Voters Don't Care about Incumbency

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This is still a work in progress, so please check with me first should you be seized with a sudden desire to cite this paper.

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Abstract

We have long known that US House incumbents enjoy profound electoral advantages. However, existing research has not asked whether individual voters actually prefer incumbents over newcomers, other things being equal. Instead, existing research has focused on showing that other things *aren't* equal, by emphasizing the structural advantages that incumbents enjoy. Contrary to the many speculations on the subject by political scientists and by pundits, I present experimental results showing that voters apparently are not concerned with incumbency status at all.

Prior to the 2010 Congressional elections, pundits and reporters at countless media outlets warned of a powerful anti-incumbent mood, one with the potential to send unprecedented numbers of Representatives packing.[1] In the end, however, 86% of U.S. House incumbents who sought reelection won.[2] While this reelection rate was slightly lower than has been typical in recent years, it was much higher than we might expect if voters really were in an "anti-incumbent" mood.

Existing political science research gives us little reason to be surprised by this high reelection rate. Indeed, the research literature shows abundantly that incumbency confers profound electoral advantages. In explaining the origins of this advantage, existing research has generally focused on the structural advantages of incumbency. That is, existing research has shown how incumbents can use the perks of office to build their name recognition, deter strong challengers, and ultimately win more votes. However, these structural explanations do not tell us whether individual voters actually like or dislike incumbents, other things being equal. Instead, these structural explanations merely stress that other things are *not* equal. Several political scientists have speculated over the years in their published work that voters might actually prefer incumbents over challengers—speculations at odds with the popular conception that voters generally oppose incumbency—but these speculations have yet to be tested empirically. It is past time to assess what voters actually think about incumbency.

This question has both theoretical and practical relevance. Foremost among its practical

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[1] For examples, see "[Gallup] Polls Reflect Anti-Incumbent Mood," from the Caucus at *The New York Times*, posted June 8, 2010 at <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/polls-reflect-anti-incumbent-mood/>; "Voters' Support for Members of Congress is at an All-Time Low, [Washington Post-ABC News] Poll Finds" June 8, 2010, *Washington Post*.

[2] Of 396 incumbents who sought reelection, 4 lost in primaries and 54 lost in November, an 85% reelection rate (Jacobson 2013, 31). Of the 39 retirements, 17 left to run for another office (usually Senate or Governor), leaving 22 retirements that may have been strategic decisions to avoid a certain defeat. Even if we count these 22 retirements as defeated incumbents, however, the reelection rate is still a respectable 238 out of 418, or 81%.

implications stands the sticky matter of ballot design. Some states indicate on their printed ballots which candidate is the incumbent; others do not. If (poorly informed) voters have preferences about incumbency (other things being equal), then these seemingly-innocuous ballot design decisions could have meaningful impacts on election day.

In the following pages, I present the results of a randomized experiment that directly tests whether voters have preferences about incumbency. I find that voters do not seem to take incumbency status into account at all once the structural advantages of incumbency are held constant. Claims by political scientists that voters are attracted to incumbency, as well as claims by political pundits that voters are repulsed by it, are equally incorrect.

The Structural Incumbency Advantage

There is no question that Congressional incumbents enjoy profound electoral advantages. Only twice since 1976 have fewer than 90 percent of House incumbents who sought reelection won it.[3] Instead, most incumbents win by large margins. Researchers seeking to explain these trends have generally pointed to structural factors, which can be grouped into three broad categories.

First, incumbents have access to various resources of office. They can use these resources to promote their "brand" and enhance their name recognition. Mayhew (1974) famously argued that Congress is perfectly structured to enable "credit claiming" (such as slipping district-based pork into legislation), "position taking" (staking out a popular stance on an issue without having to specify details), and "advertising" (sending out franked mailings and taking other actions to enhance name recognition). Using similar logic, Fiorina (1977) argued that incumbents can do

[3] The years were 1992 (88%) and 2010 (85%). See Jacobson (2013, 31).

favors for their constituents—casework—to build apolitical favorability among constituents. In addition to these formal resources of office, incumbents also exploit the informal resources of office, such as opportunities to make speeches and appear on television throughout the year. Even such trivial perks of office as invitations to appear on *The Colbert Report* can benefit incumbents (Fowler 2008). At a minimum, these formal and informal resources help incumbents build up name recognition within their districts, and name recognition can help incumbents on election day (Box-Steffensmeier, Jacobson, and Grant 2000). More broadly, these resources may enable incumbents to cultivate an apolitical appeal, one that enables individual incumbents to remain personally popular within their respective districts even if their political party—or Congress itself—is less popular (Fenno 1975; Parker and Davidson 1979).

