & Wilkerson, J. D. (1996). The electoral connection in the early Congress: The case of the Compensation Act of 1816. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*, 145-171.

Congressional districts in the 1970s. (1973). *Congressional Quarterly*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Congressional districts in the 1980s. (1983). *Congressional Quarterly*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Congressional districts in the 1990s. (1993). *Congressional Quarterly*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Congressional pay and perquisites: History, facts, and controversy. (1992). *Congressional Quarterly*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

1989 Congressional Quarterly Almanac. (1989). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Davidson, Roger H. (1980). The politics of executive, legislative, and judicial compensation. In R. Hartman & A. Weber (Eds.), *The rewards of public service: Compensating top federal officials* (pp. 53-100). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Davidson, Roger H., Kovenock, David M., & O'Leary, Michael K. (1966). *Congress in Crisis: Politics and Congressional Reform*. Belmont, CA: Wadworth.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009

Fiorina, Mo. P. (1974). *Representatives, roll calls, and constituents*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Fisher, L. (1980). History of pay adjustments for members of Congress. In R. Hartman & A. Weber (Eds.), *The rewards of public service: Compensating top federal officials* (pp. 25-52). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Hibbing, J. R. (1983). Washington on 75 dollars a day: Members of Congress voting on their own tax break. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *8*, 219-230.

Jackson, J. E., & King, D. C. (1989). Public goods, private interests, and representation. *American Political Science Review*, *83*, 1143-1164.

Jacobson, G. C., & Dimock, M. A. (1994, August). Checking out: The effect of bank overdrafts on the 1992 House elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, *38*, 601-624.

Key, V. O., Jr. (1961). *Public opinion and American democracy.* New York: Knopf.

Kingdon, J. W. (1989). *Congressmen's voting decisions*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Mayhew, D. R. (1974). *Congress: The electoral connection.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1963). Constituency influence in Congress. *American Political Science Review*, *57*, 45-56.

Overby, L. M., Henschen, B. M., Walsh, M. H., & Strauss, J. (1992). Courting constituents? An analysis of the Senate confirmation vote on Justice Clearance Thomas. *American Political Science Review*, *86*, 997-1003.

Peltzman, S. (1985). An economic interpretation of the history of congressional voting in the 20th century. *American Economic Review*, *75*, 656-675.

Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (1997). *Congress: A political-economic history of roll call voting*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sinclair, B. (1997). *Unorthodox lawmaking: New legislative processes in the U.S. Congress*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

U.S. Congress. (1816, March 14). *The Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 14th Congress, 1st session.

Weaver, R. K. (1988). *Automatic government: The politics of indexation*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Wilkerson, J. D. (1990). Reelection and representation in conflict: The case of agenda manipulation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *8*, 219-230.

Wilkerson, J. (1991). *The evolution of strategy: A case study of congressional pay raises*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester.

Wills, Gary (Ed.). (1982). *The Federalist Papers by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay.* New York: Bantam.

Wlezien, C. (1995, November). The public as thermostat: Dynamics of preferences for spending. *American Journal of Political Science*, *39*, 981-1000.

Sean M. Theriault is an assistant professor in the Government Department at the University of Texas at Austin. His book, Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention, and Voter Retribution *will be published in 2005. He has also published articles on a variety of subjects including the Pendleton Act of 1883, the Compromise of 1850, issue framing, and congressional careers. His work has appeared in* Journal of Politics, Legislative Studies Quarterly, *and* Presidential Studies Quarterly.

Downloaded from http://apr.sagepub.com at UNIV OF TEXAS AUSTIN on October 27, 2009