Public Support for Bipartisanship in Congress: Who Compromises, How Much, and Under What Conditions?

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Public Support for Bipartisanship in Congress: Who Compromises, How Much, and Under What Conditions?

Partisanship in U.S. politics appears to have increased dramatically over the last few decades (McCarty et al. 2006; Theriault 2008). At the same time, however, public opinion surveys have found that the public espouses a desire for bipartisanship (e.g., Pew 2010; CBS 2009; Gallup 2010),\(^1\) that partisanship damages the collective reputation of Congress (Ramirez 2009), and that a poor reputation of the institution hurts individual members electorally (Jones 2010). Similarly, scholars have found that extreme partisanship by individual members has electoral costs (Carson et al. 2010; Canes-Wrone et al. 2002). This discrepancy suggests either a breakdown in responsiveness by elected officials to what the public wants (Fiorina and Abrams 2009) or that scholars are mischaracterizing what the public wants, at least with respect to bipartisan cooperation.

This mischaracterization of mass opinion may stem from the use of terms like “bipartisan” and “compromise” in divergent and conflicting ways. Bipartisanship might be perceived as a focus on places of pre-existing common ground; a concession by both parties to meet in the middle; or a desire for the “other” side to come closer to “your” side. Without flushing out what constitutes bipartisanship or examining the limitations of public support for bipartisan cooperation\(^2\), we currently lack an understanding of which definition the public uses or whether different segments of the population use different definitions. To assess how public preferences drive legislative behavior or whether legislative behavior deviates from democratic ideals of responsiveness, we need to better understand what, when, and how the public wants political elites to engage in bipartisanship.

Although many studies have tried to understand the causes of polarization within Congress itself, experimental studies of mass preferences for bipartisan cooperation are lacking. Nonetheless, recent work suggests that it is important to consider the implications of public preferences for bipartisanship. For instance,

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\(^1\) For example, a CBS poll (2009) asked, “Looking ahead, which comes closer to your view? The Democrats won a majority in Congress and should generally try to pass legislation that they think is right for the country, even if Republicans don't support it. The Democrats should generally try to pass legislation that receives bipartisan support from Republicans in Congress.” 60% of respondents chose the bipartisan option.

\(^2\) For instance, an analysis of the word “bipartisan” in survey questions on Congress or the President in Roper’s iPoll database indicates that 67 questions provide no definition or a vague usage, 5 questions use bipartisan to indicate giving up one’s beliefs, and 11 questions use bipartisan to indicate mutual agreement. Similarly, of survey questions using the word “compromise,” 136 offer no definition or a vague usage, 50 use the term to suggest compromise involves giving up one’s beliefs, and 28 are about mutual agreement.
Harbridge and Malhotra (2011) find that although bipartisanship improves opinions of Congress as an institution among all types of respondents, strong partisans approve of individual members more when they engage in partisanship rather than bipartisanship. This work suggests that strong partisans may have an image of institutional bipartisanship that involves the other side compromising and moving toward their favored position. It also demonstrates an individual-level relationship between attachment to political party and preference for bipartisanship. Recent polls further suggest that partisanship influences preferences for bipartisan compromise. These responses indicate that even though the public expresses a desire for greater bipartisanship in an abstract sense, achieving bipartisan cooperation in politics is unlikely if the public views it as the “other” side needing to come closer to “their” side. In this case, responsiveness results in even greater acrimony.

Building off of these ideas, we propose three experiments to further understand how public preferences reinforce polarization by examining the conditional nature of public support for bipartisan cooperation. In particular, we seek to contribute the following: (1) a better understanding of what the public means by bipartisan cooperation and the implications this has on policy formation and the behavior of elected officials, and (2) whether there are institutional- and individual-level factors that also moderate support for bipartisan cooperation. These include majority control, party identification, strength of identification, and issue salience.

**Study Design and Hypotheses**

We propose a set of three short Internet-based survey experiments to examine: (1) whether bipartisanship increases support for public policies, (2) how the public defines bipartisanship, and (3) the effect of majority party control on support for bipartisan legislation. In each case we focus on relatively low-salience issues where the experimental conditions are realistic. Full question wordings and the experimental designs can be found in Appendix 1. Here, we describe the designs conceptually and lay out our hypotheses.

