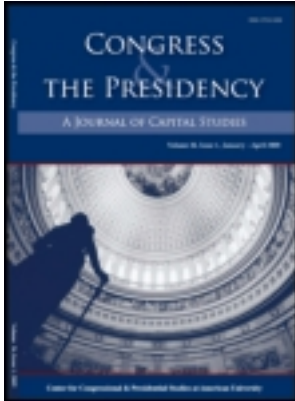


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Public and Partisan Opinions of the Speaker of the House

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PUBLIC AND PARTISAN OPINIONS OF THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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Using polling data from 1982 to 2009, I develop a model of public opinion toward the Speaker of the House. I show that, in addition to economic and institutional factors, the speaker's ideology and events associated with the speaker's responsibilities in office affect the public's opinion toward this congressional leader. I also examine the partisan differences in the formation of public opinions about the speaker. I find that minority party partisans are more likely to have negative evaluations of the speaker when the speaker has more ideologically extreme views which lead to higher levels of polarization. In addition, members of different parties weigh economic and institutional factors differently in their evaluations of the speaker.

Following the 2010 midterm elections that saw Republicans win 63 Democratic seats and a majority, the House of Representatives elected Republican John Boehner as the Speaker of the House. Integral in the campaign strategy of Republicans during the 2010 elections was the attempt to vilify former Speaker Nancy Pelosi and to link Democrats to the unpopular and polarizing speaker. This Republican strategy is evidence of the commonly held belief among political strategists that the public's feelings toward the Speaker of the House affect the re-election chances of members of the speaker's party. Strategists on both sides act on the belief that a party's ability to maintain majority status in the House, especially during midterm elections, depends, in part, on the ability to maintain a positive public image of the speaker. Nor is this belief mere political folklore. Indeed, scholarly evidence from recent mid-term elections confirms the effectiveness of this strategy and demonstrates the effect that the public's opinion of the speaker plays in an individual's congressional vote choice (Highton 2002; Jones and McDermott 2011; Overby 2006).

The Republican Party's attempt to marshal public ill-will toward Speaker Pelosi as a rallying point for congressional elections is nothing new in Washington. In 1980, the National Republican Congressional Committee ran commercials nationally that showed an overweight, white-haired character unmistakably designed

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to represent Democratic Speaker Tip O'Neill driving a gas-guzzling car. The ad showed the iconic O'Neill repeatedly disregarding warning lights and advice from passengers until the car finally ran out of gas on a deserted stretch of road.¹ Democrats deployed a similar strategy in 1996 against a Republican majority, as they filled the airwaves with more than 800,000 political ads connecting Republican candidates to the unpopular Speaker Newt Gingrich (Preston 2008) and challengers have used these same tactics against majority party members serving under Republican Speaker Dennis Hastert and Democratic Speaker Tom Foley (Bird 2004; Mark 2009).

Although attempts to vilify and link the Speaker of the House to majority party incumbents are nothing new, they may have become more effective as the national visibility of the speaker has increased (Farrell 2002; Green 2010; Harris 1998). In recent Congresses, especially during times of divided government, the Speaker has taken a more prominent role in promoting and defending the party's legislative agenda and working, as Speaker Boehner explained, "to kill [the president's agenda], stop it, slow it down, whatever [the party's majority in the House] can" (Barr 2010). The importance of the speaker in congressional elections has risen as the public's perception of the speaker as a prominent and influential player in Washington politics has continued to rise. In early 1995, following another Republican takeover of Congress, when asked who had the most power and influence in Washington, almost 60% of those surveyed mentioned Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, significantly more than mentioned then President Bill Clinton (People 1995).

While scholars have long recognized the effect of the public's opinion of the speaker on congressional election outcomes (Highton 2002; Overby 2006), the importance of the congressional leadership in setting the agenda and determining political outcomes (Cooper and Brady 1981; Cox and McCubbins 2005; Rohde 1991), and the effectiveness of a speakers' leadership style and strategy within Congress (Peters 1995; Sinclair 1983), scholars have not yet comprehensively examined the nature of the public's approval or disapproval of House Speakers.

Part of the reason that scholarship has neglected the study of public opinions about the Speaker of the House may be the lack of consistent polling data. Until recently, polling firms asked respondents to give their opinions about the speaker only sporadically and with wide variations in question wording. However, beginning with Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1995, the Harris Poll began to ask respondents about the job performance of the speaker on a regular basis. Combined with the occasional question that Harris asked about the performances of past Speakers Tip O'Neill, Jim Wright, and Tom Foley, I have compiled the quarterly average of public approval of the Speaker of the House beginning in the fourth quarter of 1982 and continuing with a few gaps until the fourth quarter of 2009. For the first time, consistent data provides a way to examine how the public shapes its views of the Speaker of the House.

