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*American Politics Research* 2008; 36; 130 originally published online Oct 3, 2007;

DOI: 10.1177/1532673X07306357

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# The Effect of Race and Ethnicity on Bill Sponsorship and Cosponsorship in Congress

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This article examines Black and Latino legislators' use of bill sponsorship and cosponsorship in Congress. As we explain, sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation are unique in that they are among the few activities outside the roll call arena that have both position taking and policy implications. We hypothesize that given minority legislators' lack of influence in Congress, they sponsor and cosponsor fewer bills than do nonminorities. We find support for our expectation; on average, Black and Latino legislators sponsor and cosponsor significantly fewer bills in Congress than do Whites and non-Latinos, respectively. But we also find the relationship to be contingent on which party controls Congress. Whereas Democratic Congresses encourage minorities' bill sponsorship and cosponsorship, Republican Congresses depress it. Because the concepts of participation and representation in Congress are so intimately tied to one another, these findings have a number of implications for the study of descriptive and substantive representation.

**Keywords:** *Congress; legislative behavior; bill sponsorship; cosponsorship; race; ethnicity; members of Congress*

Recent Census data indicate that the United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Latinos and African Americans represent 27.3% of the U.S. population, their greatest combined share of the U.S. population to date. These increases have been just as dramatic at the state and district levels. There are now four majority–minority states (California, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Texas), and since the 101st Congress, minority populations in the average congressional district have increased from 17% in the 101st Congress to 25% in the 108th Congress.

One consequence of this phenomenon has been the steady increase in minority representation in Congress. The number of Latinos in the House of

Representatives has more than doubled since the 101st Congress from 11 legislators in the 101st Congress to 23 in the 108th. Although African Americans saw their Congressional representation jump significantly from 27 to 39 members between the 102nd and 103rd Congresses, they have consistently hovered around 40 members in the U.S. House (Amer, 2005). These numbers remain well below Latinos' and African Americans' share of the overall U.S. population, but they do suggest greater minority presence in national politics.

These changes have prompted extensive research on the behavior of Blacks in Congress (Cameron, Epstein, & O'Halloran, 1996; Cannon, 1999; Cobb & Jenkins, 2001; Hill, 1995; Hutchings, McClerking, & Charles, 2004; Lublin, 1997; Mansbridge, 1999; Pinney & Serra, 1995; Singh, 1998; Swain, 1993; Tate, 2003; Whitby, 1997; Whitby & Krause, 2001), but much less attention has been paid to Latinos (Hero & Tolbert, 1995; Kerr & Miller, 1997; Lublin, 1997; Welch & Hibbing, 1984). To the extent that minorities in Congress have been studied, the focus has generally been on whether minority members of Congress (MCs) do a better job of providing substantive representation than do nonminorities through roll call votes. We seek to rectify these shortcomings in two ways. First, we move beyond the roll call arena and examine minorities' participation in Congress more broadly, which according to Hall (1996) is intimately tied to questions of representation. Second, we include Latino MCs in our analysis to draw conclusions regarding Latino and Black MCs' participation individually and minority participation generally.

This article examines the extent to which minorities sponsor and cosponsor bills in Congress. We focus on sponsorship and cosponsorship because unlike other non-roll call forums, they have been shown to have both position taking (e.g., Campbell, 1982; Koger, 2003; Schiller, 1995) and policy (e.g., Kessler & Krehbiel, 1996; Talbert & Potoski, 2002) significance. We expect minorities to sponsor and cosponsor fewer bills than nonminorities due to the disadvantages they face in Congress. The results support our hypothesis; their lack of legislative influence—whether because of the interests they represent or the “racialized” nature of Congress—depresses minorities' sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

## Background

MCs are said to have three goals: getting reelected, passing good public policy, and gaining influence in the institution (Fenno, 1973). Bill sponsorship and cosponsorship have been found to have significant consequences for each of these goals. Perhaps the most obvious observation is the policy relevance

of bill sponsorship. A bill's author, topic, and language—all of which are originally established during the sponsorship stage—are clear determinants of its success. For instance, beginning with Matthews (1960), students of Congress have long recognized that who sponsors a bill has important implications for its success (e.g., Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, & Chapman, 2003; Franzitch, 1979; Hibbing, 1991; Krutz, 2005; Moore & Thomas, 1991; Olson & Nonidez, 1972). Others have argued that a bill's urgency and scope matters to whether it passes (Adler & Wilkerson, 2005), whereas others have determined that a bill's racial content also matters (Cannon, 1999), and Schiller (1995) shows that sponsoring legislation—even bills that do not pass—shapes the legislative agenda. It is quite clear that the sponsorship stage of the legislative process has important policy implications.

Although not as obvious, bill sponsorship also has been shown to have policy implications. For example, Kessler and Krehbiel (1996) show that it can be used as a tool to signal preferences to colleagues within the House (see also Talbert & Potoski, 2002; Wilson & Young, 1997). Their study “favors an intralegislative signaling view of the dynamics of cosponsorship rather than the view of cosponsorship as electorally targeted position taking” (Kessler & Krehbiel, 1996, p. 565). Furthermore, Fowler (2006a, 2006b) shows that trends in cosponsorship can be used to detect MCs' “connectedness,” or the social distance between legislators. This measure, he reasons, helps to explain MCs' roll call votes even when controlling for the ideology and party of each legislator.

