EXPLAINING THE VOTE:
CLAIMING CREDIT AND MANAGING BLAME
IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE

Dissertation

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By

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ABSTRACT

Members of the United States Senate have choices about how to convey their Washington activities to their constituents. This study examines one of those choices: whether or not to explain a significant roll call vote. Previous research has shown that how members explain makes a difference in how they are perceived. This study goes to the archival record to determine how members explain these votes in press releases, in newspaper coverage, in mass mailings, and on the floor of the Senate. Through analysis of three bills before the 106th Congress, the study shows that there are key factors which affect the propensity for members to explain.

This study uses content analysis of media coverage, mass mailings, and floor statements to look at senators’ explanations of their votes on the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act, the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act, and the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000. It examines both the explanations that members give for their own votes as well as the statements that they issue regarding the behavior of the Senate as a whole. Further, the study argues that members give explanations with two goals in mind: claiming credit and managing blame. The importance of the bill to the member’s constituency, the member’s electoral concerns, and other characteristics such as the member’s position in the
chamber are shown to affect the propensity for senators to offer these credit-claiming and blame-managing explanations.

The study discussed here makes three main contributions to the existing literature. First, it refocuses the examinations of political accounts toward the antecedents of these explanations. Without understanding which politicians are offering explanations and under what conditions, we cannot fully understand the process through which the public receives this important information about how it is being represented. Second, the study also refocuses attention to explanations given both for positive and negative behavior. While explanations for negative behavior are more entertaining in the press and keep the public on the edge of its collective seat, the explanations for positive behavior are both more common and more educational about how members of Congress are connecting the will of the people to their policy efforts.

Finally, the study demonstrates a gulf between how senators wish to convey their representation (through their press releases) and how this representation is actually conveyed to the public (through news coverage). For many constituents “what you see” may not be “what you get” when it comes to your senator’s Washington activities. While members are able to gain coverage in the news, it is primarily when they are in trouble or when they are describing the actions of the institution. In their press releases, however, they are touting their successes to whoever will listen. This work sets the stage for other studies of explanations in a political context.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Let the budget spin begin: Lawmakers busily take credit, place blame for spending bill”
(Jonathan Riskind, 11/21/99, Columbus Dispatch, p. 1A)

The above headline exemplifies the behavior of lawmakers across the country as they were heading home, “already hard at work on the 2000 elections,” to “put their respective spins on who’s to blame for another year of political gridlock” (Riskind 1999). While the author of the article highlights congressional gridlock, the members themselves are given the opportunity in the article to highlight their accomplishments for the year -- all in the spirit of claiming credit and managing blame. Are these Ohio lawmakers any different from others across the country? What legislation do they explain? Does everyone explain everything? Are their main aims to claim credit for accomplishments or to place blame? These are a few of the questions that this study will address.

How members attempt to shape the public image through their explanations, however, has been understudied. According to Fenno, “Political scientists, preoccupied with explaining the votes of House members, have neglected to explain the explanations of House members” (1978, p.168). The Senate has been similarly neglected. Fenno notes that this “explanatory process helps link Congress and the citizenry, through its
legitimizing and its educational aspects” (1978, p. 169). While he focuses on explanations that members give while they are visiting their district, he notes that, “A complete treatment of explanatory styles would monitor the totality of congressional communications practices. That is a subject, an important subject, for another study” (Fenno 1978, p. 136). New data availability enables this study to take up Fenno’s challenge and redirect the focus from explaining the vote to explaining explanations of the vote.¹

**Explanations defined**

The root of the study of explanations comes from the psychology literature. In this literature, explanations are usually called “accounts” and refer primarily to the explanations that people give for negative behavior. Typical of this literature, Schonbach refers to “failure events” as the impetus for accounts (1990). His basic question then is “under which conditions is an account episode likely to be accomplished, and under which other conditions is such an episode likely to founder?” (Schonbach 1990, p. 16). An account is successful when the actor is able to reassure the opponent and gain higher evaluations of himself and the transgression (Schonbach 1990, p. 16). Schonbach, like others then categorizes accounts given by participants in an experimental pilot study and then measures the effects of these accounts on evaluations given by later experiment participants.

¹ While no study can monitor the “totality” of congressional communication, this study will simultaneously consider members’ press releases, floor statements, mass mailings, and news coverage in an attempt to come close to the full picture. Further, while Fenno’s focus is on the House of Representatives, this study will examine communication in the Senate for reasons noted below.
The psychological literature has made many attempts to develop typologies of accounts. These range in size from two to over one hundred categories (see Scott and Lyman 1968, Schlenker 1980, Schonbach 1990, Gonzales et al. 1995 for examples). Four cardinal categories are generally agreed upon, however: denial, confessions, excuses, and justifications (McGraw 2001). These categories can be distinguished by how much responsibility the actor claims for the behavior and how negative she admits the behavior to have been (McGraw 2001).

The political science literature has discussed explanations from two main angles. First, in the congressional literature, several prominent scholars have suggested that explanations are necessary when members have voted in ways contrary to their constituents’ interests; the idea is that “if you have to explain, you’re in trouble” (Fenno 1978, p. 145). By explaining, Fenno includes the “description, the interpretation, and the justification of their behavior” (1978, p. 136). He argues that members’ explanations provide two functions: education and legitimacy. By explaining their Washington activities to constituents, members give the citizenry information about what goes on in Congress. Fenno notes, however, that members choose particular pieces of information to convey, not presenting a full picture of the workings of Congress. They also provide negative information about Congress as a whole while polishing their own images (Fenno 1978, p. 169). Members also give explanations in order to justify their behavior so that their actions appear legitimate to constituents (Fenno 1978, p. 169).

Others, however, have noted that members of Congress give positive messages to their constituents in order to claim credit for their Washington behavior (Mayhew 1974). It is not a far theoretical leap then to suggest that credit claiming can come in the form of
explanations for roll call votes and other attempts by members to gain goods and services for their districts. This study will look at statements that senators give both to explain their positive behaviors as well as their negative behaviors.

A second approach that political scientists have taken when examining explanations is to look at the consequences of explanations for public opinion, particularly in the context of political scandals. These studies have used experimental methods as a way of controlling the myriad of factors involved in the presentation and reception of explanations. They have found generally that common, simple, and familiar rhetoric is received more favorably (Bennett 1980, Edelman 1988, McGraw 1991). Citizens who are more trusting and less politically sophisticated are more acceptant of explanations (McGraw and Hubbard 1996), and the previous opinion of the speaker serves as an anchor for the reception of the explanation. That is, citizens are more favorable toward explanations given by politicians that they like (Gonzales et al. 1995, McGraw, Best, and Timpone 1995; see McGraw 2001 for a review of this literature). While this research has pointed to key factors of explanations that make them more acceptable to the public, it has not discussed the factors which prompt politicians to offer explanations with these various characteristics.

This study will examine political explanations more from the first tradition. That is, it will discuss the antecedents of the explanations rather than their reception by the public. While the public’s reception of the explanations is indisputably important, we must first come to understand more clearly the factors which prompt politicians to issue the explanations in the first place. We must determine what rhetorical strategies are commonly employed and by whom. Consequently, this study will first examine the
presence of explanations among senators’ statements regarding roll call votes on three issues. Then, it will turn to several dimensions of these explanations. The first dimension is what being explained -- do members explain their own votes or the behavior of the Senate as a body. The second dimension is the motivation for the explanation -- are members offering explanations which claim credit as Mayhew and others suggest or are they issuing statements to manage or avoid blame as Fenno and others have noted. Because this study focuses on statements regarding both positive and negative behavior, it will use the term “explanations” to refer to the statements that senators make rather than “accounts” which have traditionally referred to statements made in defense of negative behavior.

**Scope of the project**

This study will investigate explanations of votes on three major pieces of legislation before the U.S. Senate of the 106th Congress. I chose to examine the Senate for two main reasons. First, congressional research in this area disproportionately focuses on the House of Representatives. While Fenno (1978) and Kingdon (1973; 1989) outline characteristics of House members and their districts that affect the way they portray themselves to the district, there is not a similar discussion of the Senate. Consequently, by looking at the Senate in this context, I am able to examine how results for the House apply to the Senate and how the Senate’s unique characteristics affect members’ explanations. Second, the nature of terms of office in the Senate provides a unique ability to test electoral considerations on members’ explanations. Since members of the Senate have staggered terms, at a given point in time, one-third of the Senators are
up for reelection, one-third have just been elected, and one-third are halfway between elections. We can consequently look at the effect of the distance from election on members’ behaviors while holding other factors, such as the legislation being explained, constant.

I chose legislation from the 106th Congress so that I could look at how contemporary members behave. By looking at current Senators, I was able to gather press releases from their official homepages soon after the Senate considered the legislation. The legislation in this study comes from three different policy areas: social, economic, and foreign. The bills are similar in some respects, however. These cases were all significant pieces of legislation that would affect the country as a whole, while affecting individual states differently. The Senate passed all three pieces of legislation; only one, however, was signed into law. Two of the cases (Juvenile Justice and Bankruptcy Reform) were under initial consideration in the Senate while one (China PNTR) was being considered in the Senate after House passage. While the number of cases limits the amount of comparison that can be made by policy area, it maximizes the depth with which I am able to examine each case.

**Preview of the results**

The analysis will show that explanations of the vote are a common, yet far from universal, communication strategy employed by senators on these major votes. In the three bills considered here, forty-one senators explained the bankruptcy bill (Chapter 5), sixty-two explained the juvenile justice bill (Chapter 4), and seventy-three explained the China trade bill (Chapter 6). Members primarily explained their votes in order to claim
credit for successful passage of legislation. Some, however, explained their votes to manage blame. These blame-managing explanations were found primarily in news coverage while members’ press releases and floor statements focused on credit claiming. The analysis will demonstrate differences between media outlets that members use as vehicles for vote explanations. Further, the analysis will show that the importance of the bill to the member’s constituency, the member’s electoral concerns, and characteristics of the member him or herself affect the propensity to offer explanations for the vote.

Outline of chapters to come

In the next chapter, I will review the literature on explanations in congressional and psychological research. Congressional scholars have shown that members of Congress explain their Washington behavior to constituents in an effort to persuade voters. These studies primarily focus on members’ strategies to claim credit for their congressional successes. Psychological studies of explanations have demonstrated that explanations can have a profound impact on the recipient. Speakers are able to form impressions of themselves and their behaviors by the way that they explain the behavior. These studies, however, primarily focus on the speaker’s attempt to manage blame for negative behavior. While these studies point to the benefits of explaining the vote, they do not directly examine these explanations. The chapter will demonstrate that while we can expect members’ explanations to affect constituency opinion about members of Congress, few studies have turned to archival analysis of explanations to determine what members are saying to the public about their behavior in Congress.
Chapter Three will outline the theory and methods of this study of explanations in the U.S. Senate. The chapter will show that several dimensions of explanations are important. Senators sometimes give personal explanations in which they explain their own vote. Other times, they give institutional explanations in which they explain the Senate’s vote as a whole. Further, these explanations can serve several purposes. They may be designed to claim credit or manage blame for the behavior. Finally, there are characteristics of the issue at hand, the member’s electoral concerns, and the member him or herself that affect the propensity for a senator to offer an explanation for the vote. The variables of interest in this study are outlined in this chapter.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six turn to case studies of three pieces of legislation before the 106th Congress. In Chapter Four, I present a qualitative and quantitative study of senators’ explanations regarding their votes on the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act. This bill, a response to school violence, was designed to strengthen penalties for juvenile offenders as well as tighten restrictions on handgun purchase and storage. The chapter shows that members of Congress offer explanations in several media outlets and that these explanations vary in type and purpose.

In Chapter Five, I discuss senators’ explanations of the vote on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act. This bill would change the regulations involving bankruptcy filers, making it more difficult to simply discharge debts. Democratic amendments to the bill would increase the minimum wage. While the Bankruptcy Reform Act did not receive as much public attention as other legislation, many members explained their votes on the bill. These explanations show more effects of partisanship on the propensity to explain this legislation than other bills.
Chapter Six examines vote explanations for the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000. This bill extended Permanent Normal Trading Relations status to the People’s Republic of China. It was acclaimed to be a “historic vote” by several Senators and members of the press and was the only one of the three bills considered here signed into law during the 106th Congress. Like the other two cases, members’ explanations for this bill follow several distinct patterns. More members gave explanations for this legislation than the other two bills.

The final chapter compares the results of the models in the three cases. It shows that, despite the different types of legislation studied, certain types of members are more likely to explain their votes. Further, it shows that explanations are not simply a matter of personal taste. That is, there are distinct characteristics of the member and his or her predicament that affect the likelihood that they will explain any particular vote.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Congressional scholars have been investigating members’ behavior since the inception of the institution. Young provides an account of early members of Congress and their behavior in and out of the House and Senate chambers (1966). Matthews codifies the norms of the Senate into their respective “folkways” to illustrate how members are defined and confined by the norms of the institution (1959, 1968). Inspired by normative questions about what it means to “represent,” scholars such as Pitkin (1967) and Miller and Stokes (1963) have theoretically and empirically examined the relationship between members’ votes and their constituents’ opinions. What has not been so thorough, however, is the discussion about what members say about what they do in Washington, particularly through the media. This study examines the explanations that members of Congress give for their roll-call votes in an effort to better understand the ways that members strategically interact with their constituents.

In this chapter, I will review the literature on explanations in congressional and psychological research. First, I will discuss the purposes that explanations serve and members’ motivations for offering them. Second, I will describe the types of behavior that members of Congress might be expected to explain. Then I will discuss the literature
on explanations among members of Congress and other public officials. Finally, I will
describe the media outlets that members of Congress may use when giving public
explanations.

Explanations in Congress – The Theory of Explaining the Vote

Classic studies in legislative politics and the researchers who followed them have
shown that representatives spend much time bolstering constituency support through roll
call votes that represent constituency opinion (Miller and Stokes 1963), through spending
time in the district (Fenno 1978), and through statements reflecting their reelection goals
(Mayhew 1974). The literature has given an uneven focus to various member activities,
however, and the members’ explanations of these activities have received short shrift.

In his classic discussion of “home style,” Fenno outlines three aspects of the
member’s image: allocation of resources, presentation of self, and explanation of
Washington activities (1978). Members engage in these activities to gain support from
various constituencies. As they gain support, they also gain trust – and, consequently,
voting leeway. Of the three elements of home style, allocation of resources, such as time
spent in the district and staff working there, has received the most attention from
scholars. Fiorina and Rohde note that the allocation of resources is the activity “most
amenable to extensive quantitative analysis” of the three activities that Fenno describes
(1989, p. 9). Consequently, scholars have devoted much effort to modeling the
relationship between resource allocation and constituency opinion (Johannes and
McAdams 1981; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Ragsdale and Cook 1984, 1987). The
presentation of self and explanation of Washington activities has generally been left to qualitative case studies such as Fenno’s *Home Style* (1978) and Weber’s study of Representative Richard Nolan (1989).

Before Fenno’s *Home Style*, Kingdon discussed the use of explanations by members of Congress, but did not explicitly model their use. Kingdon (1989) discusses the ways that electoral considerations constrain members’ voting behavior. Sometimes, constituency opinion can be salient enough to make a member vote in a certain way to avoid having to explain the vote to the people back home. More often, however, members vote on whatever grounds they see fit and then concoct an explanation (Kingdon, 1989, p. 47). In an election setting, it is not the objective voting record as measured by Miller and Stokes and others, but the perception of representation that the member has conveyed to the constituency that is key to reelection (Rivers and Fiorina 1989; Jacobson 1997). Similarly, Jacobs and Shapiro discuss how politicians’ “crafted talk” allows them to “pursue their policy objectives while minimizing the risks of electoral punishment” (2000, p. 7). If, as these scholars indicate, the explanation of the behavior is as important to reelection prospects as the member’s behavior itself, what members have to say about their Washington activities deserves further consideration.

Members have several options for relaying their Washington activities to constituents. Mayhew outlines three types of behavior that are electorally beneficial for members to engage: advertising, credit claiming, and position taking (1974, p. 73). The premise behind each of these activities is that it gives the constituency an indication of how well the member is working for them, thus encouraging them to support the member.

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2 See Austen-Smith 1992, for a formal representation of this process.
in the future. Mayhew explains that members behave as if reelection is their primary goal and they constantly engage in activities related to reelection (1974, p. 49). While Mayhew does not discuss explanations directly, explanations of roll calls and other behaviors can be considered forms of credit claiming or position taking if a member is able to explain that he is working for the district by gaining particular benefits or taking important stands.

While Mayhew focuses on members’ efforts to claim credit for their positive behaviors, others have argued that members are more concerned with minimizing the damage of negative behavior. According to Weaver, blame avoidance is a main goal of public officials (1986). Rather than emphasizing credit-claiming activities as Mayhew has done, Weaver argues that members seek to avoid blame for unpopular activities. His argument is based on the theory that negative information looms larger than positive information. Consequently, voters are more likely to assign blame than credit, and officials should focus on avoiding blame rather than claiming credit. While Weaver’s arguments are somewhat persuasive and are compatible with retrospective models of voting (Fiorina 1981), Weaver does not provide empirical evidence that this is how members operate. Similarly, Bennett provides a rare theoretical look at the use of accounts by public officials, but does not develop or test a model (1980).

Members’ explanations serve several possible purposes. Generally, explanations may serve as impression management techniques, benefiting the speaker by improving constituent’s evaluations (see McGraw 2001 for a review); they may also benefit the speaker psychologically (Schlenker & Weigold 1992; Snyder & Higgins 1988 for reviews). This study focuses on explanations’ usefulness to members of Congress for
impression management purposes. In this regard, explanations serve trust-building, credit-claiming, and blame-management purposes. According to Fenno, explanations build trust (1978). Mayhew provides the basis for the argument that explanations are a form of credit claiming (1974). Finally, according to Weaver (1986) and the psychology literature on political accounts, members’ blame avoidance strategies might be served by explanations. I will argue that members use explanations for both credit-claiming and blame-avoiding (-managing) purposes with an ulterior motive of building trust among constituents. To that end, members of Congress are expected to issue explanations strategically. Rather than explaining everything they have done, they are expected to only explain those things from which they can derive particular credit or avoid (or manage) anticipated blame. Scholars of legislative politics have discussed members’ explanations indirectly as both credit-claiming and blame-avoidance strategies for many years and have left many hypotheses untested.

When might members offer explanations?

Whether to claim credit for positive behavior or manage blame for negative behavior, members of Congress are likely to explain their Washington behavior and their personal transgressions. Sometimes members offer explanations on their own; often they are pushed by the media or an electoral challenger to explain their behavior. Members may explain their roll call votes to claim credit for victories and manage blame for defeat, explain their Washington behavior in response to challenges from political opponents, and explain their personal failures both inside and outside of their political duties.
Explaining the Vote

Constituents often call upon members to explain their Washington activities, including their roll-call votes (Fenno 1978, p. 141). Kingdon discusses the difficulties that members of Congress face when deciding to explain a vote. According to Kingdon’s conceptualization, explaining and voting are interrelated and both are important to the member. Consequently, members “believe they can win and lose constituent support through their explanations as well as through their votes” (Fenno 1978, p. 141; citing Kingdon, 1973). Since it is likely that the public will recognize a member’s legislative efforts not strictly on the merits, but rather through a mediated source, members have “strong incentives to actively manage public perceptions” (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, p. 25). Journalists then amplify these statements given to them by public officials (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, p. 61).

Fenno notes that members cast many more votes than they are actually called upon to explain. They never know, however, which vote may be the focus of a campaign challenge. There are also subsets of the geographical constituency who may be concerned about a particular vote or set of votes. Fenno explains that members realize their entire constituency is not focused on their voting records. Constituents are focused, however, on those issues that affect them most directly. Consequently, on any given issue there may be a group of deeply concerned constituents to which the member must effectively respond (Fenno 1978). Members may respond to these sub-constituencies through targeted mailings, press releases, or speeches. The media makes it its business to
prompt members for explanations. Members must consequently arm themselves to explain many of their votes (Fenno 1978, p. 142).

• Electoral Challenges

Explanations are offered spontaneously by members and are also solicited through campaign challenges. Challengers use the voting record of the incumbent to try to show that incumbents are “out of touch with district sentiments” (Jacobson 1997, p. 71). Roll-call voting is especially prone to attack in a campaign because the member’s stance is irrefutable from the record. Challengers probe for explanations on those votes most difficult to explain (Fenno 1978, p. 142). Consequently, the member’s explanation of the vote should be constructed in a way to mitigate the damage that a challenge might cause (Jacobson 1997, p. 71). Members’ explanations may thus be offered in anticipation of a challenge or as a reaction to a challenge such as in a campaign debate.

• Scandalous Behavior

While roll call voting is the most easily identifiable congressional behavior, many Washington activities beyond voting are likely to be explained by members (Fenno 1978, p. 141). Fenno notes that members will “explain any Washington activity that is relevant to winning and holding support at home, for the objective of explanation, as of presentation is political support” (1978, p. 137). Whether personal scandals or accusations of corruption in office, members are occasionally caught in situations that require explanation. Jacobson and Dimock indicate that the Washington Post reported a survey of members’ statements regarding the House Bank scandal in October 1991
Several scholars have used statements from personal scandals like the House Bank Scandal as materials for experimental studies of accounts (c.f. Chanley et al. 1994; McGraw, Timpone, & Bruck 1993; McGraw 1998).

