Can Congress Do Policy Analysis?
The Politics of Problem Solving on Capitol Hill

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Each year, scores of well-trained graduates of the nation's public policy schools go to Capitol Hill. Many take jobs with congressional committees or legislative support agencies such as the General Accountability Office, the Congressional Research Service, and the Congressional Budget Office. They seek to punch a ticket and build their resumes, but many also believe that policy analysis will improve legislative outcomes. Is their faith justified? Does policy analysis happen in Congress, or is it the exclusive province of executive agencies and think tanks? If Congress does engage in policy analysis, can it do so successfully?

The title of Charles O. Jones's penetrating 1976 essay expresses the predominant view among political scientists: "Why Congress Can't Do Policy Analysis (or words to that effect)." Congress is not an institution "well-structured to conduct policy analysis," Jones argues, because it is too political a body to bring systematic, unbiased evidence to bear on policy decisions (1976, 253). Congress is a *representative* assembly, not a research bureau. Its internal organization is inconsistent with analytical perceptions and definitions of policy issues (Polsby 1969). Members of Congress are parochial; geographical representation and single-member districts compel lawmakers to respond to local pressures, and undermine the incentive to legislate in the national interest (but see Lee 2005). Congress also caters to the demands of interest groups, and regularly makes economic decisions that policy analysts find indefensible on efficiency grounds (VanDoren 1989). Unsurprisingly, empirical studies on the instrumental use of policy analysis within Congress have uniformly found that policy analysis reports have little independent impact on legislative behavior and decision-making (Shulock 1999; Whiteman 1995).

Yet negative assessments of Congress's capacity for policy analysis cut much too deeply. First, they set unrealistic performance standards for Congress that ignore the constraints of

democracy, the complex political context in which Congress operates, and the large variety of ways (both direct and indirect) that policy analysis can contribute to problem solving. Many critics evaluate Congress's performance against the benchmark of a hyper-rational, apolitical model of policy analysis that does not reflect how policy analysis is taught in public policy schools, or for that matter, practiced in executive agencies (Meltsner 1976). While policy analysis does involve intellectual work and a reasoned search for solutions, it is also a "social and political activity" (Bardach 2009, xv). The purpose of policy analysis is neither to generate knowledge for the academic disciplines nor to prescribe government decisions, but rather to provide targeted advice to particular organizational clients, which invariably have projects and agendas (Weimer and Vining 1999).[1]

Second, many who assess Congress's performance fail to recognize that Congress is a "they" not an "it" (Shepsle 1992). Accordingly, policy analysis may be undertaken by committee staffs, personal staffs, individual members, and congressional party organizations. Policy analysis may also inform decision-makers at different stages of the legislative process, from issue development to oversight and evaluation. Third, many negative assessments overreach by evaluating Congress's performance in a constitutional vacuum, as though Congress is not just one of three national governing institutions (see Mayhew 2009). Congress is the country's *representative* body, and its contributions to problem solving should be viewed in conjunction with what is gained from the larger institutional system of which it is a part.

The most common error that scholars make in assessing Congress's performance as a policy analyst is to construe policy analysis as a simple matter of knowledge acquisition and information processing. In fact, policy analysis is a complex, iterative process comprised of

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[1] We thus distinguish between client-based policy analysis and policy research. On the similarities and differences between these activities, see Weimer and Vining (1999).

multiple steps or tasks, including: defining problems, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, selecting criteria, projecting outcomes, confronting trade-offs, making decisions, and telling causal stories to an audience (Bardach 2009). No extant study analyzes congressional performance at the task level, even though some of the steps of policy analysis are clearly more compatible with legislative incentives and structures than others. That is the purpose of the present essay.

There is no perfect methodology for assessing how well or poorly Congress carries out the multiple tasks of policy analysis. Our strategy is to draw upon three different sources of information to reach conclusions about the institution's central tendencies. The most extensive data source we use is a survey that we conducted in April 2013 of more than 150 Washington area policy analysis professionals who work for universities, think tanks and research organizations, and government agencies. The survey aims to probe a variety of ways and openings through which policy analysis can flow into the legislative process as an input, including during the pre-deliberation stage. (The survey design is described below).

There are both strengths and limitations to relying upon the perspective of this elite sample to evaluate Congress. One major advantage of the survey is that it relies upon the opinions of experts who are highly knowledgeable about the concepts, skills, and methodologies of policy analysis, such as cost-benefit analysis. These are technical matters about which even savvy journalists, congressional staff members and political observers may be poorly informed. Our survey sample is large enough to capture the impressions of the policy analysis expert community while avoiding placing too much weight upon the views of a few individuals. Another advantage is that professional policy analysts are a tough-minded group. To the extent such experts perceive Congress' performance as not uniformly negative, it is noteworthy.

The expert survey also comes with some important limitations, however. First, professional policy analysts (like everyone) have biases. As noted below, approximately 75 percent of our survey respondents profess a liberal bias of one sort or another. While we find no evidence that the ideology of survey respondents correlates with their beliefs about congressional performance, it is important to recognize that the political orientation of our sample is unrepresentative of the American public. Another limitation is that the survey focuses on questions about Congress's overall performance. As a result, the survey results lack the detail and texture of in-depth interviews. We work to overcome this limitation by supplementing our survey findings with the perspectives of current and former congressional policy analysts. In addition to conducting several individual interviews, we held a confidential focus group in Washington, D.C. on November 18, 2013 with six senior policy analysts who work for the three key congressional support agencies—the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and the General Accountability Office. All the participants have had extensive experience advising Congress across a range of policy areas including budget, health, and defense. As professional analysts employed by the Congress, they can be expected to possess intimate knowledge of how Congress operates and a more sympathetic view of the institution's performance.

Finally, we draw upon empirical and theoretical insights from the vast political science literature on Congress, including both classic works on the institution and more focused studies that assess Congress's use of policy analysis on the basis of congressional staff interviews. Taken together, these three data sources give us confidence that we can draw inferences about what policy analysis tasks Congress struggles to perform and what tasks it handles more adroitly.

While we do not set out to "save" Congress's reputation, our analysis provides a more a balanced and fine-grained view of Congress's strengths and limitations as a problem-solving institution.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section defines policy analysis and establishes standards for evaluating Congress's performance. Section two describes the survey methodology (question wording may be found in Appendix 2). The third section—comprising the core of the paper—evaluates how well Congress performs each of the eight major tasks of policy analysis (Bardach 2009) drawing on all three data sources mentioned above. The concluding section summarizes our main findings and offers some more speculative comments about how secular trends including partisan polarization, the widening of the policy agenda, and the growing complexity of government have interacted with Congress's policy analytic strengths and weaknesses to affect institutional performance.

What is Policy Analysis? Rational, Interpretative, and Hybrid Models

What is policy analysis? Can Congress do it? What are the standards against which Congress's performance should be assessed?[2]

The traditional model of policy analysis defines it as an objective, scientific endeavor in which decisionmakers set goals and maximize social welfare by using analytical methods and rigorous empirical research to identify the best means to address societal problems (see, e.g., Stokey and Zeckhauser 1978). There are many reasons why the "rational" model of policy analysis is apt to fail on Capitol Hill. Members are occupied with fundraising and constituent service. They lack the time to think deeply about issues, and instead rely on cues and heuristics to "muddle through" (Lindblom 1959; Schuck 2014). Even more fundamentally, members' main objective is reelection, and political payoffs come from taking pleasing positions and delivering

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[2] On the technical side of policy analysis, see Weimer and Vining (2010). For an insightful review of the evolution of the profession of policy analysis, see Radin (2000).

perceptible benefits to constituents, not from crafting efficient policy solutions (Mayhew 1974; but see Arnold 1990). As they pursue their political goals, few legislators bother to master the concepts and tools of policy analysis. The typical member finds scientific information "hard to assimilate or relate to policy questions" (Bimber 1991, 601). Legislative structures designed to facilitate reelection—including overlapping committee jurisdictions, the oral tradition, and the reliance on compromise and logrolling—also inhibit the use of analysis (Weiss 1989).

Yet Congress is not impervious to policy analysis. As Allen Schick wrote in 1976, "The argument that Congress will not become a major user of analysis is as untenable as the position that a new analytic era is just over the horizon" (234-236; see also Weiss 1989; Whiteman 1995). Members of Congress can benefit from policy analysis in at least three ways. First, information about problems and solutions helps lawmakers cope with the growing scope and complexity of government and the increasing rate of technological change. Over the decades, Congress has bolstered the informational resources and its disposal as well as its internal capacity for generating and using expertise, including funding professional committee staffs and establishing congressional support agencies (Price 1971; Sundquist 1981; Schickler 2001; Shepsle 1988; Rieselbach 1994). During the 1970s, for example, Congress established the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). Second, policy analysis can help members reduce political uncertainty (Krehbiel 1991; Arnold 1990). All else being equal, members would prefer to select policies whose effects are known in advance because it allows them to minimize the potential for surprise or embarrassment. Even if members are not interested in making "good" public policy, the capacity to anticipate allows members to "mak[e] the most of credit-claiming" opportunities and promote their reelection chances (Krehbiel 1991, 62). Finally, policy analysis can help Congress

maintain its institutional power in the separation of powers system. The rise of the administrative presidency was a major factor in prompting Congress to beef up its analytical capacity. During the 1940s and 1950s, agencies like the Bureau of the Budget provided trusted analysis to both branches. When the presidential branch "captured" these agencies during the Johnson and Nixon administrations, Congress was threatened. Congress responded by creating legislative support agencies to maintain its relative standing in the constitutional order (Moe 1985). While reforms to boost Congress's information-processing capacity are rare (Binder and Quirk 2005), they clearly suggest unwillingness on the part of members to entirely offload the institution's policy analysis responsibilities to the executive.

