

The Public's Concept of Representation

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Abstract

I examine the public's stated preferences about the mode of representation congressional representatives should provide. I also use experimental designs to assess the consequences of these preferences. The evidence I present demonstrates that, like normative and empirical scholars, the public is conflicted about how the representation relationship should work. This said, the experimental evidence I present shows that people are more inclined to reward some modes of representation than others. I also find that, in some situations, policy preferences substantially affect how people resolve their conflicting feelings about which mode of representation is best. The findings offer new insight into how the public thinks about the representation relationship and the potential electoral consequences of a legislator prioritizing one mode of representation over another.

The representation process can be characterized as a principal-agent relationship between the public and elected representatives. But exactly who should constitute a representative’s “principal”? And what is the appropriate relationship between the preferences of those principals and the agent’s behavior? The first question pertains to the “focus” of representation and involves a trade-off between representatives prioritizing serving their specific constituency or serving the country as a whole. The second question refers to the “style” of representation: whether representatives serve as conduits, guided directly by their principals’ preferences (act as “delegates”) or if they, instead, use their own judgment about what is in their principals’ best interest (act as “trustees”).

In this paper I report findings from a unique national survey that shed light on how Americans want the representation relationship to work. In addition to measuring people’s stated preferences about which mode of representation legislators should adopt, the survey included an experimental design where respondents were asked to evaluate a specific instance of a legislator prioritizing one mode of representation over another. This design provides an opportunity to assess whether people’s stated preferences about how the representation relationship should work affect how they evaluate a representative who acts in accordance with one mode of representation at the expense of another. The analysis I present makes three contributions to our understanding of public preferences about the representation relationship.

First, I measure how people say representatives should adjudicate conflicts between the four modes of representation defined by the intersection of the focus and style representation mode tradeoffs. Existing work on public preferences regarding the representation relationship has focused either on preferences regarding the tradeoff between delegate and trustee styles of representation (McMurray and Parsons 1965; Cantril 1967; Davidson 1970; Sigelman, Sigelman and Walkosz 1992; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Mndez-Lago and Martnez 2002; Carman 2007; Barker and Carman 2009; Bengtsson and Wass 2010; Barker and Carman 2010) or on preferences regarding whether representatives should prioritize local or national interests (Doherty forthcoming; 2013). I build on this existing work by considering public preferences regarding these two dimensions of representation jointly. The findings suggest that this more detailed approach is warranted. Most notably, people say they want representatives to prioritize their district’s *preferences* over national *preferences*, but that they should prioritize *what they think is best* for the country over *what they think is best* for their district.

Second, the experimental findings I present shed light on the potential electoral consequences of public preferences about the focus and style of representation. I find that preferences about modes of representation affect evaluations of specific instances of a representative’s behavior and that these direct effects are independent of the effects of agreeing with the substance of the policy position a legislator adopts. Although people’s stated preferences regarding the representation relationship shape their evaluations of a representative who adopts a particular mode of representation, this is not a simple one-to-one relationship. For example, even those who state strong support for representatives prioritizing national demands over district demands do not reward a representative who does this.

Finally, findings from the experimental design demonstrate that people’s substantive policy preferences, in some cases, affect how they respond to a representative who adopts one mode of representation rather than another. When presented with a representative who faces a conflict between public preferences and her own judgment about what is best, people’s people are only willing to accept divergence from public preferences when they, themselves, disagree with the public. In contrast, among those who disagree with the substance of a representative’s position, representatives are evaluated substantially less favorably when their position also involves diverging from public preferences.

1 The Representation Relationship: Two Dimensions

The two dimensions of the representation relationship I examine here have played a central role in normative debates about what representation entails for centuries (Burke 1854; Fairlie 1940; Eulau, Wahlke, Buchanan and Ferguson 1959; Pitkin 1967; Rehfeld 2009). Crossing these two dimensions of representation yields four modes of representation which are summarized in Table 1. This table is adapted from the taxonomy of representation outlined by Rehfeld (2009).¹

The mode of representation in the top-left cell of the table—locally focused, delegate styled representation—describes a model where representatives directly transmit their constituents’ pref-

¹Rehfeld also posits a third dimension that distinguishes between representatives who are responsive to sanctions from those who are not. This distinction is immaterial to the present research because here I am concerned with the type of representation people want officials to provide, rather than what they want to motivate representation decisions. For a discussion of the importance of public beliefs about representatives’ motives, see (Doherty 2015; McGraw 2001; 2003).

Table 1: Two Dimensions of Representation: Taxonomy

		Style	
		Dependent (“Delegate”)	Self-Reliant (“Trustee”)
Focus	Local	Those who seek the good of a part (often that of their constituents) by relying on the judgment of others.	Those who seek the good of a part (often that of their constituents) by relying on their own judgment.
	National	Those who seek the good of the whole by relying on the judgment of others.	Those who seek the good of the whole by relying on their own judgment.

Adapted from Table 2 in Rehfeld (2009).

erences into legislative votes, opposing policies their constituents oppose and supporting the policies that they support. The top-right type of representation—locally focused, trustee styled representation—also implies that the representative prioritizes her specific constituency, but charges the representative with using her own judgment in determining how to best serve the constituency’s interests. Within the national focus of representation (second row) the bottom-right cell describes a mode of representation where representatives legislate for the nation as a whole and base their decisions on the preferences of the national public. Finally, the bottom-right mode of representation is most commonly associated with Edmund Burke’s argument that “Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole” (1854). In this model representatives deliberate and use their own judgment to cooperate in legislating for the nation as a whole.

2 The Public’s Representation Preferences

In the analysis that follows, I examine how people want representatives to make decisions when faced with each of the four tradeoffs defined by the edges of Table 1. In other words, I examine how people want representatives to adjudicate the tradeoff between: 1) locally and nationally focused delegate style representation (*within Delegate Style*), 2) locally and nationally focused trustee style representation (*within Trustee Style*), 3) delegate and trustee styled, locally focused representation (*within Local Focus*), and 4) delegate and trustee styled, nationally focused representation (*within National Focus*).

Part of the reason that scholarly debates about how the representation relationship should work like persist is that competing styles and foci of representation each entail tradeoffs between appealing ideals. In the context of the U.S., the tension between a national and local focus of representation stems largely from the fact that Congress is a national institution that legislates for the nation as a whole, but is composed of representatives elected by specific constituencies. The idea of representatives cooperating to serve the nation as a whole may strike people as more appealing than representatives advocating tenaciously for the particularized interests of their specific districts and engaging in unpleasant conflicts (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Fearon 1999; Funk 2001; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Mutz and Reeves 2005). After all, the laws passed by Congress affect all Americans, not just those living in a given representative's state or district.

On the other hand, the notion that a representative ought give voice to the more particular interests of their district is also appealing—surely each constituency should have a voice in the legislative process. Furthermore, institutional incentives imply that representatives are, first and foremost, accountable to their particular constituents. Thus, from a practical perspective, people may be reluctant to expect a given representative to prioritize the country over her district because they realize that other representatives do not have incentives to do the same.