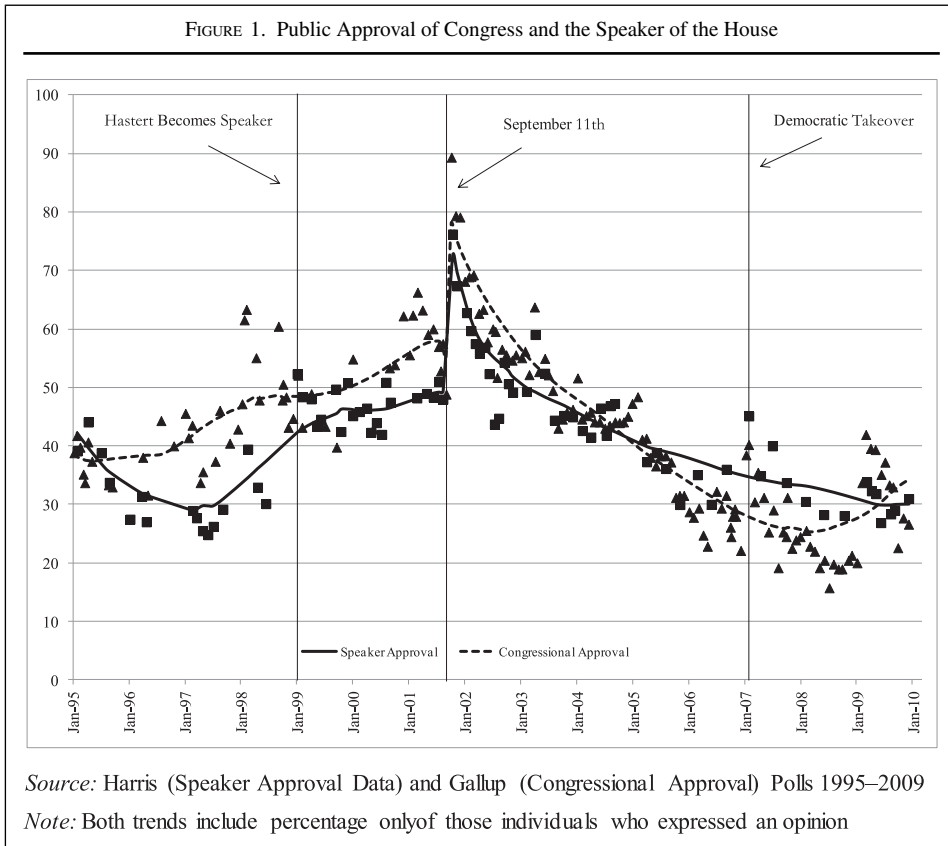
Before doing so, I first review what past scholarship has assumed but has been unable to test about the formation of public opinions of the Speaker of the House. Using these assumptions, I consider how economic and institutional factors might contribute to a speaker's popularity and create a baseline for predicting public approval of the speaker. I then discuss unique factors relevant to the Speaker of the House that should affect to the public's evaluation of the speaker's job performance independent of the public's evaluation of Congress. I show that while economic and institutional variables play a role in the perceptions of the speaker events connected to the speaker's official responsibilities also significantly affect the public's evaluations of the individual in that office.

I continue by examining how the effects of these institutional and individual factors vary between members of the majority party, minority party, and independents. I show that members of the speaker's party draw different conclusions from institutional and economic factors than do members of the minority party. I also find that the relative ideology of the speaker plays a role in driving the polarization of the public's opinion about the speaker. I conclude with a discussion of the results and what it means for future leadership in Congress in an era where the speaker occupies a more prominent leadership position than in times past.

EXPLAINING THE PUBLIC'S OPINION OF THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

As a discipline, we have operated under the assumption that public approval of congressional leaders is largely dependent upon the public approval of Congress as a whole, the body over which the speaker presides. As Durr and his colleagues explain, "we believe that Congressional leadership is part and parcel of the entire institution, and that citizens' attitudes will be structured accordingly" (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997, 180). Indeed, the public's approval of Congress affects the approval of one's own incumbent member of Congress and the probability of re-election (Born 1990; Jones and McDermott 2009). However, although opinions of Congress undoubtedly affect the public's opinion of the speaker, the speaker, with the additional responsibilities attached to the office beyond those of an individual congressional member, has a public profile independent of Congress. Although the approval of Congress and the Speaker of the House between 1995 and 2009 shown in Figure 1 indicate that the two rates generally move together, there is variation in which the public views more positively as well as variations both in the direction of the slope and the magnitude of the two trends.

In order to explain the public's opinion about the Speaker of the House, I begin with a model that includes economic and institutional variables. However, more important, I also show that other factors unique to the speaker's job responsibilities and public persona affect the public's opinion.



Economic Factors

Economic indicators provide a baseline for the public's generic sentiment toward government and public officials (Caldeira and Gibson 1992; Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Kernell 1978; King and Cohen 2005; Mishler and Sheehan 1993; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Rudolph 2002; Stimson 2004). In each of these studies, scholars have noted the important influence of economic performance on public evaluations of job performance. Stimson (2004) argues that the public's perception of all politicians and institutions moves together as part of a generic public sentiment toward government. While the public may have different perceptions of different public officials, the overall trend of public opinion toward the president, governors, senators, and Congress all move generally in the same direction. Stimson demonstrates that this sentiment is primarily the product of economic trends and conflict within government.

However, while the economy has a substantial impact on public opinion, it does not affect public opinion uniformly across public institutions and offices (Chubb 1988; Crew and Weiher 1996; King and Cohen 2005; Peltzman 1987).

Instead, voters appear to recognize that different electoral offices possess varying levels of responsibility over economic policy and assign blame for poor economic performance accordingly (Arceneaux 2006; Atkeson and Partin 2001; Carsey and Wright 1998). While the public may hold the speaker directly accountable for economic conditions, it is more likely that the influence of economic conditions on opinions of the speaker is filtered through the public's opinions of Congress. While a president or a governor holds sole responsibility for executive branch actions regarding the economy, the speaker is just one member, albeit an important one, of Congress which shares responsibility for the economy in the eyes of the public. Thus, any effect of economic variables in the model should wash out with the inclusion of a variable measuring congressional approval. To measure the impact of economic conditions on public opinion of the Speaker of the House, I include a measure of the percent change in personal disposable income in the model of public approval of the speaker (Hibbs 2000, 2008).

