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Senators' Home-State Reputations: Why Do Constituents Love a Bill Cohen So Much More Than an Al D'Amato?

Prior analyses of the bases of legislators' popular support have provided a mixed set of findings. In this note, we lay out a series of hypotheses about the determinants of legislators' home-state reputations, and test these expectations using a 1996 survey in which 40 thousand constituents in all 50 states rated their senators' job performance. We find that ideological congruence, state demographics, and electoral factors best explain variation in senators' reputations. Parochial attention, partisanship, and legislative activism do little to boost senators' approval ratings.

It is a fact of political life that while some members of Congress enjoy extremely favorable home-state reputations, others are not especially well thought of by the folks back home. During the 100th Congress, for example, constituents' mean "feeling thermometer" ratings of senators ranged from 77.7 for George Mitchell (D-ME) down to 46.7 for Steve Symms (R-ID) (Sinclair 1990, 479). In a variation on the traditional question of why Americans love their congressmen so much more than their Congress (Fenno 1975; Parker and Davidson 1979), our purpose in this note is to try to determine why some members of Congress are "loved" so much more than others. To address this issue, we rely on a 50-state set of surveys conducted in September 1996 by a private polling firm, Mason-Dixon Political/ Media Research. In those surveys, the most highly rated senators were William Cohen (R-ME), Robert Byrd (D-WV), and Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS), each rated positively by more than 80% of their constituents.

At the other extreme, Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL), and Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) received positive ratings from only 36%, 35%, and 30%, respectively.

Scholars have suggested that a key to effective representation is policy congruence between legislators and their constituents (Erikson 1990; Shapiro, Brady, Brody, and Ferejohn 1990), and there is evidence that the public agrees. So firmly is the "delegate" role embedded in public expectations that survey researchers have reported large majorities concurring even with an extreme statement like "An elected legislator should find out what his district wants and *always* vote accordingly" (McMurray and Parsons 1965).

On the other hand, so few citizens have well-defined preferences on policy issues (Page and Shapiro 1992) that there must be more to approving or disapproving of the performance of a member of Congress than sharing the member's issue positions. Moreover, most Americans know "next to nothing" about those who represent them in Washington (Ladd 1990, 65), and fewer than one in three can even name the two senators from their state (Sinclair 1990). In this light, it hardly seems plausible that most constituents know much about where their elected representatives stand on the issues. Indeed, if members of Congress are motivated primarily by the drive for reelection (Mayhew 1974), they will steer away from controversial policy issues and concentrate instead on molding favorable images for themselves by acting aggressively on behalf of their district or state (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, 153). When asked in a 1977 survey to explain their assessment of their member of Congress, 47% of those polled mentioned constituency service, and only 4% said anything about the member's positions on policy issues (Parker 1981).

There is no necessary contradiction between policy-based and constituency service-based interpretations of home-state reputation, for it could be that to forge "durable connections" with their constituents, senators must be seen as working tirelessly on their state's behalf *and* faithfully representing their constituents' policy perspectives (Fenno 1996). Here, focusing on both policy-based and parochial determinants of home-state reputations, we try to answer three broad questions. First, are legislators more highly regarded if they accurately represent the policy perspectives of their constituents? Second, notwithstanding policy-based considerations, can legislators win their constituents' hearts by tending to home-state concerns? And third, to what extent do other factors, such as the electoral cycle or a member's prominence on the national political scene, help account for constituents' assessments of their legislators?

Hypotheses

From a policy perspective, home-state approval should depend on the ideological "fit" between a senator and his or her constituents. All else being equal, in a conservative state it should be relatively easy for a conservative to garner high approval ratings. To be sure, Ripley, Patterson, Maurer, and Quinlan (1992) reported, based on an Ohio survey, that ideological similarity between a constituent and a member of the House had no effect on the constituent's rating of the member's performance. However, determining who "loves" a particular legislator, as Ripley et al. set out to do, is a far different enterprise than determining why one legislator is more "loved" than another, the focal question here. So it remains an open question whether senators who are ideologically closer to those they represent get higher ratings. There is also reason to suspect ideological proximity between senators and their constituents to enhance senators' home-state standing, for their positions on roll-call votes yield measurable changes in their approval ratings (Erikson 1990, 628–29). Hence,