Delegate and trustee styles of representation also may each appeal to the public. An extensive body of evidence finds that the public falls short of being an ideal, well-informed citizenry (e.g., Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Many citizens appear to share scholarly misgivings about public competence and are wary of allowing public opinion to dictate policy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). From an individual perspective, they also appear to be willing to defer to representatives' judgment on issues where they are uncertain about their own expertise (Gerber, Huber, Doherty and Dowling 2011). This discomfort with direct democracy may lead to support for a trustee style of representation.

This said, the notion that the people who are to be ruled ought to steer the policies that they must abide by is a central tenet of democracy and is likely to be inherently appealing. Furthermore, in order to be willing to support a representative's decision to diverge from public preferences, people must believe that the decision is driven by a genuine intention to better serve the public. Public opinion surveys suggest that most people are disinclined to trust congressional representatives to be honest in their decision-making. For example, a 2014 Gallup survey found that only 7% of

respondents rated the honesty and ethical standards of members of Congress as “high” or “very high.”² Doubts about the trustworthiness of elected officials may outweigh the appeal of deferring to their expert judgment and lead to support for a delegate style of representation.

In short, each of the four modes of representation I examine here is likely to be appealing to virtually any citizen. A locally focused, delegate style of representation requires few assumptions about the trustworthiness of representatives or how other representatives are likely to behave. Representatives are simply expected to act in a self-interested fashion, reflecting their constituents preferences when they cast their legislative votes, in exchange for reelection. Nationally focused, delegate styled representation may also be appealing in that it suggests that legislators should act in accordance with the preferences of those who will be subject to the laws they pass and avoids contending with potentially divisive preferences of specific constituencies. The appeal of locally focused, trustee styled representation may stem from a sense that representatives should prioritize their constituencies over the country, but that representatives are likely to make better decisions about their districts’ interest than the people of that district. Similarly, a nationally focused, trustee style of representation may be appealing for exactly the reasons Burke cited—it charges representatives with using their (presumably expert) judgement to discern what is best for those who will be governed by their actions.

2.1 Representation Mode Preferences in Action

I also use experimental designs to assess the relationships between people’s representation preferences and their evaluations of specific instances of representatives faced with one of the representation mode tradeoffs examined here. One possibility is that when a substantive policy is at stake, people are indifferent to the mode of representation a legislator adopts. In these situations an individual’s feelings about the substance of the policy position the legislator adopts may trump concerns about whether the position is congruent with public preferences or whether national or local interests appear to be being prioritized. This said people appear to care a great deal not only about substantive outcomes, but also about the process by which political outcomes are reached (Thibaut and Walker 1975; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Gibson 2002; Gangl 2003; Tyler 2006).

²Gallup Poll, Dec, 2014. Retrieved Mar-23-2015 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html

Thus, there is reason to suspect that the mode of representation that a legislator adopts can affect how people evaluate her above and beyond the effects associated with the substance of the positions they take.

Another possibility is that people care about the mode of representation a legislator adopts, but that what they say they want in the abstract does not track neatly with the evaluative criteria they use in concrete circumstances. This possibility also has been supported by the prior work. For example, although people are broadly supportive of civil liberties protections in the abstract, they are often less supportive when presented with specific instances of these principles in action (Chong 1993; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse and Wood 1995; Grant and Rudolph 2003). Similarly, people may state preferences regarding the appropriate role of a representative that are appealing in the abstract, but fail to reward that behavior when it is put into action. Some existing work finds that even people who say representatives should *always* prioritize national preferences over the preferences of those in their district do not evaluate representatives who do this any more favorably than legislators who prioritize their district's preferences (Doherty 2013). This dynamic may be particularly prevalent in the domain of tradeoffs between delegate and trustee styles of representation. Although many people may find the idea of representatives prioritizing their own judgment over public sentiment to be appealing in the abstract, they may respond less favorably when asked to evaluate a legislator who chooses to eschew public opinion in favor of her own purported "best judgment."

A final possibility stems from the fact that many people are likely to feel conflicted about which mode of representation is best. This ambivalence may foster a situation where people's substantive policy preferences color their responses to the type of representation a legislator's behavior implies (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2002; Doherty and Wolak 2012). When a mode of representation leads to an outcome they like, they may view that mode of representation as more desirable than when presented with an instance of that same mode of representation leading to a less preferred outcome. This type of conditioning effect may be particularly pronounced when people are asked to evaluate a legislator who chooses to prioritize what they think is best for the public over the public's stated preferences. In these situations, even those who voice strong support for trustee styled representation may not reward the legislator's adoption of this mode of representation if they disagree with policy position it implies. This is because people's own stated policy preference are,

in essence, expressions of what they think is best. Thus, people may only be willing to accept a representative's stated claim that she is diverging from public opinion because she knows what is best insofar as they, themselves, agree that the public has misjudged it's own interests.

3 Examining Representation Preferences

The data for this study come from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), fielded by Polimetrix/YouGov. The CCES is an opt-in, Internet-based survey that uses a combination of sampling and matching techniques to account for the fact that opt-in Internet survey respondents may differ from the general population. This process is designed to identify a sample that approximates a random digit dialing (RDD) sample.³ Approximately 1,600 respondents completed the module on representation preferences. The analysis below is restricted to the 1,542 respondents who provided valid responses for all items used in the analysis.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. These conditions correspond to one of four trade-offs along the edges of Table 1. Again, the first two pertain to the trade-off between a local and national focus of representation: 1) the trade-off between acting as a delegate on behalf of one's constituency and acting as a delegate on behalf of the nation as a whole (*within Delegate Style*) and 2) the trade-off between acting as a trustee on behalf of one the nation or one's constituency (*within Trustee Style*). The remaining two conditions examined the trade-off between delegate and trustee styles of representation. Specifically, they deal with the tradeoffs between 3) acting as a delegate or acting as a trustee on behalf of one's constituents (*within Local Focus*) and 4) acting as a delegate or acting as a trustee on behalf of the country as a whole (*within National*

³The survey sample is constructed by first drawing a target population sample. This sample is based on the 2005-2006 American Community Study, November 2008 Current Population Survey, and the 2007 Pew Religious Life Survey. Thus, this target sample is representative of the general population on a broad range of characteristics including a variety of geographic (state, region, and metropolitan statistical area), demographic (age, race, income, education, and gender), and other measures (born-again status, employment, interest in news, party identification, ideology, and turnout). Polimetrix invited a sample of their opt-in panel of 1.4 million survey respondents to participate in the study. Invitations were stratified based on age, race, gender, education and by simple random sampling within strata. Those who completed the survey were then matched to the target sample based on gender, age, race, region, metropolitan statistical area, education, news interest, marital status, party identification, ideology, religious affiliation, frequency of religious services attendance, income, and voter registration status. Finally, weights were calculated to adjust the final sample to reflect the national public on these demographic and other characteristics. For more detailed information on this type of survey and sampling technique see (Vavreck and Rivers 2008). The analysis that follows uses the analytical weights provided with the dataset, and so the analysis aims to represent a national sample. The weighted demographic and political characteristics of the sample used in the analysis that follows are presented in Appendix Table ??.