As instruments of credit claiming and position taking, cosponsoring and sponsoring legislation also help MCs accomplish their electoral goal (Mayhew, 1974). Koger (2003) argues that because legislators are rewarded and punished for the positions they take, they have an incentive to cosponsor bills that are popular or supported by influential interest groups (Koger, 2003, p. 231). This sort of position taking is especially valuable for issues that do not come to a vote. Koger quotes a legislative assistant in his article: “Cosponsorship is a chance to show that a member has taken action to support a bill. Even if a bill doesn't move, cosponsoring helps clarify your message. That way, people know where you stand, pro or con” (p. 232).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the same logic extends to sponsorship. Initiating legislation sends strong signals to constituents that MCs not only agree with their positions but feel strongly enough to incur the nontrivial costs associated with writing a bill (Schiller, 1995).<sup>2</sup> As Hall (1996) notes, revealed intensities can be just as important a signal as revealed preferences. The relevance of revealed intensities to representation is that members may “reflect the intensity of constituent interests through the time and energy they expend” (p. 3). We suggest that sponsoring bills is one way

for MCs to express the intensity of their own preferences and represent the intensity of their constituents.<sup>3</sup>

## Theory

Following Mayhew (1974), we assume that reelection is MCs' primary goal because it "must be achieved over and over if other ends are to be entertained" (p. 16). One electoral activity that legislators must engage in is position taking, which Mayhew defines as "the public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors" (p. 61). Legislators take positions to identify with constituents, to signal to voters that they "think the way they do" and "care about the same things they do" (Fenno, 1978, p. 58). Another electoral-oriented activity is credit claiming, or generating a belief that a member of Congress is responsible for producing something desirable (Mayhew, 1974, pp. 52-53). The emphasis in this case is on "individual accomplishment" and "on the congressman as doer (rather than as, say, expounder of constituency views)" (p. 53).

There are a wide variety of activities in Congress in which a legislator might take a position or generate credit-claiming opportunities. Perhaps the most recognizable—and certainly the most studied—is roll call voting. The dilemma for some legislators is that roll call voting also is arguably the most restrictive legislative activity in Congress (Mayhew, 1974). As a result, many MCs do not have an opportunity to generate "good" positions or credit-claiming opportunities through votes. For example, Hall (1996) notes that MCs—particularly those in the minority party—are often "cross-pressured" by the agenda, and Schiller (1995) claims that less influential MCs routinely take votes on policies they had little to no part in shaping.

What this means, in effect, is that some MCs cannot rely on roll call votes as an effective means to take positions or claim credit. They must turn to forums outside the roll call arena to meet their electoral demands. These include newsletters and press releases (Yiannakis, 1982), nonlegislative debate (Harris, 2005; Maltzman & Sigelman, 1996; Morris, 2001; Rocca, 2007), general debate (Hall, 1996; Smith, 1989), amicus curiae briefs (Highton & Rocca, 2005), and bill sponsorship and cosponsorship. These studies generally find that institutionally disadvantaged MCs—those who lack influence over the agenda such as freshmen, minority party members, and ideologically extreme MCs—participate disproportionately in non-roll call activities. As a result, they have been called "institutional safety-valves" used by MCs who are "on the outside when it comes to policy influence" (Maltzman & Sigelman, 1996, p. 819).

To date, previous research defines these disadvantaged individuals by their institutional status. But racial and ethnic minorities have been shown to be marginalized in Congress as well and thus unable to exert influence on public policy (Hawkesworth, 2003; McClain, 1993). One reason for minorities' lack of influence stems from the types of interests they represent. Because minority interests tend not to be "perceived as important by the dominant population" (McClain, 1993, p. 2), agenda setters in Congress have little incentive to address minorities' policy priorities. As Cameron et al. (1996) and Lublin (1997) find, the creation of majority-minority districts has only exacerbated the problem. One implication of minorities' inability to influence the agenda is that they must turn to non-roll call activities to voice their constituents' interests. Thus, Cannon (1999), Bratton and Haynie (1999), and Whitby (2002) find that Black MCs are more likely than White MCs to sponsor and cosponsor racial bills.

Another reason for minorities' lack of influence may be due to racial polarization in Congress. According to the "racialized institutions model" of policy influence, coalitions are difficult to maintain when policy preferences are reinforced by racial cleavages rather than broader ideology (Preuhs, 2006). Examples are seen in Southern legislatures where partisanship continues to be defined by racial attitudes (Valentino & Sears, 2005). Racial polarization also mitigates minorities' increasing presence and incorporation in legislative settings. For example, Hawkesworth (2003) finds that racism within large legislative bodies such as Congress overrides any influence that minority lawmakers potentially gain through traditional institutional mechanisms. They are "forced to deal with institutional dynamics and interpersonal relations that constitute them as subordinate" (p. 546).

