

Information, Expectations, and Racial Differences in Accountability*

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Abstract

Citizens contribute to the process of democratic accountability by acquiring information about their elected officials' behavior, comparing this information to their expectations regarding substantive representation, and voting in elections based on the result of this comparison. However, citizens possess varying levels of information about, and different expectations of, Representatives' voting behavior, which raises the possibility that some citizens are more likely to hold their Representatives accountable than others. We find that there are substantial *racial* disparities in democratic accountability, and that these disparities originate from African Americans' relative difficulty acquiring information about their Representatives' voting behavior, as well as from this group's unique expectations of their Representatives. However, consistent with pluralist models of democracy, we show that on issues most important to African Americans, this group is actually more successful than whites at holding Representatives accountable.

As V. O. Key (1961) famously stated, “Unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense” (7). At the foundation of this normative prescription is the belief that public policies should tend to reflect public opinion, and that Congress, as the branch of government with “an immediate dependence on, and intimate sympathy with, the people” (Madison, Fed. 52, 327), should act as a chief mediator between citizens' preferences and policy outcomes. Given this belief, a large and growing body of literature assesses the congruence between public preferences and policy outcomes (e.g. Page and Shapiro 1983; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 1995, 2002; Wlezien 2004), and between public preferences and legislator behavior (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978; Powell 1982), finding largely congruent relationships for both.

Elections are one of the important avenues by which citizens participate in the formation and maintenance of the opinion-policy relationship.¹ Through elections, citizens can select and retain elected officials who are “like-minded,” in the sense that they are likely to support policy alternatives that their constituents also would support (Miller and Stokes 1963). When elected officials are out of step with their constituents, democratic accountability requires that citizens are willing and capable of either inducing a change in their representative's behavior or replacing them.²

¹ As Fiorina (1981) put it, “Elections are the ultimate tie between the governed and the governors in a democratic society” (7). Similarly, Wright (1989) contends that “elections are the chief mechanism for achieving accountability and for insuring legislative responsiveness to constituency preferences” (465).

² Arnold (2004) emphasizes that at the core of accountability is the ability of citizens who are unhappy with the performance of their elected officials to “throw the rascals out” (5).

Previous work finds that citizens do in fact sanction so-called legislator "shirking," by punishing at the ballot box legislators whose voting records deviate too far from mean or median constituency opinion, measured various ways (e.g. Erikson 1971; Wright 1978; Johannes and McAdams 1981; Goff and Grier 1993; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Burden 2004a). These studies offer an encouraging account of the current operation of the accountability mechanism.

More troubling, however, is the possibility that citizens are not equally likely to hold their Representatives accountable. Implicit in most studies of accountability are the assumptions that individual citizens are able to acquire the necessary information about their representatives' behavior in Washington, and that citizens expect that their elected officials will represent their preferences when making important decisions and take them to task when they do not. However, prior studies show that there is considerable variation both in citizens' success in acquiring information about their representatives' behavior (e.g. Wright 1978; Powell 1989; Husted, Kenny, and Morton 1995; Alvarez and Gronke 1996; Wolpert and Gimpel 1997; Wilson and Gronke 2000), and in citizens' expectations of their elected officials' representational role (e.g. Davidson 1970). This strongly suggests that the likelihood that citizens will hold their Representatives accountable varies, perhaps considerably. Moreover, citizens' tendency to hold elected officials accountable may vary by issue. In particular, on issues that are more important for citizens, prior research suggests that they are more knowledgeable (Iyengar 1990; Krosnik 1990; McGraw and Kinney 1990; Hutchings 2001, 2003), and tend to use this information when choosing between candidates (Hutchings 2003).

In this study, we ask whether African Americans, in particular, are less likely than whites to hold their legislators accountable. Specifically, using legislators' roll call decisions, measured

using DW-NOMINATE coordinates (1977-2001) and their constituents' ideological self-placements, incumbent placements, and incumbent evaluations, all measured using National Elections Studies data (1978-2002), we find evidence of racial disparity in democratic accountability. The prospect of racial differences in accountability is cause for worry among those concerned about the representation of African Americans' interests. If African Americans are not represented as well as whites, which some have asserted (Guinier 1994) and others have shown (Bartels 1998; Hero 1998), the accountability mechanism may be limited in its ability to correct this imbalance, and may even exacerbate it. Put simply, if citizens do not take notice or action when their preferences are not being represented by their elected officials, democratic accountability suffers and their preferences may be left underrepresented.

