Who's Driving? Ideology, Public Opinion and Interest Groups

Sara Renee Browning

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, fellowshipstudent1@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs rp

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.
WHO’S DRIVING? IDEOLOGY, PUBLIC OPINION & INTEREST GROUP INFLUENCE

by

Sara Renee Browning

B.A., Bradley University, 2003

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of Political Science
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2016
RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

WHO’S DRIVING? IDEOLOGY, PUBLIC OPINION & INTEREST GROUP INFLUENCE

By
Sara Renee Browning

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the field of Political Science

Approved by:
Dr. Kenneth Mulligan, Chair
Dr. Scott McClurg

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 6, 2016
AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

SARA BROWNING, for the Master of Liberal Arts degree in POLITICAL SCIENCE, presented on APRIL 6, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: WHO’S DRIVING? IDEOLOGY, PUBLIC OPINION & INTEREST GROUP INFLUENCE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Kenneth Mulligan

This study measures the influence of a representative’s personal, or party, ideology, public opinion and campaign PAC and interest group contributions on the voting behavior of United States Senate members. Theory holds that district preferences exert the most salient influence on voting behavior of public officials at the national level. Conversely, I propose that the personal ideological orientation of a United States senator influences his voting behavior to a greater extent than constituent preferences and political interest group contributions and that a representative’s personal ideology is synonymous with the values and ideas of his political party. I base my argument on the rational assumption that representatives who establish party loyalty through their voting record as well as through financial contributions to other candidates within their party will attain respect, promotion, endorsements and financial backing from party leadership. Quantitative data is taken from roll call votes in 2013 listed on senate.gov and from DW Nominate scores, which places senators’ party ideology on a liberal-conservative scale. Data targets a single issue: gun control. I also use quantitative data aggregated on a state-by-state basis from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey in 2012 to obtain the percentage of constituents favoring stricter background checks and gun control regulations in each state. Finally, I use OpenSecrets.org to look at state-level data to track the size of political interest group and PAC donations to United States senators.
DEDICATION

To Mom & Dad for your enduring love and sacrifices that have made this achievement possible. And to Jessie Kaye for your prayers and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Professor Kenneth Mulligan for the advice, assistance, guidance and expertise you contributed to this study and for the knowledge that I will take with me as I continue my academic training. Much appreciation also to Dr. Chris Stout for data assistance. And special thanks to my good friend and mentor, Dr. Stephen Bloom, for your help and encouragement that kept me going throughout this project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 – Who Wins? Party Values, District Threats and Interest Groups</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – A Different Understanding of Party Influence</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 – Research Design and Data Source</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 – Methods, Data Interpretation and Analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6 – Discussion and Implications</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7 – Conclusion</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The extent to which personal ideology\(^1\) influences the formation and passage of legislation on Capitol Hill has been a growing concern among liberals and conservatives in Washington. Since the unprecedented loss in the 2014 Republican primary elections of then-House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) to Tea Party favorite and little-known economics professor, David Brat, political analysts who connect Cantor’s defeat to his moderate views on immigration reform—an ideology hugely unpopular with most of Cantor’s conservative 7\(^{th}\) District—question not only to what extent Cantor’s personal beliefs on immigration and the interests of his constituents affected the former House leader’s policy stance but also how much personal ideology and constituent preferences play a part in the legislative decisions of all Capitol Hill lawmakers.

A fundamental question consuming recent legislative analyses has been the role ideology plays in the formation of policy initiatives within democratic regimes. Previous theory (Jenkins 2000; Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Kau and Rubin 1993; Rothenberg and Sanders 2000) contends that the personal ideology of United States legislators, constituent ideology and campaign interest group contributions have proven significant in the formation and passage of legislation on Capitol Hill. The interest group hypothesis (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kau and Rubin 1992) argues that interest groups, using constituent ideology as a medium, influence public policy when constituent voters give to interest groups that support their

\(^1\) Personal ideology and party ideology, or party membership, are used interchangeably throughout the text. This study draws on scholarship contending that a senator’s personal ideology aligns with the values of his or her party membership, and therefore, the two variables are highly correlated. A senator votes according to his personal set of liberal or conservative values (Kau and Rubin 1979; Kalt and Zupan 1984).
particular policy preferences. Another proposition, the *district threat hypothesis*, (Kau and Rubin 1992) presents a “competition” between the influences of a representative’s own ideology, construed as party ideology, and his or her district preferences, claiming that House and Senate members will ultimately vote according to district needs for fear of losing their seats (Kau and Rubin 1992). This same study (Kau and Rubin 1992) renders ideological shirking—the process by which representatives and senators vote according to their own ideology at the expense of constituent preferences—irrelevant, arguing that constituents quickly punish such behavior by neglecting to re-elect incumbents. In sharp contrast, the *ideological boots hypothesis* claims that representatives remain true to their personal values for the duration of their career (Hibbing 1986; Poole and Romer 1993). This hypothesis takes into consideration factors such as retirement, redistricting and promotion to present a strong argument in favor of the prominent effects of representatives’ personal ideologies on voting behavior.

Three main research designs have tested the impact of constituent ideology, interest group influence and personal ideology on voting behavior. First, a mixed logic model has tested the impact of constituent ideology and interest group influence on representatives’ and senators’ decision making. Secondly, cross-institutional analyses have compared representatives’ votes who legislate within the House chamber with the votes of representatives who have been promoted to the Senate chamber to determine personal ideological consistency. Lastly, quasi-experimental research designs have contrasted members seeking reelection with lame-duck members of Congress to determine whether members of Congress who are retiring or changing careers continue to vote according to their personal belief systems and whether they continue to vote on a consistent basis. Most empirical data has been gathered from the United States Congress.
These studies elicit intriguing findings. Jackson and Kingdon (1992) and Cox and McCubbins (1993) find that ideological interest group contributions hold a substantial amount of influence over a member’s voting behavior. Kau and Rubin’s (1992) study makes a strong case for the influence of district preferences and the purported irrelevance of ideological shirking; however, the scholars’ decision to restrict their methodology by using measures solely for testing constituent ideological influence and the influence of interest group contributions without including any type of indicator for personal ideology drastically undermines the validity of their claim that ideological shirking is irrelevant. Hibbing (1986), Jenkins (2000), Poole and Romer (1993) find evidence to suggest that constituent preferences do not dissuade representatives from voting according to their personal attitudes. Finally, Rothenburg and Sanders (2000) discover that lame-duck legislators continue to vote according to their personal ideologies; however, not all legislators engage in participatory shirking by voting less often.

Although a large amount of scholarship (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kau and Rubin 1992) has argued that constituent policy preferences exert the greatest influence over the voting behavior of House and Senate representatives, little scholarly attention has been devoted to contending in favor of the predominant influence of a representative’s or senator’s personal ideology on policy decisions in Washington in spite of much supportive evidence to this point.

My hypothesis, the self-identification hypothesis, advances this literature by proposing that a United States legislator’s personal ideology maintains the strongest influence over legislative voting behavior. The premise for this claim is twofold. Firstly, a legislator “self-identifies” with the values of his party causing him to vote in line with his Republican or Democratic Party
membership. Secondly, the party membership values that a legislator identifies with are the values he or she prefers over outside factors, such as constituent and interest group influences.

It is reasonable to assume that a Senator whose ideology is made up of conservative beliefs, values and ideas will identify with conservative Republican Party values rather than with the liberal Democratic values. It is equally reasonable to assume that a senator whose ideology is composed of liberal beliefs, values and ideas will identify with the liberal values of the Democratic Party rather than with more conservative beliefs. In other words, it would prove illogical for a senator who strongly advocates gun rights and the right to life to join the Democratic Party, a party that supports strict limits on the Second Amendment and liberal views on abortion; the senator would not identify with these Democratic Party values.

A senator’s votes will fall in line with his liberal or conservative party values. For instance, a senator who is a member of the Republican Party and who values Second Amendment rights will vote against Democratic legislation proposing stricter background checks for persons with criminal histories or legislation proposing a ban on assault weapons, all things being equal. Likewise, a Democratic House member who values a woman’s right to choose will most likely vote in favor of abortion rights because these rights align with the values of the Democratic Party and with her own beliefs concerning abortion. In this manner, the representatives identify with the conservative or liberal values of their political party membership.

In addition to the idea that a legislator will identify with the party values that coincide with his or her personal values, a legislator will often hold his or her personal values in higher esteem than the outside preferences of constituents or interest groups, causing his personal values to exert the strongest influence on his voting behavior. My hypothesis gains support from Bawn (1999) whose study finds that “ideological preferences are often decisive in democratic decision
making,” as votes cast on the basis of personal ideology can easily overwhelm those cast on the basis of constituent or interest group influence (303; emphasis mine). By “creating preference” over outside influences, ideology exerts the strongest influence on legislators’ roll call voting (303). Ideology is, therefore, “critical” to voting behavior because it causes people to have preferences about policy issues that tend to subsume other influences on roll call votes (303-04).

Salient to this study, my hypothesis acknowledges that district policy concerns are not irrelevant to voting. When members vote according to their personal belief system, they run the risk of being voted out by constituents who hold different views on policy issues. Downs (1957) claims that legislators who vote in line with their personal conservative or liberal values create a dependable conservative or liberal voting record on particular policies that helps ensure that their constituents know where they stand on various issues and that their positions on these issues are firm.

Legislators, therefore, have “an electoral incentive to . . . maintain ideological ‘labels’ that will allow their constituents to discern their positions on a range of individual issues” (Downs 1957, 126). Simply put, by voting in line with their personal values, legislators develop a reputation for voting either more liberal or more conservative on particular policy issues—a record that, I argue, will help establish trust, and by extension, tolerance from the constituent base when representatives’ votes and district preferences fail to align on particular policy decisions.

Thus, according to Downs (1957), constituents depend on their legislators and senators to vote according to their party values as a means of obtaining consistent knowledge of their legislators’ positions (126-27). This does not imply that constituents will always agree with
legislators’ positions; however, it does imply that constituents, knowing in advance how their legislators will vote and have voted on certain issues, may judge them less harshly at the polls.

Attesting to the acute relevance of this hypothesis is the mounting concern among liberals and conservatives over purportedly untouchable incumbencies slowly growing the list of unprecedented congressional election upsets. Political analysts have contended that former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor’s stellar 13-year career in Congress was suddenly depleted because of his attempt to stem the tide of Tea Party base ideology prominent within his 7th District Virginian constituency by voting according to the much more moderate Republican views held by members of his own party leadership on immigration reform. Cantor’s actions and motives are consistent with the self-identification hypothesis, which predicts that members of Congress will vote in line with their party membership. Legislators who vote with their party ensure position, promotion and financial backing.

Cantor had achieved all three. The House Majority Leader, rumored to be a strong candidate for promotion to House Speaker following then-Speaker John Boehner, had consistently voted in line with the moderate Republican ideologies of his party leadership, notably then-Speaker Boehner, values which were largely inconsistent with the much more conservative ideology of his Tea Party district. Not only did Cantor attain position, but he also benefitted from the generosity of his party, raising millions from House leadership for his 2014 re-election campaign.

However, Cantor’s career plummeted with his moderate stance on immigration policy. He was sharply accused by many of his Tea Party constituents of helping to execute President Barack Obama’s pro-amnesty agenda. In a CBS News interview with Major Garrett in February
2014, Cantor espoused his moderate ideology on immigration reform, claiming that children brought to the United States illegally by their parents should remain in this country.\textsuperscript{2}

The former House Leader’s statement received almost immediate backlash from Tea Party members who felt Cantor was sidling up too closely to President Obama. In a speech given in his 7\textsuperscript{th} District regarding his stance on immigration policy not too long before his primary election loss, Cantor spoke to Tea Party members “all of 24 seconds before the crowd cut him off. Then the man who expected to inherit the House of Representatives was drowned out by a bunch of booing.”\textsuperscript{3} With an ambitious eye on the House Speakership, Cantor deviated from his Tea Party constituents’ preferences on immigration, and consequently, his district base crumbled.