Second, incumbents have existing support networks waiting to be tapped when a challenge arises. Incumbents tend to mentally divide their constituency into their weakest and strongest supporters, and then labor vigorously to expand their personal following (Fenno 1978), eventually resulting in a "personal vote" independent of partisanship (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000). When a tough challenger comes along, an incumbent can pull out donor lists, volunteer lists, and mailing lists from previous campaigns to rapidly mobilize her supporters. By contrast, a challenger would need to invest considerable time and energy into identifying and building a relationship with his core constituencies. Because incumbents already have existing support networks, they can generally raise money far more easily than challengers can.[4]

Third, a "scare-off" effect enhances any other structural advantages of incumbency (Cox

[4] As a result, there has been considerable debate concerning the effects of incumbent and challenger spending on Congressional election results. Several models show that incumbent spending actually has a negative correlation with the incumbent's vote share, since incumbents tend to spend only when threatened, whereas challenger spending helps the challenger's vote share (Jacobson 1980, 136-145; Jacobson 1985; Jacobson 1990). Competing models suggest that incumbent spending does have powerful effects, especially Green and Krasno's work (1988, 1990).

and Katz 1996). Potential challengers are strategic. The more a potential challenger has to lose by running for office, the less likely he is to run—and the most experienced potential candidates often have the most to lose (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Consider, for example, the plight of state legislators. Because most states hold their legislative elections concurrently with federal elections, state legislators would typically need to retire from their current office to run for the U.S. House. A state legislator who runs for Congress but loses will find himself out of political office, perhaps permanently. Thus, state legislators—who arguably have the best shot at matching a U.S. Representative's political skill and resources—also have the most to lose from running. Many Congressional races are foregone before the campaign even gets underway merely because the strongest challengers decline to run an uphill battle against an entrenched incumbent (Stone, Maisel, and Maestas 2004).

We see, then, that the literature's explanations of the incumbency advantage rely heavily on structural logic. The first set of theories emphasizes the resources of office that incumbents enjoy; the second emphasizes the existing support networks that incumbents can tap into; and the third emphasizes the challenger deterrence effect. Most published explanations of the incumbency advantage can be classified into one or more of these categories.

Observe that none of these structural approaches implies that individual voters like or dislike incumbents. Instead, these structural theories imply that incumbents can win reelection whether voters like incumbency or not (Parker and Davidson 1979). Indeed, these structural theories may explain why so many incumbents win reelection each year even though voters routinely tell pollsters that they are dissatisfied with Congress. In June 2010, only 32% of voters felt that "most members" of Congress deserved reelection; even among Democratic respondents,

whose party controlled Congress, only 53% felt that "most members" deserved reelection.[5] In this so-called "anti-incumbent" year, the fact that 85% of incumbents won anyway suggests that these structural theories have something right. Incumbents, it seems, can win even if voters are unhappy with Congress as a whole.

Do Voters Care about Incumbency?

As insightful as existing research has been, though, it has not asked what voters think about incumbents *qua* incumbents. Voters rarely have enough information to behave the way democratic theorists might like, but they compensate somewhat by relying heavily on information shortcuts (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Given that partisanship and incumbency are often the only two shortcuts available on the physical ballot itself, we might reasonably expect voters to make use of both of them. Evidence dating back decades shows that voters use the partisanship shortcut (Campbell et al 1960); the incumbency shortcut remains unexplored.