Focus).

Respondents were first asked how often they thought conflicts between the two types of representation occurred. For example, those in the *within Delegate Style* condition were asked: “Thinking about the situations representatives in Congress face: How often do you think what people in a representative’s district say they want is different from what people in the country as a whole say they want?” In contrast, those in the *within Local Focus* condition were asked about the trade-off between delegate and trustee-style representation, assuming a district focus: “Thinking about the situations representatives in Congress face: How often do you think what people in a representative’s district say they want is different from what the representative thinks is best for the district?” (Full question wording and coding rules for all items used in the analysis are presented in the Appendix.) Responses were measured using a sliding ruler which recorded responses on a 100 point scale. Responses were rescaled to range from “almost never” (0) to “almost always” (1). These items provide insight into whether people believe these modes of representation are typically well-aligned—e.g., whether they believe national and local preferences are typically aligned. Figure 1 presents kernel density plots of the distribution of responses to this item for respondents assigned to each of the four tradeoff conditions.

The distribution of responses reported in Figure 1 suggest that people recognize that local and national interests often conflict. This is true in both the *within Delegate Style* and *within Trustee Style* conditions. Respondents in the *within Delegate Style* condition, on average, indicated that what people in the district say they want and what people in the country as a whole say they want conflict more often than not (test of equality of mean [.585] and midpoint on scale [.5]: $p < .01$). Similarly, in the *within Trustee Style* condition the mean perception was that what representatives think is best for their district and what they think is best for the country conflict more often than not (test of equality of mean [.544] and midpoint on scale [.5]: $p < .01$).

The findings presented in Figure 1 also show that people believe that what the public wants and what representatives think is best for the public regularly conflict. Respondents in the *within Local Focus* condition indicated that they believed what people in a representative’s district say they want often conflicts with what the representative thinks is best for the district; those in the *within National Focus* condition indicated that what people in the country as a whole say they want often conflicts with what a representative thinks is best for the country. The mean response

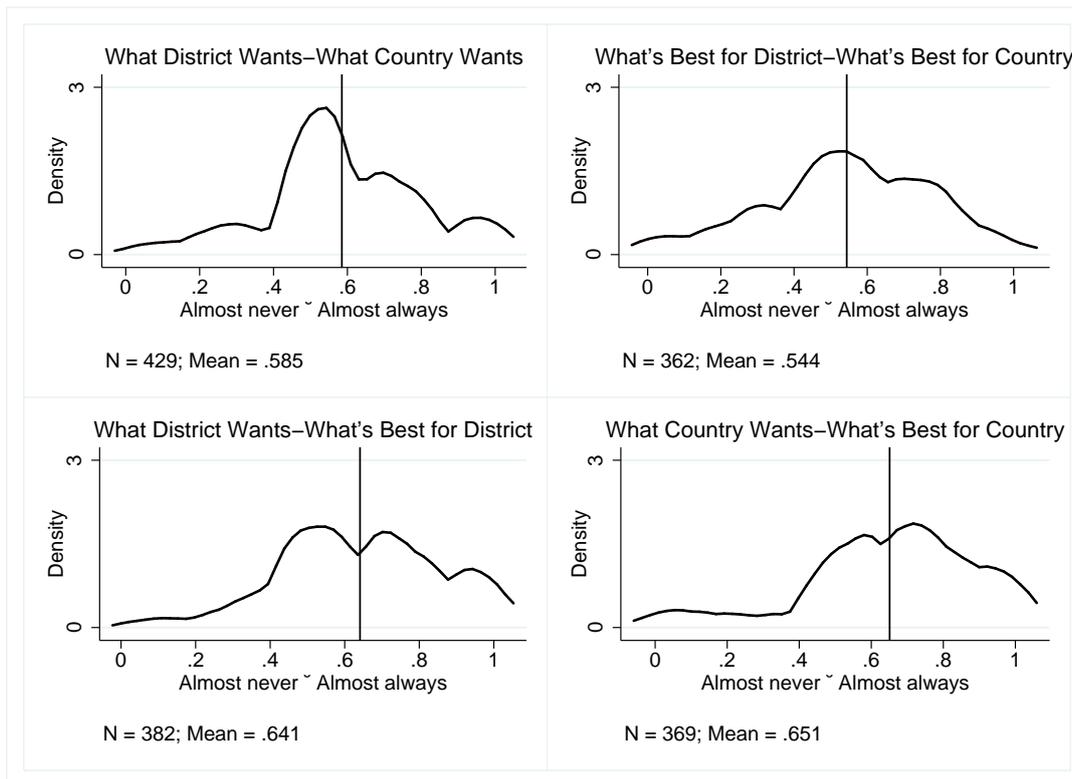


Figure 1: **Perceived Frequency of Conflict between Modes of Representation:** Kernel density plot of respondents’ perceptions regarding how frequently modes of representation conflict. Vertical lines indicate means. Weighted estimates.

in each case was significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale and greater than the perceived frequency of national versus local conflicts reported by those in the other two conditions ($p < .01$ for all comparisons).

The second question in the battery asked respondents how they think representatives should resolve conflicts between each pair of representation models. For this item, those in the *within Delegate Style* condition were asked: “When conflicts arise do you think representatives in Congress should do what people in their district say they want or what people in the country as a whole say they want?” Again responses were provided using a sliding ruler that captured responses on a 0 to 100 scale. I rescaled responses to range from -1 to 1. The ends of the scale described preferences for always adhering to one mode of representation or the other. For example, in the *within Delegate Style* condition responses ranged from “Always do what people in their district say they want” (-1) to “Always do what people in the country as a whole say they want” (1). Figure 2 presents kernel densities of the distributions of respondents preferences regarding what decision rule representatives

should use when modes of representation conflict.