While we could examine Senators’ explanations in any of these forums, this study will focus on members’ explanations for their roll-call votes. This behavior is common among all members and part of their “daily” duties as legislators. Consequently, by examining explanations of roll-call votes, we are able to see how members use their explanations of a day-to-day activity and are able to hold the member’s political situations (the legislative agenda) constant while focusing on key characteristics of the bill for each member’s district, the member’s electoral concerns, and factors which distinguish members politically from each other (such as their leadership status and seniority).

Explanations in Congress – The Empirical Evidence

While many legislative scholars have referred to the importance of studying members’ explanations, few have undertaken this endeavor. Several scholars have conducted interviews with members to investigate the ways that members use explanations. Others have used formal theory to model the explanation process. Few studies, however, have performed a systematic analysis of accounts used by members of Congress to explain their votes to the district.

Interviews with members of Congress have shown how members of Congress use the media to explain their behavior to constituents. These studies have been less able to
show when and how members offer explanations other than to say that members explain votes when they have created a predicament. Such studies are based on self-reports from members, however, so it is difficult to know how the constituents received the accounts or perceived the predicament (Fenno 1978; Bianco 1994).

Bianco finds evidence of members’ explanations of the Catastrophic Coverage Act and the Ethics Act (1994). Bianco did not go to archival data to find the explanations; he asked members if they explained the vote to their constituency. Bianco finds that forty percent of the members he interviewed reported to have explained the Catastrophic Coverage act to their constituents (1994). It is not clear whether this means they explained their own position, the bill itself, the topic of discussion, or the outcome of the vote, however. Thus, position-taking, advertising, and credit-claiming activities may be all rolled up in Bianco’s measure of explanation. He finds that the only members who explained the Ethics Act were those who angered their constituencies. Bianco uses this as proof that explanations are not intended to be persuasive; members do not intend to change the minds of constituents, but rather to use the explanations to appear accountable and available to constituents (1994, p. 154). I argue, however, that Bianco’s evidence does not necessarily refute the use of explanations as persuasive rhetoric. Rather, we should expect to find that those members with the most trust should be least likely to explain their votes, while those who have violated trust will be compelled to justify their behavior. Members may not intend to change constituents’ opinions on particularly policies with their accounts but instead may use their explanations to frame the policy differently and thus influence the attitudes that the constituent believes are relevant for assessing the member’s behavior (c.f., Nelson and Willey 2001). While this study will
not examine trust dynamics directly, it will challenge Bianco’s proposition that members use explanations only to convey their accessibility to voters. If this were the case, explaining would be a strategically costless activity, and members would explain all of their votes and not only when the explanations are strategically beneficial for maintaining support. If explanations were geared mainly to inform, we would expect members to use them for credit claiming, but not blame management.

Austen-Smith uses a formal model to discuss the role of explanations for members’ voting behavior (1992). As Kingdon discussed, member can use accounts to explain votes that they knew a priori would upset constituents (1989, p. 47). Similarly, Austen-Smith models the relationship between voting decisions and explaining. He argues that when costs for lying in an explanation are high, members will vote sincerely because unrepresentative members are less willing to conceal their motives in their voting behavior. When these costs are low, however, members have an incentive to vote strategically and use explanations as a way to cover up their “unrepresentative” behavior. Austen-Smith’s model suggests that members will use explanations as a blame management strategy and deserves empirical verification.

In a content analysis of accounts related to the March 2, 1995, Senate vote on the Balanced Budget Amendment, I found many members offering explanations of several types (Willey 1998). Some members offered explanations for their own votes while others explained the outcome of the vote, why the bill failed to pass. Because constituency support for the Balanced Budget Amendment was so high, many members were in predicaments either because they voted against the bill that so many constituents supported or because they supported it, but the bill was not passed by the Senate. This
analysis also points to several within member characteristics that may affect the propensity to explain.

Recently, scholars have been more interested in vote explanations in the context of the historic impeachment vote against President Clinton (Loomis 1999; McGraw, Anderson, and Willey 2000). Loomis conducted thematic content analysis of the ninety-five statements given by senators the Congressional Record regarding impeachment. His discussion is primarily descriptive and notes such aspects of impeachment explanations as legalistic and rule-of-law reasoning, party differences, and the analogies that Senators used when describing the president. Loomis does not develop a causal model of the explanations and does not situate the work in a particular theoretical framework or discuss extant literature on explanations. He concludes that partisanship dominated the impeachment explanations. McGraw, Anderson, and Willey examine the impeachment statements that House members issued on their congressional websites and construct a quantitative model of the propensity for a member to post a vote explanation on the web site based on member and district characteristics (2000). We find effects for leadership and committee membership as well as party differences, partisan regional norms, and strong effects for having a communication mechanism in place on the propensity to explain impeachment via the world wide web. Generally, members were likely to post statements about their vote on impeachment when they voted in ways consistent with district preferences. This study suggests that the world wide web serves as a useful outlet for members to claim credit for their congressional behavior; explanations serve more than blame management purposes (McGraw 2001; McGraw, Anderson, and Willey 2000).
While members’ vote explanations are certainly acknowledged as an important part of their home style by many congressional scholars, the evidence for how members use explanations strategically is sparse. Consequently, this study aims to go beyond the descriptive, anecdotal studies of the past to rigorously analyze the explanations issued by members of Congress in a variety of situations both within and between members. Further, it will incorporate research from communications and psychology literatures which catalog explanations given in many contexts, typically apolitical and often experimental, and congressional literature which points to possible impetus for issuing explanations without studying them systematically.

Explanations in non-congressional contexts

Although there is very little direct research of explanations in a congressional context, in non-congressional contexts, several studies have investigated the types of explanations offered by officials. These studies focus primarily on the explanation of negative events such as scandals and are primarily descriptive in nature or report on experiments to measure the impact of various explanations on evaluations.

Research in social psychology and political science has identified elements of explanations (called “accounts” in this literature) that improve evaluations (McGraw 1990; McGraw 1991; McGraw, Best & Timpone 1995; McGraw, Timpone, & Bruck 1993). We do not know, however, whether politicians actively use these blame-management strategies. Instead, many social psychological studies focus on the benefits of accounts to the account giver (see Schlenker & Weigold 1992; Snyder & Higgins 1988
for reviews). These studies are less applicable to members of Congress since political scientists are not typically interested in the self-esteem of individual members. Other studies in psychology have examined the interpersonal effects of accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968). Fewer studies have examined accounts in the natural setting to determine what types of explanations are offered, under what conditions, and by whom.

A rare example of archival research on explanations was conducted by Sigelman and Walkosz (1991; 1992). They examined newspaper statements related to Arizona’s decision not to observe a Martin Luther King holiday. Sigelman and Walkosz compared the explanations given by opinion letter writers to those given by survey respondents to evaluate the representativeness of letters-to-the-editor as a measure of public opinion on the issue (1992). Sigelman and Walkosz categorized statements according to account type (1991). They coded “every passage from any news, sports, or feature story, column, editorial, or letter to the editor that could be possibly interpreted as containing an account of the defeat of King Day” (1991, p. 6). While their content is thorough, Sigelman and Walkosz do not focus on the type of person giving the account and, consequently, they cannot explain variation in account types based on different actors having different motivations for explanation. Sigelman and Walkosz do, however, find interesting differences between the accounts given by proponents and opponents of the King holiday. They also find equal numbers of excuses, justifications, and denials and very few confessions (1991). While Sigelman and Walkosz’ data do not allow for modeling of the account process, they do represent one of the few studies of political accounts in a natural setting.
In a study of the Tailhook scandal, McGraw (1998) content analyzed newspapers and magazines to classify statements made by those affiliated with the incident. McGraw used an inductive method and classified the accounts according to a variation of Schonbach’s typology, a very thorough typology of account rhetoric that is useful for classifying, but not explaining, the rhetoric. Four basic types of accounts resulted from Tailhook: the navy-culture excuse, blaming-the-victim excuse, denial of wrongdoing, and concessions. Statements from members of Congress resulting from roll-call votes might differ significantly from these types because the members’ behavior cannot be disputed. Those explanations resulting from personal indiscretions, however, may exhibit similar patterns as Tailhook.

A key difference between previous studies of explanations and this study is that previous studies have focused almost exclusively on explanations for negative behavior. Congressional research indicates, however, that members of Congress engage in explanations of positive behavior (Mayhew 1974) as well as negative behavior (Fenno 1978). Mayhew’s discussion of credit claiming and Fenno’s discussion of trust building both consider members’ explanations as a tool for improving constituency opinion by relaying positive information about the member’s behavior. This study examines explanations from both angles at once, however, with the hypothesis that members will explain both negative and positive behavior to constituents. Studies from non-congressional contexts provide a framework under which to discuss explanations by members of Congress as a blame-management tool.
Outlets for Explanations

Members of Congress have several outlets at their disposal for explaining their Washington activities to constituents. Members make personal visits to constituencies in the district, and constituents visit members in Washington. Members send press releases to media outlets and post them on their web pages. Members make statements to newspaper reporters and are invited to participate on radio and television shows. Members use their floor statements to take official stands recorded in the *Congressional Record*. Finally, members can take advantage of the franking privilege to send newsletters about their activities back to the district. Members’ control over these outlets varies as does the width of coverage each provides. Do members explain the same activities in all of these outlets? Are some outlets reserved for credit claiming and others for blame management? Do some types of members prefer particular outlets over others? Scholars have examined explanations in several outlets, but comparison among them has been limited. This study gathers data from several sources contemporaneously allowing for direct comparisons of senators’ activities across several media outlets.

- Visiting the District

Perhaps the most vivid accounts of members conversing with their constituents about their Washington activities are the studies that report on members' trips to the district. Fenno's *HomeStyle* (1978) is the most notable of these studies. Fenno reports on
his visits to eighteen House districts over a period of eight years. He discusses with great
detail how members vary in the way that they portray themselves and their Washington
activities when visiting constituents.

Often visits to the district are aimed at enhancing constituents' perceptions of their
member as attentive and accessible (Bond 1985; Parker 1986). These district visits are
costly because they interfere with the member’s Washington-based activities (Parker
1980; Fenno 1978). Parker examines the effects of travel allowances, recess periods,
elections, and the political climate on the propensity for House members to travel to the
district. Senate district visits are not discussed much, if at all, in the literature. While
data about travel expenditures to the district are available, data regarding with whom
members talk and what they say while in the district (unless reported in newspaper
coverage or press releases) are not available, except through self-reports from members
themselves. Consequently, members’ district visits will not be discussed further in this
study.

• Press Releases

Press releases can be an important source of information about what members
want to explain. Hess discusses the use of the “lowly” press release by members as a
way to let the press know what they want to be covered (1991). From the press’s
standpoint, members provide them with a “smorgasbord of subjects competing for
attention” (Hess 1991, p. 79). Hess notes, however, that members use their press releases
for advertising, credit claiming, and position taking. It is these credit-claiming press
releases that increase in number as an election nears (Hess 1991). Hess finds a disproportionate number of credit-claiming press releases from members of the Senate. He attributes the number of credit-claiming press releases in the Senate to the fact that senators are more likely than House members to lose elections (Hess, 1991, p. 87).

Today, members of the House and the Senate are able to distribute press releases to their respective press galleries for the press in Washington to gather. More importantly, however, they are able to freely post these press releases on their official web pages where they are archived for the press and the public to access. In this way, the press releases become a semi-permanent record of the member’s stances. The member, however, has control over which releases are posted and for how long. Today’s senators are no longer beholden to the media for coverage. They can provide coverage of themselves through these very public web page postings. From a researcher’s vantage point, the senators’ abilities to post their press releases directly to their sites allows the scholar to access the press releases directly and examine what the senator wished the press to cover, not simply what the press chose to cover.

• Newspaper coverage

Newspaper coverage of senators has received some attention in the literature. These studies are quick to make distinctions between the national press and the local press. The national press is more likely to cover the Senate than the House (Hess 1991, p. 5). Other reporters, however, cover the House or the Senate according to which story might be more marketable (Hess 1991, p. 5). Hess (1991) finds a lesser role of press
releases than some previous scholars. Others, such as Kedrowski (1996), have noted that reporters are generally suspicious of the “spin” that policymakers put on their behavior (p. 95). While not the central aim of this study, the use of press releases by the news media will be addressed through content analysis of each. Little contiguity between press releases and news coverage would suggest that members do not control their own fate in the press; a close match between the two would indicate that members of Congress are able to direct media attention through the press releases that they constantly feed the press.

- Mass Mailings

Mass mailings are a unique outlet for explanations because the mailings come directly into the homes of constituents whether they are politically aware or not. Also, members are able to target friendly constituents in their mailings by sending them to constituents in particular issue publics such as the elderly or constituents who have previously written to the member about a particular issue. Members are able to directly discuss their Washington activities with constituents through the mass mailings that they send to the district. Yiannakis (1982), Lipinski (1998), Schaffner (2001), and others have discussed the use of mass mailings by members of the House. Senators’ mailings, however, have not received attention from scholars even though Senate rules make them readily available to the public. The use of mass mailings has been on the decline in recent years and some senators have even put forth measures to ban the use of mass

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mailings altogether. This study will examine the use of mass mailings on three specific issues to determine whether senators’ use of mass mailings conforms with or differs from their use of other media outlets.

- **Congressional Record**

Members’ floor statements recorded in the *Congressional Record* provide a “permanent” record of their official policy stances and other matters. The *Record* does not, however, simply provide an account of what was actually said on the floor of the Senate. Instead, members of the Senate are able to gain permission to insert their statements into the *Record* “as though read” and the statements are placed in the *Record* so as not to disrupt the flow of the discussion (Smith 1999, p. 246). These matters recorded in the *Record* are available for dissemination to the public by the press and by the members themselves through newsletters, web pages, press releases, and public visits. That does not mean, however, that members will necessarily repeat what they have said in the *Record* to the public. Their selection of issues to explain may reflect components of the issue or the electoral situation that the member faces. Members’ statements in the *Record* are readily available to determine whether members use this venue as a place to claim credit or manage blame.

Most research on members’ explanations relies on interviews to sort out the uses of the media by members (Bianco 1994; Fenno 1978; Larson 1992; Lipinski 1998).

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4 While not successful, measures were introduced in September 1999 (S. 1671) to ban the use of mass mailings and in January 1999 to prohibit mass mailings within one year of an election in which the senator was a candidate (S. 16).
Other studies only take up one source of data such as press releases or district mailings (Lipinski 1998; McGraw, Anderson, and Willey 2000) or combine several sources without differentiating between them (Yiannakis 1982). By looking at several outlets simultaneously while making distinctions between them, this study is able to investigate the ways that members use them in different ways.

Conclusions

While there have been quite a few experimental studies of accounts, there is still much to discover. Fewer studies have turned to archival data to study explanations. The circumstances surrounding the predicament, the characteristics of the member and the district may all affect the type of explanation a member offers, the timing, and the statement’s impact on the evaluations of the member and Congress as an institution. Senators have several media outlets at their disposal and may use them (and be used by them) differently depending on the bill or their personal circumstances. This study will turn to one occasion for explanations, the roll-call vote, and will discuss how senators’ explanations have several dimensions.

Theoretical innovations in the field are long overdue as well. While psychologists have studied the impact of giving an explanation in reference to the person who proffers the explanation, there is little framework around which to discuss how explanations operate on the recipient or how officials choose to use them. The studies reported here demonstrate that senators’ statements appear differently across media outlets. They also show that key characteristics of senators affect their propensity to explain their roll-call
votes in the public press. The next chapter will introduce the theory of explaining the roll-call vote and the variables that may affect these explanations as well as the methods and data used in the case studies that are reported in later chapters.
CHAPTER 3

THEORY AND METHODS

This study uses content analysis of three cases to examine several dimensions of vote explanations given by members of the United States Senate. First, I will discuss the factors that may prompt senators to offer explanations for their roll-call votes. Second, I will examine several dimensions of these explanations including what is being explained, the reasons evoked in the explanation, and the presumed purpose of the explanation -- whether the member is seeking credit or managing/avoiding blame for the behavior. I will discuss the various explanation outlets that members have at their disposal and potential differences in how members use them. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the data used in the analysis that follows in later chapters.

Factors that affect giving explanations

Little theory from the communications and social psychology literatures involves predictions of who will be likely to offer political accounts, what types will be employed most often, and what conditions are most likely to elicit accounts from public officials. Literature from psychology suggests that the severity of the predicament is integral in prompting explanations. Congressional scholars have speculated about characteristics of the members and their districts that make some more likely to explain their votes than
others. From these literatures, we can derive testable hypotheses about which members are more likely to explain their votes.

The factor most considered in the psychology literature is the severity of the predicament itself. This literature posits that the more severe the predicament, the more defensive bolstering will occur (Schonbach 1990, p. 146). Unfortunately, however, severity is a somewhat circuitous term. One way in which we naturally gauge the severity of the predicament is itself in the reaction of the offender, whether he explained or not. Consequently, we will have to use more concrete measures of the severity which is somewhat aided by the nature of the congressional context. Unlike many situations where one would be issuing explanations, congressional roll-call votes often have quantifiable consequences in terms of district impact and constituency opinion. This feature of the congressional context makes it an interesting arena in which to examine the severity of the predicament. Consistent with credit-claiming research in congressional studies, we can also expect that the more favorable the member’s behavior, the more likely he or she will explain the behavior to constituents. Consequently, this study will not only examine the severity of the predicament but, more generally, the importance of the bill in terms of the member’s constituency. A member who votes against an “important” bill may find himself in a predicament while a member who votes in favor of the same may find himself in a position to claim credit. Consequently, members consider the impact of the vote on constituency opinion when making decisions on whether or not to explain a vote (Fenno 1978, p. 143). Fenno postulates that “if a member votes contrary to district opinion, ‘I’ll [the member] have a lot of explaining to do’” (1978, p. 143). This study will measure the bill’s importance by including campaign contributions,
district salience, and the member’s vote in the analysis. These variables will be discussed in more detail below.

In addition to the importance of the bill, members of Congress have electoral concerns as well as particular personal characteristics that make them more or less likely to explain. Literature on congressional behavior indicates that for members of Congress there are key factors that seem to affect the probability that they will choose to explain the behavior to constituents. First, electoral considerations may dominate members’ concerns (Mayhew, 1974). Kingdon also points to electoral safety as a factor that affects a member’s propensity to explain. He concludes from his interviews that members from safe districts were less likely to mention explaining than those at risk (1981, p. 49).

Consistency is also important. If a member revises his or her policy positions, he may be in danger of being perceived as “getting too far away from the district” (Fenno 1978, p. 144-45). Consequently, votes that are inconsistent with each other may provoke members to explain why their overall policy stances have not changed.

The propensity for a member to explain his or her votes is affected by characteristics of his or her district. Fenno goes into great length about how a member’s district affects home style (1978). Many practical considerations about the district would also affect the propensity to explain. Since members from more homogeneous districts are themselves most like their district, these members are likely to vote in ways that their district agrees and thus the votes will require less explanation (Fenno, 1978, p. 142). Similarly, Kingdon notes that urban members refer to explaining less than members from small towns (1981, p. 49). While he does not offer speculation of why this is the case, it may be simply that urban districts are less homogenous than small towns. Also, media
forces may come into play. The extent to which the member’s district is congruent with media markets may affect the amount of coverage that the district receives about the member’s Washington behavior (Lipinski, 1998). Consequently, if the press does not reach a member’s district efficiently, it is not a likely medium for a member’s explanations. Lipinski finds that members in low congruence districts used district-wide newsletters, alternatives to the public press, to publicize their positions on several key issues (1998, p. 72). While district-level variables would be important to include in an analysis of the House of Representatives as these other studies have done, they are not as applicable to the Senate. Because Senate districts, encompassing entire states, are difficult to differentiate from one another in ways comparable to the House studies described here, these variables are not included in the analysis in this research.

Characteristics of the members might also affect their propensity to explain. Kingdon notes that members with higher seniority referred to explaining less than more junior members (1981, p. 49). However, Hess’ study on media relations in the Senate indicates that for leadership, members with more prestigious positions are more likely to be targeted by the press than those lower in the hierarchy (Hess 1986, p. 44). Consequently, there may be independent and counteractive effects of seniority and leadership on the propensity to offer vote explanations in the public press. Bill sponsorship or co-sponsorship might also increase the propensity for members to explain. Of course, members who are signed on as co-sponsors would have an enhanced credit-claiming opportunity when their bill is victorious. Members who are co-sponsors might also have more blame to manage when their prized legislation fails passage. Consequently, overall, we would expect to see sponsors explain their votes at higher
rates, regardless of the outcome of the vote. The literature points to three main factors that affect a member’s propensity to explain: the importance of the bill, the member’s electoral concerns, and characteristics of the member and his or her district.