**Experiment #1: Do citizens’ prefer bipartisan legislation?** In the first experiment, we present respondents with a piece of legislation that makes it easier for businesses to obtain loans. We randomly assign

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3 For instance, a CNN/Opinion Research Poll (2010) asked, “If the two parties can develop bipartisan solutions to the country’s problems, which party to you think should give up more of the proposals it supports – the Democratic Party of the Republican Party?” 80% of Republican respondents thought the Democrats should give up more, while 65% of Democratic respondents through the Republicans should give up more.
respondents to one of six conditions where we vary the composition of the coalition supporting the bill. In three conditions, the coalition is evenly split 46-46 and in the other three conditions it is less divided at 68-24. Within each of these coalition sizes, we vary the partisan makeup of the coalition (bipartisan, mainly comprised of Democrats, or mainly comprised of Republicans) and measure the effect of the treatment on three dependent variables: support for the legislation, assessment of the quality of the legislation, and how bipartisan respondents perceive the supporting coalition. By conditioning on the size of the majority, we can isolate the effect of the bipartisan nature of the coalition separate from the overall support for the legislation. We hypothesize that the coalitional structure of the various versions of the bill will be interpreted as party cues. In other words, partisanship should moderate the effect of the treatments. Conditional on a given overall vote (e.g. 68-24 or 46-46), Democrats/Republican respondents will be more likely to support the bill when they observe more Democrats/Republican members supporting the bill. We predict that a bipartisan coalition per se will not improve support for legislation because citizens will interpret the legislation based on the partisan cue revealed by the coalition. The alternative hypothesis is that all respondents—regardless of partisanship—are more supportive of the legislation when it is presented as bipartisan.

Experiment #2: Do people think bipartisanship means balanced compromise or wanting the other side to come closer to your side? In this experiment, we present respondents with proposals to cut NASA spending from both Congressional Republicans and Democrats and then randomize the outcome of the negotiation across three conditions: (1) the outcome being closer to what the congressional Democrats wanted; (2) the outcome being closer to what the congressional Republicans wanted; and (3) the outcome being in between the two positions. Respondents are then asked to assess the degree of bipartisanship in the outcome, whether each of the parties behaved in a bipartisan manner during the negotiations, and their preferred outcome to the negotiations. We hypothesize that evaluations of bipartisanship are biased toward one’s own party. That is, a compromise by one’s own party may be viewed as bipartisan but a similarly-sized compromise by the other party may not be viewed as bipartisan. We also expect respondents to view a bipartisan compromise as one in which the opposite party moves to their side, as opposed to both parties meeting in the middle.
Experiment #3: Do institutional advantages influence attitudes toward bipartisanship and compromise?

In this experiment, we manipulate whether respondents are associated with the majority or minority party in Congress to assess how they feel about bipartisan cooperation with the majority party. To do this, we leverage the current political arrangement to randomize whether respondents are told about a bill to increase the accessibility of higher education introduced by the leadership in either the House (with Republicans in the majority) or the Senate (with Democrats in the majority). In both conditions, respondents are told about both Democratic and Republican proposals. The only difference in the prompts is whether respondents are told that the legislation is being considered in the House or in the Senate, with the corresponding majority party. Respondents are then asked which party should give up more of its proposals in order to reach an agreement. If respondents care about how institutions distribute power (following electoral outcomes), co-partisans may expect greater bipartisan compromise from their own party (and less from the other party) when their party is in the minority relative to when their party is in the majority. The alternative is that people care only about partisan advantage and thus expectations of which party compromises is not dependent on whether their party is in the majority or in the minority; in both conditions, respondents may think the opposing party should give up more of its proposals. As explained above, we expect partisanship (and accordingly strength of partisanship) to moderate the treatment effects. Additionally, issue importance may be an important moderator. Respondents for whom an issue has lower salience may be more willing to support bipartisanship than those with a higher personal salience given the perceived stakes.