A "racialized institution" may disadvantage minorities regardless of the interests they represent or the institutional status they acquire. If minorities are indeed treated as "less than equals during committee operations, floor debates and in interpersonal relations," then this should be reflected in their general legislative participation, that is, beyond their participation on just racial interests (Hawkesworth, 2003, p. 546). This conception yields a different set of expectations than those tested by Cannon (1999), Bratton and Haynie (1999), and Whitby (2002) regarding minorities' bill sponsorship and cosponsorship. In short, if minorities' lack of influence stems not only from the substance of their interests but from their simply being a racial or ethnic minority, then we should observe an across-the-board decrease in their sponsorship and cosponsorship participation.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that members who initiate policy proposals tailor at least some of them to have a chance to win. Following

Fenno (1973) and Anderson et al. (2003), we assume that the passage of a member's legislative proposals is one of his or her primary goals. Franzitch (1979) makes a similar point: "[Members] would prefer to have more rather than less legislation bearing their name" (p. 420). Given the opportunity costs associated with crafting bills (Schiller, 1995), it makes sense for MCs to write legislation that has at least some chance of passing. Because minorities face hurdles in getting their policy priorities on the agenda, the costs of sponsoring legislation may outweigh the benefits for minority MCs. These constraints might extend to cosponsoring legislation as well. It is reasonable to expect that because their issue priorities are not adequately represented in Congress, there may be fewer bills available for minority MCs to cosponsor. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

*Sponsorship hypothesis:* Latino and Black members of Congress sponsor fewer bills than do non-Latino and White MCs, respectively, holding all else constant.

*Cosponsorship hypothesis:* Latino and Black members of Congress sponsor fewer bills than do non-Latino and White MCs, respectively, holding all else constant.

But this story is slightly complicated by political parties. Indeed, most minorities in Congress belong to the Democratic Party. In all, 85% of Latinos and 97% of Blacks who served between the 101st and 108th Congresses were Democrats. Thus, minority MCs may be less disadvantaged during Democratic Congresses than Republican Congresses (but still disadvantaged nonetheless). Accordingly, they should have greater incentive to sponsor and more opportunities to cosponsor legislation during Democratic Congresses than during Republican Congresses. This suggests that although the difference between minorities and nonminorities should be negative during both Democratic and Republican Congresses, the effect should be much smaller during Democratic Congresses than during Republican Congresses.

## Data and Method

Our goal is to examine the extent to which minorities sponsor and cosponsor legislation in Congress. We test two hypotheses—a sponsorship hypothesis and cosponsorship hypothesis—which predict that minorities sponsor and cosponsor fewer bills than do nonminorities. Our analysis focuses on all Latinos and African Americans who served in the House of Representatives between the 101st and 108th Congresses. We used Amer's (2005) *Congressional Research Report for Congress* to identify African

American MCs and the National Association of Latino Elected Official's (NALEO, 2005) *National Directory of Hispanic Elected Officials* to identify Latino members of the House.

Our dependent variables measure the number of bills MCs sponsored and cosponsored, respectively, each Congress. We differ from previous studies because we do not differentiate between ethnic or racial bills (e.g., Cannon, 1999; Whitby, 2002). Rather, we are interested in minorities' sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation as an indicator of their overall participation in the policy process. Thus, we use a generic count of sponsorship and cosponsorship similar to those used by Schiller (1995), Koger (2003), and Campbell (1982). Each variable was collected using the online version of the *Congressional Record*.<sup>4</sup>

The dependent variables are nonnegative count variables without upper bounds. Although the Poisson distribution is commonly adopted for models with variables of this type, it does not make sense here because sponsorships are not independent within Congresses and do not have a constant rate of occurrence (King, 1989). Simple empirical tests confirm this. Not only is the dependent variable overdispersed (a common symptom of dependence between events) but a chi-square test shows that the Poisson distribution is in fact an inappropriate choice for the model. We therefore employ negative binomial regression, which relaxes the constant rate of occurrence assumption and thus accounts for overdispersion.

The key independent variables in the study are measures for Latino ethnicity and African American race. The variables are coded 1 if an MC is Latino or African American, respectively, and 0 otherwise.<sup>5</sup> Because most minorities in Congress are Democrats, our models account for the possibility that legislative agendas during Congresses controlled by the Democratic Party may better reflect minority interests. We interact our key independent variables—Black MC and Latino MC—with a control variable—Democratic Congress—which captures the three Democratic-controlled Congresses in our data set (101st-103rd). Our models also control for a number of factors that previous research has shown to significantly influence the number of bills that MCs sponsor and cosponsor. The control variables and coding schemes are noted in the appendix. These variables were collected using the yearly editions of the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone & Ujifusa, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004). The average MC in our data sponsors 15 bills, cosponsors 274 bills, has served 10 years in the House, represents a safe district, and is just right of center ideologically (DW-NOMINATE score of .005). Not surprisingly, he is a non-Latino, White male.

**Table 1**  
**Summary Statistics, Bill Sponsorship, and Cosponsorship**  
**(101st-108th Congresses)**

	Democratic Congresses		Republican Congresses	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Sponsorship				
Black MC	14.826	1.348	11.449	0.794*
White MC	16.696	0.376	14.754	0.274*
Latino MC	16.974	2.216	10.406	0.763*
Non-Latino MC	16.560	0.367	14.658	0.270*
Cosponsorship				
Black MC	407.476	24.260*	326.321	11.717*
White MC	321.264	4.313*	236.396	2.785*
Latino MC	327.282	26.471	268.604	13.571
Non-Latino MC	326.903	4.431	242.897	2.845

Note: This table depicts results from mean comparison tests (*t* tests). MC = member of Congress.

\**p* < .05.

