

The Movers and the Shirkers

*Representatives and Ideologues
in the Senate*

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Ann Arbor

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS

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Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
♻️ Printed on acid-free paper

2002 2001 2000 1999 4 3 2 1

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Uslaner, Eric M.

The movers and the shirkers : representatives and ideologues in
the Senate / Eric M. Uslaner.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-472-10943-X (cloth : alk. paper)

1. United States. Congress. Senate—Voting.
2. Legislators—United States. 3. Party discipline—United States.
4. Public opinion—United States. 5. Representative government and
representation—United States. 6. Ideology—United States.

I. Title.

JK1161 .U85 1999

328.73'071—dc21

98-40236

CIP

To Avery, who, like any nine-year-old, tries to get away with as much as he can, but whose fundamental loyalty is never in doubt.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
Chapter 1. Lies, Damn Lies, and Ideology	1
Chapter 2. If You Can't Please Everyone, Must You Only Please Yourself?	28
Chapter 3. Legislator Ideology: Roots and Consequences	50
Chapter 4. Triple Play: Constituency, Elite, and Legislator Opinions	73
Chapter 5. Representation and Elections	92
Chapter 6. Representation and Culture	117
Chapter 7. The Institutional Bases of Ideology	142
Chapter 8. Ideology and Its Consequences	171
<i>Appendixes</i>	
Appendix A. Supplement to Chapter 2	191
Appendix B. Supplement to Chapter 3	193
Appendix C. Supplement to Chapter 5	195
Appendix D. Supplement to Chapter 7	197
<i>Notes</i>	199
<i>References</i>	219
<i>Name Index</i>	229
<i>Subject Index</i>	231

Preface

Some time around 1982 my friend and colleague Joe Oppenheimer rushed into my office and handed me a paper to read. “It’s about Congress and a new way to measure personal ideology,” he said — or at least something pretty close to that. He asked for my comments. I had seen some similar work — especially Kalt 1981 — and doubted that anything such as personal ideology exists. I read the manuscript, liked its boldness, but found it difficult to accept *any* argument that labeled Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) and Harrison “Pete” Williams (D-NJ) as conservatives or Strom Thurmond (R-SC) and John Stennis (D-MS) as liberals (Carson and Oppenheimer 1984, 174–75). It made little difference that these characterizations were “relative” to their constituents. I was *not* convinced. I was even more surprised when Joe told me some months later that the paper had been accepted at the *American Political Science Review*.

About the same time I discovered a similar approach, developed independently by Joseph A. Kalt and Mark Zupan (1984). Two more articles, one in the most prestigious political science journal and the other in the premier economics journal, did not change my mind. But they made me take the approach more seriously. When an entire literature developed using this methodology, attention must be paid. I decided to put aside my disbelief and at least feign agnosticism.

What bothered me about the personal-ideology literature? And how did I come to terms with it? I was never comfortable with the argument, derived from principal-agent models, that legislators who voted contrary to their constituents were “shirking” their responsibility to the voters. I had long admired those handful of Southern moderates and liberals who sacrificed their careers to the defenders of Jim Crow. Midwestern Progressives were also heroes, especially legislators such as George Norris

and Robert La Follette who stood up to the Republican leaders in the Senate. Yet, I could never accept the argument that these legislators hid their ideology as deep secrets from their constituencies. A La Follette or a Norris was a product of the Midwest and its distinctive political culture. Many Southerners who would be lambasted for their civil-rights stands nevertheless came from districts that appreciated federal economic programs and still embraced much of the Democratic party's ideology.

I was bothered by the attempt to divorce a legislator's personal ideology and constituency attitudes. I was also worried that the estimates of constituency preferences were inadequate. The largest component of constituency ideology is party (Carson and Oppenheimer 1984; Kalt and Zupan 1984). Yet, party is a trait of the senator, not the constituency. When you drop party from the models estimating constituency ideology, you lose much of the predictive power. (See chapter 2 for an elaboration of both themes.) What would happen if we took party out of constituency attitudes and reformulated the whole problem by presuming that party is central? Legislators respond to masses and elites within their parties, rather than to their statewide electorates? What would happen if you dropped the assumption that legislators' values and constituency preferences had to be independent? What would happen if we had better measures of public attitudes?