Policy-based hypothesis: The greater the ideological congruence between a senator and the home state, the more favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

If most citizens know anything about a senator, it is apt to be his or her party affiliation. In senatorial elections as in presidential elections, partisanship is a key to voter decision making (Abramowitz and Segal 1992), and it seems likely to shape constituents' ongoing impressions of senatorial performance as well. Senators whose partisan affiliation is shared by the great majority of their constituents might, therefore, have a cushion of support that other senators lack. Thus,

Partisanship hypothesis: The greater the identification in the senator's state with the senator's party, the more favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

Senators can also use congressional resources strategically to boost their home-state reputation. Fiorina (1989, 44) suggested as much when he concluded that "A lesser proportion of congressional effort is now going into programmatic activities and a greater proportion into pork-barrel and casework activities. As a result, today's congressmen make relatively fewer enemies and relatively more friends among the people of their districts." If, as Sinclair (1990) observed, constituency-minding activities have a similar payoff for senators, then,

Parochialism hypothesis: The more resources a senator devotes to home-state business, the more favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

No matter how well senators represent their home state ideologically, which party they belong to, or how attentive they are to home-state business, it may be inherently difficult for them to become very popular in certain types of states. For one thing, it may be that, in contrast to the generally positive tone of local media outlets' coverage of senators (Hess 1991, 57), big-state media take a more balanced, and hence more critical, approach. For another, a large state population could hinder constituent relations by discouraging close and frequent contact between senators and their constituents. The more populous the state, Oppenheimer (1996) shows, the less the contact between senators and their constituents, the less common the image of senators as helpful, and the less widespread the ability to recall what they have done for the state (see also Abramowitz and Segal 1992; Hibbing and Brandes 1981). Hence,

State demographics hypothesis #1: The smaller the population of the senator's state, the more favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

Beyond sheer size, the diversity of a senator's statewide constituency must be taken into account. A large but relatively homogeneous state may be easier to represent than a smaller but more heterogeneous one. This seems likely in terms of the underlying population mix—the blend of rich and poor people, urban and rural dwellers, new immigrants and old settlers who live in the state. It seems all the more likely in terms of the ideological diversity that stems from demographic diversity. If the public is scattered widely across the ideological spectrum, any position a senator adopts will have limited home-state appeal. Of course, a senator could be out of step ideologically with his or her constituents even in an ideologically homogeneous state. Still, ideological heterogeneity could make it more challenging for the senator to win high marks from his or her constituents. It follows that:

State demographics hypothesis #2: The more diverse the population of the senator's state, demographically and ideologically, the less favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

This does not exhaust the list of factors that can add to or detract from a senator's home-state reputation. One obvious factor is the senator's record of accomplishment in Washington; having a high

national profile may reap political benefits at home. Thus, Sinclair (1990) found that senators who were more prominent nationally had significantly more favorable home-state reputations than their less prominent colleagues. Others have suggested that senators shape their legislative activities, such as introducing new legislation, toward currying favor in their home state (Schiller 1995). Thus,

Activism hypothesis: The more active and prominent the senator is on the national political scene, the more favorable the senator's home-state reputation.

Where a senator stands in the electoral cycle must also be taken into account. After all, people remember current events more clearly than distant ones (Fiske and Taylor 1984). Accordingly, the longer it has been since a senator campaigned for office, the less likely the senator's current public standing to be tarnished by it; mud slung last week may still be sticking, long after mud slung two or four years ago has turned to dust. Hence,

Electoral hypothesis: A senator who is currently campaigning for reelection will have a less favorable home-state reputation.

Finally, there is some evidence that deciding not to run for reelection produces a halo effect for officeholders (Mueller 1973, 219), presumably because their motives are no longer assumed to be reelection-driven. Thus,

Retirement hypothesis: A senator who is about to retire will have a more favorable home-state reputation.