Several political scientists have raised the possibility of this incumbency shortcut, typically with the assumption that voters would respond positively to incumbency status. As early as 1957, Campbell and Miller suggested that voters might prefer candidates merely because of "their designation as incumbents" on the ballot (Campbell and Miller 1957, 305). In the midst of the Southern realignment, Ferejohn (1977) and Cover (1977) supposed that declining party loyalty might make incumbency an increasingly important voting cue. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2000) echoed this logic, writing that "incumbency may simply act as a voting cue, a label which voters rely on because party has become less relevant."

[5] See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/139409/voters-favor-congressional-newcomers-incumbents.aspx>, accessed November 10, 2010.

Research from other fields lends support to these conjectures about the incumbency shortcut. For example, economists have uncovered evidence of a "status quo bias" in decision making: "People will only switch to a new policy if they *strictly* prefer it to the old one" (Fatas, Neugebauer, and Tamborero 2007; emphasis added). Faced with a choice between preserving the status quo and switching to an unknown alternative (cf. Ferejohn 1986), these experiments suggest that people will choose continuity. Applying similar logic, Samuelson and Zeckhauser extrapolated from their experimental results to predict that status quo bias could lead voters "to elect an incumbent to still another term in office" (1988, 8). Specifically, they calculated that status quo bias alone could shift what might otherwise be a perfectly divided 50-50 vote into a 59-41 vote sending an incumbent back to Washington (1988, 9).

Of course, incumbency might just as easily evoke a negative response from voters. The same emotions that motivate voters to support term limits might also motivate them to oppose incumbents as a general rule. Scholarly researchers have not had much to say about this possibility. To be sure, previous research has shown that voters frequently have harsh evaluations of Congress as a whole, but these observations are usually followed by an argument that the structural advantages of incumbency enable Representatives to continue winning reelection despite these negative feelings about the institution as a whole. Fenno (1975) said it best: "If our congressmen are so good, how can our Congress be so bad? … We apply different standards of judgment, those that we apply to the individual being less demanding than those we apply to the institution" (see also Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).

Whatever the precise causal mechanism may be, an individual-level preference for incumbents over challengers has been conjectured frequently enough in the research literature to warrant testing whether it actually exists, giving rise to our primary hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 1**: Voters prefer incumbents over challengers, other things equal.

Although political scientists have not said much about incumbency as a liability, several political commentators promoted this sort of reasoning prior to the 2010 elections: "Undecideds usually break against the incumbent," wrote one, without providing supporting evidence.[6] Press coverage and punditry generally framed coverage of the 2010 Congressional elections around a supposed anti-incumbent mood, as noted above. Suggestions that incumbency might be a liability tend to focus especially on those who serve for many, many years. For example, after Senator Bob Bennett unexpectedly lost his party's renomination, political commentators were quick to suppose that during his 18 years in office he had simply lost touch with voters. This logic suggests a hypothesis working against that given above—namely, that increasingly lengthy service can turn incumbency into a liability in voters' minds.

- **Hypothesis 2**: Lengthier service renders voters less supportive of incumbents, other things equal.

Of course, it's possible that any effect incumbency may have pales in comparison to partisanship. As noted earlier, Gallup reported in June 2010 that only 32% of voters felt that "most members" of Congress deserved reelection. Among Republicans, however, the number fell to 16%; among Democrats, whose party controlled Congress, it rose to 53%. Apparently, voters were mentally changing the question from asking about "most members" to asking about "most majority (i.e. Democratic) members." Surely Gallup would have found an even wider partisan gap if it had asked separately whether "most Republican members" and "most

[6] The quote is from Sean Trende at *Real Clear Politics* (see http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/10/07/the_democrats_dead_cat_bounce_107476.html). See also Michael Barone at *The Washington Examiner* (http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/politics/House-Democrats-head-for-a-thumping-at-the-polls-1004124-99388554.html).

Democratic members" deserve reelection. We can easily test whether stating partisan affiliations alongside incumbency status negates any effects that the incumbency shortcut may have.

- **Hypothesis 3**: Any effects of incumbency status on voter behavior will diminish or disappear when each candidate's partisanship is known.

