

Congressional Representation of Black Interests: Recognizing the Importance of Stability

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The relationship between black constituency size and congressional support for black interests has two important attributes: magnitude and stability. Although previous research has examined the first characteristic, scant attention has been directed at the second. This article examines the relationship between district racial composition and congressional voting patterns with a particular emphasis on the stability of support across different types of votes and different types of districts. We hypothesize that, among white Democrats, the influence of black constituency size will be less stable in the South, owing in part to this region's more racially divided constituencies. Examining LCCR scores from the 101st through 103rd Congress, we find that this expectation is largely confirmed. We also find that, among Republicans, the impact of black constituency size is most stable—albeit negligible in size—in the South. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for the relative merits of “influence districts” and “majority minority” districts.

It has been more than 35 years since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, yet political representation for African Americans remains an unresolved issue. Some argue that the best way to promote “black interests” is by increasing the number of black representatives in Congress (Whitby 1997). Others, including a narrow majority of the Supreme Court, argue that this perspective is wrong-headed and leads merely to greater “descriptive” rather than greater “substantive” representation (Swain 1993; Thernstrom 1987). As an alternative to increasing the number of racial minorities in Congress, some suggest that blacks will be more politically effective if they represent a significant minority across many districts (i.e., “influence districts”), rather than an absolute majority in a relative few.¹ These

¹Although there is some dispute as to when black interests are maximized in nonmajority-minority districts (see Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997), most redistricting scholars agree that the influence district strategy assumes “. . . a generally positive relation between the percentage of blacks and the representation of black interests” (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996, 795).

influence districts can then encourage greater support for black interests, provided that they lead to the election of more Democrats, regardless of their race (Swain 1993).²

Although the strategy of crafting majority-minority districts has recently generated considerable controversy in the literature (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Canon 1999; Cobb and Jenkins 2001; Hill 1995; Petrocik and Desposato 1998; Shotts 2001; Whitby 1997), less attention has been devoted to the effects of black constituency size in nonmajority-minority districts. When the relationship between district racial composition and representation is explored, scholars rarely move beyond the argument that legislators with large black constituencies have an electoral incentive to adopt more liberal voting records. However, the influence of black constituency size on congressional voting patterns extends beyond the strength of this relationship. Another important element is the stability of this relationship. By stability we mean the variance in the influence of black constituency size across different types of votes and different types of districts. In general, previous work has focused on *whether* the size of the black constituency affects support for black interests and not *under what circumstances* this relationship may wax or wane. We argue that an examination of both concepts is necessary in order to understand fully the relationship between district racial composition and representation of black interests.

We hypothesize that the influence of black constituency size will vary across party, region, and type of vote. Specifically, the influence of district racial composition will be greatest among white southern Democrats—especially on legislation that generates significant media coverage, such as final votes. The size of the black population should have less impact among southern Democrats on more obscure votes such as amendments. These legislators typically hail from the most racially divided districts and consequently balance these competing interests by selectively supporting the often-controversial black interest votes before Congress. This racial polarization at the district level also means that, among southern Democrats, increases in black constituency size will not necessarily result in the election of legislators more responsive to black interests. As we shall see, some southern Democrats with large African-American constituencies are remarkably responsive to these voters whereas others frequently neglect their interests.

Our argument builds upon and differs from previous research on race and representation. Black's (1978) analysis showed that, following the Voting Rights Act, southern Democrats with significant African American constituencies were more

²The importance of influence districts has not been lost on the federal courts. For example, after repeatedly striking down North Carolina's majority-minority districts, the Supreme Court in *Hunt v. Cromartie* (2001) finally approved a redistricting plan from North Carolina. Notably, the plan approved by the Court does not contain any majority-minority districts but does contain two influence districts. Similarly, in *Page v. Bartels* (2001), a three-judge district court approved a state legislative-reapportionment plan that included at least one influence district. The court reasoned that voters of color would remain "an effective political force" even though they may not constitute a numerical majority in a particular district.

apt to support black interests at the final vote stage rather than the amendment stage. We extend this model in several ways. First, to date, no one has fully examined whether there continues to be a differential impact of black constituency size across amendments and final votes. As detailed below, Whitby (1997) explores this hypothesis with more contemporary data, but he does not examine whether the impact of black constituency size works differently in the non-South relative to the South. Second, we also examine the influence of district racial composition across other types of votes (i.e., based on the visibility and divisiveness of the bill). In this way we can determine more precisely whether the differential effects of black constituency size occur because of substantive or strategic differences in legislation. Third, we develop a theoretical model that explains why the size of the black constituency should be more influential for some votes rather than others, and among some legislators rather than others. Finally, while others have also shown how the impact of district racial composition varies across different kinds of votes (Hutchings 1998; Swain 1993; Whitby and Krause 2001), no one has examined whether increases in black constituency size lead to more consistent support of black interests, *across districts*. That is, previous work has not explored whether increases in black constituency size are associated with a reduction in the across-district variation of support for black interests.