We also probe the extent to which racial disparities in accountability are explained by racial differences in information and expectations of representation, and whether racial differences in accountability vary by issue domain. Specifically, we test the two factors we have identified that cause variation in accountability, information and expectations. We find that whites' perceptions of how well they are substantively represented are much more accurate than African Americans' perceptions; and whites are more willing than African Americans to sanction legislators they perceive as ideologically distant at election time. Both of these differences are aggravated when African Americans are descriptively represented. However, we also show that for issues most salient for African Americans, this group is more likely to hold their Representatives accountable than whites. Together, these findings contribute to literatures on racial disparities in representation, differences in citizens' acquisition of political information and their expectations of their elected officials, and the study of democratic accountability.

Background

Several studies have analyzed the link between legislator voting, usually measured as a legislators' tendency to support the extreme of their party, and *aggregate electoral outcomes* (Erikson 1971; Johannes and McAdams 1981; Wright and Berkman 1986; Goff and Grier 1993; Erikson and Wright 2000; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Burden 2004a). These studies generally find that legislators who deviate from the preferences of their mean constituent enjoy less electoral success, whether measured as vote share or electoral outcome.³

Building on these findings at an aggregate level, a second series of studies has shown that *individual citizens* who are at odds with their incumbent's actual or perceived roll call decisions are less likely to rate them favorably or support their re-election (Wright 1978; Powell 1982; Bernstein 1991; Binder, Maltzman, and Sigelman 1998; Hutchings 2003).⁴ For instance,

³ Erikson and Wright (2000) contend that legislators are aware of this, and take their own electoral security into account when making decisions; Representatives who face the greatest threat of electoral defeat tend to moderate their voting. Likewise, Wolpert and Gimpel (1997) assert that "It is the fear of the use of the electoral sanction that prompts the representative to act in accordance with the preferences of the represented" (537).

⁴ Many students of voting behavior have focused on the related subject of "issue voting," or the extent to which citizens rely on the congruence between their preferences and candidates' promises when choosing between candidate platforms in elections (e.g. Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989). Where the issue voting approach asks how voters evaluate prospective policies, democratic accountability asks whether voters evaluate politicians' prior behavior, in light of voters' policy preferences. A separate literature has focused on citizens' retrospective reactions to general conditions, such as the economy, unemployment, inflation, and international conflict (Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981).

Bernstein (1991) found that citizens who perceive their Representative to be ideologically distant from their own preferences are less likely to support their reelection.

A third literature speaks to whether citizens are able to gain the necessary *information* to make a reasonable assessment of whether their incumbent is representing their interests. Many political scientists have questioned the ability of citizens to acquire political information and use that knowledge to participate intelligently in politics (Converse 1964; Bennett 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).⁵ Niemi and Junn (1998) summarize the literature well:

“[D]emonstrating the ignorance of the public has become something of a cottage industry, with one researcher after another trying to find a more absurd example of what Americans do not know about politics and government or a more apt metaphor to express their collective ignorance” (5). If this were the entire story, democratic accountability might suffer, as elected officials would enjoy significant leeway in their voting behavior that would go largely unnoticed by most citizens.⁶

Other scholars have contended, however, that there are a number of possible sources citizens can utilize to gain information about the voting behavior of their elected officials. First, elected officials often provide simple “cues” about their voting behavior to citizens, including the political party with which they choose to affiliate (Downs 1957; Erikson 1971; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Second, challengers can bring attention to an incumbent’s voting record

⁵ Schumpeter (1942) argues that “the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field” (262).