We already know from repeated research that incumbents outperform challengers on election day.[7] Existing explanations have focused on structural explanations. The difficulty in testing these specific hypotheses, then, lies in holding the structural advantages of incumbency constant. Observational studies based on election results or public opinion polls can demonstrate that voters tend to support incumbents over challengers, but observational studies cannot disentangle the structural advantages of incumbency from voters' raw feelings about incumbency itself. I do so here through controlled, randomized experimentation. My null hypothesis is simply that voters do not care which candidate is the incumbent once other things (i.e. structural advantages) are held constant.

Experimental Conditions

I present below the results of a simple survey experiment that tests these hypotheses directly. An initial wave of 979 respondents was recruited from July 16-29, 2012, using Amazon's Mechanical Turk service (hereafter "MTurk")[8]; a second wave of 997 respondents participated in November 2012 as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (hereafter "CCES"). Previous work has shown that MTurk panels differ markedly from national samples in terms of participant demographics (Berinsky et al. 2012), and this study was no

[7] Among the earliest studies of this sort were Abramowitz (1975), Ferejohn (1977), and Nelson (1978). Good overviews are in Jacobson (2013) and Herrnson (2008).
[8] Only MTurk users from the United States were included. Each participant received $0.21 in compensation.

exception. Compared to the CCES sample, the MTurk sample was more male, young, Democratic, and college educated; see the appendix for details. Previous work has also shown that experiments administered to MTurk samples tend to produce similar results as experiments administered to more representative samples (Berinsky et al. 2012), and this study was, once again, no exception.

Respondents in both studies were presented with brief profiles of two fictional Congressional candidates, Steven Redden and Ray Kepler. The candidates were characterized as actual candidates running against each other in another state. After reading the profiles, respondents indicated their preferred candidate along a 7-point scale labeled "Definitely Steven Redden" at one end and "Definitely Ray Kepler" at the other. Except where noted, I code strong support for Redden as 1 and strong support for Kepler as 7. Figure 1 presents the actual question wording and formatting.

[Figure 1 about here]

The candidate profiles varied randomly along two dimensions.[9] First, references to candidate partisanship varied. One-third of respondents saw the partisan descriptions shown in Figure 1; one-third saw the partisanship reversed; and one-third saw no mention of partisanship at all. Second, references to incumbency varied. Some respondents saw a brief paragraph inserted into the middle of Ray Kepler's profile characterizing him as an incumbent. This language took a few different forms, as shown in Table 1. Some saw no reference to incumbency; some saw the *Incumbency: No length* treatment; and some saw either the

[9] For MTurk users, but not for CCES respondents, profiles varied along a third dimension: The order of the candidate profiles. In analyzing the MTurk data, I found that it made no difference which profile appeared at left, so this dimension was omitted from the CCES experiment.

Incumbency: 2 years or *Incumbency: 22 years* treatments.[10]

[Table 1 about here]

Respondents were randomly assigned into these three partisan conditions and four incumbency conditions. It appears the randomization "worked"; assignment to these conditions does not correlate meaningfully with respondent age, partisanship, education, or gender in either study. Because assignment was random, it is unnecessary to include demographic control variables in the analysis that follows.

The difficulty with vignette experiments like these is that the treatment language can be so subtle that respondents fail to notice it (Mutz 2011, 84). The MTurk wave employed manipulation checks to assess this possibility. After indicating their preferred candidate, respondents were shown a new screen asking three factual questions about the candidates. The first question asked which candidate had spent more money on the race; the second asked which candidate was the incumbent; and the third asked which candidate was the Republican. Overall, 89% of respondents answered at least two of the three questions correctly, and 63% answered all three correctly. Accuracy rates were high across all experimental conditions,[11] even though respondents generally completed the survey very quickly.[12] It appears that the experimental manipulations, though subtle, effectively attracted respondents' notice.

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[10] In MTurk, one-third were in the control, one-third were in *Incumbency: No length*, and one-sixth each were in *Incumbency: 2 years* or *Incumbency: 22 years*. In CCES, one-quarter were in each group.

[11] For incumbency, 89% correctly chose "I don't know" in the incumbency control condition, and 73% correctly chose Kepler in the treatment conditions. For partisanship, 76% correctly chose "I don't know" in the partisanship control condition, and 88% correctly identified the Republican candidate when partisanship was explicitly mentioned.

