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The Policy Consequences of Motivated Information Processing Among the Partisan Elite

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Abstract

Policymakers are bombarded with information, enough that they cannot process it all. Combining the theories of disproportionate information processing and motivated reasoning, which the authors call motivated information processing, Anderson and Harbridge argue that policymaking by elected officials reflects partisan biases in the treatment of information that have previously been observed among citizens. With surprising frequency, motivated information processing would cause Democrats to make large cuts to the budget and Republicans to make large increases as necessary accuracy corrections after pursuing their directional goals. The effects of motivated information processing ought to be larger on issues more closely aligned with the parties and further from an election. The researchers test these observable implications on budgetary data at the subaccount level, finding evidence that Democrats engage in motivated information processing and that the effects of it are felt more on social spending and in off-election years.

Information in the political world is not scarce. Policymakers are bombarded by signals from constituents, from lobbyists, from Dear Colleague letters, and from many other sources of information that offer conflicting messages. Yet, they must still somehow make policy decisions. Existing work at the elite level suggests that policymakers engage in disproportionate information processing where they ignore some signals from the environment while relying too heavily on others, perhaps eventually being forced to react or even overreact. This yields either large or small changes in policy but relatively few moderate changes (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). For the most part, work on disproportionate information processing gives little attention to the direction of policy change, much less to the way that partisan biases affect both the direction and size of policy change. Existing work on motivated reasoning at the mass level, however, emphasizes how partisan attachments can subconsciously affect decision making and lead to systematically biased responses to new information (for a review, see Druckman et al. 2009). Drawing on these two bodies of literature, we argue that policy-making by elected officials reflects partisan biases in the treatment of information and, focusing on the federal budget, derive a series of observable implications if lawmakers are using these strategies.

When considering the domestic federal budget, traditional views of partisan ideologies and the constituency bases of each party suggest that Democrats generally want to increase social spending while Republicans want to decrease it. These prior ideological positions open the door for motivated reasoning and allow us to predict both the direction and size of policy changes. We suggest that attention to informational signals that align with prior beliefs will drive the overall pattern of Democratic increases and Republican cuts. But ignoring signals that contradict each party's natural stances, combined with efforts at accuracy and thus policy adjustment, drives Democrats to make big cuts more frequently than Republicans among the budgetary subaccounts

that are cut. This counterintuitive prediction is produced because by the time that Democrats make a cut, they have likely ignored many signals and must make large corrections, or they are responding to an especially large signal. A similar logic holds in terms of Republicans and large increases. These "corrections" occur because elites have both directional (ideological) and accuracy goals. Importantly, these policy corrections would not be predicted by a story of policymakers merely following their preferences. The combination of motivated reasoning and disproportionate information processing is called *motivated information processing* throughout this paper.

The first section brings together prior theoretical work and empirical findings to produce a framework of motivated information processing. The second section derives observable implications, which are tested in the third section using a series of multilevel logistic models. We find that, although Democrats are more likely to increase spending than are Republicans, they also make more large cuts. Moreover, these tendencies are particularly pronounced on issues owned by the parties and in non-election years. These findings are consistent with the predictions if lawmakers are indeed using motivated information processing.

Motivated Information Processing Framework

The information rich world in which policymakers are steeped means that they need a simpler way of making decisions. This is particularly true if policymakers operate under conditions of bounded rationality (Simon 1955), where they are goal oriented and strategic but have cognitive limits and finite time in which to make decisions. Instead of evaluating all possible options for dealing with a problem in public policy, policymakers must search among available alternatives for a solution. One possible method of search is to make small changes from the status quo: to follow a path of incremental change (Lindblom 1979; Wildavsky 1974).

Since it is clear that there are also large changes in policy, often referred to as punctuations, Jones and Baumgartner (2005) suggest that what actually occurs is disproportionate information processing whereby individuals sometimes overreact to information and at other times underreact. These cognitive limitations are further compounded by institutional arrangements. However, their analysis focuses on disproportionate changes in general but not on the sources of the "systematic" mistakes and whether the decision makers were predisposed to accept signals for changes in one direction versus another.

While insightful in many ways, we suggest that these analyses of policy change and elite decision making fail to consider the robust literature in political behavior and political psychology related to motivated reasoning and the biases that may result (Kunda 1990). Evidence from individual decision making suggests that the collection and integration of information is often not independent of prior judgment (Taber and Lodge 2006, 755). Instead, bias, which is implicit in the idea of bounded rationality, is explicit in the concept of motivated reasoning, and implies that the way that people incorporate information is a function of their prior beliefs.[1] In this framework, individuals have both accuracy and directional goals (Festinger 1957). Applied to the realm of politics, the focus has been on "directional motivated reasoning, on the assumption that people seek to arrive at desired conclusions about politics" (Druckman et al. 2009, 491). Rather than being a cognitive limitation that must be overcome, motivated reasoning is "built into the basic architecture of information processing mechanisms of the brain" (Lodge and Taber 2008, 35-36).

[1] Bias need not be the result of motivated reasoning, as biases can result from other shortcuts or heuristics and can occur under Bayesian updating given certain prior beliefs, the type of information, and sufficient strength of original beliefs (Bullock 2009).

Evidence for motivated reasoning has been found in experiments and in patterns of public opinion more broadly. Taber and Lodge (2006) find evidence of both disconfirmation bias – counter-arguing against contrary arguments and uncritically accepting supporting arguments – and confirmation bias – seeking out confirmatory evidence – among citizens. In mass public opinion, the consequences of motivated reasoning manifest in partisans punishing only presidents of the opposite party for economic performance (Lebo and Cassino 2007), in their inability to make factually accurate statement about the other party (Hartman and Newmark 2012), and, outside the experimental setting, in the fact that co-partisans of the president are more likely than opposing partisans to believe that inflation and unemployment have decreased during the president's tenure (Bartels 2002).

While little existing work has studied motivated reasoning among elites,[2] they too are likely to engage in motivated reasoning. Work on motivated reasoning often finds the strongest effects among the politically aware (Slothuus and de Vreese 2010), the politically sophisticated (Taber and Lodge 2006), and those with strong prior opinions (Lavine et al. N.D.; Taber and Lodge 2006), which suggests that motivated reasoning may offer an apt characterization of how partisan goals affect elite decision making and, ultimately, public policy outcomes. In the mass public, the major driver of this motivated reasoning is partisanship (e.g., Taber and Lodge 2006; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Druckman et al. 2009) and elected officials are even more deeply embedded in a partisan system. Their directional goal may encompass prior views about the role of government (policy goals) as well as consistency with a party brand that helps facilitate reelection.

[2]Work on the courts suggests that motivated reasoning plays out in judicial decision making, even at the level of the Supreme Court (Braman 2009).