According to Downs’ (1957) study, Cantor’s decision to consistently vote with Republican Party leadership by taking a moderate stance on immigration reform should have built a sense of trust and tolerance with his constituent base who would have been familiar with his voting record on major issues, thus potentially preventing an election upset. However, when Virginia’s districts were redrawn in 2010, Cantor inherited hundreds of new constituents who were from the heavily Tea Party Republican New Kent County, east of Richmond, VA. Unlike Cantor’s original constituency, his new constituents were very unfamiliar with his voting record and expected him to vote conservatively on immigration reform. Consequently, Cantor’s moderate vote on the issue both shocked and angered his Tea Party constituents while his old constituency largely supported his re-election. Not surprisingly, Cantor performed worse with his New Kent County Tea Party district voters than in all but one of the counties he represented. Statistics show that New Kent County lost Cantor the election, providing support for Downs’ hypothesis that

constituents who are not familiar with a representatives voting record may judge them more harshly on Election Day.\footnote{Ibid.}

I expect that the general trend of influence among personal ideology, constituent policy preferences and interest group donations on legislators’ roll call voting behavior is salient across a range of policy issues, encompassing not only immigration reform but also important initiatives on issues such as abortion, gay rights, health care reform and, salient to this study, gun control legislation. Similar to constituents’ expectations of Cantor concerning immigration reform, the more important an issue is to the constituent base, the more influence the base will exert on their legislator to vote in line with district preferences. In a study investigating the importance of legislators’ votes on gun control policy to constituents, Wolpert and Gimpel (1998) construct a multivariate analysis to examine constituent attitudes toward three types of gun control regulations: banning handguns, banning assault weapons and requiring a seven-day waiting period for the purchase of firearms. Due to the fact that gun owners are likely to be personally affected by gun regulations, the study examines whether constituents exhibit distinctive preferences on gun control, collecting polling data from CBS News and The New York Times between April 1981 and December 1993 on individuals’ gun policy preferences (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998, 246). Nearly half of all poll respondents owned a firearm.

Not surprisingly, results indicate that constituents’ personal preferences strongly influence policy preferences on gun control and that anti-gun legislation, particularly banning handguns, encourages strong district influence on legislators’ voting behavior. The ban on handguns was the most controversial among constituents, generating support from between 43 and 51 percent of respondents, a sharp division of opinion. Other gun control measures received considerable
support, with 70 percent to 81 percent supporting the assault weapons ban and 87 to 89 percent supporting the seven-day waiting period (247-48). Similar to immigration reform policy, given the deep-seated division among constituents within the pro-gun verses anti-gun debate, the expectation on legislators to deliver votes coinciding with district opinion is salient (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998, 248).

In addition to constituent influence, Wolpert and Gimpel (1998) also touch on the influence of interest groups on voting behavior within the scope of gun control legislation. When investigating why gun control provokes intense mobilization among constituents, the study finds several explanations involving the indirect influence of interest groups. First, the NRA’s ability to mobilize its members into participating in a variety of political activities, including voting, is “legendary” (255). Such activities, especially those designed to raise money for particular party members, exert an important influence on Congress. Interest group activities also raise the salience of gun control and offer constituents information concerning where legislators stand on the issue, prompting voters to pressure legislators into voting according to their preferences (255).

Secondly, the NRA’s public relations campaign makes two arguments emphasizing constituent policy preferences of those who own firearms. First, gun regulations do not keep firearms out of the reach of criminals; they only impede upon Second Amendment rights. Secondly, gun ownership may actually prevent crime (Wolpert and Gimpel 255). Both arguments help trigger concerns among gun owners who, in turn, pressure legislators to vote in line with their preferences.

Third, many gun owners “contribute their personal wellbeing to the government” when it comes to anti- and pro-gun policy, pinpointing legislators as those responsible for allowing
citizens to protect themselves by making it easier to own a gun. The NRA, Sierra Club and other national gun rights groups stress the constitution’s protection of the right to bear arms that legislators are responsible to uphold (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998, 256).

Thus, personal belief systems, district concerns and interest groups play an important role in roll call voting on gun legislation. Constituents stimulated to action both by personal concerns as well as the activities of various interests could affect the extent to which U.S. House and Senate members’ set of personal beliefs and values on gun policy sways voting behavior.

For the purpose of testing my hypothesis, I use an alternative research design, which improves on other methodologies that have been used for three reasons. Firstly, rather than using the presidential vote in the congressional district to measure representatives’ ideologies as other studies (Berry, Fording, Ringquist, Hanson and Klarner 1998) have done, I measure personal ideology as a score on a voting index and use roll call voting data from the entire population of the United States Senate for my sample (N=100). This method provides a more accurate and direct measure of a legislator’s personal ideology than an analysis of the presidential vote with high internal validity, helping to establish a causal relationship (Gerring 2001). Secondly, the use of aggregated data on a state-by-state basis to measure constituent ideology on gun control is much more accurate and efficient than using individual-level data from a random public opinion survey as other studies (Aldrich, 1995; Rohde, 1991) have used. Thirdly, my model restricts the dataset to the U.S. Senate and uses aggregated state-level data to determine the effects of interest group ideology on voting behavior. Restricting the dataset to the Senate increases efficiency and makes the study easier to replicate.

Drawing from my hypothesis, my research study utilizes four main concepts: personal ideology, party ideology, constituent ideology and interest group ideology. I define personal
ideology as a set of internalized liberal or conservative ideas, beliefs and values specific to an individual United States House or Senate legislator. Hibbing (1986); Jenkins (2000); Kau and Rubin (1992); and Bawn (1998) propose that a United States legislator’s liberal or conservative value system will coincide with the values inherent in his or her Republican or Democratic Party membership and will have a direct influence on their voting behavior with regard to specific policies.

Although this study supports the notion that personal ideology and party ideology are highly correlated, they are also distinct concepts. Whereas personal ideology represents the legislator’s liberal or conservative values and belief system, party ideology is not necessarily a statement about personal beliefs. Rather, it is a liberal or conservative position that “signals” the legislator’s general view on a broad range of policy issues (Nelson 2002, 519). For example, a Republican senator’s position on gun legislation as “pro-gun rights” is derived from his personal conservative value set. Thus, a legislator’s liberal or conservative beliefs align with the liberal or conservative position of his party membership on specific policy topics.

I define constituent ideology as the voter’s “self-interest” or personal set of preferences regarding specific policy issues (Wolpert & Gimpel 1998). Contrary to personal ideology, these values are not defined as liberal or conservative specifically but, rather, are defined according to a voter’s personal opinion regarding specific legislative issues, for example, a voter’s preference for gun control regulations as opposed to equivocal support for the Second Amendment. A voter’s “self-interest” or policy opinion may fall within or outside the bounds of his liberal or conservative ideology. For example, a constituent who votes Republican may happen to hold more liberal views on immigration reform depending on her personal preference or opinion regarding the Dream Act. To illustrates, a Republican constituent may hold the more liberal
opinion that children of illegal immigrants should be allowed to remain in the United States to benefit from opportunities their Mexican parents did not have.

Lastly, interest group ideology is closely associated with constituent ideology because ideological interest groups represent the constituents who hold various policy preferences or opinions on specific issues. Therefore, an interest group’s ideology is defined according to the policy preferences or opinions of the constituent groups and organizations it represents (Bonica 2013). For example, interest groups representing constituents who prefer Common Core educational instruction in grade schools and junior high schools would be construed as possessing a liberal position on education policy. Interest group ideology may also manifest when constituents who are passionate concerning gun regulations give to anti-gun interests, such as Everytown for Gun Safety. Everytown then donates to legislators who advocate for anti-gun policies for the purpose of influencing their votes.

The purpose of this study is to cultivate a more cognizant understanding of the extent to which the personal ideological orientations of United States representatives and senators drive voting behavior in comparison with constituent ideology and campaign interest group contributions and the reasons behind such influence. Empirical support for my proposition is derived from a dataset that includes the roll call votes of one hundred U.S. Senate members, state-by-state aggregated data of constituent policy preferences on gun control and state-level data on the size of campaign interest group contributions to U.S. senators. My study consists of three organizational components. First, I critique previous scholarship investigating the effects of personal ideology, constituent ideology and interest group donations on roll call voting behavior. Next, I construct a model to test my hypothesis in relation to prevailing theory. Finally, I draw conclusions to support the self-identification hypothesis vis-à-vis competing theory.
CHAPTER 2
WHO WINS? PARTY VALUES, DISTRICT THREATS AND INTEREST GROUPS

The manner in which United States House and Senate representatives cast the votes that impact the nation has stirred much debate among social scientists who argue that either a legislator’s personal ideology, constituent ideology or interest group donations exerts the most prominent influence over policy decisions. Scholarship has examined the influence of both interest group campaign contributions (Kau and Rubin 1993) as well as constituent ideology (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993) on members’ voting behavior. Kau and Rubin’s (1993) interest group hypothesis contends that interest groups, using constituent ideology as a medium, have the ability to influence public policy (151). The primer for this hypothesis rests on the assumption that constituents give to interest groups who support candidates espousing constituents’ policy positions. An influx of constituent donations, therefore, prompts interest groups to support candidates with policy positions matching those of interest groups’ constituent donors. For the purpose of determining the role of interest groups, the study examines the 1980 congressional election, a period when changes in campaign finance laws led to a significant increase in the ability of interest groups to contribute to campaigns through PACs to achieve policy goals. The 1980 election was accompanied by a surge in contributions to interest groups by constituents advocating specific policies (Kau and Rubin 1993, 156). While some theorists (Nelson 1991) contend that constituents donate to interest groups solely from a desire to support a political party rather than to influence a particular policy outcome, other scholars (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993) find that constituents donate because they believe that through their donations they themselves help to implement policies congruent with their own political ideologies.
The second component of the argument contends that if constituents are willing to contribute money to interest groups in order to influence policy outcomes, they are also willing to use their votes to achieve these same goals, casting ballots for candidates who promise to support legislation that aligns with their ideological preferences while ousting candidates who neglect their interests (Kau and Rubin 1993, 160-61). The district threat hypothesis maintains that legislators will vote according to their district preferences at the expense of their own personal beliefs largely because they fear the potential repercussions of negating constituent ideologies during midterm elections. Hence, a competition, or inner struggle, ensues between members’ desires to vote according to their own beliefs and members’ obligation to vote according to district ideologies (Kau and Rubin 1993, 163).

Empirical evidence from the 1980 congressional election yields the following results. (1) Constituent ideology is usually significant in explaining votes on legislation. (2) A legislator’s voting behavior is usually determined by the aggregate of his constituents’ policy preferences. (3) Contributions from interest groups—acting through constituent ideology—are sometimes significant in explaining representatives’ voting behavior; however, it is less important to determine if the personal beliefs of the legislators exert an additional marginal influence on voting behavior. (4) Voter contributions to interest groups indicate constituents’ intention to spend money in order to influence public policy (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kau and Rubin 1993).

Methodology for testing the two hypotheses uses a mixed logit model involving three agents: the legislator; his constituents; and campaign contributors. The model uses ten votes on important bills taken in 1980. The three data sets used to estimate the model include data on roll
call voting by legislators; interest group contributions; and a vector of constituent characteristics (Kau and Rubin 1993).