⁶ As Erikson and Wright (2000) argue, “If electorates were indifferent to the policy stands of their elected representatives, then Congress members would have no strong incentive to follow constituency opinion” (152).

when they possess evidence that the incumbent is “shirking” or “out of touch” with the preferences of the district (Kingdon 1989; Arnold 1990, 1993).⁷ Third, interest groups and advocacy organizations often provide detailed assessments of the voting records of members of Congress to constituents (e.g., Arnold 1993; Hutchings 2003). Finally, the media, in everything from television coverage of high profile congressional votes to newspaper summaries that indicate how the local congressperson voted on bills the previous week, can provide at least a minimal amount of information about the voting behavior of members of Congress (Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995; Hutchings 1998; Arnold 2004; Snyder and Stromberg 2005).⁸

A final group of studies has shown that citizens who possess *specific political information* about their legislator's roll call behavior are *better able* to hold the legislator accountable (Wolpert and Gimpel 1997; Hutchings 2001, 2003; Arnold 2004). As Arnold put it, a "rich informational environment increases the chances that citizens will have an evidentiary basis for determining whether they approve or disapprove of a representative's performance in office (2004, 12). Moreover, based on their study of the Justice Thomas confirmation vote,

⁷ Arnold (1990, 68-71) finds that well-funded challengers increase the chances of accountability as incumbents are forced to anticipate what constituents would want if they were fully informed to avoid electoral sanction. Likewise, Kingdon (1989) finds that members of Congress tend to behave like the public is paying attention, in part to avoid the possibility of a future challenger bringing their “shirking” to light at election time.

⁸ Given these multiple sources for political information, Hutchings (2003) contends, “[V]oters are generally as informed about their incumbent’s performance in office as they *ought* to be, given the relatively high levels of responsiveness, and they are about as informed as they *can* be, given the information available” (3, emphasis in original).

Wolpert and Gimpel concluded that "voters must invest in detailed information for elections to serve as adequate instruments of accountability" (1997, 547).⁹

In summary, prior studies show that Representatives' voting behavior is linked to electoral outcomes, that it is tied to individual constituent evaluations, and that citizens are reasonably able to acquire and use information concerning their Representatives' decisions. This is an encouraging account of the present functioning of the accountability mechanism. We cast a more critical gaze on the process of accountability by assessing whether there are racial differences in accountability, focusing on the role of citizen information and expectations in this process. Specifically, we test whether the effect of ideological distance between Representative and constituent on incumbent evaluations and vote choice is weaker among African Americans than among whites. We also examine the mechanisms by which this disparity is created. First, we assess whether African Americans are as successful as whites in acquiring information about their Representative's behavior, relative to their own preferences. We also examine whether better informed citizens in both racial groups are more likely to hold their legislators accountable.¹⁰ Second, we assess whether African Americans' unique expectations of their Representatives, a point on which we provide additional evidence, affects their willingness to sanction incumbents at the ballot box. These findings shed light more generally on the role of expectations in the process of accountability, a topic that has received little scholarly attention to date. Finally, we assess whether racial disparities in accountability remain when our analysis is

⁹ Instead of focusing on a single or small set of congressional votes, we generalize this finding to a much larger pattern of roll call behavior and apply it to racial groups.

¹⁰ In doing so, we test more broadly than others have done the more general proposition that informed citizens are better able to hold their Representatives accountable (Wolpert and Gimpel 1997).

narrowed to issues most salient for African Americans, testing the implications of the proposition that, on the issues that matter most to them, African Americans are better informed and have more exacting expectations of representation.

Reasons to Expect Racial Differences in Accountability

Our expectation that there are racial differences in accountability stems from racial differences in information and expectations. One reason that African Americans may be less accurate in their conclusions about their Representative's voting behavior is that African Americans are somewhat less interested in and informed about politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hutchings 2001; Althaus 2003).¹¹ For instance, in their survey of political knowledge, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found that whites correctly identified important *national* public figures and political issues at nearly twice the rate of African American respondents.¹² This lesser interest and knowledge may stem from individual-level factors such as African Americans' lower levels of educational attainment (Farley 1999) and socioeconomic status (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) or from continued suspicion of the institutions and elected officials who are the sources of political information (e.g., Howell and Fagan 1988). Put simply, African Americans feel less politically

¹¹ Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) find that the political information gap between whites and blacks, after narrowing in the 1960s and 1970s, was nearly as large in 1988 as it was three or four decades earlier (163).