But as with the public, there are circumstances under which elites will give more weight to accuracy goals, which may indicate that policy should change in a direction contrary to their directional goals (Druckman 2012). While there is debate about whether (or when) substantive information trumps partisan cues among the mass public (Bullock 2011), experimental research suggests that motivated reasoning is attenuated only with very strong accuracy inducements (Druckman 2012; Bolsen et al. 2012) or by overwhelming evidence that runs counter to prior beliefs (Chong and Druckman 2007). These accuracy inducements may come from the same reelection and policy goals that drive bias because enacting good public policy that enhances the well-being of the country and its economy may also enhance their reelection prospects. However, even elites facing accountability along the lines of "the implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called on to justify one's beliefs, feels, and actions to others" (Lerner and Tetlock 1999, 255) via reelection will not be driven solely by accuracy goals. In part this is because the audience they face only partly reflects the characteristics of an audience that would induce accuracy, since voters are often not sufficiently informed to hold politicians accountable in the electoral process or may share their directional goals. Policy corrections may also be seen when very strong signals lead elites to go against their directional biases.

In addition to being strong partisans, which would facilitate motivated reasoning, elites are subject to the conditions that Taber and Lodge (2000, 185) suggest make directional bias most likely to creep into reasoning: the judgment task is complex, objective information is not readily available or the evidence is ambiguous, disconfirming evidence is not highlighted, counterarguments come easily to mind, and they are under time pressure. Since political elites continuously operate in a world of conflicting information, we can expect motivated reasoning to combine with disproportionate information processing, producing what we call *motivated*

information processing. In practice, this means that individuals choose which pieces of evidence to consider and how to respond to the information they receive (Druckman 2012). This implies that their decisions will be characterized by a pattern where most changes are in the direction of their bias, but occasionally, given their accuracy goals, we would also expect them to make corrections that go against the direction of bias. Given that these corrections likely occur only after an accumulation of decisions in the direction of their bias or after substantial information that cannot be ignored, they are likely to be large.

Observable Implications

Since we cannot vary the information provided to political elites during the policymaking process using the same experimental techniques as can be used in the mass public, we must seek observable implications that enable us to indirectly test whether elites use motivated information processing. This paper assesses three observable implications: that despite a general preference for spending increases over cuts, Democrats will make more large cuts than Republicans and vice versa; that motivated information processing will be more prevalent on issues owned by the parties; and that motivated information processing will have more of an effect further from elections. These implications are derived in the context of the budget so we first justify the choice of the budget as a place to test motivated information processing.

The budget is an effective place to test the combined framework of disproportionate information processing and motivated reasoning in the partisan elite for three reasons. First, the budget, long used in studies of incrementalism and punctuated equilibrium, is one of the few places where we can assess the direction of policy change and where we have general information about the prior beliefs of each party (Erikson et al. 2002; Natchez and Bupp 1973). However, traditional approaches to characterizing budgetary change focusing on incrementalism

(Wildavsky 1992; Dahl and Lindblom 1953; Davis et al. 1966) have often been found to be limiting (Anderson and Harbridge 2010; Berry 1990; Dezhbakhsh et al. 2003). Second, the budget receives policy attention every year, unlike many multiyear authorizations where changes in preferences do not predict changes in policy once expiring authorization provisions are taken into account (Adler and Wilkerson Forthcoming). As a result, we are able to assess whether party control affects policy changes. However, this feature does limit our ability to look at whether motivated information processing affects whether an issue is put on the agenda at all. Third, partisan strategies manifest in motivated reasoning may be observed in decisions regarding budgetary outcomes. Both party leaders in Congress and the president offer specific directives on what accounts should be increased or decreased (Lowery et al. 1985; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991) and have influence throughout the process, but the connection between party effects and motivated reasoning has not yet been made.

To test our argument, this analysis uses disaggregated budget data (Cogan 2002) consisting of the amount of budget authority in each discretionary subaccount (the smallest unit in the appropriations bills) for each fiscal year beginning in 1956 and going through 2003. Included in the data are 1,539 subaccounts. Of course, not all of these subaccounts are funded in each year, so the panel is unbalanced. The fiscal year data is adjusted to correspond to the calendar years because the political variables of interest change by calendar year.

Budget Outcomes and Motivated Information Processing

Given a broad distribution of information signals, confirmation bias implies that partisans will disproportionately process those that confirm their beliefs. Just as with politically sophisticated members of the public, political elites seek directional goals and their prior beliefs about the necessity of either increasing or decreasing spending affect what signals from the

environment are considered. On domestic issues Democrats believe that increased spending would be beneficial[3] and Republicans believe that decreased spending would be beneficial.[4] As they gain more control of the political process, Democrats will process signals indicating that spending should be increased, and we should observe increases to budgetary spending. As Republicans gain more control, we should observe decreases. These expectations are unsurprising and consistent with their policy positions.

More interesting are the cases where motivated information processing results in actions contrary to their traditional partisan stances. When the evidence presented for one side clearly trumps the other or when there are strong accuracy inducements, even partisans in the public move from their directional goals (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2012). Given the need to be considered competent with the national budget and to be reelected, the partisan elite also cannot ignore repeated or large signals that run contrary to their prior beliefs. As a result, the parties can be expected to make small changes in the direction of their prior beliefs unless one of two things happens: 1) they receive enough signals that movement in the contrary direction must occur or 2) they receive a strong signal that a change in the contrary direction must be made that

[3] For example, the 2008 Democratic Party Platform stated, "We will provide immediate relief to working people who have lost their jobs, families who are in danger of losing their homes, and those who – no matter how hard they work – are seeing prices go up more than their income. We will invest in America again –in world-class public education, in our infrastructure, and in green technology" (Democratic Party 2008).

[4] For instance, in the Republican Party Pledge to America released in September 2010, Republicans put forth "a plan to stop out of control spending & reduce the size of government" (GOP 2010).

just cannot be ignored. Because these changes occur after repeated signals have been ignored for a time or are the result of a strikingly large signal, their magnitude should be larger than that of many of the small changes that partisans make in the direction of their prior beliefs. For example, Democrats may ignore a signal that spending on subsidies to solar power needs to be cut until spending on solar power must be *greatly* cut.[5] Thus, we would observe a slow downward trajectory in spending from the Republicans as they observe the signal but increases to spending from Democrats followed by a large cut. The empirical manifestation of this motivated information processing is that, conditional on cutting the budget, Democrats should make large cuts surprisingly often compared to Republicans. Similarly, conditional on increasing spending, when Republicans hold more branches of government, they should make large increases surprisingly often compared to Democrats.[6] The raw budgetary data provides evidence of this relationship. Drawing on those subaccounts that align most closely with Democratic priorities, Figure 1 shows the proportion of cuts that are greater than 50%. Among budget subaccounts that are cut, a higher proportion of big cuts (50% vs. 35%) are made when Democrats have greater control.

[5] This signal might, for example, be evidence that solar power technology is not living up to its promise or that U.S. firms will have trouble competing with lower-cost Chinese manufacturers.

[6]Although we move between the phrases 'when Democrats control more branches, policy will…' and 'Democrats will do X to policy', we are cognizant that the collective nature of policy making in Congress necessitates that we make a leap from focusing on the behavior of individuals to parties as aggregates. Given the aggregation of multiple individuals and the institutional arrangements that filter policy change, policy outputs are a difficult test for our framework of motivated information processing.