Support for Black Interests and the Racial Composition of the District

Congressional support for African-American political interests has historically varied according to black population size. Although initial accounts found this relationship to be negative (Key 1949), more recent research has found that increases in black constituency size are associated with higher levels of support for expansive civil rights legislation (Combs, Hibbing, and Welch 1984; Fleisher 1993; Lublin 1997; Overby and Cosgrove 1996). An important shortcoming of this literature is that it has concentrated primarily on establishing the relationship between the racial composition of the district and congressional voting patterns. Although the existence of this relationship is politically relevant in and of itself, less attention has been devoted to exploring the conditions that might enhance or diminish the influence of black constituency size.

The research of Black (1978) represents an important exception to this trend. Black found that in the 1970s southern Democratic members of Congress (hereafter MCs) with significant black constituencies were more likely to support civil rights legislation at the final vote stage of the legislative process rather than at the amendment stage. He speculated that this was because support at the final vote stage represented endorsement of the principle embedded in the legislation whereas the amending stage was where the bill was strengthened or weakened. In short, although southern Democrats with large black constituencies had electoral incentives to support the idea of civil rights legislation, they were ideologically inclined to favor more restrictive alternatives.

We believe Black's work provides an important perspective on the relationship between district racial composition and support for black interests. Moreover, examining whether the influence of black constituency size continues to hinge on strategic and ideological considerations remains vitally important to the realization of black political representation. To our knowledge, only one scholar has applied Black's model to contemporary congressional politics. In an extension of this model, Whitby (1997) finds that African-American legislators are most supportive of black interests, relative to white MCs, on amendments more so than final votes. However, he also finds that the impact of district racial composition is *not* contingent on the legislative stage.

There is at least one reason to explore this latter conclusion further. Whitby does not fully incorporate regional differences into his explanatory model. That is, although region (typically North/South) is included in his analyses, he does not explicitly examine how this variable might *interact* with the racial composition of the district.³ As Black's model was developed with southern Democrats in mind, this omission suggests that the jury is still out on whether black constituency size is more influential under some circumstances—and among some MCs—rather than others.

Alternative Mechanisms for Black Constituency Influence

According to Miller and Stokes (1963), constituents exert influence over the voting behavior of their MCs in only two ways. The first manner relies on voter selection of like-minded representatives. Under this mechanism, legislators typically vote in a manner consistent with their constituents because they generally share the same views and values. This is particularly true in more ideologically homogenous states or districts (Erikson 1978; Powell 1982). Gosnell (1948) refers to this as “unconscious representation.”⁴ The other mechanism of representation, similar to what Gosnell (1948) describes as “conscious representation,” comes about through the careful efforts of the MC to represent faithfully what he or she perceives to be their constituents' position on the issues. According to this method, the representative does not necessarily share the same beliefs as significant elements of their constituency but nevertheless tries to represent district opinion in order to win reelection (Mayhew 1974).

Different predictions about the likely impact of black constituency size can be derived from each mechanism of constituency influence. Policy agreement that occurs as a result of unconscious representation should be relatively stable, irrespective of the electoral implications associated with particular votes. This is because this mechanism of constituency influence derives more from the fact that

³ For convenience we refer to the non-South as “North.”

⁴ Gosnell defines unconscious representation as “. . . the condition which exists when an act or a characteristic of an official is in accord with an individual's expressed or unexpressed desire, and when that accord is the result of environmental influences of *which neither representative nor represented is aware*” (quoted in Pitkin 1969, 111, italics added).

legislator and constituent share similar views as opposed to strategic calculations about what stance is most advantageous (Miller and Stokes 1963). Consequently, even when there is no obvious electoral benefit, legislators operating under this mechanism will vote in a manner consistent with district opinion.

In contrast, policy agreement that flows more from the conscious representation path should be less stable across different types of legislation (e.g., amendments and final votes). This mechanism is distinguished from its alternative because it depicts legislators as motivated more by a desire to secure reelection, rather than their own convictions (Erikson 1978; Mayhew 1974; Miller and Stokes 1963). Thus, when this mechanism is dominant, constituency influence on policy agreement should vary based on the perceived probability of enhancing reelection prospects.

We argue that the impact of black constituency size on the voting patterns of white southern Democrats generally adheres to the conscious representation mechanism. This is because southern Democrats with large black constituencies are far more likely than their northern counterparts to represent districts wherein racially conservative whites coexist with racially liberal blacks (Glaser 1996; Glaser and Gilens 1997). This means that, when confronted with black interest legislation, southern Democrats with significant black constituencies cannot easily cast a cost-free vote. If they adopt a liberal position they may alienate their typically more numerous white constituents and if they adopt a conservative position they risk alienating their frequently more loyal black supporters.