Although the study does an adequate job of accounting for the effects of constituent ideology and interest group donations on voting behavior, the methodology is flawed for several reasons. Most importantly, the study includes no measure for ideological shirking. Because the issue central to my research involves deciphering the extent to which a legislator’s beliefs impact his votes, this lack of data is disconcerting. A measure of the effects of a legislator’s personal ideology should be included, as its potential impact could have meaningful implications for ideology’s influence on legislative decisions.

Second, the study downplays the role of legislators’ personal ideologies solely because they contend that ideological shirking is swiftly punished by voters who refuse to reelect incumbent legislators that deviate from voting in accordance with district ideologies. However, one study (Lott and Davis 1992) finds that U.S. Senators who deviate from the interests of their constituents by just 1.27 percentage points almost always lose their seats in office (88). Kau and Rubin (1993) overlook the fact that voter intolerance can change the face of representation, potentially changing the demographics of the U.S. House and Senate and, hence, the types of policy signed into law. For these reasons, ideological shirking is relevant and warrants exploration and inclusion in this study.

Third, the logic that the significant number of voter contributions to PACs in the 1980 election was for the purpose of influencing candidates’ voting behavior is flawed. This logic incorrectly assumes that the only reason constituents contribute to PACs is to influence a candidate’s policy position. A constituent’s decision to give to a PAC may reflect his desire to gain affiliation with the candidate. Contending that constituents’ policy ideologies influence
voting behavior via their contributions to interest groups is misleading if swaying the legislator’s vote is not the constituent’s goal. Further research is needed to decipher the reasons for constituent contributions.

Aside from interest group and constituent influences, legislators’ personal ideology constitutes one of the most controversial influences on the voting behavior of U.S. House and Senate members. Theorists who contend that personal ideology influences policy decisions offer striking evidence. Hibbing (1986) and Poole and Rosenthal (1991) find that legislators vote according to their personal ideology from the time they enter office and throughout the entirety of their political career, regardless of factors including retirement, redistricting, promotion and cross-institutional (U.S. House or U.S. Senate member) changes. The ideological boots hypothesis (Hibbing 1986; Poole and Rosenthal 1991) proposes that legislators die in their ideological boots.

In a study testing the ideological boots hypothesis, evidence points to the ideological stability of legislators both during member-specific studies examining whether members of Congress change their voting behavior as their personal demands change as well as district-specific studies testing whether representatives change their behavior as their district demands change. The member-specific study (Hibbing 1986; Poole and Rosenthal 1991) focuses on the voting behavior of representatives who are retiring or running for higher office within the U.S. House chamber. This study uses conservative coalition scores to analyze the legislative behavior of members of the Eighty-sixth through the Ninety-seventh Congresses and scores from D-NOMINATE, a congressional roll-call voting database used to measure representative ideology (Poole and Rosenthal 1991), to analyze representative voting patterns from the Eightieth through the Ninety-eighth Congresses. Both studies find no evidence suggesting that members deviate
from voting in line with their personal ideologies when running for higher office within the House or Senate or upon approaching retirement (Poole and Rosenthal 1991, 271-75).

A second component of the member-specific study examines the voting patterns of legislators who have been promoted from the U.S. House chamber to the Senate chamber. Grofman, Griffin and Berry (1995) use scores from Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) to analyze the voting records of fifty-four House members who served in the Senate between the 97th and 102nd Congresses. Analyses (Poole and Rosenthal 1991) find no differences in the voting behavior of representatives promoted from the lower to the upper chamber, confirming that representatives’ personal ideologies extend across legislative institutions (277). As Poole and Rosenthal (1991) illustrate: “Members not only die in their ideological boots, but they do not change them when they run for the Senate” (232).

Finally, several district-specific studies focus on U.S. House members’ voting records before and after redistricting. Using ADA scores, Glazer and Robbins (1983) find significant differences in voting behavior once constituencies have changed. However, Poole and Rosenthal (1991) use D-NOMINATE scores and find that representatives consistently vote according to personal attitudes before and after redistricting. In a later study, Poole and Rosenthal (1991) replicate Glazer and Robbins’ (1983) study and finds ideological consistency using W-NOMINATE scores to measure representatives’ ideology based on roll call votes. Poole and Rosenthal (1991) concludes that “the difference between the two findings is probably due to the coarseness of ADA scores, which are typically based on 20 or fewer roll calls” (52).

Data from studies focusing on the influences affecting legislators’ voting within the United States House reveal that personal ideology exerts a profound influence on representatives’ voting decisions, withstanding the influence of outside factors including cross-institutional change,
career change, retirement and promotion. However, studies also reveal that U.S. House members are acutely aware of the importance of heeding district policy preferences and listening to constituent concerns, sometimes at the expense of voting in accordance with their personal value system. I now turn to literature focusing exclusively on the United States Senate for the purpose of assessing whether personal ideology exerts the same salient impact on roll call voting and how a U.S. senator’s ideology may be measured differently than that of a U.S. House member.

Scholarship focusing exclusively on Congress’s upper chamber also provides support to the *ideological boots hypothesis*. Nelson (2002) evaluates the roles of ideology, constituency and political party and their influences on roll call voting in the U.S. Senate assessing a broad range of environmental issues (518). The study uses a model of political support using voting scores from 1988-1998 from the League of Conservative voters (LCV). The model includes observations from 90 senators on 130 roll call votes. Nelson’s (2002) analysis “decomposes” the scale-adjusted scores into relative weights due to the general electorate, the senator’s support constituency, party leadership and ideology (518). Each senator’s vote accounts for four different interests: (1) the overall preferences of the state’s general electorate (2) preferences of the senator’s specific “support constituency” for the state in question (3) preferences of national party leaders and (4) the senator’s personal ideology (520).

Nelson (2002) retrieves his data from *The National Environmental Scorecard*, published annually by the League of Conservative Voters (LCV). Each *Scorecard* contains the following information: an editorial overview of the session of Congress; average LCV scores by party, state, region and congressional chamber; a description of the roll call votes analyzed for each chamber; the actual votes on each issue; and the LCV’s interpretation of which response is a pro-LVC vote; each legislator’s recorded vote on the policy issue; and the LCV score for each
senator and representative. The raw LCV scores fall between 0 and 100. Higher scores indicate a more “pro-environment” senator. Nelson’s study uses the annual LCV score of each senator (Nelson 2002, 521).

The study uses a generalized least squares (GLS) regression model. Results indicate that a senator’s ideology is “by far the most important variable for voting profiles on environmental issues. Ideology receives a “relative weight” of 0.68 compared to the influence of party leadership with a weight of 0.16 (Nelson 2002, 518).

Overall, the study demonstrates that senate voting on environmental issues has been highly partisan. More salient to this study, however, is that results show “senators place a greater weight on ideology and less weight on the preferences of the general electorate” (Nelson 2002, 519; 528). This study provides support to the idea that personal ideology holds the most important influence over voting behavior when tested against constituent and interest group preferences.

Continuing in the vein of the United States legislature, Hill, Hanna and Shafqat (1997) conduct a study in response to scholarly concerns regarding measurements of legislators’ ideologies. This study tests the usefulness of a new measurement approach using formal content analysis of the news coverage of U.S. Senators’ initial campaigns for office to create an ideology scale (1395). The study provides tests of reliability as well as “convergent and discriminant construct validity” and conventional, indirect measures of senator ideology using interest group ratings and “residualized analyses” measures of legislator ideology (Hill, Hanna and Shafqat 1997, 1395).

For their legislator sample, Hill, Hanna and Shafqat (1997) chose Senators in the 101st Congress due to the mass availability of data on representative samples of the constituents of each of these senators in the 1988-1992 American National Election Study (1399). The principle
news stories chosen from the senators’ initial campaigns for election to the Senate were stories published on each senator in the *Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times* and *Washington Post* in the calendar year if his or her first election and in January of the following year. Thus, the study provides a form of “multiple-source management” (1399).

Overall results indicate that the study’s newspaper content analysis procedure produces ideology scores that demonstrate high reliability and validity and that “are superior for theory-testing purposes” when compared to more commonly used surrogate or indirect measures of legislator ideology (Hill, Hanna and Shafqat 1997, 1395). Additionally, the study demonstrates that the personal liberal or conservative value systems of Senate members are symmetrically associated with their party membership. Thus, on average, Democrats are more liberal than Republican, and non-Southern Democrats are very liberal (1401). Results also indicate that senators’ personal ideologies conform closely to the ideologies of their colleagues, or “co-partisans” (Hill, Hanna and Shafqat 1997, 1402).

Similar to studies of the U.S. House, studies of the upper chamber of Congress confirm the salience of personal ideology in making policy choices. Moreover, findings closely coincide with the manner in which my study conceptualizes the relationship between personal ideology and party membership. Furthermore, new measures indicate that the study of ideology is evolving and producing increasingly accurate projections of the interplay of personal belief systems with policy decisions.

My tack is different. The *self-identification hypothesis* argues that a U.S. legislator will predominantly vote according to his or her personal ideology for two reasons: (1) Legislators identify with the values of their party membership and (2) Legislators prefer their own personal values over those of constituents and interest groups, all things being equal.
The empirical database contains multifarious ideas involving legislators’ self-identification with their party membership. Academic studies of legislators’ roll call voting (Bawn 1999; Froman 1990; Hibbing 1986) have emphasized the substantive degree of party cohesion in the U.S. House and Senate on multiple policy issues and have stressed party membership influence as a significant factor influencing legislative voting. One might be forced to wonder, otherwise, why an individual would join a particular party if he or she disagreed with the party’s values. Such a decision would not make logical sense. Thus, according to the self-identification hypothesis, legislators should vote in accordance with the members of their political party.

Identifying with party membership is closely tied to the idea broached by Aldrich (1995), Cox and McCubbins (1999) and Rohde (1991). Aldrich contends that the stable two-party system in the U.S. Congress acts as a “bonding mechanism,” helping to ensure legislators retain the same personal ideologies as their party membership (81). Consistent with my hypothesis, Aldrich (1995), Cox and McCubbins (1999) and Rohde’s (1991) study finds evidence suggesting that a legislator’s personal ideology depends on a two-party system to assist members in maintaining the values, attitudes and beliefs of either Republicans or Democrats.

The aforementioned literature endorses four hypotheses that can be ascribed to theories regarding the effects of interest group donations, constituent policy preferences and personal ideologies on legislative voting behavior:

Hypothesis 1 (interest group): Interest groups use constituent ideologies (constituent donations) as a medium for influencing policy decisions.

Hypothesis 2 (district threat): District preferences “compete” with representatives’ ideologies. Legislators, fearing the potential repercussions of midterm elections, vote to please their constituents.
Hypothesis 3 (*ideological boots*): Members consistently vote according to their personal attitudes and beliefs from the time they enter congressional office and for the duration of their congressional career, despite factors such as promotion; redistricting; or changes in institution or party system.

Hypothesis 4 (*self-identification*): A representative’s personal ideology exerts the most profound influence on roll call votes. Personal ideology and party membership ideology are synonymous because of a representatives’ ability to “self-identify” with his party values.
CHAPTER 3
A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF PARTY INFLUENCE

When considering the influence of party on legislators’ voting behavior, it is important to consider other methods of measuring partisanship in addition to how often a legislator’s liberal or conservative belief system causes him to vote with his or her party on a specific issue. Simply put, partisanship encompasses more than ideology.