An alternative, "interpretive" model of policy analysis is more modest in its expectations of Congress—and more nakedly political. According to Nancy Shulock, policy analysis is not a problem-solving, scientific activity, but rather an "instrument of democratic process" that is used "(a) as language for framing political discourse; (b) as legitimate rationalization for legislative action where prospective rationality is inhibited by 'garbage can' decision environments; and (c) as a symbol of legitimate decision processes that can increase support for governance processes in a society that values rationality" (Shulock 1999, 229; see also Stone 2002). Don't be fooled by appearances, Shulock implies. Members of Congress may *look* like they are carefully weighing options and projecting consequences, but they are just using the positivist forms of policy analysis to create a favorable public impression. While there is no doubt that members of Congress want to look good in the eyes of observers, this view is too cynical. The massive investment in Congress's analytical capacity over the past half-century is far more than institutional window dressing.

Ultimately, the rational and interpretive models are best understood as ideal-types. Neither fully captures the complexity of the roles that policy analysts play (or seek to play) in the United States (Radin 2000). Whereas the rational model asks too much of Congress by denying the legitimacy of power and persuasion in policymaking, the interpretive model asks too little of the institution by rejecting both the normative, problem-solving focus and scientific foundation of policy analysis. The challenge is to define policy analysis in a way that reconciles the power of ideas with a sober appraisal of the messy realities of legislative politics.

In our view, policy analysis is best understood as an *amalgam* of intelligence and pragmatic action. Policy analysts seek to develop options that, if adopted, will mitigate problems that people are experiencing in their daily lives. In a democracy, the audience for policy analysis includes "diverse subgroups of politically attuned supporters and opponents of the analyst's work" (Bardach 2009, xv). As such, policy analysis stands between pure planning–in which apolitical, synoptic rationality guides governance—and raw politics—in which the preferences of the powerful dictate policy prescriptions. Aaron Wildavsky developed this more balanced, hybrid model in his classic book *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*:

> If analysis were purely intellectual, analysts would be everything, or if analysis were purely interactive, analysts would be nothing. Are we faced, then, with a choice between mind without matter or force without foresight? No. Our task is to develop a hybrid, called policy analysis, which uses intellect to help guide rather than replace social interaction (Wildavsky 1989, 124).

Just as the effort to separate politics and administration (Wilson 1887) collapses in skirmishes over policy implementation, so the attempt to quarantine the intellectual work of policy analysis from the politics of democracy crumbles when actors frame problems and advocate solutions. Ideas about how to recast government are the currency of policy analysis, but

these ideas are accepted or rejected by actors who have particular projects or interests. Wildavsky wrote that policy analysis has many faces: among other things, it is *descriptive* (in seeking to explain how a difficulty has come about); *selective* (because oriented to particular people and organizations); *objective* (in aiming to get people to agree on the consequences of options); and *argumentative* (in recognizing that the capacity to convince is essential for political support) (Wildavsky 1979). Assessments of political feasibility— who supports an idea? what are the obstacles to change? how might these obstacles be overcome?—are integral to policy analysis. The aim of such assessments is not to claim that the feasible is desirable, but rather to help make the "desirable do-able" (Wildavsky 1989, 126).

Viewed in this light, the question is not only whether and under what conditions Congress heeds the scientific advice offered by economists (Derthick and Quirk 1985; Schick 1976), but also what Congress contributes to the multi-faceted task of problem-solving. David Mayhew adopts a similar position:

> To contribute effectively to societal problem solving, [members of Congress] need to be able to help define as 'problems' the often inchoate fancies, preferences or demands of society or its elite sectors. The members need to make such definitions widely known and accepted. They need to frame these problems in ordinary, common sense so as to bring the public along, yet also frame them in a way that adapts to the instrumental-rationality needs of political executives and bureaucrats. They need to merchandise causal stories to a wide audience…Beyond this, they need to probe evidence reasonably hardheadedly in a search for 'solutions'….It is a tall order, but as a descriptor of congressional activity it does not refer to a null set (Mayhew 2006, 223).

We use this hybrid model as a more realistic baseline against which to evaluate Congressional performance.

Survey of Public Policy Experts

We conducted an Internet-based survey of members of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, a leading professional association. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to APPAM members who had a mailing address in the greater Washington, D.C. area (DC, Maryland or Virginia).[3] In total, approximately 449 people were contacted. The overall response rate was 36 percent (N=162). The sample included policy analysts from a range of employment backgrounds: 42 percent work in universities or colleges, 36 percent work in think tanks or research organizations, 14 percent work in the federal executive branch, 8 percent in the federal legislative branch, 8 percent in state or local government, 8 percent work for government contractors, 4 percent work for nonprofit service providers, and 2 percent work for foundations or advocacy organizations. The sample is 58 percent male. 60 percent of the respondents have a doctorate as their highest degree, and 38 percent have a master's or professional degree. 47 percent earned their highest degree in public policy, 21 percent in economics, 14 percent in public administration, 8 percent in political science, and the rest in other fields. The sample also skewed ideologically to the left. On a 7-point scale of political views, 8 percent identified as extremely liberal, 43 percent as liberal, 24 percent as slightly liberal, 15 percent as middle of the road, 4 percent as slightly conservative, 2 percent as conservative, and 0 percent as extremely conservative. Most respondents also report having had direct interactions with members of Congress or congressional staff. Only 20 percent reported never interacting directly with members of Congress or congressional staff. 30 percent said they had such interactions at least several times a year, 19 percent once a year, and 30 percent on occasion but less than once a year.

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[3] APPAM and UVA employees were excluded from the survey invitation list.

While the respondents have no lack of criticisms of the institution's performance, they are not reflexively "anti-Congress." The respondents accept that Congress has a major role to play in national policymaking. Only 13 percent said that important domestic policy decisions should be made mostly by the president with some input from Congress. 59 percent said they thought such decisions should be made by the Congress and the president equally, and 26 percent said such decisions should be made mostly by the Congress with some input from the president.[4]

Congress and Policy Analysis Tasks

Most studies of Congress and policy analysis have examined whether Congress produces and consumes policy-analytic knowledge (Weiss 1989; Whiteman 1995). This is an essential question, but it is posed at too high a level of abstraction. Policy analysis is a multi-step activity combining intelligence and interaction. To separate the pieces of this hybrid model, we use Bardach's well-known conceptual framework (Bardach 2009). Bardach argues that policy analysis consists of eight tasks: (1) defining problems, (2) assembling evidence, (3) constructing alternatives, (4) selecting criteria, (5) projecting outcomes, (6) confronting trade-offs, (7) making decisions, and (8) telling causal stories to an audience. (We treat the tasks as discrete, even though in practice they overlap). Congress has potential roles to play at each step. How well does Congress perform them?

Defining Problems

The first step of policy analysis is to define the problem. On the surface, Congress looks like a premier problem-definer. Countless bills contain proclamations along the lines of "Whereas X is occurring…" where X represents some allegedly serious problem that warrants a

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[4] Respondents had a different view when it comes to important foreign policy decisions. A majority (54 percent) said such decisions should be made mostly by the president, with some input from the Congress.

legislative solution. Yet, while such bold assertions may serve the electoral goals of members, they are often little more than "issue rhetoric" that is, too imprecise or emotion-laden to catalyze *pragmatic* problem solving. Instead, to serve as the foundation for policy analysis, a problem must be defined in a way that is "analytically manageable and that makes sense in light of the political and institutional means available for mitigating it" (Bardach 2009, 4).

Survey respondents gave Congress dismal marks as a problem definer. 81 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Congress is more concerned with "looking good in the eyes of voters than with actually solving problems." Only 3 percent believed that Congress has done a good or better job over the last ten years in "defining problems in ways that are logical and analytically manageable," and 56 percent rate Congress' performance as "poor."[5] What accounts for Congress's poor performance on this step?

Defining problems is a challenging task for a legislature. It requires Congress to bring order to the conflicting demands of voters, experts, and interest groups. It also requires a clear-eyed diagnosis of the source of the difficulties. Even when there is a consensus on the existence of a problem, there may be disagreement about its causes. For example, are the disability rolls expanding because of rising clientele needs or because more people are gaming the system? Are health care costs high because providers charge too much or because consumers do not have enough "skin in the game"? Is unemployment a structural or cyclical problem? Experts themselves may disagree on the answers to these questions; it may be too much to expect a representative assembly to resolve them.

On the basis of interviews with 83 staff of congressional committees and congressional support agencies during the 1980s, Weiss found that committee staff reported using analysis

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[5] While the N is very small, the 10 self-identified Republicans/ lean Republican respondents who answered this question had similar assessments to the overall sample. 6 of 10 rated Congress's problem defining performance as poor, and 4 as fair.

primarily to certify positions and influence the priority of proposals on the agenda, but tended

not to use analysis to reconceptualize problems (Weiss 1989).[6] Consistent with the findings of

Weiss's earlier study, the experts we surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that members use

evidence to fortify positions they already hold.[7] 84 percent of respondents said they believe that

Congressional leaders usually know how they wish to address national problems, and that the

leaders use the recommendations of policy experts to add legitimacy to positions they would

have taken anyway. Only 4 percent agreed with the statement that Congressional leaders often do

not know the best way to address national problems, and look to policy experts for guidance on

the most effective course of action. Of course, this begs the question of where members' views

come from in the first place (Peterson 1995). Constituency opinion, party positions, and ideology

are all potential sources of legislative preferences, but so too is the tenor of the times, to which

policy analysis contributes. Policy analysis might still shape legislative problem definitions, but

(as we discuss below) it may filter into Congress through more indirect channels at earlier stages

of the legislative process (Weiss 1989).

Yet Congress does possess some institutional capacities as a problem definer, especially

when its role is evaluated in the context of a separation of powers system. While Congress lacks

the executive's ability to frame problems in analytically crisp ways, its openness to outside

pressures and demands arguably makes a contribution to the American political system's

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[6] This is not to say Congress never uses expertise to reconceptualize problems. As a staff member of the House Subcommittee on Elections in the late 1980s, Patashnik corresponded with political scientist Raymond Wolfinger about his empirical research on the causes of low voter turn-out. Contrary to the widely-held belief that low voter turn-out reflected political alienation and mistrust in government, Wolfinger's research suggested that a more prosaic reason why some citizens did not vote was because they were residentially mobile and failed to update their voter registration information following a change of address. Wolfinger's research helped reframe the problem of low voter turnout among congressional staffers working on the issue, leading to the enactment of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (the "motor-voter" bill). See Wolfinger 1991.

