Covering the Median Voter in Congress

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Political communication and congressional politics scholars have seemingly long settled the question of who in Congress receives national news attention. Party leaders, committee chairs and ranking members, and influential senators typically dominate national news attention. In this paper, I argue that scholars also need to consider the median voter in the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate to gain a clearer understanding of national media coverage of Congress and its members. The results suggest that members do not receive more coverage simply from being the median voter or the filibuster pivot. Instead, the median voter in the House receives more attention when the majorities in the House are slim and thus the median voter is potentially more important. In the Senate, the filibuster pivot garners more attention from the national media, again conditioned on party margins, than other senators.

Introduction and Background

Political communication and congressional politics research have long detailed why certain members of Congress receive more national news coverage than others. As the space devoted to Congress has diminished in national news outlets over the past few decades, it has become clearer that party leaders, members with powerful positions on committees, and influential senators dominant the national news (Cook 1986, 1989, 1998; Hess 1986; Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992; Squire 1988). Given the norms of balanced journalism, it is also the case that the national media give leaders of the out-party of the presidency and Congress a strong say in the papers and on the air (Ansolabehere et al. 1993; Schnaffer and Sellers 2003). In addition, the Senate, as an institution, receives much more national attention than the House (Cook 1986; Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992; Squire 1988).

Within the realm of the traditional news media, questions about who within Congress receives national news attention has seemingly been settled.[1]

In this study, I argue that political communication and congressional scholars also need to consider other important members in the legislative process to gain a richer understanding of national news coverage of Con-

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gress and its members. These members are the median voter in the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate.

There are clear incentives for the media for covering the median voter and the filibuster pivot. The national press focuses much of their attention in Congress on members who are critical and important actors in the legislative process (Cook 1986; Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992; Squire 1988). Having a quote or statement from 'someone in the know' lends credibility to and enhances the insight of a story (Cook 1998; Tuchman 1978). The national media focus storylines more around individuals in Congress than the overall institution. By focusing on individual members, the media are able to develop compelling narratives about the legislative process (Cook 1998). This process makes it easier for journalists to add new developments on certain legislation and allows even casual readers to quickly orientate themselves to possible policy changes in Congress.

If the median voter plays an integral role in the shape of legislative outcomes, the media should also want to understand how policy was changed or what concessions were given to win the median voter's vote; or, if a bill fails to pass, why the median was against the measure. In determining why different bills contain different measures, the national media should look at the median voter's position alongside actions of congressional leaders, committee chairs, and influential members. However, this attention is likely conditioned on such factors as the majority-minority difference in Congress. The median voter should become more newsworthy as majorities are slim and the passage of legislation more tenuous.

The existence of the filibuster in the Senate, and the considerable increase in its usage (Davidson et al. 2010; Koger 2010), often makes the median voter in the Senate less relevant to the passage of legislation. Instead, the key member is the filibuster pivot—the senator whose vote must be won in order to pass cloture (Krehbiel 1998). Like with the median voter in the House, the relevance and media attention of the filibuster pivot should become greater as the size of the majority party's margin shrinks. In Senates where the majority party holds over 60 of the seats, the potential influence of the filibuster pivot on policy is diminished and thus the national media should find this member less newsworthy.

In examining whether median and pivotal members receive more press attention than others, one should also consider whether these members act differently in Congress to draw news coverage. As Sellers (2009) deftly notes, moderates in Congress are more willing to go against the party message on certain policy areas and specific pieces of legislation. This form of elite disagreement has been noted to draw increased news scrutiny (Cook 1998). Therefore, these members may be able to gain from both news coverage and benefits given by party leaders to get the members on board (Sellers

2009). If the median and pivotal members can gain from going against the party, one would surmise they behave differently in office than other members.[2]

This paper proceeds with a brief overview of the median voter theorem and then a look at national media attention to the theorem. The following section examines coverage of the median voter in the House and Senate in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Finally, I consider how the *Times* and the *Post* cover the filibuster pivot in the Senate.

Median Voter Theorem Overview

Since Black (1958) and Downs (1957), the median voter theorem (MVT) has played a prominent role in theories of elections, political organizations, and institutions. Institutional theories of congressional voting and policymaking also often employ the median voter theorem. Simply, the MVT argues that parties and candidates will converge to the median voter in the electorate to win elections (Downs 1957; Grofman 2004). Likewise, legislative policymaking will move to the chamber's median voter's preference in order to pass legislation (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987, 1990; Krehbiel 1998).