¹² Interestingly, while African Americans knew much less than whites about national politics, African Americans actually were actually more knowledgeable about local politics than whites after controlling for socioeconomic status (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 149).

efficacious, hold more negative attitudes toward government, and are less likely to seek and attain information about many aspects of government, including their Representative's voting record.

A second reason that African Americans may face greater hurdles to acquiring information about their Representative's roll call voting is that this group is less likely to be targeted for mobilization by candidates and political parties during elections (Bartels 1998; Frymer 1999), in which a significant amount of political learning can occur (Conover and Feldman 1989). Since African American tend to vote overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates, both parties may choose to devote little of their campaign resources specifically towards African Americans, as this group's votes may appear less "up for grabs" than other groups. Thus, African Americans' strong allegiance to the Democratic Party may also contribute to lower levels of political information among this group.

Finally, some have suggested that African Americans who are descriptively represented may be "blindly loyal" toward their Representative and, accordingly, pay little attention to their Representative's voting behavior (Mansbridge 1999, 640). Put another way, African Americans represented by an African American congressperson might "project" their preferences onto their Representative and believe they are ideologically similar when substantively this is not the case (Wilson and Gronke 2000). As about one-third of African Americans in the United States are represented by an African American Representative in Congress,¹³ descriptive representation may act as another mechanism leading African Americans to possess less information about the behavior of their legislators compared to whites.

¹³ For instance, using the National Annenberg Election Survey (2000), a national RDD sample of more than 50,000 respondents, we observe that 30% of African Americans are descriptively represented.

African Americans' unique expectations of their Representatives should also contribute to racial differences in accountability. After comparing whatever information they acquire about their Representative's voting record with their own preferences, legislative accountability requires that citizens form a general conclusion of the performance of the incumbent and vote based on this judgment.¹⁴ Studies show that citizens are not uniform in this regard (Bernstein 1989, 4-5; Wolpert and Gimpel 1997). Some citizens are more likely to expect that their Representative will closely monitor and respond to the preferences of the district, while others may expect that their Representative will act as a problem solver for the district in which they reside, and still others expect that their Representative should focus on solving the nation's problems (Davidson 1970; Fenno 1978).¹⁵

Davidson (1970) found that less advantaged, less politically active groups such as racial minorities and those who earn lower incomes were much less likely to form *any* expectations of their Representatives, and even when they did form expectations, they were less often concerned with dyadic, substantive representation (660-61). Tate (2003) also showed that African Americans are more likely to expect their Representatives to focus their energies on making sure their district receives its fair share of federal government appropriations rather than making laws or conducting casework.

¹⁴ As Wolpert and Gimpel (1997) put it, "citizens must evaluate legislative candidates on the basis of their policy positions and actions in office and . . . they must use such evaluations as the basis of their vote" (537).

¹⁵ These expectations, in turn, may form the basis of Representatives' "role orientations" as Representatives form some perception of their constituents' expectations and mold their "home style" to fulfill these expectations (Fenno 1978).

Another reason to expect racial differences in expectations is that African Americans represented by an African American congressperson may tend to rate that Representative favorably largely because they are of the same race, placing much less weight on ideological congruence (Tate 2003, 129-31). African Americans may be more concerned with descriptive and symbolic representation than with substantive representation (Pitkin 1967).¹⁶ In sum, differences in the general information and expectations that racial groups possess should both contribute to racial differences in accountability.

On the other hand, African Americans may be much *better* able to hold their representatives accountable on issues they deem most important. Prior studies demonstrate that citizens more readily acquire political information in their environment about issues salient to them (e.g., Iyengar 1990; Krosnick 1990; McGraw and Pinney 1990; Hutchings 2001, 2003). For example, Iyengar (1990) showed that African Americans are more informed than whites about civil rights issues. Hutchings (2003) demonstrated that African Americans and whites were equally knowledgeable about their Senator's vote on the Justice Thomas confirmation, and in swing states African Americans were even more knowledgeable than whites.