[7] This is broadly consistent with Kingdon's (1997) finding that solutions may chase problems as the policy agenda is formed, rather than the other way around.

capacity to address a changing menu of topics over time. About 4 in 10 (37 percent) of experts surveyed rated Congress's performance good or better in bringing attention to new issues.

Because developing effective problem definitions is challenging, many experts recommend an iterative process in which understandings of a problem are subject to revision and refinement (Bardach 2009). When confronting complex problems, trial-and-error learning is a defensible approach. By its nature, legislative coalition building is an iterative process in which bill sponsors often modify their initial assumptions in response to input from colleagues whose support they hope to win (Schick 1976). As one analyst we interviewed stated, "Making policy adjustments for political reasons that moves toward a second best solution is often the best way to proceed as it creates more ownership over the final bill. This can be critical as you often need to make technical corrections [after policy enactment]."

Indeed, the process of trial-and-error learning does not end when a bill becomes a law. As E. Scott Adler and John D. Wilkerson observe in their recent book *Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving*, there has been a significant rise in "temporary" legislation since World War II. While there are many explanations for this trend, including conflict between Congress and the executive, Adler and Wilkerson argue that the increasing reliance on short-term authorizations reflects Congress's desire to preserve the flexibility to update a preexisting policy in light of new information and changing conditions (Adler and Wilkerson 2012).

Yet congressional learning about problems takes place in a political context shaped by the policy feedback from past legislative activity (Pierson 1993). Whether short-term or permanent, statutes carry the force of law, and laws generate reactions (stop! continue! do more!) among constituencies, to which lawmakers must respond. As government has grown, the policy "space" has become increasingly congested. It is rare today for Congress to legislate in an area

not already populated by existing policy commitments (Patashnik 2008; Patashnik and Zelizer 2013). In the contemporary American state, legislators do not define new problems so much as cope with the consequences of earlier "solutions." Consider, for example, Congress's decision to end air traffic furloughs in 2013. That decision reflected Congress's effort to manage the political fallout from budget sequestration, which was itself a (temporary) resolution of the debt-ceiling crisis. In sum, as the complexity of government grows, lawmaking increasingly turns in on itself. Legislators still respond to the demands of constituent groups, but those demands are mediated by the consequences of past decisions. As Wildavsky put it, "policy becomes more and more its own cause" (1989, 81).

Assembling Evidence

Evidence-based decisions cannot be made unless evidence is assembled. Data must be collected and then turned into information relevant to the policy questions at hand (Bardach 2009). Few members of Congress have the time or desire to keep up with the academic literature let alone to conduct original research studies.

Yet, Congress is "awash in policy information" (Bimber 1996, 1). Information is absorbed and packaged not only by congressional committees, but also by the staffs of 535 individual member offices. While many of these "congressional enterprises" are not inclined to tap into policy-analytic knowledge, others are highly active and engaged. Staff members at the core of "issue networks" devour policy reports and interact regularly with experts in academia and think tanks (Whiteman 1985; Heclo 1978). Among the most important sources of information for lawmakers are the congressional support agencies—the Congressional Research Service, the Congressional Budget Office, the General Accountability Office, and the Office of Technology Assessment (before its termination in 1994). These agencies issue thousands of

detailed reports each year and play a key role in gathering and summarizing evidence and conducing financial analysis for members. Through its analytic support agencies, Congress forges institutional and ideational connections to other sites of the vast U.S. policy analysis enterprise, including the academy, think tanks, and private research organizations like Mathematica and MDRC.

The politics of legislative support agencies highlights the complex relationship between expertise and power in American democracy (Hird 2005; Fisher 2011). To ensure continuing political support, agencies must refrain from criticizing firmly held congressional positions, avoid catching members by surprise, and be attentive to Congress's prerogatives, including its goal of maintaining a balance of power with the executive (Bimber 1996). Members of Congress expect professional, nonpartisan guidance from the support agencies; they also insist upon responsiveness to their institutional interests. Support agencies that fail to satisfy the demands of members of Congress, their clients, may be denied the political sustenance required for their survival. In 1995, for example, the Office of Technology Assessment was terminated, among other reasons, because Congress did not view assessments of technology as essential to maintaining a balance of power with the executive (Bimber 1996; Mucciaroni and Quirk 2006). Sometimes support agencies like the CRS and GAO are criticized when they do not follow a model of "neutral competence." Such criticism is unwarranted because *all* policy analysts must satisfy the needs of their organizational clients, and the legislative support agencies are no exception.[8] As one senior analyst who participated in the focus group stated, "I don't like that

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[8] At times, experts who work for congressional support agencies face hard questions about how to balance responsibility to their clients and analytical integrity (see Fisher 2011). Having Congress as one's boss is certainly not easy, but policy analysts (no matter who their client is) struggle with such professional dilemmas all the time. "Analysts must expect…that their clients will be players in the game of politics—players who not only have their own personal conceptions of the good society but who almost always must acknowledge the often narrow interests of their constituencies if they hope to remain the in the game" (Weimer and Vining, 1999, 44).

word [neutral] at all. I prefer the word 'objective.' Neutral implies that we don't make pronouncements or draw conclusions, but we do—all the time." In a separation of powers system, the requirement that the legislative support agencies be sensitive to Congress's institutional needs—and thus abandon any pretense of "neutrality" toward basic constitutional values—is not a weakness but a strength (Fisher 2011).

While the congressional support agencies strive to be nonpartisan, partisan and ideological conflicts over the generation of information can arise when Congress decides whether to request an official government report from an agency. A reporting requirement on a subject of broad legislative interest might seem like a good government issue on which liberals and conservatives would generally agree. As Frances Lee points out, however, members are well aware that "information is a powerful weapon" (2009, 121). A study could favor one side or the other in a partisan debate. Hence congressional votes on information control tend to be either noncontroversial or highly contentious on partisan lines (Lee 2009).

The main way that members learn about policy issues is through interaction with interest groups, not from reading government reports. The conventional wisdom holds that lobbying distorts information-gathering (but see Hall and Deardorff 2006), because narrow special interests are more likely to possess the resources and incentive to convey information to legislators than organizations representing diffuse public interests (Wright 2003). If members simply listen to the advice they get from interest groups, the result may be bad policy. Kevin Esterling (2004) challenges this pessimistic conclusion about the policy consequences of interest group lobbying. Drawing on Gary Becker's model of interest group competition, Esterling argues that advocates of policies that evidence suggests will work well are more likely to invest scarce resources in lobbying efforts than are the groups that would be harmed by the adoption of

these policies (Esterling 2004; Becker 1983). In sum, even if members are not motivated to promote good policies, they will do so as a byproduct of servicing the organized. Esterling supports his counter-intuitive claim through case studies of Congress's use of evidence in the adoption of socially-efficient policies, such as the 1990 acid rain emissions trading program.

As Sarah Binder persuasively argues, however, lawmakers are interested in receiving information not only about the programmatic effects of policy solutions, but also about their *political* consequences, such as how support for proposals would affect a member's reelection chances (Binder 2006; see also Peterson 1995; Price 1991). There is no reason to think that the information emanating from the political environment will be unbiased or naturally lead members to support Pareto-improving reforms (Binder 2006). Members of Congress are often uninterested in learning information that challenges constituent views on salient issues and are reluctant to incorporate evidence that casts a negative light on programs that benefit well-organized groups. As one focus group participant told us, "Our analytical work has the most influence in micro, technical areas where there are no entrenched views." Members who represent districts with oil companies are unlikely to be interested in evidence about the inefficiency of oil subsidies. The problem of congressional indifference to evidence is arguably most severe when special interests are not geographically concentrated because then there may be no countervailing constituency. For example, there is compelling evidence that U.S. physicians perform many unnecessary medical procedures, but Congress has been hesitant to use this information to strengthen the government's role in reviewing Medicare billings and reducing wasteful health care spending out of fear of antagonizing doctors, providers and senior citizens across the country (Gerber and Patashnik 2006). Sometimes clear evidence of a serious national problem exists—but Congress prefers to keep its collective head in the sand.

This mixed assessment of Congress's performance as evidence assembler is reinforced by our survey results and interviews. 65 percent of survey respondents said that Congress has done a poor job over the past ten years in making policy decision on the basis of objective evidence. To make our inquiry more concrete, we asked survey respondents to reflect on the following scenario: What if a prestigious academic journal publishes a research study that shows that an existing federal transportation program is highly cost-ineffective, meaning that it would be possible to achieve the same transportation benefits at much lower cost, or to spend the same amount of money while generating much larger transportation benefits. We asked respondents how likely they thought it was that the chairs of the congressional committees with jurisdiction over the program would become aware of the study. About half of the experts (46 percent) were very or somewhat confident that committee chairs would become aware the study. In a multivariate analysis, respondents who reported having been a legislator or served on a legislative staff were more confident that the committee chair would learn of the study, but the effect was not statistically significant in all models. (See Table A4.).[9] Just 4 percent of experts were very or somewhat confident that Congress would makes a serious attempt to replace the transportation program with a more cost-effective approach, however. While we did not pose a follow-up question as to why respondents believed that Congress would fail to act on the findings of the study, we suspect the most likely answer is the existing transportation program can be assumed to have vested interests, which Congress will be reluctant to upset.

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[9] Of course, even if the committee chair does not learn of the study, it is possible her staff would. During the 99th Congress (1985-1987), Whiteman surveyed congressional staff about their awareness of specific policy analysis reports. He found considerable variance, but in most issue areas over 80 percent of the staff members were aware of the relevant studies, and only one project showed less than 50 percent awareness. Interestingly, Whiteman found an inverse relationship between the perceived constituency interest in an issue and familiarity with policy analysis: on issues salient to the constituency, congressional offices tend to rely more heavily on constituent views and do not seek out other sources of information (Whiteman 1995, 162-163).

In sum, the main information problem Congress faces is not the absence of evidence, but rather the failure of members to make good use of available information (Quirk 2005). Indeed, only six percent of survey respondents said that lack of information is an extremely important reason for Congress's failure as problem solving institution. As Figure 1 shows, experts were far more likely to name the following factors as extremely important reasons for Congress's failures to solve problems: partisan polarization (71percent), lawmakers focused on their own reelections (55 percent), and interest group pressure (48 percent).