Pilot Study

As part of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, we conducted a pilot study of 1000 respondents of the first proposed experiment to demonstrate the plausibility of our hypotheses as well as the soundness of the experimental designs. The full question wordings of the pilot study are presented in Appendix 2. We asked respondents to evaluate legislation reauthorizing and expanding the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and randomly presented descriptive blurbs manipulating Republican support for the program. After the blurb, respondents were asked about their support for the legislation and their perceived
quality of it. As shown in Figure 1, overall, the bipartisan version of the SCHIP legislation significantly enhances people’s support of it and their assessment of its quality by 10 percentage points ($p < .001$). As shown in Figure 2, we obtained similarly strong estimates for the perceived quality of legislation (7 percentage points, $p < .001$). However, the positive treatment effect is primarily concentrated among Republicans and is close to zero among Democrats. These results are consistent with the Republican support of the bipartisan bill being interpreted as a party cue. One potential confound is that respondents may be affected by the unanimity of the bipartisan condition rather than the party cue. Because Democratic support does not increase in the bipartisan/unanimous condition, this is likely not the case. Nonetheless, an improved feature of the proposed design over the pilot study is that this confound is accounted for by keeping the final passage vote constant and simply varying the partisan composition of the coalitions. Another limitation of the pilot study is that we can only observe the party cue in one direction since the bipartisan treatment adds Republicans to the coalition. The proposed experiment corrects for this by including a condition of lopsided Republican support. Nonetheless, this pilot study demonstrates that treatments regarding the bipartisanship of legislation can meaningfully shift respondent attitudes and that the pattern of results is what we would expect if party cues drive perceptions of bipartisanship.

**Study Requirements**

This study will require 800 respondents and 21 units (18 questions plus three vignettes). The experiment with the largest number of conditions (Experiment #1) has the least statistical power so we use this one to determine study requirements. Based on the pilot study (which gives us expectations about the treatment effect and standard deviations), we can observe a .145-unit treatment effect (on a normalized 0-1 scale) within a given partisan group (assuming a power of .90, a standard deviation of .20 in each group, and a two-tailed .05 level) with only 80 respondents per condition. Assuming that partisans make up 60% of the sample, we would need a total of 800 respondents (~133 respondents per condition). $^4$

$^4$ This is a conservative estimate since we are not accounting for the correlation between partisan groups. Calculating the power of a difference-in-difference test is complicated because it requires some expectation about the structure of the
References


variance-covariance matrix. Nonetheless, if we observe a significant, positive effect in one partisan group and a significant, negative effect in the other partisan group, then the difference in the treatment effects is likely significant.


Figure 1: Effect of Bipartisanship Treatment on Support for SCHIP Legislation (Pilot Study)
Figure 2: Effect of Bipartisanship Treatment on Perceived Quality of SCHIP Legislation (Pilot Study)

[Bar graph showing the treatment effect of the "bipartisan" condition for Full Sample, Republicans, Independents, and Democrats.]
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

[All comments to TESS survey administrator or notes for the researcher are bracketed.]

[Do not put question numbers on the screen. Question numbers are for researcher reference.]

[As is evident in the questionnaire, we do not offer respondents “don’t know” response options. If a respondent attempts to go to the next screen without answering one or more questions, the following text should appear in red at the top of the screen:

(If there are two or more questions on the screen): “We noticed that you didn’t answer all the questions on this page. It would be a big help to us if you would be willing to answer them all, but if you would prefer not to, you can push “next screen” and go ahead to the next questions. Thank you.”

(If there is only one question on the screen): “We noticed that you didn’t answer the question on this page. It would be a big help to us if you would be willing to answer it, but if you would prefer not to, you can push “next screen” and go ahead to the next questions. Thank you.”

If the respondent then attempts to go to the next screen a second time, the next screen should appear.]

[Randomly assign half of the respondents to receive Form A of the questionnaire and the other half to receive Form B. The main difference between the forms is that for some questions, the response choices are reversed. The ordering of responses for the forms is explained in the questionnaire. For most questions, the question stem wordings are the same for both forms. Include in the dataset a variable for the form the respondent received. Code respondents who received Form A as “0” and respondents who received Form B as “1.”]