As a result of this conflict, we suspect that these legislators provide *selective* support for black interest legislation. When the likelihood that their black constituents might learn of an errant vote is high, as for example with more publicized legislation or on final votes, the relationship between district racial composition and support for black interests should be strong. When this probability is low, as with more obscure votes or amendments, white southern Democrats are relatively free to vote their conscience (and incidentally court white support). In practice this often means opposition to less prominent black interest bills (Hutchings 1998).

Glaser (1996) advances a similar argument: in southern congressional campaigns, white Democrats with significant black constituencies have an electoral incentive to endorse black interests even if this strategy risks white votes. It is also, we add, more likely to occur on more prominent roll calls, such as final votes. Again, this is because the advantages of courting black support at the expense of white support is starkest with these bills.

We hypothesize that policy agreement between black constituents and white northern Democrats occurs largely because of unconscious representation. This is because these districts tend to be far less fractured along racial lines. This greater ideological agreement makes the election of legislators sympathetic to district opinion more likely (Powell 1982). Moreover, there is less need to balance competing interests in such districts. As a result, the impact of district racial composition should not drastically vary across different types of votes.

Among Republicans, the question of which mechanism of representation fits this group is less applicable since the relationship between black constituency size and support for black interests should be negligible—across all types of black interest legislation. This is because Republicans are generally far more racially conservative than Democrats (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Of course, northern Republicans are typically less conservative than their southern counterparts. Still, even in the North, African Americans are peripheral to Republican reelection strategies. Thus, when it occurs at all, Republican responsiveness to black interests would most likely manifest itself as the more conscious form of representation.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, variation in the impact of black constituency size might also occur *across districts* as well as across different types of votes. An examination of stability across districts addresses the reliability of the influence district strategy. That is, in addition to higher levels of support for black interests, does an increase in black population size also lead to less variation in this support? If variation in support of black interests across districts declines as the black population grows—in other words, MCs from these districts all tend to be similarly responsive—then, if accompanied by increasing levels of support, one can conclude that increases in black constituency size lead to more consistently responsive legislators. If increases in the black constituency do not reduce across-district-variation in support for black interests, then the results of the influence district strategy are more sporadic than most observers expect. This is because representatives with significant black constituencies, as a group, are just as likely to vary in their support of black interests as are MCs with few or no blacks in their districts—even though the overall mean may be higher in the former relative to the latter.

We expect that increases in black constituency size will have less success in reducing the variation in support for black interests among southern Democrats compared to northern Democrats. Again, this is because of the more racially divided districts in the South. Although many Democrats from this region face electoral pressures to support black interests as their African-American constituencies grow, others face countervailing pressures from their more conservative white constituents. Thus, increases in the size of the black voting-age population may lead to more consistent support for black interests in the North, but less so in the South. Finally, owing to blacks' less central role in Republican reelection strategies, district racial composition should have minimal effect on variation in voting patterns regardless of region.

Methods and Procedures

To test these hypotheses, we use data on voting patterns in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 101st (1989–1990), the 102nd (1991–1992), and the 103rd (1993–1994) Congress. “Black-interest votes” are derived from the *Leadership Conference on Civil Rights* (LCCR) voting scores from each session of

Congress. The LCCR typically identifies 12 or more votes in each Congress, vital to the interests of the labor, religious, and civil rights organizations. We also modify the LCCR measure so as to exclude those votes that have, at best, only an indirect relationship to the political interests of black Americans.⁵

The dependent variables in this study are the average level of support for black interest legislation at the *amendment* and *final vote* stages. As indicated above, these votes represent legislation of differing levels of prominence and ideological divisiveness. Because these concepts can be measured in alternative ways, and because the amendment-final vote dichotomy may unnecessarily conflate the two, we also develop separate measures of prominence and divisiveness. Each dependent variable is coded on a 0–1 scale.

To gauge levels of prominence, we examined state-level newspaper coverage of the bills in our modified LCCR measure. We identified whether or not a major newspaper in each state (in the case of the South), or a sample of newspapers from a range of states (in the case of the North), provided information on how each member of the local delegation voted on black interest legislation.⁶ The local delegation was defined based on the area covered by the newspaper. Our expectation is that legislation receiving greater levels of media coverage would also be more likely to generate an opinion among constituents. Also, the more prominent the legislation the more likely that an interest group or potential challenger might use it against the incumbent in the next election cycle. Given space limitations, newspapers will only provide information about the roll-call votes of individual MCs on bills it regards as important (Hutchings 1998). *High-profile votes* were defined as those bills that provided this coverage in at least half of the state newspapers we examined. In some cases, this was not possible as only one bill received this level of coverage. As we wanted to capture at least two roll calls in our measure of prominence for each Congress we examined, in order to construct more reliable scales, we then included the next most prominent bill.⁷ Each legis-

⁵ An independent coder identified the bills in the LCCR measure that were most directly relevant to African Americans. She was advised to choose the votes that disproportionately affect African Americans and that informed blacks were likely to care about. The coder's decisions closely overlapped with the first author's prior coding of the LCCR measure. The correlation between the two was .875 for the 101st Congress, and 1.00 for each subsequent Congress.