And what would happen if we could solve all three of these puzzles at the same time and that the answer to one led to the answer to the other two? This fourth question reverses the traditional order in which we first ask, as at Passover, why this study is different from all others. My intellectual puzzle about why there should be such a thing as personal ideology led me to question the use of party as an indicator of constituency opinion and of a demographic approach to estimating public opinion. Dick Fenno (1978) laid out the theoretical framework of multiple constituencies, emphasizing the roles of party followers and elites. This led me to posit that an equation including party as a component of party attitudes really was estimating the ideology of a legislator's fellow partisans. That was the key to part of the problem. Adding elite opinions to the representational mix was also central. And the availability of real data on public opinion solved two difficulties at once: I could get reliable data on the attitudes of a senator's geographic constituency, as Fenno called it, and the member's reelection constituency, presumed to be partisan supporters. Real public-opinion data solve the core theo-

retical problem as well. We no longer need to presume that legislators' ideology and constituency values are independent of each other.

This is the journey ahead. To show why legislators and constituents' views are more often in sync than opposed, I decided to attack headfirst. I went with the principal-agent model that sees legislators as shirkers to show that they rarely are—and those who do face electoral sanctions. By the time I got into the project I found that the approach, though flawed, had a compelling theoretical focus. It led me to seek my own way of estimating personal ideology, ultimately falling back on the same methodology that I criticized. But by the time I am through with it in this study, I have a much richer discourse and a measure of pure personal ideology that is far less impressive than the shirking literature would lead us to expect.

The critique of principal-agent models would not have been possible without the original data on which one of the classic studies is based. Mark Zupan graciously shared his data on Senate roll call behavior in 1977–78. And Gerald C. Wright provided the public-opinion data, generating state party attitudes for me from his database of CBS News/*New York Times* polls from 1976 to 1982. He also kindly shared the CBS survey of Senate incumbent and challenger ideology in 1982 (see chap. 5). The Honorable Bob Michel (R-IL), former minority leader of the United States House of Representatives, provided data of a different sort. He was most helpful in discussing how he sees a leader's obligations to president, party, and constituency—and did it in his typically gracious manner.

Along the way, I delivered papers from this project at the 1994 and 1995 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association and at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. My original goal was to publish a few papers and move on to other projects. The research program expanded way beyond my expectations, and the book overtook my plans to prepare a series of articles. Early on I did set out the methodology and the core theoretical framework in “If You Can't Please Everyone, Must You Only Please Yourself: Personal or Party Ideologies and Senate Roll Call Voting,” published in *Public Choice* in 1997. This article, in revised form, is much of chapter 2 and a bit of chapter 1.

I have amassed a large number of debts along the way. The Dirksen Center for Congressional Leadership and the General Research Board of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland–College Park

provided valuable support. I could not have done the study at all without the data provided by Mark Zupan and Gerald C. Wright. Throughout the project my colleagues Jim Gimpel, Mark Graber, Paul Herrnson, and (of course) Joe Oppenheimer provided detailed comments on the manuscript and a wonderful sounding board for my ideas.

Friends elsewhere were just as helpful, even if I could not bother them quite so regularly. Mike Munger read much of an early draft and all of a later one, saving me from errors large and small. Linda Fowler, John Lott, Lynda Powell, Wendy Schiller, and Charles Stewart read the manuscript; Bernard Grofman, David King, and Paul Quirk read much of it. All provided sage advice, sometimes help that was too good. John Kingdon, Jan Leighly, and Brian Roberts all provided useful comments as panel chairs or discussants at the meetings where I presented papers. I owe them all a lot — some less than others, since I have repaid them in kind — even as I could not always bring myself to take all of their advice. When I apportion both credit and blame, Jim Gimpel, Paul Herrnson, and Mike Munger go first. They each read several drafts, which surely must qualify as real torture. And a collection of people, collectively known as the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, provided some of the data that I use. They are not responsible for any claims that I make (or fail to make). Charles T. Myers at the University of Michigan Press helped guide this project to completion and publication.

Even more central was the love and support of Debbie and Avery, who endured long hours while I struggled with what seemed a Sisyphean project. Each time I thought I was close to being finished, I thought of another angle or reread a chapter and recognized that it was far too long and convoluted. I hope that I did not shirk my familial obligations too much.