Dimensions of Explanations

All explanations are not equal. Previous scholars have established several typologies of types of explanations and their disparate effects on recipients. These scholars have proposed typologies including a wide range of categories (see Sykes and Matza 1957, Scott and Lyman 1968, Goffman 1971, Schlenker 1980, Tedeschi and Reiss 1980, Tetlock 1985, Schonbach 1990, McGraw 2001), but four main categories are agreed upon: denial, confession, excuse, and justification. These studies then use those categories to form the basis of experimental analysis of the effects of the explanations on evaluations of the speaker. While extremely useful in this sense, because each type indicates a different degree of responsibility and negativity that the speaker is accepting, they are not as useful to examine the antecedents of the explanations. There simply is not a theoretical basis to derive expectations of how much responsibility a member of Congress will accept for his behavior or how negative he will admit that they event is. Further, these typologies were developed for blame-management explanations and are not as easy to translate to positive events, those credit-claiming opportunities discussed widely in the congressional literature. Consequently, this study will focus on two different dimensions of the explanation: what is being explained and what motivates the explanation.
Members not only explain their own votes, “I voted for the bill because it would do great things for the district,” but they also explain the decision that Congress as a body has made, “the Senate failed to pass the bill because the legislation was blocked by the opposition party.” Members also have several purposes for issuing their explanations. They may intend to claim credit for the behavior or deflect blame. Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, members have several outlets at their disposal for issuing the explanation. Each media outlet reaches a slightly different audience, requires a different amount of effort on the part of the member, and enables the member to have a different extent of control over his or her portrayal.

- Personal and Institutional Explanations

Previous work has made distinctions between types of explanations in terms of the explanation’s ability to mitigate or aggravate the predicament (excuses, denials, confessions, and justifications) (e.g., Chanley 1994, McGraw 1991, Schonbach 1990). What this work does not do, however, is examine closely whose behavior is being explained or it is restricted to explanations for a single individual’s behavior. In the congressional arena, this distinction between personal and institutional explanations is particularly important to make since constituents receive information about both the behavior of their individual member and also the behavior of the institution as a body, even though the constituent only chooses the member from his or her own district. This study will make distinctions between explanations that are given for a person’s behavior
as an individual (personal explanations) and those that are made by a member for the behavior of the Senate as a body (institutional explanations).

In the congressional politics literature, individual (or personal) explanations have been treated most predominately (eg. Fenno 1978; Kingdon 1989; Bianco 1994). In these explanations, the official is making a statement about how she as an individual behaved. For example, in his *Congressional Record* statement regarding the U.S.-China Relations Act, Senator Abraham (R-MI) said the “best course for our nation is to join with the other nations of the world in accepting China . . . .That is why I voted for [PNTR]” (146 Cong Rec S8812). By issuing an individual-level explanation, members of Congress seek to claim credit (Mayhew 1974) or manage (or avoid) blame for their behavior (Fenno 1978; Kingdon 1989). The individual explanations in this study concern how a member of the U.S. Senate chose to vote on a particular piece of legislation.

The notion of institutional explanations for congressional behavior comes most directly from studies of congressional approval which demonstrate that the public has a higher approval for individual members of Congress than for Congress as an institution (Fenno 1975; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). Fenno argues that members “run for Congress, by running against Congress.” He makes the distinction between statements that members make about themselves and those that they make about the institution of which they are a part. Fenno argues, however, that members are more likely to use explanatory opportunities to discuss their own behavior rather than to talk about the institution (1978, pp. 140-41). He says that members are willing to defend their own votes, but when it comes to defending Congress as a whole, “the institution [the U.S. House] bleeds from 435 separate cuts” (Fenno 1978, p. 168). Lipinski has directly
examined members’ statements about Congress in a general context (1998). I argue that members do not ignore the institution when they give explanations. For example, in response to debate on the U.S.-China Relations Act, Senator Byrd (D-WV) said, “I believe that the Senate is about to make a grave mistake” because there is “more than ample evidence that to grant PNTR to China at this time is very unwise” (146 Cong Rec S. 8682). Members not only make general statements about Congress as a body, but they explain the behavior of Congress as a body, often by laying blame for the outcome of a specific vote on the membership as a whole or on a particular group of members (Willey 1998).

The variables that we would expect to affect the use of the personal versus the institutional explanation overlap to some extent, but their relationship with the propensity for the member to offer an explanation in the public press differ such that they should be modeled independently. Personal and institutional explanations serve distinct purposes for the member, and while they both serve to claim credit or deflect blame, the target of this credit or blame is different. With a personal explanation, the member can only hope to improve his or her own rapport with the constituency of interest. Institutional explanations, however, affect constituency perceptions of the member herself and also the image of the body of members. With these explanations of the aggregate decision, a member is able to compare and contrast her own behavior with the devious “other” party to set her behavior apart from the other members. Further, an institutional explanation affords the member the opportunity to herald the unity of a congressional decision to illustrate the power of the member within the institution (Fenno 1978). So, while we would expect many of the predictive variables to be the same for the two levels of
explanations, we would expect the variables’ effects on the propensity to offer such an explanation to be different.

- Purpose of the Explanation

Members can give explanations for several different reasons. The dimension discussed in this study is that of credit claiming or blame managing. Members may explain their votes to engage in what Mayhew has termed “credit claiming” (1974). That is, the purpose of the explanation is to draw attention to the good things that the member has done for the district, country, etc. and convey a sense that he was at the least partially responsible for the outcome. The types of things for which members claim credit may differ by district. Yiannakis (1982) points to the propensity for members from poorer districts to focus on credit claiming for particularized benefits while members from more affluent districts may perceive their district’s wishes to be that the member has positions on the major, national issues of the day. Members do not simply interpret positive events, however. For negative events, members may explain their votes in order to deflect or avoid blame. Members may do so by blaming others for the negative outcome for which they are being blamed, or expect to be blamed (eg., Antaki 1981). These blame-managing explanations are especially likely to come from members if they are pressed by the media or an electoral challenger to give an explanation for negative behavior.
Source of the Explanation

As discussed in the previous chapter, members have a variety of outlets in which they can explain their Washington behavior. They can issue press releases directly to the local press or through a press gallery. Members often post these press releases on their official web page. Members can give statements to newspaper or television reporters who call and can themselves call press conferences to gather reporters together. They can also appear on television and radio talk shows. Members’ floor statements are recorded in the *Congressional Record* for all to see. Members can use their franking privilege to send mass mailings to constituents to discuss their Washington activities. Finally, members make public appearances back in the district and in Washington to discuss their legislative efforts. This study will examine explanations on two dimensions (personal and institutional), given to achieve two purposes (credit claiming and blame management), and issued through a variety of media outlets (press releases, newspaper coverage, mass mailings, and the *Congressional Record*).

Methods

This study examines Senators’ explanations of their votes using content analysis of their public statements regarding three votes: the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act (5/20/99), the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Bill (2/2/00), and the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 (PNTR) (9/19/00). The bills provide a variety of issue areas by including social, fiscal, and foreign policy and involve very disparate constituency concerns. They are taken
from the same Congress in order to provide continuity in the senators who are being analyzed. The analysis is limited to the Senate for several reasons. First, previous studies of explanations have been limited to the House. Consequently, this study is able to test the hypotheses which seem to hold for the House on the Senate. Second, studies of congressional media suggest that members of the Senate receive more coverage than those in the House. If we are to observe members of Congress issuing explanations in the press, we should expect to see them foremost among senators. Finally, the Senate is a unique governing body because its members have staggered terms. The Senate enables us to look at members at varying distances from reelection to examine the influence of election concerns on members’ explanations while holding other contextual factors, such as the bill in question, constant.

This study turns directly to the members’ statements in several media outlets to investigate the propensity for members to offer personal and institutional explanations for their votes. Such an analysis has several added benefits. First, archival research is a required method for examining the statements given by the entire Congress. Interviews with all 535 members would be cumbersome in the least and probably logistically impossible. Archival research has the benefit of examining the objective record of members’ statements without the biases that interviews with individual members would bring. While interviews such as those conducted by Fenno (1978) and Bianco (1994) have the advantage of speaking directly to members to assess their motivations, they cannot examine the record of explanations as received by the American public in the way that archival analysis can.
Second, archival analysis of members’ explanations has not been conducted until very recently (Willey 1998; Loomis 1999; McGraw, Anderson, Willey 2000). While the analysis is certainly time intensive and requires careful consideration in coding the materials carefully, the materials are increasingly available through Lexis/Nexis and other archives. Third, archival analysis can provide new information about members’ explanations such as what type of explanations members typically offer, when members give explanations, how many members offer explanations, how many explanations members give, to what audiences members offer explanations, and many other questions. This information is interesting in its own right as we examine the ways that members frame votes in different ways and to different parts of the constituency.

Data Sources

Members’ statements were gathered through an on-line Lexis/Nexis search of state newspapers and Congressional Record statements as well as a search of members’ press releases regarding the legislation. Members’ newsletters sent to constituents were also gathered for the periods of the legislation of interest. Only recently has such a widespread collection of press coverage been made possible through on-line sources.

For the newspaper search, all stories from one month before the Senate vote to one month after the vote were collected. This time frame allows for statements made by Senators both before and after the roll call, but which were directly relevant to the bill itself and not the general topic of the legislation, to be gathered. The large majority of

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5 For a similar technique on members’ position taking, see Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn (1998).
6 For a similar data-collection approach, see McGraw, Anderson, and Willey (2000).
statements found, however, were given within a few days of the vote. For each search, the Lexis/Nexis news archive was searched state-by-state for keywords relating to the bill in question and “Senate.” Only stories that included quotations from members about the vote in question were counted as explanations.7 The quote was coded as an explanation if the member both discussed what was being explained (his or the Senate’s vote) and why the behavior occurred. Simply announcing that the Senate or senator voted a certain way does not give a reason for the behavior and does not suggest any type of credit claiming or blame managing (ie., “The following senators voted against the Juvenile Justice Act . . .”). Telling the constituency why a behavior occurred (ie., “the Senate was sharply divided”) without describing the behavior does not qualify as an explanation because there is no target for the recipient to judge accountable for the behavior. The list of newspapers searched is included in Appendix A.

All references to the bills in question in the Congressional Record were collected using the Library of Congress’ legislative information service, Thomas. The Congressional Record includes the members’ floor statements and articles and other matters that they asked be read into the Record. For each bill, the text of the Record was searched for the bill number and all sections including statements about that bill were coded. The Record provides somewhat of a coding challenge because much of the testimony, as to be expected, is framed at persuading other members to take their position. Thus, in many statements members are not explaining either their own or the

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7 Including only quotations probably decreases the number of explanations found in newspaper coverage because the press might truncate a statement that was originally given as an explanation into a simple statement of fact. This decision to include only quotations limits the number of explanations found in news coverage, but errs on the side of caution by not including paraphrased statements that might have been misinterpreted into explanations by the press.
Senate’s vote, but they are explaining the merits of the bill. Only statements that were explanations of how the speaker did or will vote or speculations by the member of how the Senate did or will vote were coded as explanations of the vote.

Press releases, a direct source for members’ statements, were collected from the Senators’ official web pages. Today, every member of the Senate has a web site and all but two maintain an archive of press releases on the site.\(^8\) Members archive their press releases for a variety of time periods; some maintain an ongoing archive while others only post press releases from the previous three months.\(^9\) Hess also notes that press releases are an important outlet for credit claiming by members (1991). As elections near, these credit-claiming press releases may become more prevalent, according to Hess (1991, p. 83). He also notes that press releases are used by members to explain their votes (Hess 1991, p. 85). As with the other sources, all press releases which mentioned the legislation in question were gathered and then coded for the presence, type, and presumed purpose of explanations therein.

Members’ newsletters that were sent out under the franking privilege were also gathered. While no systematic record of individual letters to constituents is kept, Senators are required to file a quarterly report with the Secretary of the Senate which includes copies of all mass-mailings\(^10\) and the target group to which each was sent.

\(^8\) Ernest Hollings (D-SC) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) provide position statements but not press releases on their webpages as of 7/1/00.
\(^9\) In the analysis that follows, press release statements that were not posted on a given bill because the member did not post releases on any bill from that time period were coded as missing since at the time the vote was taken, or shortly after, there may have been press release explanations for the bill available to the public (and the press) through the website but this information was censored at the time the data were gathered.
\(^10\) as defined in section 3210(a)(6)(E)2 of title 39, United States Code
These newsletters are kept on file and are available to the public.\(^{11}\) Senate Rule XL also forbids members from sending mass mailing within 60 days of an election in which the member is a candidate unless the election is uncontested. For the bills in question, all newsletters sent by senators during the year in which the bill was voted on were gathered. Few senators use this outlet to communicate with constituents, however. In 1999, only twenty-seven senators sent bulk mail. Many of these were specifically targeted to veterans or elderly constituents. Some were legislative updates while others were announcing town meetings to be held in the district. Those which mention the legislation under consideration in this study are discussed in the chapters that follow.

There is little discussion in the literature about how Senators might use these media outlets differently. While press releases, newsletters, and floor statements are issued directly from the members, the press itself may be the initiator of newspaper coverage. In his classic work, Congress and the News Media, however, Robert Blanchard indicates that newspapers often quote directly from members’ press releases (1974). Lipinski’s survey of House members’ offices indicates that members use media (press releases, mailings, and public appearances) equally and that it is the staff’s job to make sure that they present the same image in each medium (1998, p. 37). Yiannakis (1982) examines members’ press releases and newsletters, but does not distinguish between the two in the analysis.

It is likely that press releases will focus on positive behavior while newspaper statements focus on negative behavior. Since members initiate press releases, they are

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\(^{11}\) The newsletters are archived at the Office of Public Records, Hart Office Building 232. The author would like to give special thanks to Karen Paul and Elizabeth Miller for the help in collecting the newsletters for analysis.
naturally likely to put a positive spin on their contents. The press, however, may not be so benevolent. Weinberger notes that newspaper coverage of members “will likely consist of a wide-ranging survey of multiple congressional districts, with an emphasis on nefarious behavior” (1998, p. 99). He does not comment, however, on how coverage of the Senate may differ. Robinson (1981) concurs that the press has a negative focus when it comes to covering Congress. The analysis in the chapters that follow will discuss differences found between these media. Statements were coded as having a credit-claiming purpose if the member was describing his behavior in a positive light and a blame-managing purpose if the member was describing his behavior as a response to criticism, real or anticipated. More discussion of the variables and how they were coded will follow.

Variables and Hypotheses

The chapters that follow report the results of a quantitative model of the propensity for a U.S. Senator to offer explanations for their votes on the Juvenile Justice Act, Bankruptcy Reform Act, and the U.S.-China Relations Act (PNTR). The review of the literature points to three main categories of variables which will be included in this analysis and hypotheses that are associated with each.

First, the importance of the bill\(^\text{12}\) for the member is expected to affect the member's propensity to explain. The greater the victory for the member, the more credit he is likely to claim. A member who votes against a bill which would please his

\(^{12}\) By “importance” of the bill, I am referring to the bill’s importance to a member’s constituency relative to other members, rather than the importance of the legislation relative to other pieces of legislation.
constituents or who votes for a bill of which her constituents are opposed is likely to anticipate blame to manage. Ideally, we would measure the importance of the bill by including a direct measure of constituency opinion on the issue. This type of measure is problematic for several reasons, however. First, state-level survey data are not available for all states on all issues. While they are available for certain issue areas, the applicability of a general question on gun control, for example, is questionable when related to a Senator's vote on a specific justice bill provision. Further, research indicates that the geographic constituency (in this case, a state) might not be the constituency that the member takes into account when contemplating legislation (Fenno 1978, Bishin 2001). Consequently, the models presented here do not include direct measures of geographical constituency opinion. Instead, they focus on a more central constituency, different for each bill.

To adequately measure the importance of the bill, several measures are used. First, research has given mixed support for the effect of Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions on members’ votes (Snyder 1992).\footnote{For studies on the elusive effects of PAC contributions on roll-call voting behavior, see J.I. Selberman & G. C. Durden (1976), "Determining Legislative Preferences on the Minimum Wage: An Economic Approach." \textit{Journal of Political Economy} 84: 317; Henry W. Chappell (1981). "Campaign Contributions and Voting on the Cargo Preference Bill: A comparison of Simultaneous Models." \textit{Public Choice}, 36: 301; Henry Chappell (1982). "Campaign Contributions and Congressional Voting: A Simultaneous Probit-Tobit Model. \textit{Review of Economics and Statistics} 62: 77 and others.} Stratmann (1998) provides some evidence that the timing of PAC contributions indicates that the PACs are interested not only in aiding in the election of favored candidates, but in influencing members' legislative decisions. Further, Box-Steffensmeier and Grant (1999) demonstrate that, at least in the House, PACs invest in members who are effective legislators. It is logical, consequently, that members who received greater amounts of
money from parties interested in the bill at hand may be more likely to explain the votes on these issues to those donors in order to demonstrate their effectiveness as legislators and garner support for future efforts. The effect of such contributions on members' explanations, however, has been left untested. The models that follow will test whether these contributions are evident in members' public statements. The models include a measure of the amount of money a member has received from issue-related PACs in the 1996, 1998, and 2000 election cycles.\textsuperscript{14} The contributions were reported to the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) by the members and compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics. The Center reports the amount of each contribution and includes lists of donors who are dedicated to particular causes (donors for the issues discussed in this study are reported in Appendix B).

A second measure of the importance of the bill is the saliency of the issue to the member's district. This measure is the number of news articles on a given state on the issue in question during the time period of interest. The same newspapers were searched for this measure as were used in the content analysis of newspapers. This measure, however, does not restrict the search to articles pertaining to the Senate and the issue. Members who represent districts with more news coverage of the issue are expected to explain their votes on the issue.

The member's vote itself might also be an important indicator of the importance of the bill for the member. A member who has voted contrary to a majority of members might be more likely to explain this countermajoritarian behavior. Consequently, the member's vote is included in the analysis. The vote is also expected to interact with the

\textsuperscript{14} Snyder (1992) indicates that it is the repetitive nature of contributions over time that is as key as a single PAC donation to a member.
importance of the bill. Members who receive more money from PACs, but who vote against the bill, may have to manage blame. Members who receive more money but who vote in favor of the bill may take this opportunity to claim credit in front of their benefactors. Similarly members from districts where the bill is particularly salient, and who vote in favor of it, may take the opportunity to claim credit for the actions. Those from districts where the bill is particularly salient, but who vote against it, might remain silent on the vote in hopes that no one challenges the decision.

A member's electoral concerns are operationalized in several ways. Members who faced a primary challenger in their previous election may be more likely to face a challenger in the next. This would make them more vulnerable to defeat than other members and also parties to more contentious elections in the media spotlight. A member with a lower margin of victory in her previous election may be more vulnerable in the next and, consequently, more intent on claiming credit and managing blame.\footnote{Margin of victory is logged in the models that follow to account for the diminishing return of additional vote percentage at higher levels.} By examining the Senate, we have the unique ability to look at the effect of the distance from election on the propensity to explain. Members whose election draws nearer are thought to be more conscious of their district's perceptions of them and more likely to take credit-claiming opportunities when they present themselves. They are also more likely to be in the media spotlight when they cast negative votes and called upon by challengers to explain themselves. The distance to election is operationalized as a series
of three dummy variables (one which is excluded from the analysis) representing each of the election cycles of which a member could be a part.\textsuperscript{16}

Several characteristics of the members are also included in the models. The member's Senate \textit{seniority} is represented by the number of years that the member has served in the chamber. Members with more seniority are expected to give fewer explanations (Kingdon 1981). A member's \textit{leadership} status is represented by a dummy variable coded 1 if the member is a member of the Senate leadership.\textsuperscript{17} Members in leadership positions are expected to be more accessible to the media and, thus, more likely to issue explanations (Kedrowski 1996; Hess 1986). Bill \textit{sponsorship} or co-sponsorship is also likely to increase the propensity for a member to offer an explanation. Members who signed on as sponsors or co-sponsors of legislation in question are represented by a 1 on the sponsorship dummy variable. The descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis are included in Appendix C.

\textbf{Content Analysis}

Content was coded to determine which types of explanations Senators offered for their votes on the Juvenile Justice Act, Bankruptcy Reform Act, and U.S. China Relations

\textsuperscript{16} Members in the first cycle would face election the soonest (2000); members in the second cycle would have terms ending in 2002; the excluded category includes senators who are furthest away from reelection (those elected in 1998, facing reelection in 2004).

\textsuperscript{17} The Senate leadership as defined by the Senate web page includes the Democratic and Republican leaders, the Democratic and Republican whips, the Republican conference chair, and the chairmen of the Democratic and Republican Policy Committee.
Act. First, the content was coded for the presence of an explanation. As noted above, only direct quotations were counted in newspaper coverage. Explanations were coded on the following dimensions:

1. **To-be-explained outcome:**
   a. Personal – the member is explaining her own vote
   b. Institutional – the member is explaining the Senate’s decision as a group
   c. Both – the member explains his own vote and the Senate’s decision

2. **Objective of the explanation:**
   a. Credit claiming – the member proclaims victory for his own or the Senate’s decision
   b. Blame managing – the member expresses a sense of regret for his own or the Senate’s decision

The most clear-cut of these dimensions is the to-be-explained outcome. Members often clearly differentiate between explaining their own vote and explaining the institution’s choice. If the member used singular pronouns “I,” “he,” “she” (press releases are often written in third person), the explanation was coded as personal. For example, in a press release regarding the Bankruptcy Reform Act, Senator Levin comments, “I voted for that bill because I thought it was well-balanced reform bill [sic] that would discourage abuse of the system” (2/2/00). If the member used plural pronouns “we,” “they,” or referred to the actions of “the Senate,” the explanation was coded as institutional. In a press release on the China PNTR Bill, Senator Frist (R-TN) remarked that “Today’s vote to grant permanent trade relations to China supports America’s best interests, as well as those of our farmers and manufacturers” (9/19/00). Statements which referred to both the behavior of the individual member and the Senate as a whole were coded in a separate

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18 For all sources, the unit of analysis was the member’s complete statements. In news articles, this is the member’s quotes in an article; in press releases, it is the entire release; in the Congressional Record, it is the speech.
“both” category. For press releases, newsletters, and Congressional Record statements, the predominant explanation was noted. This distinction is impossible to make with news articles, however, since the predominance of the personal or institutional explanation is up to the discretion of the reporter and not the senator.