⁶ A single newspaper was examined in each of the 11 southern states. These newspapers are the *Birmingham News*, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Columbia State* (SC), the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and the *Washington Post* (VA). Sixteen newspapers were examined in the North. These papers were the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Arizona Republic and Phoenix Gazette*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Gazette* (CO), the *Courier Journal* (KY), the *Baltimore Sun*, the *St. Louis Dispatch*, the *Star Ledger* (NJ), the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Journal Record* (OK), and the *Milwaukee Journal & Sentinel*.

⁷ We regard our concept of issue prominence as a *relative* measure more than an absolute one. Thus, selecting the next most prominent bill if a sufficient number did not surpass our arbitrary cut-off seemed natural. We also examined coding schemes with alternative (i.e., less restrictive) definitions for the high-profile category. In each case, these changes did not substantially alter our findings and thus we opted for the more restrictive, and theoretically defensible, definition.

lator's average level of support for these bills—and the remainder, which constituted our measure of *low-profile votes*—were then used as our second set of dependent variables.

Our alternative measure of *divisive roll calls* is defined as the three bills, within each congress, on which the fewest number of Democrats and Republicans supported the LCCR's position. These votes were selected separately for Democrats and Republicans. All other bills in our sample represent *consensus roll calls*.

The principal independent variables are *region* (i.e., North/South), *black constituency size* (i.e., the percentage of African Americans of voting age in each district) and their interaction.⁸ Given our interests in the effects of influence districts on white representatives, black and Latino legislators, and whites representing majority-minority districts, are excluded from these analyses. Other standard controls include the *percent urban*, the *vote for the incumbent in the most recent election*, the *number of terms the MC has served in Congress*, the *percentage of Latinos of voting age in the district*, and the *district level vote for the Democratic presidential candidate* (Bullock 1985; Fleisher 1993; Lublin 1997; Swain 1993; Whitby and Gilliam 1991). This latter measure is likely to be heavily correlated with the percentage of blacks and Latinos in the district. In order to purge this influence, we regress the district-level vote for the Democratic candidate on the percentage of blacks and Latinos in the district. The residuals are then used in place of the unmodified measure (see Fleisher 1993).

In examining these votes, we use heteroskedastic regression analysis (Greene 1993; Harvey 1976). This is because our hypotheses center on both the stability of support for black interests across different types of districts as well as across different types of bills. This particular method is especially appropriate for an examination of the former (Alvarez and Brehm 1997). Heteroskedastic regression analyses provide information on both the strength of the association between the independent and dependent variables (i.e., the choice function) as well as the standard deviation of this relationship (i.e., the variance function). The functional form for the choice portion of the model is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Black Interest Votes} = & B_1(\% \text{ Black}) + B_2(\text{South}) \\ & + B_3(\% \text{ Black} * \text{South}) + B_{4-16}(\text{Controls}) + \text{Constant.} \end{aligned}$$

Our expectation is that, among Democrats, the B_1 coefficient, representing the North, will be positive and of roughly equivalent sizes across different types of legislation. The net impact of the B_1 and B_3 coefficients, representing the South, should also be positive but larger on final votes, higher profile bills, and consensus legislation relative to amendments, lower profile bills, and divisive votes, respectively. The influence of black constituency size should not vary across votes among Republicans. A similar model is employed for the variance function. However, here we expect the B_1 coefficient to be significantly negative, indicating that, as the black population rises, variation in support of black interests

⁸ We define the South as the 11 states of the old Confederacy.

among northern Democrats declines. The net effect should be close to zero for southern Democrats and Republicans.

Results

Table 1 presents the results for the heteroskedastic regression analyses on amendments and final votes. Results for Democrats are reported in columns 1 and 2.⁹ Turning first to the votes on amendments in the choice portion of the model, we find that black constituency size is positively associated with support for these black interests votes. The region-by-black voting-age population interaction is, however, insignificant, indicating that the effects are not statistically different in the North relative to the South. Although positive, the substantive impact of black constituency size on amendments is quite modest in the North. The average northern Democratic district only has a black voting-age population of about 6%, with a standard deviation of .06. Thus, in an average northern district, black constituency size only contributes about two additional percentage points of support for black interests compared to a similar district with no African Americans (mean district BVAP of .06 * coefficient on *%Black VAP* of .34 = .02). This figure rises only to four percentage points in districts one standard deviation above the mean (.06 + .06 = .12; .12 * .34 = .04). The practical impact of district racial composition in the South is much larger. In this region, where the typical district is about 17% black with a standard deviation of about .09, the average effect of black constituency size is a gain of about .07 on the dependent variable relative to a similar district without black constituents. The corresponding figure is .11 in districts one standard deviation removed from the mean.