Data and Measurement

The standard source of data for scholarly research on senators' home-state reputations, the 1988–90–92 Senate Election Study (Hibbing and Alford 1990; Oppenheimer 1996; Sinclair 1990), has certain drawbacks. For example, in the 1988 wave no questions were asked about retiring senators. More problematically, even when the three separate waves of the survey are combined, only 71 senators are available for analysis (Oppenheimer 1996), and the number of respondents per state is modest and in some cases, dangerously small.

The ratings of senators analyzed here come from a 50-state set of surveys conducted by Mason-Dixon Political/Media Research over a ten-day period in September 1996. The respondents in these surveys

were some 40 thousand likely voters—approximately eight hundred per state except in Connecticut, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Utah, where somewhat smaller samples were employed. Sampling error for samples of this size is in the 3.5% to 5% range. The statewide samples were drawn randomly from lists of registered voters, and only likely voters (identified as such by their responses to a screening question about the frequency with which they had voted in recent elections) were interviewed.[1] The brief interviews, which lasted around five minutes on average, focused on the upcoming general election. In the focal question for present purposes, interviewees were asked, "How would you rate the performance of [each senator from their state]?" and answered "excellent," "pretty good," "only fair," or "poor." Based on responses to this question, we calculated an overall job performance rating for each senator. The rating scale runs from 0 to 100, though in practice the ratings varied within a narrower range.[2]

The hypotheses outlined above are represented in the statistical model by several measures. Two of these tap the ideological dimension. To test the policy-based hypothesis, we regressed senators' 1995 ADA ratings (a frequently employed indicator of the liberalism-conservatism of members of Congress) on the mean liberal-conservative position of their state's citizens, as calculated from survey data compiled by Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993, 16). The absolute value of the regression residual expresses the distance between a senator's actual ideological position and the position that would be expected given the ideological central tendency of his or her home state. The state partisanship measure is also based on survey data compiled by Erikson et al., who created a state partisanship mean score ranging from –100 (signifying unanimous Republican identification in a state) to +100 (signifying unanimous Democratic identification). For present purposes, the issue was not how pro-Republican or pro-Democratic a state electorate was per se, but rather the extent to which the prevailing partisan sentiments in the state matched the party affiliation of a senator. Accordingly, for Democratic senators we used the state mean partisanship score, but for Republican senators we multiplied the state mean score by –1. For example, in a state where the mean partisanship score was a slightly pro-Democratic 0.2, the score would be +0.2 for a Democratic senator or –0.2 for a Republican.

The parochialism hypothesis is represented by two measures. Because it is often asserted that members join the Appropriations Committee because it affords them a greater opportunity to procure visible distributive benefits for their state (Fenno 1966; Munson 1993), we include a dummy variable indicating membership on Appropriations

(coded 1, otherwise 0). A more direct measure of a senator's attentiveness to state business is based on staffing patterns. To create this measure, we divided the number of staffers working for the senator in the home state by the total number of staffers working for the senator.[3]

Three variables represent the state demographics hypothesis—population size, sociocultural diversity, and ideological diversity. Population size is self-explanatory. The sociocultural diversity measure is a composite index of the heterogeneity of a state's population in terms of education, income, occupation, housing ownership, ethnicity, and religion (Morgan and Wilson 1990). The ideological diversity measure was calculated by summing the squared intrastate deviations around a state's liberal-conservative mean, as defined above.

The remaining predictors in the model take account of various political and electoral factors. Two measures represent the activism hypothesis: the number of times a senator was mentioned on network television newscasts during 1995, and the total number of bills the senator introduced in the 104th Congress.[4] We assess the effects of the electoral cycle via a set of dummy variables indicating whether a senator was scheduled to be up for reelection in 1998 or 2000 (each coded 1, otherwise 0; being scheduled to run in 1996 served as the omitted or reference category), and a separate dummy variable indicating whether he or she had decided to retire as of 1996 (also coded 1, otherwise 0).[5]

Results

The senators' home-state reputations, which range from D'Amato's 33.3 rating to Cohen's 73.1, are shown in Table 1. An ordinary least-squares regression model of the determinants of these ratings comprising all the predictors introduced above performed reasonably well at accounting for variability in home-state reputation ($R = .672$, adjusted $R^2 = .369$).