## Results

Table 1 depicts summary statistics indicating minorities' bill sponsorship and cosponsorship behavior under Democratic and Republican Congresses. They suggest two conclusions. First, minorities' sponsorship behavior appears to be depressed during Republican Congresses and encouraged during Democratic Congresses. Both Black and Latino MCs sponsor fewer bills than White and non-Latino MCs, respectively, during Republican Congresses (Black MCs sponsor about 12 bills vs. White MCs' 15; Latino MCs sponsor about 11 bills vs. non-Latino MCs' 15) and statistically indistinguishable amounts during Democratic Congresses (Black MCs average about 15 sponsorships and all other MCs average about 17).

Second, minorities appear to cosponsor at least as many bills as nonminorities regardless of which party controls Congress. In both cases, African American MCs cosponsor more bills than do White MCs (408 vs. 321, respectively, in Democratic Congresses and 326 vs. 237, respectively, during Republican Congresses). Latino MCs cosponsor a statistically indistinguishable number of bills than do non-Latino MCs (both groups cosponsor about 327 bills during Democratic Congresses and about 267 vs. 243 bills, respectively, during Republican Congresses).

**Table 2**  
**Negative Binomial Regression Results, Bill Sponsorship**  
**(101st-108th Congresses)**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Black MC	-0.544*	.057	-0.523*	.065
Black MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	-0.072	.098
Latino MC	-0.318*	.064	-0.374*	.077
Latino MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	0.174	.136
Female MC	0.194*	.041	0.197*	.0478
Female MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	-0.006	.090
Democrat	-0.169*	.030	-0.170*	.030
Majority party member	0.368*	.033	0.368*	.034
Seniority	0.019*	.002	0.019*	.002
Committee leader	0.250*	.030	0.251*	.030
Party leader	0.090	.101	0.095	.101
Member of control committee	0.040	.026	0.042	.026
Ideological extremity	0.004*	.001	0.004*	.001
Previous vote margin	0.001	.001	0.001	.001
District partisanship	0.012*	.001	0.012*	.001
Democratic Congress	-0.477	.644	-0.439*	.645
101st Congress	0.596	.645	0.558	.646
102nd Congress	0.622	.645	0.584	.646
103rd Congress	0.530	.645	0.492	.645
104th Congress	-0.178*	.048	-0.178*	.048
105th Congress	-0.145*	.047	-0.145*	.047
106th Congress	0.006	.047	0.006	.047
107th Congress	0.017	.046	0.017	.046
Constant	1.515*	.082	1.512*	.083
Observations	3,515		3,515	
Log likelihood	-12520.178		-12518.983	

Note: The dependent variables are the number of bills each member of Congress (MC) cosponsored each session. The excluded Congress is the 108th.

\* $p < .05$ .

Tables 2 and 3 depict the results from the negative binomial regressions. The first column of each table shows the results of the constrained model (i.e., no interaction effects) and the second column shows the results of the fully specified model (i.e., with the interaction effects). Let us first consider bill sponsorship, shown in Table 2. Model 1 of Table 2 shows that Latino MCs and Black MCs have significant independent effects. Both are significant ( $p < .05$ ) and negative, suggesting support for our sponsorship hypothesis.

**Table 3**  
**Negative Binomial Regression Results, Bill Cosponsorship**  
**(101st-108th Congresses)**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Black MC	-0.134*	.034	-0.146*	.038
Black MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	0.034	.059
Latino MC	-0.152*	.038	-0.175*	.046
Latino MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	0.073	.082
Female MC	0.122*	.025	0.130*	.029
Female MC * Democratic Congress	—	—	-0.026	.055
Democrat	0.090*	.018	0.089*	.018
Majority party member	-0.016	.020	-0.021	.021
Seniority	-0.009*	.001	-0.009*	.001
Committee leader	0.081*	.019	0.081*	.019
Party leader	-0.107	.062	-0.107	.062
Member of control committee	-0.085*	.016	-0.084*	.016
Ideological extremity	0.003*	.001	0.003*	.001
Previous vote margin	-0.001*	.0003	-0.001*	.0003
District partisanship	0.011*	.001	0.011*	.001
Democratic Congress	-0.185	.417	-0.193	.419
101st Congress	0.584	.418	0.589	.419
102nd Congress	0.501	.418	0.506	.419
103rd Congress	0.238	.417	0.244	.419
104th Congress	-0.392*	.029	-0.393*	.029
105th Congress	-0.217*	.029	-0.217*	.029
106th Congress	0.017	.028	0.017	.028
107th Congress	-0.016	.028	-0.016	.028
Constant	4.974*	.049	4.980*	.050
Observations	3,515		3,515	
Log likelihood	-21308.289		-21307.67	

Note: The dependent variables are the number of bills each member of Congress (MC) cosponsored each session. The excluded Congress is the 108th.

\* $p < .05$ .

For an idea of the variables' substantive effects, we present changes in predicted values in Table 4.<sup>6</sup> According to Table 4, Latino MCs average four fewer sponsorships per Congress than do non-Latinos; African American MCs sponsor six fewer bills than do White MCs. These are significant differences, especially given that the average member of Congress sponsors only 15 bills per Congress. These results are consistent with the idea that minorities' disadvantages in Congress depress their bill sponsorship rather than encourage it.