Institutional Factors

The partisan context in which a speaker operates should also influence the public's perception of the speaker. As conflict within government grows, public approval of all public officials decreases (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Koo 2011; Stimson 2004). In addition, during times when the party in control of the House is not the same as the party of the president, the speaker takes a more prominent role as a leader of his or her party. During these times of divided government, the public perceives one of the speaker's main responsibilities to be to create conflict in government by opposing the agenda of the president (Barr 2010). As such, in times of divided government, the public should have a more negative view of the speaker because of the speaker's elevated publicity and prominent role in opposing the president's agenda (Binder 2003).

Job Relevant Factors

To suppose that the public's opinion of politicians, however, is entirely dependent upon economic and institutional factors beyond the immediate control of the office holder is a gross misrepresentation. Instead, in addition to these situational factors, the public also uses events and personal characteristics unique to a public official's responsibilities in office to form judgments about that individual. These actions and personal characteristics also allow the public to differentiate its judgments about the public official from opinions about the institution in which that official serves (Fenno 1978; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). For example, international events, such as war and other military actions, provide short-term surges in popularity for presidents followed by long-term negative effects (Jacobson 2008; Kernell 1978). Domestic political events, such as policy decisions and government budgets, allow individuals to evaluate governors and presidents (Crew et al. 2002; Ellis and Faricy 2011; MacKuen 1983; Stimson 2004). Scandals and other matters of personal

conduct also allow for the evaluation of the character and performance of public officials (Crew et al. 2002; Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Kernell 1978).

As such, the public should evaluate the speaker on his or her performance in fulfilling the responsibilities of the office of the speaker. Because the primary responsibility of the speaker is to preside over the House of Representatives, scandals involving members of that body should reflect poorly on the speaker's leadership.² To measure the extent of this impact in the model, I include a dummy variable that takes the value of one if there was an ongoing major scandal involving a member of the House of Representatives.³

In addition, the media's coverage of the speaker should also play a role in the shaping of public opinion. Most individuals spend little or no time actively monitoring the Speaker of the House's actions in Washington, DC. Instead, most individuals rely on news coverage in order to find out and form opinions about political leaders. Because the news coverage is not a perfect replication of all that happens in politics, the media's choice in its coverage can either focus the public's attention on the speaker or away from the speaker. In addition, the frame of the news, whether positive or negative, can also affect the public's views of the speaker's performance in office. In order to capture the effect that news has on the public's perceptions of the speaker, I collected all of the NBC's *Nightly News* segments that mentioned the Speaker of the House during the period between June of 1982 and December of 2009 through Vanderbilt University's Television News Archives. Research assistants watched each news segment and then coded each segment as positive, negative, or neutral, and also identified whether the speaker was the main focus of the story.⁴

While previous studies of public opinion have relied upon summary measures of the *New York Times* or other print publications, there is a strong correlation between the volume and tone of coverage of Congress in the *New York Times* and in broadcast news (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997). While local and cable television news coverage has changed in the depth of its coverage in recent years, a recent study by the Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism found that network news has remained relatively consistent in its coverage (Jurkowitz et al. 2013). However, concerned that coverage of the speaker had declined in a changing television news environment over time, I compared the volume of coverage in the *New York Times* to that in NBC's *Nightly News*. The two variables are correlated at .73 suggesting high consistency in the coverage of these two news sources over the course of the time period.

Although during most quarters NBC mentions the speaker only infrequently in conjunction with coverage of legislation or on-going negotiations in Congress, at times the speaker may be the central character in news stories. Part of this variation may be related to the leadership stylistic preferences of the speaker. Speaker Wright, for instance, was mentioned 37 times in the quarter prior to his resignation following an extensive ethics investigation, while NBC carried 45 stories about Newt Gingrich, most of them positive, in his first quarter as speaker. Dennis

Hastert, a speaker known for his more laid back leadership, however, averaged only two mentions a quarter. Because there is such a variation in the centrality of the speaker in news coverage, I create a weighted measure of news using the number of positive or negative news segments aired the previous quarter multiplied by the percentage of news stories where the speaker was the primary focus that quarter. As such the measure reflects both the tone and the quantity of the coverage.

MODEL OF APPROVAL OF THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Table 1 presents results from two models of the public's job approval of the Speaker of the House.⁵ The dependent variable for the models is the percentage of Harris Poll respondents who express approval of the speaker among those who express an opinion. Beginning on a sporadic basis from 1982 to 1994 and then regularly from 1995 until 2009 Harris pollsters asked "How would you rate the job Speaker X as Speaker of the House is doing—excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"⁶ For this analysis, respondents who evaluated the Speaker's performance as "excellent" or "pretty good" were categorized as having a positive evaluation of the Speaker.

	(1) Speaker Approval	(2) Speaker Approval	(3) Speaker Approval
Change in Disposable Income	1.903 (1.367)	-0.300 (0.619)	1.896* (0.960)
Divided Government	-5.577* (2.898)	-5.086* (2.529)	-3.417* (1.964)
Weighted Positive News about Speaker	4.475** (1.689)	3.781*** (0.900)	5.100*** (1.287)
Weighted Negative News about Speaker	-0.954* (0.480)	-1.399*** (0.310)	-1.441*** (0.367)
September 11th	28.957*** (4.628)	11.962*** (2.952)	18.680*** (3.199)
Major Congressional Scandal	-9.169** (4.061)	-7.563*** (2.376)	-6.645*** (2.015)
Congressional Approval		0.363*** (0.099)	
Presidential Approval			0.366*** (0.066)
Constant	43.437*** (3.161)	29.139*** (5.383)	20.735*** (4.600)
Observations	57	47	57
RMSE	7.952	4.573	6.192

Newey-West standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Beginning in 2010 Harris Interactive changed the question and began asking respondents to first answer whether they knew enough about the Speaker to give an opinion.