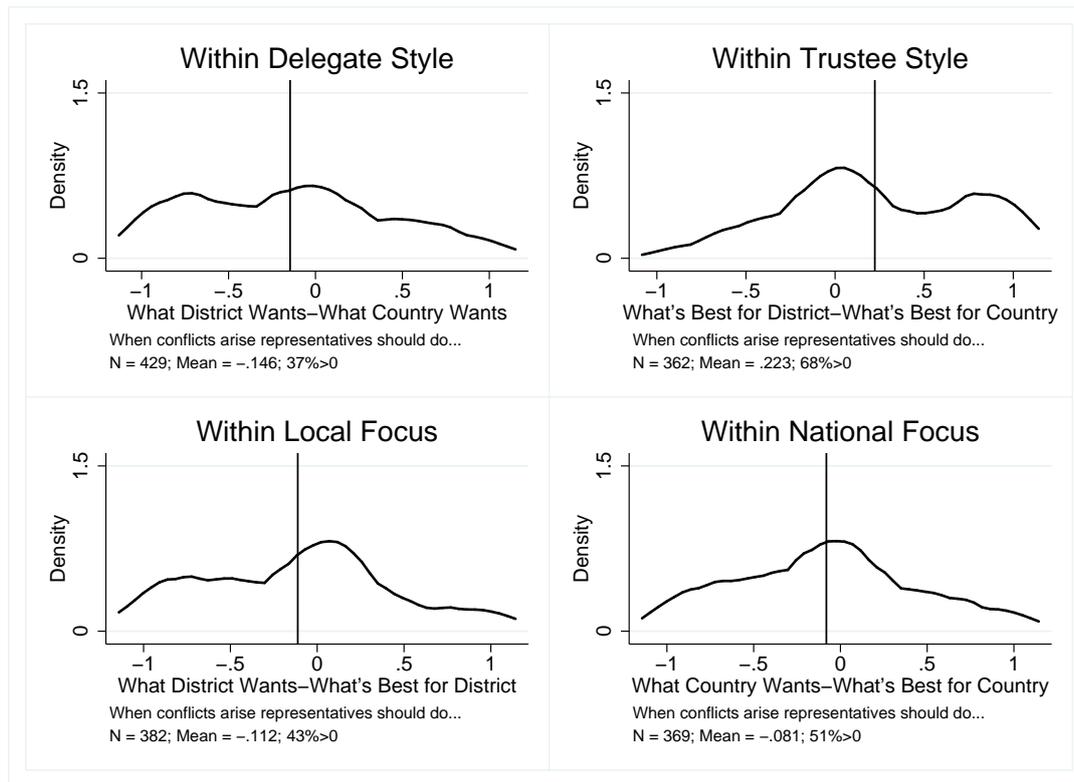


Figure 2: **Stated Representation Preferences:** Lines correspond to kernel density estimates of respondents' preferences regarding mode of representation. Vertical lines indicate means of each distribution. Weighted estimates.

The *within Delegate Style* and *within Trustee Style* panels suggest that people's feelings about how representatives should and do treat the tradeoff between local and national foci of representation varies substantially across delegate and trustee styles of representation. When faced with a tradeoff between doing what people in the district say they want and what people in the country as a whole say they want, people tend to say that representatives should respond to their district's preferences. In contrast, within the trustee style of representation—when representatives face a tradeoff between what they think is best for the district and what they think is best for the country—people say they want representatives to do what they think is best for the country. In other words, although people see it as a representative's responsibility to prioritize district preferences over national preferences, when representatives are deciding whether to do what they think is best for their district or what they think is best for the country, they prefer that representatives focus on doing what they think is best for the country as a whole.

Examining respondents' preferences about the tradeoff between delegate and trustee styles of representation we find similar distributions in the *within Local Focus* and *within National Focus* conditions. In each case respondents, on average, indicate that they prefer that representatives respond to public demands rather than acting based on what they think is best. That said, in each case a substantial proportion of respondents provided responses on the trustee side of the scale. When asked whether "representatives in Congress should do what people in their district say they want or what they think is best for the district," 43 percent of respondents moved the slider toward the trustee end of the scale. About half (51 percent) of those presented with the analogous tradeoff within nationally focused representation stated a preference for trustee-styled representation.

3.1 Representation Mode Preferences in Action

Next, I examine how the mode of representation a representative adopts in a specific instance affects how people evaluate that representative. Near the end of the survey module (approximately 4 minutes after the representation questions discussed above were asked), respondents read a brief vignette describing a legislative vote cast by a member of Congress on the American Clean Energy and Security Act. The representative in the vignette was in a position where he had to make a tradeoff between two modes of representation. For example, respondents in the *within Trustee Style* condition were presented with a representative who had to choose to do what he thought was best for his district or what he thought was best for the country as a whole; those in the *within Local Focus* condition were told that 60% of the people in the representative's district supported (opposed) the bill, but that the representative thought the bill would be bad (good) for the district (the full text of the vignettes is presented in the Appendix). The state of the world (e.g., whether the representative's constituents supported the bill but he thought it was a bad idea or vice versa) was randomly assigned, as was the representative's vote on the bill.

After reading the vignette, respondents were asked to rate the job the representative was doing as a representative using a slider ranging from "poor" (0) to "excellent" (100). They also indicated how likely they thought they would be to vote for the representative in the 2010 election if he lived in his district on a slider scale ranging from "not very likely" (0) to "very likely" (100). These two items were highly correlated ($r = .848$) and I average them to construct a summary measure (*Rating of Representative*) that ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values corresponding to more

favorable evaluations of the representative.

In Table 2, I present analysis of how people rated a representative who faced a focus conflict—i.e., had to decide whether to prioritize his constituents or the country as a whole. I conduct separate analysis for those in the *within Delegate Style* and those in the *within Trustee Style* conditions. In all cases the respondent’s rating of the job the representative was doing is specified as the dependent variable.

In columns (1) and (4) I report estimates from a model specifying an indicator for whether the representative sided with the nation (1) or the district (0) and an indicator for whether the substance of the representative’s position was congruent with the policy preference the respondent stated in response to an earlier survey question (1 if congruent, 0 if not). Consistent with respondents’ stated preferences, representatives who prioritized the preferences of the country as a whole were evaluated 8.6 units less favorably than those who sided with their district’s preferences. Conversely, those who prioritized what they thought best for the country over what they thought was best for the district were evaluated 8.5 units more favorably than those who prioritized locally focused, trustee style representation ($p < .01$). As expected, the effect of the respondent agreeing with the substance of the representative’s position is positive and statistically significant in these models.

In the models presented in columns (2) and (5) I include the measure of the respondent’s pre-treatment stated preference regarding the focus of representation, as well as an interaction between this measure and the treatment indicator for the focus the representative adopted in the vignette. These interactions provide a way to assess whether the effects of the representative’s decision about which representation focus to adopt depend on the respondent’s stated preference regarding the focus of representation.

The interaction in column (2) is statistically significant and in the expected direction. The negative effect of the decision to side with national, rather than district, opinion is mitigated among respondents who said they prefer that representatives respond to national preferences. This linear interaction model predicts that among those who say representatives should *always* side with the nation (1 on the preference scale), a representative who prioritizes national demands over district demands is evaluated approximately 14.4 units more favorably ($p < .05$). The model estimates that those stating the strongest preference for district focused representation rated a representative described as prioritizing district preferences over national preferences 26.1 units more favorably

Table 2: Responses to Specific Cases of Representatives Adopting Local or National Focus

