

# Reassessing the Unequal Representation of Latinos and African Americans

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*Recent research has adopted a proximity approach to measuring unequal representation, focusing on the ideological distance between citizen and legislator. This approach has produced evidence that Latinos and African Americans receive unequal representation relative to whites. In this article, I argue that work employing the proximity approach conflates two conceptual standards of equal representation, leading to ambiguous results. I clarify these conceptual standards and reevaluate analyses from two previous articles. My results confirm previous findings that Latinos and African Americans are ideologically further from their Representatives than whites. However, my analyses uncover no evidence that Representatives place greater weight on the views of white constituents. This seeming contradiction arises from minorities tending to reside in more ideologically diverse districts. These findings emphasize the importance of conceptual clarity and the role of heterogeneity in studies of unequal representation.*

One of the defining characteristics of a democracy is the extent to which the preferences of its citizens are assigned an equal weight or value in the decision-making process (Dahl 1956).<sup>1</sup> According to this rule, political equality can be assessed at multiple levels of observation including at the voting booth, during votes in Congress, and in policy outcomes. At the level of citizen voting, research has found that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to vote for the losing candidate, across a variety of governmental offices (Hajnal 2009; although see Grose and Yoshinaka 2011). At the highest level of observation, research suggests that wealthy citizens' preferences are given much more weight in determining national policy outcomes (Gilens 2005). However, a failure to examine how legislators respond to the views of their constituents leaves a "black box in our understanding of how some citizens become privileged in the policy process" (Griffin and Newman 2007, 1033).

A growing area of research has begun to address this concern, asking "whether the decisions of individual government actors respond more to some groups than others" (Griffin and Newman 2007, 1033). With the growing availability of sophisticated measures of legislator ideology, and large, national surveys, research on equality in representation has been growing rapidly. However, the evidence so far does not paint a flattering

picture of American democracy. Research on this topic finds that U.S. Representatives and Senators tend to be ideologically closer to their white constituents than to their Latino (Griffin and Newman 2007) and African American constituents (Flavin and Griffin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008). Representatives also appear to be more responsive to the views of wealthy citizens (Bartels 2008). Moreover, there is some evidence that as the size of a minority population grows within a district, representation of that minority group diminishes rather than increases (Griffin and Newman 2007, 2008).

As with many important questions in political science, however, clear conceptualization and measurement remain elusive. One of the most popular approaches—the responsiveness method—simply regresses legislator roll-call votes on aggregate constituency opinion (e.g., Bartels 2008). However, this approach is subject to methodological problems that render empirical results ambiguous (Bhatti and Erikson 2011; see also Matsusaka 2001 for problems with the responsiveness approach). Scholars have thus sought alternative methods for measuring political equality. A recent approach has adapted Achen's (1978) proximity measure to the individual level, measuring the absolute ideological distance between legislator and constituent (Flavin and Griffin 2007).

<sup>1</sup>Data and replication materials will be made available at [www.scottaclifford.com](http://www.scottaclifford.com) upon publication.

This work has generated greater insight into, and stronger evidence of, the unequal representation of racial and ethnic groups (Flavin 2010; Flavin and Griffin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2007, 2008).

The proximity approach has many desirable features. It yields a large number of observations, allows one to easily estimate which groups are better represented, and has an apparently simple interpretation. In spite of these attractive features, I argue that previous work employing this approach conflates two distinct concepts of representation. According to the centrism conception of representation, constituents are represented equally when their opinions are weighted equally with those of any other constituent (Dahl 1956).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, some have argued for a proximity concept, which gauges the quality of representation by the ideological distance between citizen and representative (Brunell 2006; Brunell & Buchler 2009).

While each of the two conceptual approaches tells us something unique about representation, factors outside of the control of the representative influence the quality of proximity representation. Achen (1978) warns that poor proximity scores cannot necessarily be blamed on the representative, as representatives from heterogeneous districts will receive worse proximity scores than representatives from homogeneous districts, *even if they equally weight the preferences of members of various constituent groups*. Thus, proximity models that fail to control for district heterogeneity cannot give us an accurate picture of centrism representation, or whether a legislator favors the views of one ideological group over another.

In this article, I first distinguish between two conceptual standards of representation and argue that proximity models must control for the heterogeneity of a district and the individual's distance from the mean citizen in order to make inferences about centrism representation. Second, I demonstrate that the ideological heterogeneity of a district is positively correlated with the size of the minority population. Third, I replicate analyses from two previous articles finding evidence of unequal representation of Latinos and African Americans using the proximity measure. Upon accounting for district heterogeneity, I find no evidence that legislators place less weight on the opinions of members of racial or ethnic minority groups. Fourth, I demonstrate this bias is not limited to individual-level analyses, but affects aggregate proximity models as well. Finally, I discuss potential

implications for studying attitudes and behavior and introduce an adjusted proximity measure.

## Two Concepts of Representation

Perhaps the most popular approach to conceptualizing representation appeals to Dahl's (1956) criterion that the preferences of citizens be equally weighted by the representative (centrism representation). Many scholars of representation invoke this conceptual approach (e.g., Bartels 2008; Griffin 2006; Verba 2003), prescribing that representatives give equal consideration to the views of the members of different ideological or demographic groups. Thus, whether considering the lone conservative in a liberal district or one of the many liberals in that district, so long as each constituent's opinion is given equal weight in the representative's decision-making process, constituents are equally represented. Empirically, this standard demands that a legislator's ideology matches the mean constituent's ideology. Any deviation by the legislator away from the mean constituent represents favoritism of some ideological group. Thus, the centrism conceptualization of representation focuses on bias in legislative behavior.