Partisanship may also be construed as party loyalty, which may be perceived as either donations to a legislator from a national party committee or donations to a legislator from colleagues within his party. Leyden and Borrelli (1990) argue that party influence on roll call voting may be interpreted in terms of national party committee donations to U.S. House incumbents. Such donations lead to party cohesion as a voting bloc (343). Leyden and Borrelli claim that although at first blush the monetary assistance that national party committees offer to legislators or candidates within their respective party during an election year may seem insignificant, largely due to campaign finance laws that have placed a ceiling on party contributions to other members of Congress, “we should not be quick to dismiss the party committees’ monetary contributions as unimportant” (343). This is because aside from the fact that national party committees, among them the Democratic National Committee (DNC), the Republican National Committee (RNC), the National Republican Congressional Committee and the National Republican Senatorial Committee to name a few, often exploit loopholes in campaign finance law, interest groups may use party contributions as a guide for selecting recipients of their own donations (343). Most importantly, national party committees often provide House incumbents defending their seats with campaign strategy assistance, “talking points” and the production of campaign advertisements. Reichley (1985), Jacobson (1985) and
Adamany (1984) suggest that monetary donations coupled with congressional campaign assistance contribute to party unity in roll call voting in Congress. In other words, party unity can be bought. The ability to buy party unity and the manifestation of this loyalty in party voting blocs rests on the premise that those who receive financial contributions are inclined to “return the favor,” once they have been re-elected, by voting in line with the party (Reichley 1985, 98).

For the purpose of testing the relationship between national party committee giving and party voting cohesion, Leyden and Borrelli (1990) run two separate regressions. Two models—one for Republican and one for Democratic House incumbents—measure 1983-84 coordinated party expenditures, contributions that national party committees spend on behalf of candidates as the party chooses, and 1983-84 direct contributions, monies from the party that candidates may spend as they choose. The effects of these two independent variables are tested against the 1985 Congressional Quarterly party unity score, which measures roll call voting cohesion in Congress based on party loyalty. Individual scores illustrate the percentage of times a member of the House or Senate has voted in agreement with the party leadership on selected roll call votes during a particular Congress. Results indicate that coordinated party expenditures, measured as a percentage of total funding, have a statistically significant effect on party unity scores for all Republicans but not for Democrats (Leyden and Borrelli 1990, 361-62). The second variable, direct party funding, proved insignificant for both Democrats and Republicans. Leyden and Borrelli conclude that only coordinated expenditures prove significant for Republicans because only coordinated expenditures are spent by the party on behalf of the candidate (362). Republican incumbents must convince a review board composed of their colleagues that their campaigns are really in need of assistance (361). Due to the fact that legislators are aware that coordinated expenditures “come directly from the party, are spent on their behalf” and must be
“asked for and approved by a board of one’s peers,” these donations are considered “special” monetary gifts—by both incumbents and newcomers—received from the party and carefully targeted to help the legislator (361). Hence, there is a greater incentive to demonstrate both appreciation and loyalty to party leadership by voting in line with the party. The fact that both variables prove insignificant for Democrats is explained by the fact that in 1984, the DNC had much less assistance to offer fellow party members.

Leyden and Borrelli (1990) argue that the relationship between national party committee giving and incumbent roll call voting rests on the apparent lack of direct influence that either individual or PAC contributions have on members’ voting behavior. In other words, individual and PAC contributions “are often faceless and carry no clear expectation as to how the contributor expects the elected member to vote” (354). Unlike PAC and individual contributions, party leaders share a chamber with members who have received their donations. In the presence of their colleagues, members might feel obligated to demonstrate their loyalty in the event they need assistance in the next election (355).

In addition to understanding party influence on legislators’ voting through donations from national party committees, Clucas (1997) has found that donations directly from individual legislators have a salient impact on roll call voting, “particularly among freshmen recipients of monetary contributions who foresee a need for financial support in the future, wish to maintain a close relationship with party leadership and who develop a sense of obligation to repay party leaders for their financial influence on their campaign” (179-80). In this scenario, Clucas argues, the financial contributions produce “an exchange” in which recipients of funds “provide support on policy matters as a way to return the favor” (181). Examining the effect of financial contributions of Democratic and Republican members of the House leadership (ie: House
Majority leaders or House Speakers) on the party unity scores of freshman legislators during the 98th and 99th Congresses, Clucas finds that Democratic recipients of money from party leadership on average were likely to have a party unity score more than 18 points higher than Democrats who did not receive funding from party leaders while Republicans produced a unity score 16 points higher than other Republicans (186). Such evidence suggests that monetary donations from party leadership substantially affect party unity in terms of roll call voting.
I have chosen a single-country research design as the most appropriate stratagem to test the self-identification hypothesis. My three independent variables are the personal ideology of United States senators, the policy ideology of the constituents in the senators’ home states and the campaign contributions from interest groups who donate to the representatives. My object in choosing these variables is to discover whether personal ideology, constituent ideology or interest group donations exert the most salient influence on policymaking by comparing the effects of each variable on legislators’ voting behavior.

My dependent variable is the votes of United States senators. By analyzing the extent to which these votes align with senators’ personal ideologies, constituent preferences and interest group donations, I will be able to establish “deterministic causation” and discover which independent variable has the largest causal effect (Gerring 2001, 133).

My case is the United States because my hypothesis is framed around the United States Senate. One potential limitation to choosing a single-case research design is a decrease in representativeness (Gerring 2001, 164). However, a single-case research design for this study will be easier to replicate. It should be acknowledged, however, that a study with multiple cases may result in a different outcome.

My unit of analysis is the individuals in the United States Congress. My population is all representatives in the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate consisting of 435 representatives and 100 senators. My sample is the legislators in the U.S. Senate chamber. Although Gerring (2001) insists that “more evidence is better,” I confine my sample to the U.S. Senate due to time constraints (165). The U.S. Senate is suitable to test the
strength of my hypothesis because it provides access to a broad pool of legislators as well as policy issues that I may not find in individual state legislatures.

The Model

The model for this study is divided into three components designed to measure the effects of each of my independent variables—legislators’ personal ideology, constituent ideology and interest group ideology—on senators’ votes regarding four bills on gun control taken in 2013, one year prior to the 2014 congressional election. Each component of the model gathers quantitative data. I have chosen a quantitative analysis for this model in order to analyze roll call votes based on a numerical scoring system; aggregated state-level data to determine the percentage of each state’s constituency that favors stricter gun control regulations; and monetary figures from interest group donations.

This study analyzes roll call votes on one specific policy issue: gun control. I choose gun control because outside spending by new gun control interest groups that formed in response to highly publicized mass shootings has greatly increased, and senators have found themselves the recipients of substantial campaign contributions from groups and gun PACs favoring either gun rights or gun control. The shooting of then-Representative Gabrielle Giffords (D-AR) in January 2011 brought the gun debate close to home for legislators on both sides of the aisle. Following this shooting, lobbyists on both sides of the gun rights issue began working toward proposed gun control legislation dealing with issues ranging from high-capacity gun magazines to the right to bear arms near members of Congress. Moreover, the gun debate has recently become salient among constituents, especially those with loved ones who were victims of school shootings, such as the December 2012 killing of 26 children and staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. This tragedy prompted the U.S. Senate in 2013 to vote on a series of
measures designed to enforce stricter background checks for gun buyers and tighter regulations for those who own guns. The measures failed. Saliently, those senators voting against it had received substantial contributions from PACs connected with gun rights groups. With Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly’s, formation of Americans for Responsible Solutions, however, in excess of $8 million was donated to support candidates who advocate stronger gun safety initiatives in the 2014 United States House and Senate midterm elections.

One potential drawback to analyzing votes on gun control is that the issue is biased toward liberals. Gun control advocates have favored Democrats almost exclusively with their donations over the past several years. Democrats—much more than Republicans—are inclined to favor increased background checks and gun regulations whereas Republicans are strong defenders of Second Amendment rights. Such an inclination would perpetuate bias in my sample and decrease internal validity, if, for example, all Democrats voted in favor of stricter background checks and gun control regulations. Choosing a biased issue, however, may also benefit my study. Republicans and Democrats whose votes clash with their party on gun control may be construed as being influenced by variables other than ideology, such as constituents or interest groups.

**Measures of Personal Ideology.** The model’s first component measures senators’ personal ideologies and their effects on voting behavior. The model uses DW-NOMINATE, a multidimensional data scaling system used to analyze legislative roll call voting behavior.

DW-NOMINATE is an appropriate measure of personal ideology because, as defined earlier in this study, the personal liberal or conservative value system of legislators is closely aligned with the political values of their party membership. DW-NOMINATE is designed to measure these political values on a liberal-conservative scale.
According to Carroll et al. (2009), the acronym DW-NOMINATE stands for dynamic, weighted, nominal three-step estimation. The program is designed to estimate a probabilistic model of binary choice of legislators (262). The binary choice model is the random utility model developed by McFadden (1976). According to Carroll et al., in this model, a legislator’s utility for voting “Yea” is the sum of a deterministic utility and a random error” (262). Although DW-NOMINATE was designed to measure the ideology of U.S. House and Senate members, it may also be used to analyze any voting body that meets in a series of legislative terms over time, such as the United Nations or European Parliament (263).

I use DW-NOMINATE for the purpose of examining online data from roll call votes taken in April 2013 on four separate pieces of gun control legislation. I chose 2013 in order to gather the most recent dataset possible. This year is also just one year prior to the 2014 congressional midterms when several senators are up for re-election and are inclined to be more susceptible to monetary, constituent and party influence.

DW-NOMINATE operates under the assumption that representatives’ votes on various policy issues can be numerically ranked to determine their most preferred legislative outcome. These preferred outcomes are determined by observing voting choices with representatives exhibiting similar policy preferences ranked more closely than those exhibiting dissimilar voting behavior. In order to achieve an accurate measurement of the ideologies of each U.S. senator and representative, DW-NOMINATE assigns scores to votes on specific issues and applies a numerical rank to each score for the purpose of indicating the extent to which a congressman votes liberal or conservative on an issue. A negative score (-) is liberal; a positive score (+) is conservative. The higher a numerical value, the more conservative a member’s vote; the lower a numerical value, the more liberal the vote. For example, a score closer to 1 is described as a
conservative vote whereas a score closer to -1 is described as liberal. A score at zero or close to zero signifies a moderate vote. Knowing each representative’s ideology on gun control will allow me to compare how much this ideology fluctuates under the influence of constituent ideology on this same issue and under the influence of interest group donations.

DW-NOMINATE has been used in a wide variety of studies for the purpose of examining the roll of personal ideology in African-American roll call voting (Rocca, Sanchez and Nikora 2009) as well as for determining how legislators vote on foreign policy (Uscinski, Rocca and Brenden 2009).

Rather than using DW-NOMINATE to measure representative ideology, Berry, Fording, Ringquist, Hanson and Klarner (1998) construct a state-by-state measure of representative ideology based on the assumption that the average position of the members of a party in a state legislature is equal to the average policy orientation of the party’s U.S. representatives and senators. The study utilizes this assumption in conjunction with Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) interest group scores for members of Congress to compute separate scores for the Republican and Democratic delegations for the House and Senate chambers of each state’s legislature. The study averages these scores to obtain the ultimate measure of state government ideology and does so for each state (Berry, et al., 1998). This measure is much more time consuming and yields a mass of convoluted data that my study avoids using the DW-NOMINATE measure. Furthermore, Berry, et al.,’s study threatens internal validity if ADA and COPE scores fail to accurately reflect the policy preferences of members of Congress.

One limitation to this component of my model is the fact that some members of Congress hold ideologies that are inconsistent with the ideologies of their party. These members form a small
group of representatives that Fleisher and Bond (2004) refer to as “the shrinking middle in the United States Congress” (434). This “shrinking number of partisan non-conformists,” such as moderate and cross-pressured members of Congress, hold policy preferences outside of the “ideological mainstream” of their party (438-39). Representatives in this group may be more prone to yield to constituent or interest group demands than representatives who vote consistently along party lines.