[Unless otherwise indicated respondents should only be allowed to fill in one radio button per question.]

[Each page below is a separate screen.]
POTENTIAL MODERATORS OF THE TREATMENT EFFECT: PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND ISSUE IMPORTANCE. ALTHOUGH PARTY IDENTIFICATION IS IN THE RESPONDENT’S PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE, WE WOULD LIKE TO REFRESH THIS QUESTION GIVEN ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE STUDY.

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a:

[FORM A:]
- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other

[FORM B:]
- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other
2A. Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat/Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG [Democrat/Republican]?

- Strong [Democrat/Republican]
- Not very strong [Democrat/Republican]

[FORM A:]

2B. Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party

[FORM B:]

2B. Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Republican Party
- Democratic Party
3. Some issues are personally important to people while others are not.

How important is the issue of small business loans to you personally?

[FORM A:]

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not important at all

[FORM B:]

- Not important at all
- Not too important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Extremely important
4. How important is the issue of spending on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to you personally?

[FORM A:]
- Extremely important
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not important at all

[FORM B:]
- Not important at all
- Not too important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Extremely important
5. How important is the issue of the affordability of higher education to you personally?

[FORM A:]

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not important at all

[FORM B:]

- Not important at all
- Not too important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Extremely important
[RANDOMIZE ORDER OF PRESENTATION OF EXPERIMENTS #1, #2, AND #3]

[EXPERIMENT #1: QUESTIONS #6-#9]


Recently, the U.S. Senate considered the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, which funded tax cuts to
small businesses and made it easier for them to obtain loans. There are 100 members of the U.S.
Senate, 53 Democrats and 47 Republicans. 46 Democrats and 46 Republicans voted on the Small

[A CONDITIONS]

A1. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 34 Democrats voted for the bill and 12 Democrats voted
against it. 34 Republicans voted for the bill and 12 Republicans voted against it.

A2. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 34 Republicans voted for the bill and 12 Republicans voted
against it. 34 Democrats voted for the bill and 12 Democrats voted against it.

A3. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 12 Democrats voted against the bill and 34 Democrats voted
for it. 12 Republicans voted against the bill and 12 Republicans voted for it.

A4. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 12 Republicans voted against the bill and 34 Republicans
voted for it. 12 Democrats voted against the bill and 12 Democrats voted for it.

[B CONDITIONS]

B1. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 46 Democrats voted for the bill and 0 Democrats voted
against it. 22 Republicans voted for the bill and 24 Republicans voted against it.

B2. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 22 Republicans voted for the bill and 24 Republicans voted
against it. 46 Democrats voted for the bill and 0 Democrats voted against it.

B3. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 0 Democrats voted against the bill and 46 Democrats voted
for it. 24 Republicans voted against the bill and 22 Republicans voted for it.

B4. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 24 Republicans voted against the bill and 22 Republicans
voted for it. 0 Democrats voted against the bill and 46 Democrats voted for it.
[C CONDITIONS]

C1. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 22 Democrats voted for the bill and 24 Democrats voted against it. 46 Republicans voted for the bill and 0 Republicans voted against it.

C2. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 46 Republicans voted for the bill and 0 Republicans voted against it. 22 Democrats voted for the bill and 24 Democrats voted against it.

C3. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 24 Democrats voted against the bill and 22 Democrats voted for it. 0 Republicans voted against the bill and 46 Republicans voted for it.

C4. The bill passed on a vote of 68-24. 0 Republicans voted against the bill and 46 Republicans voted for it. 24 Democrats voted against the bill and 22 Democrats voted for it.

[D CONDITIONS]

D1. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 23 Democrats voted for the bill and 23 Democrats voted against it. 23 Republicans voted for the bill and 23 Republicans voted against it.

D2. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 23 Republicans voted for the bill and 23 Republicans voted against it. 23 Democrats voted for the bill and 23 Democrats voted against it.

D3. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 23 Democrats voted against the bill and 23 Democrats voted for it. 23 Republicans voted against the bill and 23 Republicans voted for it.