The MVT has played a domineering role in formal theories of legislatures and other institutions over the past decades. While early work highlighted the convergence of policy to the median in unidimensional space, most recent formal work uses the median voter in legislatures and committees as an anchor point in developing richer models of legislative voting, procedural effects, and policy development and outcomes (e.g., Cox 2000, 2001; Groseclose and Snyder 1996; Krehbiel and Meirowitz 2002; Krishna and Morgan 2001; McCarty 2000; Patty 2008; Shotts 2002; Snyder and Ting 2005).

Empirical evidence suggests the MVT has trouble explaining election outcomes (Adams et al. 2004; Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Erikson and Wright 2001; Levitt 1996). For example, Ansolabehere et al. (2001) show a lack of convergence to the median voter in House elections over a hundred year span. The MVT has found more empirical support amongst applications to theories of legislatures (e.g., Grofman et al. 2001; Krehbiel 1996, 1998; Schickler 2000; Schickler and Rich 1997; Wawro and Schickler 2004). For instance, Krehbiel (1996) finds support for the MVT in explaining Congress' 1987 smoking ban on domestic flights. Shickler (2000) shows that changes in the median voter's position in the House accounted for significant rule changes during the nineteenth and twenty centuries. Other work finds that institutional changes to Congress were significantly impacted by the role of the median voter (Schickler et al. 2003; Wawro and Schickler 2004). How-

ever, some scholars have questioned the empirical strength of the MVT in explaining aspects of legislatures such as in distributive politics (Berry et al. 2008; Clinton 2007). Notwithstanding questions over the empirical support of the MVT, the theory continues to play a critical role in understanding congressional politics.

National Coverage Descriptives of the Median Voter Theorem

If the MVT matters as an explanatory model we may expect the media to use it in explaining campaigning and elections results, and congressional policymaking. So, do the national media discuss the MVT? What about similar phrases such as 'swing voter' or 'pivotal voter'? I performed a simple search examining these key terms in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from 1977 to 2009. I focus on these two national news outlets as they are the standard bearers of political news in the U.S. and often serve as agenda setters for much of the American news industry (Fogarty 2005; Sabato 1991; Wu et al. 2002). In the *New York Times*, there were 14 articles that use the term 'median voter' and only 4 in the *Washington Post*. During the same time period, there were only 3 articles in the *Times* and in the *Post* using the term 'pivotal voter', and often the term simply implied important voters in the electorate; and not in the manner Krehbiel (1998) uses the term pivotal voter.

Using the search term 'swing voter and Congress' produced a larger number of stories in the *Times* and the *Post*. The *Times* had 319 articles and the *Post* had 379 articles between 1977 and 2009 using the search term. Interestingly, though, the *Times* or the *Post* did not use 'swing voters' to describe policymaking in Congress. Instead, the *Times* and the *Post* used the term 'swing voters' to refer to independents who have the ability to swing an election toward the Democrats or the Republicans. This usage hints at the notion of candidates and parties converging on the median voter's position to win elections. However, based on a keyword search, it is not clear whether the national media understand the significance of the median voter in the electorate or congressional politics. Perhaps, the national media understand the importance of the median voter and the filibuster pivot in congressional politics, even if they do not utilize political science jargon in their reporting. Anecdotal evidence suggests this may be the case.

In interviews with congressional reporters from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *McClatchy* news service, and *ABC News*, none knew about the median and pivotal voter theories by name. However, their intuition about who matters in the legislative process reflected the foundation of the theories. A consensus emerged that moderates in Congress—those most likely to occupy the median voter or filibuster

pivot positions—receive more press attention on votes and policy matters, particularly on controversial bills. These members have greater credibility and influence on the outcomes of bills than more extreme members.[3] Therefore, understanding their words and deeds is critical for reporters in understanding the legislative process. For example, one reporter at *McClatchy* said their reporting was focused on Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and Ben Nelson (D-NE) during the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009, while during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 debate greater attention went to Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Arlen Specter (R-PA). All of these senators occupy the middle positions in the Senate.

The following section includes an examination of the volume of coverage the median voter in the House and the Senate receives in the *Times* and the *Post*. Afterward, an examination of coverage of the pivotal voter in the Senate is performed. The results suggest that members do not receive more coverage simply from being the median voter. Instead, the House median voter receives more attention when the majorities in the House are slim and thus the median voter is potentially more important for the passage of legislation. In the Senate, the filibuster pivot garners more attention, conditioned on party margins, than other senators.