**Measures of Constituent Ideology.** The second component of the model analyzes constituents’ policy ideologies toward stricter gun control regulation on a state-by-state basis. It uses data gathered from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) of 2012. Data drawn from CCES in this study includes the percentage of constituents in each state who favor stricter gun control regulations.

The Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) is an appropriate measure for constituent ideology. As defined above, constituent ideology is the voter’s “self-interest” or personal set of preferences regarding particular policy issues (Wolpert & Gimpel 1998, 241). These preferences are not defined as either liberal or conservative but, rather, they are defined according to a voter’s personal opinion regarding specific legislative issues. As such, an effective method for measuring constituent opinion on a country-wide basis is using data from constituent surveys in each state with results aggregated at the state level.

CCES surveys queried constituents regarding their opinions on gun control policy. Appropriate to my analysis, surveys questioned constituents regarding why they would or would not choose to support policy encompassing gun control issues, such as assault weapons bans, background checks for persons with a history of criminal offenses, regulations on ammunition feeding devices and punishing firearms trafficking—all of which are issues tested in this study.
Moreover, the CCES study is an appropriate measure of constituent ideology because it includes information concerning constituents’ various life experiences within different political, geographical and social contexts. Thus, CCES percentages benefit my analysis of constituent opinions on gun legislation because they account for the experiences that help shape these policy opinions.

CCES has been used by numerous scholars to determine voters’ preferences concerning trade policy (Guisinger 2009) and constituents’ opinions on “symbolic racism” during the 2012 presidential election (Redlawsk, Tolbert and McNeely 2014) and has been strongly advocated by Warshaw and Rodden (2012) as a measure for examining district-level public opinion on policy issues across the board.

The constituents for the CCES study were recruited in the fall of 2012, and surveys on gun control were conducted in October and November of 2012 by YouGov and Polimetrix of Palo Alto, California. Each survey consisted of 120 questions.

Survey interviews were conducted in two waves. The first wave, conducted in October 2012, encompasses the Pre-Election wave and measures constituents’ knowledge of the candidates and demographics. The second wave, the Post-Election wave, includes data on where constituents stood on gun control legislation. The Post-Election wave was conducted two weeks after Election Day, November 6, 2012.

A salient weakness to this component of my research design, which I am uncertain how to remedy, is the fact that constituent ideologies change over time. As these ideologies evolve, the results of my study will differ when the design is replicated. Changing constituent ideologies could decrease internal validity if, for example, constituent ideologies evolve to mirror those of their representatives.
Measures of Interest Group Ideology. This component of my model addresses the influence of interest group contributions on members’ voting behavior. Using data from OpenSecrets.org. I examine the interest group contribution amounts to all incumbent U.S. Senate members between 2007 and 2014, identifying specifically interest groups associated with gun rights and gun control who have donated to senators within this timeframe. I chose the timeframe between 2007 and 2014 in order to ensure that the gun control and gun rights groups who give to the United States senators are groups which donate on a consistent basis, rather than merely making a donation as a one-off.

OpenSecrets.org is the most appropriate and reliable measure for this component of my model. As discussed above, an interest group’s ideology is defined according to the policy preferences or opinions of the constituent groups and organizations it represents. For instance, constituents passionate concerning gun rights give financial contributions to the NRA who then contributes to pro-gun legislators. The amount of money interest groups donate to legislators’ campaigns on constituents’ behalf concerning specific policy issues indicates the liberal or ideological leanings of these interests.

OpenSecrets.org provides data on the size of political donations to individual United States House and Senate members from both gun rights and gun control interest groups as well as groups supporting other legislative issues. This web site also records which types of interest groups and industries support particular legislators and tracks the donations’ effects on voting during elections, all salient indicators of an interest group’s ideology.

McCarty and Poole (1998) were the first to measure interest group ideology with interest group contribution records to legislators without the aid of voting records using their model, PAC NOMINATE (Bonica 2013, 294). The model adapts the spatial model of voting to PAC
contributions “by structuring the choice problem for PACs as a series of binary vote decisions between incumbent challenger pairs, where a contribution to the incumbent is coded as a vote for and a contribution to the challenger is coded as a vote against the incumbent” (Bonica 2013, 294).

I include several types of data in this portion of my model. Firstly, I gather data on the amount of money each U.S. senator receives from gun rights groups. The top interest groups giving to U.S. senators from 2007-2014 donated to Republican Senate members and include the National Rifle Association, which protects Second Amendment Rights, the Sierra Club, which supports Second Amendment rights particularly for outdoor recreation, the Safari Club International, an organization dedicated to protecting gun rights for hunting, and the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an organization with the mission to preserve hunting for sport.

Gun control groups primarily included donations from Americans for Responsible Solutions, an organization formed by former Representative Gabrielle Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly; Everytown for Gun Safety, an organization started by former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg; and the Independence USA PAC, also started by Bloomberg.

I found data indicating which gun control interest groups gave to specific U.S. senators on OpenSecrets.org by searching under Influence and Lobbying from the main homepage, Interest Groups and Gun Control. I then searched under Background and searched under the links for each gun control interest group or PAC within the text providing background on the gun control debate in the United States. I then searched the Targeted Candidates to which each interest groups donated.

Secondly, I examined data on gun rights interest groups. I found this information on OpenSecrets.org by searching under Politicians & Elections from the main homepage; Outside
Spending; and By Candidate. I then clicked on Senate Candidates in the search box and chose an election cycle. Lastly, I chose a senator from the list that appeared and clicked on the member’s name.

Among other control variables, discussed in the next section, the model controls for the amount of money each senator receives from his or her party. These contributions take two forms: the amount of money senators receive from national party organizations, such as the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee, and the amount of money senators receive from individual House representatives and Senate colleagues, such as leadership or committee chairs. The circulation of monetary donations within the party is a salient control variable because, as discussed earlier, money exchanging hands between colleagues in the Senate or between Senate members and national party committees is a substantial indicator of partisanship and provides another measure of party influence other than ideology.

OpenSecrets.org provides data indicating which Republican and Democratic national party committees gave to United States senators and the amounts given to each senator between 2010 and 2014. I chose this time span because these were the years for which the Open Secrets web site provided the most data on party giving relative to this study and also because this timeframe encompasses the period just prior to the succession of votes on gun control legislation that occurred in the spring of 2013. This time period is also just prior to the 2014 congressional midterm elections when party leadership and committees are more likely to give substantial sums of money to their colleagues in the Senate and when Senate members seeking to retain their positions in public office are most likely to be influenced by these donations.
In order to find data regarding the amount of money such national committees as the Democratic and Republican National Committees; the National Republican Congressional Committee; and the National Republican and Democratic Senatorial Committees gave to United States senators, I began at the OpenSecrets.org homepage and searched under Politicians and Elections and then Political Parties. Next, I chose the national party committee of interest along the left-hand sidebar. I then clicked on Recipients and chose an election cycle in order to view the total amount of money donated to particular senators in that specific election year.

For the purpose of gathering data regarding how much money United States senators gave to their colleagues in their respective parties, I searched under Politicians and Elections from the OpenSecrets.org homepage and clicked on Congressional Elections. Next, I typed in the last name of the senator, clicked on the respective link to his name and selected an election cycle. Under the heading Total Raised and Spent, I clicked on the senator’s name again. Beneath the senator’s picture, I clicked on the name of his or her PAC. Under the heading PAC Contribution Data, clicked on the link that reads List Recipients to find the list of senators to which the PAC donated in a specific election cycle.
CHAPTER 5
METHODS, DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

For the purpose of data analysis, I perform an ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. I chose OLS regression, rather than Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) or Ordered Logit Regression (OLR) because OLS regression allows me to compare the effects of my independent variables of interest on my dependent variable in a linear relationship.

Variables & Coding

My dependent variables of interest are the votes that one hundred senators in the 113th Congress cast on four gun control bills pertaining to stricter gun regulations. Due to the fact that my model encompasses four pieces of gun control legislation, my dependent variables are gunbillvote1, gunbillvote2, gunbillvote3 and gunbillvote4. Each of these variables measures how each senator voted on each piece of legislation. Each variable is coded 1 for senators’ “yea” votes and 2 for senators’ “nay” votes.

The four votes on gun control legislation were taken on April 17, 2013, and concern the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013. Gunbillvote1 measures support for Senate Amendment 715 to Senate Bill 649, proposing to ensure that all individuals who should be prohibited from buying a firearm are listed in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, and provides a responsible and consistent background check process. Gunbillvote2 measures Senate support for Senate Amendment 711 to Senate Bill 649, legislation proposing stricter regulation of assault weapons to place limits on the Second Amendment. Gunbillvote3 measures support for Senate Amendment 713 to Senate Bill 649, a bill proposing to increase public safety by punishing and deterring firearms trafficking. Lastly, gunbillvote4 measures senators’ support for
Senate Amendment 714 to Senate Bill 649, a bill mandating tighter regulation of large capacity ammunition feeding devices.

My independent variable of interest is the personal ideology of each Senate member in the 113th Congress. As discussed earlier, DW Nominate issues two scores for each senator and places each score on a continuous liberal-conservative scale. Senideol1 is a continuous variable coded using the senator’s first DW-Nominate score plotted on a liberal-conservative continuum to measure the senator’s party ideology. Senideol2 is also a continuous variable coded using the senator’s second DW-Nominate score and plotted on a liberal-conservative scale. Due to the fact that ideology is measured on a liberal-conservative scale and gun control is an issue largely supported by liberal Democrats, I expect to find a negative correlation between a senator’s ideology and his support for liberal gun control legislation as his ideology becomes more conservative on the liberal-conservative continuum. I also expect ideology will prove significant.

My second independent variable is the ideology of each senator’s constituency aggregated at the state level. The variable representing the policy preferences of each senator’s constituency is constitideol. Constitideol is a continuous variable and is coded using CCES percentages representing the amount of constituents that favor stricter gun control regulations aggregated at the state level. I expect to find a positive correlation between constituent ideology and voting behavior based on the district threat literature that claims senators are influenced by their constituents’ policy preferences due to the fear of losing their positions in public office. However, I expect ideology will exert a larger effect on voting behavior than constituent preferences.

For the purpose of measuring the effect of interest group donations from gun rights and gun control groups on senators’ votes on gun control legislation, my model incorporates three distinct
variables. The first variable, sengunrights, is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the senator did or did not receive money from gun rights groups. It is coded 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no.” The second variable, senguncontrol, is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the senator did or did not receive money from gun control groups. It is coded 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no.” The last variable measuring the influence of interest group donations on senators’ votes is gungroupamount. This is a continuous variable measuring the actual dollar amount of money each senator received from gun rights and gun control groups and is coded on a scale from zero to one hundred.

I expect to find no relationship between interest group giving and senators’ votes on gun control legislation largely due to the fact that interest groups that support U.S. Senate members have already pledged their loyalty and support to senators backing particular policies; consequently, interest group loyalty does not need to be gained by consistently voting in line with their interests. Constituent loyalty, however, hangs in the balance, and senators must cater to district policy interests in order to earn voters’ loyalty in the 2014 election. I therefore expect that constituent ideology will prove significant and interest group giving will prove not significant in terms of voting behavior.