The objective of the explanation must be inferred, rather than observed directly from the content analysis. Members who give explanations in which they were pleased with the outcome and their part in it, were coded as claiming credit. These members use phrases such as “I am extremely pleased that the Senate approved . . .” (Boxer, D-CA, 5/18/99). Members who expressed some sort of regret for the decision, either their own regret or anticipated blame from another source, were coded as having blame management as the purpose of the explanation. For example, in response to the passage of the Juvenile Justice Act, Senator Bob Smith (R-NH) explained in a statement in the New York Times (5/21/99) that the bill passed because “the other side skillfully used terrible tragedies to change people’s votes.” This was coded without regard to how the member voted on the bill to prevent inferring the purpose from the probable predicament rather than the member’s rhetoric. For all dimensions, example statements that justify the coding were noted on the coding form.

Conclusions

Literature from both psychology and political science points to several factors that may prompt senators to explain the votes. The importance of the bill, electoral considerations, and characteristics of the members themselves affect the propensity for
the member to explain a vote. These explanations may take several forms, including personal explanations and institutional explanations. The factors that prompt these specific types of explanations will be examined in the case studies that follow. Because members have several media in which they can explain their votes, this study examines press releases, newspaper articles, Congressional Record statements, and mass mailings to determine how members use these media to explain their roll-call votes. The content analysis of these media provides for a measure of the propensity for the member to offer an explanation in each medium and several dimensions of the explanations: the type of explanation (personal or institution) and the purpose of the explanation (credit claiming or blame managing). These dimensions and the uses of various media will be discussed with reference to three bills before Senate of the 106th Congress in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 4

THE 1999 JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM ACT (S. 254)

To directly examine the propensity for members to explain their votes, this study examines three pieces of legislation before the 106th Congress. In this chapter, I will discuss senators’ explanations concerning the vote on S. 254, the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Accountability and Rehabilitation Act of 1999. The chapter will show that the bill’s importance, the members’ electoral concerns, and other member characteristics affect the propensity for senators to give explanations that both claim credit and manage blame for their votes. It will also show that media outlets reflect explanations differently with the preponderance of credit-claiming explanations appearing on the Senate floor and in press releases while news coverage reports blame-managing explanations.

The debate over juvenile crime legislation is not a new one. For most of the 105th Congress, legislation aimed at curbing juvenile crime sat untouched in the Senate. The bill was met with opposition from both the Left, who thought the bill was too tough on children, and the Right, who thought the bill would lead to gun-control legislation. As a result, the juvenile crime legislation went nowhere. Nowhere, that is, until the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in April 1999.
Exactly one month after the Columbine shootings, the Senate voted to pass a bill aimed at curbing juvenile crime. *Congressional Quarterly* attributes the passage of the legislation that had been defeated soundly in the Senate the year before to the perception of “galvanized public sentiment” (Carney 1999, p. 1204). Debate in the Senate began on May 11, 1999, and concluded with a vote on May 20. As passed by the Senate, the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1999 included provisions to ban the importation of high-capacity ammunition clips, increase the minimum age for handgun purchase from 18 to 21, change sentencing guidelines for juvenile offenders, and require the sale of a lock or storage box with the sale of each gun. Vice President Gore’s tie-breaking vote added a provision to amend the Brady Bill to require background checks at gun shows. After Senate passage, the struggle was not over for proponents of the reform. House GOP leaders were poised to block restrictive gun-control legislation. Republicans worried that the bill would jeopardize the public’s perception of the party’s stance against gun control (Carney 1999, p. 1205).

While S. 254 passed in the Senate 73-25\(^\text{19}\) on May 20, 1999, the bill was not without controversy. The House split the bill into two; HR 1501 included the juvenile justice provisions and passed 287-139 in July 1999, but HR 2122 contained the gun-control provisions and was defeated 147-280. The Senate bill included a provision regarding ammunition clips that would result in an increase in revenue. Since revenue bills must begin in the House, the House leaders returned the bill to the Senate. In the end, the bill languished in conference for over a year until the Congress ended without

\(^{19}\) Senator Hollings (D-SC) and McCain (R-AZ) did not vote on S. 254.
another vote. However, the Senate’s initial vote on S. 254 provides an interesting test of
the uses of explanations by members of Congress.

The Juvenile Justice Bill provides an incentive for senators to explain their votes
to several different audiences. We could expect that senators might use explanations to
sway members of the House to vote for a comparable measure, to claim credit from the
public for their success in being tough on crime, and to avoid blame for jeopardizing
second amendment rights. Further, because similar legislation had come up a year
before, we might see senators explaining the timeliness of the legislation or explain their
shift from one position to another over the course of the year.

To investigate the factors prompting explanations of senators’ votes regarding the
Juvenile Justice Act of 1999, press releases, newspaper statements, floor statements, and
mass mailings from the senators were collected. Press releases were collected from
senators’ homepages, and newspaper statements were gathered using Lexis/Nexis
archives of state newspapers. Floor statements were gathered from the Congressional
Record. Senators’ mass mailings were collected from the Senate Office of Public
Records. On the Juvenile Justice Act, twenty-eight members issued press releases,
twenty-nine members gave statements in newspapers, forty members gave explanations
on the floor of the Senate, and three members explained their votes on the bill in their
mass mailings to constituents. See Table 4.1. A total of sixty-two senators explained the
vote on the Juvenile Justice Act. Several members offered multiple statements or
statements in multiple outlets about the vote on the bill.
Table 4.1: Number of Senators Offering Personal and/or Institutional Explanations for the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Press Releases</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspaper Statements</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Congressional Record</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6(^{20})</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senate Bill 254 was read for the first time in the Senate on January 20, 1999, and debate began on May 11. The eight days of ensuing debate resulted in over 300 pages of floor statements published in the Congressional Record. Thirty-three senators explained their position on the bill or its amendments during the eight days of debate. These explanations were almost exclusively personal explanations aimed at persuading other members of the Senate to take the speaker’s side on the issue at hand. The senators made extensive reference to provisions of the bill, or previous legislation, that they authored. This suggests a powerful effect of sponsorship on the propensity to explain.

Unlike the press releases and newspaper statements, the floor statements were geared toward an internal, congressional audience, rather than the public. Senators made

\(^{20}\) With the exception of one Senator who offered both a personal and institutional explanation in the same statement, the personal explanations and institutional explanations that senators gave in the Congressional Record came from separate statements.
many references to the work of other members either for or against their positions. The press releases and newspaper statements rarely refer to other members’ efforts while floor statements often refer to other members in quite colorful language. For instance, Senator Feinstein says that Senator Byrd’s “intelligence is only exceeded by his gentility and courtliness” (146 Cong. Rec. S5345, 5/14/99). Of course, this is to be expected since the floor statements are essentially a transcript of live debate, they are inherently interactive, where press releases and newspaper statements are issued by individual members.

The number of senators who offer floor statements cannot represent the total number who wanted to offer floor statements. The leadership make it very clear throughout the debate that the Senate was intent on finishing the legislation quickly in order to get to other business before the Memorial Day recess. Consequently, some members who would have liked to offer statements may not have been given floor time to do so.

Discussion of the bill began again during the summer when the House began to consider juvenile justice legislation. Twelve senators spoke about the bill as it moved through the House and to conference. The statements given after the bill had passed the Senate were qualitatively different than the ones offered before the vote. Statements given after the Senate vote were primarily institutional explanations directed at the House which these senators perceived to be stalling the movement of the bill late in the session of the Congress. For example, Senator Kennedy (D-MA) remarked in the Congressional Record that the Senate had passed a great bill, but “each new tragedy is a fresh indictment of our failure to act responsibly” and bring the bill to conference (146 Cong. Rec. S. 7862, 6/30/99). In the spirit of credit claiming, however, these statements
generally triumph the bipartisan nature of the Senate bill by saying things like, when the
“body rolls up its sleeves and gets to work, we can make significant progress” (Sen.
Leahy (D-VT), 146 Cong. Rec. S.9459, 7/28/99) and that the “Senate walked ‘hand-in-
hand’ to pass it” (Boxer, D-CA, 146 Cong. Rec. S. 7858, 6/30/99). Members’ floor
statements published in the Congressional Record illustrate the members’ aims at the
internal audience in this medium.

As expected, members use media differently. While previous research points to
the prolific use of newsletters, particularly by members of the House, only three senators
issued statements in their newsletters that were relevant to the Juvenile Justice Bill.
Grams and Burns sent newsletters specifically to gun owners, constituents in favor of the
Second Amendment, and those interested in juvenile justice. In his newsletter sent to
31,401 gun owners, Senator Rod Grams (R-MN) includes a detailed account of his
positions on legislation regarding gun control and assures readers that he will “continue
to work to protect the sacred principles of the Second Amendment.” In his “Second
Amendment Update,” sent to 6,389 pro-Second Amendment constituents, Grams outlines
his positions on several pieces of legislation, and again affirms his commitment to
Second Amendment rights. Similarly, in his newsletter sent to 5,524 constituents
interested in juvenile justice, Conrad Burns (R-MT) describes the Senate’s actions on the
Juvenile Justice Bill and his opposition to gun-control amendments. Both of these
Senators aim their newsletters at friendly audiences by sending them to a targeted mailing
list.

Barbara Boxer (D-CA) included a survey about gun-control legislation in her
“Boxer Bulletin” which was sent to 336,211 constituents. The survey includes a
statement about the efforts that Boxer has made to promote gun-control provisions. She also discusses education, energy costs, and the environment in the newsletter. Few conclusions can be drawn from the newsletters because there were so few. Certainly the members who mentioned the Juvenile Justice Act in their franked mail were more outspoken than many other members on the issue, but other members who were at the forefront of the gun debate did not use mass mailings as an outlet for explanations.

In press releases and newspaper statements, Senators offered explanations for both their own vote and the Senate’s decision on the Juvenile Justice Act. As illustrated in Table 4.1, in their press releases, 13 members offered explanations for their own votes (personal explanations). Six additional members offered explanations for the Senate vote (institutional explanations). Nine members explained both their own and the Senate’s vote on the Juvenile Justice Reform Act in press releases. In news articles, eleven members explained their own votes. Eleven members explained the Senate’s vote. An additional seven members explained both their own and the Senate’s vote in news articles. This is evidence that members not only claim credit and manage blame for their own behavior, but for the behavior of the institution as well.

Contrary to some previous reports (Fenno 1975; Cook 1979), Senators’ institutional explanations were not predominately negative. Consistent with Lipinski (1998, p. 122), the data for the Juvenile Justice Act show overwhelmingly positive statements about the Senate as a body. For example, Senator Kohl says, “I am pleased that the Senate approved this common sense measure [the Child Handgun Safety Act], and I look forward to it becoming law” (5/18/99). Statements such as these may be targeting members of Congress as much as the public since the House had yet to vote on
juvenile justice legislation and the Senate had not yet approved the final (post-conference) version of the bill. Senator Smith (R-OR) explains that “we’re [the Senate] protecting law-abiding citizens, and we’re going after the dangerous and the deranged that haunt our society” (5/20/99). Members’ press releases show their generally positive statements about the institution. Of the twenty-eight members who issued press releases, twenty-five of them were seeking credit. Among the six senators who offered institutional explanations, they were generally very positive, claiming credit for a successful Senate vote.21

The bill is an interesting case because there were so many amendments to the legislation. Some of the amendments added more penalties to juvenile offenders while others toughened gun control. Many members offered explanations that treated one or more of the legislation’s provisions as something to claim credit for, but did not take the heart of the bill into account. For example, Senator Roth issued a press release (5/13/99) stating, “I am pleased that a common sense approach to background checks at gun shows, which I advocated, has finally been achieved.” Perhaps this is not surprising since the parties were divided on which half of the bill they favored; Republicans supported the stiff-penalty-provisions, and Democrats were behind the gun-control measures. In a way, this makes the measure ripe for explanations, particularly from electorally vulnerable members, as almost everyone had a part of it for which they could claim support. Not

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21 Another dimension of explanations that we can consider is whether the reasons evoked in the explanation are internal or external. The reasons that members give for their (and the Senate’s) behavior are both personal and collective. When explaining their own votes, ten press release explanations give personal (unilateral) reasons for voting as they did. Eighteen explanations focus on collective reasons for the senator’s vote. In the institutional explanations, members focus on the “common sense” of the measure, the “responsibility of the Senate to act,” and many mention that the vote was bipartisan.
surprisingly, we find that of the press release explanations, twenty-four senators claimed credit while only four were discernibly seeking to manage blame. See Table 4.2. Of the press release explanations, most used personal explanations to claim credit. Nine members claimed credit for the Senate’s vote. See Table 4.3.

The newspaper statements, however, demonstrate a different motivation for the statements. Senators’ newspaper explanations emphasize their blame management. Eleven members claim credit for their (or the Senate’s) vote while eighteen members manage blame. See Table 4.2. The blame-management explanations are not all institutional, however. While six members gave institutional, blame-managing explanations, six other members give personal, blame-managing explanations and six give explanations both for their own and the Senate’s vote in news coverage. See Table 4.3. We see that members use several media outlets when explaining their votes. They do not all give explanations, however, nor do the senators use the same outlets to broadcast their explanations. The important questions then become, which members are doing the explaining and do different types of members use different media outlets?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Statements</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Number of Senators Claiming Credit or Managing Blame for the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act
Table 4.3: Number of Senators Claiming Credit and Managing Blame with Personal and Institutional Explanations on the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act in Press Releases and Newspaper Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Explains</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRESS RELEASES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWSPAPER COVERAGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A quantitative model was developed to examine the effects of characteristics of members and their districts on the propensity to offer personal and/or institutional explanations for votes on the Juvenile Justice Act. For this analysis, the dependent variable is the presence of an explanation from a member before or after the vote on the bill in any of the four sources (press releases, newspaper, Congressional Record, mass mailings). Thus, the unit of analysis is the Senator and members giving multiple explanations are treated identically in this analysis. A probit model is used because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (1=explain, 0=not explain).

To operationalize the importance of the bill to the member and the district, a measure of the **amount of money** given to the member by the gun lobby in the previous election cycles (1994-1998) is used. This measure, developed by the Center for
Responsive Politics, indicates the amount of money contributed to the member by gun-rights and gun-control organizations. While the measure does not directly capture constituency opinion on the bill, it does reflect the influence of a core group of supporters for the member. Because the Juvenile Justice Act both includes gun-control and crime-control measures, direct measures of constituency opinion were not available. The hypothesis is that members who receive more money from gun-rights or gun-control groups are more likely to explain their votes. A list of the organizations included in this measure of the gun lobby is included in Appendix B. This variable is broken into gun-rights money and gun-control money variables to represent the distinct effects of the different goals of the donating organization. The natural log of the number of dollars donated represents the diminishing effect of each additional dollar at a certain threshold.

A measure of district salience is also included to indicate the amount of attention the issue is getting in the district. The hypothesis is that senators from states where juvenile justice is more salient are more likely to explain their action on the bill. For this measure, the Lexis/Nexis state newspaper archive was searched for the phrase “juvenile justice” (the primary focus of this legislation) in articles and editorials in the period from one month before the bill was under Senate consideration (4/11/99) to one month after

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22 Several proxy measures of constituency opinion have been considered, but did not prove to be workable. In an earlier analysis, the percentage of the member’s state population who hunt with firearms (as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau) was used in the model, but the measure had no statistical effect on the models and is theoretically questionable since hunters are not necessarily opposed to the gun-control provisions of the bill. National surveys such as the NES typically do not have enough respondents from any given state to construct state-level measures of public opinion. Further, they do not include questions on specific pieces of legislation, such as the JJA, which allow the imputation of data for a bill such as this.

23 The contributions variables are transformed log(1 + D) where D is the number of dollars that the group contributed to the member.
the vote (6/20/99), and the measure includes the number of articles retrieved by state. The list of newspapers included in the search is included in Appendix A.

The member’s vote on the bill is included to determine whether members voting in a particular direction are more likely to explain. Members voting against a bill that overwhelmingly passed may be more likely to justify their decision. Members voting in favor of the bill do not inherently need to claim credit for their vote unless the bill is of importance to the member. Consequently, the vote is interacted with measures of PAC contributions and district salience to measure this added effect of having voted in favor of a bill of high importance to the member or the district.

Members whose vote corresponds with the preferences of a PAC supporting them should be less likely to explain their votes than members who vote contrary to PAC contributions. A positive interaction term would indicate that members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely to explain their votes as PAC contributions increase – indicating credit claiming for the vote. A negative interaction term would indicate that members who voted against the bill are more likely to explain than those who voted in favor as PAC contributions increase, suggesting that blame-management strategies prompt explanations. In this model, the interaction term could be included for gun-rights contributions and the vote but not for gun-control contributions because all members who received money from gun-control groups voted in favor of the bill (thus, the interaction term would take on the same values as the gun-control contributions variable).

The vote is also interacted with district salience. A positive interaction effect would indicate that members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely to explain this vote as the salience of the bill increases – evidence of credit claiming. A negative
interaction term would indicate that members who voted against the bill are more likely than members who voted in favor of the bill to explain as the salience of the bill increases. Such an effect would indicate that salience prompts blame-managing behavior among members who vote contrary to constituency interests. The interpretation of the district salience variable in terms of credit claiming and blame management, however, is hampered because we are not certain of the attitudes of the relevant constituency for each member.24

Members’ electoral concerns are operationalized in several ways. Variables are included that represent the member’s distance from election. The Senate provides a unique arena for this type of test because of the staggered nature of their terms of office. Members are coded as one, two, or three cycles away from their next election and dummy variables are included to represent each category (with three cycles as the excluded category). The hypothesis is that members who are closest to their next election will be most likely to offer explanations. These members should be most concerned with impression management – likely to claim credit for positive actions and called to manage blame for negative behavior. The presence of a primary challenger in the member’s previous election is included as a dummy variable to indicate the member’s electoral vulnerability. Similarly, the member’s margin of victory in the previous election is included. This variable is the natural log of the margin to account for the diminishing returns of a greater margin at a certain level. The hypothesis is that a primary challenger

24 If the constituency is opposed to the bill, and the member votes against it, a negative interaction effect would actually indicate credit-claiming behavior on the part of members voting against the Juvenile Justice Act since the member’s vote would have been in agreement with constituency opinion. Given the overwhelming passage of the Juvenile Justice Act, however, we will argue that evidence of supporting members explaining indicates credit claiming while evidence of dissenting members explaining indicates blame management. Taking Sigelman and Walkosz’s (1992) approach, letters-to-the-editor were coded to determine the direction of district opinion, but there were too few letters to get a clear sense of opinion.
will increase the likelihood that a member will explain the vote while a high margin of victory will decrease the propensity for a member to explain.

Several characteristics of the member are also included in the model. Variables are included to represent seniority, the number of years that the member has served in the Senate. The hypothesis is that more senior members are more secure in their positions and are less likely to offer explanations. The leadership variable indicates whether the member was a party leader at the time of the vote. The hypothesis is that members of the Senate leadership are more visible to the press and the public and, consequently, will be called upon to give more explanations than other members. The sponsorship variable indicates whether the member sponsored the bill or one of its amendments. The hypothesis is that members who sponsored the bill or one of its amendments will be likely to claim credit for the success of the bill. For the Juvenile Justice Act, there were eleven sponsors and cosponsors. While it is not expected to affect the propensity for members to offer explanations, the party of the member is also controlled in the models presented below (Democrat=1, Republican=0). Descriptive statistics for all variables used in this analysis are presented in Appendix C.

Appendix D shows the results of correlations between each of the independent variables. There are several substantively interesting relationships between the independent variables. Contributions from gun-rights groups are correlated with bill sponsorship and political party. These contributions are also related to the vote on the bill. The amounts of contributions from gun-control groups, however, do not show a relationship with the vote. All members receiving funds, regardless of the amount, from gun-control groups voted in favor of the Juvenile Justice Act. District salience is also
correlated with the vote on the juvenile justice bill. Generally, the correlations show the independent variables to be related in ways we would expect them to be, but they do not show strong risks for multicollinearity in the models that follow.

An initial look at the bivariate relationships between the independent variables and the propensity for members to explain their vote on the Juvenile Justice Act shows some interesting relationships. The strongest correlations are between explaining the vote and gun-rights contributions and district salience. The correlations are of similar magnitude across outlets with a few notable exceptions. There is a positive correlation between issuing a press release on this bill and being up for reelection in the next cycle. There is a similar correlation for *Congressional Record* statements, but not for newspaper coverage. Bill sponsorship is also correlated with issuing a press release and making a statement on the *Record*, but not newspaper coverage. Newspaper coverage, however, is positively correlated with having had a primary challenger in the previous election.

While partisanship is highly correlated with the vote on the Juvenile Justice Act, it is not statistically related to explaining this vote in any of the sources. Table 4.4 illustrates these relationships. The multivariate models discussed below will further examine the relationships between these independent variables and senators’ propensities to explain the vote on the Juvenile Justice Act.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of the Bill</th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gun Control Contributions(a)</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Rights Contributions</td>
<td>.681</td>
<td>.661</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Salience(a)</td>
<td>.773</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>-.082</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Electoral Concerns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Challenger</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of Victory(a)</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in One Cycle</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Two Cycles</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Three Cycles</td>
<td>-.182</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>-.074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Member Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seniority(a)</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Values are Eta statistics. All other values are Phi statistics.