In contrast, one might conceptualize the quality of representation in terms of how well an individual's political views fit the views or behavior of their representative (proximity representation). From this perspective, a politician "represents what (or whom) he looks after or concerns himself with, the interest that he furthers... whether a certain official represents the nation or whether he 'really' represents some special interest" (Pitkin 1967, 116). Representation in this sense is about "who gets his way" (Pitkin 1967, 116). This view is not prescribed by Pitkin, but it forms the basis for an intuitive concept of representation that focuses on how ideologically close constituents are to their legislator. Indeed, Brunell argues that "the ideal congressional district is one that is populated entirely by people with the same political preferences" (2006, 80) because homogeneous districts minimize the average ideological distance between voter and representative. This view is supported by the positive benefits flowing from ideological proximity between citizen and representative. Empirical work demonstrates that greater proximity leads to increased approval (e.g., Jones and McDermott 2002), positive feelings towards the incumbent and the legislative institution, and greater trust (Brunell and Buchler 2009). Thus, the proximity approach does not focus specifically on bias in legislative behavior, but on all of the factors that

<sup>2</sup>This term reflects Achen's (1978) use of the term, although his own centrism measure addressed aggregate representation.

might affect an individual's level of representation, including the diversity of the constituency.

## Measuring Representation

Achen's (1978) seminal article on measuring representation introduces three approaches to studying representation, including the proximity measure. Achen's aggregate-level measure is simply the mean squared ideological distance between a legislator and constituents, intended to capture how ideologically "close" constituents are to their representative (Achen 1978, 481). Griffin and Newman (2007) adapt this approach to the individual level, producing the following measure:

$$\text{Proximity}_i = |\text{CitizenIdeology}_{i,j} - \text{LegislatorIdeology}_j|$$

The proximity score for citizen  $i$  in district  $j$  is the absolute value of the difference between the citizen's and legislator's ideology. Given the size of modern survey samples, this approach has the advantage of a large number of observations and a clear interpretation. Researchers regress proximity on a set of demographic variables to determine which characteristics predict greater or lesser distance, and thus *who* is better represented. This approach has also yielded considerable evidence of unequal representation, showing that African Americans (Flavin and Griffin 2007) Latinos (Griffin and Newman 2007) and low-income citizens (Flavin 2009) receive worse representation.

As Griffin and Newman explain:

To gauge the extent of (in)equality in governmental outputs, we rely on an established measure of dyadic representation, what Achen (1978) calls the proximity between legislators and constituents to assess an elected official's level of representation (see also Flavin and Griffin 2007; Miller 1964; Powell 1982; Wright 1978). We adopt this approach, asking whether, on average, individual Latinos are ideologically "closer to" or "farther from" their MCs [Members of Congress] than are white constituents. This will tell us whether one group's "ideological view is . . . given special treatment" (Achen 1978, 488). (2007, 1035)

At first glance, this appears to be an appealing way of conceptualizing and measuring representation. However, this approach conflates the two concepts of representation discussed above. Griffin and Newman imply that how ideologically close a constituent and representative are (a measure of proximity representation) indicates "whether the decisions of individual

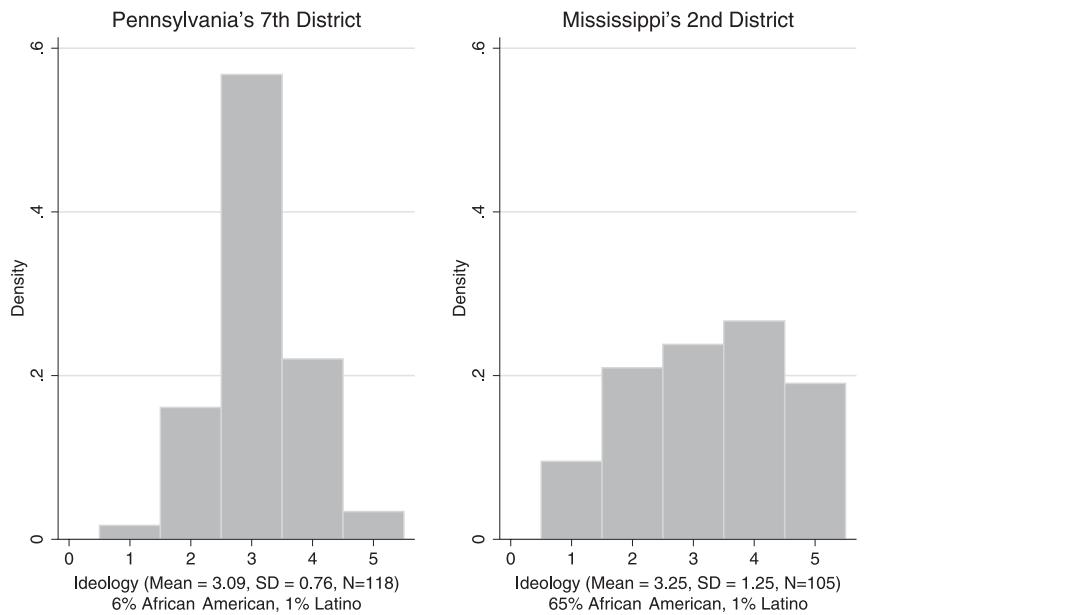
government actors respond more to some groups than others" (2007, 1033; centrism representation). Indeed, scholars have interpreted their work as evidence that "more privileged subgroups of Americans have greater—sometimes dramatically greater—sway over government policy" (Gilens 2009, 335) and that minority groups have less "influence" over policy outcomes (Hajnal 2009, 49).

As Achen argues, though, a "representative cannot necessarily be blamed for a poor proximity score. After all, a Congressman from a sharply divided district cannot please everyone: his proximity may be poor, do what he will" (1978, 487). To make this logic clear, Figure 1 displays histograms of the ideology of the least and most ideologically heterogeneous U.S. House districts in 2000.<sup>3</sup> The histogram on the left comes from Pennsylvania's 7th district, while that on the right comes from Mississippi's 2nd district. As this figure illustrates, even if the representative from each district is located at his or her mean voter's ideal point, the representative from the more heterogeneous district will have a greater average absolute distance from his or her constituents (Achen 1978). In other words, the greater average distance resulting from greater heterogeneity does *not necessarily* imply that representatives are favoring an ideological viewpoint.