**Table 4**  
**Discrete Changes (101st-108th Congresses)**

Variable	Sponsorship		Cosponsorship	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Black MC	-6.317	-6.119	-33.293	-35.920
Black MC * Democratic Congress	—	-1.004	—	9.129
Latino MC	-3.977	-4.568	-37.169	-42.320
Latino MC * Democratic Congress	—	2.739	—	19.683
Female MC	3.039	3.083	33.463	35.843
Female MC * Democratic Congress	—	-0.090	—	-6.831
Democrat	-2.455	-2.472	23.419	23.339
Majority party member	5.233	5.240	-4.267	-5.393
Seniority	20.686	20.375	-110.000	-110.000
Committee leader	3.638	3.663	21.218	21.266
Party leader	1.365	1.442	-26.640	-26.691
Member of control committee	0.578	0.604	-21.856	-21.782
Ideological extremity	7.368	7.380	106.971	105.837
Previous vote margin	1.190	1.210	-18.869	-18.628
District partisanship	14.605	14.705	249.924	249.355
Democratic Congress	-6.541	-6.038	-47.335	-49.370
101st Congress	10.923	10.062	193.252	195.381
102nd Congress	11.529	10.649	160.022	161.896
103rd Congress	9.446	8.630	68.932	70.310
104th Congress	-2.411	-2.401	-89.312	-89.467
105th Congress	-1.979	-1.982	-52.431	-52.544
106th Congress	0.086	0.082	4.569	4.372
107th Congress	0.249	0.249	-4.055	-4.210

Note: This table depicts the change in predicted values as  $x$  changes from its minimum to maximum values. Thus, the dummy variables in the model change from 0 to 1. MC = member of Congress.

The second column of Table 2 shows that party control of Congress does indeed affect minorities' sponsorship behavior. Both interaction effects are statistically nonsignificant, which suggests no differences between Black and White MCs and Latino and non-Latino MCs, respectively, during Democratic Congresses. However, the variables Black MC and Latino MC are both negative and significant ( $p < .05$ ), which shows that minorities sponsor fewer bills than do nonminorities during Republican Congresses. Specifically, Table 4 shows that Black MCs sponsor about six fewer bills than do White MCs and Latinos sponsor about five fewer bills than do non-Latinos during Republican Congresses.

In general, these results show mixed support for the sponsorship hypothesis. When control of Congress is not accounted for, we find that minorities do sponsor significantly fewer bills than nonminorities. Our more comprehensive model, however, shows that minorities' sponsorship behavior is conditioned on which party controls Congress: It is encouraged under Democratic Congresses, where minorities sponsor as many bills as nonminorities, and discouraged during Republican Congresses, where they sponsor fewer bills. In all, party control does appear to matter to minorities' sponsorship behavior.

For the most part, the results for the control variables in Table 2 support Schiller's (1995) idea that sponsorship increases as institutional status increases. Majority party members sponsor about 5 more bills than do minority party members, committee leaders sponsor about 4 more bills, and the most senior MC sponsors 21 more bills than the least senior MC. The only finding not consistent with Schiller's study is our result for party affiliation. Similar to Campbell's (1982) expectation regarding cosponsorship, Schiller hypothesizes that Democrats' inclination for expanding government—as opposed to Republicans' preference for contracting government—would lead them to sponsor more bills than Republicans because “the majority of bills introduced expand rather than contract the role of government” (Schiller, 1995, p. 192). Although she finds no statistical difference between the parties, we find that Democrats sponsor about three fewer bills per Congress than do Republicans ( $p < .05$ ). Perhaps this is a reflection of the Democrats' strategic environment between the 101st and 108th Congresses. Republicans controlled the White House during four of the eight Congresses studied here (101st, 102nd, 107th, and 108th), five of the Houses (104th-106th), and four and a half of the eight Senates (104th-106th, 108th, and part of 107th). Democrats had little incentive to incur the costs of sponsoring legislation given Republicans' sometimes complete and other times partial control of the policy process.

Tables 2 and 4 also show that district partisanship and an MC's ideological extremity and gender each matter to bill sponsorship. First, the MC from the most Democratic district sponsors approximately 15 more bills than those from Republican districts. This is consistent with Jacobson's (1990) notion that Democrats want to expand government, whereas Republicans want to contract it. Second, the most extreme member of the House (Representative Jim McDermott, a Democrat, from Washington's 7th district) sponsors about 7 more bills than the most median member of the House (Representative Daniel Lancaster, a Democrat, from North Carolina's 3rd district) on average. This is relatively surprising given extremists' bills' small chance for success. Perhaps they use bill sponsorship as they do cosponsorship or nonlegislative debate (Maltzman & Sigelman, 1996; Morris, 2001), namely, as tools of non-roll call position taking.

Third, Model 1 of Table 2 shows that similar to the variables of Latino MC and Black MC, Female MC has a strong independent effect on sponsorship. However, unlike our key variables, Female MC is positive. Table 4 shows that women sponsor about three more bills per Congress than do men. Furthermore, the findings depicted in Model 2 of Table 2 show that women sponsor as many bills as do men regardless of which party controls Congress. Specifically, the interaction effect between Female MC and Democratic Congress is statistically nonsignificant, which shows that there is no difference between the sponsorship behavior of men and women in Democratic Congresses. However, Female MC is positive in Model 2, which indicates that they sponsor more bills than do men during Republican Congresses. Table 4 shows that they sponsor three more bills than do men under Republican control.