Figure 1 about here

Constructing Alternatives

A creative aspect of policy analysis involves the identification of alternative ways to mitigate a problem. Putting multiple policy options on the table ensures that a leader's pet idea doesn't win the day without consideration of other possible solutions. How good is Congress at constructing policy alternatives, and where do members look for inspiration when they seek to develop ways to address an issue on the agenda?

Survey respondents provide a negative assessment of Congress's performance in constructing policy alternatives. Nearly half (47 percent) of the experts surveyed think Congress has done a poor job over the past ten years in developing new policy options for addressing national problems. Only slightly more than 10 percent think that Congress has done a good or mostly good job at this task.

Three developments may explain Congress's poor performance as an option constructor. First, modern presidents have taken on an active role as "legislator-in-chief," while Congress often assumes a reactive posture in which members respond to executive-initiated agenda items

rather than developing a menu of their own. Indeed, as Cohen (2012) has demonstrated, during the second-half of the twentieth century the president's legislative policy agenda grew so much that legislative activities came to occupy a central aspect of his political responsibilities. This expansion of the president's legislative responsibilities came at the expense of Congress. As Cohen argues, while Congress "might have been the center of legislative activity" through the Progressive era, presidents "became more central to the legislative process from the second half of the twentieth century onward" (109-110).

Second, committees appear to have lost power at the expense of parties over the past few decades. Policy alternatives need to be grounded in an understanding of the linkages between problems and solutions, and the mechanisms by which a particular government intervention can change the behavior of targeted constituencies. The committee process—investigations, bill mark-ups, the questioning of witnesses at hearings—give members the opportunity to develop such expertise. Andrew Taylor's (2013) recent study of congressional performance suggests, however, that intense partisanship and growing interest group pressure have undermined the quality of committee deliberations. Members come to committee hearings with "fixed preferences and a general unwillingness to change their minds" about how to approach issues (132).

Third, the growth of Big Government, and the generation of vested interest groups who lobby against reform, means that the most important alternative is often current policy. Ironically, members themselves may lack the requisite expertise even to understand the policy status quo. As one focus group participant stated, "Here's a common scenario. Congress passes a vague law, bureaucrats determine how the law is implemented and legislative branch research staff…have to have to 'explain it back' to Members and staff."

In terms of where Congress *does* look for new ideas about how to improve policy, most (68 percent) experts think that Congress never or almost never seeks to learn from the best practices and policy successes of other nations. Less than 1 percent of experts surveyed said that the typical member's support for a bill would be influenced a lot by whether other nations had adopted similar legislation. When members *do* look for best practices, they search much closer to home. 48 percent of survey respondents said they believe that Congress seeks to learn from the policy successes of state governments sometimes, and 21 percent believe that Congress seeks to learn from these state-level experiences fairly or very often. This suggests that successful policies may not only transfer across the states (Shipan and Volden 2012), but may also spread from one level of government to another. When such policy diffusion occurs, Congress may end up (indirectly) using information that entered the process at an earlier (pre-Congress) stage.

Welfare reform offers a good illustration of how research can shape congressional policymaking without leaving a direct imprint on legislative behavior. A number of observers have argued that evaluation research on welfare-to-work experiments helped create the policy conditions that made the Family Support Act of 1988 possible (Haskins 1991). However, while many lawmakers were clearly familiar with these experiments, research was not a decisive factor during either committee mark-up or floor debate (Haskins 1991). Kent Weaver, in his detailed study of the 1996 welfare reform law, similarly finds that lawmakers did not use research in a straightforward, technocratic fashion. Evaluation research did, however, improve the prospects for Republican policy ideas, including deterrence and devolution, by showing that welfare-to-work programs alone would be "inadequate to reduce welfare dependence and recidivism substantially" (Weaver, 2000, 168).

In a related vein, policy analysis at times can shape the menu of congressional options through anticipated reactions. Congressional support agencies assist members with the development of policy options, but they may have even more influence by working with the executive branch to flag problems with proposals before they are presented to the Congress. One focus group participant told us about how a CBO analysis of problems with a ground combat vehicle that the Pentagon was developing led the Pentagon to significantly scale back the proposal before most members were even aware of it. "Our work sometimes gets into Congress through agencies or the press—we don't necessarily hand an idea to a member and get legislative traction," she said.

Selecting the Criteria

Policy analysis is a value-laden activity. The decision to support or oppose a policy expresses normative judgments about what constitutes good policy. A critical issue is what evaluative criteria Congress brings to bear when considering options to address a problem (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

For many policy analysts, the most important evaluative criterion is *effectiveness*—whether an option actually helps solve the policy problem (Bardach 2009, 26). Back in the 1950s and 1960s, members like Wilbur Mills took pride in the craft of legislation (Zelizer 1998). While symbolism has always been a staple of legislative life, Capitol Hill culture encouraged a seriousness of legislative purpose during this era. In today's Congress, however, it appears that partisanship, ideological rigidity, and the weakening of committees vis-à-vis parties have

undermined instrumental activity (Mayhew 2006). Congressional debates are often vehicles for position-taking and member advertising, rather than opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed legislation. In their study of congressional deliberation, for example, Mucciaroni and Quirk (2006) found that members of Congress frequently make misleading empirical arguments about the consequences of proposals, and only abandon such unsupported claims when there is no longer a political gain from repeating them.[10]

Congress also gives little weight to *economic efficiency*.[11] The usual way that analysts assess efficiency is through cost-benefit (or cost-effectiveness) studies. A majority (54 percent) of survey respondents said that cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis have "only a little" influence on congressional decision-making. 29 percent said these methods have a moderate amount of influence. In multivariate analysis, we found that respondents who reported a high frequency of interactions with members of Congress or congressional staff were *less* likely to believe that cost-benefit studies have a significant impact on Congress ($p < .05$; see Table A3.).[12] This is not to suggest that Congress *prefers* inefficient policies, or that there are no conditions under which Congress will vote for Pareto-improving policies (see Arnold 1990). But Congress tends not to value efficiency as an end in itself.

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[10] Of course, there are exceptions to the rule that Congress is less interested in policy effectiveness. Several analysts we interviewed independently pointed to the design of the 2009 economic stimulus legislation as a counter-example. Senators from natural resource states like North Dakota that were suffering less from the Great Recession were willing to embrace a Medicaid formula that targeted funds at hardest hit states in an effort to blunt-the pro-cyclical budget cuts of the states and boost the national recovery, even though this meant their states would be losers under the formula. But it is difficult to maintain a congressional focus on effectiveness outside national crises.

[11] The literature has identified many factors that may cause government to pay little attention to economic efficiency, including: reelection incentives, geographically based constituencies, the influence of interest groups, electoral cycles, and the tendency of voters to treat losses and gains asymmetrically (Weimer and Vining 2006).

[12] When members of Congress *do* actively push for greater use of cost-benefit analysis, they often do so in a selective way, to erect procedural barriers against policies disfavored on ideological or partisan grounds. For example, House Republicans who wanted to neuter financial reform proposed that the Security and Exchange Commission conduct cost-benefit studies of its rulemakings (Haberkorn 2013). It should be emphasized that cost-benefit analyses conducted by the executive branch may leave a significant imprint on congressional decision-making. See Hird (1991).

Congress also gives scant attention to what Bardach (2009) calls *robustness*, or the capacity of policies to survive the implementation process. As Martha Derthick observes, members of Congress are focused on achieving their political goals and are "not receptive to objections that something they want to do is not administratively feasible" (1990, 92). Indeed, only 16 percent of survey respondents said that over the past ten years, Congress has done a good job passing bills that can be implemented by the bureaucracy without excessive difficulty.

While Congress tends to downplay effectiveness, efficiency and administrative feasibility, it often focuses on *fairness.* Based on their review of legislative debates over welfare reform, repeal of the estate tax, and telecommunications deregulation, for example, Mucciaroni and Quirk argue that "legislators' favorite claims appeal to matters of personal tragedy, struggle or fair treatment, and evoke emotions like envy, resentment and empathy" (2006, 157). Members typically devote far more time to discussing the *distributional* consequences of proposals, and whether the outcomes they would produce accord with citizens' views of moral deservingness, than to the proposals' impacts on allocational efficiency (VanDoren 1989). As Schick notes, "[p]ropelled by pervasive political impulses of 'Who gets what,' Congress seems more concerned about the distributive effects of public policies than about *pro bono publico* benefit-cost ratios. Unlike the analyst who seeks to maximize national welfare, the legislator knows that it is *someone's* welfare that is to be benefited" (1976, 217; emphasis in original). This congressional concern for fairness clearly does not ensure a commitment to reducing income inequality or to equalizing the political influence of the rich and the poor (Bartels 2010; Hacker and Pierson 2011; Gilens 2012; Hochschild 1981). But Congress often concerns itself with assisting groups perceived to be the victims of inequitable treatment. In the debate over whether

to subject internet purchases to sales taxes, for example, Congress was concerned about rectifying "unfairness" to bricks-and-mortar retailers.

Congress also focuses on the budgetary costs of proposals. 30 percent of experts in our survey said the cost of the bill would have a lot of influence on the typical member. In multivariate analysis, we found that respondents who had been a legislative staff member were more likely to say that cost considerations would affect congressional support for the bill ($p <$ .01; see Table A2). As we explain in greater detail below, the CBO has become a key arbiter of the economic consequences of policies, and its analyses of budgetary effects often shapes the political context in which proposals are considered (Joyce 2011).