As Table 2 indicates, one of the best predictors in the model was the ideological distance between a senator and his or her constituents. Consistent with the policy-based hypothesis, the smaller the ideological distance between senator and constituents, the higher the senator's job rating. However, the reward for being in tune with one's constituents (or, alternatively, the penalty for being out of tune with one's constituents) was rather modest. Other factors being equal, to increase his or her job ratings by a single point, a senator would have to move approximately eight points closer to the ideological position predicted from the mean home-state ideology—a considerable distance.

TABLE 1
Constituents' Ratings of Their Senators

Senator	% "Excellent"	% "Pretty Good"	% "Only Fair"	% "Poor"	Rating
Abraham (R-MI)	7	39	33	10	49.4
Ashcroft (R-MO)	11	43	31	13	51.0
Baucus (D-MT)	14	41	17	27	47.5
Bennett (R-UT)	7	49	23	13	51.5
Biden (D-DE)	16	41	32	9	55.1
Bingaman (D-NM)	10	44	33	11	51.4
Bond (R-MO)	15	40	27	16	51.7
Boxer (D-CA)	5	31	32	28	37.9
Bradley (D-NJ)	14	42	31	9	54.5
Breaux (D-LA)	10	40	33	14	49.1
Brown (R-CO)	13	47	25	9	56.0
Bumpers (D-AR)	17	46	25	10	57.2
Burns (R-MT)	6	37	28	26	41.2
Byrd (D-WV)	38	43	14	4	72.1
Campbell (R-CO)	14	43	22	17	52.1
Chafee (R-RI)	19	44	27	9	57.9
Coats (R-IN)	10	43	34	9	52.1
Cochran (R-MS)	14	56	22	3	61.8
Cohen (R-ME)	39	43	12	4	73.1
Conrad (D-ND)	16	41	32	9	55.1
Coverdell (R-GA)	9	41	28	17	48.1
Craig (R-ID)	12	47	28	8	55.5
D'Amato (R-NY)	7	23	30	37	33.3
Daschle (D-SD)	10	44	30	14	50.3
DeWine (R-OH)	6	43	34	10	49.5
Dodd (D-CT)	7	49	27	14	50.2
Domenici (R-NM)	21	46	26	7	60.3
Dorgan (D-ND)	12	42	31	11	52.4
Exon (D-NE)	11	48	29	7	55.5
Faircloth (R-NC)	5	41	30	17	45.5
Feingold (D-WI)	10	38	36	7	52.0
Feinstein (D-CA)	7	35	34	22	42.5
Ford (D-KY)	17	40	28	11	55.2
Frahm (R-KS)	2	31	27	19	40.1
Frist (R-TN)	9	46	28	8	53.9
Glenn (D-OH)	10	41	30	17	48.3
Gorton (R-WA)	9	42	30	15	49.0
Graham (D-FL)	12	47	30	10	53.9
Gramm (R-TX)	17	36	20	24	49.2
Grams (R-MN)	9	32	26	25	42.4
Grassley (R-IA)	9	51	34	4	55.5
Gregg (R-NH)	13	42	27	14	52.1
Harkin (D-IA)	8	40	33	17	46.6
Hatch (R-UT)	15	47	18	17	54.0
Hatfield (R-OR)	19	53	18	7	62.2
Heflin (D-AL)	11	37	35	13	49.3
Helms (R-NC)	16	37	20	26	47.8
Hollings (D-SC)	9	34	36	19	44.6

TABLE 1 (continued)