Thus, the proximity measure can tell us whether certain groups are, on average, ideologically closer to or further from their legislators than other groups. However, without proper controls, it does not give an accurate picture of centrism representation. To get an accurate estimate of centrism representation, we have to consider the nature of the district in which a citizen resides. If a representative gives equal weight to the opinions of each constituent, the legislator's ideology will match the mean citizen's ideology, demonstrating ideal centrism representation. Even in this case of ideal representation, considerable variation will remain in constituents' distance from their legislators, which will be perfectly predicted by their ideological distance from the mean citizen. Thus, after controlling for a citizen's distance from the mean, any residual represents bias in the legislator's ideological views.

However, as Golder and Stramski argue, it is not the *absolute* distance between citizens and legislators that is most important, but the "distance between the citizens and their representatives *relative to the dispersion of citizen preferences*" (2010, 93; emphasis in original), particularly when we are comparing across

<sup>3</sup>Data come from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study, as detailed below. The measure is on a 5-point scale from liberal to conservative.

**FIGURE 1** Ideology in the Least and Most Heterogeneous Districts

different units of analysis (e.g., states). In other words, a fixed deviation from the mean citizen means more in a homogeneous district than it does in a heterogeneous district. Returning to Figure 1, if the legislator residing in the district represented by the left panel moved one unit to the left of the mean, it would constitute a more serious violation of the constituency's preferences than if the legislator from the district in the right panel also moved one unit to the left of the mean. Thus, in order for the individual-level proximity model to give an accurate picture of centrism representation, it is also essential to control for the ideological heterogeneity of the district. Without these controls, a proximity model cannot assess centrism representation and thus cannot tell us whether legislators are favoring the ideological views of one group over another.

## Heterogeneity and Minority Group Size

While these conceptual concerns are important, they only become problematic for estimating unequal representation if minority groups tend to disproportionately reside in more heterogeneous districts or tend to be further ideologically from the district mean. There are two reasons why this might be the case. First, minority groups, such as Latinos and African Americans, tend to hold more ideologically diverse views. To show this, I use NAES data, measuring heterogeneity as the standard deviation of self-

reported ideology (Griffin and Keane 2006). As shown in Table 1, an equality of standard deviations test finds that there is significantly greater variation in the ideological views of African Americans and Latinos than among whites ( $p < .001$ ). While the differences below may seem quite small, a hypothetical district composed entirely of African Americans (representative of the national population) would be nearly a full standard deviation more heterogeneous than a uniformly white district, or the median congressional district. This finding is surprising in light of previous work characterizing African American public opinion as homogeneously liberal (e.g., Gay 2004) and assuming that majority-minority districts will be ideologically homogeneous (e.g., Swain 2006). In fact, the nation's most ideologically heterogeneous district in this dataset (Figure 1) is 65% African American.

The second reason to believe that racial and ethnic minorities might reside in more ideologically heterogeneous districts follows from a key assumption of all work on equal representation—that members of ethnic, social, or racial groups hold distinctly different political attitudes (Soroka and Wlezien 2008). As a result, scholars have taken pains to demonstrate that such differences of opinion do exist (Gilens 2009; Griffin and Newman 2007). The result is that demographically diverse constituencies are also likely to be ideologically diverse constituencies. Indeed, scholars studying the effects of heterogeneity sometimes use measures of ideological diversity and demographic diversity interchangeably (Adams, Bishin, and Dow 2006).

**TABLE 1** Ideological Positions of Whites, Latinos, and African Americans

	Non-Latino Whites	African Americans	Latinos	Median District
Mean Ideology	3.19	3.02 <sup>a</sup>	3.10 <sup>a</sup>	3.16
Standard Deviation	0.93	0.98 <sup>a</sup>	0.98 <sup>a</sup>	0.93
Ideological Distance (from Mean Citizen)	0.73	0.77 <sup>a</sup>	0.79 <sup>a</sup>	0.74
Observations	49,928	5,710	5,259	152

Note: <sup>a</sup>Indicates a significant difference from Whites ( $p < .001$ ). Ideology: 1 = Very Liberal, 5 = Very Conservative. Extremity: 1 = Moderate, 3 = Very Liberal/Conservative.

To determine whether ideological heterogeneity is positively correlated with the percentage of the population that belongs to a minority group, I measure district-level ideological heterogeneity using the standard deviation of ideology within a district (Adams, Bishin, & Dow 2006).<sup>4</sup> Figure 2 displays the relationship between heterogeneity and the percentage of the population coming from three groups that are typically studied by scholars of unequal representation—Latinos, African Americans, and low-income citizens. Each curve is a simple quadratic fit with 95% confidence intervals.

As the figure makes clear, heterogeneity is positively related to percent Latino ( $r = .227, p < .001$ ) and percent African American ( $r = .268, p < .001$ ) and negatively related to mean income ( $r = -.230, p < .001$ ). Indeed, moving from the minimum to the maximum observed proportion of each demographic group increases heterogeneity by more than a full standard deviation. While not overwhelming, these results are sizable enough to raise concerns about ignoring the role of heterogeneity in models of unequal representation.

As argued above, in order for the proximity measure to give an accurate picture of centrism representation, we must also make an assumption about the relative location of voters within a district. We have already seen that African Americans and Latinos tend to reside in more heterogeneous districts (Figure 2). Additionally, African Americans and Latinos, on average, are further than whites from the mean ideological viewpoint in their districts ( $p < .01$ ). As a result, the

failure to control for each of these variables may have led to biased estimates in previous research.