The criterion that Congress weighs most heavily is *political acceptability*. There is no guarantee that this political filter will eliminate only "bad" ideas or ensure that experts' proposals will be adopted. Yet, in a democracy, political acceptability is a crucial procedural value. Even the most brilliant, expert-certified, Pareto-improving policies cannot be enacted (or sustained) without it. The challenge for experts is that lawmakers are not only responsive to organized groups, they also cater to public opinion and seek to incorporate popular understandings of instrumental rationality into policy design (Mayhew 1974).[13] Counterintuitive proposals that do not reflect common sense tend to be resisted by voters and therefore struggle to gain traction on Capitol Hill (Mayhew 1974). Consider the difficulty that economists had following the 2008-2009 financial crisis in getting even some Democratic members of Congress to accept the Keynesian argument—which challenged the average citizen's belief about how a family should respond to a period of economic stress—that while the financial crisis was "caused by too much

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[13] In multivariate analysis, we found that survey respondents who reported having served on a legislative staff or in a legislature was more likely ($p < .05$) to say that Congress does a good job of reflecting public opinion than those who have not served on a legislative staff or in a legislature. (See Table A1).

confidence, too much borrowing and lending and too much spending, it can only be resolved

with more confidence, more borrowing and lending, and more spending" (Summers 2011).

Yet the resistance of Congress to expert input is not an entirely bad thing in a system of

separated powers in which executives and courts tend to more quickly absorb elite thinking. As

Mayhew writes:

> the battle between the popular and the high-minded needs to be fought out
> somewhere. In any society, common sense versus expertise is an
> opposition that will not go away. In the American system, it is up for grabs
> how much we are willing to trust scientific, bureaucratic, legal, or moral
> experts. Congress helps supply an assurance that their ideas need to be
> sold, not just proclaimed (2009, 361).

Projecting Outcomes

Policy analysis is *predictive* (Wildavsky 1989). It asks: what will happen if a policy

option is enacted? Will a new program deliver on its promises? How much will it cost? And

what unintended consequences could it create?

Congress relies heavily on the budget projections of the CBO, which is required by law

to produce a formal cost estimate for nearly every bill that is reported by a full committee. By

all accounts, CBO budget scores have a massive influence on congressional debate (Joyce

2011). As one interviewee stated, "CBO cost estimates are very important as it is difficult to

get to the floor of the House or Senate without them. It is really the drafts of the cost estimates

and mandates that cause committee staff to re-consider approaches. The public seldom sees

this happening, but it is very important." There have been many occasions when CBO budget

scoring have had a significant impact on the political development and outcome of major

reform proposals. One famous example is the CBO's review of President Clinton's health

reform plan in 1994 (Joyce 2011). The Administration had argued that the plan would save

money, but the CBO determined it would increase the deficit. Moreover, while the Administration had claimed that the transactions of the health alliances were private and therefore should not be included in the federal budget, the CBO ruled that the transactions were budgetary in nature, making it easier for opponents to argue that the plan would vastly expand federal government activity. Some political analysts believe the CBO's rulings contributed to the demise of the Clinton health plan (Skocpol 1996).

In addition to budget scores, the CBO prepares analytic reports on the effects of legislative proposals at the request of the Congressional leadership or chairmen or ranking members of committees or subcommittees. These reports make no recommendations, but may contain findings that favor one side or another of a political debate. For example, a 1995 CBO report projected that few small businesses and farms would have to be liquidated to pay the estate tax under the rules scheduled to be in effect in 2009 (CBO 1995). A recent history of the CBO, supported by many case examples, concludes that the studies produced by the agency cannot get Congress to do something it does not want to do, though at times they can improve the content of a law that Congress was poised to enact (Joyce 2011).[14] In sum, CBO's budget scores are highly consequential, but its analytic reports have a more circumscribed and contingent impact.

Congress frequently lacks information about potential administrative challenges or weak spots of legislative proposals. Policies that work on paper may not work in practice (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Implementation breakdowns not only make it less likely that policy goals will be achieved, but damage the morale and prestige of agencies, although

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[14] It is sometimes claimed that a role of the support agencies is to stop bad ideas, but it is unclear how frequently this happens. Certainly there are examples of the support agencies' work improving legislation. For example, the Carter energy proposal changed as a result of a CBO analysis (Joyce 2011).

typically not the reputation of legislators themselves.[15] Congress's indifference to

implementation concerns appears to have grown over time. An appreciation for the limits of

bureaucratic capacity has traditionally resided in committees, but the institutional knowledge

base of committees has been weakened by staff turnover. "At one time you had staff directors

who were there for 10, 15 and 20 years and not only developed a lot of expertise but who

would have also worked for both Rs and Ds. Today you have a high rate of turnover," said one

analyst we interviewed. According to one expert we interviewed, "The lack of knowledge

about how to implement legislation is becoming a huge problem. This is due to the body

becoming more partisan and thus less willing to reach out…This was a huge problem with

[enactment of the] ACA and it will cause more problems down the line." Because members,

unlike presidents, do not have a direct electoral stake in the quality of public administration,

there is no procedure to ensure that implementation issues receive attention in legislative

debates. To address this gap, R. Kent Weaver proposes having the GAO perform

"Implementation Analyses" of major legislative proposals, similar to the CBO's budget

scoring, but the question remains whether Congress would heed or ignore such reports.

Confronting the Trade-offs

The sixth step of a policy analysis is to confront trade-offs. It sometimes happens that one

of the policy options under consideration is expected to produce a better outcome on every

relevant economic and political dimension than other alternatives, but that is seldom the case

(Bardach 2009). Almost every policy idea is flawed in some way. A typical situation is that

Option 1 is projected to make a big dent in solving a problem, but would be expensive for the

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[15] Fiorina (1977) famously suggested that members of Congress *want* the bureaucracy to perform poorly, so they can come to the rescue of aggrieved citizens.

government to carry out; Option 2 has a low budgetary cost, but would impose regulatory burdens on small businesses; and Option 3 is popular with voters but won't work. Typically Congress also faces the option to maintain the legislative status quo, which may have been established decades earlier when conditions were quite different.

Does Congress wrestle with such trade-offs in a serious way? Respondents gave Congress low marks on this score: 75 percent disagreed with the statement that "Congress is careful to understand the trade-offs between the outcomes associated with different policy options before deciding on a course of action." The discipline of the budget process forces Congress to accept trade-offs *across* programs, but Congress seldom compares the relative social welfare benefits of options in an effort to find the best, feasible solution to a given problem. Instead, members of Congress often use the recognition of trade-offs simply to highlight the weaknesses of proposals of the other political party, even if the proposals have net social benefits or were ones that opponents previously endorsed (Lee 2014).

In addition, as Derthick observes, there is no "budget of administrative capacity" to force Congress to establish sensible implementation priorities. "By definition," she argues "law is binding; the nature of it is to embody command. Thus, when Congress passes a law containing numerous new provisions, all equally require implementation. The legislature does not stipulate priorities. It does not say, "If you must choose, do this before that'" (Derthick 1990, 84).

Making Decisions

One of the aims of policy analysis is to inform decisions, but Congress is no ordinary decision-maker. With 535 members, it isn't easy for the institution to act even when a majority agree on a plan. Moreover, legislative rules and procedures erect barriers to change. As Terry M. Moe and Scott A. Wilson have argued, "The transaction costs of moving a bill through the entire

legislative process is enormous […] The best prediction is that, for most issues most of the time, there will be no affirmative action on the part of Congress at all. The ideal points may logically support a given outcome, but in reality *nothing will happen*" (1994, 26-27). Recent congressional reforms have made lawmaking even more difficult. Historically, one of the ways that coalition leaders have built support for broad-based national legislation is by doling out pork barrel projects to members who vote for the bills (Evans 2004: Ellwood and Patashnik 1993). The recent ban on congressional earmarks, however, has removed some of the vital grease needed to lubricate a creaky legislative process. Yet, despite its reputation as a "gridlocked" institution, Congress has passed sweeping legislation: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Affordable Care Act, Dodd-Frank, TARP, reform of the federal student loan program, and the Medicare Modernization Act, to give just a few recent examples (Melnick 2013).

From a policy analysis perspective, however, the key issue is not the quantity of decisions Congress makes, but their *quality*.[16] Experts we interviewed suggest that the existence of policy analysis informing congressional decision-making is not assured by institutionalized practices and norms but rather depends largely on the attitude and involvement of staff who work on the issue. Once bills are drafted by committee staff, there is seldom an opportunity to make major revisions. While staff are clearly agents of their members, they may have considerable discretion in what issues they choose to develop. Explained one former senior policy analyst: "The earlier that policy analysts gets involved, the larger the impact and the better the policy. This means that generalizations are difficult as the process is lumpy depending on the issue and the staff involved—it can be very good or very bad."

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[16] In addition to welfare economics and public administration lenses for evaluating the quality of statutes (Frankel and Orszag 2002; Light 2002), political scientists have recently begun to focus on policy sustainability (see Patashnik, 2008; Patashnik and Zelizer 2013; Maltzman and Shipan 2008; Jenkins and Patashnik 2012; Berry, Burden and Howell 2010).

How do members of Congress decide whether to vote for bills? There are clearly important differences between the factors that survey respondents believe members of Congress weigh in making voting decisions and the factors that experts themselves use to evaluate the quality of legislative proposals. The respondents indicated that the most important influences on their own assessments of the quality of a bill are the CBO's estimate of how much the bill will cost (43 percent said this would tell them a lot about the quality of the bill) and whether policy experts played a significant role in the bill's development (34 percent said this would tell them a lot) (Figure 2).[17] In contrast, the respondents perceived that the most important influences on a *typical member of Congress* in deciding whether to support a bill are whether major interest groups are for the bill (82 percent of experts said they believed interest group support would have a lot of influence on legislators), and how popular the bill is with citizens (57 percent of experts such public support would have a lot of influence on the typical member) (Figure 3).

Figures 2 and 3 about here

Telling Causal Stories

The final step of a policy analysis is to convince others that the analyst's recommendations are sound. In a democracy, the audience for policy recommendations includes not only elites, but also ordinary citizens who (to press an earlier point) tend to reject ideas that do not reflect common sense. As Bardach (2009) argues, policy analysts must be able to "tell a causal story" linking public problems with proposed solutions (on stories on policymaking, see Stone 2011). To be effective, such stories must pass what he calls the "New York Taxi Driver Test" (Bardach 2000, 41). While stalled in New York traffic, the analyst must be able to provide

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[17] Just 11 percent of survey respondents said that a *New York Times* editorial board endorsement would tell them a lot about the quality of a bill. To the extent such editorials give respondents new information, this finding implies that while professional policy analysts skew to the left, they are not reflexive liberals.

a coherent, easily understood explanation of her policy idea to the typical NYC cabbie, before

the taxi driver loses interest or rejects the idea as yet another scheme of intellectuals to waste

taxpayer money. Would-be policy analysts who fail this test prove incapable of "carrying on

with the task of public, democratic education" (Bardach 2009, 42).