Table 4.4
Correlations Between Independent Variables and Members’ Explanations in the Congressional Record, Press Releases and Newspaper Coverage
Analysis

Explainers vs. Non-explainers

The probit analysis of the effects of the importance of the bill, electoral concerns, and member characteristics on the propensity for a senator to explain his/her own or the Senate’s vote on the Juvenile Justice Act yields some support for the hypotheses. When press releases, newspaper statements, Congressional Record statements, and mass mailings are included together, several variables have effects on the propensity of a Senator to explain his or her vote. See Table 4.5.

The importance of the bill has an effect on the propensity to explain in several ways. While the correlation analysis shows that the amount of contributions from gun-control groups does not affect the propensity to vote in favor of the bill (since all recipients voted in favor), the amounts of these contributions do affect the propensity that members will explain this affirmative vote. As members receive more contributions from gun-control groups, they are more likely to explain their votes. When media outlets are considered separately, however, we see that this effect is only for explanations given on the floor of the Senate and reported in the Congressional Record. All of the recipients of gun-control money voted in favor of the bill. Since the Juvenile Justice Bill contained provisions that were highly desirable to gun-control groups, it stands to reason that members closely associated with these groups (and recipients of generous support from them) would be major proponents of the legislation especially on the floor of the Senate as they attempt to persuade other members to support the bill. The propensity for gun-
control contributions recipients to explain their votes in favor of the bill on the floor of the Senate demonstrates their credit-claiming efforts. Gun-control contributions do not aid in the prediction of explanations in press releases and as reported in news coverage.
Table 4.5

(Continued)
Table 4.5 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Sources&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Newspapers&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Press Releases&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Congressional Record&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>-.024*</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.017)</td>
<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td><strong>1.361</strong>&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.557*</td>
<td><strong>1.090</strong>&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.467)</td>
<td>(.367)</td>
<td>(.461)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>-.575</td>
<td>.834*</td>
<td>-.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.568)</td>
<td>(.596)</td>
<td>(1.126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>-.146</td>
<td>-.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.455)</td>
<td>(.480)</td>
<td>(.537)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-1.112</td>
<td>-.839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.853)</td>
<td>(3.919)</td>
<td>(3.619)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. * indicates p< .05 one-tailed. ** indicates p< .10 one-tailed.

a. N= 98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).

b. N= 98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill)
   LR chi2 (14) = 26.54,  Prob>chi2 = .0221,  Pseudo R2 = .2263,  Log likelihood = -45.36

c. N= 69 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill; 31 members, including one who did not vote, did not post press releases for this time period).
   LR chi2 (13) = 18.07,  Prob>chi2 = .1547,  Pseudo R2 = .1939,  Log likelihood = -37.558
Several effects of the bill’s importance to different members emerge for specific media outlets but not in the overall model. While contributions from gun-control groups only have an effect on explanations reported in the *Congressional Record*, contributions from gun-rights groups have a negative effect on explanations in the *Congressional Record* and in newspaper coverage. Of course, since gun-rights groups were strongly opposed to the gun-control provisions in the legislation, members who received large contributions from these groups would please the group to vote against the bill. The model shows that members who voted against the Juvenile Justice Act are less likely to explain their votes as the amount of money they received from gun-rights PACs increases. The positive interaction term between the vote and gun-rights contributions in the model with newspaper coverage indicates that members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely than those who voted against it to offer explanations as the contributions of gun-rights groups increase. These members would have behaved contrary to the gun-rights groups’ demands; consequently, explanations of their votes would serve blame-management purposes. This corresponds to the earlier finding that the statements in the newspaper coverage were more geared toward blame management than statements in other media outlets.

District salience does not have a direct effect on the propensity for a member to explain the vote on the Juvenile Justice Act in the full model or when we examine newspaper coverage or the *Congressional Record* separately. Salience does, however, have an effect on the propensity to explain the vote in a press release. Among press release explanations, salience also interacts with the member’s vote. Members who voted in favor of the Juvenile Justice Act are more likely than those who voted against the bill
to explain their votes through press releases as district salience increases. A member from a district where the issue is highly salient who voted in favor of the bill has a predicted probability of .73 explaining in a press release. A member from a similar district who voted against the bill, however, has a predicted probability of only .00. See Table 4.6. This suggests that members are claiming credit for their votes in press releases. As the salience of the bill increases, members who voted in favor of it have more to gain by explaining their behavior to constituents. Members who voted against the bill, however, seem to be hiding from the issue by not explaining the vote in press releases. They may not want to advertise their vote through a press release unless directly challenged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote Yea</th>
<th>Vote Nay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Press Releases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Minimum</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Mean</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Maximum</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspapers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Minimum</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Mean</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience Maximum</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All other variables are held at their mean (modal category) value and for senators who are two cycles away from election.

Table 4.6: Predicted Probability of Explaining the Vote at Different Levels of District Salience

Newspapers show a different pattern. While district salience and members’ votes do not have main effects on the propensity for senators to explain their vote in newspaper coverage, the interaction between the salience of the issue in the district and the senator’s
vote is statistically significant. Members who voted in favor of the Juvenile Justice Act are less likely to explain their votes in news coverage as district salience increases. This further confirms the tendency for news coverage to reflect blame-managing rather than credit-claiming behavior. As district salience increases, newspapers are less likely to print statements from members who supported the Juvenile Justice Act.

The predicted probabilities of explaining the vote in news coverage under different levels of district salience and for members who voted both for and against the bill illustrate the magnitude of the effects of the district salience and the member’s vote on the propensity to explain the Juvenile Justice Act in news coverage. The predicted probabilities show a dramatic difference between members who voted for and those who voted against the bill depending on the salience of the issue in the district. See Table 4.6. When all other variables are held at their mean, members from districts where the issue was the most salient who voted for the bill have a .01 probability of explaining their votes, while members from similar districts who voted against the bill have a .97 probability of explaining their votes in news coverage. Members from states where the issue is of least salience and who voted for the bill have a .42 probability of explaining while those who voted against the bill in these districts have a .56 probability of explaining the vote in news coverage. Consequently, we can see that the interaction between vote and salience has the most effect where the issue is highly salient. This effect makes sense for news coverage where the explanation is not under the control of the member, but rather the media. Newspapers may not give members from districts where the issue is highly salient the opportunity to hide. The media in districts where the issue is covered are more likely to draw on members who voted against the measure.
Members’ electoral concerns also affect their propensity to explain the vote on the Juvenile Justice Act. In the full model, members who were closest to reelection are more likely to explain their votes than those farthest from reelection. Those two cycles away from reelection are not statistically different from those farthest from reelection. Consistently positive across models, this effect is most pronounced in the *Congressional Record* explanations. The predicted probabilities show a marked effect for the closeness of the member to election among *Congressional Record* explanations, particularly among members who voted in favor of the Juvenile Justice Act. Among proponents of the bill, those closest to election have a .52 probability of explaining while those farthest from reelection have a .17 probability of explaining that vote in the *Congressional Record*. See Table 4.7. Among senators who voted against the bill, those closest to reelection are again most likely to explain, (probability = .94) while those farthest from reelection have a probability of explaining of .72, higher still than those closest to reelection who voted for the bill. Consequently, we can see that there is an overall positive effect for closeness to reelection. Members who should be most concerned with impression management, those who are closest to reelection, are indeed most likely to offer statements in their defense. This effect is most pronounced for members who voted in favor of the bill, those who have an opportunity to claim credit for a legislative victory in close proximity to an impending election. These members who supported the bill are increasingly likely to explain this vote as election nears.
Vote yea | Vote Nay
---|---
Election in one cycle\(^a\) | .52 | .94
Election in two cycles | .29 | .84
Election in three cycles | .17 | .72

\(^a\) All other variables are held at their mean (modal category) value and for senators who are two cycles away from election.

Table 4.7: Predicted Probability of Explaining the Vote in the *Congressional Record* at Different Distances from Election

While it does not have an effect in the full model, the presence of a primary challenger in the previous election has an effect on the propensity to explain the Juvenile Justice Act in newspaper coverage. Members who had a primary challenger in the previous election were more likely to explain their vote in news coverage. Those with a primary challenger who voted against the bill have a predicted probability of explaining the vote in news coverage of .67 while those without a primary challenger have a predicted probability of .40. The presence of a primary challenger in the previous election may indicate to newspapers that this member is potentially vulnerable and worthy of extra media attention. The member’s margin of victory in his or her previous election does not have an effect on the propensity to explain this vote in any of the models. Overall, the models demonstrate that members who are closest to election are more likely to offer explanations. Newspapers are likely to call on those who had primary challengers in the previous election.

Characteristics of the members themselves also affect their propensity to explain. The most prominent of these effects is for members who were sponsors of the legislation.
In the full model and in each of the media outlets modeled separately, members who were bill sponsors were more likely to explain their votes than those who were not sponsors. In news coverage, sponsorship increases the probability of explaining from .27 to .48 among members who voted in favor of the bill. In press releases, sponsorship increases the probability of explaining from .21 to .61. Similarly, in the *Congressional Record*, the probability of explaining is .29 for nonsponsors and .54 for sponsors. See Table 4.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-sponsor</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Congressional Record</em></td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Predicted Probability of Explaining the Vote Among Sponsors and Non-Sponsors

In news coverage, two other characteristics of members impact the propensity to explain. More senior members are less likely to offer explanations in news coverage. Party leaders, however, are more likely than nonleaders to offer explanations in news coverage. Of course, party leaders would be more visible to the media given their status in the Senate. The effect for seniority does not necessarily indicate that newspapers interview more senior members less often, but that the statements that they print from these members are not vote explanations. The statements that party leaders give the media are generally institutional explanations indicating why the Senate, under their leadership, was able to pass the legislation.
These models confirm findings from the qualitative analysis that press releases are used more for credit claiming where members choose to trumpet their successes. Newspaper coverage, however, may be directed at members' negative (in this case, countermajoritarian) behavior, prompting them to engage in blame management. Results from the *Congressional Record* indicate that members who received more contributions from advocates of the legislation (gun-control groups), those who are closest to reelection, and those who sponsored the legislation are likely to explain their votes on the floor.

Since only three members offered explanations for this vote in newsletters, this source is not modeled independently. In general, however, these members were particularly active on the legislation and are from districts where the issue was highly salient. All three members issued explanations in media outlets in addition to the district newsletter. All three gave explanations in the *Congressional Record*. Burns and Boxer issued press releases and Grams had a statement in news coverage. Consequently, these members are accounted for in the individual media outlet models reported above.

It is clear from this analysis that members are using these four media outlets differently. News coverage is used in ways consistent with blame-management strategies. Press releases and floor statements demonstrate credit claiming. Members who are sponsors of legislation are naturally likely to explain their vote or the Senate’s vote on the floor of the chamber. These sponsors are also likely to issue press releases about their activities. Of course, members have more control over their press releases than their news coverage. Consequently, the importance of the primary challenger and party leader variables for predicting news coverage may reflect gate-keeping behavior of
the media rather than strategic behavior of the member. Unfortunately, these data do not allow us to make direct inferences about which is occurring. What is important, however, is that all members are not explaining equally. Some members do not explain the vote at all. Of those who do explain, they are likely to be sponsors of the bill, have received more money from gun-control interest groups, and have faced a primary challenger in the previous election.

**Types of Explanations**

We have seen that there are important differences in how members use different types of media to explain their votes. The next analysis will look more closely at the members who gave explanations to determine whether members use personal and institutional explanations differently depending on their own situations. Recall, personal explanations are those in which members are explaining their own vote. Institutional explanations are those in which members are explaining the vote of the Senate body as a whole. It is expected, consequently, that members who are in predicaments for having voted the way that they did will be likely to issue personal explanations. It will be necessary for them to explain why they personally made the choice that they did. Members seeking credit for the Senate’s behavior (the passage of legislation) will be likely to explain it as such, regardless of their own role in the process. Some members will give explanations both for their own and the Senate’s vote on the bill.

The dependent variable for this analysis is a multinomial construction of the type of explanation given by a senator (0=personal; 1=institutional; 2=both personal and institutional) and is restricted to members who offered explanations. Because the number
of cases is necessarily limited, a multinomial, multivariate model is not appropriate. A chi-square test was performed on each independent variable with respect to the dependent variable (type of explanation). Few statistical effects emerged from this analysis.

One effect that was strong across all media outlets in the initial analysis is that of bill sponsorship. Sponsors were more likely to offer an explanation in all four media outlets considered. Further analysis shows that sponsorship also affects the type of explanation that members give. Members who were not sponsors were likely to give institutional explanations. Those who were sponsors gave both personal and institutional explanations (chi-square(2) = 5.56, p=.062). See Table 4.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Explanation</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Sponsor</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=50
Phi=.333, p=.062

Table 4.9: Chi-square test of association between sponsorship and type of explanation of the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act

Similarly, the member’s vote has an effect on the type of explanation offered (chi-square(2)=5.377, p=.068). See Table 4.10. Members who voted for the bill gave both personal and institutional explanations. Those who voted no, however, tended to give institutional explanations for why this bill passed despite their efforts. Members such as Bob Smith (R-NH) said that “the other side [Democrats] skillfully used terrible tragedies
to change people’s votes” (NYT, 5/21/99). Similarly, Paul Coverdell (R-GA) said “I guess politics being of the sound bite nature that it is, just can’t restrain itself. Every time something happens, 50 people stand up and say we’re going to solve it because we write something down on a piece of paper” (Cox News Service, 5/20/99).

**Type of Explanation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vote</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yea</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nay</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=49
Phi=.331, p=.068

Table 4.10: Chi-square test of association between member’s vote and type of explanation of the 1999 Juvenile Justice Act

While both of these effects are interesting and in directions that make sense, they are the only statistically significant relationship between the independent variables and the type of explanation. Ideally, we would use a multivariate model. But this is not feasible with such a small number of cases when the analysis is restricted to explainers.

**Discussion**

The analysis of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act reported here demonstrates that Senators do not all explain the vote equally. The importance of the bill, electoral
concerns, and characteristics of the member affect the propensity for members to explain. In many cases, the direction of the member’s vote interacts with other factors to affect his or her explanation. Characteristics of the member, particularly bill sponsorship, seem to influence the decision to explain. They may also influence media decisions about who to ask for explanations. Either way, the public receives explanations from sponsoring members more than from other members. Members receiving more money from gun-rights groups are less likely to give explanations in the *Congressional Record* or newspapers. Those who voted in favor of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act are more likely to explain using press releases as their level of district salience increases.

When we examine what is being explained, whether it is the member’s vote or the Senate’s vote, we also see key differences between members. Again sponsoring members differ from nonsponsors. Nonsponsors tended to give institutional explanations. Members who voted against the bill also gave institutional explanations. In general, however, members explain their own votes rather than the Senate’s decision. This is intuitive since members have little to gain from Senate popularity and a lot to gain from their own public approval.

Finally, the analysis of the Juvenile Justice Act of 1999 provides support for the notion that members explain both to claim credit and to manage blame. Members engaged in both of these activities related to the Juvenile Justice Act. Those who voted against the bill, which 75 percent of the Senate supported, were likely to explain their votes by shifting the blame to other members who added provisions that they could not support. Those who were sponsors of the legislation or who were close to election were likely to claim credit for the Senate’s passage of the Juvenile Justice Act. Further, there
is some evidence to indicate that members use press releases to claim credit, while the statements found in news coverage reflect their uses of rhetoric for blame management.

Even though S. 254 did not become law, sixty-two senators explained their votes on the bill. Through personal and institutional explanations, these members both claimed credit and managed blame for their behavior. The next two chapters will look at other legislation voted on by these same senators to determine whether patterns in the explanations of the Juvenile Justice Act hold across other cases.
CHAPTER 5

THE BANKRUPTCY REFORM ACT OF 1999 (S. 625)

The second case under investigation is the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999 (S. 625). Like the Juvenile Justice Act, this was not the first time this issue had been before Congress. The previous bankruptcy overhaul bill died at the end of the 105th Congress when the Senate refused to consider a conference agreement (Ota 2000). Unlike the debate on the Juvenile Justice Act, which took only eight days from beginning to end, S. 625 was first considered by the Senate on November 5, 1999, and was passed by a vote of 83-14 on February 2, 2000.\(^\text{25}\) The bills differ in several other respects as well. While the Juvenile Justice Act was first passed by the Senate and then sent to the House, the House had already passed a bankruptcy overhaul bill (313-108 on May 5, 1999) when the Senate began consideration of a similar measure.

The core of the bill requires bankruptcy filers to reorganize debts under a repayment plan and file under Chapter 13 rather than Chapter 7 under which debts are discharged after assets are liquidated (Ota 2000). Several proposed amendments,

\(^{25}\) Of course, part of the reason that the bankruptcy bill took so long to discuss was the intervening winter recess and a massive snowstorm that shut down Washington and delayed the vote on final passage. Despite these delays, however, the Bankruptcy Reform Act was argued in a stop-and-go fashion over a period of several months while it became loaded with controversial, and often non-germane, provisions.
including provisions regarding gun manufacturers and abortion protesters, heightened
debate. Republicans narrowly averted a “showdown with Democrats” over the Schumer
amendment that was aimed at preventing “those convicted of violence at abortion clinics
from avoiding debts related to the violence” (Ota and Benton 2000, p. 244). Vice-
President Gore presided over the chamber, poised to cast a tie-breaking vote, but
Republicans decided to support the amendment, vowing to “correct” it in conference
rather than giving Gore a chance to “make political points” (Ota and Benton 2000, p.
244). Republicans added tax break incentives to counteract Democrats’ minimum wage
hike. The Senate passed the House companion measure HR 833 by substituting the text
of S. 625 on February 2, 2000, by a vote of 83-14. 26 While the House version was passed
313-108 in May 1999, like the Juvenile Justice Act, the Bankruptcy Reform Act died
while waiting for conference agreement. The minimum wage increase proved to be the
most divisive issue for conference agreement.

While the final vote margin was pretty clear, the debate surrounding the
provisions of the Bankruptcy Reform Act provided many incentives for members to
explain their behavior. Opponents of the bill came from two main groups: those from
states without limits on the homestead exemption (which the bill would impose) and a
small group of Democrats who argued that the bill was biased against consumers. Other
members could take a stand on the core of the bill or more peripheral measures.
Members could pick and choose particular amendments to support or oppose. Like the
Juvenile Justice Act, interest groups were heavily involved in debate over the bill. The
bill itself, however, did not receive as much attention in the public press as either the

26 Fitzgerald (R-IL) answered “present.” McCain (R-AZ) and Burns (R-MT) did not vote.
Juvenile Justice Act (discussed in Chapter 4) or trade with China (discussed in Chapter 6).

To investigate senators’ explanations regarding the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act, press releases, newspaper statements, newsletters, and Congressional Record statements were gathered. The search for explanations revealed striking differences between this bill and the Juvenile Justice Act. Overall, fewer members gave explanations for the bankruptcy bill than for juvenile justice reform. While sixty-two members offered a statement in one or more outlets on juvenile justice reform, only forty-one members offered statements on bankruptcy reform. The differences are most apparent in the newspaper coverage of the two issues. While twenty-eight senators made statements in newspapers on juvenile justice reform, no newspaper explanations were coded from senators on bankruptcy reform. It is important to note, however, that the issue of bankruptcy was not absent from news coverage at the time of the vote. Indeed, the median number of news articles for a state on bankruptcy during the time the legislation was being considered was 101 while the median number for juvenile justice was eighty-one. What the press was not covering, however, were members’ statements regarding their votes on the legislation pertinent to bankruptcy reform. Fewer members were pursuing the press through press releases on the bankruptcy reform issue as well. Only twelve members issued press releases on this topic, while twenty-nine issued press releases on juvenile justice reform. See Table 5.1.

While direct comparisons of the frequency of news coverage are affected by the length of time that the bill was under consideration and other factors, the comparison of the amount of coverage of the topic of the legislation and the amount of that coverage that included statements from senators is illustrative of differences in the propensity for members to explain (and the press to cover explanations) their votes on these two pieces of legislation compared to the press’ propensity to discuss the issue in general.
Table 5.1: Number of Senators Offering Personal and/or Institutional Explanations for the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Record</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members’ behavior on the floor of the Senate did not differ much between the two bills, at least in terms of the number of senators offering statements. Thirty-eight members explained their vote on bankruptcy reform from the Senate floor while thirty-three had given explanations regarding the Juvenile Justice Act. At the outset, we can see that fewer members offered statements in the press regarding bankruptcy reform than juvenile justice reform, yet their floor behavior did not differ significantly. Further investigation will explore whether the types of members found to explain the Juvenile Justice Act were likely to explain the Bankruptcy Reform Act.

As with the Juvenile Justice Act, few members used mass mailings as a vehicle to explain their vote. In his Second Amendment Update sent to 6,389 “pro-2nd amendment” constituents, Rod Grams (R-MN) claims credit because he voted against, and the Senate defeated, the Levin amendment to the Senate bankruptcy bill. That amendment would have encouraged “lawsuits against the gun industry and prevent firearms manufacturers
facing these lawsuits from restructuring their legal costs through bankruptcy.” The only other member to address issues raised in the Bankruptcy Reform Act in his mass mailings was John Edwards (D-NC) who briefly mentions in his legislative update to 2,727 constituents that he cosponsored legislation that would raise the minimum wage, but does not address the bankruptcy bill directly. Grams also discussed his vote in the *Congressional Record*. Edwards did not issue either a press release or a statement in the Record on the Bankruptcy Bill, however. Few senators use mass mailings to explain votes in general; of these, even fewer explain issues discussed in this study.