D4. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 23 Republicans voted against the bill and 23 Republicans voted for it. 23 Democrats voted against the bill and 23 Democrats voted for it.

[E CONDITIONS]

E1. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 46 Democrats voted for the bill and 0 Democrats voted against it. 0 Republicans voted for the bill and 46 Republicans voted against it.

E2. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 0 Republicans voted for the bill and 46 Republicans voted against it. 46 Democrats voted for the bill and 0 Democrats voted against it.

E3. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 0 Democrats voted against the bill and 46 Democrats voted for it. 46 Republicans voted against the bill and 0 Republicans voted for it.

E4. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 46 Republicans voted against the bill and 0 Republicans voted for it. 0 Democrats voted against the bill and 46 Democrats voted for it.
[F CONDITIONS]

F1. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 0 Democrats voted for the bill and 46 Democrats voted against it. 46 Republicans voted for the bill and 0 Republicans voted against it.

F2. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 46 Republicans voted for the bill and 0 Republicans voted against it. 0 Democrats voted for the bill and 46 Democrats voted against it.

F3. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 46 Democrats voted against the bill and 0 Democrats voted for it. 0 Republicans voted against the bill and 46 Republicans voted for it.

F4. The bill passed on a vote of 46-46. 0 Republicans voted against the bill and 46 Republicans voted for it. 46 Democrats voted against the bill and 0 Democrats voted for it.
6. Would you say that you generally favor or oppose this legislation?

[FORM A:]

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

[FORM B:]

- Strongly oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Somewhat favor
- Strongly favor
7. How would you describe the quality of the legislation?

[FORM A:]
- Very high quality
- Above average quality
- Average quality
- Below average quality
- Very low quality

[FORM B:]
- Very low quality
- Below average quality
- Average quality
- Above average quality
- Very high quality
8. How much **time and effort** do you think went into crafting this legislation?

[FORM A:]

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None

[FORM B:]

- None
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal
9. How “bipartisan” is the proposed legislation?

[FORM A:]
- Extremely bipartisan
- Very bipartisan
- Somewhat bipartisan
- Slightly bipartisan
- Not bipartisan at all

[FORM B:]
- Not bipartisan at all
- Slightly bipartisan
- Somewhat bipartisan
- Very bipartisan
- Extremely bipartisan
[EXPERIMENT #2: QUESTIONS #10-#15]

[RANDOMLY ASSIGN RESPONDENTS TO A/B/C]

President Obama and the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives are currently negotiating on how much spending to cut from NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) in 2012. In 2011, NASA’s budget was approximately $19 billion.

President Obama and the Democrats propose cutting $200 million from NASA.

Speaker of the House Boehner and the Republicans propose cutting $400 million from the budget.

A. Suppose that the outcome of the negotiations was that $375 million in NASA spending was cut.

B. Suppose that the outcome of the negotiations was that $225 million in NASA spending was cut.

C. Suppose that the outcome of the negotiations was that $300 million in NASA spending was cut.
10. Would you say that you generally favor or oppose the negotiated NASA budget?

[FORM A:]
- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

[FORM B:]
- Strongly oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Somewhat favor
- Strongly favor
11. How “bipartisan” is the negotiated NASA budget?

[FORM A:]

- Extremely bipartisan
- Very bipartisan
- Moderately bipartisan
- Slightly bipartisan
- Not bipartisan at all
12. To what extent did Speaker Boehner and the Republicans behave in a bipartisan fashion during the negotiations?

- Extremely bipartisan
- Very bipartisan
- Moderately bipartisan
- Slightly bipartisan
- Not bipartisan at all
13. To what extent did President Obama and the Democrats behave in a bipartisan fashion during the negotiations?

- Extremely bipartisan
- Very bipartisan
- Moderately bipartisan
- Slightly bipartisan
- Not bipartisan at all
14. How much of a cut to NASA’s budget would you consider to be a “bipartisan” outcome?

[PRESENT SLIDER BETWEEN “Cut $200 million” and “Cut $400 million”]
15. If you had to choose, how much would you cut NASA’s budget?