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Within Delegate Style		Rating of Representative (0-100)		Within Trustee Style	
Representative Side With Country (not District) = 1	-9.101 [2.483]***	-5.823 [2.573]**	5.181 [5.404]	8.979 [2.638]***	5.279 [2.896]*	22.995 [5.808]***
Representative Side with Respondent	28.546 [2.483]***	28.823 [2.396]***	28.727 [2.384]***	28.369 [2.605]***	27.464 [2.645]***	27.216 [2.650]***
Respondent Locus Preference (-1=District; 1=Nation)		-5.854 [3.492]*			-7.200 [3.646]**	
Representative Side With Country x Respondent Preference		20.234 [4.907]***			14.849 [5.327]***	
Preference Quartile: 1			5.273 [5.466]			9.035 [5.308]*
Preference Quartile: 2			12.245 [5.064]**			9.365 [4.411]**
Preference Quartile: 3			-4.444 [5.404]			6.510 [4.263]
Representative Side With Country x Preference (Q1)			-26.180 [7.566]***			-19.566 [8.016]**
Representative Side With Country x Preference (Q2)			-26.928 [6.699]***			-24.977 [7.740]***
Representative Side With Country x Preference (Q3)			-0.984 [7.001]			-13.488 [7.820]*
Constant	42.794 [2.330]***	41.196 [2.445]***	38.598 [4.584]***	29.685 [2.122]***	32.686 [2.559]***	24.631 [3.386]***
Observations	429	429	429	362	362	362
R-squared	0.256	0.299	0.314	0.261	0.279	0.287
Representation Mode p-value	0.000	0.024	0.338	0.001	0.069	0.000
Joint significance of interactions		0.000	0.000		0.006	0.012

Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates. Robust standard errors in brackets. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

($p < .01$).

The estimates in column (5) also support the notion that people’s stated preferences affect how they respond to specific instances of a representative prioritizing one mode of representation over another. The coefficient on the interaction terms is positive and statistically significant. Take together, the coefficients in column (5) suggest that those who most strongly supported the idea that representatives should prioritize what they think is best for the country over what they think is best for their district evaluated a representative who did so 20.1 units more favorably ($p < .01$). The point estimates suggest that those whose stated preferences were at the other end of the spectrum—i.e., those who said representatives should *always* do what they think is best for their district rather than what they believe is best for the country—evaluated a representative who prioritized this mode of representation 9.6 units more favorably. However, this estimated effect falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = .172$).

The interactions presented in columns (2) and (5) restrict the interaction between respondents’ stated focus preferences and the experimentally assigned focus adopted by the representative to be linear. In columns (3) and (6) I adopt a more flexible specification. I include a set of indicators for each quartile of these preferences (calculated separately for the *within Delegate Style* and *within Trustee Style* conditions) as well as interactions between each indicator and the representation focus treatment. The top quartile—i.e., the 25% of respondents who were most supportive of a national focus—is the excluded category.⁴

Consistent with the findings from the linear interaction specifications, in each case the results reveal a pattern where people who said they preferred representatives who focus on serving the country evaluated a representative who did so more favorably than those who said representatives should prioritize their district. However, the models reveal a pattern of effects that was obscured by the linear interaction specification. The model in column (3) indicates that among the quartile of respondents who stated the strongest support for representatives who prioritize national demands over district demands (the excluded category), the effect of a representative following this prescription was indistinguishable from zero ($b = 5.18; p = .338$). The linear combination of the coefficient

⁴I report analysis that makes even fewer assumptions about the functional form of these models in the Appendix. Specifically in Figure A1 I present polynomial smoothed plots of the relationship between stated support for representatives prioritizing nationally, rather than locally, focused representation and residuals from a model predicting representative ratings with randomly assigned policy agreement. I present lines for respondents in each condition.

on *Representative Side With Country* and the interaction between this measure and the *Preference Quartile: 3* indicator suggests that this indifference is also present among those in the quartile that was second most supportive of nationally, rather than locally, focused delegate style representation (linear combination of coefficients on *Representative Side With Country* and *Representative Side With Country x Preference (Q3)* = 4.20; $p = .346$).

In contrast among those in the two quartiles of respondents who were most supportive of locally-focused, rather than nationally-focused, delegate style representation, a representative who appeared to prioritize national preferences over district demands was evaluated over 20 units less favorably ($p < .01$ for both quartile estimates). Notably, the magnitude of each of these effects is statistically indistinguishable from the effect of policy agreement ($p = .197$ and $.141$ for quartiles 1 and 2, respectively). In short, these models suggest that even the two quartiles of the public who are most supportive of the idea that representatives should put national preferences ahead of their districts' demands are not inclined to reward a representative who follows this prescription. In contrast, the two quartiles who are most supportive of representatives putting their districts' preferences ahead of national preferences substantially punish a representative who diverges from this prescription.

The model in column (6) indicates that when the tradeoff between nationally and locally focused representation is situated within the trustee style of representation, the pattern of effects observed in the *with Delegate Style* context is essentially inverted. The quartile of respondents that was most supportive of nationally focused trustee style representation evaluated a representative who prioritized what he thought best for the country over what he thought best for the district substantially more favorably ($b = 23.00$; $p < .01$)—an effect that is statistically indistinguishable from the effects of policy agreement ($p = .535$). Those in the quartile that was the second most supportive of nationally focused trustee style representation (Q3) also evaluated a representative who prioritized that mode of representation more favorably, though the effect was more modest ($b = 9.50$; $p < .10$) and significantly smaller than the effect of policy agreement ($p < .01$). In contrast, the *Representative Side With Country* treatment did not affect ratings of the representative among those in the two quartiles that were most supportive of locally focused, trustee style representation ($p = .693$ and $.526$ for those in Q2 and Q1, respectively).

Table 3 presents a similar set of models to those presented in Table 2, for respondents presented

with representative who faced a tradeoff between acting as a delegate and acting as a trustee. The findings among those assigned to the *Within Local Focus* tradeoff and those assigned to the *Within National Focus* tradeoff are substantively similar. The models in columns (1) and (4) each indicate that, on average, representatives who prioritized a trustee style of representation were evaluated significantly less favorably than those who responded to public demands. The findings in columns (2) and (5) each reveal a statistically significant interaction between respondents' stated preferences regarding how representatives should resolve the tradeoff between delegate and trustee styles of representation. Estimates using these linear interactions suggest that, in each case, even those who said representatives should *always* prioritize trustee styled representation (1 on the stated preference scale) did not evaluate a representative who prioritized that mode of representation significantly more favorably ($p = .241$ and $.297$ for the models in columns [2] and [5], respectively). In contrast, the models predict that those who stated the greatest possible support for delegate styled representation evaluated a representative who prioritized his judgment over public opinion over 20 units less favorably ($p < .01$ for both models).

The models in columns (3) and (6) of Table 3, again, adopt more flexible model specifications that do not restrict the interaction between stated preferences and responses to the *Representative Act As Trustee* to be linear. In each case, the models show that among the two quartiles of respondents (Q3 and Q4 [excluded category]) that stated the greatest support for trustee styled representation, the *Representative Act As Trustee* treatment did not significantly affect evaluations of the representative ($p > .10$ in each case). In contrast, respondents in the two quartiles that were most supportive of delegate styled representation evaluated a representative who prioritized his own judgment over public opinion significantly less favorably ($p < .05$ in each case). In each case, the effect of the representative adopting a trustee style of representation is statistically indistinguishable from the effect of policy disagreement among those in the quartile that stated the greatest support for delegate styled representation.