[12] The MTurk study involved a consent screen, the treatment question, the three manipulation check questions, and four demographic questions, with each step displayed on a separate screen. Still, the median respondent spent only 75 seconds on the survey, with the 25th and 75th percentiles at 60 and 94 seconds, respectively. Even among those who spent 42 seconds or less on the survey (the 5th percentile), 64% answered at least two of the manipulation checks correctly. I do not have comparable data about CCES respondents.

Findings

In analyzing the experimental data, the dependent variable is the respondent's preferred candidate. This variable is coded on a seven-point scale where 1 indicates firm support for Redden while a 7 indicates firm support for Kepler. I estimate the effects of the various experimental conditions on this 7-point scale using ordinary least squares regressions. The incumbency treatments described above were applied only to Kepler. Thus, a positive coefficient on one of the dummy variables designating an incumbency treatment condition indicates that respondents reacted favorably to incumbency status; a negative coefficient indicates that respondents reacted negatively to incumbency status.

Models 1a and 1b in Table 2 provide a direct test of Hypothesis 1, while Models 2a and 2b provide a direct test of Hypothesis 2. In Models 1a and 1b, all respondents who saw any mention of incumbency are grouped together; in Models 2a and 2b, the various incumbency treatments are separated out. These four models omit respondents who were shown any information about candidate partisanship. The coefficients reported in Table 2 produce a sea of null results. The lone significant finding arises in Model 2b, which nevertheless has remarkably poor overall fit (as estimated by the R^2 statistic). If we take this estimate at face value, it actually works against Hypothesis 2; it appears that voters prefer long-term incumbents, other things equal, but have no preference concerning short-term incumbents. Nevertheless, it seems prudent to treat this finding as a false positive, especially since Model 2 uses the less representative MTurk sample.

[Table 2]

The models in Table 3 differ from those in Table 2 in two ways. First, all respondents are

included in these models, whether they saw information about candidate partisanship or not. Second, these models include two additional variables to account for this change. *Party labels present* is a simple dummy indicating whether a particular respondent was shown party labels at all. *Party effect* is a trichotomous variable incorporating both candidate and respondent partisanship. *Party effect* is coded +1 for respondents whose partisanship aligns with Kepler's, which would lead to a higher expected score on the dependent variable, and -1 for respondents whose partisanship aligns with Redden's, which would have the opposite effect. This variable is coded as 0 for respondents who are pure independents; leaners are treated as partisans. It is also coded 0 for respondents who were not shown party labels.

[Table 3]

Unsurprisingly, the partisan effect is large across every model shown in Table 3. Voters are likely to move 1.3 or 1.4 points along the 7-point scale toward a candidate that shares their partisanship. Inserting this new variable also pushes the incumbency dummies in Models 3a and 3b toward statistical significance, along with some of the dummies in Models 4a and 4b. This finding is problematic on two fronts, however. First, the estimated effects of incumbency have opposite signs depending on whether we estimate it using CCES respondents or MTurk respondents. Second, the incumbency dummies appear to make no meaningful contribution toward explaining variance in the dependent variable. In fact, Bayesian model selection (Raftery 1995) supports dropping all but *Party effect* from every model in Table 3; doing so does not change any of the adjusted R^2 statistics reported in Table 3. With a large enough sample size, even trivial coefficients can attain statistical significance; that seems to be what has happened with the incumbency coefficients here. The estimated effects of incumbency are substantively small, have conflicting signs, and do nothing to improve the model's overall fit, all of which

supports viewing their occasional statistical significance skeptically.

Table 4 adds interactions between *Party labels present* and the various incumbency dummies as a test of Hypothesis 3. None of these interactions attains traditional levels of statistical significance. As with models in previous tables, the MTurk respondents seem to have rewarded incumbents with 22 years experience, but this finding appears to be a fluke of the MTurk sample. Nothing in the CCES sample supports this finding. Moreover, Bayesian model selection once again supports dropping all but *Party effect* from every model in Table 4, as was the case with Table 3. Doing so does not change any of the reported adjusted R^2 statistics.