As Mayhew notes, "struggles over causal stores are often at the center of drives to enact

legislation (2012, 259). Think of the struggle over the narrative of the Affordable Care Act, or

the failed push for Social Security privatization. Members may be challenged to explain

proposals to constituents at town hall meetings. On the positive side, the need to tell compelling

stories affords members of Congress the opportunity not only to build trust and enhance their

political standing, but to play a formative role in the construction of public preferences (Sunstein

1988, 1539-1590). Haskins (1991, 618), for example, argues that members built support for

welfare reform legislation in the 1990s by telling a plausible causal story that linked citizen

dissatisfaction with the increase in welfare spending to the top-down, "federally imposed"

structure of the program.

Richard Fenno's study of members' "homestyles" also highlights the importance of

causal explanations. On the basis of participant observation research conducted in the 1970s,

Fenno reported that many members believed that their explanations for their votes mattered as

much or more as their roll call votes themselves (Fenno 1978; see also Kingdon 1989).[18] At

times, members of Congress has played a key role not only in explaining their actions to voters

in their districts, but in making experts' ideas acceptable to broader publics. For example, in the

1970s, key coalition leaders, such as Ted Kennedy (D-MA), sold microeconomists' proposal for

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[18] In today's more polarized environment, however, it may be more challenging for members to come up with
explanations that will satisfy both primary and general election voters, unless they are able to successfully tailor
their messages and communications to suit different audiences (on tailoring of legislators' explanations, see
Mayhew 1974).

pro-competitive transportation deregulation to the public—over the intense opposition of organized interests—by offering "simple and vivid cues of the merits of the issue;" explaining how vulnerable geographic constituencies (small towns) would be protected from harms; and "making a rhetorical connection between deregulation and larger concerns of the general public," including worries about inflation and Big Government (Derthick and Quirk 1985, 244).

Does the contemporary Congress have a similar capacity to market ideas to the public? The public policy experts in our survey expressed skepticism about members' effectiveness at telling causal stories. Only 19 percent of respondents said that Congress has done a good job or better over the past ten years at explaining policy decisions in commonsense language that ordinary Americans can understand. 35 percent said Congress has done a fair job in explaining policies, and 44 percent said Congress's performance on this dimension has been poor. This poor performance is not due to a lack of assistance from the legislative support agencies. According to a focus group participant, agencies like CRS offer a lot of help to members who know there is a problem but don't know how to fix it or how to explain a technical policy solution to voters. "Case in point is the rising salinity of the ocean. A liberal Member knows this is a problem, but has no idea what options are to solve it. Policy analysis helps him to credit claim (I have a solution), take a position (we need to lower the temperature of the ocean) and explain causal action (if we don't do this, we won't be able to continue commercial fishing off the coast of our state"). If the public mistrusts Congress, however, the persuasive influence of members will be constrained.

As a gauge of how effective experts believe members are at telling convincing stories, we asked respondents to evaluate how effective different actors would be at convincing the average citizen that a recently-enacted public health law was necessary and in the public interest. As

Figure 4 shows, respondents overwhelmingly believed that the local of member of Congress would be less persuasive to the average citizen not only than the US President and the president of the American Medical Association, but also than a radio talk show host. The CBO director was perceived to have no ability to persuade the public about the need for the program.

Figure 4 about here

What Does Congress Not Do Poorly?

As we have seen, our survey respondents give Congress low marks as a problem solving institution. This is unsurprising. Policy analysts (especially those who work in universities and think tanks) are tough critics, and Congress is a disparaged institution. In the face of these negative reviews, does the survey say *anything* positive at all about Congress's contribution to problem solving?

Another way to interrogate our results is to ask not what experts believe Congress does well, but what they believe Congress at least does not do poorly. Here the results are illuminating. As Table 2 shows, experts overwhelmingly agree that Congress' performance over the past decade has *not* been poor in avoiding negative consequences for business, satisfying interest groups, reflecting public opinion, and bringing attention to new issues. These are not insignificant contributions to problem solving in a political system in which different institutions and actors bring different strengths. A concern for public opinion, for example, is essential if people are to accept the outcomes of policy decisions.[19] More striking is that a clear majority of experts does not give Congress poor marks on key tasks including achieving policy goals at

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[19] As Wildavsky (1989, 406) wrote: "Nor do I believe policy analysis is a waste of time, because no one cares what is true and beautiful but only what is popular and preferable. Popularity in a democracy is no mean recommendation; a policy that is marginally preferable has much to commend it compared to one that is perfectly impossible."

acceptable cost, reflecting the ideas of policy experts, and passing bills the bureaucracy can handle without difficulty. (For the most part, the experts rate Congress's performance as "only fair" in these areas). The performance dimensions on which an overwhelming majority of experts finds Congress's record poor are distributing benefits equitably across income groups, taking into account the interests of future generations, and making evidence-based decisions. Two-thirds of respondents believe that Congress is dismal at those tasks.

Table 2 about here

Conclusions

Congress's performance as a policy analyst is problematic to say the least, but it is important to appraise the institution against a reasonable set of expectations. Policy analysis involves (and should involve) both intelligence *and* social interaction (Wildavsky 1979). Once Congress's performance is broken down into discrete tasks—something that previous research on the subject has not done—it becomes clear that Congress is neither estranged from policy analysis nor consumed by it. Great efforts have been made over the past half-century to boost Congress's analytic capacity through the establishment of support agencies like the CBO. The contemporary Congress clearly possesses the information and access to expertise required to absorb social science findings and craft thoughtful solutions. What is arguably needed to improve Congress's performance as a problem-solving institution are not additional analytic-boosters, but rather changes in legislative norms and practices (such as reducing the number of complex omnibus bills covering diverse subjects) to promote a "culture of problem solving on Capitol Hill" (Mayhew 2006, 230).

Overall, survey respondents give Congress low marks on tasks involving the use of knowledge, such as making policy decisions on the basis of evidence. At the same time, their responses point to some areas of *relative* institutional strength, such as Congress's ability to craft policies that reflect public opinion. The most troubling results of the survey, in our view, touch not on Congress's lack of interest in cost-benefit analysis, which is old news, but rather on the perception among many experts that the institution today is not contributing as much as it might to the representational and legitimating sides of problem-solving. This can be seen, for example, in the belief among many respondents that Congress has done a poor job in explaining issues to mass publics in plain language or in developing solutions that the citizenry can understand and embrace. The quality of governance depends on the efficiency of policy choices, but it also depends on the accountability relationship between legislators and citizens.

Several issues require more attention. The first is the influence of polarization and party competition on congressional performance. The literature on partisan polarization has focused on its impact on legislative productivity as measured by the quantity of laws passed, but we need more fine-grained evidence on how polarization and party competition affects the quality of deliberation, the definition of problems, and the way that Congress incorporates expertise and uses information (Quirk 2011). The standard process by which expertise influences policymaking in the United States is through elite-led social learning. Policy experts first reach a scientific consensus on a technical issue, which then diffuses down to policymakers and the general public (Zaller 1992). This elite-led social learning process is mediated, however, by the structure of electoral competition between the two parties. The current political era is characterized by a polarization of policy elites, a sorting of constituencies, and the longest period of parity in party competition since the Civil War (Lee 2014). In this combative environment,

each party has a strong electoral incentive to attack the proposals of the other side, even in the absence of an underlying substantive disagreement about public policy (Lee 2014). Gerber and Patashnik have argued that even bipartisan, technocratic reform ideas like evidence-based medicine may become the objects of political contestation (Gerber and Patashnik 2010). We need to learn more about the conditions under which such politicization of expertise emerges, and what if any countervailing forces might suppress it.

While the focus of this paper is on how Congress's capacities vary across eight dimensions of policy analysis, a key issue for inquiry is whether and how Congress's use of policy analysis varies across policy sectors (Katznelson and Lapinski 2008). Is it the case, for example, that Congress's use of policy analysis is better in the defense arena than in domestic sectors (Schick 1976)? How is the willingness of Congress to confront tradeoffs shaped by the density of think tanks and experts in particular arenas? Do senior staff and members of congressional support agencies systematically skew the advice they give to members to comport with Congress's strongly instrumental approach when issues directly implicate members' reelection concerns? How severe is this skewing? How much rationality seeps through, and does this vary in any systematic way across policy domains?

A third issue concerns the variation in Congressional performance over time. There is nothing remotely new about elite complaints about Congress's failure to follow expertise.[20] Yet Congress's performance as a problem solving institution seems to have atrophied in recent decades (Mayhew 2006). At earlier moments in American history, Congress appeared to have the capacity to address the issues on its agenda, including big social conflicts like civil rights, yet today the congressional agenda is dominated by technical issues, where Congress does not seem

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[20] Back in the 19th century, Mark Twain famously quipped, "Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself" (Paine 1912, 724).

as well-suited to act. At the same time, expectations of political fairness and economic performance have become more exacting. How have congressional tools to reconcile the pressures of democratic politics with the dictates of policy analysis been affected by the new kinds of political demands and issue contexts we are confronting today? Does Congress end up focusing on more technical issues because its analytic capacity has grown—or because secular trends like polarization, the closeness of electoral competition between the two parties, and globalization have weakened the institution's ability to deal with larger challenges? Our sense is that Congress's agenda is driven more by presidential leadership, policy feedback from past decisions, and electoral pressures than by the growth of its analytical machinery, but the necessary research has not been conducted.