Examining National Media Coverage of the Median Voter in the House and Senate

Data

The analysis examines the amount of coverage the median member of the House and Senate received in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from 1977 to 2008. Only news stories related to policy and institutional matters were included in the dataset. The median members of each Congress were identified using the 1st dimension of Poole-Rosenthal's DW-Nominate scores (2007).[4] The 1st dimension of DW-Nominate scores uses roll-call votes to rank members for each Congress according to overall liberal-conservative ideology.[5] Several sessions of the House had two members as the median member; the members had identical ideological scores at the median of the House. In this situation, both members are included in the analysis.

In order to compare coverage of the median members of the House and Senate, I qualitatively match and pair each member with another member who is as close as possible in party affiliation, term in office, party and committee leadership positions, gender, and district proximity. Ideally, one would match members where the only difference is that one member is the median voter, but given the limited number of choices, 435 representatives

Table 1. House Members and Senators

House		Senate	
Median	Paired	Median	Paired
K Gunn McKay (1977-1978)	Harold Runnel (1977-1978)	John Melcher (1977-1978)	Gary Hart (1977-1978)
Walter Jones (1977-1978)	L. Richardson Preyer (1977-1978)	Jim Exon (1979-1980)	Edward Zorinsky (1979-1980)
Ronnie Flippo (1979-1980)	Richard Shelby (1979-1980)	John Chafe (1981-1982)	Gordon Humphrey (1981-1982)
James David Santini (1981-1982)	Bob Stump (1981-1982)	John Chafee (1983-1984)	Gordon Humphrey (1983-1984)
Jack Hightower (1981-1982)	Sam Hall (1981-1982)	Robert Stafford (1985-1986)	Lowell Weicker (1985-1986)
Jim Cooper (1983-1984)	William Boner (1983-1984)	Lloyd Bentsen (1987-1988)	David Boren (1987-1988)
Robin Tallon (1985-1986)	John Spratt, Jr. (1985-1986)	Alan Dixon (1989-1990)	Paul Simon (1989-1990)
Martin Lancaster (1987-1988)	David Price (1987-1988)	John Breaux (1991-1992)	Wyche Fowler (1991-1992)
Lewis Payne (1989-1990)	Owen Pickett (1989-1990)	Ben Nighthorse Campbell (1993-1994)	Jeff Bingaman (1993-1994)
Ike Skelton (1991-1992)	Harold Volkmer (1991-1992)	William Cohen (1995-1996)	Alfonse D'Amato (1995-1996)
Michael Andrews (1991-1992)	John Bryant (1991-1992)	Susan Collins (1997-1998)	Olympia Snowe (1997-1998)
Michael Andrews (1993-1994)	John Bryant (1993-1994)	Susan Collins (1999-2000)	Olympia Snowe (1999-2000)
Stephen Horn (1995-1996)	Ed Royce (1995-1996)	Ben Nelson (2001-2002)	Timothy Johnson (2001-2002)
Marge Roukema (1997-1998)	Sue Kelly (1997-1998)	Olympia Snowe (2003-2004)	Susan Collins (2003-2004)
Sherwood Boehlert (1999-2000)	James Walsh (1999-2000)	Arlen Specter (2005-2006)	Rick Santorum (2005-2006)
Christopher Shays (2001-2002)	Peter King (2001-2002)	Ben Nelson (2007-2008)	Jon Tester (2007-2008)
Frank LoBiondo (2003-2004)	Rodney Frelinghuysen (2003-2004)		
Steve LaTourette (2005-2006)	Paul Gillmor (2005-2006)		
Melissa Bean (2007-2008)	Jan Schakowsky (2007-2008)		

and 100 senators, differences do exist. Table 1 shows a list of median and paired members.

The *Times* and the *Post* were searched using each member's name for the time period he or she was relevant to the study. For example, I used the search term "Harold Runnels" in the *Times* and *Post* from 1977-1978.[6]

Non-parametric Analysis

For comparison, I use a non-parametric test, specifically a Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test, to see whether median members differ significantly in national news coverage from non-median members. The benefit of using a non-parametric approach is that the test makes no assumptions about the distribution of the data unlike tests such as the commonly employed Student's *t-test* which assumes a normal distribution (Sheskin 2007).

First, I compare House member coverage in Table 2. Median House members do tend to receive more coverage than non-median members in the *Times* and the *Post*, but the difference is not statistically significant. The standard deviation for median members is considerably larger than non-median members suggesting that certain median members in the House do receive abnormally higher coverage. For example, Christopher Shays (R-CT) received 148 stories in the *Times* and 150 stories in the *Post* from 2001 to 2002 as the median member of the House. Shays' unusually high coverage was likely a function of Republicans' slim majority in the House during that Congress, only 9 seats, and his work on campaign finance at the time.[7]

Table 3 compares coverage of median and non-median senators. A similar picture to the House member coverage emerges. Median senators do receive more coverage in the *Times* and *Post*, but the difference is not statistically significant. Analogous to the House, median senators' coverage, in particular, shows wide variation compared to their matched senators. For example, Lloyd Bentsen is an outlier with 327 stories in the *Post* between 1987 and 1988 while running for vice-president; even though the dataset excluded all stories related to the 1988 election.