My model controls for several personal characteristics of each senator. The variable senatorage is coded according to the age of the senate member. I include this variable because I am curious whether being younger causes senators to vote in line with their party more often as younger senators may be more likely to be freshmen senators and therefore more inclined to vote with their party for the purpose of forming strong relationships with party members and increasingly the likelihood of promotion. Yearsinsenate measures the number of years the member served in the United States Senate and indicates whether the senator is a first-term
freshman, coded 1, or otherwise, coded 0. I include this variable because studies (Bowen and Scheb 1993) have shown that freshmen are less likely to vote in line with “established ideological blocs” (1). I, therefore, expect this variable will prove not significant. The variable, party, indicates the political party to which the senator is a member. This variable is coded 1 for Republican or 0 for Democrat. I include party as another measure of ideology. Due to the fact that I expect the party ideology and the conservative or liberal ideology of each senator to be highly correlated (Jenkins 2006), examining the statistical similarities and differences between the two variables will shed light on exactly how close a relationship the two variables share. I expect this variable will be significant. The variable, senatorrank, measures the rank or position of the Senate member within the U.S. Senate body, such as majority or minority leader or committee leader. It is coded 1 for a leadership position or 0 for otherwise. I include this variable because within the institution of the United States House, leaders such as former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor and former House Speaker John Boehner have been shown to deviate from the conservative values of the Republican Party on salient issues, such as immigration reform. Controlling for leadership will determine whether Senate leaders behave in the same manner as House leaders. My expectation is that Senate leaders, wishing to cater to public opinion by appearing to take steps to avoid partisan gridlock, will on occasion cast votes that deviate from the party base, such as the Tea Party. Senservstatus measures the status of the senator in terms of continuing service in the U.S. Senate following the 2014 election cycle. This variable indicates whether the senator plans to run in the 2014 election and is coded 1 for “running again” or 0 for “not running again.” I expect, according to Rothenberg and Sanders’ (2000) participatory shirking hypothesis, that lame-duck representatives who are leaving office due to factors such as retirement or career change will legislate according to their personal ideologies because they
incur no risk in voting against their constituency. I therefore expect this variable will prove significant. I do not, however, expect that legislators will vote less often. The variable, senpartyorg, is a continuous variable measuring the amount of money the senator received from national party organizations, such as the RNC or the DNC. It is coded according to actual dollar amounts. I include this variable as a measure of party influence other than ideology. Lastly, senpartycolleague is a continuous variable measuring the amount of money the senator received from individual party members or colleagues. It is coded according to actual dollar amounts. This variable also controls for party influence by offering a measure of such influence other than ideology. I expect that senpartyorg and senpartycolleague will have a significant effect on the way senators vote on gun control legislation due to the fact that senators will feel obligated to return their party’s monetary favors by voting as their party wishes.

**Results**

My first four models test for the effects of interest groups using the total amount of money donated to senators from pro-gun and anti-gun groups. Table 1 shows the effects of ideology, district preferences and interest groups when tested against the effects of the four gun control bills.

**Bill #1: Senate Amendment 715 on Senate Bill 649: Listing Individuals in the Criminal Background Check System.** The first model compares the effects of ideology, district policy preferences and interest group donations on senators’ support for legislation proposing background checks for potential gun owners with criminal histories. The P-values for both ideology and district influences are significant at 0.00. From 100 observations, as a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative on the liberal-conservative continuum, his support for stricter background checks decreases by .01, revealing a negative correlation between conservative ideology and votes on liberal gun control legislation. Additionally, as the percentage of constituents in each state who support gun control increases, a senator’s support for stricter background checks also increases by .02. Thus, although representatives are influenced by their ideology, they are also influenced by their constituencies. As expected, interest group giving is not
significant regarding senators’ support for background checks. This model provides strong support for my hypothesis that a relationship exists between ideology and voting behavior. However, little indication is provided in this model as to whether districts or personal ideology are more salient to Senate members’ roll call votes.

Table 1. Effects of Ideology, Pro- and anti-gun contributions, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without Controls</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background Checks</td>
<td>Assault Weapons Ban</td>
<td>Punishing Firearms Trafficking</td>
<td>Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01*** (.00)</td>
<td>.01** (.00)</td>
<td>.01*** (.00)</td>
<td>.01*** (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>.02*** (.01)</td>
<td>.03*** (.01)</td>
<td>.01 (.01)</td>
<td>.03*** (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro- &amp; anti-gun</td>
<td>2.59 (2.14)</td>
<td>-4.81 (2.18)</td>
<td>-4.59 (2.01)</td>
<td>-5.31 (2.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

Bill #2: Senate Amendment 711 to Senate Bill 649: Regulating Assault Weapons. Using support for the regulation of assault weapons as the dependent variable, I compared the effects of ideology, constituent interests and the total amount of money given to interest groups. Ideology is statistically significant. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for regulating assault weapons decreases by .01, providing support once again that senators’ voting behavior is a reflection of their personal ideology. District results also remain significant. As the percentage of constituents who support gun control in each state increases, senators’ support for regulating assault weapons also increases by .03. Contrary to my expectations, interest groups are significant with a P-value of .03.

Bill #3: Senate Amendment 713 to Senate Bill 649: Punishing Firearms Trafficking. When testing support for the third gun control bill, the effects of the three independent variables produce noteworthy results. Similar to models testing legislators’ support for background check legislation, interest group donations to senators are again not significant. Ideology, however, is a significant indicator. As a senator’s ideology
becomes more conservative, his support for punishing firearms trafficking decreases by .01. Strikingly, district effects lose their significance.

**Bill #4: Senate Amendment 714 to Senate Bill 649: Regulating Large Capacity Ammunition Feeding Devices.** Next, I compared the effects of personal ideology, district policy ideology and interest group donations on roll call votes supporting regulating ammunition feeding devices. The P-values for personal ideology and district ideology are significant at 0.00. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, senators’ support for stricter regulations on ammunition feeding devices decreases by .01. As the percent of constituents who favor gun control legislation in each state increases, senators’ support for regulating ammunition feeding devices also increases by .03, again, a slightly larger effect than personal ideology. Surprisingly, similar to results testing support for regulating assault weapons, interest group contributions are significant with a P-value of .02. As analysis of legislators’ support across the four gun control bills indicates, personal ideology is always statistically significant when either district influence or interest group effects do not matter, providing support for my hypothesis that ideology exerts a prominent influence on roll call voting behavior.

**Changing Perspectives on Interest Groups.** Given that interest group effects are both significant and not significant in models testing support for the four gun control bills, I used multiple variables to test the influence of interest group contributions. In addition to measuring the *total amount* of money given to senators from both gun control and gun rights groups, as the models in Figure 1 show, I also tested the influence of interest groups by measuring the amount of money donated to senators by gun rights groups and the amount contributed by gun control groups. Examining the effects of interest group giving from multiple perspectives increases the internal validity of my analysis.

My next four models test for the effects of interest groups using the amount of money donated to senators from pro-gun groups. Table 2 shows the effects of ideology, district preferences and interest groups when tested against the effects of the four gun control bills.

**Pro-Gun Money.** First, I tested the effects of personal ideology, constituent ideology and money given to senators from gun rights groups on support for background checks. Results indicate that money given to
senators from gun rights groups is significant with a P-value of .03. As gun rights groups give more money to senators, support for stricter background checks for potential gun owners decreases by .21. Ideology is also significant with a P-value of 0.00. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for stricter background checks decreases by .01. District influences are significant with a P-value of 0.00. As the percentage of support in each state for gun control increases, senators’ support for stricter background checks also increases by .02. Notably, when measuring interest group influence using pro-gun donations to senators in this model, the effect of interest groups is substantially larger than when measuring donations using the total amount of money given to senators from both pro- and anti-gun interests.

Next, I tested the effects of personal ideology, district influences and pro-gun donations on support for assault weapons regulation. Contrary to the previous model measuring support for background checks, money from gun rights is not significant. Ideology is significant with a P-value of 0.01. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for regulating assault weapons decreases by .01. District influences are also significant with a P-value of 0.00. As the percentage of constituents who support gun control in each state increases, senators’ support for gun legislation increases by .03.

When testing the influence of the independent variables on senators’ support for punishing firearms trafficking, results indicate that money from pro-gun groups is significant with a P-value of 0.00. As money from gun rights groups increases, support for punishing firearms trafficking decreases by .25. Ideology is significant with a P-value of 0.01. Surprisingly, district influences are not significant.

Finally, I tested support for regulating ammunition feeding devices using the same independent variables and the same measure for interest groups. Similar to the model testing support for banning assault weapons, results indicate that money from gun rights groups is not significant. Ideology is significant with a P-value of 0.01. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for regulating assault weapons decreases by .01. District influences are also significant with a P-value of 0.00. As the percentage of constituents who support gun control in each state increases, senators’ support for gun legislation increases by .03.
Table 2. Effects of Ideology, Pro-gun contributions, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without Controls</th>
<th>Model 1 Background Checks</th>
<th>Model 2 Assault Weapons Ban</th>
<th>Model 3 Punishing Firearms Trafficking</th>
<th>Model 4 Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01*** (.00)</td>
<td>.04* (.00)</td>
<td>.01*** (.00)</td>
<td>.01* (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>.02** (.01)</td>
<td>.03*** (.01)</td>
<td>.01 (.01)</td>
<td>.03*** (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-gun groups</td>
<td>-.21* (.10)</td>
<td>-.18 (.10)</td>
<td>-.25** (.08)</td>
<td>-.18 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

Anti-Gun Money. My next four models test for the effects of interest groups using the amount of money donated to senators from anti-gun interests. Table 3 shows the effects of ideology, district preferences and interest groups when tested against the effects of support for criminal background checks, banning assault weapons, punishing firearms trafficking and regulating ammunition feeding devices.

Across the four models, money from gun control groups is not significant. Perhaps this is because gun control groups contributed less money to senators in 2013 than gun rights groups. Personal ideology is always significant with a P-value of 0.00 and a coefficient of .01.

The results for constituent ideology vary little when testing its effects on support for the four gun control bills. When measuring support for criminal background checks, regulating assault weapons and support for regulating ammunition feeding devices, district influence is significant with a P-value of 0.00. Coefficients shift slightly from .02 to .03. However, when measuring support for punishing firearms trafficking, districts lose their significance.
Table 3. Effects of Ideology, Anti-gun contributions, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without Controls</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Checks</td>
<td>.01***</td>
<td>.01**</td>
<td>.01***</td>
<td>.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Weapons Ban</td>
<td>.01***</td>
<td>.01***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishing Firearms Trafficking</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

Control Variables. My control variables include the personal characteristics of the United States senator, encompassing his age; his party membership, whether he is a freshman or veteran; whether he holds a leadership position; whether he is running again; the amount of money he received from his colleagues through PACs between 2007-2014; and the amount of money he received from party organizations, such as the RNC and the DNC between 2007-2014.

My next four models include the control variables but exclude measurements for party membership. I will explain the reason for excluding this control variable in the section testing the effects of party influence. Table 4 shows the effects of ideology, district preferences and money donated to senators from pro-gun interests when tested against support for criminal background checks, banning assault weapons, punishing firearms trafficking and regulating ammunition feeding devices while accounting for outside factors.

When testing the effects of personal ideology, constituent policy preferences and money from pro-gun interests on support for criminal background checks, results indicate that money given to senators from gun rights groups is significant with a P-value of .03. All other variables held constant, as gun rights groups give more money to senators, support for stricter background checks for potential gun owners decreases by .23. Ideology is also significant with a P-value of 0.00. All other variables being equal, as a
senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for stricter background checks decreases by .01. District influences are significant with a P-value of 0.00. As the percentage of support in each state for gun control increases, senators’ support for stricter background checks also increases by .02, all other variables held constant. None of the control variables is significant.