These findings are consistent with Swers (2000, 2002), Tamerius (1995), and Vega and Firestone (1995), who find that congresswomen work hard to open the national agenda to gender-related issues. This begs the question: Why do women sponsor more bills than men but racial and ethnic minorities generally sponsor fewer bills than nonminorities? Although we cannot deliver a definite answer to this question here, we have some suspicions. For example, it is possible that women in general are in a relatively stronger strategic position in Congress than minorities despite operating in a "gendered institution" (Duerst-Lahti, 2002a, 2002b; Thomas, 1994). First, they have an edge over minorities with regard to the electoral connection. Because women are more efficiently distributed throughout the United States, it is in the majority party's interest to remain relatively attentive to women's policy interests.

Second, there are generally more women in Congress than African Americans or Latinos. Indeed, there have been times since 1991 when there were as many women in Congress as Blacks and Latinos combined (e.g., the 107th House when there were 54 women and 55 racial/ethnic minorities). Although partisan divides are more prominent among women than minorities in Congress (e.g., there were 36 Democratic and 17 Republican women in the 108th Congress vs. 56 Democratic and 4 Republican minorities), women have been known to use their collective weight to influence the agenda, especially on gender issues (Swers, 2000, 2002). Indeed, Latino and African Americans' collective influence in Congress is further disadvantaged due to their lack of perceived commonality, an essential step in the process of building political associations (Kaufmann, 2003).

What this suggests, therefore, is that women have greater incentive than do minorities to sponsor bills in Congress. Although women too have been disadvantaged by the policy process in Congress, electoral incentives exist for the majority party to, at the very least, consider its policy interests. It is

true that minorities—Latinos in particular—are among today's most sought after voting bloc but their influence over the legislative agenda continues to be less than robust, especially under a Republican-controlled Congress (Swain, 1993; Whitby, 1997). This is a powerful disincentive for Latino and Black MCs to sponsor bills in Congress.

All three of the remaining substantive variables (Previous Vote Margin, Party Leader, and Member of Control Committee) in Model 2 of Table 2 are statistically nonsignificant. Perhaps the most interesting is Previous Vote Margin, which just misses significance at the .05 level (it is significant at the more relaxed .1 level). Consistent with this finding, Table 2 shows it to have a relatively negligible effect on bill sponsorship. The safest member of Congress delivers about one more bill per Congress than the most vulnerable member. This effect is weak given the difference between the safest member, who runs unopposed, and the most vulnerable member, who wins by less than 1%.

We suspect that the nonsignificance of Previous Vote Margin is due to the unique cost–benefit trade-offs of position taking. On one hand, position taking can be risky (Mayhew, 1974) so it may behoove vulnerable MCs to remain silent by sponsoring fewer bills. On the other hand, taking “good” positions also can be politically rewarding because it builds trust with constituents (Fenno, 1978; Mayhew, 1974). Thus, it may behoove MCs to “pump up the volume” and sponsor more bills as they become more vulnerable. This is a difficult issue to settle without accounting for the types of bills MCs sponsor. For example, it may be that vulnerable MCs sponsor “safe” bills unlikely to alienate voters, whereas secure MCs can afford to take riskier stances on issues through bill sponsorship. The exact relationship between electoral vulnerability and bill sponsorship is a worthy topic for future research.

## Cosponsoring Legislation

Table 3 depicts the results for cosponsorship. Column 1 shows that Latino MC and Black MC have significant independent effects on cosponsorship, which supports the cosponsorship hypothesis. According to Table 4, Latino MCs cosponsor about 37 fewer bills than do non-Latinos, holding all else constant. Black MCs cosponsor about 33 fewer bills than do White MCs. These are significant differences; indeed, they are among the strongest in the model. They are consistent with the notion that Latino and Black MCs do not have the same cosponsorship opportunities as do nonminorities in Congress.

The results of the fully specified model (depicted in column 2 of Table 3) are almost identical to the results for bill sponsorship. First, Black and Latino

MCs cosponsor fewer bills than do White and non-Latino MCs during Republican Congresses, respectively. The differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. Specifically, Black MCs cosponsor 36 fewer bills than do White MCs, and Latino MCs cosponsor 42 fewer bills than do non-Latinos during Republican Congresses. There is no difference, however, between minorities and nonminorities' cosponsorship during Democratic Congresses. In general, these results are again consistent with our expectation and show that similar to sponsorship, party control matters to minorities' cosponsorship behavior.

The control variables in Table 3 fit right in line with Koger (2003) and Campbell's (1982) findings. Party affiliation, seniority, committee leadership, and ideological extremity all have statistically significant effects on the dependent variable. Specifically, Democrats cosponsor about 23 more bills than Republicans each Congress, committee leaders cosponsor about 21 more bills than backbenchers, the most senior member of the House cosponsors about 110 fewer bills than the least senior MC, and the most extreme MC cosponsors about 107 more bills than the most median member.