One obvious flaw of the Harris Poll question used in the analysis is that the presentation of the question does not offer an option for respondents to respond that they do not know. In spite of that, many respondents did indicate that they did not know enough about the speaker to express an opinion. While the public face of the speaker has increased in recent years, he or she is still not as well-known as other public officials such as presidents or governors. The percentage of individuals who expressed an opinion of the Speaker of the House ranged from as many as 96% (Newt Gingrich in 1996) to as few as 54% (Dennis Hastert in 2001). Because of the wording of the question, it is probable that the number of individuals who do not know enough to offer an opinion is under reported, thus providing some bias in the results. While an alternative question wording would be preferable, other polling firms that used a variation of the question that did offer respondents an option to respond that they did not know enough did not ask the question on a consistent enough basis to allow for any analysis.

While the lack of a “do not know” response causes some trouble for our analysis, previous studies about attitudes towards presidential candidates indicate that voters are more likely to give positive evaluations to candidates about whom they have little information (Holbrook et al. 2007). To control for the possibility that respondents are expressing optimism about speakers about whom they know little, I re-ran these models using the overall percentage of individuals who disapprove of the speaker’s job performance (not just the percentage of those who express an opinion). Because those who express disapproval are more likely to actually have an opinion, these models act as a check on the analysis. I also considered a model that includes the total percentage of individuals who voluntarily chose not to express an opinion about the speaker as an independent variable to control for the public’s overall knowledge of the speaker. The results from these models do not vary significantly from the results I present here.

In all the models I include a variable that decays over time to account for the events of September 11th, 2001, which had a dramatic short-term effect on the public’s evaluation of all government officials (Jacobson 2003). The second model adds a variable for the public approval of Congress to control for the general sentiment towards legislators. As should be expected, this variable is positively correlated with approval of the Speaker of the House and strongly significant. In addition, I also include a model that uses presidential approval instead of congressional approval to control for the general sentiment of public opinion that resulted in no additional loss of observations.⁷

As expected, the coefficients for divided government are significant with signs in the expected directions. During times of divided government, when the speaker takes a more prominent political role in publicly opposing the president’s agenda, public opinion of the speaker drops by about five percentage points.

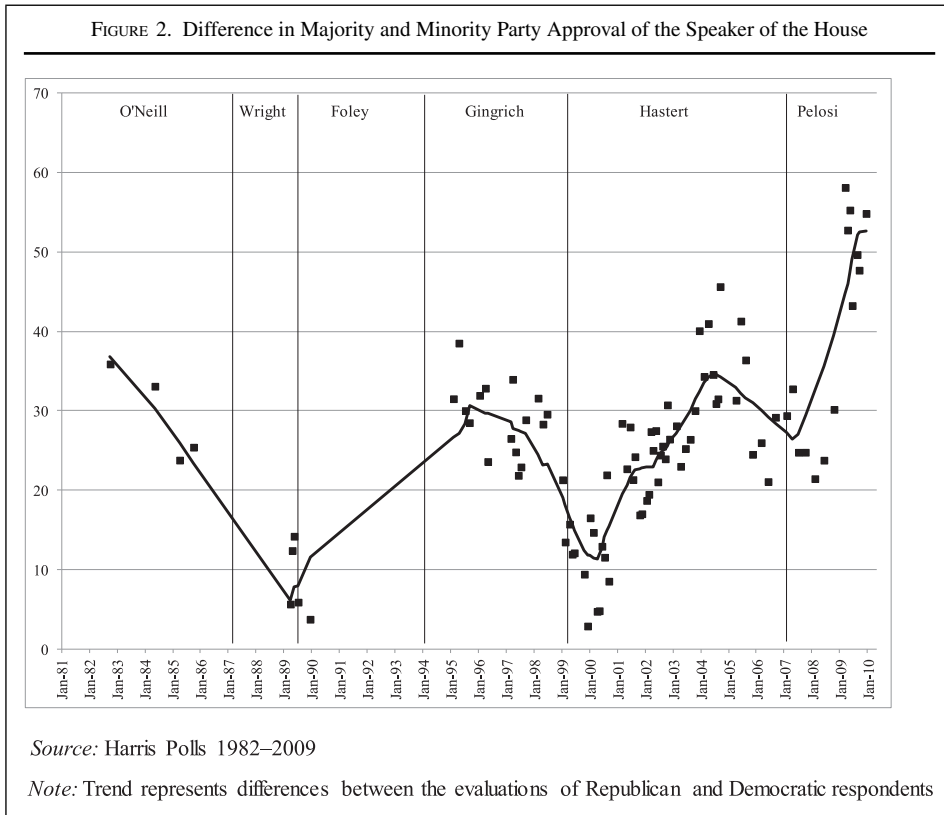
Although not quite significant, the state of the economy also seems to impact the public's approval of the Speaker of the House. As personal disposable income rises, the public is more likely to approve of the job performance of the speaker. The inclusion of a variable measuring the public's approval of Congress, however, eliminates any semblance of the significance of the economic variables. However, while the economic variables are insignificant when controlling for congressional approval, they are significant when controlling for presidential approval. As expected, the public's view of the responsibility of the speaker for the economy appears to run through public opinions about Congress as a whole.