From the 12 models presented in these tables, the general pattern is that voters do not react to incumbency status—not positively, and not negatively. Those interested in examining additional specifications may consult the appendix. Tables A2, A3, and A4 replicate Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively, but using a dichotomous vote choice indicator as the dependent variable rather than a 7-point preference scale.[13] Tables A5 and A6 examine respondents separately by partisanship, to see whether Republican or Democratic respondents react differently to incumbency depending on whether it is a Republican or Democratic incumbent. As with the tables presented in the main text, the appendix tables produce another sea of null results. It is true that a few coefficients attain statistical significance here and there. However, their substantively small coefficients, inconsistent signs, and poor overall fit suggest that these are statistical aberrations. The general pattern is that respondents react strongly and consistently to candidate partisanship but ignore candidate incumbency.

[13] A score of 1, 2, or 3 is coded as 0 (a vote for Redden), while scores of 5, 6, or 7 are coded as 1 (a vote for Kepler). Scores of 4 are omitted from the model. Models are estimated using probit.

Discussion

In published work, several political scientists have speculated that voters favor incumbents over challengers, even with the structural advantages of incumbency held constant. Meanwhile, pundits and reporters routinely speak of voters' distaste for incumbents, with the implication that incumbents achieve their great electoral success against the wishes of voters. Either proposition, if correct, would have far-reaching implications for ballot design in American elections, since states vary in whether they mark incumbents on the ballot.

As it happens, the results presented here work against both propositions. Instead, it seems that voters do not care one way or the other whether a candidate is an incumbent, a challenger, or pursuing an open seat. To the extent that incumbents enjoy electoral advantages, we can safely credit structural factors, not voter preferences, as the source. Whether states choose to write the word "incumbent" on their ballot seems to have little effect on election results, since voters have no preference between incumbents and challengers, other things equal.

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Figure 1: Question Wording

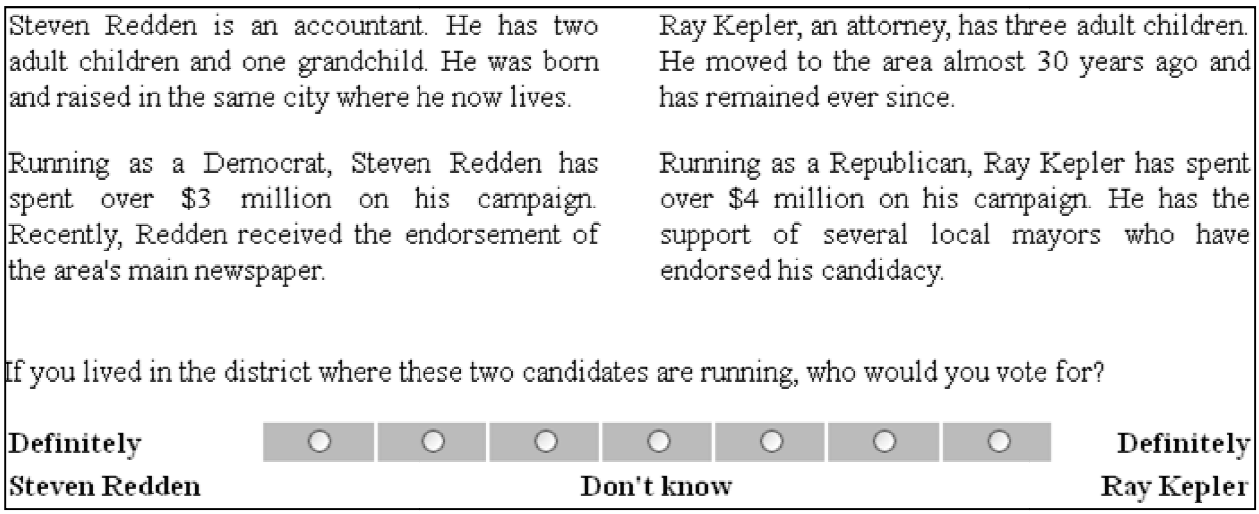

Table 1: Treatment Language for Incumbency Status

Group	Language
Control	(No mention of incumbency)
Incumbency: No length	Kepler is the current Representative. He is seeking reelection to another term.
Incumbency: 2 years	Kepler has served in Congress for the past 2 years. He is seeking reelection to another term.
Incumbency: 22 years	Kepler has served in Congress for the past 22 years. He is seeking reelection to another term.