Senator	% "Excellent"	% "Pretty Good"	% "Only Fair"	% "Poor"	Rating
Hutchison (R-TX)	18	37	31	9	55.8
Inhofe (R-OK)	11	38	29	18	47.9
Jeffords (R-VT)	9	47	27	14	50.9
Johnston (D-LA)	11	37	33	17	47.6
Kassebaum (R-KS)	29	52	12	4	69.8
Kempthorne (R-ID)	19	45	22	11	58.1
Kennedy (D-MA)	9	42	29	19	47.1
Kerrey (D-NE)	9	43	25	21	46.9
Kerry (D-MA)	11	44	23	21	48.5
Kohl (D-WI)	13	47	27	8	56.2
Kyl (R-AZ)	6	38	32	11	48.3
Lautenberg (D-NJ)	9	34	37	12	47.8
Leahy (D-VT)	13	51	26	7	57.4
Levin (D-MI)	11	43	26	16	50.4
Lieberman (D-CT)	9	54	27	7	55.7
Lott (R-MS)	28	42	26	3	65.3
Lugar (R-IN)	18	42	29	9	56.8
Mack (R-FL)	11	47	30	9	54.0
McCain (R-AZ)	15	47	28	9	56.2
McConnell (R-KY)	10	48	22	15	51.9
Mikulski (D-MD)	25	34	24	13	58.0
Moseley-Braun (D-IL)	7	28	30	31	37.2
Moynihan (D-NY)	13	42	25	16	51.4
Murray (D-WA)	14	35	29	17	49.5
Nickels (R-OK)	23	41	25	9	59.9
Nunn (D-GA)	37	33	21	8	66.7
Pell (D-RI)	25	41	21	13	59.3
Pressler (R-SD)	6	39	38	16	45.1
Pryor (D-AR)	21	47	21	8	61.2
Robb (D-VA)	5	31	40	22	39.8
Rockefeller (D-WV)	28	39	22	8	63.2
Roth (R-DE)	22	48	18	7	63.2
Santorum (R-PA)	6	37	34	12	47.2
Sarbanes (D-MD)	14	31	32	17	48.2
Shelby (R-AL)	11	48	23	12	53.9
Simon (D-IL)	23	42	29	6	60.7
Simpson (R-WY)	26	44	24	4	64.6
Smith (R-NH)	12	36	34	13	49.8
Snowe (R-ME)	27	42	19	9	63.2
Specter (R-PA)	9	41	37	10	50.2
Thomas (R-WY)	16	41	29	6	57.6
Thompson (R-TN)	22	40	22	9	60.2
Thurmond (R-SC)	11	50	23	15	52.5
Warner (R-VA)	9	51	34	5	54.9
Wellstone (D-MN)	10	37	29	23	44.8
Wyden (D-OR)	9	34	25	17	47.1

Source: September 1996 Mason-Dixon poll; n = approximately 800 respondents per state, 40,000 in all. Overall ratings could range from a minimum of 0 (if a senator received only ratings of "poor") to a maximum of 100 (if a senator received only ratings of "excellent").

TABLE 2
OLS Regression Summary, Senators' Ratings

Predictor	b	s.e.
Policy-based hypothesis		
Senator-state ideological discrepancy	−.124*	(.038)
Partisanship hypothesis		
Senator-constituency partisanship match	−.018	(.050)
Parochialism hypotheses		
Appropriations committee member	−.420	(1.459)
State staff ratio	−5.960	(7.883)
State demographics hypotheses		
State population, in millions	−.426*	(.129)
State sociocultural diversity	−57.004**	(24.847)
State ideological polarization	20.750	(18.790)
Activism hypotheses		
Number of bills sponsored	.011	(.040)
Television appearances	.043	(.043)
Electoral hypotheses		
Up in 1998	.928	(1.785)
Up in 2000	3.003**	(1.790)
Retirement hypothesis		
Retiring in 1996	8.373*	(2.180)
Constant	79.009*	(8.710)
Multiple R	.672	
Adjusted R^2	.368	
Standard error	5.752	
F	5.424	
Significance of F	.001	
N	92	

*$p < .01$.
**$p < .05$.
Note: N = 92 because the senators representing Alaska, Hawaii, and Nevada had to be dropped in order to test the policy hypotheses, and Frahm and Wyden, filling unexpired terms, had no valid scores on several of the predictors. The excluded or reference category for the electoral hypotheses comprises those scheduled for reelection in 1996.

The partisanship hypothesis was not supported. Some of the most popular senators were Republicans from southern states that tend to support Republicans in presidential and senatorial elections even though the Democrats continue to have the edge in party identification. More generally, the ideological match between a senator and his or her state appears to be far more decisive than the partisan match in shaping public evaluations of the senator.