Members gave explanations for both their own vote on the Bankruptcy Reform Act and for the Senate’s vote as a whole on the bill. Most of the explanations, however, were for senators’ own behavior. In the press releases, eight members gave personal explanations, three gave institutional explanations, and one member gave an explanation for both his own vote and the Senate’s vote. In the *Congressional Record*, twenty-eight members explained their own votes, four explained the Senate’s vote, and six members explained both their own and the Senate’s vote on the bill. See Table 5.1. These numbers are comparable to those from other cases. With the Juvenile Justice Reform Act (Chapter 4) and the U.S.-China Relations Bill (Chapter 6) we find that institutional explanations are most predominant in newspaper coverage, an outlet that does not lend data to the Bankruptcy Reform Act case.

In the press releases, members both claimed credit and managed blame for their votes. Seven members’ press releases were aimed at claiming credit while five members were managing blame. See Table 5.2. These explanations were predominately personal.
Even though the vote on the Bankruptcy Reform Act was highly skewed, members gave explanations which both claimed credit and managed blame for the vote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Blame</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Both</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2: Number of Senators Claiming Credit and Managing Blame with Personal and Institutional Explanations on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act in Press Releases**

**Who Explains?**

Parallel to the analysis of the Juvenile Justice Act in Chapter 4, a quantitative model was developed to examine the effects of characteristics of members and their districts and the propensity to offer personal and/or institutional explanations for votes on the Bankruptcy Reform Act. For this analysis, the dependent variable is the presence of an explanation from a senator before or after the vote on the bill in any of the four sources. The models are analyzed using probit, and descriptive statistics for all variables are included in Appendix C.

Constituency measures included in the model are unique to the Bankruptcy Reform Act. To operationalize the importance of the bill to the member and the district,

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28 As with the other cases in this study, the unit of analysis is the senator and members giving multiple explanations are treated identically. A probit model is used because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (0=no explanation, 1=one or more explanations).
a measure of the amount of money given to the members by the National Consumer Bankruptcy Coalition (NCBC), the leading voice in favor of bankruptcy reform is used. This measure, developed by the Center for Responsive Politics, is the number of dollars that the PAC contributed to each member during the previous three election cycles. The NCBC, composed of several trade associations, Visa, and Mastercard, donated nearly $1.2 million to federal parties and candidates in the first six months of 1999 alone (Bailey 1999).29 A list of the organizations included in this measure of the bankruptcy reform lobby is included in Appendix B.30 The hypothesis is that members who receive more money from the NCBC are more likely to explain their votes. Because the NCBC was lobbying in favor of the legislation, members who received money from the lobby but who voted against the bill should be particularly likely to explain their behavior. An interaction between vote and money is consequently included in the models. A positive interaction effect would indicate that members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely to explain as contributions increase over and above the effects of the contributions themselves. Such an effect would indicate credit claiming among members voting in favor of this bill which contributing interest groups supported.

A measure of district salience is also included in the models to indicate the amount of attention being paid to the issue in general in the senator’s state. This measure is the number of news articles on the issue of “bankruptcy” in state and local newspapers from one month before the bill was under consideration in the Senate to one month after

29 There were several consumer groups, Consumer Federation of America and Public Citizen, that were lobbying against the bill. However, CRP does not have any contribution data for these groups. Consequently, the single NCBC measure is used for campaign contributions in these models.

30 For the contributions variable, the value of the variable is transformed log(1+D), where D is the number of dollars contributed to the member by the interest group.
the vote. The hypothesis is that senators from states where bankruptcy is more salient are more likely to explain their action on the bill. An interaction term is also included between the member’s vote on the bill and district salience. Members who voted against the bill in more salient districts should be more likely to explain than members in low salience districts or those who voted in favor of the bill.

Senators’ electoral concerns and personal characteristics are measured identically in this case as in other cases discussed in this study. Variables are included which represent a senator’s vote on the bill, primary challenger, margin of victory (logged), distance from election (1, 2, or 3 cycles), seniority (years served), sponsorship, party leadership, and party membership (0=Democrat; 1=Republican). Descriptive statistics for all of the variables used in the models can be found in Appendix C.

The statistical relationships between the independent variables are illustrated in Appendix E. Overall, the correlations are weak. Contributions, however, are strongly related to bill sponsorship and vote on the bankruptcy bill. While the eta statistic is 1.000 for both of these sets of variables, it does not indicate a perfect relationship between contributions and the vote or sponsorship. When contributions are taken as the dependent variable, the eta statistics are .260 for vote and .050 for sponsorship. An independent samples t-test shows that members who voted in favor of the bill do have a significantly higher average contribution level (t = 2.630, p= .010). This mean is probably driven, however, by the member who received the highest level of contributions from credit-related PACs, a full million dollars more than the next member. The independent samples t-test for contributions and sponsorship does not indicate a significant difference

31 The list of newspapers searched is the same as was searched for newspaper explanations and is included in Appendix A.
between the mean level of contributions for sponsors and nonsponsors (t = .498, p = .620).

A look at the bivariate relationships between the independent variables and the propensity for members to explain their votes suggests some similarities and differences between this case and the Juvenile Justice Act. See Table 5.3. As with the juvenile justice bill, the importance of the bill is correlated with explanations in both the Congressional Record and press releases. Contributions and district salience have strong effects on offering explanations in both outlets. The member’s vote, however, has a very weak, negative effect. Electoral concerns do not correlate strongly with explanations. There is some effect, however, for the member’s margin of victory. Members’ characteristics are correlated with explanations on the bankruptcy bill in ways similar to the juvenile justice bill. Seniority again has a moderate correlation with explanations. Party is again positively related to the vote on the Bankruptcy Reform Act (phi = .324, p = .001). In this case, however, there is also a correlation between party and members’ explanations. There is a stronger, negative correlation between being a Republican and issuing a press release (phi = -.220, p = .038) or a Congressional Record statement (phi = -.286, p = .004) on the bankruptcy bill. We will look at these and other relationships in the multivariate models discussed below.
Table 5.3
Correlation Between Independent Variables and Members’ Explanations in the Congressional Record and Press Releases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of the Bill</th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Salience&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>-.161</td>
<td>-.020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Electoral Concerns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Challenger</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of Victory&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in One Cycle</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>-.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Two Cycles</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Three Cycles</td>
<td>-.155</td>
<td>.057</td>
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</table>

**Member Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Seniority&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-.286</td>
<td>-.220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Values are Eta statistics. All other values are Phi statistics.
Analysis

*Explainers vs. Non-explainers*

The probit model of the propensity to explain the Bankruptcy Reform Act regressed on the importance of the bill, electoral considerations, and member characteristics yields some support for the hypotheses. In the model with all sources together, the importance of the bill affects senators’ propensities to explain in several ways. See Table 5.4. First, contributions from the National Consumer Bankruptcy Coalition have a negative effect on the propensity to explain the bankruptcy vote (-.791, p=.075). This effect suggests that members who voted against this bill are less likely to explain their votes as interest group contributions increase, thus avoiding media exposure for an unfavorable action. When we examine the media sources separately, we see that this effect of interest group contributions is manifested most strongly in the floor statements. Again, NCBC contributions have a negative effect on the propensity to explain (-.773, p=.084). In the predicted probabilities, however, we see that these contributions have little substantive impact on the probability of explaining the vote. Among members who voted in favor of the bankruptcy bill, members who received minimum levels of contributions have a probability of explaining of .79 while those with maximum levels of contributions have a predicted probability of .71. The effect is more apparent among members who voted against the bill. Those with minimum levels of contributions have a predicted probability of explaining the vote of .99 while those with maximum levels of contributions have a predicted probability of only .39. See Table 5.6.
Table 5.4
Probit Estimates of the Importance of the Bill, Electoral Concerns, and Member Characteristics on the Probability of Explaining the Vote on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act in Press Releases, Mass Mailings, and the Congressional Record.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of the Bill</th>
<th>All Sources(^a)</th>
<th>Press Releases(^b)</th>
<th>Congressional Record(^c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBCB Contributions (logged)</td>
<td>- (0.791^*) (.549)</td>
<td>-0.187 (.492)</td>
<td>-0.773* (.562)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Salience</td>
<td>-0.001 (.001)</td>
<td>0.002 (.002)</td>
<td>-0.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>-10.505* (7.688)</td>
<td>-4.367 (7.685)</td>
<td>-10.340* (7.849)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote*contributions</td>
<td>0.745* (.572)</td>
<td>0.431 (.597)</td>
<td>0.731 (.585)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote*district salience</td>
<td>0.000 (.002)</td>
<td>-0.002 (.003)</td>
<td>-0.000 (.002)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Concerns</th>
<th>All Sources(^a)</th>
<th>Press Releases(^b)</th>
<th>Congressional Record(^c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Challenger</td>
<td>0.321 (.316)</td>
<td>0.239 (.549)</td>
<td>0.322 (.321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of Victory (logged)</td>
<td>-0.049 (.777)</td>
<td>1.218 (1.405)</td>
<td>0.143 (.789)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in One Cycle</td>
<td>0.485* (.378)</td>
<td>-1.150* (.734)</td>
<td>0.655* (.383)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Two Cycles</td>
<td>0.281 (.378)</td>
<td>-0.469 (.670)</td>
<td>0.463 (.385)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Sources(^{a})</th>
<th>Press Releases(^{b})</th>
<th>Congressional Record(^{c})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.064**</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.015)</td>
<td>(.024)</td>
<td>(.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.888**</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.429)</td>
<td>(.609)</td>
<td>(.436)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.711(^{+})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.556)</td>
<td>(1.008)</td>
<td>(.555)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-.946**</td>
<td>-1.297(^{*})</td>
<td>-.846**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.310)</td>
<td>(.580)</td>
<td>(.314)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>10.999</td>
<td>-4.623</td>
<td>9.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.193)</td>
<td>(8.52)</td>
<td>(8.375)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard Errors are in parentheses.  + indicates p < .10, one-tailed.  * indicates p < .05, one-tailed.  ** indicates p < .10, one-tailed.

a. N=97 (three senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (13) = 20.32, Prob> chi2 = .0874, Pseudo R2 = .1555, Log likelihood = -55.19

b. N=86 (three senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill; eleven senators, including one who did not vote, did not post press releases for this time period).
   LR chi2 (13) = 21.01, Prob>chi2 = .0727, Pseudo R2 = .3195, Log likelihood = -22.379

c. N=97 (three senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (13) = 20.31, Prob>chi2 = .0876, Pseudo R2 = .1575, Log likelihood = -54.32
The member’s vote has a strong effect on the propensity to explain. Overall, members who voted for the Bankruptcy Reform Act are less likely to explain their vote (-10.050, p=.086). As with the contributions variable, the effect of the vote is strongest among Congressional Record explanations (-10.340, p=.094). Members who voted in favor of the bill have a predicted probability of explaining their vote in the Congressional Record of .74 while those who voted against the bill have a predicted probability of .95. When we look at the interaction effect between the vote and contributions, however, we see that there is a positive effect for this interaction on the propensity to explain (.745, p = .096). This effect suggests that members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely to explain (claim credit for) their votes as PAC contributions increase and is most evident among Congressional Record statements.

Electoral concerns also play a role in the senators’ propensity to explain their votes. When all sources are included together, there is a positive effect for senators who are up for election in the next cycle (.485, p=.100). Members who are closest to reelection are more likely to explain their votes on the Bankruptcy Reform Act than those members farthest from reelection. When we look at the sources separately, however, two different patterns emerge. Among press releases, members up for reelection in the next cycle are less likely to explain their votes on this bill (-1.150, p=.058). This effect probably has to do with the timing of the vote in relation to the elections, however, and is more of a statistical artifact than a “real” effect. Members are prohibited from updating their web sites within sixty days of a primary or general election in which they are a candidate. Consequently, some members were prohibited from updating their websites during the time period of before and after this vote. While members who did not post any
press releases for this time period are treated as missing, this leaves few members in the
cycle closest to reelection to analyze for the press release model. In *Congressional
Record* statements, however, members closest to reelection are more likely to explain
their votes than those farthest away from reelection (.655, p=.043) while those two cycles
from reelection are not statistically different from those farthest away (.463, p=.114).
The predicted probabilities show that members who voted in favor of the bill and are up
for reelection in the next cycle have a predicted probability of explaining the vote in the
*Congressional Record* of .85 while those farthest from reelection have a predicted
probability of .65. The effect of the distance from election is smaller for members who
voted against the bill. The predicted probability of explaining for members closest to
reelection is .96 while the predicted probability for those farthest from reelection is .88.
See Table 5.5.

Several member characteristics affect the propensity for senators to offer
explanations on the bankruptcy bill. First, more senior members are more likely to issue
a press release explaining the vote on the Bankruptcy Bill (.064, p=.004). This effect
might be driven, however, by Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC) because he explained this
bill (and not the Juvenile Justice Bill) and has a seniority value of forty-five when the
median value is eleven. As with the Juvenile Justice Act, members who sponsored the
bill or its amendments are statistically more likely to explain the vote in a press release
(.888, p=.009). Sponsorship increases the predicted probability of explaining the vote from .01 to .05 in a press release. Members who are party leaders are more likely to give
explanations in the *Congressional Record* (.711, p=.100), but are no more or less likely to
issue press releases (p=.453). Finally, there is a strong effect for partisanship on the
propensity to explain the Bankruptcy Reform Act. Republicans are statistically less likely to explain this vote (-.946, p=.001). This effect is consistent across both press releases and in *Congressional Record* explanations. Among press release explanations, as with the full model, Republicans are less likely to explain the vote on this bill (-1.297, p=.012). Republicans have a predicted probability of .01 while Democrats have a predicted probability of .1 of explaining the vote in press releases. See Table 5.5. In the *Congressional Record*, Democrats are also more likely to explain this vote (-.846, p=.003), although this effect is most pronounced for members who voted in favor of the bill. Republicans who voted for the bill have a predicted probability of .75 while those who voted against the bill have a predicted probability of explaining the vote in the *Congressional Record* of .95.
a. All other variables are held at their mean value (modal value for nominal variables). The typical member is a Republican with twelve years of experience in the Senate, a primary challenger in the previous election and is not a party leader or a sponsor of the legislation. Predicted probabilities are calculated for members in the second election cycle. Mean values for all variables are in Appendix C.

Table 5.5: Predicted Probabilities of Explaining the Vote on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Bill in Press Releases
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yea</th>
<th>Nay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election in one cycle&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in two cycles</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in three cycles</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBC minimum</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBC mean</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBC maximum</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> All other variables are held at their mean value (modal value for nominal variables). The typical member is a Republican with twelve years of experience in the Senate, a primary challenger in the previous election and is not a party leader or a sponsor of the legislation. Predicted probabilities are calculated for members in the second election cycle. Mean values for all variables are in Appendix C.

Table 5.6: Predicted Probabilities of Explaining the Vote on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Bill in the *Congressional Record*

When all sources are taken together, we see effects comparable to those of the Juvenile Justice Act (discussed in Chapter 4). There are statistically weak effects for PAC contributions, the member’s vote on the bill, and being close to reelection. Partisanship, however, has a strong effect on a senator’s likelihood of explaining the vote on the Bankruptcy Reform Act that is absent in the other cases. The effect is consistent with the hypothesis that countermajoritarian members, in this case Democrats, will be more likely to explain than members who go along with the crowd. Since the Bankruptcy Reform Act passed by such an overwhelming margin, we would expect to see that members who voted against the bill and those who were in the party predominantly opposing the bill would be most likely to explain. These effects are evident in this
model. With the bankruptcy bill, most Democrats voted in favor of the bill even though consumer groups supporting them were opposed to its passage. Many of these members explained that they supported the bill for its minimum wage provision, despite the downsides of the bill. The Democrats who voted against the bill explained why they did not support that bill that so many of their fellow members favored, usually because the minimum wage increase was not enough, and they saw other provisions of the bill as a threat to consumer rights.32

**Types of Explanations**

Just as senators can explain their votes in several media outlets, they can also explain the vote on several dimensions. The next analysis will turn to a discussion of what part of the vote senators explain. Do they explain their own votes (personal explanations) or do they explain the Senate’s vote as a whole (institutional explanations)? A first look at the explanations on the Bankruptcy Reform Act shows that members who explained the vote were more likely to give personal explanations. That is, they were more likely to explain how they voted, not how the Senate voted. See Table 5.1. In the juvenile justice case, however, the institutional explanations were predominately in newspaper coverage. Without that coverage, we should expect to see predominately personal explanations from members. Do the members who gave personal explanations for this vote differ from members who gave institutional explanations?

---

32 Only two Republicans voted against the Bankruptcy Reform Act, Hutchison (R-TX) and Brownback (R-KS). Hutchison gave an explanation for her vote in a press release and a floor statement. Limitations on homestead exemption would have a strong effect on her home state of Texas. Brownback did not issue a statement on his vote.
Chi-square tests of association were performed on each independent variable with the type of explanation that members gave (personal, institutional, or both). Only members who gave explanations were included in this analysis. In this analysis, only the presence of a primary challenger in the candidate’s previous election is related to the type of explanation the senator gives for his vote. While members without primary challengers issued all types of explanations (personal, institutional, and both), all members who had primary challengers in the previous election gave only personal explanations (three members gave both types) in the Congressional Record ($X^2(2) = 5.930, p=.052$). See Table 5.7. Press releases among members who had primary challengers and those who did not were not statistically different from each other ($X^2(2) = 1.833, p=.400$). In general, however, there are too few institutional explanations for the Bankruptcy Reform Act to examine the factors that might cause members to issue this type of explanation instead of a personal explanation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Explanation</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Challenger</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Primary Challenger</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=38  
Phi=.395, p=.052

Table 5.7: Chi-square test of association between primary challenger and type of explanation in the Congressional Record on the 1999 Bankruptcy Reform Act
**Discussion**

While the Bankruptcy Reform Act received a lot of attention on the Senate floor and from interest groups, this bill did not spur the same attention in the public press. Fewer members issued press releases on this bill than on the Juvenile Justice Reform Act, and news coverage gave members’ explanations little, if any, attention. The Bankruptcy Reform Act was not the focal point of members’ mass mailings to constituents. While the issue of bankruptcy reform is certainly not as vivid as that of school shootings, the issue did receive attention in the news. The attention, however, was focused on business leaders rather than on Congress.

Despite the lack of coverage of members’ explanations, several types of members are more likely to explain the vote. Consistent with findings on other bills, sponsors of the Bankruptcy Reform Act or its amendments were likely to give explanations. Also, partisanship is an important predictor of explaining this vote. All else constant, Republicans were less likely to explain this vote. The intuition is not that Democrats are generally more verbose, but that on this legislation, Democrats had more to explain. Many were challenged to explain why they supported provisions which might hurt consumers. Others found the minimum wage provisions of the bill to be a feature for which they could claim credit. Senators were more likely to explain their own votes for the Bankruptcy Reform Act than the Senate’s decision. They were also more likely to claim credit for the vote, a result that is consistent with the Senate’s overwhelming passage of the bill.
CHAPTER 6

THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS ACT OF 2000 (H.R. 4444)

This chapter will turn to the realm of foreign relations to examine senators' explanations of their votes on House Resolution 4444, a measure to extend permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status to the People's Republic of China. This measure, like the others discussed in this study, was approved by the Senate. Like the Juvenile Justice Act, the bill was debated under intense public scrutiny and featured lobbying efforts both for and against passage. Both Juvenile Justice (S. 254) and China PNTR were considered for short, intense periods of debate – eight days for Juvenile Justice and seven days for PNTR. Like the Bankruptcy Reform Act, the Senate took up the bill after the House and passed both bills by nearly identical margins (83-14 and 83-15). Unlike Bankruptcy Reform and Juvenile Justice Reform, PNTR was taken up for consideration in the Senate shortly before the very contentious 2000 presidential election and a bid for a Democratic takeover of Congress. Unlike the other two bills considered here, HR 4444 was signed into law. Consequently, we can expect to see the results of the models here to reflect the bill's similarities to and differences from previously discussed legislation.

The bill on China PNTR would make permanent, the trading status that the United States had been affording China one year at a time since the Jackson-Vanik amendment
to the 1974 Trade Act (PL 93-618). The amendment allowed the president to give normal trading status to communist countries on a year-by-year basis. China was given normal trade status yearly starting in 1980, but the status became contentious in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Since then, China's human rights record has taken center stage in a yearly congressional debate on whether to protest the president's decision on trade with China (Christensen 2000, Nitschke and Dalrymple 2000). Several House amendments to the core of the bill were aimed at gaining approval of wavering members. One such amendment would allow the president to regulate tariffs in order to protect domestic industries from a surge of imports. Another would establish a commission to monitor human rights and labor practices in China (Nitschke and Tully 2000).

President Clinton submitted to Congress the bill to extend PNTR status to China in March 2000 (Nitschke 2000). The House passed its version of the bill (HR 4444) by a vote of 237-197 on May 24 (Pomper 2000). Soon after, the Clinton administration and business leaders who were lobbying heavily in favor of the bill "turned up the heat under the Senate" to follow quickly on the heels of the House (Nitschke 2000).