Multivariate Analysis

If simply being the median voter does not appear to affect the quantity of coverage, perhaps the effect is conditional. The median voter in Congress may only receive attention when the size of the majority is narrow and thus his or her vote is critical. In contrast, when the majority is large, the median voter should matter less as outcomes sought by the majority party often pass with less opposition. Several multivariate analyses of the volume of coverage in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were used to test this conditional expectation.

Table 2. Average National Newspaper Coverage of House Members

Variable	Median Voter MCs	Matched MCs	K-S Exact P-Value
New York Times	14.84	5.79	.901
	(34.84)	(6.76)	
Washington Post	13.89	10.84	.962
	(34.20)	(17.87)	

Note: Cells are average number of policy and institution-related stories per Congress with standard deviations in parentheses. The unit of analysis is House members and N=38. The number of news stories used in the analysis is 862. Significance tests use Kolmogov-Smirnov test for equality of distributions.

Table 3. Average National Newspaper Coverage of Senators

Variable	Median Voter MCs	Matched MCs	K-S Exact P-Value
New York Times	73.19	64.56	.426
	(109.46)	(60.22)	
Washington Post	101.69	87.56	.952
	(127.04)	(81.82)	

Note: Cells are average number of policy and institution-related stories per Congress with standard deviations in parentheses. The unit of analysis is senators and N=32. The number of news stories used in the analysis is 5232. Significance tests use Kolmogov-Smirnov test for equality of distributions.

Using past research as a guide, I consider several member-level variables, besides from being the median voter, to explain the quantity of coverage in the *Times* and *Post*. These include term, the number of bills sponsored, whether the member is from the same or adjacent state to the *Times* and *Post*, and the size of the majority in the House.[8] For the Senate analysis, term, number of bills sponsored, committee chair, and the size of majority are included as covariates.[9]

A dummy variable for median voter, with 1 equaling "median voter" and 0 equaling "not median voter," is used as the grouping variable in the analysis. If the importance of the median voter is conditioned on majority sizes, then the volume of media coverage should track those differences. Therefore, an interaction term is included between the median voter and the size of the majority party's margin in the House and Senate.

The member's term is included since members who have been in office for a number of years are likely skilled at dealing with the media. Hence,

more senior members may receive more coverage since they know how to attract attention from the media (Arnold 2004; Cook 1989). In the House, Marge Roukema (R-NJ), Sherwood Boehlert (R-OH), and Paul Gillmor (D-OH) were the most senior members with nine terms each. In the Senate, Arlen Specter (R-PA) was the most senior with five terms.

Including bills sponsored allows for the effect of members' actions on the coverage they receive.[10] Members sponsor bills for a variety of reasons, including as a signal of workload in office and as a means to generate news. The median number of bills sponsored in the House was 16, ranging from 1 by Jim Cooper (D-TN) to 37 by Jan Schakowsky (D-IL). In the Senate, the median number of bills sponsored was 71, ranging from 10 by Jim Exon (D-NE) to 323 by Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY).[11]

Research has demonstrated that newspapers are more likely to cover politicians who are spatially close to them (Pauly and Eckert 2002). Therefore, House members who represent states and districts far from New York and Washington may receive less coverage than members who are located close by. A dummy variable is used denoting whether the member was in the same or adjacent state to the *Times* and *Post* (1 = Yes). Eight House members were in the same or adjacent state to the *Times*, while only two members were in adjacent states to the *Post*.

Research has also established that committee chairs receive more national news attention than other senators. Therefore, in the Senate analysis, a dummy variable is used for whether the member is a committee chair (1 = Yes). Ten of the senators examined in this paper were committee chairs.

The House

In Table 4 the volume of coverage in the House by the *Times* and *Post* is examined using a negative binomial regression model.[12] This is followed by an analysis of the Senate.[13]

Models 1 and 2 look at the *Times*' coverage while models 3 and 4 examine the *Post*'s coverage. The analysis shows in model 1 that whether a representative is from the same or adjacent state is the only significant variable in explaining the volume of coverage in the *Times*. This finding speaks to the needs of even national papers to fulfill their local readers' interests. As seen in the non-parametric analyses, simply being the median voter has no effect on the amount of coverage received by the member.