Events relevant to the speaker's responsibilities also have a significant effect on job approval ratings. A congressional scandal, on average, costs the speaker between 6 and 9 percentage points of public approval suggesting that the public perceives congressional scandals as a failure of the speaker to effectively preside over the House and to enforce the discipline and decorum expected of public officials. The variables measuring the volume and tone of news coverage about the speaker are also significant and in the expected directions. As expected, more positive news coverage of the speaker cause public approval to rise, while more negative stories causes public opinion of the speaker to drop.

EXPLAINING PARTISAN OPINIONS OF THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

An increasingly polarized political era prevents any analysis of aggregate opinions from telling the whole story. The polarization of opinions has made it more difficult for public officials to respond to public policy demands, leads to more gridlock within Congress (Binder 2003; Sinclair 2011), and also led to a decline in political civility within the walls of Congress (Uslaner 1997). As with the president and Congress, opinions about the Speaker of the House have become increasingly polarized over time (Jacobson 2003, 2005; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Figure 2 shows the absolute difference between Democrat and Republican evaluations of the Speaker of the House since 1982. Whereas partisan differences in opinions of Speakers Jim Wright and Tom Foley are consistently below 15 percentage points, these differences are near 40 percentage points for Newt Gingrich, 50 percentage points for Dennis Hastert, and 60 points for Nancy Pelosi.

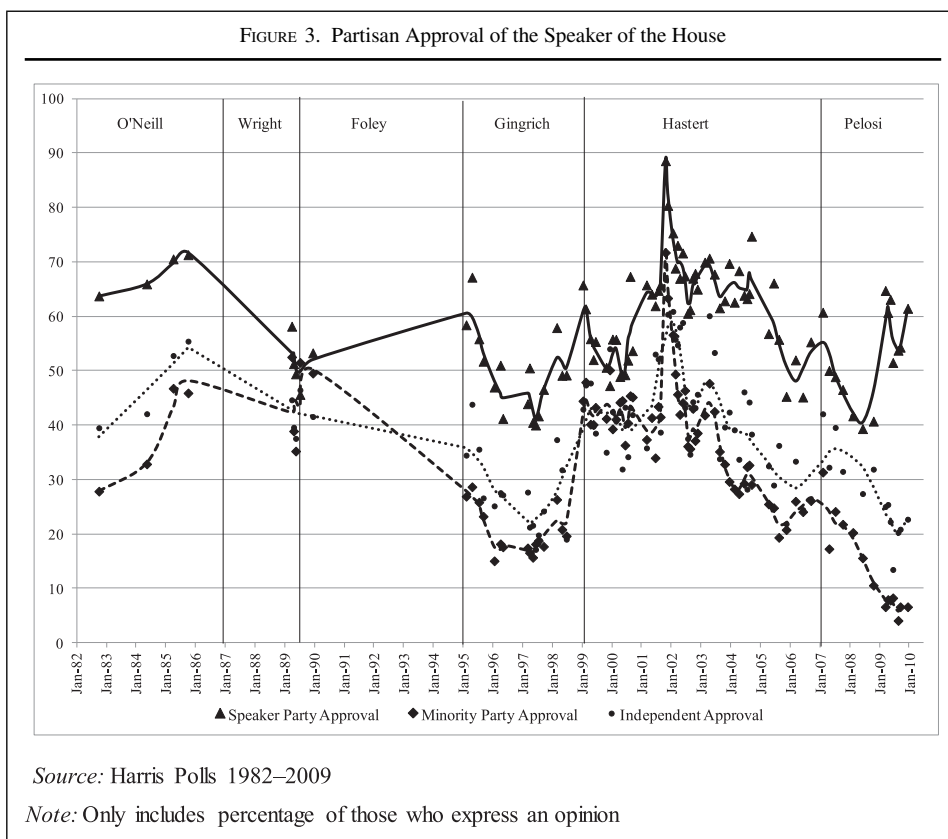
Aggregate patterns in public opinion toward the speaker also mask important differences among partisan subgroups. Because the Speaker relies upon members of the majority party's House caucus for reelection, it is important to consider the origins of opinions of the speaker held by members of the public belonging to the speaker's party. Speakers Wright and Gingrich resigned their office because members of their party viewed them as detrimental to the party's electoral chances. Low approval ratings among members of his own party were a significant factor in Newt Gingrich's resignation after the 1998 elections (Highton 2002). Because members of Congress are generally responsive to the desires of their reelection



constituencies, the opinions of members of the public belonging to the speaker's party can affect the willingness of fellow caucus members to support the speaker's leadership (Highton 2002; Owens 2002; Peters 1999). In the same vein, the effectiveness of negative advertising tying incumbent members of Congress to the speaker is contingent upon the minority party's opinions of the speaker (Brader 2006; Highton 2002).

Figure 3 shows the speaker's approval among those who express an opinion aggregated separately by party identification. This figure shows that the opinions of minority party members, majority party members, and independents do not necessarily move in perfect parallel with one another. As such, the factors that affect the majority's public approval of the speaker may vary in the magnitude to which they affect the minority party's or independent's approval of the speaker. High levels of polarization can be the result of high levels of approval among by the speaker's party, low levels of approval by the minority party, or both.