Table 2: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice (without Partisan Cues)

	Model 1a	**Model 1b**	**Model 2a**	**Model 2b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	-0.037 (0.13)	+0.28† (0.17)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	+0.10 (0.17)	+0.16 (0.19)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	-0.018 (0.16)	+0.32 (0.25)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.18 (0.17)	+0.53* (0.24)
Constant	3.82** (0.11)	3.90** (0.13)	3.82** (0.11)	3.90** (0.13)
N	357	325	357	325
R^2 (adj.)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.02 (0.01)

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a 7-point vote choice indicator.

Table 3: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice

	Model 3a	**Model 3b**	**Model 4a**	**Model 4b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	-0.22* (0.10)	+0.19* (0.09)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	-0.19 (0.13)	+0.11 (0.10)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	-0.19 (0.12)	+0.30* (0.14)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.30* (0.12)	+0.26† (0.13)
Party effect	+1.32** (0.065)	+1.43** (0.059)	+1.32** (0.065)	1.42** (0.059)
Party labels present	+0.18* (0.089)	+0.041 (0.092)	+0.18* (0.089)	0.040 (0.092)
Constant	+3.95** (0.10)	+3.96** (0.095)	+3.95** (0.10)	3.96** (0.095)
N	953	958	953	958
R^2 (adj.)	0.31 (0.30)	0.38 (0.38)	0.31 (0.30)	0.38 (0.38)

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a 7-point vote choice indicator.

Table 4: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice with Interactions

	Model 5a	**Model 5b**	**Model 6a**	**Model 6b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	-.037 (0.15)	0.28† (0.16)	--	--
× party labels present	-0.31 (0.20)	-0.14 (0.19)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	0.10 (0.20)	0.16 (0.18)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.46† (0.26)	-0.068 (0.22)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	-0.018 (0.19)	0.32 (0.24)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.28 (0.24)	-0.026 (0.29)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.18 (0.20)	0.53* (0.23)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.20 (0.25)	-0.41 (0.28)
Party effect	1.32** (0.065)	1.43** (0.059)	1.32** (0.065)	1.42** (0.059)
Party labels present	0.40* (0.17)	0.13 (0.16)	0.40* (0.17)	0.13 (0.16)
Constant	3.82** (0.13)	3.90** (0.13)	3.82** (0.13)	3.90** (0.13)
N	953	958	953	958
R^2 (adj.)	0.31 (0.30)	0.38 (0.38)	0.31 (0.30)	0.38 (0.38)

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a 7-point vote choice indicator.

Appendix

Table A1: Profile of Respondents

	MTurk	CCES
Number of respondents	979	997
Gender		
Male	62.1%	48.1%
Female	37.9%	51.9%
Age		
25th percentile	22	43
50th percentile	25	56
75th percentile	32	65
Average age	28.4	52.9
Partisanship		
Strong Democrat	10.3%	25.2%
Democrat	23.4%	9.1%
Independent, leaning Democrat	24.2%	10.3%
Independent	18.8%	10.8%
Independent, leaning Republican	12.0%	11.6%
Republican	6.8%	10.4%
Strong Republican	1.4%	19.7%
Another party or not sure	3.1%	4.3%
Education		
Less than high school	0.5%	2.2%
High school diploma	10.6%	23.2%
Some college	45.9%	28.5%
Two-year degree	In "some college"	12.0%
Four-year degree	34.3%	21.5%
Graduate degree	8.7%	12.6%

Table A2: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice

	Model 1a	**Model 1b**	**Model 2a**	**Model 2b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	+0.18 (0.27)	+0.37* (0.18)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	+0.40 (0.36)	+0.24 (0.20)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	+0.31 (0.31)	+0.51† (0.28)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.09 (0.32)	+0.58* (0.26)
Constant	-0.46* (0.23)	-0.20 (0.14)	-0.46* (0.23)	-0.20 (0.14)
N	131	226	131	223

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a dichotomous vote choice indicator derived from the 7-point vote choice indicator using the procedure described in the main text.