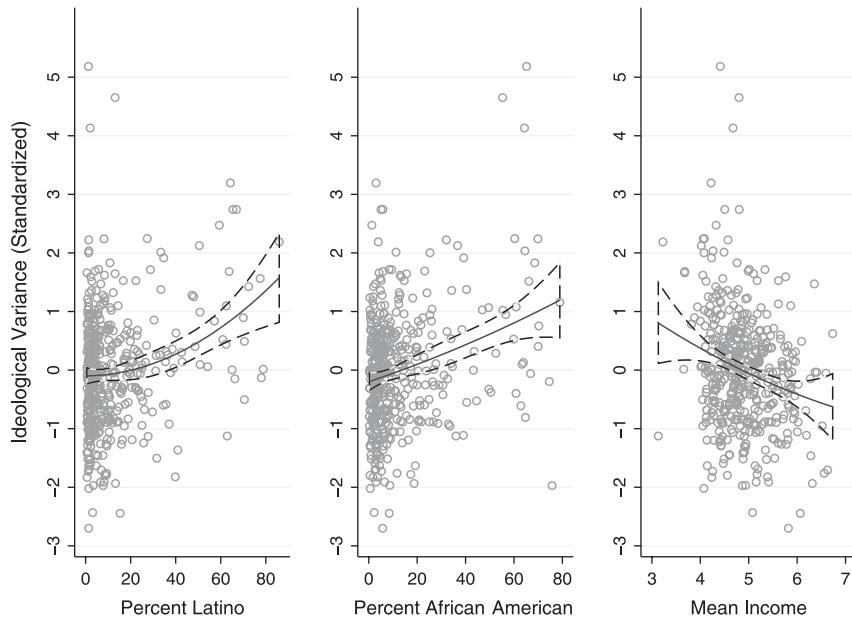
## Reassessing Unequal Representation of Latinos

To replicate the findings of Griffin and Newman (2007; hereafter G&N), I use the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES), including the rolling cross-section and Super Tuesday and Second Tuesday cross-sections. In addition to using the same data source, I adhere as closely as possible to G&N's coding and methods. Legislator ideology is measured using first-dimension DW-Nominate scores.<sup>5</sup>

To measure legislator ideology and citizen ideology on a similar metric, I use Wright's (1978) method, as do previous studies employing the proximity measure (Flavin and Griffin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2007). Wright's methods standardizes citizen ideology based on the ideology of strong partisans, under the assumption that the distribution of ideology among strong partisans more closely mirrors the ideology of legislators. Legislator DW-Nominate scores are also standardized. As in previous works, the dependent variable is measured as the absolute value of the distance between a legislator's standardized ideology and a constituent's standardized ideology. Following previous work (e.g., Achen 1978; Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2007; Miller 1964); this assumes that the DW-NOMINATE and citizen ideology scales are comparable. In an attempt to test the consequences of this assumption, I performed a variety of sensitivity checks, showing that the results

<sup>4</sup>While more complex measures could be used (e.g., Levendusky and Pope 2010), the standard deviation of the self-placement measure of ideology is ideal because the dependent variable is constructed from this measure. Alternatively, the mean ideological distance of a district's citizens from its median citizen could be used. This alternative is highly correlated ( $r=.86, P<.001$ ) with the standard deviation and produces the same substantive results.

<sup>5</sup>In six cases, two DW-Nominate scores were listed for a single district, due to death in office, resignation, or other circumstances. In these cases, each district was assigned an averaged DW-Nominate score, weighted by the number of months each legislator spent in session. Measures of district demographics come from the 2000 Census.

**FIGURE 2 Relationship between Heterogeneity and Demographic Characteristics**

presented below are highly robust to a variety of scaling assumptions.<sup>6</sup> In keeping with G&N, all respondents who are neither white nor Latino are excluded from the analysis. Additionally, in order to keep the sample size constant (as in G&N), respondents with missing data on any variable in the full model are excluded from all other models.

Table 2 demonstrates an attempt to replicate the results of G&N. Across several models, the proximity measured is regressed on Latino identification using OLS.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to match exactly the number of observations reported in G&N and thus the exact results found in their article.<sup>8</sup> However, the results are substantively quite similar to those of G&N, with one exception, which I discuss below. My models also differ from G&N's in that the standard errors are robust

and clustered on district in order to account for possible intradistrict correlation. This adjustment is important because the dependent variable is partially constructed out of the district-level variable of legislator ideology. As a result, proximity scores for individuals from the same congressional district may be correlated.

Column 1 displays the results when only Latino is entered as a predictor. The positive coefficient indicates that Latino identification is associated with a significantly greater ideological distance between a citizen and legislator, when compared with whites. This finding confirms G&N's findings, showing inequality between whites and Latinos in *proximity* representation. Column 2 adds controls for district-level ideological heterogeneity and the individual's ideological distance from the district's mean citizen. As expected, both are positive and highly significant. These controls enable an estimate of differences between whites and Latinos in *centrism* representation. As the insignificant coefficient on Latino shows, there is no evidence of unequal centrism representation, in spite of the large sample size. Column 3 includes income and self-reported turnout as control variables. As originally found by G&N, turnout and higher income are correlated with a smaller ideological distance and attenuate the effect of Latino identification. Column 4 adds controls for district heterogeneity and ideological distance from the mean, again producing an insignificant coefficient on Latino.

Finally, column 5 adds G&N's Latino "threat district" measure, which is operationalized as districts

<sup>6</sup>In order to test this assumption, I transformed the DW-NOMINATE scores in a variety of nonlinear ways before creating the dependent variable. With each transformed variable, I then reestimated the models below. Across a variety of transformations (and thus assumptions about the true relationship between DW-NOMINATE scores and citizen ideology), the coefficient on Latino identification never changed in a substantively meaningful way. As a result, we can be fairly confident that the results portray an accurate picture of representation. Most importantly, the introduction of the proper controls consistently attenuated estimates of inequality.

<sup>7</sup>Columns 1, 2, and 4 are intended to replicate columns 1, 3, and 4 from Griffin and Newman's (2007) Table 1.

<sup>8</sup>However, the number of observations is very close. The number of Latinos reporting their ideology is identical (5,259), but the number of white constituents reporting their ideology is slightly smaller in my data (49,928 versus 49,930).