In considering the origins of public opinion among different partisan sub-groups I begin again by examining the economic, institutional, and job relevant



factors that were the basis of public opinion of the Speaker of the House. In addition I also explore the possible effects of the ideology of Speaker of the House.

Economic Factors

Individuals evaluate the state of the economy not only based upon real economic conditions but also based upon the party identification of officials in public office relative to their own party identification (Bartels 2002; Brown 2010; Fiorina 1981; Gerber and Huber 2010; Jacobson 2010; Maughan and Lacy 2002). Because individuals use their appraisal of the state of the economy to evaluate the House Speaker, the polarization of opinions about the House Speaker should increase as the economy declines. Partisan respondents are also more apt to blame the effects of a bad economy on public officials that belong to the opposite party (Brown 2010). Thus changes in the state of the economy should have a greater effect on minority party partisans as these individuals assign more blame to the speaker for poor economic conditions.

Institutional Factors

Divided government not only leads to more unfavorable opinions of the speaker overall, it should also contribute to the polarization of opinions about the speaker. Because Congress originates all legislation but must negotiate a bill acceptable to the president, divided government should frustrate members of the majority party by clearly revealing the speaker's inability to implement legislation in the face of a presidential veto threat. During the government shutdown of 1995 and 1996, Speaker Gingrich's approval plummeted and undermined his reputation among Republicans (Highton 2002; Langer 2007; Owens 2002; Peters 1999).

Members of the minority party and independents, however, do not experience the same frustration. These individuals do not view the inability of the speaker to unilaterally implement his or her policy preferences as a job failure. After controlling for the volume and tone of the news, the opinions of members of the minority party and independents should not change during divided government. As I will explain in the subsequent section, these individuals should lower their opinions during divided government as a result of the additional news coverage of the speaker and the speaker's policy positions.

Job Relevant Factors

Because there is more news coverage of the Speaker of the House's legislative negotiations with the Senate and with the president during times of divided government, members of the minority party and independents learn more about the speaker's policy views. While positive and negative news stories should have the same effect on members of different parties, neutral news stories provide information about the speaker's positions on political issues. Many of these stories discussed contemporary negotiations in Congress and in Washington and highlighted the stances of the political actors involved. As a result, these stories provide partisan respondents information about the speaker's positions, and as such, more of such coverage should cause opinions to polarize along party lines (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; Puglisi and Snyder 2008). Whereas members of the speaker's party are unlikely to change their opinion of the speaker as they learn more about his or her policy preferences as new information only reinforces previous assumptions, members of the minority party and independents will be more likely to lower their opinions of the speaker as they learn about the speaker's policy positions which are likely to be different than their own (Holbrook et al. 2007).

There should not, however, be any significant difference in the reaction to congressional scandals. While it is possible that same-party partisans might react differently to political scandals than opposing-party partisans, the scandals included in the data are matters of ethical judgment, and as such should have a universal negative effect on the popularity of the speaker. While evidence suggests that partisan leaning sources provide more information about scandals involving the other party (Puglisi and Snyder 2008), information about the significant misconduct

of members of Congress is widely available to the entire public and reflects poorly on the speaker's presiding authority in Congress.

House Speaker Ideology

In addition to the responsibilities tied to the speakership, the Speaker of the House must also represent his or her own constituency. Because each speaker represents a unique district with distinct preferences, the voting record and ideology of each is also unique (Butler 2011; Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974). Given that voters penalize more extreme candidates in the general election (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002) but reward them in the primary election (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007) speakers with more extreme ideological views relative to the median voter should cause public opinion to polarize. In addition, more extreme ideological views should have a greater effect on the views of those individuals farthest ideologically from the speaker. As a result, minority party partisans should be more likely to hold negative opinions of speakers with extreme ideological views.

To measure the effect of the speaker's ideology on the polarization of public opinion about the speaker, I include in the model a variable which measures the distance of the speaker's first dimension DW-NOMINATE from the median ideology of the group evaluating the speaker.⁸ Because the speaker presides over the House they participate in relatively few legislative votes and do not receive an ideological score from DW-NOMINATE or other measures of ideology while serving as speaker. As such, in calculating this variable I average the distance between the party's median NOMINATE score and the speaker's NOMINATE score over the speaker's career prior to becoming speaker. For members of a specific party, this is the average difference between the speaker's ideology and the median ideology of that party in Congress, for independents and the general public I assume the median voter to be exactly in between the medians of both parties.

MODEL OF DIFFERENCES IN PARTISAN OPINION ABOUT THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The five models in Table 2 show the effects of these factors on the polarization of opinions of the Speaker of the House and the opinions of majority and minority party partisans and independents. Just as with the model of overall speaker approval, I also include a variable that decays over time to control for the general increase in public approval that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the first two models, the dependent variable is the difference between the share of majority party partisans and the share of minority party members who approve of the speaker. The first model includes the speaker's ideological position from his or her first session in Congress measured by the absolute value of his or her first dimension NOMINATE score. The second model is the same as the first but also includes a variable measuring the polarization of opinions about the president