According to the Black model (1978), the influence of district racial composition should be greater at the final vote stage, especially in the South. As anticipated, the effects remain negligible in the North where the coefficient on black voting-age population is indistinguishable from zero. However, the net effect in the South is somewhat larger on these bills. The coefficient of .75 (i.e., .11 + .64 = .75) suggests that, compared to districts with no black constituents, the average effect of black constituency size results is a 13-percentage point gain in responsiveness. This effect rises to 19 percentage points in districts one standard deviation above the mean. These results confirm our hypothesis that the influence of black constituency size is contingent, particularly in the South, on the type of vote before Congress.

Now consider the impact of district racial composition in the variance portion of the model. With regard to amendments, black voting-age population significantly diminishes the standard deviation among northern Democrats. Moreover, the magnitude of this effect is nontrivial. The coefficient of -3.14 indicates that,

⁹ Because of space constraints, we neither report nor discuss the findings for our control variables and instead focus on our primary independent variables: district racial composition and region. The full results, as well as information on the specific bills included in each category, are available from the authors upon request.

TABLE 1
 Heteroskedastic Regression Models Predicting White MCs'
 Vote on Amendments and Final Votes
 (101st through 103rd Congress)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Democrats		Republicans	
	Amendments	Final Vote	Amendments	Final Vote
Choice Model				
Intercept	.78*** (.06)	.81*** (.04)	-.47*** (.08)	-.73*** (.10)
% Black VAP ^a	.34** (.12)	.11 (.09)	2.08*** (.45)	3.48*** (.47)
South ^b	-.51*** (.12)	-.47*** (.10)	.47*** (.11)	.67*** (.13)
South * % Black VAP	.10 (.26)	.64** (.23)	-2.07*** (.47)	-3.52*** (.49)
Mean R ²	.4821	.1084	.2302	.1951
Variance Model				
Intercept	-1.45*** (.05)	-2.04*** (.05)	-1.99*** (.06)	-1.60*** (.05)
% Black VAP	-3.14*** (.60)	-1.44** (.53)	8.46*** (1.32)	3.51** (1.14)
South	.00 (.12)	.58** (.11)	-.28* (.13)	-.60 (.12)
South * % Black VAP	3.31*** (.81)	1.15 (.74)	-7.90*** (1.56)	-3.85*** (1.08)
Variance R ²	.2046	.3743	.2409	.265
Log Likelihood	102.24	350.88	207.77	126.40
χ^2	585.21***	279.31***	155.27***	423.45***
N	660	660	505	507

Notes: Figures in parentheses are standard errors * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ for two-tailed test. ^aThe black voting age population, the percentage of the district that is urban, and the Latino voting age population are based on 1980 census figures for the 101st and 102nd sessions of Congress. They are based on the 1990 census for the 103rd Congress. ^bControls in each analysis include % Latino voting-age population (VAP), % Urban, incumbents vote % in last election, district presidential vote for Democratic candidate, incumbent's number of terms in office, dummy variables for the 101st and 102nd Congress, and the interaction of each variable with region.

for the average northern Democratic district, variation in support of black interests declines by .19 (i.e., $-3.14 * .06 = .19$) compared to a similar district with no African Americans. The effects are essentially twice as large in districts with relatively high proportions of black constituents. In the South, however, the results run in exactly the opposite direction, indicating that there is essentially no relationship between black constituency size and across-district stability of support for these bills. Similar, although more muted, results emerge with regard to final

votes. Substantively, these results indicate that, although generally supportive of black interests even at the amending stage, some southern Democrats with substantial black constituencies are nevertheless considerably less supportive than others.

We have argued that the influence of black constituency size on support for black interests should be relatively unstable among southern Democrats relative to northern Democrats. Differential responsiveness to black constituencies should not hold among Republican MCs. This proposition is examined in columns 3 and 4 of Table 1. Among southern Republicans we find, as expected, that the net effect of district racial composition is negligible at both the amendment and final vote stage even though many of these districts have significant black populations.¹⁰ Also, as anticipated, the mean level of support for these black interest votes is only .03 among these legislators. Surprisingly, in the North, the coefficient on black voting-age population is quite large and statistically significant across both types of votes. The average Republican district, outside of the South, has a black population of 3%. Thus, on an amendment votes, a Republican representing such a district scores about six percentage points higher than a Republican with similar district characteristics but no black constituents. This figure increases to about 10 percentage points at the final vote stage. Thus, even among northern Republicans, the impact of black constituency size varies across different types of votes, although with a mean level of support at only .10 this support is rarely overwhelming. We explore below whether this occurs primarily because of the ideological content of the vote or the electoral implications.