A final issue concerns the separation of powers.[21] The idealized view of institutional relationship in modern American government suggests that Congress "owns" the representation function while the executive branch "owns" most technocratic governing capacity. From this perspective, many scholars believe that stark differences remain between Congress and the executive in both orientation and performance. In his recent book on why domestic policies go awry, for example, Peter Schuck argues that congressional defects and dysfunction are the main institutional source of government failure, while administrative agencies remain the "best loci within the government of fine-grained policy analysis" (Schuck 2014, 169). Yet other scholars argue that the thrust of institutional development over the past half century—including the expanded representational role of the presidency, agencies, and courts—has been to erode the separation of powers and functional differences among the branches. To evaluate the consequences of Congress's work as a policy analyst, we therefore need to understand not only how Congress's roles and capacities have changed, but also how other institutions have

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[21] We thank Stephen Skowronek for stimulating us to think about this issue.

responded to Congress's evolution. Have the other branches found ways to enhance (or offset) the strengths (and limitations) of Congress's contributions to problem solving? Or are the virtues (and defects) of our political institutions today mutually reinforcing? Answering these questions will reveal not only how public policy is made in American government, but to what ends.

Table 1

Congress and Evaluative Criteria

Criterion	Key findings from literature review and survey
Effectiveness	Outside of particularistic programs, MCs rewarded for positions, not effects (Mayhew 1974); instrumental rationality waning (Mayhew 2006)
Economic efficiency	Congress frequently ignores economic efficiency (VanDoren 1989)
Robustness/ ease of implementation	MCs not receptive to arguments that something they want to do is not administratively feasible (Derthick 1990)
Fairness	MCs favorite claims appeal to "fair treatment" (Mucciaroni and Quirk 2006)
Budgetary cost	In multivariate analysis, respondents who had been a legislative staff member were more likely to say that cost considerations would affect congressional support for a bill ($p < .01$).
Political acceptability	Congress is responsive to public opinion (survey) and seeks to incorporate popular understandings into policy design (Mayhew 1974)

Table 2

Experts Reporting Poor Congressional Performance On…	Percent of Total
Pleasing Interest Groups	1
Avoiding Negative Consequences for Business	9
Reflecting Public Opinion	15
Bringing Attention to New Issues	21
Distributing Benefits Equitably Across Districts	33
Achieving Policy Objectives at Acceptable Cost	34
Reflecting Ideas of Policy Experts	35
Passing Bills that the Bureaucracy Can Handle	36
Promoting Economic Efficiency	43
Explaining Decisions in Ordinary Language	45
Developing New Policy Options	48
Targeting Resources Effectively	50
Defining Problems Logically	56
Distributing Benefits Equitably Across Income Groups	62
Taking Into Account the Interests of Future Generations	65
Making Evidence-Based Decisions	66

Figure 1
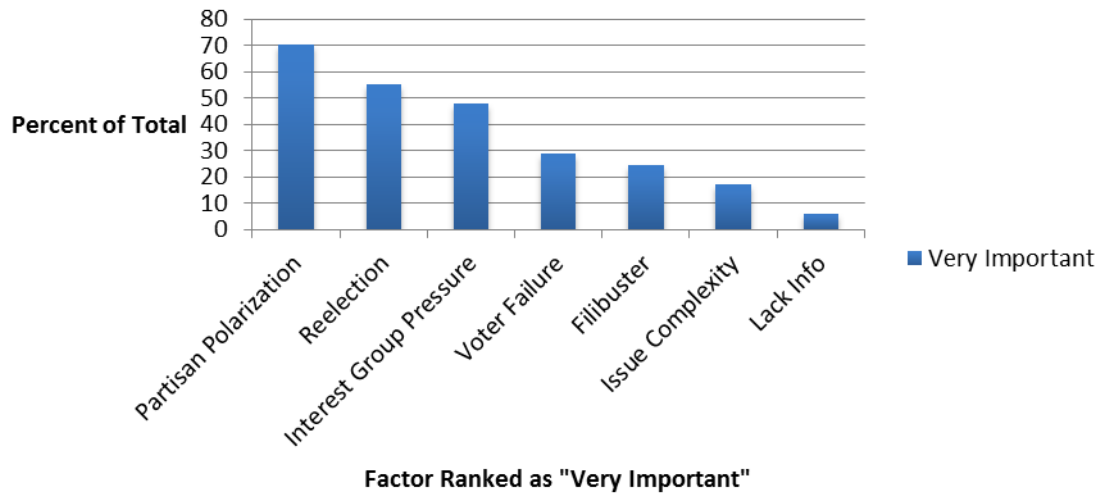**Experts Believe Lack of Information Not the Problem**

Figure 2
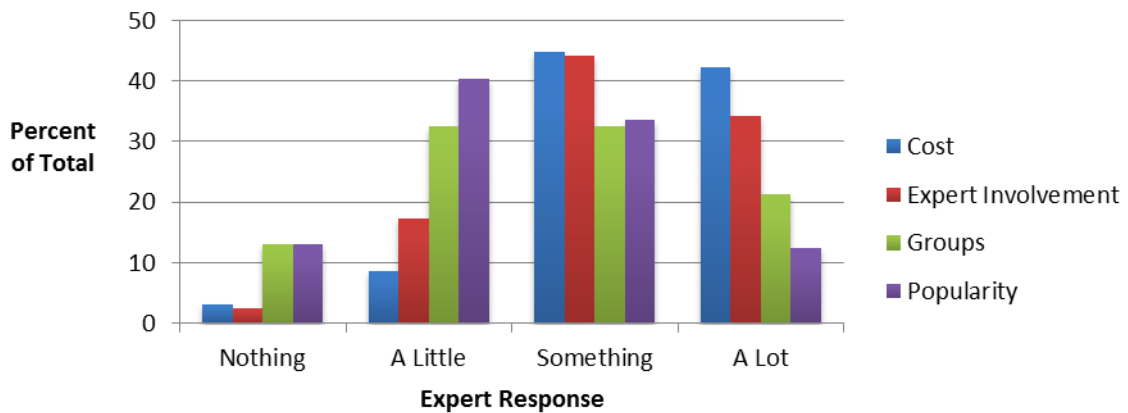**Experts Focus on Cost and Expert Input**

Figure 3
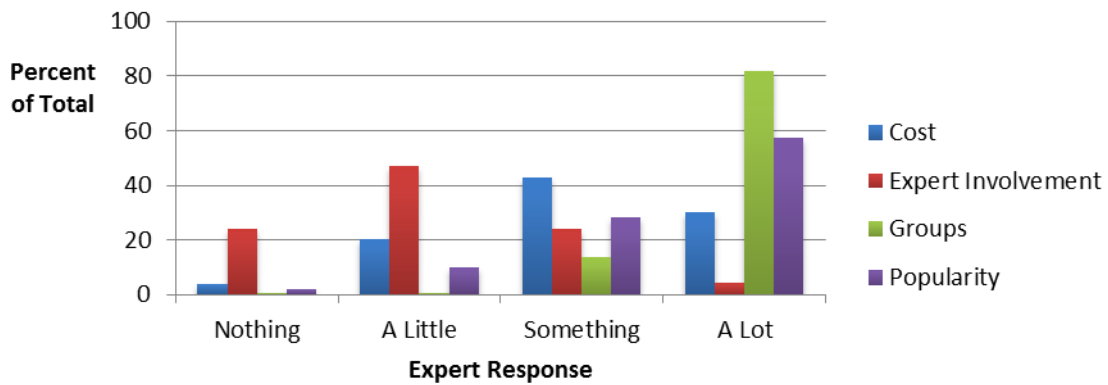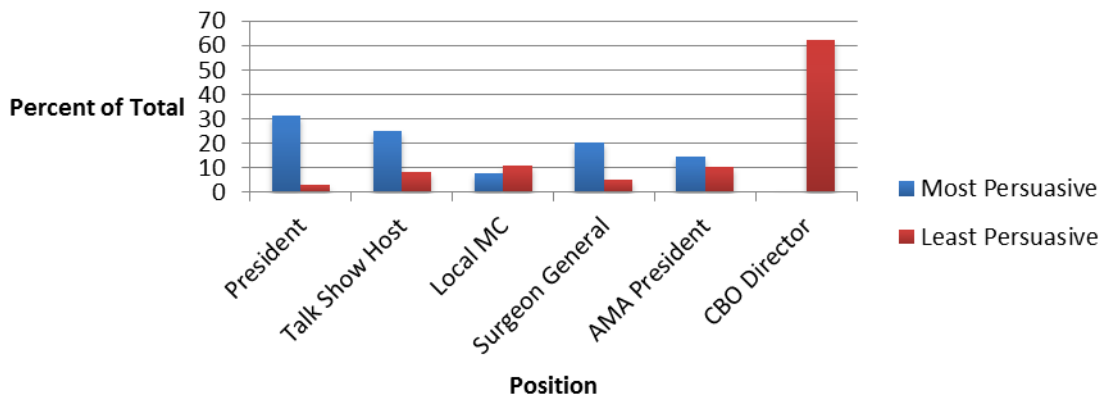**Experts Believe that Members Focus on Groups and Popularity**

Figure 4
Expert Assessments of Relative Persuasiveness

Appendix 1

A1. Determinants of the Belief that Congress Fails to Reflect Public Opinion

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Legislative Staffer	−0.35** (0.16)	−0.37** (0.17)	−0.36** (0.17)
Party Identification	0.21*** (0.06)	--	0.18*** (0.06)
Ideology	0.06 (0.06)	−0.01 (0.05)	--
Female	−0.002 (0.14)	0.04 (.14)	−0.02 (.14)
Constant	2.32*** (0.61)	3.73*** (0.17)	2.69*** (0.54)
R^2	0.10	0.03	0.10
N	155	155	155

Note:
All tests run using OLS regression. Robust standard errors in parenthesis.
*$P < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)
Models were also run using ordered logistic regression and the results were nearly identical.

A2. Determinants of the Belief that the Cost of a Bill Influences Votes

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Legislative Staffer	0.49*** (0.14)	0.49*** (0.14)	0.51*** (0.14)
Party Identification	−0.03 (0.05)	--	−0.04 (0.05)
Ideology	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	--
Female	0.15 (0.13)	0.15 (.13)	0.18 (.14)
Constant	3.04*** (0.36)	2.85*** (0.15)	3.17*** (0.31)
R^2	0.06	0.06	0.06
N	157	157	157

Note:
All tests run using OLS regression. Robust standard errors in parenthesis.
* $P < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)
Models were also run using ordered logistic regression and the results were nearly identical.