The performance of the predictors representing the parochialism hypothesis was mixed. Tellingly, D'Amato, the senator who fared worst of all in the ratings, and Byrd, whose ratings were surpassed only by Cohen's, are probably the two senators most renowned for unflagging attention to constituency service. The impression that these two extreme cases convey—that constituency service had no consistent impact on senators' job ratings—is borne out in the nonsignificant coefficients of the two parochialism indicators, those pertaining to the proportion of staffers a senator allocated to the home state and membership on the Appropriations Committee.[6]

The state demographics hypothesis fared better. As predicted, representing a more populous state significantly depressed a senator's job rating. For every increase of one million in a state's population, its senators' ratings fell by just over four-tenths of a point, so that, ceteris paribus, the senators from a state like South Dakota, with a population of less than a million, would be rated 12 points higher than the senators from California, with a population of 30 million or so. Obviously, senators from a mega-state must surmount a high hurdle in order to build and maintain a positive home-state reputation. State sociocultural diversity also affected senators' ratings: senators representing more heterogeneous populations paid the price in terms of significantly lower ratings. However, contrary to expectations, the data provided no support for the idea that senators' ability to please their constituents would be dampened if the constituency were highly polarized in ideological terms.[7]

Contrary to the activism hypothesis, neither the amount of network television news coverage senators received nor the number of bills they introduced significantly affected their job ratings. On the other hand, the results were largely consistent with the electoral hypotheses. Although there was no significant difference in the ratings of senators who were up for reelection in 1996 and those who would be up in 1998 (perhaps because the campaign for 1998 had already begun in 1996), senators who were up for reelection at the time the Mason-Dixon poll was conducted—some of whom were involved in very hard-hitting campaigns—had significantly lower job ratings than those whose terms would not be up until 2000; controlling for the

effects of all the other predictors in the model, those up for reelection in 1996 found themselves at a three-point rating disadvantage compared to their colleagues whose reelection campaigns were four years in the future. Moreover, the ratings of those who announced their retirement in 1996 were, ceteris paribus, more than eight points higher than those of other senators. Apparently, then, the decision to retire insulates senators from the critical scrutiny of many of their constituents. Indeed, in 1996, retiring senators dominated the top of the Mason-Dixon poll ratings: of the 13 senators who had announced their retirement, five (Cohen, Kassebaum, Nunn, Simpson, and Hatfield) were among the ten most highly rated.[8]

Conclusions

We conclude by returning to our original question. In the fall of 1996, almost 40 points on the 0 to 100 rating scale separated the highest- and lowest-rated senators. Why were Maine residents so much more supportive of Cohen than New Yorkers were of D'Amato? One reason was that whereas Cohen stood on the ADA scale almost exactly at the point that would be predicted from the mean ideological leanings of his Maine constituents, D'Amato was much more conservative than would be expected of a senator from New York. Indeed, almost seven and one half points of Cohen's 40-point lead over D'Amato in the job ratings can be attributed to Cohen's closer ideological proximity to his constituents.[9] Second, New York's population dwarfs Maine's, and this population differential added seven more points to Cohen's lead over D'Amato. Third, New York is also far more diverse than Maine, giving Cohen an additional advantage of more than five points. Finally, Cohen's announcement of his retirement gave him another boost over D'Amato, this one of more than eight points. Collectively, then, the factors in the model tested here go a good deal of the way toward explaining why Cohen's home-state reputation was so much more positive than D'Amato's, accounting for about 28 points of the 40-point differential between the two in the esteem of their constituents.

The rest of the ratings gap between Cohen and D'Amato cannot be attributed to factors included in the model tested here. According to Fenno (1996, 326), a comprehensive reckoning of the sources of home-state reputation must take into account senators' personal character, as perceived by constituents. In this respect, it is instructive to note the striking differences in personality and style between the excitable and abrasive D'Amato and the calm and well-modulated Cohen, and to contrast the frequent allegations of corruption lodged against D'Amato with Cohen's "white knight" image. In personality,

style, and public image, the two could hardly be more different. While systematically measuring such differences for one hundred senators would be extremely difficult and lies well beyond the scope of this paper, it seems quite likely that such differences might explain the variability in senators' home-state reputations left unexplained by the factors included in the model tested here.