Is the influence of black constituency size stable across districts among Republicans? Consistent with our expectations, the variance portion of the model suggests that increases in the black population do not contribute to greater across-district stability of support for black interests. In the South, the net effect is indistinguishable from zero on both amendments and final votes.¹¹ In the North, particularly on amendments, the standard deviation actually *rises*, as the size of the African-American constituency grows larger. In practice, this means that increases in black population size are as likely to lead to the election of a Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD; % BLACK = 17%) who supported black interests on final votes at 67% in the 101st Congress, as they are to a Randy Cunningham (R-CA; % BLACK = 13%) who did not support any black interest votes in this congress.

The results from Table 1 indicate that, among southern Democrats, the influence of black constituency size is greater on final votes relative to amendments, but this effect is not particularly large. As indicated above, however, bills differ in ways other than the stage at which they are voted on. The original Black model (1978) implied that southern Democrats with large black constituencies sup-

¹⁰ The average southern Republican district has 12% black voting-age population. The standard deviation is .09.

¹¹ This was determined by redoing the analyses on southern Republicans only, which indicated that these effects were not statistically significant.

ported black interests at the final vote stage in part because this was when they reaped the greatest electoral advantages. Thus, another way to determine the stability of support for black interests across different types of votes is to examine the influence of black constituency size on bills of varying levels of prominence. These results are presented in Table 2.

As in Table 1, the results for northern Democrats are largely equivalent—and typically marginal—regardless of the media attention devoted to the legislation (see columns 1 and 2). An entirely different picture emerges in the South. On

TABLE 2

Heteroskedastic Regression Models Predicting White MCs' Vote on Low and High Profile Votes (101st through 103rd Congress)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Democrats		Republicans	
	Low-Profile	High-Profile	Low-Profile	High-Profile
Choice Model				
Intercept	.79*** (.05)	.78*** (.04)	-.56*** (.08)	-.68*** (.11)
% Black VAP ^a	.28** (.10)	.18 (.11)	2.55*** (.42)	3.32*** (.56)
South ^b	-.48*** (.10)	-.58*** (.13)	.58*** (.12)	.60*** (.14)
South * % Black VAP	.09 (.22)	.83** (.29)	-2.59*** (.45)	-3.33*** (.58)
Mean R ²	.4371	.2433	.2173	.1906
Variance Model				
Intercept	-1.56*** (.05)	-1.82*** (.05)	-1.94*** (.05)	-1.57*** (.05)
% Black VAP	-3.23*** (.61)	-1.64** (.56)	6.60*** (1.21)	5.17*** (1.17)
South	-.09 (.11)	.62*** (.11)	-.14 (.14)	-.64*** (.13)
South * % Black VAP	3.51*** (.80)	1.24 (.77)	-6.44*** (1.52)	-4.84*** (1.46)
Variance R ²	.1698	.4595	.159	.3775
Log Likelihood	196.15	205.65	195.17	81.57
χ^2	394.45***	330.30***	298.68***	188.02***
N	662	645	504	494

Notes: Figures in parentheses are standard errors * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ for two-tailed test. ^aThe black voting age population, the percentage of the district that is urban, and the Latino voting age population are based on 1980 census figures for the 101st and 102nd sessions of Congress. They are based on the 1990 census for the 103rd Congress. ^bControls in each analysis include % Latino voting-age population (VAP), % Urban, incumbents vote % in last election, district presidential vote for Democratic candidate, incumbent's number of terms in office, dummy variables for the 101st and 102nd Congress, and the interaction of each variable with region.

low-profile votes, the effect of district racial composition in the average southern district is a mere six-percentage point gain in support of black interest when compared to a district without African-American constituents (i.e., $(.28 + .09) * .17 = .06$). This effect increases dramatically, with a 17-percentage point gain, on more prominent legislation.¹² In districts with especially large black populations (i.e., one standard deviation greater than the mean) the effects translate into a 10 or 26-percentage point gain for low profile and high profile votes, respectively. Clearly, the impact of black constituency size on southern Democrats is substantially weaker on lower-profile votes.

The results in the variance portion of the model generally mirror what we uncovered in Table 1. Black constituency size substantially reduces the variation in support of black interests in the North, especially on less prominent bills, and has essentially no effects among southern Democrats. This provides additional evidence for our contention that increases in black constituency size produce more consistent support for black interests among northern Democrats compared to their counterparts in the South.

Although the effects of black constituency size are largely contingent on legislative prominence among southern Democrats, this distinction appears less important among Republicans. As with Table 1, southern Republicans are unaffected by the size of the black population in both the choice and variance models. In the North, the percentage of blacks in the district is associated with voting patterns, but the magnitude of the effects are similar on low-profile votes relative to more prominent bills. Moreover, increasing racial diversity leads to greater across-district variation in support for black interest among these MCs rather than less. This last result is also of similar magnitude on both low- and high-profile votes.

According to Black (1978), the influence of district racial composition is greater on final votes relative to amendments because the former have a more moderate ideological cast. That is, in the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act, even most conservative southern Democrats can accept the principle of black interest legislation although they might question the scope of these bills. If this is so, then this pattern should also be reflected in an examination of consensus and divisive black interest legislation. These results are presented in Table 3.