[Figure 1 about here]

Attributing different patterns of spending not to "true" signals from the environment but to the behavior of the parties when they receive signals requires the assumption that the distribution of signals in the environment (i.e., the need for a cut or increase to a given program) is relatively similar across partisan control. We would be concerned that this assumption is violated if Democrats are elected when there is a "need" for more social spending, perhaps in economic downturns. While models of presidential and House elections find that the economy helps to predict election outcomes (Fair 2009; Hibbs 2000; Abramowitz 2012), it is the *incumbent party's* vote share that is predicted by economic variables, not the vote share of the Democratic or Republican Party. Nonetheless, in later analyses we include economic controls to account for plausible systematic variation in the size of changes that is due to economic conditions rather than motivated information processing.

The counterfactual to the framework of motivated information processing could be one of two patterns. The first, drawn from just disproportionate information processing, would suggest that the distribution of policy changes should have more big changes and very small changes than a normal distribution – but that party control of the process should not predict either the type or direction of policy change. The second, drawn from a more rational choice perspective of politics, would predict that party control affects the direction of change, possibly with Democrats making more big increases while Republicans make more big cuts.

Issue Ownership and Motivated Information Processing

In addition to the observable implications about the size and direction of budgetary changes, the logic of motivated information processing implies that the effects will be stronger on those issues that are owned by the parties than on all discretionary spending, since this is

where directional and accuracy goals are strongest (Bolsen et al. 2012). In the case of the budget, we expect to see larger effects of party on social spending (Petrocik 1996), which is generally considered to be owned by the Democratic Party and constitutes a majority of domestic discretionary spending. Since defense spending, owned by the Republican Party, may also be significantly impacted by wars or other external events (e.g., Goldsmith 2003), our analyses of issue ownership focus on the social issues that are owned by Democrats.

Election Cycles and Motivated Information Processing

We also predict that the degree of motivated reasoning, or bias toward one's priors, will vary between the first and second session of a Congress because of electoral pressures and the need to appeal to constituents who benefit from social spending. The directional motivations of politicians come not just from ideology and partisanship, as they do in the electorate, but also from their constituencies (e.g., Kingdon 1973; Levitt 1996; Harden and Carsey 2012). Members have electoral incentives to be mindful of constituents, and large budgetary corrections are likely to put members out-of-step and thus at electoral risk (Canes-Wrone et al. 2002). Assuming that even necessary accuracy corrections may run counter to the perceived interests of constituents but that voters are myopic (Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2008; Achen and Bartels 2004), we expect that parties will choose to make necessary large changes counter to a party's preferred direction of change in the first session when they are further from the election and more able to avoid the electoral consequences. Because of the role of constituency in creating directional goals, this electoral cycle is most likely to be apparent among the issues that are owned by the parties.

Tests of Observable Implications

That Democrats Make More Large Cuts and Republicans Make More Small Increases

Testing the first observable implication that, despite being prone to make increases, Democrats make more large cuts requires examining differences in the distribution of changes among cuts and increases conditional on the number of Democratic branches (the total number of branches – House, Senate, and presidency – controlled by the Democrats in each year). In the time period of our data, CY 1956-2002, there are no periods of unified Republican control so this number ranges from 1 to 3.[7] In order to incorporate covariates, nested dichotomous models provide a multivariate test of motivated information processing. Jones and Baumgartner (2005, 142-3) suggest that policymakers will consider alternatives in a stepwise fashion, deciding in what direction to move policy from the status quo, then deciding how big of a policy change to make. In practice, decisions at each step are made with expectations about what subsequent decisions will be, but they can be modeled separately to consider the political effect of party control across various types of outcomes. The specification is similar to Cameron's (2000, 52) account of veto bargaining and to models of women's participation in the labor force (Fox 2002). We consider whether the budget allocation changes (coded 1) or not; when it does change, whether it increases (coded 1) or decreases; when it decreases, whether it decreases by a large (coded 1) or small amount; and when it increases, whether is increases by a large (coded 1) or small amount. The definition of no change from year-to-year includes very small adjustments of +/- 3%. This paper uses a threshold of 50% to differentiate small and large changes.[8] Because we

[7] Since the Jeffords party switch occurred prior to passage of the budget, we treat 2001 as having Democratic Senate control.

[8]Robustness checks were conducted using thresholds for big cuts/increases of 25%, 40%, 50%, 60%, and 75%. We use categories for large and small policy changes because our argument is that the partisan identity of decision makers will affect the signals that will be considered and

are interested in the size of the changes in spending actually made by policymakers, appropriations are not adjusted for inflation.

Nested dichotomous models allow us to look the effects of independent variables on each decision without constraining their effects on other decisions. Mathematically, this has the advantage of not treating the categories symmetrically as a polytomous logit model would. Additionally, the nested dichotomous models do not impose the restriction that the equations for the regression lines for each category are the same as an ordered probit or logit model would.[9] In all of our subaccount-level analyses, we use multi-level models allowing the intercept to vary for each of the subaccounts. This approach has the benefit of acknowledging relationships over time within each subaccount, while also acknowledging that some subaccounts provide more information than others (Gelman and Hill 2007).

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thus the type of change that will occur. A continuous specification of the size of policy change would allow us to predict the size and direction of change, but would mask the corrections lawmakers must make to achieve their accuracy goals.

[9]Another possibility, quantile regression, has the nice property of creating less arbitrary cutpoints, but it only allows the effect of the independent variable to vary across quantiles, rather than allowing the independent variable to predict which quantile policy occurs in. Our interest is not in whether party control has a varying effect within big cuts compared to within small cuts, but in whether party control corresponds to having a large cut or a small cut in the first place.

This multivariate specification includes the main political variables of interest and controls. In addition to the number of branches controlled by Democrats,[10] each specification includes net turnover that indicates the net percent of seats that changed from Republican to Democratic averaged across the House and the Senate.[11] Positive values reflect Democratic gains, while negative values reflect Republican gains, capturing the degree to which one party has increased control.

To control for constraints on policymakers, the analysis includes the size of the surplus, unemployment, budgetary rules, and the duration of bargaining over appropriations. The economic backdrop of deficits and unemployment may constrain the behavior of lawmakers (Padgett 1980, 364). Thus, we include the surplus as a percent of GDP (lagged by one year) and the unemployment rate. But beyond being a constraint, the state of the economy may also offer information about the signals from the environment that are available to partisan actors. Controlling for the state of the economy holds constant the economic signals that each party receives.

Budgetary rules also constrain policymaking. From fiscal years 1985 to 1990, the existence of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit limits intended to constrain spending should limit

[10]The continuous specification assumes that the difference between one and two branches of Democratic control is similar to that between two and three branches. Robustness checks treating the number of Democratic branches as a categorical variable are available in the online appendix.