TABLE 2 Comparing the Ideological Representation of Whites and Latinos

Ideological Proximity	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Latino	0.064** (0.020)	0.028 (0.019)	0.043* (0.020)	0.015 (0.019)	-0.000 (0.020)
Ideological Distance	-	0.528** (0.012)	-	0.528** (0.012)	2.075** (0.123)
District Heterogeneity	-	0.717** (0.183)	-	0.715** (0.184)	0.706** (0.184)
Turnout	-	-	-0.060** (0.012)	-0.052** (0.010)	-0.029** (0.009)
Income	-	-	-0.005* (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.004 (0.002)
Threat District	-	-	-	-	-0.133* (0.065)
Threat*Latino	-	-	-	-	0.089 (0.062)
Education	-	-	-	-	0.000 (0.002)
Male	-	-	-	-	-0.004 (0.008)
Age	-	-	-	-	0.000 (0.000)
Partisanship	-	-	-	-	0.010 (0.006)
Ideology	-	-	-	-	0.083** (0.032)
Ideological Extremity	-	-	-	-	-1.423** (0.115)
District Ideology	-	-	-	-	-0.179* (0.085)
Constant	1.041** (0.012)	-0.005 (0.167)	1.114** (0.020)	0.035 (0.169)	1.568** (0.319)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.158	0.002	0.159	0.305
Observations	28,061	28,061	28,061	28,061	28,061

Note: Robust clustered standard errors are given in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

with 40–50% Latino population and an interaction between threat district and Latino identification. Additionally, the model in column 5 adds individual-level controls (education, sex, age, partisanship, ideology, ideological extremity) and district ideology.<sup>9</sup> Controlling for turnout is important because, as previous

<sup>9</sup>One might wonder about multicollinearity problems from the inclusion of both Ideological Distance and Ideological Extremity. The two variables are indeed highly correlated ( $r=.93$ ), but the large sample size prevents multicollinearity from becoming problematic. The mean variance inflation factor for model 5 is only 2.78, creeping up to 12.01 on the Ideological Extremity variable in model 6. Although reaching borderline levels, the latter VIF only affects my ability to make confident estimates of the effects of these two variables and of other variables that are highly correlated with them. Therefore, this multicollinearity does not create a problem for estimating the effect of ethnicity.

work has shown, voters receive better representation than nonvoters (Griffin and Newman 2005), and voter turnout explains some of the racial and ethnic differences in the quality of representation (Griffin and Newman 2007). Ideology is also a necessary control because representation may have a liberal or conservative bias, particularly in any given election cycle. Latinos' significantly different political preferences (from non-Latino whites) may explain some of the ideological distance.

The inclusion of these controls further reduces the coefficient on Latino. G&N found a positive and significant coefficient on the interaction between Latino and the threat district indicator, suggesting that Latinos residing in threat districts are significantly less proximate to their legislators, which they

interpret as evidence of white backlash. In contrast, the interaction term is not statistically significant in the replication reported here, indicating no evidence that Latinos become less proximate to their legislators as the size of the Latino population increases. Interestingly, ideological extremity has a significant, negative effect, indicating that, holding all else constant, legislators are more extreme than their constituents (Bafumi and Herron 2010). The distance from the district mean also has a large and significant impact, leading to greater ideological distance as the distance from the mean grows. District heterogeneity remains positive and significant, suggesting that legislators deviate further from the median citizen in more heterogeneous districts, supporting the conclusions of theoretical models (Buchler 2005; Gilligan and Matsusaka 2006). Upon including the full set of controls for the ideological views of the individual and the district, the only demographic variable remaining statistically significant is reported turnout. This suggests, in contrast to previous work, that one's ideological views and district characteristics are the primary determinants of the quality of proximity representation, while demographic variables hold little explanatory power.

Overall, these results suggest that representatives are ideologically more proximate to whites than Latinos, yet the reason differs from previous explanations. This effect is not the result of legislators placing more weight on the views of their white constituents, showing no evidence of inequality in centrism representation. Instead, this finding is largely the result of the distribution of ideological views within a district. Upon controlling for the appropriate variables, Latino identification is no longer statistically significant, in spite of the extremely large sample size of 28,061 observations.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that, while there is no ethnic inequality in centrism representation, Latinos fare worse by the standard of proximity representation due to district composition.

## **Reassessing Unequal Representation of African Americans**

Flavin and Griffin (2007; hereafter G&F) find evidence that African Americans are ideologically further than whites from their representatives and that this difference in proximity exceeds the difference between high-income citizens and low-income citizens.

Their finding survives various controls, however, they do not take into account district heterogeneity. In this section, I replicate their work, showing only weak, inconsistent evidence of inequality in centrism representation.

While G&F used American National Election Studies data (1978–2002), I test their model using the NAES data from the previous analysis. Replicating their work using the ANES data would not be possible due to insufficient observations within any district-year to create a measure of ideological heterogeneity. Although the different data source makes it more difficult to claim that G&F's original results were driven by district heterogeneity, finding this result among African Americans in an alternative data source will strengthen the claims made in the previous section. In accordance with G&F, two versions of the dependent variable are used. First, Wright's method is used, as in the previous section. Second, the MAB (Miller, Achen, and Burden) measure of proximity is created by simply rescaling the first-dimension DW-Nominate scores to match the range of the NAES measure of ideology.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with G&N, all citizens who are neither white nor African American are excluded from the analysis. I also exclude all subjects with missing data on any of the variables present in the full specification, in order to keep the sample size constant across specifications.

The first column of Table 3 presents a simple bivariate model, using the Wright measure. The coefficient on African American is positive and statistically significant, similar to G&F's model, in spite of the different data sources. This result indicates that African Americans are ideologically further from their legislators relative to whites, showing evidence of inequality in proximity representation. Column 2 adds controls for ideological distance and district heterogeneity in order to get an estimate of centrism representation. Upon inclusion of these controls, the size of the coefficient on African American is nearly cut in half and no longer statistically significant. This indicates no evidence of inequality between whites and African Americans in terms of centrism representation. In other words, there is no evidence that legislators are ignoring the preferences of their African American constituents.