3.2 The Role of Substantive Policy Preferences

The final empirical question I address in this paper pertains to whether people's preferences regarding the substance of the policy position the representative adopts affects how they respond to the representative prioritizing one mode of representation over another. In Tables 4 and 5, I

Table 3: Responses to Specific Cases of Representatives Adopting Trustee or Delegate Style

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Rating of Representative (0-100)					
	Within Local Focus			Within National Focus		
Representative Act As Trustee (not Delegate) = 1	-10.197 [2.941]***	-8.180 [2.877]***	3.425 [5.073]	-7.958 [2.796]***	-7.294 [2.783]***	0.650 [5.807]
Representative Side with Respondent	29.673 [2.886]***	27.622 [2.919]***	28.164 [2.923]***	28.282 [2.792]***	28.139 [2.764]***	28.078 [2.791]***
Respondent Style Preference (-1=Delegate; 1=Trustee)		1.186 [4.417]			-3.141 [4.239]	
Representative Act As Trustee x Respondent Preference		15.818 [5.505]***			14.281 [5.719]**	
Preference Quartile: 1			-1.438 [6.325]			4.704 [5.725]
Preference Quartile: 2			5.794 [5.427]			5.042 [5.052]
Preference Quartile: 3			6.059 [6.362]			2.918 [5.248]
Representative Act As Trustee x Preference (Q1)			-21.311 [8.057]***			-19.807 [8.153]**
Representative Act As Trustee x Preference (Q2)			-18.681 [7.145]***			-10.274 [7.602]
Representative Act As Trustee x Preference (Q3)			-12.830 [8.949]			-3.339 [7.754]
Constant	38.495 [2.813]***	39.744 [2.807]***	37.041 [3.938]***	40.210 [2.387]***	40.157 [2.393]***	37.257 [4.112]***
Observations	382	382	382	369	369	369
R-squared	0.237	0.288	0.285	0.240	0.263	0.263
Representation Mode p-value	0.001	0.005	0.500	0.005	0.009	0.911
Joint significance of interactions		0.004	0.024		0.013	0.070

Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates. Robust standard errors in brackets. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

present models analogous to those presented in columns (1) and (4) of Tables 2 and 3, but add an interaction between the policy agreement indicator and the representation mode treatment. These interaction terms serve as a way to test whether the effects of a representative prioritizing one mode of representation over another depend on how the observer feels about the substantive policy positions each mode of representation is aligned with.

Table 4: Policy Preferences and Responses to Focus Tradeoff

	(1)	(2)
	Rating of Representative (0-100)	
	Within Delegate Style	Within Trustee Style
Representative Side With Country (not District) = 1	-8.033 [3.649]**	7.523 [3.744]**
Representative Side with Respondent	29.638 [3.634]***	26.978 [3.195]***
Side with Country x Side with Respondent	-2.053 [4.981]	2.928 [5.280]
Constant	42.224 [2.817]***	30.417 [2.354]***
Observations	429	362
R-squared	0.256	0.261
Representation Mode p-value	0.028	0.045
Interaction p-value	0.680	0.580

Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates. Robust standard errors in brackets. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

The coefficients on the interaction terms in columns (1) and (2) of Table 4 each fall well short of conventional levels of statistical significance. The findings in column (1) suggest that, when it comes to tradeoffs between locally and nationally focused representation, people prefer representatives whose behavior prioritizes district preferences over national preferences and they do not respond more favorably to a nationally focused delegate mode of representation when their own preferences are aligned with national preferences. Conversely, the findings in column (2) suggest that, when faced with a tradeoff between nationally and locally focused trustee styled representation, people prefer representatives who prioritize what they think is best for the country over those who prioritize their judgments about what is best for their district, regardless of their own policy preferences.

In stark contrast, the models in Table 5 demonstrate that responses to a representative who must act either as a delegate or as a trustee are strongly conditioned by respondents' policy preferences. In each model the estimates indicate that, among those who disagreed with the substance of the representative's position, a representative presented as diverging from public opinion (acting as a trustee) was evaluated less favorably ($b = -17.78$ and -13.87 for the models in columns [1] and [2],

Table 5: Policy Preferences and Responses to Style Tradeoff

	(1)	(2)
	Rating of Representative (0-100)	
	Within Local Focus	Within National Focus
Representative Act As Trustee (not Delegate) = 1	-17.783 [4.218]***	-13.869 [3.806]***
Representative Side with Respondent	21.616 [4.532]***	22.459 [3.751]***
Act as Trustee x Side with Respondent	14.098 [5.844]**	12.103 [5.571]**
Constant	42.867 [3.441]***	43.228 [2.720]***
Observations	382	369
R-squared	0.249	0.249
Representation Mode p-value	0.000	0.000
Interaction p-value	0.016	0.030

Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates. Robust standard errors in brackets. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

respectively; $p < .01$). In contrast, respondents who agreed with the representative’s policy position were indifferent between representatives who prioritized a delegate style of representation and those who prioritized their own judgment (linear combination of the coefficients on *Representative Act As Trustee* and the interaction term = -3.69 and -1.77 for the models in columns [1] and [2], respectively; $p > .10$ in each case). In short, among those who agreed with the representative’s policy position, the representative was not rewarded for eschewing public opinion to do what was “best.”

4 The Nature of Representation Preferences

What it means for a legislator to provide effective representation has been debated for centuries. The findings reported in Figure 1 demonstrate that people recognize that different approaches to representation often conflict. So how do people want representatives to resolve these conflicts? The observational and experimental evidence I present in this paper suggest that public preferences about the representation relationship are consequential, but nuanced.

How people view the tradeoffs between locally and nationally focused representation depends substantially on whether they are considering this tradeoff within a trustee or delegate style of representation. People tend to say they prefer representatives who prioritize district demands over national preferences—a finding that is consistent with existing evidence (Doherty 2013; forth-

coming). In contrast, within a trustee framework, most people say they want representatives to prioritize what they think is best for the country over what they think is best for their districts. When asked about tradeoffs between responding to public opinion and a representative using her own judgment, I find consistent preferences regardless of whether this tradeoff is situated within nationally or locally focused representation. In each case, although people, on average, state a modest preference for representatives prioritizing a delegate style of representation over a trustee style, a substantial segment of the public voices support for a trustee model of representation.

The experimental evidence provides a way to examine these preferences “in action.” When faced with a specific instance of a representative who must choose to prioritize one mode of representation over another, do people care which mode is adopted or do substantive policy preferences swamp these considerations? The evidence I report here suggests that the mode of representation a legislator adopts affects how people evaluate her, even when a substantive policy matter is at stake. These effects are distinct from the effects associated with whether the respondent agrees with the substance of the representative’s policy position.