Model 2 includes an interaction term between the median voter and the size of the majority party's margin in the House. Interestingly, the statistically significant interaction shows that as the size of the majority party in the House increases, the amount of coverage the median voter in the House receives decreases; and obviously coverage increases for the median voter

Table 4. Volume of National Coverage in the House

| Variables	New York Times		Washington Post	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Median Voter	.013	1.18*	.224	1.39*
	(.427)	(.636)	(.425)	(.726)
Term	.146	.149	.245*	.151
	(.110)	(.098)	(.132)	(.109)
Bills Sponsored	.019	.007	.046*	.049**
	(.022)	(.019)	(.026)	(.025)
Adjacent State	1.61**	1.14*	-.727	-.880
	(.547)	(.599)	(.752)	(.690)
Size of Majority	—	.004	—	.005
	—	(.006)	—	(.005)
Size of Majority	—	-.019**	—	-.018**
x Median Voter	—	(.007)	—	(.008)
Constant	.486	.463	.245	.200
	(.424)	(.623)	(.409)	(.479)
Log-likelihood	-109.42	-106.58	-120.75	-118.45
Alpha	1.23	1.01	1.53	1.35
N	38	38	38	38

Note: Cells are negative binomial regression coefficients with Huber-White robust standard errors in parentheses. The number of policy and institution-related news stories used in the analysis is 862. *p < .10; **p < .05.

when the majority is slim. For the *Times*, it appears the importance of the ideological center of the House matters less when the size of the majority is large. If the majority party does not need a party line vote to pass legislation, and can allow individual members to defect on votes, the median voter matters less to the press in crafting the news.

Models 3 and 4 show similar results in the *Post* to those in the *Times*. The analysis finds a member's term, the number of bills sponsored, and the interaction between the median voter and majority size are statistically significant predictors of volume of coverage in the House. Again, the effect of being the median voter on the amount of attention received by the press is conditioned on the size of the majority. Therefore, the *Times* and the *Post*, at least indirectly, understand the importance of the median voter in the House is conditioned on the size of the majority.

To get a better sense of the interactive effect between majority size and being the median voter in the House on national news attention, I plot the predicted average number of articles in the *Times* and *Post* for the median voter by majority size.[14] As shown in Figure 1, attention in the national press to the median voter swiftly decreases as the size of the majority increases.

Figure 1. Average Predicted National News Coverage in the House
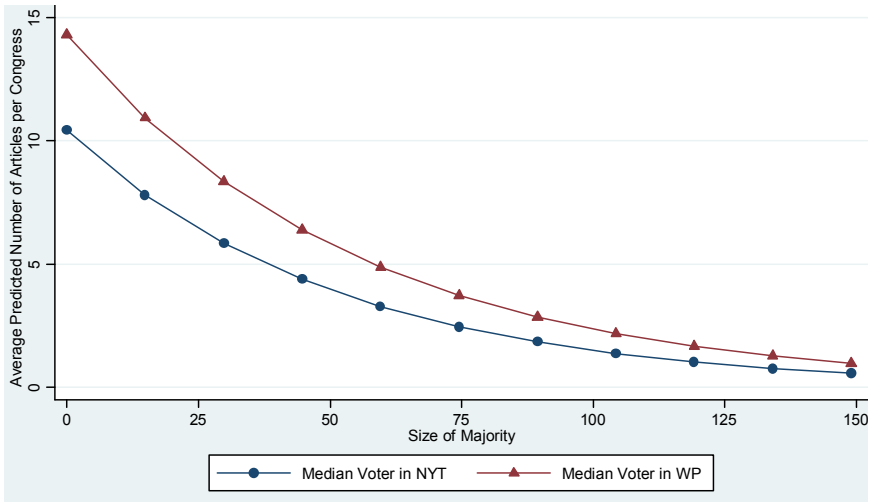
The *Post* is expected to devote slightly more attention to the median House member than the *Times*, though the difference narrows as majority size increases.

The Senate

Based on the strong hierarchical nature of the House, vote margins are often dictated by the size of the majority party (Davidson et al. 2010; Smith 2007). When the size of the majority party shrinks, it increases the importance of the median voter in passing or killing legislation. Votes in the Senate do not always fall along such neat party lines as in the House. The Senate is a more deliberative body with informal rules and less party discipline (Davidson et al. 2010; Koger 2010; Smith 2007). With this in mind, Table 5 analyzes the volume of coverage of senators in the *Times* and the *Post*.