Other work indicates that citizens may hold more demanding expectations of their Representatives on the issues they deem most salient (Fiorina 1974; Hutchings 2003). "Interested" citizens rely more heavily on the issues they care about when casting ballots in elections (Hutchings 2003; but see Wolpert and Gimpel 1997). Hutchings (2003) showed that citizens who are union members became more likely to support their incumbent Senator's re-

¹⁶ Indeed, representation can be powerfully symbolic for, as Eulau and Karps (1978) emphasize, "How else could one explain that representatives manage to stay in office in spite of the fact that they are *not* necessarily or always responsive to the represented?" (61).

election as the incumbent's AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education (COPE) score increases, and that this is particularly true when labor issues are raised in Senate campaigns. In sum, on issues most important to African Americans they should be more informed and have more exacting expectations, and thus be more likely to hold their elected officials accountable.

Data and Method

In this section, we discuss the manner in which we measure both representation and citizens' perceptions of how well they are represented. We introduce the remaining measures we use as they arise in the analysis. Following Achen (1978), we measure representation as the *proximity* of legislators to their constituents.¹⁷ To assess this proximity, we require data to measure legislators' behavior and citizens' preferences, as well as a method of comparing the distance between them.

As a measure of Representatives' aggregate voting behavior, we use their first dimension DW-NOMINATE coordinates for the 95th-106th Congresses (1977-2001), which range continuously from -1 to +1 with higher scores indicating a more conservative voting record (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997). These scores are usually interpreted as measuring a legislator's social welfare ideology, given their revealed preferences. Studies of congressional roll call voting have frequently employed this and alternative versions of NOMINATE scores as a dependent variable (e.g. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Bartels 2002). As a practical matter, DW-NOMINATE coordinates are highly correlated with alternative, summary

¹⁷ According to Achen, linking representation to proximity emphasizes the extent to which "no ideological view is . . . given special treatment" (488).

measures of legislator roll call behavior such as interest group ratings and Heckman-Snyder scores (Burden, Caldeira, and Groseclose 2000).

For our measures of citizen ideology, perceived incumbent ideology, and incumbent evaluations we principally use data from the National Election Studies (NES).¹⁸ Other scholars have recognized the "nexus" between citizens' surveyed ideological orientations and legislators' NOMINATE scores (Bartels 2002). Our measures start in 1978, when the NES began to ask its respondents to place their Representatives on an ideological scale, and conclude in 2002.¹⁹ We map this data for each NES respondent onto their Representative's roll call behavior in the preceding Congress.²⁰

¹⁸ The wording of the item is: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal [1] to extremely conservative [7]. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" A similar item asked respondents to place their congressperson on the same ideological scale.

¹⁹ The NES also contains measures of incumbent placement, incumbent opposition (i.e. the presence of an electoral challenger), incumbent favorability, and incumbent electoral support, which we require for our analysis. Incumbent placement was queried in 1978, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000.

²⁰ One concern with this data is that general measures of ideological orientation may be less meaningful for African Americans than for whites (McClain and Stewart 1992). We therefore repeated our key estimations using an issue-based measure of citizen ideology, consisting of each respondent's mean answer to the NES government services and spending and government provision of jobs items, both coded conservative end higher. Measuring citizen ideology using specific issues rather than directly on an ideological scale generally does not affect our results.

To assess citizens' level of representation, we must determine the distance between Representatives' aggregated roll call decisions and their constituents' ideologies. However, the lack of a common scale for legislators and their constituents has confounded legislative scholars for decades (e.g., Miller 1964; Achen 1978; Wright 1978; Kuklinski 1978; Powell 1982, 1989; Burden 2004b). The earliest approach, yet one still advocated, was simply to transform scales measuring Representatives' decisions and constituents' attitudes to the same range (Miller 1964; Achen 1978; Burden 2004b). Yet another method was to standardize both measures so that they share the same mean and variance (Wright 1978).²¹ Other distance measures followed (Powell 1982). One reason for this proliferation of distance measures is that each measure has been subject to criticism of one form or another.²² Rather than adjudicating between the merits and demerits of these measures, we use as many of them as possible in our analysis, and introduce a measure of our own as well. If multiple measures of citizens' proximity to their legislators point to the same conclusions, we gain more confidence in our results.