There are three small differences between our results and those of previous research. The first two are in regard to majority party membership and party leadership. Where Koger (2003) finds statistically significant and negative relationships between the variables and cosponsorship, our results show nonsignificant coefficients. Still, consistent with Koger, Table 4 shows negative substantive effects for each variable. Party leaders cosponsor 27 fewer bills than do rank-and-file MCs, and members of the majority party cosponsor about 5 fewer bills per Congress than do minority party members. The third difference is in regard to Previous Vote Margin. Although Koger (2003) and Campbell (1982) both hypothesize that cosponsorship increases as MCs become vulnerable, they find nonsignificant results for the relationship. Our results, on the other hand, support their expectations and show that the most vulnerable MC cosponsors about 19 more bills than the safest MC ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, Table 3 shows that gender, membership on a control committee, and district partisanship—none of which is included in previous research—significantly affect cosponsorship ( $p < .05$ ). Consistent with our findings for sponsorship, Model 1 of Table 3 shows that Female MC has a significant independent effect on the cosponsorship in Congress. Specifically, Table 4 shows that women cosponsor about 34 more bills than do men each Congress, and we once again find significant differences across Congresses. Female MC is statistically significant and positive in the fully specified model in Table 3. Specifically, women cosponsor about 36 more bills than do men during Republican Congresses. The interaction effect is statistically nonsignificant,

indicating no difference between the cosponsorship behavior of men and women during Democratic Congresses.

The results also show that members of a control committee cosponsor about 21 fewer bills than do noncontrol committee members. This is consistent with an “institutional safety-valve” approach to cosponsorship because non-control committee members are less advantaged than control committee members. Last, the representative from the most Democratic district in the House cosponsors 250 more bills than the MC from the most Republican district. Although large, this difference is not unrealistic given the sizable partisan distance between the most Democratic and Republican districts in the House. The most Republican district in our data set is the 19th district of Texas, represented by Larry Combest during the 107th Congress, where George W. Bush beat Vice President Al Gore in 2000 by 80% to 20%. (This is not surprising given that President Bush once lived in the district.) The most Democratic district in the House is the 1st district of Illinois during the 101st and 102nd Congresses, represented by Charles Hayes. Michael Dukakis won the district by a 95 to 4 margin in 1988 over George H. W. Bush. Following Campbell’s (1982) logic that “liberals believe that governmental responsibilities are more extensive than conservatives” (p. 420), it makes sense that the representative from the most Democratic district in our data, Mr. Hayes, cosponsors many more bills than does the MC from the most Republican district, Mr. Combest.

## Conclusion

This study shows that even after controlling for a variety of important factors, race and ethnicity matter to bill sponsorship and cosponsoring in Congress. In general, we find that minorities in Congress, that is, Latino and African American MCs, sponsor and cosponsor fewer bills than do nonminorities. These findings suggest that minorities have less incentive to participate in bill sponsorship and cosponsorship in an institution that historically places them and their policy priorities at a disadvantage.

We also find minorities’ bill sponsorship and cosponsorship behavior to be contingent on which party controls Congress. Our results show that minorities sponsor and cosponsor fewer bills than do nonminorities during Republican Congresses and as many bills as nonminorities during Democratic Congresses. Because most minority MCs are Democrats, Democratic Congresses are most likely friendlier to minorities and their interests. This encourages minorities’

bill sponsorship and cosponsorship participation. Conversely, their participation is depressed under Republican Congresses because their odds of setting the agenda and passing policy are significantly lower.

Finally, our results also have interesting implications for the study of women in Congress. To date, most research finds that women are more likely than men to sponsor and cosponsor women's issue bills (Swers, 2000, 2002; Tamerius, 1995; Vega & Firestone, 1995). Our more general study of sponsorship and cosponsorship shows that women sponsor and cosponsor at least as many bills as men regardless of which party controls Congress. Specifically, we find that women sponsor and cosponsor more bills than do men under Republican Congresses and a statistically indistinguishable amount during Democratic Congresses. As we discuss above, we believe these results suggest three conclusions. First, women work hard to ensure that their voices are heard in what some refer to as a "gendered institution" (e.g., Duerst-Lahti, 2002b). Second, despite participating in a gendered institution, women may be in a stronger strategic position than minorities and thus have more incentive to sponsor and cosponsor legislation. Finally, continued changes in descriptive representation make the "intersectionality" of race and gender in the legislative setting worth future investigation (Crenshaw, 1997).

These findings have important implications for the study of representation and participation in Congress. As we discuss above, Hall (1996) points out that the two are intimately tied to one another:

One of the hallmarks of representative assemblies, John Stuart Mill tells us, is that they bring together diverse parties with different views, values and political interests. The assembly makes possible a deliberation in which conflicting judgments about the public good, or even the efficient promotion of narrow interest, can be examined, debated, and resolved. . . . Such an idyllic view of the representative process, however, turns partly on the assumption that once elected, the citizens' agents themselves participate in legislative decisions. (pp. 1-2)

Of course, Hall then goes to great lengths to show that participation in Congress is not universal or equal. An MC's participation—and hence the quality of representation he or she can provide his or her constituents—depends on factors such as seniority, ideological extremity, and whether he or she is in the majority party.

Our study of bill sponsorship and cosponsorship suggests that participation in Congress, broadly conceived, is partly determined by an MC's race or ethnicity. Because participation and representation are intimately related,

this conclusion raises a number of interesting questions for studies of substantive and descriptive representation. For example, how do minority MCs participate in a legislative setting where they lack influence? Which activities in Congress give minorities the best opportunity to effectively represent their constituents when the roll call agenda may not reflect their interests? We can think of a few non-roll call venues worthy of future research, for example, nonlegislative debate (i.e., 1-min speeches and special order addresses), committee hearings, press releases, and *amicus curiae* briefs. Indeed, these activities only represent one small portion of representational activities. One relatively untapped avenue of research is minority MCs' "homestyle" (Fenno, 1978). How much time do minority MCs spend in their districts and do they present themselves differently than nonminority MCs? It seems to us that minorities' homestyle takes on added significance because of their disadvantages on Capitol Hill.