The fourth column of Table 3 presents the bivariate model using the MAB measure. Again, the coefficient on African American is positive and statistically significant, indicating unequal proximity

<sup>10</sup>Low variance inflation factors indicate that this result is not driven by multicollinearity.

<sup>11</sup>The MAB measure is calculated as follows: DW-Nominate\*2 + 3.

**TABLE 3 Comparing the Ideological Representation of Whites and African Americans**

<b>Proximity Measure</b>	(1) <b>Wright</b>	(2) <b>Wright</b>	(3) <b>Wright</b>	(4) <b>MAB</b>	(5) <b>MAB</b>	(6) <b>MAB</b>
African American	0.062** (0.022)	0.032 (0.019)	-0.008 (0.019)	0.084** (0.021)	0.054** (0.018)	0.014 (0.017)
District Heterogeneity	- 0.740** (0.171)	0.712** (0.171)	- 0.713** (0.164)	- 0.636** (0.160)	- 0.561** (0.012)	- 2.041** (0.120)
Ideological Distance	- 0.530** (0.012)	2.071** (0.124)	- 0.561** (0.012)	- 0.561** (0.012)	- 0.561** (0.012)	- 2.041** (0.120)
Income	- 0.003 (0.002)	- 0.003 (0.002)	- 0.003 (0.002)	- 0.003 (0.002)	- 0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Education	- - - (0.002)	- - - (0.002)	- - - (0.002)	- - - (0.002)	- - - (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)
Male	- - - (0.008)	- - - (0.008)	- - - (0.008)	- - - (0.008)	- - - (0.008)	0.001 (0.007)
Age	- - - (0.000)	- - - (0.000)	- - - (0.000)	- - - (0.000)	- - - (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Partisanship	- - - (0.006)	- - - (0.006)	- - - (0.006)	- - - (0.006)	- - - (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)
Ideological Extremity	- - - (0.116)	-1.419** (0.116)	- -1.419** (0.116)	- -1.355** (0.112)	- -1.355** (0.112)	- -1.355** (0.112)
Ideology	- - - (0.031)	0.103** (0.031)	- 0.103** (0.031)	- 0.183** (0.029)	- 0.183** (0.029)	- 0.183** (0.029)
Turnout	- - - (0.009)	-0.027** (0.009)	- -0.027** (0.009)	- -0.023** (0.009)	- -0.023** (0.009)	- -0.023** (0.009)
District Ideology	- - - (0.080)	-0.215** (0.080)	- -0.215** (0.080)	- -0.478** (0.078)	- -0.478** (0.078)	- -0.478** (0.078)
Constant	1.043** (0.012)	-0.026 (0.155)	1.634** (0.297)	0.998** (0.011)	-0.070 (0.150)	2.177** (0.300)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.161	0.301	0.001	0.192	0.316
Observations	29,897	29,897	29,897	29,897	29,897	29,897

Note: Robust clustered standard errors are given in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

representation, relative to whites. The fifth column again adds controls for ideological distance and district heterogeneity. The coefficient on African American is again substantially reduced in size; however, in contrast to the previous model, it remains statistically significant. This suggests some evidence of unequal centrism representation, although the evidence is substantially weaker once district heterogeneity is accounted for. Finally, the sixth column adds a full set of controls, to determine whether an individual's race exerts an independent effect on the level of representation, or whether it can be explained by other individual or district characteristics. The coefficient on African American remains positive, but is statistically insignificant. Auxiliary analyses (not reported here) show that adding controls for respondent ideology and ideological extremity to the model in column five reduces the coefficient on African American identification to statistical insignificance.

Overall, the results show strong evidence of inequality in proximity representation, as indicated by the bivariate models. However, according to the Wright measure, there is no evidence of inequality in centrism representation, suggesting that the differences in proximity representation are due to factors outside of the control of legislators. Shifting to G&N's secondary measure of ideological proximity, the results show some evidence of inequality in centrism representation, although this effect evaporates upon controlling for ideology and ideological extremity. Griffin and Flavin conclude their analysis by stating that "there exists a distinctly racial difference in proximity that is not accounted for by income, educational attainment, and ideological extremity" (2007, 225). The results here suggest that this "distinctly racial difference" can be largely accounted for by district composition, although controls for individual ideological views further attenuate this relationship. Most

importantly, the results demonstrate again that the failure to include a control for district heterogeneity leads to a more pessimistic view of the level of inequality in representation.

## Implications for Aggregate Models of Representation

While the focus above is entirely on individual-level research, the effect of district heterogeneity on ideological proximity is not limited to Griffin and colleagues' unique individual-level approach. As I demonstrate below, aggregate-level models of ideological proximity show the same bias.

For these analyses, I use the same NAES data, including all respondents to create district-level measures.<sup>12</sup> The dependent variable is the average proximity score (using Wright's method) within a district. In the first column, percent Latino and percent African American in the district are entered as independent variables, along with mean income and district ideology.<sup>13</sup> Standard errors are robust and clustered on state in order to account for any correlation between districts from the same state as a result of similar electoral laws or political environments.

The first model, shown in column 1 of Table 4, shows that both a larger Latino population and a larger African American population lead to greater mean ideological distance, based on the Wright measure. However, column 2 includes the ideological heterogeneity measure, which has a significant, positive effect. As a result, percent Latino and percent African American are no longer statistically significant. In conclusion, ignoring the role of heterogeneity in aggregate proximity analyses will seriously inflate the estimated effect of racial and ethnic composition.

## Implications for Attitudes and Behavior

Throughout this article, I have argued that a fixed difference in ideological proximity means less in a heterogeneous district than a homogeneous district.

<sup>12</sup>Each district has an average of 137 respondents ( $\sigma = 36$ ,  $min = 25$ ,  $max = 266$ ). Excluding the 59 districts with less than 100 respondents does not substantively change the results.