Examining northern Democrats first, we find that the coefficient on black constituency size is significant on divisive votes but indistinguishable from zero on less contentious bills. The former effect is still mild, translating into a gain of only four percentage points in districts with a relatively high proportion of blacks (i.e., one standard deviation greater than the mean) compared to districts without these constituents. In the South, increases in the district's racial composition lead to higher levels of support for black interests on both divisive and consensus votes. Contrary to the expectations of the Black model however, the effects among these Democrats are not substantively greater on consensus bills. On divisive

¹² These results are not substantively altered when we examine each Congress separately.

TABLE 3
Heteroskedastic Regression Models Predicting White MCs'
Vote on Consensus and Divisive Votes
(101st through 103rd Congress)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Democrats		Republicans	
	Divisive Votes	Consensus Votes	Divisive Votes	Consensus Votes
Choice Model				
Intercept	.53*** (.07)	.98*** (.02)	-.45*** (.07)	-.76*** (.11)
% Black VAP ^a	.38** (.14)	.08 (.05)	2.20*** (.44)	3.29*** (.48)
South ^b	-.65*** (.14)	-.32*** (.08)	.36*** (.09)	.76*** (.14)
South * % Black VAP	.24 (.30)	.52** (.18)	-2.17*** (.45)	-3.20*** (.50)
Mean R ²	.3983	.337	.2075	.2118
Variance Model				
Intercept	-1.23*** (.05)	-2.35*** (.04)	-2.13*** (.06)	-1.53*** (.05)
% Black VAP	-3.20*** (.60)	-2.72*** (.49)	10.33*** (1.37)	2.89** (1.09)
South	.01 (.12)	.67*** (.11)	-.42*** (.13)	-.78*** (.13)
South * % Black VAP	2.73*** (.82)	2.46*** (.72)	-10.67*** (1.58)	-1.71*** (1.04)
Variance R ²	.0976	.3903	.345	.2021
Log Likelihood	-22.22	560.47	284.76	96.53
χ^2	612.86***	137.66***	145.70***	354.74***
N	664	649	507	507

Notes: Figures in parentheses are standard errors * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ for two-tailed test. ^aThe black voting age population, the percentage of the district that is urban, and the Latino voting age population are based on 1980 census figures for the 101st and 102nd sessions of Congress. They are based on the 1990 census for the 103rd Congress. ^bControls in each analysis include % Latino voting-age population (VAP), % Urban, incumbents vote % in last election, district presidential vote for Democratic candidate, incumbent's number of terms in office, dummy variables for the 101st and 102nd Congress, and the interaction of each variable with region.

votes, the average effect of black voting-age population results in a 10-percent-age point gain in support for this legislation compared to a similar district with few or no blacks. The corresponding effect on consensus bills is also only a 10-percent-age point gain. These results suggest that the lesser impact of black constituency size on amendments (see Table 1) compared to final votes is probably not because the former are more ideologically divisive. Instead, the influence of

district racial composition tends to be smaller on amendments because they are generally less prominent (see Table 2).

The results in the variance portion of the model are generally consistent with the trend established in the previous two tables. The influence of black constituency size is essentially indistinguishable from zero in the South, and substantively large and negative in the North. In a slight departure from results in Tables 1 and 2, however, the magnitude of the coefficient on black voting-age population in the North is almost the same on divisive and consensus bills. This suggests that the differential effects of district racial composition on reducing the variation in support of amendments versus final votes, and less prominent bills versus more prominent ones, may have less to do with the controversial nature of these votes (i.e., amendments and low-profile bills) and more to do with their relative obscurity.

Among Republicans, the effects of black voting-age population again vary across region. In the South, this variable has virtually no effect on the level of support for black interests. In the North, the effects are somewhat greater on less divisive bills. When coupled with the results from Tables 1 and 2, this suggests that the influence of black constituency size seems to hinge moderately on both divisiveness and prominence of black-interest legislation. With regard to variation across districts, black constituencies again have little influence in the South. In the North, however support for black interests vary widely as the black population grows, especially on divisive votes. The effect of having an average number of blacks in these districts results in a .31 increase in the level of variation on the dependent variable relative to districts without African Americans. On consensus bills, this change results in only a nine-point increase in the standard deviation. Thus, in addition to having less predictive power on “divisive” votes, for northern Republicans, black constituency size also leads to less consistent support for black interests across districts.

Conclusion

Our goal in this article was to examine the circumstances under which black constituency size would promote support for black interests and when it would not. Specifically, we examined the relationship between district racial composition and congressional voting behavior with regard to the stability of this relationship across different types of votes and different types of districts. We have argued, on the one hand, that the linkage between race and representation might occur because of a kind of unconscious policy agreement between constituent and legislator. On the other hand, black constituency size might be influential because of more conscious efforts on the part of the MC to represent their black supporters. Identifying these mechanisms is important because of our expectation that more conscious efforts would also be relatively unstable. We hypothesized that white southern Democrats were more likely to fall into the latter category whereas white northern Democrats more typically fell into the former.