In the *Times*, the only significant variable in explaining coverage is the number of bills sponsored by senators; and, marginally, a senator's term. None of the predictors explain the *Post*'s coverage of median senators and their matches.

The interesting result in Table 5 is that the interaction between the median voter and the size of the majority is not significant. It is not simply that the median voter does not receive more coverage than other senators, but that even conditioned on the size of the majority party there is no effect. Is it the case that the *Times* and the *Post* understand the importance of the

Table 5. Volume of National Coverage in the Senate

Variables	New York Times		Washington Post	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Median Voter	.080	.490	.133	.446
	(.333)	(.598)	(.303)	(.546)
Term	.276*	.299	.219	.225
	(.166)	(.195)	(.156)	(.185)
Bills Sponsored	.009**	.008*	.005	.005
	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)
Committee Chair	.013	.008	.113	.127
	(.539)	(.614)	(.608)	(.668)
Size of Majority	—	-.018	—	-.015
	—	(.028)	—	(.029)
Size of Majority	—	-.053	—	-.041
x Median Voter	—	(.049)	—	(.039)
Constant	2.76	2.98	3.52	3.71
	(.396)	(.438)	(.389)	(.437)
Log-likelihood	-159.65	-158.57	-173.03	-171.85
Alpha	.859	.813	.743	.698
N	32	32	32	32

Note: Cells are negative binomial regression coefficients with Huber-White robust standard errors in parentheses. The number of policy and institution-related news stories used in the analysis is 5232. *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$.

median voter in the House but not in the Senate? Not likely. Instead, the *Times* and the *Post* probably understand legislation does not get passed in the Senate without taking into account the filibuster (Koger 2010). It is not that the median voter does not matter in the Senate; you still need a simple majority to pass legislation. It is that the filibuster pivot, the 60th senator, is more important (Groseclose and Snyder 1996; Koger 2010; Krehbiel 1998). In fact, we should expect, absent a unanimous consent agreement barring filibustering, the median voter to not matter in the Senate. As illustrated by Krehbiel (1998), the principle of the median voter theorem still applies to understanding the filibuster pivot. Specifically, legislation will move towards the filibuster pivot's preference in order to secure passage in the Senate.

If the national media understand strategic lawmaking in the Senate, we should observe more attention paid to the filibuster pivot than the median voter. The following analysis examines coverage of the filibuster pivot in the *Times* and the *Post*.

Covering the Filibuster Pivot

The filibuster pivots, the 60th senators, were identified using the 1st dimension of Poole-Rosenthal's DW-Nominate scores (2007).[15] Table 6 lists those members.

As shown in Table 7, on average, the filibuster pivot receives slightly less coverage in the *Times*, 68 stories per Congress, than the median member, 73 stories per Congress. In the *Post*, the filibuster pivot averages 117 stories a Congress and the median member averages 102 per Congress. In both cases, the differences are not statistically significant. It appears that the national newspapers do not necessarily focus more attention on the filibuster pivot than the median voter in any given session of the Senate. Like the median member in the House, it is also possible that the effect of the filibuster pivot is conditioned on the size of the majority. A negative binomial regression analysis is used to explore that possibility. The same independent variables are included in this analysis as in the previous Senate analysis. Coverage data from the median senators, their matched senators, and the filibuster pivot senators are used in the analysis.

Table 6. Filibuster Pivots in the Senate

John Sparkman (1977-1978)	John Chafee (1993-1994)
David Boren (1979-1980)	Bob Kerrey (1995-1996)
J. Bennett Johnston (1981-1982)	Joseph Lieberman (1997-1998)
J. Bennett Johnston (1983-1984)	Max Cleland (1999-2000)
Charles Mathias (1985-1986)	John Warner (2001-2002)
John Heinz (1987-1988)	Joseph Lieberman (2003-2004)
John Heinz (1989-1990)	Tom Carper (2005-2006)
Mark Hatfield (1991-1992)	John Warner (2007-2008)

Table 7. Average National Newspaper Coverage of Median and Filibuster Pivot Senators

Variable	Filibuster Pivot MCs	Median Voter MCs	K-S Exact P-Value
New York Times	68.50 (70.75)	73.19 (109.46)	.462
Washington Post	116.75 (126.59)	101.69 (127.04)	.716

Note: Cells are average number of non-election stories per Congress with standard deviations in parentheses. The unit of analysis is senators and N=32. The number of policy and institution-related news stories used in the analysis is 4135. Significance tests use Kolmogov-Smirnov test for equality of distributions.