Senate leaders were pressed to bring up the bill in the Senate and avoid contentious amendments. Late in the session, and with appropriations bills looming, Senate leaders were hoping to put forward an unamended, "clean" bill, so that HR 4444 could be passed and signed into law without returning to the House and a conference committee. Congressional leaders were leery of facing fall elections and congressional adjournment without the legislation. Bill opponents Wellstone (D-MN) and Helms (R-NC) nevertheless introduced amendments on human rights that threatened to derail the
Senator Byrd (D-WV) introduced several amendments that failed to be added to the bill. Frustrated by the Senate’s treatment of amendments, Senator Byrd compared the bill’s consideration to a “greasy pig” contest at a county fair:

"Everyone is trying to slow down that pig. I feel like one of those poor rubes out here chasing the greasy China (trade) pig, trying my best to slow it down with good amendments. But that pig is well greased and it is flying through the Senate." (qtd. in Fischer 2000)

The China trade bill was considered by the Senate from September 8-19, 2000. In the end, the bill passed the Senate unamended by a vote of 83-1533 on September 19, 2000, and was signed into law (PL 106-286) by President Clinton on October 10, 2000.

Debate over China's trade status came from two major angles. China's human rights record was a point of contention among opponents of the measure, who argued that the bill would represent tacit approval of the offenses. Proponents of the bill, however, argued that bringing China further into the global market, opening its economy, would lead to increased rights for its citizens. The economic gains of PNTR status vary considerably by district. States such as North Carolina, with a large textile industry, were cautious of losing money with less expensive, Chinese products in the market. States such as Wyoming were hoping to gain considerably by being able to export more goods to China.

33 Akaka (D-HI) and Lieberman (D-CT) did not vote.
More senators issued explanations on the U.S.-China Relations Act than on either the Juvenile Justice Act or the Bankruptcy Reform Act. Overall, seventy-three members issued explanations on the China bill in the *Congressional Record*, press releases, newspapers, and mass mailings. The preponderance of these explanations was given on the floor of the Senate, with fifty-eight members giving explanations there. Thirty-one members issued press releases explaining the vote on this legislation, more than on either of the other two bills discussed here.

As with the Bankruptcy Reform Act, newspaper coverage did not focus on members’ explanations. Only eight members’ explanations were quoted in newspaper coverage of the bill. Instead, the news coverage relied heavily on discussion from business leaders and quotes from President Clinton who signed the bill into law shortly after passage. Rather than discussing why members, and the Senate, voted as they did, the news coverage focused on the impacts that the legislation would have on the districts in which it was reporting. This difference may be because this bill was expected to be signed into law in the short term and would have real impacts on the United States. Thus, papers *could* focus on impacts of the legislation rather than speculate about passage or give members an outlet in which to explain their votes. While senators could freely issue press releases on the issue (and did), they had more competition for news coverage.

As with other legislation, members’ explanations on the China trade bill focused on both explanations of their own votes (personal explanations) and the decision of the Senate as a whole (institutional explanations). For this bill, however, most explanations were of individual members’ votes. Among press releases, twenty-two members discussed their own votes while six discussed the Senate’s votes as a whole. An
additional three members issued both personal and institutional explanations in their press releases. Similarly, in the *Congressional Record* fifty-three members discussed their own positions while only two members gave institutional explanations and three members gave both types of explanations. Newspaper coverage, however was more apt to focus on institutional explanations. While only eight members’ explanations were quoted in news coverage, six of these quotes were of institutional explanations. One member’s personal explanation was quoted (Sen. Collins, R-ME) and one member gave both personal and institutional explanations in news coverage (Sen. Thompson, D-TN). See Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper Statements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Record</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Number of Senators Offering Personal and/or Institutional Explanations for the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000

As with the other bills discussed in this study, few members mentioned the issues in their mass mailings to constituents. Three members discussed trade with China in their mass mailings to constituents. These members, Rod Grams (R-MN), Chuck Grassley (R-
IA), and Chuck Hagel (R-NE), made statements in their newsletters about the benefits that their district would see from increased trade with China. Only Rod Grams (R-MN) addressed the PNTR bill directly by telling “Minnesota job providers” in a June 2000 business update that “with so many Minnesota job providers . . . depending on the outcome, I am committed to passing a measure that so clearly benefits our entire state.” Grams points out, however, that “there will be many attempts to attach related and unrelated amendments to PNTR that could slow it down significantly and even force another vote in the House.”

While most of the explanations that members gave were for their own votes, they used these explanations both to claim credit and to manage blame for the vote. As we have seen in other cases, the newspaper coverage was more likely to pick up these blame-managing explanations than the members' own press releases. In their press releases, twenty-five members claimed credit for the vote on the China trade bill. Six members used the press release to manage blame. The number of newspaper articles is substantially smaller, but we see that five members were managing blame in their newspaper statement while three members were claiming credit. This confirms findings from the Juvenile Justice Act that newspaper coverage tends to focus more on members’ blame management than allowing them a forum to claim credit. Since press releases are initiated by the member, they are able to use them to claim credit unless they are challenged to offer a blame-managing explanation. See Table 6.2.
To examine the effect of the importance of the legislation, electoral considerations, and member characteristics on the propensity for a member of the Senate to explain his or her vote, or the Senate’s vote, on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000, a multivariate model was developed. The dependent variable in the models presented below is a dichotomous measure of explanations in various media outlets (0= no explanation, 1=one or more explanations) and the models are analyzed using probit.

Table 6.2: Number of Senators Claiming Credit and Managing Blame with Personal and Institutional Explanations on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 in Press Releases and Newspaper Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRESS RELEASES</th>
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<th>NEWSPIER COVERAGE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Blame</td>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who explains?

To examine the effect of the importance of the legislation, electoral considerations, and member characteristics on the propensity for a member of the Senate to explain his or her vote, or the Senate’s vote, on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000, a multivariate model was developed. The dependent variable in the models presented below is a dichotomous measure of explanations in various media outlets (0= no explanation, 1=one or more explanations) and the models are analyzed using probit.
Variables which indicate the importance of the legislation to a member and the district, the member’s electoral considerations, and characteristics of the member him or herself are described below. Descriptive statistics for all variables included in the models are listed in Appendix C.

By all accounts, the Senate vote on PNTR status for China was a historic vote. Senator Gramm (R-TX) said in a press release on the vote, “. . . my guess is that 20 years from now, when people look back on the Clinton era, the vote on normal trade relations with China will be one of the most historic votes cast” (5/17/00). The importance and visibility of the bill, however, is expected to vary significantly by district. The China trade debate was marked by extensive lobbying in favor of the bill by business groups and against the bill by labor groups. The most vocal proponent of the bill, The Business Roundtable, contributed over $85 million to federal candidates in the 1999-2000 election cycle alone. Many members of the group, including Boeing, UPS, and Lockheed Martin, would have faced extensive losses if the China trade bill had failed (Bailey 2000). Labor groups such as the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters' union lobbied heavily against the bill (Nitschke and Pomper 2000). For this bill, two variables represent the interest group contributions. Contributions by members of the Business Roundtable are included to indicate lobbying on behalf of the bill. Contributions by labor groups are included to indicate lobbying against the bill.34 Groups included in these two measures are listed in Appendix B.

34 For both contributions variables, the value of the variable is log(1+ D) where D is the number of dollars contributed to the member by the group. The Center for Responsive Politics compiled the Business Roundtable and labor organizations contributions data.
The salience of the China trade issue in each district is measured by a count of the number of news articles in the state containing the phrase “china trade” from August 8 to October 19, 2000.\textsuperscript{35} Newspapers included in this measure are listed in Appendix A. The member’s vote on the bill is also included in the models. As with the other legislation considered in this study, several interaction terms are included in the models to represent the added effect of a particular combination of attributes on the senator’s propensity to explain the vote. The member’s vote is multiplied by interest group contributions, both in favor of and against the bill. The hypothesis is that members who voted in favor of the bill, but who received contributions from labor groups (lobbying against the bill) will be more likely to explain thus engaging in blame managing behavior. A positive coefficient on the labor contributions * vote interaction term would confirm this hypothesis. Similarly, members who voted against the bill, but who received more contributions from the Business Roundtable (lobbying for the bill) will be more likely to explain. A negative coefficient on the business roundtable * vote interaction term would confirm this hypothesis. If members are instead claiming credit for their votes, we should see a positive coefficient for the interaction between the Business Roundtable contributions and the vote and a negative coefficient for Labor contributions and the vote. Further, members voting against the bill in states where the issue was more salient will be more likely to explain if they are engaging in blame management. Again, a negative coefficient on this interaction term would confirm the hypothesis. Members voting in favor of the bill in districts of high salience will be likely to explain if the goal

\textsuperscript{35} This time period is one month before the Senate began consideration of the bill to one month after their vote on the bill (and one week after it was signed into law).
is credit claiming. A positive coefficient on the interaction term would confirm this hypothesis.

Variables indicating a member’s electoral concerns are included in the models. The presence of a primary challenger and margin of victory (logged) in the previous election indicate the competitiveness of the senator’s district. Dummy variables for members who are up for election in one cycle and those up for election in two cycles are also included (with members up for election in three cycles as the excluded category).

Characteristics of the members themselves including the number of years the member has served in the Senate (seniority) and his status as a party leader are included. The bill sponsorship variable indicates whether the member served as a sponsor or co-sponsor of the bill or an amendment. The party variable indicates the member’s party affiliation (0=Democrat, 1=Republican).

The statistical relationships between the independent variables are illustrated in Appendix F. Overall, the independent variables are not strongly related to one another. Several are related as we would expect. For example, no members who are up for reelection in the next cycle are up for reelection in the second or third cycle. There is a strong relationship between sponsorship and having voted for the legislation. Vote is related to both labor contributions and Business Roundtable contributions. Unfortunately, this makes the interaction terms between these variables problematic, particularly in the model of Congressional Record statements. Also, there is a moderate relationship between labor contributions and seniority and a strong relationship between labor contributions and sponsorship. Overall, however, the independent variables look relatively distinct from one another.
Next, we look at the bivariate relationships between each of the independent variables and members’ explanations in each media outlet. Here the differences between media outlets begin to emerge. The bivariate relationships are reported in Table 6.3. The importance of the bill is correlated with explanations in the *Congressional Record* and in press releases. Both Business Roundtable contributions and labor contributions are positively related to explanations. District salience also has a moderate relationship with explanations. The vote, however, is not strongly correlated with explanations in either outlet.

Electoral concerns are also correlated with *Congressional Record* statements and press releases. The member’s margin of victory in the previous election shows the strongest relationship with offering an explanation. In both sources, we see a weak, but statistically significant, correlation between being up for reelection in the next cycle and offering an explanation for the vote on the U.S.-China Relations Act.

Among the member characteristics, seniority shows the strongest relationship with the propensity to explain. Generally, these correlations are comparable to those found in the other cases. Contributions, district salience, margin of victory, and seniority have the strongest correlations with explanations of the vote. The quantitative analysis that follows will examine these effects more closely through a multivariate model which controls for the effects of all of the variables in the model.
### Importance of the Bill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Roundtable Contributions(^a)</td>
<td>.904</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Contributions(^a)</td>
<td>.970</td>
<td>.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Salience(^a)</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Electoral Concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Challenger</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of Victory(^a)</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in One Cycle</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Two Cycles</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election in Three Cycles</td>
<td>-.221</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Member Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Press Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seniority(^a)</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td>-.084</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Values are Eta statistics. All other values are Phi statistics.

Table 6.3
Correlations Between Independent Variables and Members’ Explanations in the Congressional Record and Press Releases
Analysis

Explainers vs. Non-explainers

The probit model regressing explanations for the U.S.-China Trade Relations Act of 2000 on the importance of the bill, electoral considerations, and member characteristics yields several effects which are comparable to those found in the other cases discussed here. When all sources (press releases, newspaper, Congressional Record, and mass mailings) are included together, however, there are no statistically significant effects. This result is probably because the vote on the bill was 83-15. So, for 83 members, their values on the interactions variables are identical to their values on the components of those interactions. With only 100 total observations and fifteen independent variables, the model is stretched too thin. Further hampering the model, most members who voted against the bill also gave explanations; only two members voting against the bill did not explain their votes. This model is included in Appendix G. With the interaction terms excluded, the model achieves more stability.
### Importance of the Bill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Sources*</th>
<th>Press Releases*</th>
<th>Congressional Recordc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Roundtable Cont. (logged)</td>
<td>0.058*</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.123)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Contributions (logged)</td>
<td>-0.152*</td>
<td>0.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.281)</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Salience</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.126)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>-0.270</td>
<td>4.235*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.523)</td>
<td>(3.00)</td>
<td>(0.605)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote*Roundtable contributions</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-----)</td>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>(-----)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote*labor contributions</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-0.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-----)</td>
<td>(0.279)</td>
<td>(-----)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote*district salience</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-----)</td>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>(-----)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Electoral Concerns

| Primary Challenger | .010 | -.477 | -.084 |
| (0.335) | (0.358) | (0.332) |
| Margin of Victory (logged) | .954 | .508 | .938 |
| (0.890) | (0.966) | (0.887) |
| Election in One Cycle | -.113 | -.696* | .303 |
| (0.416) | (0.430) | (0.413) |
| Election in Two Cycles | .093 | -.198 | .461 |
| (0.397) | (0.418) | (0.405) |

Table 6.4

Probit Estimates of the Importance of the Bill, Electoral Concerns, and Member Characteristics on the Probability of Explaining the Vote on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 in Press Releases, Mass Mailings, and the Congressional Record. (Continued)
Table 6.4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Characteristics</th>
<th>All Sources(^a)</th>
<th>Press Releases(^b)</th>
<th>Congressional Record(^c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.024*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.017)</td>
<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsor</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>-1.419*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.724)</td>
<td>(.706)</td>
<td>(.745)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leader</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>-.380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.582)</td>
<td>(.689)</td>
<td>(.581)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>-.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.355)</td>
<td>(.345)</td>
<td>(.366)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.796</td>
<td>-5.979</td>
<td>-5.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.822)</td>
<td>(5.095)</td>
<td>(3.791)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. ** indicates p< .01, one-tailed. * indicates p< .05, one tailed. + indicates p<.10, one tailed.

a. N=98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (12) = 12.42, Prob> chi2 = .4122, Pseudo R2 = .1116, Log likelihood = -49.44

b. N=84 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill; fourteen senators did not post press releases for this time period).
   LR chi2 (15) = 7.99, Prob>chi2 = .9243, Pseudo R2 = .0722, Log likelihood = -51.316

c. N=98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (13) = 34.05, Prob>chi2 = .0012, Pseudo R2 = .2569, Log likelihood = -49.240
The importance of the bill affects members’ explanations when all sources are included together. See Table 6.4. Members with more Business Roundtable contributions are more likely to explain their votes (.058, p=.062). Those with more Labor contributions are less likely to explain their votes (-.152, p=.028). When we look at the press releases and Congressional Record statements separately, however, we see that the importance of the bill is particularly key in the Congressional Record model.

Consistent with the full model, Business Roundtable contributions have a positive effect on the propensity to explain (.091, p=.011); Labor contributions have a negative effect (-.252, p=.001). Members who received more money from the Business Roundtable are more likely to give statements in the Record while those who received more money from labor groups are less likely to explain. This indicates some degree of credit-claiming behavior on the part of the members who received money from the Roundtable. Senators with large contributions from labor may have been downplaying the importance of the bill, focusing on other things, to not draw attention to this vote which labor vehemently opposed. The effects of these variables on the probability of explaining in the Congressional Record are illustrated in Table 6.5.
Table 6.5 Predicted Probabilities of Explaining the Vote on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 in the Congressional Record

The member’s vote also affects his or her propensity to explain in the Congressional Record; members who voted against the U.S.-China Relations Act more likely to explain the vote (-1.42, p=.009). All else held at its mean, senators who voted in favor of the bill have a predicted probability of explaining of .74. Members voting against the bill have a predicted probability of explaining of .98. See Table 6.5.

Members who voted in favor of the bill, but did not receive contributions from the Business Roundtable (and an average level of contributions from labor groups) have a
predicted probability of explaining the vote in the *Congressional Record* of .42. Those senators receiving the maximum level of contributions from the Business Roundtable, however, have a predicted probability of .89. Members who voted in favor of the bill, but who received maximum levels of contributions from labor groups (and average amounts from the Roundtable) have a predicted probability of explaining of .41 while those who received no money from the labor groups have a predicted probability of .99. See Table 6.5.

Among press releases, we do not see the effects of the interest group contributions on explanations. The vote on the China trade bill has the opposite effect on press releases than on *Congressional Record* statements. The vote on the China trade bill has a positive effect on explanations in press releases (4.235, p=.079). Members who voted in favor of the bill are more likely to explain using a press release than members who voted against the bill. This further confirms that press releases are an outlet for credit claiming rather than blame management. Most members do not use press releases as an outlet to explain this vote, however. Members who voted in favor of the bill have a predicted probability of explaining the vote of .26. Those who voted against the bill have a predicted probability of .11.

Unlike previous models, electoral concerns do not seem to prompt members to offer explanations on the China trade bill. There is no effect of the distance from a member’s next election in the full model or in the *Congressional Record* model. In the press release model, the results are opposite of what one might expect. Members who are up for reelection in the next cycle are less likely to offer press releases on this bill (-.696, p=.052). Because of the proximity of the vote to the election, however, these members
were not allowed to post press releases to their web sites. Members who were facing reelection and who posted them to their website, did so after the election. Consequently, this negative effect of reelection is probably more of an artifact of Senate rules prohibiting web updates during an election than it is reflective of members’ strategies.

Characteristics of the members themselves have different effects on explanations of the China trade bill than in the other legislation discussed here. In the full model and the model with press releases, characteristics of the member do not affect the propensity for the member to explain the vote. Unlike previous models, senators who sponsored amendments to the China trade bill were less likely to give explanations in the *Congressional Record* (-1.42, *p*=.028). While initially puzzling, this effect is explained by two factors. First, amendments were highly discouraged on this bill because it was making its way from the House through the Senate. The Senate leadership was pushing to get the bill passed unamended to avoid having to go to conference and risking ending the Senate session without passage. Consequently, there were very few sponsors in the model. Second, the members who were sponsors of amendments did make statements on the floor, these statements, however were not explanations of the vote, but rather statements on why the amendment should pass or why the Senate should consider amending the bill to begin with. Seniority has an unanticipated positive effect on explanations in the *Congressional Record* (.024, *p*=.084). This effect has negligible substantive significance, however.

Overall, we see evidence that members use their explanations for credit claiming as members who received more contributions from groups supporting the bill were more likely to explain their votes. Members voting against the bill were more likely to explain
in the *Congressional Record*; those voting in favor of China PNTR were more likely to explain in press releases.

*Types of Explanations*

The types of explanations that members gave for the U.S.-China Relations Act are similar to those found in the Juvenile Justice Act and Bankruptcy Reform Act cases. Most members issued personal explanations. As with the Juvenile Justice Act, however, the explanations in the newspaper coverage were predominately institutional. See Tables 6.1 and 6.2.

Chi-square tests of association were performed between each of the independent variables and the type of explanation members gave (personal or institutional or both). Only sponsorship had a chi-square that achieved statistical significance. The limited number of observations when only explainers are included in the analysis hinders measures of statistical significance, however. All of the sponsors of the China trade bill who gave explanations explained both their own and the Senate’s vote. The members who did not sponsor the legislation predominately gave personal explanations ($\chi^2(2) = 24.063, p=.000$). See Table 6.6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Explanation</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Sponsor</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=70
Phi = .586, p=.000

Table 6.6: Chi-square Test of Association Between Sponsorship and Type of Explanation for the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 in the Congressional Record, Press Releases, Newspaper Coverage, and Mass Mailings

Discussion

While the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 passed by the same vote margin as the Bankruptcy Reform Act, we see clear differences in the way that members explained these votes. Many more members explained the China trade bill than explained the bankruptcy issue. More members issued statements on the floor of the Senate or in press releases on this bill than in either of the other two bills discussed here. The importance of the bill effects members’ explanations most in the Congressional Record. In this media outlet, interest group contributions affect members’ propensities to explain or remain silent on their votes. Also, the members voting against the bill were likely to explain this vote in the Congressional Record. Those issuing press releases, however, were likely to have voted in favor of the bill. Again we see the internal nature of floor statements, as
members try to persuade other members to vote as they do and the external nature of press releases as members publicly claim credit for their votes.

Unlike the previous votes considered, electoral concerns and characteristics of the members do not seem to drive explanations of the vote on the U.S.-China Relations Act. While members who are up for reelection in the next cycle are weakly correlated with giving explanations in the bivariate analysis, once other factors are controlled, this effect washes out.

The newspaper coverage of the U.S.-China Relations Act was not as widespread as for Juvenile Justice Reform. It did, however, demonstrate the use of institutional and blame-managing explanations by the news media at levels greater than members themselves use these explanations in other outlets. Like the other two bills, overall, senators were more likely to claim credit and use personal explanations for the U.S.-China Relations Act. This effect is consistent with expectations that members hope to improve their constituencies’ impressions of themselves; claiming credit for personal triumphs is certainly one way of attempting to improve impressions.