Our analysis also begs the question: Will minorities' newfound institutional status change how they participate or the nature of their representation? An unprecedented number of minority MCs have acquired committee chairships in the 110th Congress. Among the most notable are Nedia Velazquez (D-NY), who chairs the House Small Business Committee; Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), who chairs Ways and Means; the late Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA), who became chair of the House of Administration; John Conyers Jr. (D-MI), who gained the Judiciary position; and Bennie Thompson (D-MS), who now leads Homeland Security. Will these advancements lead to greater substantive representation for their constituents or will, as Hawkesworth (2003) suggests, racism in Congress transcend these promotions? Will the inevitable cross-pressures faced by party and committee leaders dampen minority MCs' ability to push racial agenda as Swain (1992) suggests? These are all questions future research will undoubtedly address.

In closing, we began this article by discussing the recent increases in minority population across the United States and how this has contributed to greater representation levels for both Latinos and African Americans in Congress. It is possible that with continued population growth, and more important an increase in the share of voting population, minority representation in Congress will reach a critical mass necessary to support greater legislative effectiveness. If so, the participation of minority MCs should more closely resemble that of women, who according to our results participate at slightly higher rates than do men in the legislative process. In either event, it is clear that the status of Latino and African American policy agendas will depend greatly on the ability of their representatives to overcome institutional disadvantages and become active participants in the legislative process.

## Appendix

### Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Coding Scheme
Bill sponsorship	# bills MC sponsored each Congress
Bill cosponsorship	# bills MC cosponsored each Congress
African American MC	1 = <i>Black MC</i> , 0 = <i>White</i>
Latino MC	1 = <i>Latino MC</i> , 0 = <i>non-Latino</i>
Female MC	1 = <i>female MC</i> , 0 = <i>male</i>
Democrat	1 = <i>Democrat</i> , 0 = <i>Republican</i>
Majority party member	1 = <i>majority party member</i> , 0 = <i>minority party member</i>
Seniority	# years served in Congress
Committee leader	1 = <i>chair of full or subcommittee, ranking minority member of full or subcommittee</i> ; 0 = <i>backbencher</i>
Party leader	1 = <i>Speaker of the House, majority or minority leader, majority or minority whip</i> ; 0 = <i>rank and file MC</i>
Member of control committee	1 = <i>member of Appropriations, Ways and Means, Rules or Budget committees</i> ; 0 = <i>otherwise</i>
Ideological extremity	Absolute value of (MC's DW-NOMINATE score—House Median's DW-NOMINATE score)
Previous vote margin	Incumbent's—challenger's vote share in last election
District partisanship	Democratic presidential nominee's vote share in district—Democratic presidential nominee's national vote share
Democratic Congress	1 = <i>101st-103rd Congresses</i> , 0 = <i>104th-108th Congresses</i>
Congresses 101st-108th	1 = <i>the respective Congress</i> , 0 = <i>otherwise</i> (the 108th Congress is the omitted Congress in the models)

Source: Women in Congress were identified using Amer's (2006) *Congressional Research Report for Congress*.

Note: MC = member of Congress.

## Notes

1. Some students of Congress have characterized cosponsorship as “cheap talk.” Because most bills do not pass and cosponsoring legislation requires little (if any) time and resources, it is a relatively costless way to signal one's positions. Fowler (2006a) discounts this characterization because of the costs associated with which bills to cosponsor:

From 1973-2004 the average House member cosponsored only 3.4% of all proposed bills and the average Senator only cosponsored 2.4%. Thus, although each legislator cosponsors numerous bills, this represents only a tiny fraction of the bills they might have chosen to support. (p. 5)

2. Schiller (1995) discusses three types of costs associated with sponsoring a bill: resource, opportunity, and political. Our own data support the idea that sponsoring a bill is costly. On

average, members of congress (MCs) sponsor about 15 bills each Congress and cosponsor about 274 bills.

3. As “entrepreneurial activities,” bill sponsorship and cosponsorship also may help MCs gain influence in the institution (Wawro, 2000). Wawro posits that party leaders use promotions to prestigious positions in Congress to encourage “legislative entrepreneurship.” He finds support for his hypothesis: The more entrepreneurial activity that MCs of the majority party undertake, the more likely it is that they will advance to committee and party leadership positions.

4. Sponsorship and cosponsorship data can be found at the *Thomas* Web site: <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d109/sponlst.html>

5. Uhlaner and Garcia (2002) show that Latinos are a politically and culturally diverse community. In future studies, it would be interesting to consider the three Latino national origins in Congress separately, namely, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. However, at this point in time there are simply not enough MCs with Puerto Rican or Cuban backgrounds to do so. There are only 4 Puerto Rican and 4 Cuban MCs in our data set; the remaining 27 are Mexican American.

6. Changes in predicted values were calculated by letting our variable of interest vary from its minimum to maximum values while holding all other variables at their means or modes.

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