A3. Determinants of the Belief that Cost Benefit Studies Influence Congress

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Frequent Interactions with Congress	−0.42** (0.17)	−0.45*** (0.17)	−0.41** (0.17)
Party Identification	−0.06 (0.08)	−0.05 (0.07)	--
Ideology	−0.01 (0.06)	--	0.01 (0.06)
Female	0.22 (0.19)	0.24 (0.18)	0.21 (0.18)
Constant	3.10*** (0.56)	3.04*** (0.40)	2.71*** (0.24)
R^2	0.04	0.05	0.04
N	155	155	155

Note:
All tests run using OLS regression. Robust standard errors in parenthesis.
*$P < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)
Models were also run using ordered logistic regression and the results were nearly identical.

A4. Determinants of the Belief that Committee Chairs Would Learn of Academic Study

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Legislative Staffer	0.37 (0.24)	0.37 (0.23)	0.38* (0.21)
Party Identification	0.08 (0.07)	--	0.06 (0.06)
Ideology	0.03 (0.07)	0.01 (0.06)	--
Female	−0.12 (0.16)	−0.1 (.16)	−0.11 (.16)
Constant	1.82*** (0.57)	2.38*** (0.21)	2.02*** (0.38)
R^2	0.03	0.02	0.03
N	157	157	157

Note:
All tests run using OLS regression. Robust standard errors in parenthesis.
* P < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01 (two-tailed tests)
Models were also run using ordered logistic regression and the results were nearly identical.

Appendix 2
Survey Text

Q2 Informed Consent You are being asked to complete an online research survey that will take approximately 12 minutes. Participation is voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to answer. You are free to stop the survey at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or concerns about the conduct of this study, you may contact the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for Social & Behavioral Sciences at 434-924-5999.

I agree to participate (1)

I do not agree to participate (2)

Q3 Please think about the overall performance of Congress over the last decade. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement below?

Strongly Disagree (1)   Disagree (2)   Neither Disagree nor Agree (3)   Agree (4)   Strongly Agree (5)   Don't Know (6)

Congress does not rely on expert research as much as it should (1)

Congress is careful to understand the tradeoffs between the outcomes associated with different policy options before deciding on a course of action (2)

Congress is more concerned with looking good in the eyes of voters than with actually solving problems (3)

Congress is effective at crafting solutions to national problems that the public can understand and live with. (4)

Q4 Policy experts often make judgments about the quality of bills passed by the Congress. Please tell me how much you think each of the following kinds of information would tell you about whether a specific bill passed by Congress is a good or bad bill. Would this tell you nothing, a little, something, or a lot about the quality of the bill?

Nothing (1)   A Little (2)   Something (3)   A Lot (4)   Unsure (5)

Whether the bill has bipartisan support (1)

Whether the president supports the bill (2)

Whether public policy experts played a significant role in the bill's development (3)

How popular the bill is with citizens (4)

The Congressional Budget Office's estimate of how much the bill will cost to implement (5)

Whether other nations have adopted similar measures (6)

Whether the New York Times editorial board endorsed the bill (7)

Whether major interest groups support the bill (8)

Whether the bill was recommended by a blue ribbon commission of distinguished leaders (9)

Q5 Please tell me how much you think each of the following kinds of information would influence a typical member of Congress in deciding whether to vote for a specific bill. Do you think each would influence the typical legislator not very much, a little, some, or a lot?

Whether the bill has bipartisan support (1)

Whether the president supports the bill (2)

Whether public policy experts played a significant role in the bill's development (3)

How popular the bill is with citizens (4)

The Congressional Budget Office's estimate of how much the bill will cost to implement (5)

Whether other nations have adopted similar measures (6)

Whether the New York Times editorial board endorsed the bill (7)

Whether major interest groups support the bill (8)

Whether the bill was recommended by a blue ribbon commission of distinguished leaders (9)

Q6 Suppose that Congress has passed a law costing $1 billion to mitigate a public health problem that most citizens know nothing about. After the law's enactment, various actors make public statements about the law.
Which of the following actors do you think would be most effective at persuading the average citizen that the law's enactment was necessary and in the national interest?

Talk radio host (1)

The U.S. President (2)

The member of Congress who represents the citizen's district (3)

The Surgeon General (4)

The president of the American Medical Association (5)

The director of the Congressional Budget Office (6)

Q7 Which of the following actors do you think would be least effective at persuading the average citizen that the law's enactment was necessary and in the national interest

Talk radio host (1)

The U.S. President (2)

The member of Congress who represents the citizen's district (3)

The Surgeon General (4)

The president of the American Medical Association (5)

The director of the Congressional Budget Office (6)

Q8 Suppose a prestigious academic journal publishes a research study that shows that a federal transportation program is highly cost-ineffective, meaning that it would be possible to achieve the same transportation benefits at much lower cost, or to spend the same amount of money while generating much larger transportation benefits.

Not at all confident (1)   A little confident (2)   Somewhat confident (3)   Very confident (4)
Unsure (5)

How confident are you that the chairs of the congressional committees with jurisdiction over the transportation program would become aware of this research study? (1)

How confident are you that Congress would make a serious attempt to replace the existing transportation program with a more cost-effective approach? (2)

Q9 In the past 10 years, how good a job do you think that Congress has done on...

Excellent (1)   Very Good (2)   Good (3)   Only fair (4)   Poor (5) Not sure (6)

Bringing political attention to new issues (1)

Defining public policy problems in ways that are logical and analytically manageable (2)

Making policy decisions on the basis of objective evidence (3)

Developing new policy options for addressing national problems (4)

Explaining policy decisions in ordinary, commonsense language that the public can understand (5)

Q10 In the past 10 years how good a job do you think that Congress has done at passing bills that

Excellent (1)   Very good (2)   Good (3)   Only fair (4)   Poor (5) Unsure (6)

Promote economic efficiency (1)

Distribute the benefits of government programs equitably across geographic jurisdictions (2)

Distribute the benefits of government programs equitably across income groups (3)

Achieve their policy objectives at acceptable cost (4)

Reflect the ideas of policy experts (5)

Reflect public opinion (6)

Are acceptable to interest groups (7)

Are able to be implemented by the bureaucracy without excessive difficulty (8)

Avoid negative consequences for businesses (9)

Target public resources efficiently and minimize waste and abuse (10)

Take into the account the interests of future generations (11)

Q11 Which of the following statements do you agree with more? Statement 1: Congressional leaders often do not know the best way to address national problems, and look to policy experts for guidance on the most effective course of action Statement 2: Congressional leaders usually know how they wish to address national problems, and they use the recommendations of policy experts to add legitimacy to positions they would have taken anyway

Agree with Statement 1 more (1)

Agree with Statement 2 more (2)

Agree equally with both statements (3)

Don't agree with either statement (4)

Don't know, unsure (5)

Q12 Sometimes Congress fails to take steps to address an important domestic problem. Here is a list of some things that could cause Congress to fail as a problem-solving institution. For each one, please indicate how important you believe each one has been over the last decade.

Extremely Important (1)   Very Important (2)   Somewhat Important (3)   Not too important (4)   Unsure (5)

Partisan polarization (1)

Lawmakers focused on their own reelection (2)

Lack of good information about how to solve problems (3)

Interest group pressure (4)

Failure of voters to hold Congress accountable for its collective performance (5)

Filibuster and other procedural hurdles (6)

Problems are very complicated (7)

Q13 How often do members of Congress seek to learn from the best practices and policy successes of state governments when they craft legislation?

Never (1)

Almost Never (2)

Sometimes (3)

Fairly Often (4)

Very Often (5)

Don't Know (6)

Q14 How often do members of Congress seek to learn from the best practices and policy successes of other nations when they craft legislation?

Never (1)

Almost Never (2)

Sometimes (3)

Fairly Often (4)

Very Often (5)

Don't Know (6)

Q15 How much impact do cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness studies have on congressional decision-making

None at all (1)

A little (2)

A moderate amount (3)

A lot (4)

A great deal (5)

Don't know (6)

Q16 Do you think that important domestic policy decisions should be made by the Congress or by the President?

Only the Congress (1)

Mostly the Congress, with some input the President (2)

The Congress and the President equally (3)

Mostly the President, with some input from Congress (4)

Only the President (5)

Don't know (6)

Q17 Do you think that important foreign policy decisions should be made by the Congress or by the President?

Only the Congress (1)

Mostly the Congress, with some input the President (2)

The Congress and the President equally (3)

Mostly the President, with some input from Congress (4)

Only the President (5)

Don't know (6)

Q18   Where do you work? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Federal executive branch (1)

Federal legislative branch (2)

Federal court system (3)

State or local government (4)

Think tank or research organization (5)

Foundation (6)

University or college (7)

Advocacy organization (8)

Government contractor (9)

Nonprofit service provider (10)

Other (11) _____

Q19 Have you ever served in a legislature or on a legislative staff?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q20 In the past five years, how often have you had occasion to interact directly with members of Congress or with congressional staff?

Once a month or more (1)

Several times a year (2)

About once a year (3)

On occasion, but less than once a year (4)

Never (5)

Not sure (6)

Q21 We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Extremely Liberal (1)

Liberal (2)

Slightly Liberal (3)

Moderate, Middle of the Road (4)

Slightly Conservative (5)

Conservative (6)

Extremely Conservative (7)

Haven't thought about it much (8)

Does not apply/Don't wish to answer (9)

Q22 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent, or what?

Strong Republican (1)

Republican (2)

Independent, Lean Republican (3)

Independent (4)

Independent, Lean Democratic (5)

Democrat (6)

Strong Democrat (7)

Other (8) _____

Don't wish to answer (9)

Q23 What is your gender?

Female (1)

Male (2)

Q24 What is your highest education level?

High School graduate or less (1)

College Graduate (2)

Master's or Professional Degree (3)

Doctorate (4)

If High School graduate or less Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block If College Graduate Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Q25 What field was your highest degree earned in? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Economics (1)

Political Science (2)

Public Administration (3)

Public Policy (4)

Sociology (5)

Law (6)

Business (7)

Other (8) _____

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