[PRESENT SLIDER BETWEEN “Cut $200 million” and “Cut $400 million”]
[EXPERIMENT #3: QUESTIONS #16-#18]

[RANDOMLY ASSIGN RESPONDNETS TO A/B]

Next we would like to tell you about some proposed reforms to make higher education more affordable.

Democrats in Congress would like to increase the accessibility and affordability of higher education by eliminating the ‘middle-man’ in student loans – private lenders who earn interest from student loans - and by increasing the amount of direct federal loans to students, particularly at community colleges.

Republicans in Congress would also like to increase the accessibility and affordability of higher education. They propose expansion of Education Savings Accounts, by which millions of families now save for college and receive tax cuts for their education-devoted investments.

A. The issue of higher education affordability is currently being debated in the House, where Republicans hold the majority.

B. The issue of higher education affordability is currently being debated in the Senate, where Democrats hold the majority.
[IF QUESTION #1 = “REPUBLICAN” OR QUESTION #2B = “REPUBLICAN, ASK QUESTION #16A]

[IF QUESTION #1 = “DEMOCRAT” OR QUESTION #2B = “DEMOCRATIC, ASK QUESTION #16B]

[IF QUESTION #2B = NO RESPONSE, RANDOMIZE RESPONDENT TO RECEIVE EITHER QUESTION #16A OR #16B]

16A. Which do you think should be a higher priority for Republicans in Congress right now—working in a bipartisan way with the Democrats in Congress or sticking to Republican positions on higher education affordability policies?

[FORM A:]
- Work in a bipartisan way
- Stick to positions

[FORM B:]
- Stick to positions
- Work in a bipartisan way

16B. Which do you think should be a higher priority for Democrats in Congress right now—working in a bipartisan way with the Republicans in Congress or sticking to Democratic positions on higher education affordability policies?

[FORM A:]
- Work in a bipartisan way
- Stick to positions

[FORM B:]
- Stick to positions
- Work in a bipartisan way
17. If the two parties can develop bipartisan solutions to the issue of higher education affordability, which party do you think should give up more of the proposals it supports—the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

[FORM A:]

- Democratic Party should give up more
- Republican Party should give up more

[FORM B:]

- Republican Party should give up more
- Democratic Party should give up more
18. Which of the following roles would you like to see your elected representative play in this policy area?

[FORM A:]

- Work in a bipartisan way and be willing to compromise with others to make progress on important problems
- Stand firm with their party on issues and stick to their principles without compromise

[FORM B:]

- Stand firm with their party on issues and stick to their principles without compromise
- Work in a bipartisan way and be willing to compromise with others to make progress on important problems
Appendix 2: Pilot Study Experiment

Experimental Design

One-half of respondents were randomly assigned to read the following blurb:

Last year Congress introduced and discussed legislation to reauthorize and reform the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The program is designed to help children from low-income families get necessary medical services. Some people say that without SCHIP, health care will end up costing the states more in the long run because of increased emergency care. Other people say that SCHIP pulls already insured children out of coverage through private insurance companies, resulting in a crowding out of private insurers. The legislation received the support of 97% of Democrats and 95% of Republicans.

The second experimental group read the same blurb except the last sentence read: “The legislation received the support of 97% of Democrats and 22% of Republicans. Hence, the first condition presented the SCHIP legislation as a bipartisan bill whereas the second presented it as a bill marked by partisan division.

Dependent Variables

Support for Legislation. “Would you say you generally favor or oppose this legislation?”
(response options: “strongly favor,” “slightly favor,” “slightly oppose,” and “strongly oppose”)

Perceived Quality of Legislation. “How would you describe the quality of the legislation?”
(response options: “very high quality,” “somewhat high quality,” “neither high or low quality,” “somewhat low quality,” or “very low quality”)

5 The order in which the arguments were presented was randomized. Half of respondents were first presented the sentence in favor of the legislation. The other half of respondents were first presented with the sentence arguing against the legislation.

6 We were able to manipulate this information and remain truthful to respondents because SCHIP legislation was brought to the floor on multiple occasions. Both votes we considered garnered the support of 97% of Democrats but had different levels of support among Republican members (95% and 22%).