The effects associated with the mode of representation a legislator adopts vary across individuals who state different abstract preferences about how the representation relationship should work. However, the findings also suggest that representatives are unlikely to be substantially rewarded for adopting certain modes of representation—even among those who state strong support for that model. For example, even the two quartiles of the public who were most supportive of the idea that representatives should prioritize national preferences over district opinion do not appear to be inclined to reward concrete instances of this type of prioritization. In contrast, the effect of a representative prioritizing national preferences over district preferences among those in two quartiles who were least supportive of this mode of representation was substantial and indistinguishable in magnitude from the effects of policy agreement. Similarly, although approximately half of respondents voiced support for representatives who prioritize their own judgment over public opinion, I find little evidence that people are actually willing to reward representatives for diverging from public opinion. This is particularly notable given that the issue used in the vignette—a broad energy bill—seems like a prime example of a complex national policy where we might expect people to be particularly supportive of representatives who adhere to a nationally focused, trustee model of representation.

When presented with a representative who faced a tradeoff between prioritizing national or district interests, people's substantive policy preferences did not moderate the effects of a representative prioritizing one locus of representation over another. In contrast, policy preferences strongly conditioned responses to a representative who had to choose to act either as a trustee or a delegate. The effects of the legislator prioritizing his judgment over public opinion was significant, substantial, and negative among those who disagreed with the substance of this position; among those who agreed with his position these effects were indistinguishable from zero.

As with all research, the evidence I present here has limitations. For example, the experimental vignettes I used were brief and provided respondents with limited information about the target legislator. In addition, only one issue was used in the experiments. It is possible that the treatment effects identified here would be attenuated or otherwise altered if respondents were provided with additional information about the target legislator (e.g., his party affiliation). An additional factor that I do not explore here is whether legislators can use rhetoric to temper negative reactions to, say, a decision to adopt a position that is at odds with public preferences. Existing work suggests that such justifications can be consequential (e.g. McGraw, Best and Timpone 1995; Grose, Malhotra and Houweling 2015). Similarly, the effects of the representation mode treatments reported here may have been different if an alternative policy was used. Examining how these additional factors affect responses to the mode of representation a legislator adopts is an important avenue for future work.

These limitations aside, the findings presented offer unique insight into how the public thinks the representation relationship should work. Given the persistence of debates about what the representation relationships should look like, understanding what the mass public thinks about this matter is arguably inherently important. However, beyond this, the experimental evidence I report suggests that the mode of representation a legislator adopts may affect her electoral prospects in ways that extend beyond the effects associated with the substantive positions she adopts. Taken together the results suggest that prioritizing the preferences of one's constituents is the dominant strategy for congressional representatives who want to win reelection. Although some individuals say they want representatives to prioritize their own judgment and criticize representatives for being too poll-driven and others say they want representatives to focus on serving the country, rather than their specific districts, the evidence presented here indicates that representatives are

unlikely to be rewarded for using these “principled” decision rules.

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Appendix A Appendix

Appendix A.1 Additional Analysis

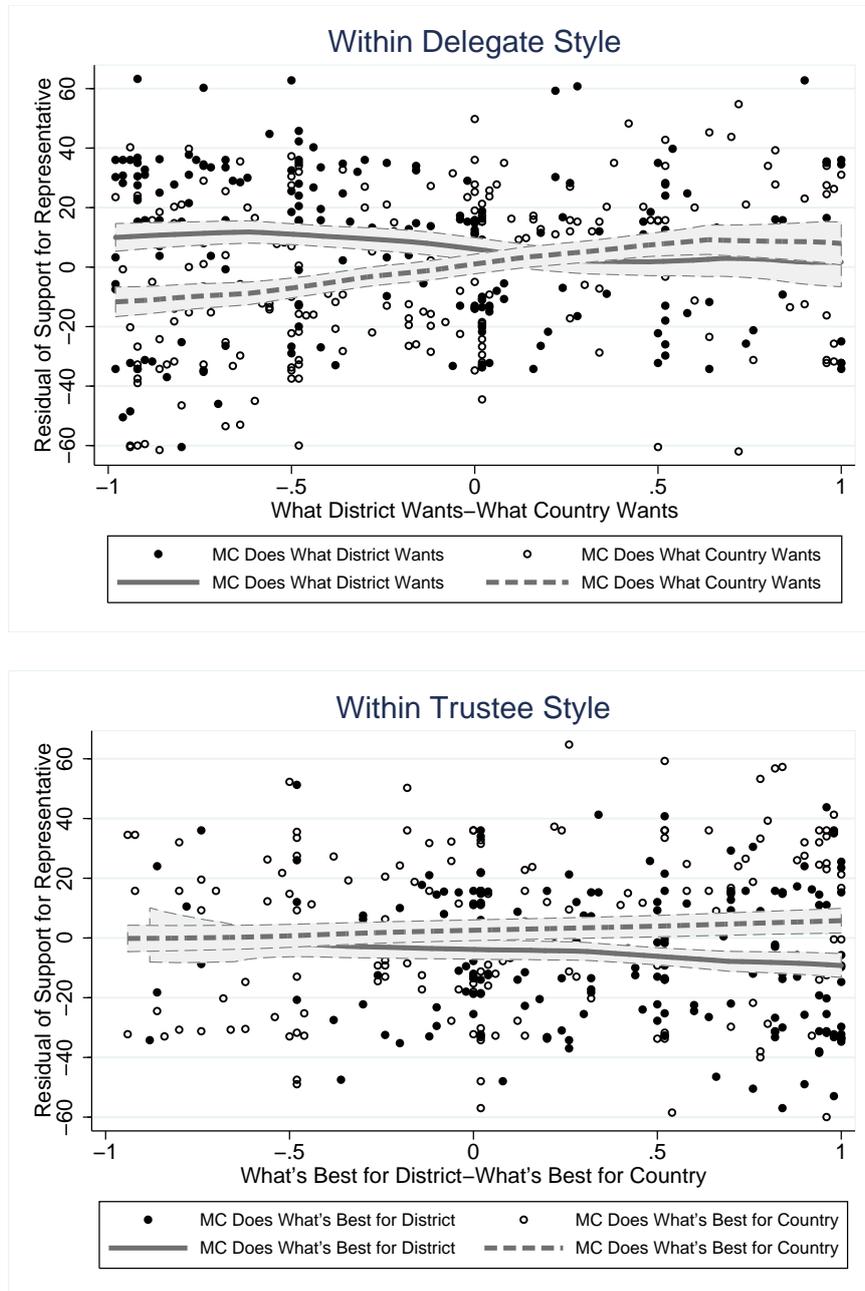


Figure A1: **Nonparametric Relationships: Focus Tradeoffs** Lines are local polynomial smoothed plots of the relationship between stated support for representatives prioritizing nationally, rather than locally, focused representation and residuals from a model predicting representative ratings with randomly assigned policy agreement. Solid line plots relationship among those presented with a representative who prioritized his district; dashed lines for those presented with a representative who prioritized the country. Gray areas indicate 90% confidence intervals.