<sup>13</sup>Both mean income and district ideology are estimated using self-report questions in the NAES.

TABLE 4 Aggregate Representation

Mean Proximity Measure	(1) Wright	(2) Wright
% Latino	0.132*	0.045 (0.053)
% African American	0.159* (0.079)	0.059 (0.077)
Mean Income	0.010 (0.020)	0.029 (0.018)
District Ideology	0.062 (0.074)	0.089 (0.082)
District Heterogeneity	-	1.077** (0.171)
Constant	0.774** (0.270)	-0.383 (0.323)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.018	0.093
Observations	432	432

Note: Robust clustered standard errors are given in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

While I have demonstrated that this claim has important implications for measuring unequal representation, it may also have important implications for studying attitudes and behavior. In this section, I argue that district heterogeneity may condition the effect of ideological distance on attitudes and behavior, and I introduce an adjusted measure of ideological distance.

The primary intent of G&F is to assess the extent to which whites and minorities hold politicians accountable for their ideological views. Using incumbent favorability and electoral support for the incumbent as their dependent variables, G&F argue that whites punish ideologically distant legislators more heavily than African Americans punish distant legislators.

However, consider how this conclusion is reached. G&F estimate separate models for whites and African Americans, using ideological proximity as the primary independent variable. Their interpretation is based on the smaller, and sometimes insignificant, coefficient on ideological proximity in the models for African Americans. Yet, assume that whites and African Americans are fully aware of and make use of this proximity information. Given that a fixed difference in ideological proximity *means less* in a heterogeneous district than a homogeneous district, we *should* expect larger proximity coefficients for whites. To put it another way, deviating from the median point is much more consequential in an ideologically tight-knit district. As a result, we should expect voters in homogeneous districts to punish deviations more heavily than voters in heterogeneous

districts. This implies that the coefficient on ideological proximity for African Americans *should* be smaller than the coefficients on proximity for whites.

Additionally, consider the alternatives that voters face in heterogeneous versus homogeneous districts. Even if all citizens voted for the candidate ideologically closest to them, citizens in more heterogeneous districts would on average be voting for less proximate candidates than citizens in less heterogeneous districts.<sup>14</sup> As a result, absolute measures of ideological proximity may give biased estimates of how citizens hold politicians accountable.

## A Relative Measure of Proximity

The analyses above have included district heterogeneity as a control variable, preventing a clear way to adjust for heterogeneity when proximity is used as an independent variable. Golder and Stramski (2010, fn 3) advocate adjusting the proximity measure rather than controlling for heterogeneity. This would allow researchers to use an adjusted, or relative, measure of proximity to explain citizen attitudes and behavior. Golder and Stramski's relative citizen congruence measure, however, is designed for the aggregate level, and thus cannot be directly applied to the individual level. However, a simple adaptation of their measure should suffice. Since the meaning of absolute proximity for centrism representation depends on the heterogeneity of the electorate, a ratio of individual proximity and district heterogeneity is appropriate:

$$\text{RelativeProximity}_i = \frac{|C_{i,j} - L_j|}{H_j}$$

where  $C_{i,j}$  is the ideology of citizen  $i$  in district  $j$ ,  $L_j$  is the ideology of the legislator for district  $j$ , and  $H_j$  is a measure of the heterogeneity of the electorate. Below, three alternative forms are considered. In keeping with the models above, the first relative measure uses the standard deviation of the distribution of ideology as  $H_j$ . I also use the average distance from the median citizen for  $H_j$  (as used by Golder and Stramski), and the average distance from the mean citizen as alternatives to the standard deviation of district ideology.

<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the larger standard errors could be explained by the greater variation in heterogeneity among African Americans than among whites (in addition to the much smaller sample sizes). African Americans tend to be dispersed across a wider variety of heterogeneous and homogeneous districts. As a result, greater variation in what the variable means will inflate the error.

Using these measures, I replicate the full model (Column 6) from Table 2 on the representation of Latinos, and compare them to the original specification.<sup>15</sup> In order to aid comparison across models, all four dependent variables are standardized.

As is clear in Table 5, the results are highly similar across all three models. Most importantly, the use of the relative measure does not alter the conclusions with respect to the effect of ethnicity on ideological proximity. The only clear difference between the models is the slight variation in the coefficient on district ideology. Otherwise, the coefficients across the models are nearly identical. Overall, the use of different measurement approaches seems to make little substantive difference.

The consistent results in Table 5 not only bolster the earlier findings in the article, but also allow researchers to use relative measures of ideological proximity as independent variables to explain attitudes and behavior. As argued above, the appropriate measure in these cases will depend on the question being asked and the theory being employed. In the example of electoral support for the incumbent above, a relative proximity measure seems most appropriate. Consider, however, the example of the role of ideological proximity on trust. Do citizens only trust politicians who are ideologically proximate to them in an absolute sense, or do citizens take into account the difficulty of representing diverse electorates? Clearly, the choice of measure will depend on the theory and assumptions being made. Paying closer attention to concepts will allow researchers to empirically test more nuanced theories of attitudes and behavior.

## Conclusion

Scholars of legislative politics face two closely related, but distinct ways to conceptualize unequal representation. According to the standards of centrism representation, constituents are equally represented to the extent that their preferences are weighted equally with the preferences of other constituents. In contrast, according to proximity representation, constituents are equally represented if they are ideologically no further or closer to their representative than other constituents.

While the distinction may seem subtle, it has important implications for our understanding of

<sup>15</sup> Comparisons across models of representation of whites and African Americans also demonstrate highly similar results.