[11]This also controls for the fact that changes in the coalition of decision makers may also affect the size of policy change, as the status quo may be further away when there is substantial turnover, we include in variable in our multivariate analyses that accounts for the magnitude of legislative turnover.

both the number and size of changes. Then the adoption of pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) rules required that increases in one area be offset by decreases in another so we should expect fewer changes, and especially fewer large changes, between 1991 and 2001 because of the political difficulty of determining an appropriate offset. Moreover, when there are changes, PAYGO is likely to promote decreases in spending as any increases must be offset.

Longer durations of bargaining, as measured by the number days past the beginning of the fiscal year that an appropriations bill passes, should be associated with fewer changes in spending, a greater likelihood of small cuts in spending, and a greater likelihood of small increases in spending. This is because spending has often already continued via the continuing resolution at last year's levels, making even an intended large change smaller. It is also because delays in the appropriations process are associated with greater disagreement on the part of the actors (Woon and Anderson 2012) making them less likely to agree to large changes in the level of appropriations.

To test the first observable implication, that Democrats make more large cuts and that Republicans make more large increases, each specification in the columns of Table 1 has the primary partisan predictor.[12] Column 1 shows that more subaccounts are changed when Democrats control more branches. As we would expect given the ideological stances of the parties, among those subaccounts that are changed in column 1, column 2 shows that more are increased when Democrats have control of more branches. This result is unsurprising and aligns with the expectations of confirmation bias in motivated reasoning. The application of

[12]It also contains an interaction between the partisan variable and a dummy for the first or second session of a Congress, allowing the effect of the partisan variable to vary. We discuss these results in more detail when we consider the third observable implication.

disconfirmation bias and accuracy goals to congressional decision-making offers a more surprising result in Column 3. Motivated reasoning would predict that Democrats make big cuts when they do make cuts more often than Republicans because they must counteract an accumulation of inappropriate increases based on their ideological bias. In fact, among those subaccounts that are cut, more big cuts are made when Democrats control more branches of government. Increasing Democratic control by one branch corresponds to a 4% increase in the probability of making a big cut.[13]

Although we would expect disconfirmation bias to operate among Republicans as well, big increases do not occur more often when Republicans control more branches and, in fact, occur more frequently with greater Democratic control in this specification.[14] There are two reasons that we might expect motivated information processing to be less visible on the Republican side. First, even if Republicans engage in motivated information processing, this study does not include a period of unified Republican control analogous to the three periods of unified Democratic control in this time period, which may dampen the effect of motivated information processing on policy. Second, large increases are more difficult to make than large

[13] The estimated predicted probability is the upper bound of the predictive difference as it is calculated at the midpoint of the logistic curve, following the suggestion by Gelman and Hill (2007, 82).

[14] These specifications include the inception of new programs in the category for large increases. When cases of inception are removed, the number of Democratic branches is insignificant (β=0.03, p=0.64). Although a different dynamic may be at work for inception, we include it here as a way of taking the broadest view on large changes.

cuts, especially if budget rules like Gramm-Rudman-Hollings or PAYGO are in place. To the extent that legislators face a budget constraint, large increases are limited.

[Table 1 about here]

The remainder of Table 1 offers some insight into the other factors that affect changes in spending. A greater number of average net seats gained by Democrats is associated with more increases in spending and more big cuts.[15] During the time that PAYGO was in place and increases to appropriations had to be offset by cuts elsewhere, fewer changes to spending were made, with more cuts. PAYGO also reduced the number of large changes in spending. Similarly, Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, which set deficit limits, was associated with fewer changes, but not with more cuts. It also reduced the number of large changes. Higher unemployment is associated with greater changes to the budget but, perhaps counter intuitively to those who advocate fiscal solutions to unemployment, with fewer big increases in spending. The size of the surplus from the prior year is associated with more changes to spending, more increases, and more big cuts. As we might expect, having more money to spend makes activity on the budget more prevalent. It is surprising, however, that within subaccounts that are cut, those in years with a larger surplus are cut more. Finally, longer delay is associated with more changes and more cuts. This reflects the difficulty of compromise (Woon and Anderson 2012), but it also suggests that budget impasses are not resolved with large changes to the subaccounts.

That Motivated Information Processing is Stronger among Issues Owned by the Parties

The second observable implication of the motivated information processing framework is that policy effects ought to be stronger on issues owned by the party because the directional and accuracy goals of motivated reasoning are stronger on such issues. To test whether this is

[15]Seat turnover is zero for the second session.

empirically true, Table 2 repeats the analysis from above on a subsample of the data, including only subaccounts in areas that can be considered owned by the Democratic Party. These data include subaccounts in the areas of low-income housing assistance, education, job training, housing finance, the environment, energy and power subsidies, community development aid, and management of the public domain.

Table 2 shows that each of the findings related to motivated reasoning that existed among the universe of subaccounts is stronger within those subaccounts owned by the Democratic Party. More branches controlled by the Democratic party is associated with more increases to those subaccounts that are changed and more big cuts to those that are decreased. The point estimates of the coefficients on each of these are larger than the coefficients when all subaccounts are considered, just as would be expected if motivated reasoning plays a larger role in issues owned by the party. In this case, increasing Democratic control by one branch corresponds to nearly an 11% difference in the probability of making a big cut. Again, we do not find support for Republicans making more big increases as the coefficient on the number of Democratic branches in column 4 is insignificant.

[Table 2 about here]

That the Effects of Motivated Information Processing are Stronger Further from Elections

We turn now to a discussion of the interaction terms with the second session, which serve to test the observable implication that the effects of motivated information processing will be stronger further from elections because the parties cannot afford to alienate their supporters by making corrections close to elections. This means that while they can go against their directional goals in off-election years and even make necessary corrections, we should see them do so less in election years. Tables 1 and 2 show that the effect of the number of Democratic branches is

dampened in the second session.[16] It appears that Democrats do make large corrections by making more big cuts, but they do so more often than Republicans only in years when potential electoral punishment is further away. Again, this is consistent with legislators who are constrained by the nearness of an election in the second session. While the coefficient on the number of Democratic branches in the Big Increase column is not distinguishable from zero among most owned issues, its interaction with the second session is. This suggests that more large increases are made in election years, which may reflect a general desire by Republican constituents for spending on individual issues despite have a broader preferences for spending cuts (Jacoby 1994; Eismeier 1982). The asymmetry of cuts and increases may mean that the incentives for Democrats and Republicans are different because the penalty for accuracy corrections is stronger when they cut than when they increase spending. The different distributions of changes in the first and second sessions are illustrated in Figure 2, which shows that fewer subaccounts falling under Democratic issue ownership are changed in the second session and more cuts are made in the first session. These findings offer some insight into which signals they take into account and how that varies as they get close to an election.

[Figure 2 about here]

Robustness Checks

[16] In Table 1, the effect of the number of Democratic branches in the second session (the sum of the coefficients on the number of Democratic branches and the interaction term) is not statistically different from zero ($p < 0.10$) for columns 1 and 4. For columns 2 and 3, the estimate is significant but changes direction from the effect in the first session. For Table 2, the effect of the number of Democratic branches in the second session is insignificant for columns 1 and 3. For columns 2 and 4, the effect is significant but reverses in direction.