TABLE 2. Polarization and Partisan Opinions of the Speaker of the House

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Polarization of Approval	Polarization of Approval	Majority Party Approval	Minority Party Approval	Independent Approval
% Change in Disposable Income	-2.085* (1.168)	-2.308** (1.133)	0.256 (1.494)	1.787 (1.233)	0.922 (1.308)
Divided Government	-9.742*** (2.926)	-7.951*** (2.794)	-11.740*** (2.147)	-3.877 (3.351)	-2.348 (3.035)
Weighted Positive News about Speaker	-3.662*** (0.658)	-3.311*** (0.800)	3.855*** (1.302)	9.472*** (1.432)	6.538*** (1.790)
Weighted Neutral News about Speaker	2.026*** (0.297)	1.746*** (0.340)	0.249 (0.412)	-2.444*** (0.458)	-1.186** (0.461)
Weighted Negative News about Speaker	0.080 (0.229)	0.163 (0.265)	-1.225*** (0.251)	-1.294*** (0.369)	-1.183*** (0.417)
September 11th	-18.575*** (3.741)	-10.413* (5.177)	18.972*** (3.693)	36.101*** (4.334)	23.925*** (3.344)
Congressional Scandal	1.607 (3.093)	1.810 (3.256)	-8.716** (3.322)	-10.423*** (3.835)	-10.025*** </ (2.932)
Speaker Ideology Extremity Relative to Group Median	63.711*** (19.719)	47.307** (21.379)	10.478 (36.118)	-55.232*** (14.530)	-34.976** (15.505)
Polarization of Presidential Approval		0.207** (0.094)			
Constant	7.748 (8.808)	2.006 (8.649)	64.233*** (3.160)	74.648*** (11.852)	53.849*** (6.801)
Observations	56	55	56	56	56
RMSE	8.031	7.882	7.241	8.607	7.775

Newey-West standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

to control for general the polarization of opinions.⁹ In order to clarify how these affect the evaluations of different partisans and whether polarization is the result of lower evaluations by those in the minority, or higher evaluations by the speaker's co-partisans I also include models which predict majority party approval, minority party approval, and the approval of political independents separately.

The results strongly support the aforementioned hypothesis on the effect of economic factors on the polarization of opinions. As the economy declines opinions of the speaker polarize. As expected the changes in the economy have the greatest effect on those in the minority party.

The model also shows that polarization of approval of the speaker decreases during times of divided government. As expected, models three and four show that the decrease in polarization during divided government stems from members of the speaker's party lowering their opinions of the speaker. Members of the speaker's party appear to become frustrated or disillusioned with the speaker's inability to implement the party's preference when the speaker does not belong to the same party as the president. The effect of divided government, however, does not have a significant effect on the opinions of members of the minority party or independents.

The effect of an increase in neutral news stories about the speaker that often accompanies times of divided government also extenuates the gap between Republican and Democratic opinions of the speaker. While more neutral news about the Speaker of the House does not change the views of the speaker's co-partisans, it causes minority party partisans, and also independents to a slightly lesser extent, to evaluate the speaker at lower levels. I also find that scandals have a negative effect on the approval of the speaker for both parties but have a slightly larger effect for minority party partisans and independents.

Last, the results also show that the speaker's ideology influences partisan opinions. Speakers with more extreme ideologies relative to the median voter are more likely to cause partisan individuals to diverge in their opinions of the job performance of the Speaker.¹⁰ While a speaker's relative ideology has no significant effect on the opinions of those within the majority party, minority party partisans and independents are significantly more likely to view ideologically extreme speakers negatively.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As with all public officials, many economic and institutional factors outside of the speaker's control set baseline levels of public opinion of the Speaker of the House. Yet, that is not all that matters. I have also shown how the fulfillment of leadership responsibilities and the media's coverage of the speaker affect the public's evaluation of the individual in this leadership position. While the media controls exactly what is broadcast to consumers of the news, the non-linear variation in the coverage of the speaker over time suggests that the speaker's choices in

leadership style of the speaker and the media coverage that it generates affect the public's approval. The importance of both of these controllable factors suggest that the speaker has more influence and is able to affect his or her own popularity in an era when the visibility of the speaker is has increased substantially.

I have also shown how majority and minority party partisans differ in the process by which they evaluate the speaker. As the coverage of the speaker continues to increase and as the speaker takes a more prominent leadership role during divided government, we should continue to expect polarization of opinions. Stories that highlight the speaker's role in opposing the policy positions of the president appear to drive partisans apart in their opinions of the speaker.

Likewise, changes in the economy, the presence of divided government, and the media's coverage of the speaker each affect the opinions majority and minority party partisans hold of the speaker in distinct ways. More important, however, I find that the relative ideology of the speaker has a significant and sizable influence on the polarization of opinions about the Speaker of the House. Speakers with a more extreme ideological voting record relative to the median party voter are more likely to be viewed in a negative light by independents and those of the opposing party. The speaker's ideology, however, has little impact on the approval rating among those in his or her own party. Thus while the majority party may not be overly concerned about the ideological extremity of its leader, given that the public's approval of the speaker has an effect on the electoral prospects of the majority party (Highton 2002), the majority caucus would be well advised to choose wisely.

These findings also demonstrate a need for more detailed investigation into the legislative consequences of public opinion toward the speaker. I show that divided government has a negative effect on the approval of the speaker within his or her own party. Indeed, many of the difficulties Speaker John Boehner has encountered in trying to preside over the current House of Representatives have resulted from differences of opinion within his own party as conservatives have questioned his leadership. If approval within the party is linked to a decrease in the effectiveness of leadership as some scholars have suggested (Highton 2002; Peters 1995) and opinions of the speaker held by members of Congress reflect those of their constituents (Jacobson 2003), such results would suggest that divided government not only hinders the legislative process by limiting the range of acceptable legislation (Binder 2003), but also by making it more difficult for the speaker to whip his or her own party in the House in support of legislation. In many ways, recent events related to Speaker Boehner's negotiations on the 2013 government shutdown and increases to the debt ceiling have shown the difficulty the speaker has had in whipping votes within his own party during this time of divided government and maintaining his own popularity among copartisans.