TABLE 5 Sensitivity Analysis: Four Alternative Proximity Measures

Proximity Measure	Absolute (w/control)	Relative (S.D.)	Relative (Mn. citizen)	Relative (Mdn. citizen)
Latino	-0.000 (0.026)	-0.009 (0.027)	-0.013 (0.028)	-0.017 (0.028)
Turnout	-0.039** (0.012)	-0.039** (0.012)	-0.039** (0.012)	-0.040** (0.012)
Income	0.005 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.006 (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)
Threat	-0.175* (0.085)	-0.177* (0.089)	-0.216* (0.094)	-0.207* (0.093)
Threat * Latino	0.117 (0.081)	0.119 (0.075)	0.134 (0.075)	0.134 (0.075)
Education	0.000 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Male	-0.005 (0.011)	-0.006 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.011)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Partisanship	0.013 (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)
Ideology	0.109** (0.042)	0.104* (0.042)	0.110* (0.043)	0.107* (0.043)
Ideological Extremity	-1.867** (0.151)	-1.870** (0.153)	-1.831** (0.150)	-1.836** (0.149)
Distance from Mean	2.722** (0.161)	2.723** (0.163)	2.675** (0.160)	2.679** (0.159)
District Ideology	-0.235* (0.112)	-0.220 (0.113)	-0.472** (0.125)	-0.433** (0.124)
District Heterogeneity	0.926** (0.242)	-	-	-
Constant	0.677 (0.418)	1.510** (0.358)	2.254** (0.396)	2.147** (0.389)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.305	0.299	0.288	0.289
Observations	28,061	28,061	28,061	28,061

Note: Robust clustered standard errors are given in parentheses.

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

unequal representation. For example, Griffin and Newman conclude that “most members of the House of Representatives tend to vote in ways that better reflect the political preferences of their white constituents than those of their Latino constituents” (2007, 1043). The reanalysis of their results suggests that this is accurate according to the standards of proximity representation, in that representatives tend to be ideologically closer to their non-Latino constituents than their Latino constituents. However, their claim is inaccurate by the standards of centrism representation, as there is no evidence that representatives weight the views of their non-Latino constituents more heavily than the views of their Latino constituents.

Importantly, this seeming contradiction results not from representative behavior but from district

composition—a factor exogenous to the legislator. Both Latinos and African Americans tend to live in more ideologically heterogeneous districts, caused in part by greater ideological heterogeneity *among* Latinos and African Americans. The result of this heterogeneity is greater ideological distance from their representatives. Additionally, Latinos and African Americans tend to be further than whites from their district’s median voter, also resulting in greater ideological distance from the representative.

These results should encourage researchers to state explicitly which conceptual standards of representation they are assuming and employ the appropriate test. If the intention is to evaluate legislative behavior, it is inappropriate to use the proximity approach. This is because differences in proximity representation do not

necessarily follow from bias in legislative behavior, but may be the result of geographic forces or redistricting procedures.

Appealing to the proximity concept of representation, some scholars have recently called for the creation of politically homogeneous districts because they decrease the ideological distance between citizens and their representatives (Brunell 2006; Brunell and Buchler 2009). Following from the increased proximity, ideologically homogeneous districts lead to normative benefits, such as increased approval, trust, efficacy, and satisfaction (Brunell and Buchler 2009; Jones & McDermott 2002). Moreover, formal theory suggests that as the homogeneity of a district increases, policy outcomes converge towards the median voter (Buchler 2005; Gilligan and Matsusaka 2006). Scholars and pundits worry that the creation of homogeneous districts will increase partisan polarization (Abrams, Fiorina, and Pope 2006); however, there is little empirical evidence for this claim (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009). In fact, a major cause of partisan polarization is the *intristrict* divergence of parties (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009). Overall, homogeneous districts provide greater congruence between citizens and legislators and increase public satisfaction on a number of important dimensions.

However, based on the data analyzed here, majority-minority districts do *not* imply ideologically homogeneous districts. In fact, the data suggests a tension between the representational benefits of homogeneous districts and the benefits of majority-minority districts. Since African Americans and Latinos tend to have more heterogeneous ideological views than whites, majority-minority districts tend to be more heterogeneous. Thus, on one hand, majority-minority districts are more likely to bring about descriptive representation, which increases willingness to contact representatives (Gay 2002) and increases knowledge and approval of representatives (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004). On the other hand, majority-minority districts will tend to be more heterogeneous, decreasing the quality of proximity representation, and thus forgoing the benefits of proximity representation.

Turning to the perspective of the representative, district heterogeneity may play an important, but understudied role. Legislators face the difficult task of informing themselves of their constituents' diverse viewpoints and translating them into policy goals. However, the difficulty of this task is magnified by increasing constituency diversity (Fenno 1978). We currently know very little about how legislators might cope with this diversity. Some research employing the

responsiveness method, by regressing roll-call scores on constituent ideology, finds that representatives are less responsive to aggregate opinion in ideologically diverse districts (Adams Bishin, and Dow 2006; Bailey and Brady 1998; Gerber and Lewis 2004). However, it may be that representatives in diverse districts employ different strategies of representation. For example, representatives in heterogeneous districts may be more likely to be "splitters," seeking out more information about issue-specific attitudes (Druckman and Jacobs 2006) and voting on policy-specific opinion. Recent comparative work demonstrates that party systems respond to constituency diversity by offering more diverse policy platforms (Ezrow 2007). Analogously, individual representatives may take on more diverse (or less constrained) policy stances to better represent diverse constituencies. In short, constituency diversity may play a potentially important, but under-studied role in representation.

Looking forward, scholars face an increasing number of approaches to studying representation. Researchers may choose between alternative conceptual (e.g., proximity vs. centrism representation) and measurement approaches (e.g., responsiveness vs. proximity). The evidence provided here suggests that scholars need to pay closer attention to conceptual choices and how the concept should affect their measurement choice. From a conceptual standpoint, scholars must make clear what standard of representation they are invoking. Additionally, scholars of representation must pay closer attention to the role of heterogeneity. Numerous studies on representation use measures of the racial and ethnic characteristics of a state or district to predict the quality of representation. Yet, nearly all of these studies ignore the role of heterogeneity, potentially biasing results towards findings of inequality. Increasing our understanding of the role of heterogeneity and further reevaluating previous findings may cast new light on unequal representation.

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