As a final examination of the observable implications of motivated information processing, we conduct a number of robustness checks of the analyses. First, in order to assess whether these findings are being driven by the large number of observations that result from disaggregating to the subaccount level, Table 3 presents similar results aggregated by year. As with Table 2, this specification focuses on budgetary subaccounts falling under Democratic issue ownership. In this specification, the dependent variable is the percent of most-owned subaccounts that are changed. For example, the dependent variable in Column 3 is the percentage of subaccounts, among those that are cut, that are cut greater than 50%. The results confirm the findings from the subaccount level. Even at a yearly level, motivated information processing is manifested in more big cuts to subaccounts when Democrats control more branches. In all cases, the interaction term shows a dampening in the second session such that the effect of the number of Democratic branches is statistically insignificant in the second session.

[Table 3 about here]

The remaining robustness checks repeat the analyses in Tables 1, 2, and 3 either varying the threshold for defining large budgetary changes (both cuts and increases) or defining the number of Democratic branches as a categorical variable. The basic findings of the paper are robust to these changes in specification, with some exceptions for the most extreme definitions of large changes (i.e., 25%).[17] The results of these models are available in the online appendix.

[17] The finding that having more Democratic branches is associated with more large cuts is significant for the 40%, 60%, and 75% variation in cutpoints and for treating the number of branches as a factor. This is true across both the all subaccounts and most owned subaccount specifications and in the yearly model. As with the analyses presented in the paper, the effect of the number of Democratic branches is sometimes significant (and positive, contrary to

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we maintained the assumption that motivated information processing is what drives the behavior of policymakers and found evidence consistent with the derived observable implications. Are there other theoretical explanations that would produce the same patterns? One alternative hypothesis is that incentives for electoral moderation drive the pattern of changes. Given a first-past-the-post electoral system, candidates and parties have every incentive to appeal to the median voter. One way to do this would be to balance increases in spending with cuts, where increases occur on the issues of party ownership. Two observable implications follow from this. First, Democrats should make more big cuts on broad domestic discretionary spending (Table 1) than they do on their own issues (Table 2) in order to appeal to their electorate. Instead, we observe the opposite. Second, we should see moderating behavior close to elections. Instead, Democrats make cuts more often in the first session of a Congress. There may be some evidence that Republicans are moderating, given that they make more big increases in the second session. Nonetheless, the observable implications of motivated information processing rather than electoral moderation appear to fit the patterns in the data.

A second alternative explanation for the variation in the size of changes is that the institutional structures force compromise. Like the classic literature on divided government and its effect on outputs (e.g. Mayhew 1991, Binder 2003), this would predict that Democrats make cuts to spending under divided government when they must make concessions to Republicans.

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expectations) for big increases among all subaccounts but never among the Democratic owned subaccounts. Moreover, the effect estimates are larger for Democratic issues than for all subaccounts. In the factor specifications, the effect of 3 Democratic branches is often larger in magnitude than the effect of 2 Democratic branches.

However, the pattern of Democrats making big cuts to spending is most apparent under unified government, not divided government. In a similar vein, institutional structures might mean that budget impasses or deficits result in compromises that necessitate major concessions to the other party. However, the empirical findings here show that there are no more large cuts as negotiations drag on or under deficits. Thus, it appears that compromise forced by the institutional arrangements or economic conditions is not at the heart of big cuts under Democratic Party governance.

Instead, combining the insights from institutions and policy scholars on disproportionate information processing with insights from political psychology on motivated reasoning results in predictions that largely match the empirical reality. Partisan elites, just like partisans in the public, have directional goals. As a result, we argued that given an abundance of informational signals from which to choose, policymakers will use their partisan identity to select information in line with their directional goals. But as policymakers tasked with national welfare and facing reelection, they also have accuracy goals that may necessitate corrections to policy. By maintaining the assumption that motivated reasoning is occurring in the heads of political elites, we tested a series of observable implications using budgetary policy.

In particular, we found support for the implications that despite having a general preference (and behavior) for increasing spending, among the subaccounts that were cut, Democrats made more large cuts. This was found to be strongest on those issues that are associated with Democratic issue ownership and during the first session of a Congress, rather than in election years. Although we found little support for Republicans making large budgetary increases, this may be driven by a lack of unified control in our data and by the political difficulty of increasing spending.

This paper offers further evidence that parties play a crucial role in producing policy (Berry et al. 2010; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 2006; Smith 2007). In particular, they structure the directional goals of their members in ways that manifest in motivated information processing. Partisanship, as a heuristic and as a source of ideological direction, interacts with the information rich environment faced by policymakers to produce predictable changes in governmental policy. It manifests in intuitive ways, with more Democratic control associated with more increases to spending on various programs. But it also manifests in less obvious ways when the accuracy goals of policymakers drive them to make large corrections that result in an empirical pattern of more large cuts to budgetary subaccounts when Democrats control more branches of government. This counterintuitive pattern becomes predictable when lawmakers are conceptualized as subject to both confirmation and disconfirmation bias that result in the necessity of course corrections. While scholars have realized the importance of partisanship and its attendant motivated reasoning at the mass level, this paper offers evidence that elites too combine partisan reasoning with accuracy goals when they engage in policymaking.