As a result, the influence of district racial composition should vary most among southern Democrats.

This expectation was borne out in the data. Among southern Democrats, black-population size had its greatest influence on support for black interests on final votes, and especially high-profile bills. Interestingly, whether or not the bills were ideologically divisive seemed not to affect significantly the strength of the relationship between district racial composition and support for black interests. This suggests that these MCs sought to court black support when they might receive the maximum electoral advantage (i.e., on legislation generating significant media attention) and not simply on the most ideologically acceptable bills. Moreover, although black constituency size contributes to greater support for black interests—albeit at various levels, depending on the type of vote—it does not promote more *consistent* support across districts. For example, although increases in the size of the black population generally led to greater support for black interests, some representatives with black constituencies in excess of 30% were not more liberal on these votes. These representatives include Jerry Huckaby of Louisiana, and Sonny Montgomery and Mike Parker of Mississippi, all of whom opposed black interests even on high-profile legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1990. Clearly, support for black interests is somewhat unreliable among southern Democrats, even when a significant fraction of their constituents are black.

The influence of the size of the black population works differently in the North. Among Democrats, support for black-interest legislation is generally high irrespective of the district's racial composition. However, African-American constituency size is important because it substantially reduces the across-district variation in support for black interests. This is particularly true on votes where MCs might be inclined to ignore black concerns: amendments and other low-profile bills.

Although we found that northern Democrats were generally supportive of black interests, irrespective of the size of their black constituencies, this support is easily overstated. Previous work has shown that the relatively narrow range of issues that make it to the House floor exaggerates these Democrat's commitment to black interests (Hall 1996). Moreover, some scholars have found that even outside the South black representatives can provide intangible benefits to their black constituents such as higher approval ratings, increased perceptions of responsiveness, and (occasionally) greater participation rates (Gay 2001; Tate 2003). Further, Canon's (1999) work on bill sponsorship and constituency service suggests that it would be premature to conclude that black legislators do not continue to play an important role in advancing black interests.

Increases in the size of the black constituency also seem to influence the voting patterns of northern Republicans although not their southern counterparts. This seems counterintuitive given the limited role blacks play in Republican electoral strategies. We speculate that northern Republicans respond, in a limited sense, to black interests because they are more likely to gain elective office in districts with

relatively significant black constituencies. These Republicans do appear to make some conscious efforts to court black support, given the moderately higher influence of black constituency size on some votes rather than others (e.g., final votes versus amendments). However, given that our results were largely equivalent whether we categorized votes according to their prominence or divisiveness, these effects appear to be driven at least as much by the ideological content of the bills as they are by the electoral implications. Finally, increases in the size of the black constituency significantly increase variation in support of black interests, especially on amendments and divisive votes. This indicates that, although some northern Republicans become more responsive to black interests as the black population grows, others are almost wholly unaffected by the presence of these constituents.

The implications of our work for the current controversy on the utility of majority-minority districts are mixed. On the one hand, we find that—at least outside the South—white Democrats can provide effective representation of black interests. That is, regardless of the size of the black constituency, mean levels of support for this legislation is typically high. Moreover, the variation in support of black interests declines significantly as the black population increases. This suggests that Swain (1993) and others may be at least partially correct when they advise against the creation of majority-minority districts in favor of the influence district strategy. Of course, our results rest entirely on an examination of roll-call votes. It is conceivable that the impact of black constituency size is much weaker on other legislative duties such as committee work, or sponsorship and cosponsorship of black-interest legislation.

On the other hand, we find that the influence of the black voting-age population is limited in important ways in the South. White Democrats in this region did become more responsive to black interests when the proportion of blacks in their districts increased. However, this effect was not stable across districts or across different types of votes.¹³ Moreover, southern Republicans did not become more responsive to black interests under any circumstances even though some of their districts contain a substantial number of African Americans. These results suggest that, as with majority-minority districts, the influence-district strategy is also far from perfect. As a result, at least for the foreseeable future, institutional efforts such as drawing majority-minority districts may be the only effective way to ensure the consistent representation of black interests, at least in the South.

Finally, we believe our discussion of the impact of black constituency size on congressional responsiveness also has implications for the broader literature on representation. Specifically, our emphasis on the stability of support for black interests, as well as the overall level, helps to focus our attention on an under explored yet important component of legislative responsiveness. We have shown that, in the case of black interests, ascertaining the stability of support has sig-

¹³ In contrast—in data not presented—black southern Democrats provided perfect scores on the modified LCCR measure across each of the congresses examined in this paper.

nificant implications for the quality of representation. Logically, there is no reason why an examination of stability should not also matter across other issue domains. Thus, we suggest that future research on this topic address both components of representation: magnitude and stability.

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