The three bills discussed in this study show consistent patterns of effects for the importance of the vote, electoral concerns, and member characteristics on the propensity for senators to explain their votes. They show that while members themselves offer credit-claiming, personal explanations, newspapers publish blame-managing and institutional explanations. The next chapter will turn to a more specific case-by-case comparison of these three pieces of legislation and senators’ explanations of the vote.
CHAPTER 7

CASE COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSION

Just as the Ohio lawmakers highlighted in the introduction of this study, members of the Senate of the 106th Congress were busy taking credit and placing blame for legislation. While not all members explained everything, many members did offer explanations for votes on the Juvenile Justice Act, the Bankruptcy Reform Act, and the U.S.-China Relations Act. These members offered explanations both to claim credit for efforts they knew would please constituents and to manage blame for behavior that they knew might disappoint onlookers. This chapter will review the findings from the three case studies, discuss their contributions and implications, and suggest avenues for future research.

In each of the cases discussed in this study, a different number of senators offered explanations for their votes. The results indicate that while every member does not give an explanation for every piece of significant legislation, explanations are offered by many members and in several media outlets. In all cases, however, most members who offered explanations issued an explanation on the floor of the Senate. In the bankruptcy case, few members offered explanations other than the ones given on the Senate floor. For the other two cases, however, we see that a large number of members also offered press
releases explaining the vote. News coverage of Senators’ explanations varied widely across cases. For the juvenile justice bill, twenty-nine members’ explanations were quoted in news coverage; but, for the bankruptcy bill, news coverage did not report any senators’ explanations, and only eight senators were quoted in news coverage of the China bill. Since news coverage is more dependent on the behavior of the press than the behavior of members of Congress, this variability is not surprising. Rather, the press was focusing more on statements from the business community for the bankruptcy bill and statements from the president on the China bill (since he signed the bill into law). Few members used mass mailings to explain their votes. Table 7.1 illustrates the number of senators who gave explanations in each media outlet for each case.

There are several implications for the number of explanations that members give across media outlets. The fact that even in high-profile cases such as the U.S-China Relations Act only three-quarters of members explain indicates that the public does not receive explanations of all of their members’ Washington activities. While such a result is not surprising given what we know about the general lack of interest in politics among the citizenry, it does lend credence to the assumption that members use explanations strategically. They do not need to explain all of the time, but only when an explanation will help them claim credit or manage blame. Further, the fact that in some cases a majority of members do offer explanations indicates that this behavior is not rare and deserves consideration. Members are clearly making attempts to reach their constituencies not only in the ways that they choose to vote, but through explanations of these votes. Future studies should more directly examine the effects of these explanations on constituency opinion.
Table 7.1 Number of Senators Explaining in Each Media Outlet for Each Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of Senators explaining</th>
<th>Press Releases</th>
<th>News Coverage</th>
<th>Congressional Record</th>
<th>Mass Mailings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Justice Act</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy Reform Act</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.-China Relations Act</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The case studies discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate some of the factors that make some members more likely to explain their votes than others. Contributions from political action committees affect the propensity to explain in each case. This effect is most prominent in *Congressional Record* explanations. The salience of the legislation’s issue in the district is also an important factor that affects the propensity for a member to explain the vote for the juvenile justice bill, but not for the other two. Of the three, however, the Juvenile Justice Act would have had the most direct impact on constituents and is a vivid issue to describe in the news. In the bankruptcy and China cases, however, the member’s vote on the bill affects his propensity to explain. Overall, these measures of the importance of the bill to the member and his district affect the propensity for the member to explain the vote on the legislation. These results point to
the importance of the severity of the predicament and also the magnitude of the cause for
celebration as impetus for explanations. If the issue is not going to cause problems or if
there is little credit to be claimed, the member is likely to remain silent on the vote.

The cases also show that members are more likely to explain their votes as
election nears. This effect is particularly consistent in the *Congressional Record* as we
see that members who are closest to reelection are most likely to offer explanations.
These results are consistent with previous hypotheses that members of Congress are
concerned with reelection as a goal and tailor their behaviors to pursue this goal
(Mayhew 1974). Further, the Senate rules illustrate its concern that members might use
these outlets of explanation for campaigning. By restricting members from updating web
sites and sending mass mailings within sixty days of election, the Senate rules lower the
number of explanations that members are able to give (at least through these means).

A final set of considerations that affect the propensity for members to explain
their votes are characteristics of the members themselves. Across the three cases, bill
sponsors are more likely than nonsponsors to offer explanations. Of course, these
members have the most at stake in terms of the bill’s passage or failure; they are the
members most interested in the policy area. Claiming credit for these bills’ passage
allows sponsors to both please constituents in terms of policy benefits, but it also has the
added benefit of giving sponsoring members an opportunity to explain their power within
the institution (Fenno 1978). Generally, while the statistical models are limited by the
size of the Senate and the distribution of explanations across the members, the results
indicate support for the notion that the more important the bill, the more concerned the
member about election, and the higher the member’s status within the institution, the more likely the member will explain the vote.\footnote{This discussion compares the individual case-by-case models. A pooled, logit model with all three cases provides results comparable to the discussion here. When all cases are combined and observations are clustered by member to compensate for multiple observations of the same member, the results mirror the dominant patterns in the individual cases. Contributions and proximity to election are the strongest of the effects.}

While we see some overlap across cases for which members explained and which remained silent, explanations are not simply a matter of personal taste. While some members did not give explanations in any of the three cases, most picked and chose bills and outlets in which to offer their statements. For press release explanations, fifty-three members offered an explanation for at least one of the votes considered here. Only two members explained all three in press releases while fifteen explained two of the three. Twenty-nine members were quoted in news coverage of one of the bills. Only four were quoted in coverage of both the Juvenile Justice Act and the China trade bill. One member, however, Rod Grams, offered a statement in a mass mailing on all three issues. This suggests that personal taste might influence the use of mass mailings.

The \textit{Congressional Record} is the most popular outlet for explanations. Seventy-eight members explained at least one of these votes in the \textit{Record}. Most, however, did not explain all of the issues discussed here. Thirty-six members explained only one of the bills, twenty-six members explained two of the bills, and sixteen members offered explanations on all three issues in the \textit{Congressional Record}. Consequently, we can see that these explanations are not being issued by only a handful of members. Instead, members pick and choose which issues to explain and what outlet best suits the explanation. Because the cases are taken from the same Congress, many of the variables
remain constant across cases. To the extent that the distance from election, for example, affects one’s propensity to explain, we would expect it to have equal effect across the three cases. Other variables, such as PAC contributions and district salience, vary considerably from member-to-member across the three cases discussed here.

The cases consistently show that members are more likely to offer explanations for their own votes than explanations for the behavior of the institution. We see, however, that these institutional explanations are most prominent in news coverage – the media outlet most easily accessible to the public. See Table 7.2. Further, while members use their explanations mostly to claim credit for successful legislation, news coverage disproportionately reports blame-managing explanations. See Table 7.3. This finding has important normative implications for representation. If members are trying to relay their positive Washington behaviors to constituents through their press releases, but newspapers choose to report their nefarious behavior, citizens may receive biased information about the members who represent them. Instead of receiving the full picture, members voting in ways that are both good and bad for the district, the media may create and reinforce a negative image of Congress and its members.
The study discussed here makes three main contributions to the existing literature. First, it refocuses the examinations of political accounts toward the antecedents of these explanations. Without understanding which politicians are offering explanations and under what conditions, we cannot fully understand the process through which the public receives this important information about how it is being represented. Further, it
indicates that there is much more to congressional voting behavior than members’ casting of roll call votes. Studies that examine congruence between members’ behavior and constituents’ wishes are missing a part of the story if they do not include how members *explain* their representation. What members say about their votes, the behavior more likely to be seen by constituents, varies by members’ situations and the issue at hand. It is not enough to investigate the reasons behind the roll call vote; we must simultaneously consider the impacts of interest groups, constituents, the media, and other political pressures on the ways that members are held accountable and these votes are explained.

Second, the study also refocuses attention to explanations given both for positive and negative behavior. While explanations for negative behavior are more entertaining in the press and keep the public on the edge of its collective seat, the explanations for positive behavior are both more common and more educational about how members of Congress are connecting the will of the people to their policy efforts. Consequently, studies of political explanations should focus not only on scandals and corruption, but also on the everyday efforts of representatives to represent.

Finally, the study demonstrates a gulf between how senators wish to convey their representation (through their press releases) and how this representation is actually conveyed to the public (through news coverage). For many constituents “what you see” may not be “what you get” when it comes to your senator’s Washington activities. While members are able to gain coverage in the news, it is primarily when they are in trouble or when they are describing the actions of the institution. In their press releases, however, they are touting their successes to whoever will listen. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this study to determine who it is that receives these press releases. The fact that a
senator’s news coverage does not reflect the press releases he or she issues, however, confirms previous work that points to the press’s reluctance to print whatever senators feed them.

This work sets the stage for other studies of explanations in a political context. The results for the Senate here could be compared with House members’ behavior. Analysis of the House has the statistical benefits of more cases. The results are expected to be similar to the ones reported here with a few exceptions. First, House members are all equidistant from election. In effect, they are all in the position of the senators closest to reelection and, in many cases, most likely to explain. We might expect, consequently, that explanations are more predominant overall across the House than the Senate. Senators, however, receive more media coverage than House members. Such an effect would diminish the electoral effect for House members. Consequently, we might expect to see House members issuing more press releases in an effort to gain exposure, while receiving even less news coverage than their Senate counterparts.

The dynamics of these explanations and their effect for policy debate in the chamber considering the bill second would be interesting to study. As the juvenile justice bill indicated, members of one chamber of Congress are sometimes giving explanations directed at members of the other chamber. We know that members take cues from one another on how to vote (Matthews and Stimson 1975); perhaps cuetaking is prevalent among explanations as well. The various media outlets examined here could be investigated individually. For example, the mass mailings collected for this project indicate that members are likely to use this media to reach elderly constituents. Is this finding unique to the time period studied here? Are these members explaining these bills
in other outlets contemporaneously? Other contexts could be considered as well, such as explanations during political campaigns. Campaign rhetoric such as political advertisements, speeches, and debates would provide an excellent forum for examining explanations that both claim credit and manage blame. The dynamic nature of the context would also lend insight into the extent to which politicians are asked to explain their behavior by challengers. Future research could examine the use of explanations by other members of the United States government or politicians abroad. The ways that the explanations vary over a member’s career would also be interesting to study in future work. Fenno (1974), Arnold (1997), and others have discussed how members’ goals change over their careers. We might then expect their explaining to change commensurate with these goals.

Taking a step back from explaining the vote, we see that it is a worthwhile endeavor to examine the explanations of these votes. These public statements are overlooked strategies used by members of Congress to convey their representation to various constituencies. While no study can fulfill Fenno’s challenge to examine the totality of congressional communication, this study goes farther than those before it to attempt to explain explanations.
APPENDIX A

State and Local News Sources

ALABAMA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

ALASKA
The Anchorage Daily News
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

ARIZONA
The Arizona Republic
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Phoenix New Times

ARKANSAS
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

CALIFORNIA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The California Business Press
Cal-OSHA Reporter
California Journal
California Supreme Court Service
City News Service
The Daily News of Los Angeles
The Dispatch
The Fresno Bee
Los Angeles Times
Metropolitan News Enterprise
The Modesto Bee
New Times Los Angeles
North County Times
The Orange County Register
The Press Enterprise
Recorder
The San Francisco Chronicle
San Francisco Examiner
San Jose Mercury News
SF Weekly
Ventura County Star

COLORADO
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Denver Post
Denver Westword
The Gazette (Colorado Springs)

CONNECTICUT
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Connecticut Law Tribune

DELAWARE
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

FLORIDA
50 Plus Lifestyles
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Broward Daily Business Review
Fort Pierce News
Jupiter Courier
The Ledger (Lakeland)
Miami Daily Business Review
The Miami Herald
Miami New Times
New Times  Broward-Palm Beach
Palm Beach Daily Business Review
The Palm Beach Post
Post and Courier (Charleston, SC)
The Press Journal
Sebastian Sun
St. Petersburg Times
Stuart News / The Port St. Lucie News
The Tampa Tribune
Treasure Coast Business Journal

GEORGIA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Atlanta Journal and Constitution
The Augusta Chronicle
Fulton County Daily Report
The Macon Telegraph

HAWAII
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Pacific Employment Law Letter

IDAHO
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Idaho Falls Post Register
Lewiston Morning Tribune

ILLINOIS
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Chicago Daily Herald
Chicago Daily Law Bulletin
Chicago Lawyer
Chicago Sun-Times
Crain’s Chicago Business
Crain’s Small Business Chicago
Illinois Legal Times
The Pantagraph
The State Journal-Register (Springfield, IL)

INDIANA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Indiana Lawyer
The News-Sentinel
South Bend Tribune

IOWA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)

KANSAS
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Kansas City Star
The Wichita Eagle

KENTUCKY
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Lexington Herald-Leader

LOUISIANA
The Advocate (Baton Rouge)
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Times-Picayune

MAINE
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Bangor Daily News
Central Maine Morning Sentinel
Kennebec Journal
Portland Press Herald

MARYLAND
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Baltimore Sun
The Capital (Annapolis, MD)
Daily Record and Sunday Mail

MASSACHUSETTS
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Boston Globe
The Boston Herald
The Patriot Ledger
Telegram and Gazette

MICHIGAN
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Crain’s Detroit Business
Crain’s Small Business Detroit
Detroit Free Press
Detroit Monthly

MINNESOTA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)

MISSISSIPPI
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

MISSOURI
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Kansas City Star
Riverfront Times
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

MONTANA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

NEBRASKA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Omaha World Herald

NEVADA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Las Vegas Review-Journal
NEW HAMPSHIRE
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Union Leader

NEW JERSEY
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
New Jersey Law Journal
New Jersey Lawyer
The Record (Bergen County, NJ)
The Record (New Jersey)
The Star-Ledger

NEW MEXICO
The Albuquerque Journal
The Albuquerque Tribune
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Santa Fe New Mexican

NEW YORK
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Buffalo News
Columbian Journalism Review
Crain’s New York Business
Daily News (New York)
Long Island voice
New York Law Journal
New York Observer
The New York Post
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Times Union (Albany, NY)
The Village Voice

NORTH CAROLINA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Charlotte Observer
The Herald-Sun
Morning Star (Wilmington, NC)
News and Record (Greensboro, NC)

NORTH DAKOTA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Bismarck Tribune
Grand Forks Herald
OHIO
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Cleveland Scene
The Columbus Dispatch
Crain’s Cleveland Business
Dayton Daily News
The Plain Dealer

OKLAHOMA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Tulsa World

OREGON
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Oregonian (Portland)

PENNSYLVANIA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Intelligencer Journal
Lancaster New Era
Legal Intelligencer
The Morning Call (Allentown)
The Patriot-News
Pennsylvania Law Weekly
Philadelphia Daily News
The Philadelphia Inquirer
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Sunday News (Lancaster)
The Times Leader

RHODE ISLAND
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Providence Journal-Bulletin

SOUTH CAROLINA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Beaufort Gazette (South Carolina)
The Herald-Sun

SOUTH DAKOTA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

TENNESSEE
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Chattanooga Times / Chattanooga Free Press
The Commercial Appeal (Memphis)
Knoxville News-Sentinel

TEXAS
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Austin American-Statesman
Corpus Christi Caller-Times
The Dallas Morning News
Dallas Observer
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
The Houston Chronicle
Houston Press
San Antonio Express-News
Texas Employment Law Letter
The Texas Lawyer
Texas Monthly

UTAH
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Deseret News

VERMONT
The Associated Press State and Local Wire

VIRGINIA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Richmond Times Dispatch
Roanoke Times and World News
The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

WASHINGTON
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Columbian (Vancouver, WA)
The News Tribune
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
The Seattle Times
Tri-City Herald

WEST VIRGINIA
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Charleston Daily Mail
The Charleston Gazette

WISCONSIN
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
Capital Times (Madison, WI)
The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Wisconsin State Journal

WYOMING
The Associated Press State and Local Wire
The Wyoming Tribune-Eagle
APPENDIX B
CONTRIBUTING PACs

In approximate order of total amounts contributed to Senators

**Juvenile Justice Act:**
Gun Rights
National Rifle Association
Safari Club International
Gun Owners of America
Arena PAC
SHOT-PAC
Great Lake Arms Collectors Association
Grass Roots NC/Forum for Firearms Education
Montana Shooting Sports Association
Ohio Gun Collectors Association

**Gun Control**
Handgun Control Inc.
Washington Ceasefire
Voters Against Violence

**Bankruptcy Reform Act:**
National Consumer Bankruptcy Coalition Members
Credit Union National Association
American Bankers Association
America’s Community Bankers
Independent Bankers Association
Visa USA Inc.
National Retail Federation
American Financial Services Association
Mastercard International
Consumer Bankers Association

**China PNTR:**
Business Roundtable Members – over 200 members, including:
Boeing
United Parcel Service
Federal Express
Lockheed Martin
**Labor Organizations – 247 contributing PACs including:**
American Federation of State, City, and Municipal Employees
Service Employees International Union
Carpenters and Joiners Union
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
Communications Workers of America
United Food and Commercial Workers Union
American Federation of Teachers
Laborers Union
Teamsters Union
Machinists/Aerospace Workers Union
National Education Association
United Auto Workers
Sheet Metal Workers Union
AFL-CIO
National Association of Letter Carriers
Plumbers/Pipefitters Union
Marine Engineers Union
International Association of Fire Fighters
Ironworkers Union
Painters and Allied Trades Union
### Importance of the Bill

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<th>Maximum</th>
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### Electoral Concerns

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### Margin of Victory

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Table C.1 Descriptive Statistics (Continued)
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APPENDIX D

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES
FOR THE JUVENILE JUSTICE ACT
### Importance of the Bill

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<th>District Salience</th>
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<td>------</td>
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### Electoral Concerns

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### Member Characteristics

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Table D.1 Correlations Between the Independent Variables for the Juvenile Justice Act (Continued)
Table D.1 (Continued)

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<td>.059</td>
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Note: Correlations between interval-level variables (contributions, district salience, margin of victory, and seniority) are Pearson’s R. Eta statistics are reported for nominal-interval combinations. Phi statistics are reported for nominal-nominal variable pairs.
APPENDIX E
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES
ON BANKRUPTCY BILL
### Importance of the Bill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Contributions</th>
<th>District Salience</th>
<th>Vote</th>
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### Electoral Concerns

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<th>Victory</th>
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<td>.531</td>
<td>.433</td>
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<td>.137</td>
<td>-.024</td>
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<td>.003</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.109</td>
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<td>Election in Three Cycles</td>
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<td>.086</td>
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### Member Characteristics

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<th>Victory</th>
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<td>.134</td>
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<td>Party Leader</td>
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<td>.081</td>
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**Table E.1 Correlations Between Independent Variables On Bankruptcy Bill**

(Continued)
Table E.1 (Continued)

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<th>Margin of Victory*</th>
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<th>Elect3</th>
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<td>.581</td>
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<td>-.504</td>
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<td>.120</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.106</td>
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<td>.521</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>-.043</td>
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Table E.1 (Continued)

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<td>.108</td>
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Note: Correlations between interval level variable are Pearson’s R, correlations between nominal variables are Phi, and correlations between nominal and interval variables are Eta statistics. Interval variables include: contributions, district salience, margin, and seniority.
APPENDIX F
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES
FOR THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS ACT
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<th>Labor Contributions</th>
<th>District Salience</th>
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<td>.953</td>
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<td>.284</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>.071</td>
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<td>.071</td>
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**Electoral Concerns**

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**Member Characteristics**

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<td>.422</td>
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<td>.085</td>
<td>.432</td>
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<td>Party Leader</td>
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<td>Party</td>
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<td>.117</td>
<td>.024</td>
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Table F.1 Correlations between the Independent Variables For the U.S.-China Relations Act
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<th>Elect2</th>
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<td>Party</td>
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Table F.1 (Continued)

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<th>Party Leader</th>
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<td>.641</td>
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<td>.078</td>
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<td>.108</td>
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<td>Margin of Victory</td>
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<td>.399</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.004</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.059</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Correlations between interval-level variables (contributions, district salience, margin of victory, Pearson’s R. Eta statistics are reported for nominal-interval combinations. Phi statistics are reported for nominal-nominal variable pairs.
APPENDIX G

Table G.1 Probit Estimates of the Importance of the Bill, Electoral Concerns, and Member Characteristics on the Probability of Explaining the Vote on the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 in Press Releases, Mass Mailings, and the Congressional Record.
Table G.1 (Continued)

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<th>All sources&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Press Releases&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Congressional Record&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
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<td>(3.791)</td>
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Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.
** indicates p<.01, one-tailed. * indicates p<.05, one tailed. + indicates p<.10, one tailed.

a. N=98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (15) = 14.18, Prob> chi2 = .5119, Pseudo R2 = .1274, Log likelihood = -48.56

b. N=84 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill; fourteen senators did not post press releases for this time period).
   LR chi2 (15) = 7.99, Prob>chi2 = .9243, Pseudo R2 = .0722, Log likelihood = -51.316

c. N=98 (two senators are dropped because they did not vote on the bill).
   LR chi2 (15) = 45.02, Prob>chi2 = .0001, Pseudo R2 = .3397, Log likelihood = -43.755
REFERENCES


Box-Steppensmeier, Janet, Laura Arnold, and Christopher J.W. Zorn. 1997. The


Sigelman, Lee, Carol Sigelman, & Barbara Walkosz. 1992. The Public and the Paradox