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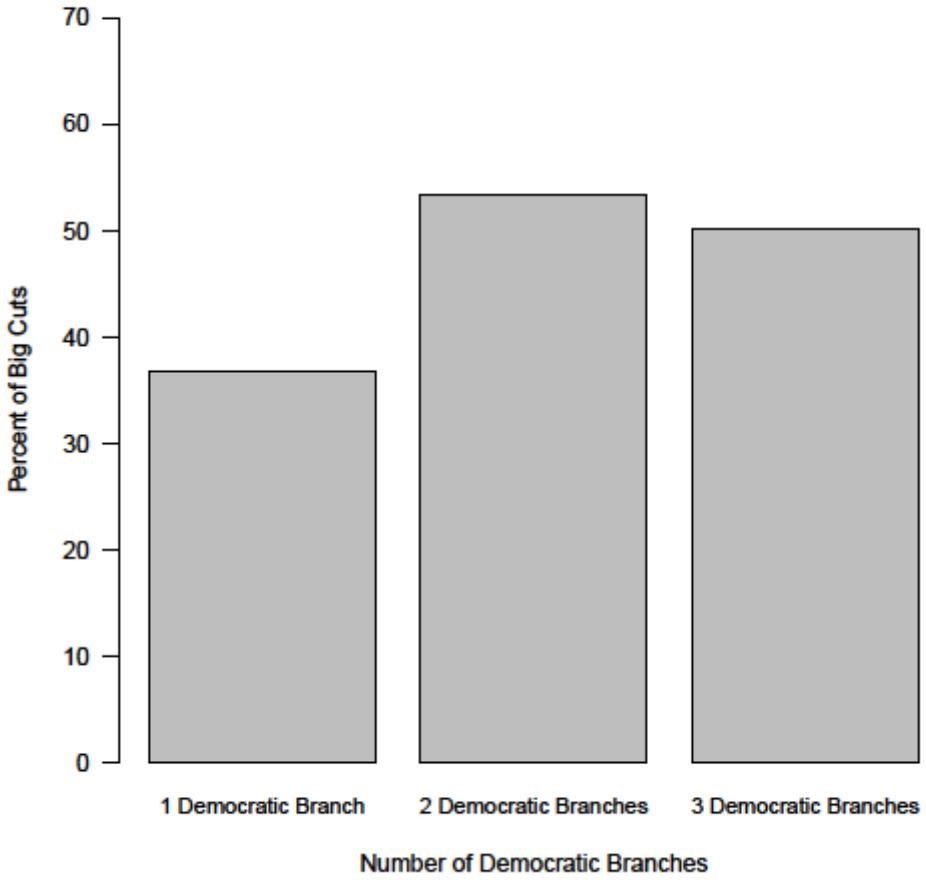
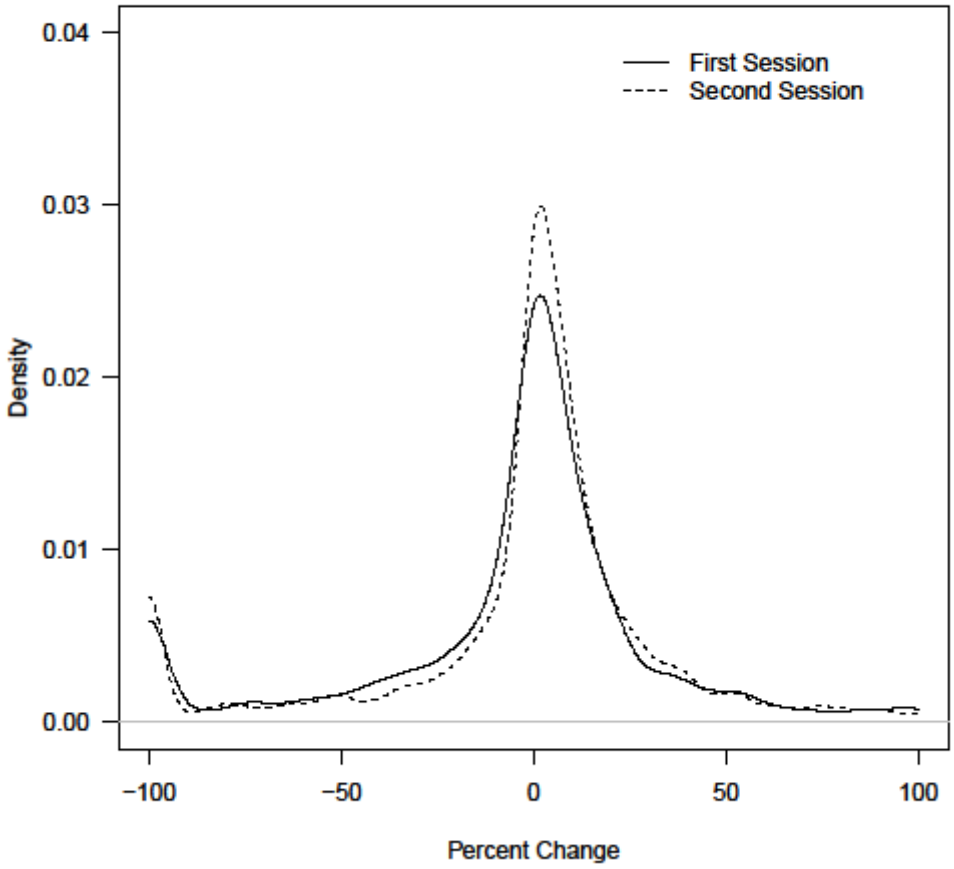
Figure 1: Distribution of Budget Cuts



Note: Y-axis measures the percent of subaccount cuts that fall into the big cut category (greater than 50%). Only subaccounts that fall under Democratic issue ownership are included.

Figure 2: Distribution of Changes in the First and Second Sessions



Note: The figure plots the density of the yearly percentage changes to the budget. Only subaccounts that fall under Democratic issue ownership are included. The x-axis is truncated at -100 and 100.

Table 1: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on All Subaccounts	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	1.57***	0.31*	0.37	0.26
	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.26)	(0.21)
# Democratic Branches	0.14***	0.30***	0.15*	0.12*
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Second Session	0.20*	0.90***	0.51**	0.01
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.13)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.12**	-0.43***	-0.29***	-0.06
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.06)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.01	0.04***	0.02^	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
PAYGO	-0.75***	-0.26***	-0.43***	-0.78***
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-0.42***	-0.01	-0.61***	-0.67***
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.09)
Unemployment Rate	0.10***	-0.01	-0.04	-0.05*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.07***	0.07***	0.12***	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Days Past FY	0.001*	-0.002***	-0.001	-0.0004
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.001)	(0.0005)
N (obs)	23631	19490	7076	12414
N (NSAs)	1228	1228	1142	1180
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	0.89	0.84	1.91	1.86
Log Likelihood	-10287	-11876	-3939	-5970

Standard errors in parentheses.
^p< 0.1, *p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001.

Note: Multi-level logistic models allowing the intercept to vary by subaccount. Dependent variable definitions are as follows: “Change” (1 if the nominal percentage change is larger than +/- 3%, 0 otherwise); “Increase” (1 if the subaccount changed and had a positive change or a subaccount inception, 0 if subaccount changed and had a negative change); “Big Cut” (1 if the subaccount was cut more than 50%, 0 if cut less than/equal to 50%); “Big Increase” (1 if the subaccount was increased more than 50% or created (inception), 0 if increased less than/equal to 50%).

Table 2: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on Most Owned Subaccounts	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	1.68***	-0.22	0.19	0.78
	(0.38)	(0.34)	(0.66)	(0.52)
# Democratic Branches	0.12	0.58***	0.42**	0.20
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.13)
Second Session	-0.01	1.53***	1.07**	0.67*
	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.41)	(0.33)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.01	-0.71***	-0.65***	-0.40*
	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.20)	(0.16)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.03*	0.07***	0.02	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
PAYGO	-0.96***	0.04	-0.88***	-1.38***
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.23)	(0.18)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-0.34*	0.27^	-1.00**	-1.32***
	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.32)	(0.22)
Unemployment Rate	0.09^	-0.04	-0.04	-0.10^
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.07*	0.08*	0.08	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Days Past FY	0.001	-0.004***	-0.001	-0.003**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
N (obs)	3823	3103	1206	1897
N (NSAs)	209	209	200	198
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	0.88	0.74	2.06	1.52
Log Likelihood	-1709	-1908	-650.5	-995.7

Standard errors in parentheses.
^$p<0.1$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$.

Note: Multi-level logistic models allowing the intercept to vary by subaccount. Dependent variable definitions are as follows: "Change" (1 if the nominal percentage change is larger than +/- 3%, 0 otherwise); "Increase" (1 if the subaccount changed and had a positive change or a subaccount inception, 0 if subaccount changed and had a negative change); "Big Cut" (1 if the subaccount was cut more than 50%, 0 if cut less than/equal to 50%); "Big Increase" (1 if the subaccount was increased more than 50% or created (inception), 0 if increased less than/equal to 50%). Only Democratically owned issues are included in the analysis.