**Table 8. Volume of National Coverage in the Senate
with Filibuster Pivot**

Variables	New York Times		Washington Post	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Filibuster Pivot	.455	1.18**	.205	.878**
	(.373)	(.491)	(.358)	(.411)
Term	.149	.159	.253*	.262**
	(.145)	(.116)	(.134)	(.081)
Bills Sponsored	.005*	.005*	.002	.003
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
Committee Chair	.486	.366	.296	.121
	(.528)	(.503)	(.538)	(.482)
Size of Majority	—	-.037	—	-.036
	—	(.025)	—	(.020)
Size of Majority	—	-.101**	—	-.102**
x Filibuster Pivot	—	(.040)	—	(.028)
Constant	3.20	3.49	3.74	3.99
	(.328)	(.388)	(.281)	(.318)
Log-likelihood	-245.07	-240.29	-264.96	-257.19
Alpha	.914	.773	.774	.587
N	48	48	48	48

Note: Cells are negative binomial regression coefficients with Huber-White robust standard errors in parentheses. The number of policy and institution-related news stories used in the analysis is 8196.
*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$.

As expected from the average coverage per session, simply being the filibuster pivot provides no benefit in terms of volume of coverage in the *Times* or *Post*. Instead, the filibuster pivot's coverage in the *Times* and *Post* is conditioned on the size of the majority party in the Senate. As the size of the majority party increases, the filibuster pivot is expected to receive less attention from the national press; and vice-versa. Again, no such effect was found in the Senate when looking at median members. The result is parallel to the interaction between the median member and the size of the majority party in the House. It appears that the press equates the importance of the filibuster pivot in the legislative process in the Senate to the importance of the median voter in the House.

Figure 2 graphically demonstrates the predicted average coverage in the *Times* and *Post* for the filibuster pivot conditioned on majority size.[16] National attention for the pivot is expected to decrease as the majority in the Senate increases; though not as rapidly as for the median member in the House. This speaks to the general importance placed by the national press on senators compared with individual House members (Cook 1998; Squire

Figure 2. Average Predicted National News Coverage in the Senate
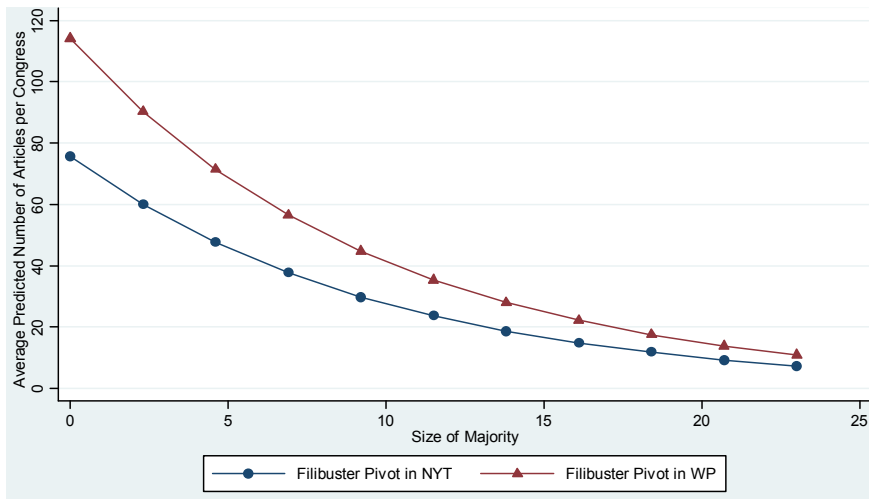
1988). Further, the filibuster pivot is expected to consistently receive more attention in the *Post* than the *Times*; reflecting the previously demonstrated coverage averages. These findings fit what scholars understand as among the key members in the House and Senate in congressional policymaking (Krehbiel 1998; Schickler 2000).

Conclusion

Our understanding of national news coverage of Congress and its members has not evolved much over the past decade. Since the formative studies of Cook (1986, 1988, 1989), among others, the field has moved on to understanding news coverage of Congress and its members on the local-level. This study demonstrates that political communication and congressional scholars need to consider the role of the median voter in the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate when discussing national news coverage of Congress. It is remains the case that party leaders, powerful members of committees, and influential senators receive more attention than other members. Scholars simply must take into account other important and key congressional actors in explaining national news coverage.

The median voter in the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate do not receive more attention simply by existing. In fact, unless members strategically position themselves at these positions of the chamber, members can do little on their own to gain this increased national attention. This is differ-

ent from striving to be a party leader or committee chair. Instead, these key members only receive increased coverage when the majority party's margin is small and thus their vote is increasingly important for the passage of legislation. In situations where the party margins are large, we should expect to find the median of the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate not receiving unordinary consideration compared to similar members. However, as Sellers (2009) argues, moderates in Congress can generate coverage by eschewing party messages and working as a maverick on policy.