Table 4. Effects of ideology with controls, pro-gun contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Controls</th>
<th>Model 1 Background checks</th>
<th>Model 2 Assault Weapons Ban</th>
<th>Model 3 Punishing Firearms Trafficking</th>
<th>Model 4 Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>.02**</td>
<td>.03***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-gun</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-elected</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization $</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
<td>(9.97)</td>
<td>(9.97)</td>
<td>(1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague $</td>
<td>-3.67</td>
<td>-1.60</td>
<td>-1.60</td>
<td>-5.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.32)</td>
<td>(2.11)</td>
<td>(2.11)</td>
<td>(2.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

Next, I tested the effects of money from gun rights groups, ideology and district policy preferences on support for regulating assault weapons. Once again, money from gun rights interest groups proved significant with a P-value of .04. As money from gun rights groups increased, senators’ support for regulating assault weapons decreased by .23, all other variables held constant. Constituent ideology also proved significant with a P-value of 0.00. As the percentage of constituents supporting gun control in each state increased, support for assault weapons regulation increased by .03, all other variables held constant. Most striking was the result for ideology. As model 2 in figure 4 shows, for the first time, ideology is not significant. I will elaborate on possible explanations in my discussion of results.
I also examined the effects of money from gun rights interest groups, ideology and district policy preferences on support for punishing firearms trafficking with my control variables. Once again, money from gun rights groups is significant with a P-value of .01. As money from gun rights groups increases, all other variables held constant, support for punishing firearms trafficking decreases by .28. Ideology is significant with a P-value of 0.00. As a senator’s ideology becomes more conservative, his support for gun rights decreases by .01, all other variables held constant. Significantly, constituent ideology loses its significance.

Lastly, I ran a regression testing the effects of money from gun rights interest groups, ideology and district policy preferences on support for regulating ammunition feeding devices. Money from gun rights groups was not significant. Notably, ideology was also not significant. Constituent ideology was significant with a P-value of 0.00.

Having assessed the influence of ideology on voting behavior while using money from pro-gun groups to measure the effects of interests, I now turn to the effects of ideology using money from anti-gun interest groups and controlling for outside influences. Table 5 shows the effects of ideology, district preferences and money donated to senators from anti-gun interests when tested against support for criminal background checks, banning assault weapons, punishing firearms trafficking and regulating ammunition feeding devices while accounting for outside factors.
Table 5. Effects of ideology with controls, anti-gun contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Controls</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background checks</td>
<td>Assault Weapons Ban</td>
<td>Punishing Firearms Trafficking</td>
<td>Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01***</td>
<td>-.01*</td>
<td>-.01***</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>.02**</td>
<td>.04***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-gun</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-elected</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization $</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>-3.58</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-5.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
<td>(9.74)</td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague $</td>
<td>-4.59</td>
<td>-4.57</td>
<td>-2.41</td>
<td>-5.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.36)</td>
<td>(2.44)</td>
<td>(2.20)</td>
<td>(2.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05 * p<.01 ** p<.001 ***

When testing support for criminal background checks, money given to senators from gun control groups is not significant. Ideology and district influences are significant with P-values of 0.00. None of the control variables is significant.

I then ran a regression testing the effects of money from gun control interest groups, ideology and district policy preferences on support for regulating assault weapons. Once again, money from gun control groups was not significant while both constituent ideology and personal ideology are significant. Significantly, constituent ideology loses its significance when models test support for punishing firearms trafficking. Money from gun control groups is also not significant. The fact that ideology is again significant when interests and districts do not matter adds support to my hypothesis that ideology is an important predictor of voting behavior.

Lastly, I ran a regression testing support for regulating ammunition feeding devices, again including the control variables in my model and measuring interest group influence by donations from anti-gun
groups. Money from gun control groups was not significant. Ideology was significant with a P-value of 0.00. Constituent ideology was also significant with a P-value of 0.00.

Considering Party Influence. Studies (Nelson 2002) suggest that the values inherent in a senator’s Republican or Democratic Party membership should be highly correlated with the senator’s own set of internalized liberal or conservative beliefs, which reflect the values of his or her party. For this reason, I expect party may affect the statistical significance of personal ideology to an egregious degree and thereby prove to be a weakness in my model. I have, therefore, excluded this control variable from my models until now.

Table 6. Effects of ideology controlling for party, pro-gun contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Controls &amp; Party</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background checks</td>
<td>Assault Weapons Ban</td>
<td>Punishing Firearms Trafficking</td>
<td>Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
<td>-.01**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02***</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-gun</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.068)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-elected</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization $</td>
<td>-4.35</td>
<td>-7.94</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>-3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.06)</td>
<td>(9.59)</td>
<td>(7.11)</td>
<td>(9.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague $</td>
<td>-3.42</td>
<td>-2.24</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>-3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.07)</td>
<td>(1.93)</td>
<td>(1.53)</td>
<td>(2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-.60***</td>
<td>-.68***</td>
<td>-.82***</td>
<td>-.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-squared</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

As shown in Tables 6 and 7, results testing the effects of ideology, district influences and interest groups, measuring interest groups using pro-gun and anti-gun donations, on support for the four gun
control bills confirm my expectations. While party is always statistically significant with a P-value of 0.00, ideology is never significant. Across all models, the substantial correlation between party membership and a senator’s liberal or conservative ideology effectively “steals” any effect ideology has on senators’ voting behavior. Coefficients for party membership range from -.60 to -.82 across models using pro-gun interest group donations to measure interest group effects while coefficients range from -.71 to -.89 across models using anti-gun donations. Effects for ideology hover at the 0.00 score. Interesting is the significant effect of district influences when measuring support for the assault weapons ban and regulating feeding devices (Table 6 & 7). A senator’s party membership does not decrease the effect districts have on senators’ voting behavior. Pro-gun interest donations are significant (Table 6).

Table 7. Effects of ideology controlling for party, anti-gun contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Controls &amp; Party</th>
<th>Model 1 Background checks</th>
<th>Model 2 Assault Weapons Ban</th>
<th>Model 3 Punishing Firearms Trafficking</th>
<th>Model 4 Regulating Ammunition Feeding Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.01 (.00)</td>
<td>-.01 (.00)</td>
<td>-.01 (.00)</td>
<td>-.01 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>(.01) (.01)</td>
<td>(.01) (.01)</td>
<td>(.01) (.01)</td>
<td>(.01) (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-gun</td>
<td>.17 (.02)</td>
<td>-.07 (.10)</td>
<td>.12 (.00)</td>
<td>-.11 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>-.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>-.03 (.09)</td>
<td>-.11 (.10)</td>
<td>-.02 (.07)</td>
<td>-.03 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.03 (.07)</td>
<td>.06 (.08)</td>
<td>.09 (.06)</td>
<td>.09 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-elected</td>
<td>.21* (.09)</td>
<td>.19 (.10)</td>
<td>.09 (.07)</td>
<td>.17 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization $</td>
<td>6.37 (8.46)</td>
<td>-2.37 (9.11)</td>
<td>2.35 (6.86)</td>
<td>-4.35 (9.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague $</td>
<td>-2.85 (1.93)</td>
<td>-2.80 (2.08)</td>
<td>-4.47 (1.57)</td>
<td>-3.42 (2.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-.71*** (.07)</td>
<td>-.54*** (.08)</td>
<td>-.89*** (.06)</td>
<td>-.60*** (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Squared</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***
Discussion & Implications

Discussion

Ideology. A public official’s liberal or conservative ideology is my key independent variable of interest. According to the ideological boots hypothesis (Hibbing 1986; Jenkins 2000; Poole and Rosenthal 1991), public officials consistently vote according to their personal attitudes and beliefs from the time they enter public office and for the duration of their political career, despite factors such as promotion or career change. My hypothesis, the self-identification hypothesis, draws from this claim, predicting that representatives will “self-identify” with the beliefs and values of the political party to which they are a member and will, consequently, vote according to their conservative or liberal ideology.

Results largely support my hypothesis. Without including the control variables, ideology is statistically significant when tested against the effects of constituent policy preferences and interest group donations on support for all four pieces of gun control legislation examined. Curiously, the co-efficient for ideology in regression models across the four bills holds relatively steady at .01. DW-Nominate measures ideology on a liberal-conservative scale from -1, representing the most liberal score, to 1, representing the most conservative score. Therefore, based on the coefficient, ideology’s effect on senators’ votes on gun control is relatively minimal within the scope of this study. This is surprising given its steady significance throughout the study and the substantial weight that the ideological boots hypothesis places on ideology’s influence.

Ideology has a smaller effect than district influences when the two variables are tested against senators’ support for stricter regulations on ammunition feeding devices and support for assault
weapons regulation, also known as the assault weapons ban of 2013. Coefficients range from .01 for ideology and .03 for district effects. These results support the *district threat hypothesis* (Kau and Rubin 1993) and indicate that senators listen to their districts in order to stay in office.

One explanation for this larger constituent effect is that assault weapon regulation is an issue that has proven more important to constituents due to the recent school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, which occurred just one year before the Senate introduced a bill banning the sale, transfer, importation or manufacture of approximately 150 named firearms.\(^5\) The Elementary School shooting was recorded as the second-deadliest mass shooting by a single person and one of the 25 deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history.\(^6\) It is therefore reasonable to assume that senators would be influenced by their constituents to a greater degree regarding this issue.

Concerning ideology, this study produced some surprising results. For the first time in the study ideology was *not* significant in models *with the control variables* comparing the influence of ideology, districts and money from pro-gun groups *only* on support for regulating assault weapons and support for regulating ammunition feeding devices. Money from pro-gun groups was significant. These findings raise the question: Why are senators’ votes more likely to be influenced by money from interest groups supporting gun rights rather than ideology when support for these two policies is at play?

Regarding assault weapons regulation, we have already seen that district policy preferences play a slightly larger role in influencing support for assault weapons regulation than ideology, implying that the issue is important to the electorate not only because of the Sandy Hook

---


\(^6\) *Ibid.*
Elementary School shooting but also due to the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords in January 2011. Moreover, following the shootings, a battle intensified between pro-gun and anti-gun supporters among constituents. At the center of this battle was assault weapons regulation. If the interest group hypothesis is correct, electorate concerns rouse interest groups to give to senators due to constituents who donate to specific groups as a way of indirectly influencing policy (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kau and Rubin 1993). In 2013, when legislation proposing to increase the rules banning assault weapons failed to pass the Senate, nearly all the senators voting against it had received substantial contributions from gun rights interests groups, which in turn had received money from pro-gun constituents who were not in favor of the assault weapons ban. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that pro-gun senators would be more influenced by pro-gun interests than by their own ideology given the massive influx of donations from pro-gun groups.

Problematic to this explanation, however, is the fact that in models without the control variables testing the effects of ideology, district influences and money from gun rights groups on support for each of the four gun control bills ideology is statistically significant. These results point toward the possibility that ideology’s large P-value results from the control variables themselves rather than from the type of policy issue being tested. Further research is needed to determine the reason for ideology’s significance in these models.

One obvious weakness inherent to ideology in this study is the lack of representativeness regarding policy issues. Due to time constraints, I limited the policy issues examined to gun control legislation. Further research necessitates a broader scope of issues to confirm the significance of ideology on roll call voting behavior. Furthermore, extending my sample to

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
include the 435 members of the United States House would increase the internal validity of my research and provide further confirmation of the significance of ideology to roll call voting. Additionally, examining House members’ roll call voting behavior would allow me to determine whether ideology exerts the same amount of influence on House members’ roll call votes as on Senate members’ votes, enabling me to determine variable significance across institutions.

Constituent Influence. The district threat hypothesis proposes that district preferences “compete” with public officials’ ideologies. Kau and Rubin (1993) claim that although personal values and belief systems may affect roll call voting, district influences hold a stronger influence as politicians, fearing the potential repercussions of Election Day, vote to please their constituents. We have already seen some support for this hypothesis when the effect of district influences is tested against ideology on support for banning assault weapons and support for regulating ammunition feeding devices. In these models, constituent ideology produces larger coefficients than personal ideology.