Table 3: OLS Regressions of Percentage in Each Category by Year (Most Owned Subaccounts)	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	81.7***	-58.7***	27.5^	33.6**
	(5.34)	(12)	(14.7)	(11.8)
# Democratic Branches	1.26	10.6**	11.4**	1.61
	(1.46)	(3.28)	(4.02)	(3.22)
Second Session	-2.15	29.1**	27.6*	-0.91
	(3.96)	(8.93)	(10.9)	(8.75)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	0.23	-11.6**	-13.8**	-1.07
	(1.85)	(4.17)	(5.1)	(4.09)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.13	1.36**	0.58	-0.48
	(0.21)	(0.47)	(0.57)	(0.46)
PAYGO	-13.2***	4.81	-7.05	-10*
	(1.92)	(4.33)	(5.3)	(4.25)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-4.38	8.08	-10.2	-12.5*
	(2.65)	(5.98)	(7.32)	(5.86)
Unemployment Rate	0.83	-0.76	0.66	0.4
	(0.64)	(1.44)	(1.76)	(1.41)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.31	1.03	1.03	-0.28
	(0.51)	(1.14)	(1.39)	(1.11)
N	47	47	47	47
R^2	0.68	0.44	0.36	0.29
Adjusted R^2	0.61	0.33	0.23	0.14

Standard errors in parentheses.
^p< 0.1, *p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001.

Note: OLS regressions of the percentage of budgetary changes in a given category in each year. Dependent variable definitions are as follows: “Change” (percentage of subaccounts in each year where nominal percentage change is larger than +/- 3%); “Increase” (percentage of subaccounts in each year where the subaccount changed and had a positive change or a subaccount inception); “Big Cut” (percentage of cut subaccounts in each year where the subaccount was cut more than 50%); “Big Increase” (percentage of increased subaccounts in each year where the subaccount was increased more than 50% or created (inception)). Only Democratically owned issues are included in the analysis.

The Policy Consequences of Motivated Information Processing among the Partisan Elite

Online Appendix

Robustness Checks Using Alternate Cut-points for Large Cuts and Large Increases

Table A1: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on All Subaccounts

	Big Cut (25%)	Big Increase (25%)	Big Cut (40%)	Big Increase (40%)	Big Cut (60%)	Big Increase (60%)	Big Cut (75%)	Big Increase (75%)
Intercept	1.25***	0.98***	0.71**	0.50*	0.09	0.24	-0.32	-0.01
	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.22)	0.27	(0.23)
# Democratic Branches	0.02	0.03	0.13*	0.07	0.15*	0.10^	0.17**	.01*
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(.005)
Second Session	0.18	0.02	0.48**	0.05	0.58***	-0.06	0.57***	-0.09
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.14)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.11	-0.03	-0.27***	-0.06	-0.33***	-0.02	-0.33***	-0.01
	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.08)	0.06	0.08	(0.07)	(.08)	(0.07)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02*	0.01	0.02*	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
PAYGO	-0.25**	-0.81***	-0.38***	-0.77***	-0.34***	-0.76***	-0.30**	-0.72***
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-0.81***	-0.70***	-0.64***	-0.67***	-0.54***	-0.69***	-0.53***	-0.65***
	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.18)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.10)
Unemployment Rate	-0.04	-0.03^	-0.05^	-0.05*	-0.04	-0.06*	-0.01	-0.06*
	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.07**	0.05**	0.10***	0.02	0.12***	0.02	0.13***	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Days Past FY	0.0002	0.0004	0.0006	0.0003	0.0003	-0.0003	0.0008	-0.0001
	(0.0006)	(0.0004)	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0006)	(0.001)
N (obs)	7076	12414	7076	12414	7076	12414	7076	12414
N (NSAs)	1142	1180	1142	1180	1142	1180	1142	1180
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	1.68	1.58	1.81	1.74	1.93	1.94	1.99	1.94
Log Likelihood	-4129	-7115	-4083	-6355	-3857	-5714	-3721	-5469

Standard errors in parentheses. $^{\wedge}p< 0.1$, $^{*}p< 0.05$, $^{**}p< 0.01$, $^{***}p< 0.001$.

Table A2: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on Most Owned Subaccounts

	Big Cut (25%)	Big Increase (25%)	Big Cut (40%)	Big Increase (40%)	Big Cut (60%)	Big Increase (60%)	Big Cut (75%)	Big Increase (75%)
Intercept	1.92**	1.48**	0.73	1.27*	0.25	0.80	0.15	0.71
	(0.61)	(0.47)	(0.62)	(0.50)	(0.67)	(0.54)	(0.73)	(0.56)
# Democratic Branches	0.05	0.11	0.30*	0.16	0.35*	0.14	0.35*	0.18
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.14)
Second Session	0.55	0.54^	1.01**	0.63^	0.94*	0.51	0.78^	0.49
	(0.37)	(0.30)	(0.38)	(0.32)	(0.41)	(0.35)	(0.44)	(0.36)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.38*	-0.26^	-0.59**	-0.38*	-0.59**	-0.27^	-0.54	-0.27
	0.18	(0.14)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.17)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	0.03	0.03^	-0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
PAYGO	-0.82***	-1.51***	-0.76***	-1.52***	-0.76***	-1.44***	-0.82**	-1.48***
	(0.20)	(.16)	(0.21)	0.18	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.20)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-1.30***	-1.48***	-0.84**	-1.46***	-1.04**	-1.50***	-1.14**	-1.48***
	(0.28)	(0.20)	(0.29)	(0.22)	(0.33)	(0.24)	(0.37)	(0.25)
Unemployment Rate	-0.11	-0.10*	-0.07	-0.13*	-0.09	-0.09	-0.07	-0.10
	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.06)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.01	0.07	0.02	0.12^	0.03
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	0.04	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Days Past FY	-0.0002	-0.0005	-0.001	-0.004**	-0.0001	-0.004**	-0.002	-0.004**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)
N (obs)	1206	1897	1206	1897	1206	1897	1206	1897
N (NSAs)	200	198	200	198	200	198	200	198
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	1.62	1.35	1.76	1.45	2.01	1.70	2.36	1.77
Log Likelihood	-716.1	-1120	-706.2	-1034	-636.8	-939.1	-587.1	-902.4

Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{\wedge}p< 0.1$, $^{*}p< 0.05$, $^{**}p< 0.01$, $^{***}p< 0.001$.

