

## Sample Student Writing: Literature Review

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**Grade this student received on this assignment:** C-

**Positive aspects of this work:** the student does a nice job organizing the paper and alluding to some of the key debates in the literature on this topic.

**Problem-areas with this work:** the student's literature review falls well short of the minimum page requirement, the thesis for the literature review is absent, most of the student's summaries of the authors mentioned are quite thin and lack proper citations (with page numbers), and the student needs to do a better job identifying and developing the different points of consensus or contention among scholars on this topic. This is to say that this student's literature review still reads like the review one would provide in a background section of one's research project as opposed to a stand-alone paper with a separate purpose, separate thesis, and detailed summaries of relevant scholarship: the aim here is to defend one's understanding of the key overlaps or divides (the current debates) in contemporary literature on this subject.

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### 1. Introduction

Are competitive parties a necessary precondition for responsive policy? While the most contemporary accounts of partisan conflict emphasize its undermining effect on policymaking, the representational consequences of partisan conflict are far less clear. Several theoretical accounts have argued that partisan competition has the effect of improving responsiveness to constituent preferences. However, these accounts have not examined whether the gains from increased responsiveness are equally distributed among constituents. Studies of representation distribution between constituents of different incomes have likewise not properly accounted for institutional determinants of responsiveness. This study joins these two bodies of research by examining income-based representation under different levels of partisan competition.

### 2. Representatives as Economic Agents

Contemporary studies of Congress have approached individual decision-making from an economic perspective. In the same way that classical economics treated the individual as a utility-maximizing agent, so do these studies approach the representative as a reelection-maximizing agent (Mayhew 1974, Lijphart 1997). Although many scholars have pointed out that representatives have multiple goals—such as crafting policy or maximizing their own power (Hacker and Pierson 2006)—representatives understand that their reelection is a necessary condition for achieving all other goals. Even contemporary theories of collective action have approached the individual as a vote-maximizing agent (Aldrich 1995, Cox and McCubbins 2005).

If Representatives' primary goal is to win reelection, their decisions will be largely designed to maximize their margins of victory. This may lead them to prioritize constituents with higher voting turnouts (Lijphart 1997), higher likelihoods of swing-voting (Bartels 2008), or those who are better at communicating their preferences directly or through interest groups (Miller and Stokes 1963; Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995).

These differences can be summarized as the term 'voting power'—the different abilities of any given individual to influence the outcome of an election (Bartels 2008). This creates a bias toward constituencies with higher rates of voter turnout (Burnham 1987) and higher rates of swing voting (Bartels 1998). These divisions will tend to create selective incentives for Representatives to

prioritize different constituencies over one another (Rosenstone and Hansen 1997, Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

A growing body of research has indicated that differences in voting power tend to fall along historical patterns of discrimination. This has led to black and Latino constituents having lower rates of policy representation than white constituents (Griffin and Newman 2008). Women are less likely to have effective representation than men (Griffin, Newman, and Wolbrecht 2012). Homosexual constituents are less likely to have their preferences enacted into law than heterosexual constituents (Lax, Phillips, and Krimmel 2009).

Numerous studies have found that low-income constituents are less likely than high income constituents to have their preferences enacted into law (Gilens 2012, Flavin 2012, Rigby and Wright 2011). While some of these studies have incorporated simplistic measures of institutional variation (for example, Gilens (2012) found that representation of low-income voters improves for the session preceding an election year), the norm is to treat representation as independent of institutional context. This ignores the possibility that representational priorities shift depending on institutional context.

### **3. Mechanisms of Improving Representation**

Several studies have indicated that lower turnout among lower-income constituents leads to undesirable policy (Piven and Cloward 1988, Gilens 2011). This would indicate that the representative's responsiveness to low-income constituents is less than would be expected from their share of the population.

Likewise, Representatives are only able to agree with their constituents on policy if they are aware of their constituents' preferences. Those constituents who are more effective and likely to communicate their preferences should be enjoy better representation. Numerous studies have pointed to this mechanism as another contributor to income-based representational inequality, as upper-class constituents are likely to be better informed and more effective at communicating their preferences (Miller and Stokes 1963; Verba 2003; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Increased attention to current events and increased contact with a Representative's office has the potential to improve representation for disadvantaged groups.

Fundraising has become an essential aspect of modern political campaigns (Powell 2015), which by definition is better suited to high-income constituents. Representatives are forced to constantly fundraise in order to fend off challengers and prepare for an expanded and costly election cycle (Heberlig and Larson 2014). This creates an incentive for Representatives to prioritize campaign donors, as these constituents have an outside influence on their reelection success.

Recent research has also illustrated that many Representatives are themselves from the upper-class. This may influence the way they perceive legislation (Carnes 2013) and may shift policy in favor of the wealthy (Griffin, Newman and Wolbrecht 2012).

These studies have largely focused on the individual representative as the unit of analysis, modeling roll call decisions as a function of constituent preferences. This approach stands in contrast to recent scholarship on endogenous influencers of congressional behavior, such as political parties, party leaders, committees, and collective electoral context. Contemporary studies of legislative behavior have similarly ignored the representational consequences of institutional arrangements—despite the fact that many of these arrangements such as the filibuster or seat allocation in the Senate were created with an articulated representational intent. This research attempts to bridge the gap by

exploring the inadvertent representational consequences of close partisan competition in the U.S. Senate.

#### **4. Strategic Party Government**

The past forty years have seen a dramatic increase in competition for legislative institutions at the federal level (Lee 2009; Lee 2016). Noting that control of national institutions has become increasingly competitive, Lee views partisan conflict as symptom of parties' efforts to favorably differentiate themselves to gain an electoral advantage. This argument is consistent with previous literature on strategic disagreement, in which political parties refuse compromise to transfer blame to the opposition (Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Gilmour 1995). Lee's treatment of competition as a categorical variable—congresses with 'low competition' versus those with 'high competition'—ignores the possibility that congressional leaders approach electoral insecurity on a spectrum and alter their strategies based on the perceived marginal benefit. Such a strategy would be consistent with theories of congressional behavior viewing representatives as dynamic actors (Lebo and Koger 2016).

Recent trends have increased individual members have an electoral incentive to uphold the party line (Abramowitz & Webster 2016) even when this behavior carries personal costs (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001, Wright 1978). Because constituents are likely to hold their Representatives accountable for these votes (Erickson 1971; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002), there is an incentive for party leaders to shift strategies to create a positive party brand. This paper will extend this line of research by examining the specific representational decisions party leaders make when choosing how to direct their members.