The findings here are presented at the aggregate-level and do not take into account preference differences bill-to-bill. Not every bill, amendment, and motion voted in Congress falls along party lines and thus the party margins are not always relevant. Therefore, the national news media are not going to cover the median voter and filibuster pivot on every measure; particularly with regards to being a substitute for discussing the role of party leaders and committee chairs. Future studies may want to isolate specific legislation where these members critically matter and closely examine press attention.

Another avenue of future study is to consider whether constituents are better able to recognize members when they are the median voter in the House or the filibuster pivot in the Senate. It is no secret that members of Congress who are heavily covered by the national and local media have better name recognition amongst voters (Schaffner 2006). The median voter in the House and the filibuster pivot in the Senate may be able to demonstrate their importance in Congress to constituents in a similar manner as members of powerful committees such as appropriations often do (Fenno 1978). These members may not have a strong claim on distributive goods, but they may convincingly argue their vote and preference has an influential effect on the outcome of legislation. And, therefore, constituents can have their policy preferences uniquely represented if the member is returned to office.

NOTES

[1]A notable recent contribution is Sellers and Schaffner's (2007) study on senators winning national television coverage through press events.

[2]It was not possible to test this hypothesis directly through press releases because it is not possible to attain them prior to the late 1990s (the time at which the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine began collecting members' websites). The dataset used in this paper is from 1977 to 2008.

[3]Importantly, most of the reporters said that extreme members can receive more press attention through the use of controversial statements in press conferences and media interviews.

[4]Placement data were attained in the fall of 2009 from www.voteview.com. Although selection of a single median voter and filibuster pivot in Congress may appear stark it has empirical merit. For example, Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers (2004) find only two senators – Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe—had a positive probability of being the median voter in the 106th Senate. In fact, it was really only Collins as the median voter in the 106th as she had a 98% probability of being the median voter.

[5]None of the reporters interviewed used DW-Nominate scores to learn about members' ideology. Instead, reporters look at certain important votes and interest group rankings such as from the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) or American Conservative Union. Since interest group rankings only include a handful of votes per year, the rankings and DW-Nominate tend not to be identical. However, research has demonstrated that they are often highly correlated. For example, Bertelli and Carson (2011) note that the ADA rankings and DW-Nominates scores for the 107th and 108th Congresses were correlated at .96.

[6]The coding data were attained by a graduate assistant.

[7]Shays was a House co-sponsor, along with Martin Meehan (D-MA), of the McCain-Feingold campaign reform bill.

[8]Variables for committee chairs, party leaders, and seeking higher office were excluded in the House as too few members held those characteristics. This makes an ideal comparison to past studies on national news coverage of Congress not possible. Yet, I argue that scholars need to simply consider the role of the median voter and filibuster pivots in national news attention, and not as a replacement for previously established results. As mentioned previously, Lloyd Bentsen was running for vice president at the time and the coverage reflects that fact. However, he is the only member running for higher office. None of the members in the dataset were party leaders. Only two House members were committee chairs, too little variation to include as a variable, though ten senators were chairs.

[9]None of the median or matched senators were from the same or adjacent states to the *Times* and *Post*, and thus the variable was excluded from the analysis.

[10]Again, members' press releases were excluded since it is not possible to attain them prior to the late 1990s (the time at which the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine began collecting members' websites).

[11]Bill sponsorship data were attained from the Library of Congress' Thomas website.

[12]Diagnostics of the data showed no signs of autocorrelation and thus using a time-series analysis was not necessary. Further, the data showed overdispersion, and thus the negative binomial model is the correct technique to analyze the data (Long 1997).

[13]An analysis combining the House and Senate showed similar results as in Tables 4 and 5. The analysis showed that senators are expected to receive 3.22 times more stories in the *Times* and 9.14 times more stories in the *Post* than House members per Congress. These findings support previous research on media coverage of House members and senators (Arnold 2004; Cook 1986, 1988, 1989; Squire 1988).

[14]Predicted averages were attained using *SPOST9* (Long and Freese 2006) by varying the size of the majority while holding the other explanatory variables at their means.

[15]Placement data were attained in the fall of 2010 from www.voteview.com.

[16]Predicted averages were attained using *SPOST9* (Long and Freese 2006) by varying the size of the majority while holding the other explanatory variables at their means.

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