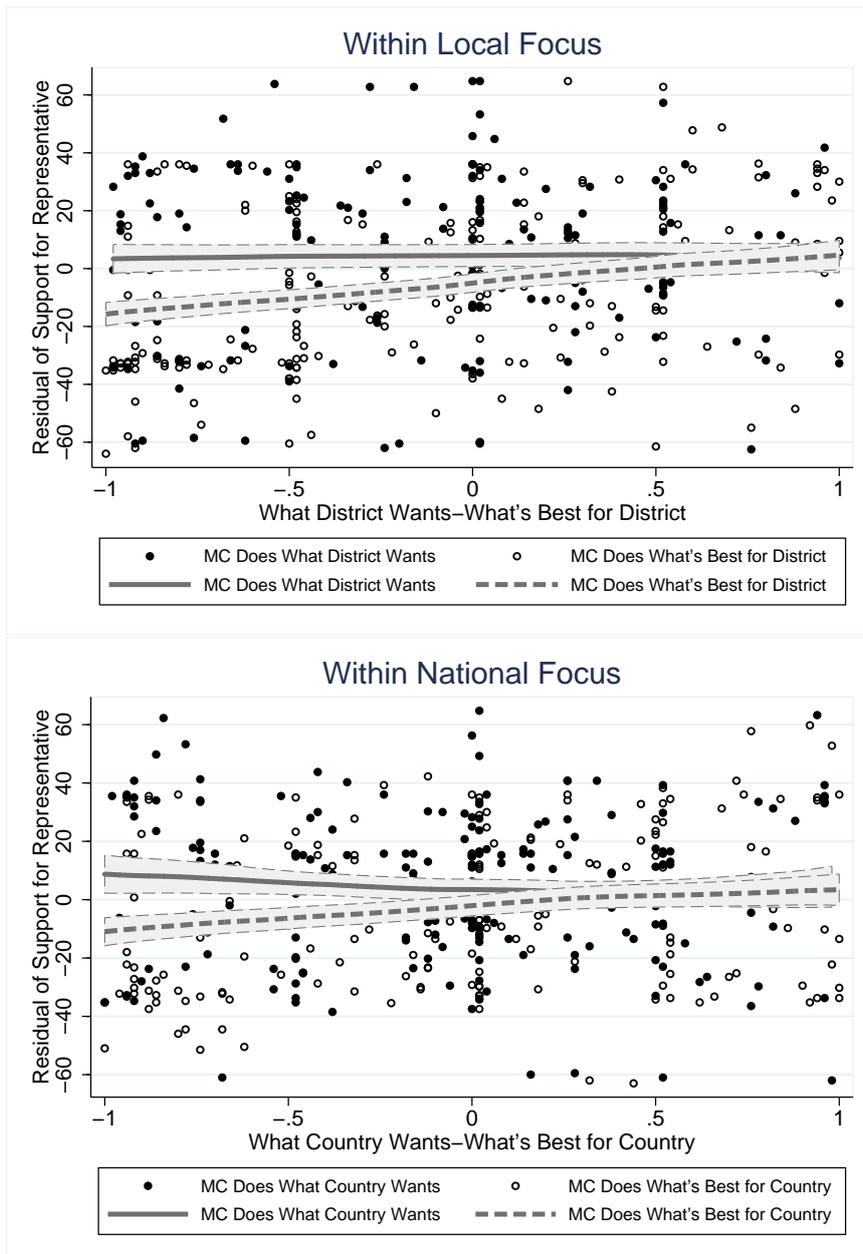


Figure A2: **Nonparametric Relationships: Style Tradeoffs** Lines are local polynomial smoothed plots of the relationship between stated support for representatives prioritizing their own judgment over public demands and residuals from a model predicting representative ratings with randomly assigned policy agreement. Solid line plots relationship among those presented with a representative who prioritized public opinion; dashed lines for those presented with a representative who prioritized his own judgment. Gray areas indicate 90% confidence intervals.

Appendix A.2 Full Question Wording and Coding Rules

Perceived frequency of conflict

Thinking about the situations representatives in Congress face:

- Within delegate style:* How often do you think what people in a representative's district say they want is different from what people in the country as a whole say they want?
[Almost never (0) - Almost always (100). Rescaled to range from 0 to 1.]
- Within trustee style:* How often do you think what a representative thinks is best for his or her district is different from what the representative thinks is best for the country as a whole?
[Almost never (0) - Almost always (100). Rescaled to range from 0 to 1.]
- Within local focus:* How often do you think what people in a representative's district say they want is different from what the representative thinks is best for the district?
[Almost never (0) - Almost always (100). Rescaled to range from 0 to 1.]
- Within national focus:* How often do you think what people in the country as a whole say they want is different from what a representative thinks is best for the country as a whole?
[Almost never (0) - Almost always (100). Rescaled to range from 0 to 1.]

Representation type preference

Preference: When conflicts arise do you think representatives in Congress should do what...

- Within delegate style:* people in their district say they want or what people in the country as a whole say they want?
[Always do what people in their district say they want (0) - Always do what people in the country as a whole say they want (100). Rescaled to range from -1 to 1.]
- Within trustee style:* they think is best for their district or what they think is best for the country as a whole?
[Always do what they think is best for the district (0) - Always do what they think is best for the country as a whole (100). Rescaled to range from -1 to 1.]
- Within local focus:* people in their district say they want or what they think is best for their district?
[Always do what people in their district say they want (0) - Always do what they think is best for their district (100). Rescaled to range from -1 to 1.]
- Within national focus:* people in the country as a whole say they want or what they think is best for the country as a whole?
[Always do what people in the country as a whole say they want (0) - Always do what they think is best for the country as a whole (100). Rescaled to range from -1 to 1.]

Representative Behavior Experiment

This past year, the House of Representatives voted on the American Clean Energy and Security Act. This bill would impose a cap on carbon emissions and allow companies to trade allowances for carbon emissions. It would also fund research on renewable energy. When voting on this bill, one representative in Congress faced a situation where...

Within delegate style: 60% of the people in his district [supported / opposed] the bill, but 60% of people in the country as a whole [opposed / supported] it.

Within trustee style: he thought the bill would be [good / bad] for the country, but thought it would be [bad / good] for his district.

Within local focus: 60% of the people in his district [supported / opposed] the bill, but he thought the bill would be [bad / good] for his district.

Within national focus: 60% of people in the country as a whole [supported / opposed] the bill, but he thought the bill would be [bad / good] for the country.

For all: In the end, this Representative voted [for / against] the bill.

Based on his decision to vote [for / against] the bill, how would you rate the job this representative is doing? [Poor (0) - Excellent (100)].

Rating of Representative:

If you lived in this representatives district, how likely do you think you would be to vote for him in the 2010 election? [Not very likely (0) - Very likely (100)].

Respondent Policy Preference: Congress considered many important bills over the past two years. For each of the following tell us whether you support or oppose the legislation in principle... American Clean Energy and Security Act: Imposes a cap on carbon emissions and allow companies to trade allowances for carbon emissions. Funds research on renewable energy. [1=Yes; 0=No]