Table A3: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice

	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 4a	Model 4b
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	-0.032 (0.17)	0.30* (0.12)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	-0.012 (0.23)	0.28* (0.13)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	0.093 (0.20)	0.37* (0.17)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.17 (0.20)	0.29† (0.17)
Party effect	1.62** (0.13)	1.45** (0.091)	1.63** (0.13)	1.45** (0.091)
Party labels present	0.17 (0.14)	0.16 (0.11)	0.18 (0.15)	0.15 (0.11)
Constant	-0.30† (0.17)	-0.15 (0.11)	-0.30† (0.17)	-0.15 (0.11)
N	494	755	494	755

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a dichotomous vote choice indicator derived from the 7-point vote choice indicator using the procedure described in the main text.

Table A4: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice with Interactions

	Model 5a	**Model 5b**	**Model 6a**	**Model 6b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Incumbency (any type)	0.18 (0.27)	0.37* (0.18)	--	--
× party labels present	-0.36 (0.35)	-0.12 (0.24)	--	--
Incumbency: No length	--	--	0.40 (0.36)	0.24 (0.20)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.68 (0.46)	0.07 (0.27)
Incumbency: 2 years	--	--	0.31 (0.31)	0.51† (0.28)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.37 (0.40)	-0.22 (0.36)
Incumbency: 22 years	--	--	-0.094 (0.32)	0.58* (0.26)
× party labels present	--	--	-0.13 (0.41)	-0.52 (0.35)
Party effect	1.62** (0.13)	1.45** (0.091)	1.63** (0.13)	1.45** (0.092)
Party labels present	0.45 (0.30)	0.23 (0.19)	0.45 (0.31)	0.24 (0.19)
Constant	-0.46* (0.23)	-0.20 (0.14)	-0.46* (0.23)	-0.20 (0.14)
N	494	755	494	755

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a dichotomous vote choice indicator derived from the 7-point vote choice indicator using the procedure described in the main text.

Table A5: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice, by Respondent Partisanship

	Model 5a	**Model 5b**	**Model 6a**	**Model 6b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Respondent party	Democratic	Democratic	Republican	Republican
GOP incumbent (any type)	-0.18 (0.22)	-0.079 (0.14)	+0.23 (0.21)	+0.28 (0.30)
Dem incumbent (any type)	-0.25 (0.22)	-0.23 (0.15)	+0.45* (0.21)	-0.49 (0.31)
Constant	3.05** (0.16)	2.60** (0.10)	5.15** (0.16)	5.27** (0.22)
N	286	386	261	127

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a 7-point vote choice indicator, with 1 indicating support for the Democratic candidate and 7 indicating support for the Republican candidate. Respondents who did not see candidate partisanship information are excluded.

Table A6: Effects of Incumbency on Vote Choice, by Respondent Partisanship

	Model 5a	**Model 5b**	**Model 6a**	**Model 6b**
Sample	CCES	MTurk	CCES	MTurk
Respondent party	Democratic	Democratic	Republican	Republican
GOP incumbent: No length	-0.13 (0.34)	-0.14 (0.16)	+0.51† (0.31)	+0.39 (0.35)
Dem incumbent: No length	-0.086 (0.33)	-0.21 (0.18)	+0.42 (0.29)	-0.42 (0.38)
GOP incumbent: 2 years	-0.048 (0.27)	+0.15 (0.28)	+0.30 (0.27)	+0.19 (0.45)
Dem incumbent: 2 years	-0.13 (0.30)	-0.27 (0.25)	+0.55† (0.29)	-0.27 (0.54)
GOP incumbent: 22 years	-0.42 (0.31)	-0.064 (0.25)	-0.039 (0.27)	+0.017 (0.57)
Dem incumbent: 22 years	-0.47 (0.29)	-0.25 (0.24)	+0.38 (0.28)	-0.77† (0.46)
Constant	3.05** (0.16)	2.60** (0.10)	5.15** (0.16)	5.27** (0.22)
N	286	386	261	127

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01 (two-tailed). The dependent variable is a 7-point vote choice indicator, with 1 indicating support for the Democratic candidate and 7 indicating support for the Republican candidate. Respondents who did not see candidate partisanship information are excluded.