The ability of the speaker to maintain a positive image and a higher level of public opinion depends both on controllable and uncontrollable factors. However, the rise in the political and public prominence of the speaker should cause the public to evaluate the speaker more on his or her own terms. In forming an opinion

of the speaker the public considers both the media coverage of the speaker and the successes or failures of the institution over which he or she presides, factors which the speaker is marginally able to control. In an era where more information about the speaker is available, these factors should become more salient in the public's eye relative to uncontrollable factors such as the economy and partisan conflict, and allow the speaker to better control his or her public image.

NOTES

1. As of this writing the ad was online and could be viewed at [youtube.com \(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh7WA7WwX28\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh7WA7WwX28)
2. Rather than responding with overall dissatisfaction with the behavior of politicians during moments when Washington is beset with scandals, the public appears to hold the speaker responsible for what occurs under his or her jurisdiction in the House. This variable does not include major scandals that involved only senators, such as the Keating Five Scandal, as the Speaker of the House is responsible for the members of the House of Representatives and not the Senate. In other variations of the model, I did include a variable denoting the presence of a scandal in the Senate, but this variable had no significant effect on the public's approval of the Speaker of the House. In addition, some have argued that parties are able to use scandals that affect both parties to claim credit for their party's ability to reform the culture in government (Lee 2009). I also ran models that distinguished between scandals that only involved members of the speaker's party, and those that involved both parties (there were no major scandals that only involved members of the minority party). Both variables are significant, and while scandals that involve only members of the speaker's party have a slightly greater negative effect on the public's opinion of the speaker, the difference between the two coefficients is not significant. For simplicity I have combined these two variables into a single major scandal variable.
3. Major scandals that occurred during the time period covered by the dataset were the House Sex Scandal (1983:Quarters 1–2), the Jim Wright Ethics Investigation (1989:1–2), the House Bank Scandal (1992:1–4), the Congressional Post Office Scandal (1994:1–4), the Newt Gingrich Ethics Investigation (1997:1–2), the Jack Abramoff Investigation (2005:1–2006:2), the Mark Foley Scandal (2006:1–3) and the Charles Rangel and Maxine Waters Ethics Investigations (2008:3–2009:4).
4. There were two coders who undertook the coding of the news segments and their independent coding results correlated at .91.
5. As with most time-series, the time-series models of the public's approval of the Speaker of the House using OLS is beset with problems of autocorrelation. Both the Breusch-Godfrey and Durbin-Watson tests show evidence of autocorrelation. To correct for those problems all of the regression models reported in this paper use Newey-West standard errors which are robust to both autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity (Hamilton 1994; Newey and West 1987). Although Newey-West standard errors have been used effectively on models with samples sizes smaller and with fewer degrees of freedom than those presented here (Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003), in some cases Newey-West standard errors have been shown to be problematic when used in models with very small sample sizes because of their asymptotic properties (Gujarati 2010; Smith and McAleer 1994). To ensure that my results are not the result of false rejections of the null hypothesis, I also ran the model as an AR process and also as an OLS model with a lagged dependent variable to deal with problems of autocorrelation and found similar results. I chose to use Newey-West standard errors here because the public's approval of Congress and the lagged approval of the Speaker of the House and are highly correlated. Because of this, these alternative specifications cause problems of multi-collinearity in the model that includes the public's approval of Congress. To keep results consistent across models, I display the results from the regressions using Newey-West standard errors.
6. While there are quite a few quarters without observations on the public's approval of the speaker, the vast majority of the missing data (all but 11 of the almost 60 missing observations) come prior to 1995 when Newt Gingrich became the Speaker of the House. Eliminating the handful of observations available for Tom Foley, Jim Wright, and Tip O'Neill has no effect on the results presented here. The lack of available data prior to Gingrich's ascension to the speakership limits our ability to distinguish between the two time periods. While the coefficients are similar when running the models for only the time period prior to Newt Gingrich, the

small sample size enlarges the standard errors and limits our ability to draw decisive conclusions about the two eras.

7. Scholars have long bemoaned the lack of consistent data on the public approval of Congress. The various studies that have modeled congressional approval have avoided this problem by creating a measure of the public's mood toward Congress by including other polling questions related to congressional behavior (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Ramirez 2009). Unfortunately, as part of the battery of questions, these studies also include the same questions from the Harris Poll about the public's opinion of the speaker that are used in this paper as a dependent variable, which renders the use of this alternative measure of congressional approval problematic in this study because of problems of endogeneity.
8. I have also run these models using the absolute value of the average ideology over the speaker's tenure in the House, the absolute value of the ideology of the speaker's first term in Congress (under the assumption that speaker's strategically move toward the center of their party over time (Butler 2011), and Poole and Rosenthal's Common Space Scores, which place all individuals who have served in Congress on a single continuum. Each of these variations provide similar results.
9. I also ran models including the polarization of opinions about Congress. The lack of available data on partisan opinions about Congress, however, reduces the sample size to a mere 24. This causes problems of statistical power, and while the results are similar, the small sample size enlarges the standard errors and masks the true effects. As should be expected, in these models the coefficients were in the expected directions, but did not quite reach statistical significance.
10. While Nancy Pelosi's voting record as a congresswoman stands out as more extreme relative to both her party and the opposition party in comparison to other speakers in recent history (Butler 2011), excluding the period during which Pelosi served as speaker does not change the results.

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