Table A3: OLS Regressions of Percentage in Each Category by Year (Big Cuts, Most Owned)

	25%	40%	60%	75%
Intercept	59.1***	36.7*	28.7^	25.1^
	(11.3)	(15.2)	(14.3)	(14.8)
# Democratic Branches	6.49*	10.7*	11**	9.84*
	(3.08)	(4.15)	(3.9)	(4.03)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	0.45	0.23	0.54	0.52
	(0.44)	(0.59)	(0.55)	(0.57)
PAYGO	-8.9*	-7.35	-5.66	-5.44
	(4.07)	(5.48)	(5.14)	(5.31)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-14.2*	-11	-11.9	-13.1^
	(5.61)	(7.57)	(7.1)	(7.33)
Unemployment Rate	-0.61	0.08	-0.18	0.04
	(1.35)	(1.82)	(1.71)	(1.77)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.13	1.15	0.70	0.89
	(1.07)	(1.44)	(1.35)	(1.39)
Second Session	19.7*	28.8*	28*	24.7*
	(8.38)	(11.3)	(10.6)	(10.9)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-10.8**	-14.3*	-14.4**	-12.3*
	(3.91)	(5.28)	(4.95)	(5.11)
N	47	47	47	47
R2	0.40	0.33	0.36	0.33
Adjusted R2	0.27	0.19	0.23	0.19

Standard errors in parentheses.
^$p < 0.1$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A4: OLS Regressions of Percentage in Each Category by Year (Big Increases, Most Owned)

	25%	40%	60%	75%
Intercept	58.4***	44.8***	31.7**	29.7**
	(13.3)	(12)	(10.9)	(10.7)
# Democratic Branches	-0.64	0.48	0.74	0.56
	(3.61)	(3.28)	(2.99)	(2.93)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.27	-0.64	-0.51	-0.52
	(0.51)	(0.47)	(0.42)	(0.42)
PAYGO	-16.3**	-12.6**	-9.03*	-7.47^
	(4.77)	(4.34)	(3.94)	(3.86)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-18.6**	-15.8*	-13*	-11.2*
	(6.58)	(5.98)	(5.44)	(5.33)
Unemployment Rate	-0.42	-0.26	0.31	0.178
	(1.59)	(1.44)	(1.31)	(1.29)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	-0.19	-0.43	-0.31	-0.43
	(1.25)	(1.14)	(1.03)	(1.01)
Second Session	-0.63	-1.73	-2.15	-4.3
	(9.83)	(8.93)	(8.12)	(7.96)
# Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.82	-1.12	0.12	0.96
	(4.59)	(4.17)	(3.79)	(3.72)
N	47	47	47	47
R2	0.35	0.34	0.29	0.26
Adjusted R2	0.21	0.21	0.14	0.10

Standard errors in parentheses.
^$p < 0.1$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Robustness Checks Using the Number of Democratic Branches as a Factor

Table B1: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on All Subaccounts

	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	1.53***	0.36**	0.39	0.26
	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.23)	(0.19)
2 Democratic Branches	0.49***	0.69***	0.32*	0.30**
		(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.10)
	(0.07)			
3 Democratic Branches	0.28***	0.63***	0.32*	0.26*
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.11)
Second Session	0.15**	0.55***	0.22*	0.01
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.09)
2 Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.38***	-0.68***	-0.29	-0.18
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.12)
3 Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.22*	-0.86***	-0.59	-0.13
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.13)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.02**	0.02***	0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
PAYGO	-0.71***	-0.20***	-0.38***	-0.75***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-0.44***	-0.03	-0.61***	-0.70***
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.10)
Unemployment Rate	0.12***	0.02	-0.03	-0.04^
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.08***	0.09***	0.13***	0.03
	(0.01)	0.01	(0.02)	0.02
Days Past FY	0.0005	-0.002***	0.0007	0.0005
	(0.0004)	(0.0003)	(0.0006)	(0.005)
N (obs)	23631	19490	7076	12414
N (NSAs)	1228	1228	1142	1180
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	0.89	0.85	1.91	1.87
Log Likelihood	-10271	-11851	-3937	-5968

Standard errors in parentheses.

^$p<0.1$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$.

Table B2: Nested Multilevel Logit Models of Spending Changes on Most Owned Subaccounts

	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	1.67***	0.05	0.55	1.11*
	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.59)	(0.46)
2 Democratic Branches	0.39*	1.01***	0.55^	-0.10
	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.33)	(0.26)
3 Democratic Branches	0.22	1.18***	0.87**	0.36
	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.33)	(0.26)
Second Session	0.02	0.82***	0.19	0.10
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.27)	(0.22)
2 Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.17	-0.72***	0.06	0.07
	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.42)	(0.30)
3 Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.02	-1.44***	-1.13***	-0.80*
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.40)	(0.32)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.05**	0.05**	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
PAYGO	-0.94***	0.13	-0.83***	-1.37***
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.23)	(0.19)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-0.37*	0.21	-1.09***	-1.31***
	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.33)	(0.22)
Unemployment Rate	0.10*	-0.01	-0.04	-0.10^
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.09*	0.09**	0.09	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Days Past FY	0.00059	-0.0045***	-0.0011	-0.0033*
	(0.0010)	(0.00084)	(0.0015)	(0.0013)
N (obs)	3823	3103	1206	1897
N (NSAs)	209	209	200	198
Varying intercept by NSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
σ_{NSA}	0.88	.75	2.08	1.52
Log Likelihood	-1707	-1898	-645.3	-994.1

Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{\wedge}p< 0.1$, $^{*}p< 0.05$, $^{**}p< 0.01$, $^{***}p< 0.001$.

Table B3: OLS Regressions of Percentage in Each Category by Year (All Subaccounts)

	Change	Increase	Big Cut	Big Increase
Intercept	80.1***	-52.4***	30.1*	39.4***
	(4.72)	(10.7)	(12.7)	(10.5)
2 Democratic Branches	4.88	15.5*	22**	-4.58
	(2.94)	(6.67)	(7.95)	(6.52)
3 Democratic Branches	3.23	22.3**	25**	2.59
	(2.91)	(6.6)	(7.85)	(6.45)
Avg. Net Seats Gained by Democrats	-0.26	1.19*	0.20	-0.22
	(0.23)	(0.51)	(0.61)	(0.50)
PAYGO	-12.2***	6.74	-3.73	-10.1*
	(1.98)	(4.5)	(5.35)	(4.4)
Gramm-Rudman-Hollings	-4.58^	7.53	-11	-13*
	(2.62)	(5.96)	(7.09)	(5.82)
Unemployment Rate	1.04	-0.453	1.29	0.08
	(0.647)	(1.47)	(1.75)	(1.44)
Surplus as Percent of GDP (lagged)	0.39	1.14	1.27	-0.45
	(0.50)	(1.14)	(1.36)	(1.11)
Second Session	-1.56	16.6**	13.8^	-6.57
	(2.63)	(5.96)	(7.1)	(5.83)
2 Dem Branches x Second Session	-0.707	-9.64	-14.3	10.1
	(3.58)	(8.14)	(9.69)	(7.95)
3 Dem Branches x Second Session	0.312	-23.5**	-28.1**	-1.81
	(3.65)	(8.29)	(9.87)	(8.1)
N	47	47	47	47
R2	0.70	0.48	0.44	0.34
Adjusted R2	0.62	0.33	0.28	0.15

Standard errors in parentheses.
^$p < 0.1$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.