What answers does this analysis provide for the broader questions with which we began? First, senators *are* more highly regarded if they accurately represent the policy perspectives of their constituents. Indeed, the ideological discrepancy between a senator and his or her home state is one of the leading predictors of the senator's job ratings. Second, our measures of senators' attentiveness to home-state business are *not* significantly related to job ratings. The fault may lie in the measures we have employed, but, for the moment we have no empirical basis to conclude that legislators can win their constituents' hearts by tending to home-state concerns. Third, other factors *do* help account for constituents' assessments of their legislators. Especially prominent among these other factors are state population and sociocultural diversity.

There are relatively few activities in Washington that senators can use to boost their ratings back home. Getting on national television, sponsoring legislation, devoting scarce resources to serving state interests, belonging to the Appropriations Committee—none of these significantly enhances senators' home-state reputations. The decision to retire seems to have a salutary reputational effect, but the obvious irony is that this is hardly a strategy that an ambitious, reelection-focused senator would want to pursue.

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NOTES

1. The respondent-level data from these surveys are not in the public domain. The senator-by-senator data from which we calculated the scores analyzed below were reported by Gelbart and Senior (1996). We are grateful to Del Ali of Mason-Dixon for the information about the samples and interviews reported in the text. We are also grateful to Christopher Deering, Bruce Oppenheimer, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

2. We calculated these ratings by (1) determining the percentage of respondents who gave a senator a particular rating ("excellent," "pretty good," "only fair," or "poor"), (2) assigning equal-interval weights (1.00, .67, .33, and .00, respectively) to the ratings, (3) multiplying each percentage by its weight, (4) summing the products, (5) dividing the sum by the percentage of respondents who expressed an opinion about the senator, and (6) multiplying by 100. Thus defined, the scores indicate the degree of support for a senator's performance among respondents who expressed an opinion. Although the Mason-Dixon poll included all one hundred senators as of September 1996, we had to exclude eight from the analysis: Sheila Frahm (R-KS) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) because, as brand-new senators in 1996, they had no valid scores on several of the predictors in the model; and the senators from Alaska, Hawaii, and Nevada, because those states were excluded from Erikson, Wright, and McIver's (1993) state ideological data.

3. Location of senators' staff (state offices of Washington, DC) was determined from the Senate telephone directory (U.S. Senate 1996). In the few cases where the directory failed to list staffers in senators' home-state offices, data were drawn from the Congressional Staff Directory (1996).

4. The data on network television coverage are from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive's on-line database. We used the Legi-Slate on-line database to count the number of bills each senator introduced in the 104th Congress.

5. We also experimented with a dummy variable designating the senator's gender, but to no avail.

6. As an alternative measure of parochialism, we also experimented with the number of state-oriented bills a senator introduced in the 104th Congress (1995–96). (State-oriented bills were identified as those that included the name of the senator's state as a Legi-Slate subject category.) This variable proved nonsignificant in preliminary analyses and was subsequently dropped.

7. State ideological polarization is highly correlated with sociocultural diversity ($r = .663$), but the nonsignificant impact of ideological polarization on senators' ratings does not reflect a multicollinearity problem. The simple correlation between state ideological polarization and senators' ratings is only $-.149$, and re-running the regression model without the sociocultural diversity index did not bolster the effect of ideological polarization.

8. An alternative interpretation might be that the particular senators who retired in 1996 had long been unusually popular with their constituents, and thus that the ostensibly positive effect of retirement on job ratings is an artifact of the coincidental timing of retirement by several popular senators. To test this interpretation, we had to rely on job rating data from the 1992 Senate Election Study, about which we have already expressed qualms. In any event, in 1992 the job ratings of the 13 senators who went on to retire in 1996 were only slightly, and not significantly, higher than those of their colleagues; the 1992 mean for the thirteen 1996 retirees was three points higher than that of other senators ($F = 1.304$, n.s.). The implication is that those who retired in 1996 were not unusually popular prior to their retirement decision.

9. This estimate and all the others presented in this paragraph were calculated simply by subtracting D'Amato's score on a given predictor from Cohen's and then multiplying the difference by the unstandardized regression coefficient for that predictor.

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