Conversely, in models not including the control variables, when comparing the effects of ideology, constituent influence and interest groups on support for punishing firearms trafficking, constituent influence is not significant, either when measuring interest group influence using pro-gun group, anti-gun group or pro- and anti-gun group donations. These results lead me to believe that constituent ideology’s large P-value derives from the policy issue at hand. Punishing firearms trafficking, or gunrunning, the illegal smuggling of firearms into the United States, has received bipartisan support in the House and strong support among Senate Democrats. However, gun smuggling may not be an issue of primary concern for constituents, unlike policy issues proposing background checks making it difficult for constituents with criminal records to purchase a firearm. Issues proposing tougher regulations on assault weapons, a policy designed
to promote the safety of school children, also hit closer to home for district voters. Consequently, senators may find it much easier to vote according to their personal beliefs and values and may feel less obligated to listen to their districts if their constituents are not highly mobilized over a particular policy issue.

Noteworthy is that in all of the models—either with or without the control variables—where the effect of district policy preferences is compared with the influences of ideology and interest groups on support for punishing firearms trafficking, interest groups are not significant. Also noteworthy is the fact that ideology is statistically significant both with and without the control variables. These results provide support for my hypothesis that ideology exerts a prominent influence on voting behavior when either constituent ideology or interest group influence or both do not matter.

**Pro-Gun Interest Groups.** The *interest group hypothesis* contends that constituents give to interest groups who support politicians espousing constituents’ policy positions. An influx of constituent donations to particular interest groups, therefore, prompts these groups to support senators with policy positions matching those of their constituent donors (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kau and Rubin 1993).

We have already seen evidence supporting this hypothesis when the effects of ideology, constituent influence and money donated to senators from gun rights groups are tested on support for assault weapons regulation when all control variables except party are included in the model. As discussed above, ideology is not significant.

However, both constituent ideology and money from gun rights groups are significant when tested on support for assault weapons regulation. These two variables are also significant when tested against support for background checks. This is important because both background checks
and assault weapons regulation are salient issues for constituents. In 2013, with the introduction of legislation proposing limiting Second Amendment rights for gun buyers who are former criminals through background checks, gun control interests spent a record $2.2 million on federal lobbying in response to constituent donations to anti-gun groups, a level that stands as a historic record. That same year, after constituents petitioned pro-gun organizations to lobby against the bill, substantial contributions from gun rights interest groups to senators prevented the passage of this legislation.

Conversely, when measuring support for punishing firearms trafficking and support for regulating ammunition feeding devices, either constituent ideology or interest group giving is not significant. This is not surprising given that these policy issues may not garner as much concern from the electorate.

These results imply that where gun control legislation is concerned, under circumstances when interest group donations to senators are prompted by an influx of constituent contributions to these groups, constituent and interest group influence may overshadow the influence of politicians’ personal liberal or conservative beliefs. These results offer support to the interest group hypothesis and run contrary to my prediction that ideological and district influences would subsume any effect from interest group donations.

One drawback to this explanation, however, is the fact that in models without the control variables testing the effects of ideology, district influences and money from gun rights groups, interest groups are not significant when models measure support for assault weapons regulation. Further research is necessary to determine an explanation for these results.

---

9 Ibid.
Anti-Gun Interest Groups. When comparing the effects of ideology, district influence and money from anti-gun groups on support for the four pieces of gun control legislation, money from anti-gun groups is not a significant predictor of voting behavior, either with or without the control variables. Because more money was given to senators from gun rights groups in 2013 than from gun control groups, this could potentially account for the wide scope of large P-values across models.

More importantly to my hypothesis, however, is the explanation that interest groups simply may not matter. In the absence of an unusual amount of push for a particular policy issue from the constituent base, interest groups are relatively powerless in terms of effecting political careers. Interest groups cannot end a politician’s career or smudge his reputation in the Senate. They cannot promote legislators to leadership positions or call for their resignation based on unethical behavior. Aside from contributing funds to re-election campaigns, interest groups have very little influence (Nelson 1991). Senators who realize this pay homage to their districts or vote in accordance with their own policy values.

The “Freshman Effect.” Results for control variables raise two important questions. First, why does being a freshman or veteran matter when measuring support on banning assault weapons when all other control variables are not significant? Although there is a gap in the literature regarding examinations of the impact of being a first-term legislator on roll call votes in either the House or the Senate, Bowen and Scheb (1993) studied what they term the “freshman effect” within the environment of the United States Supreme Court. This effect is termed as a pattern of behavior associated with newly appointed justices (1). The freshman effect hypothesis claims that first-term justices will be less likely than their senior colleagues to vote with “established
ideological blocs,” or party belief systems. Bowen and Scheb examine the behavior of all court justices between 1921 and 1990 and find no evidence of a freshman effect.

If the “freshman effect” hypothesis is null and void, how can one account for the significance of the control variable yearsinsenate on support for assault weapon regulation? The most obvious explanation is that court justices behave differently than legislators. A less obvious explanation is that freshmen, having just been elected to office in the Senate, may be more susceptible to influence from the people who helped elect them. First-year senators who, provided they have not served in the U.S. House prior, have not yet become “career politicians” with their eyes on rising up the ranks of Senate leadership, may be more likely to have the interests of their constituents foremost in their minds. Because constituents harbor strong feelings regarding bans on assault weapons, freshmen senators may be more likely to listen to their districts. As yet, however, more evidence is needed to confirm this claim.

The second question involves why the amount of money given to senators from their colleagues matters when measuring support for regulating ammunition feeding devices. This result was not surprising given studies (Reichley 1985; Jacobson 1985; Adamany 1984) finding that monetary donations from senator’s colleagues in the House and Senate contribute to party unity in roll call voting. Senators who receive financial contributions feel obligated to return the favor once they have been re-elected by voting in line with the party. This is especially true when senators have received the money by formally requesting finances from their colleagues during a committee hearing. Once a senator has made a case for his financial need, his colleagues on the committee decide whether to allot a specified sum to cover a particular expense. The money then becomes a “special” favor spent by the party on his behalf (Leyden and Borrelli 362).
**Personal Ideology and Party Membership.** The effects of party membership were not surprising. Given the high degree of correlation between party membership and a senator’s personal ideology, party subsumes the effect that personal ideology has on senators’ voting behavior.

The debate regarding the role of party and ideology in influencing voting behavior is ongoing. Some scholars (Kau and Rubin 1979; Kau, Keenan and Rubin 1982) argue that legislators’ set of personal values give rise to parties, which in turn drive roll call voting. Other studies (Jenkins 2006) find that the personal beliefs of legislators are in “constant conflict” with their partisan affiliations (235).

Jenkins (2006) examines the impact of party membership and personal ideology on voting behavior using survey-based measures of the legislative ideology of state candidates to examine voting in five state legislatures from 1993-98. The five states were surveyed for the Election Dynamics Project (238). She finds that, although party and ideology both exert “consistent and large effects” on voting behavior and are indeed “inexorably intertwined,” party membership exerts a more substantial impact (236; 238).

OLS regression results confirm Jenkins’ (2006) analysis with the extremely large coefficients for party when tested against support for the four gun bills. And although the high correlation between party affiliation and personal beliefs may, in a sense, be said to belie the effects of personal ideology in this study, these results nevertheless comment on the relationship between the two variables by offering support for the importance of partisan affiliation.

Party’s substantial effect does not by any means diminish ideology’s importance to the study of voting behavior. A respectable amount of evidence exists to support either claim that personal ideology and party are in consistent conflict or that the two variables are highly correlated. The purpose of this study is not to decipher whether party or personal ideology exerts the larger effect
on roll call voting but rather to achieve a more cognizant understanding of the interaction between the two variables and, in so doing, grasp the larger picture of personal ideology’s role in voting behavior. I present my conclusions on this research question in the next section.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Widespread contention surrounds the manner in which United States politicians make legislative decisions at the federal level. The self-identification hypothesis provides fresh insight into the prominent theoretical explanations regarding congressional voting behavior. This hypothesis proposes that a representative’s personal ideology maintains the most robust influence over legislative voting in Congress and concurs with previous scholarship (Kau and Rubin 1979; Kau, Keenan and Rubin 1982; Segal, Cameron and Cover 1992; Kalt and Zupan 1984) that a member’s personal belief system is synonymous with the values of his or her political party. The ideological boots hypothesis, in contending for the consistent, steady influence of personal ideology on representatives’ votes, supplements the self-identification hypothesis. Results from this study support both of these hypotheses.

My hypothesis fills a gap in this literature by providing a hypothetical explanation for why members never stray from party values, arguing that the rewards of party loyalty outweigh the risks of ideological shirking, especially if representatives believe they can develop trust with their constituency by establishing a consistent liberal or conservative voting record on which their district can depend, if not agree.

Although numerous questions regarding legislative behavior remain, several significant conclusions can be drawn from the results of this analysis that shed some light upon the hypotheses discussed. First, the findings suggest that both constituencies and the personal beliefs of legislators exert a significant influence over United States senators’ voting behavior. Results for constituent influence when compared against personal ideology offer some support for the district threat hypothesis. For instance, in models including the control variables and comparing
the influences of ideology, districts and money from pro-gun groups to senators, districts are significant when tested against support for assault weapons regulation and support for regulating ammunition feeding devices. Ideology, however, is not significant on both counts, offering support for the claim that legislators do listen to their districts.

Interest groups play a smaller role in influencing voting decisions. First, within the scope of this study, little support exists for the interest group hypothesis. Evidence for this claim is largely confined to models measuring senators’ support for assault weapons regulation and support for background checks when controlling for other factors. However, further research encompassing a broader range of issues could easily tip the scales. As more policies that are important to constituents rise to the surface, more opportunities for district mobilization, and hence, substantial constituent donations to interest groups backing particular senators, may reveal more occasions by which interest groups play a strong hand in voting behavior. On the whole, interest groups were not significant in this study.

Where is ideology? Where does ideology fall in the big picture? Analysis in this study indicates that the effect of personal ideology remains significant when compared with the influences of both interest groups and district policy preferences and when tested against senators’ support for enforcing stricter rules for background checks, banning assault weapons, punishing firearms trafficking and regulating ammunition feeding devices. Moreover, results indicate that when either district influences or interest groups do not matter, ideology is almost always statistically significant. These findings provide support for the self-identification hypothesis that ideology does indeed exert a prominent influence on voting behavior.

A broader study testing legislative support for certain policies across the U.S. House and Senate and encompassing a wider range of policy issues would increase the validity of this
finding in large measure. Hence, it remains unclear the extent to which legislators’ personal beliefs and values influence roll call votes.

Nonetheless, the study has been successful in uncovering an important finding: In order to explain some of the differences in the effect of personal ideology, constituent ideology and interest group donations on voting behavior, the key lies not in determining which variable exerts the most prominent effect but in identifying the situations under which each has the deepest impact. Ideology, in this study, has the strongest effect when tested against support for issues less important to constituents, such as punishing firearms trafficking and regulating ammunition feeding devices. Conversely, districts and interest group donations to senators exert the most robust effect when senators vote on issues more important to constituents, such as enforcing background checks for potential gun buyers with criminal histories or banning assault weapons in an effort to prevent school shootings.

On a broader scale, this study has important implications for how social scientists construe democratic representation in Congress. Should further research on this study produce results largely favoring the influence of ideology as the key influence on legislative voting behavior, questions will arise regarding ideology’s niche within the framework of democracy and more poignantly, how the democratic ideal of “rule by the people” can be fully realized within a government system in which ideology subsumes the general will of the electorate. Political scientists will need to take steps to examine whether American government is built upon self-rule or self-identification with an ideology that belies the democratic system.
Bibliography


VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Sara R. Browning

sara.peoriamagazines@yahoo.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Arts, English Literature, May 2003

Southern Illinois University Carbondale


Major Professor: Professor Kenneth Mulligan