As our first measure of proximity, following Miller (1964), Achen (1978), and Burden (2004b) (hereinafter *MAB*) we rescaled the DW-NOMINATE scores so their range was the same as that of the citizens' ideological self-placement item (1-7).²³ Next, similar to Wright (1978), we standardized the DW-NOMINATE scores and ideological self-placements to a mean of zero

²¹ More precisely, Wright (1978) used the mean and variance of politically active citizens' opinions to transform all citizens' opinions, while standardizing the distribution of legislators to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

²² For instance, Powell (1982, 663) questioned the underlying assumption of many of these measures that the means and variances of incumbents' and citizens' positions are equal.

²³ Rescaled DW-NOMINATE=DW-NOMINATE*3+4.

and a standard deviation of one. We also introduce a new measure of proximity that takes advantage of citizens' placement of House incumbents to meaningfully group incumbents into the same "bins" that survey respondents are asked to place themselves.²⁴

We construct two measures of substantive representation using these data. First, in order to retain the information concerning whether the Representative is to the citizen's "right," (i.e. more conservative) or to the citizen's "left," we simply subtract the citizen's self-placement from the legislator's location. We term this measure *Relative Distance*. We use this measure in models of citizens' perceived representation because it allows us to assess the accuracy of citizens' perceptions of representation both in terms of correct distance and direction. Second, we calculate the absolute value of the distance between citizen and legislator, and term this

²⁴ Specifically, using NES data we pooled partisan, college-educated citizens' placements of their House incumbents from 1996 to 2002, a period during which the ideological composition of Congress was relatively stable. We then use the distribution of citizen incumbent placements to generate cut points for the distribution of legislator DW-NOMINATE scores. To increase the size of the citizen sample at the extremes of the ideological spectrum, where so few citizens placed incumbents that we are less certain of the location of the cut points, we collapsed the extreme values in the scale with their neighboring values (i.e. we combine "very conservative" and "conservative" placements and "very liberal" and "liberal" placements). Using the tabulated percentages of incumbents that citizens placed in each bin, we then selected cut lines for the DW-NOMINATE distribution in each of the Congresses we analyze such that the percentage of incumbents is equal to the percentage of citizen incumbent placements. These incumbent placements tell us, from citizens' perspective, the percentage of incumbents who are in each of the "bins" in which the NES allows citizens to place themselves. We can then compare incumbents' binned locations on the ideological scale to voters' ideological self-placements to measure respondent proximity.

Absolute Distance. We use this measure in some of our models of incumbent favorability and electoral support.

We also measure how well citizens perceive they are represented in two ways. To measure *Perceived Relative Distance*, we subtract citizens' ideological self-placements from their ideological placement of their Representative. Because both placements are scalar, the measure of perceived representation is categorical. Nevertheless, in our models of perceived distance we use an OLS estimator to ease interpretation of the results.²⁵ To measure *Perceived Absolute Distance*, we determine the absolute value of the distance between citizens' placements of themselves and their Representatives. We use this measure in some of our models of incumbent favorability and electoral support.

Results

We present three sets of results that (1) describe whether African Americans are less likely than whites to hold their Representatives accountable; (2) explain why African Americans are less likely to hold their Representatives accountable; and (3) assess whether racial disparities in accountability are attenuated when the analysis is narrowed only to issues most important to African Americans.

Describing Racial Differences in Accountability

To determine the effect of citizens' distance from their Representatives on their likelihood of voting for the incumbent's re-election, we estimated a series of probit models.

²⁵ Parallel estimations using an ordered probit estimator yielded very similar results.

These estimations included citizens who resided in a district where the incumbent ran for re-election, but only those who reported voting for the incumbent Representative (coded 1) and those who reported voting for the challenger (coded 0).

We report the results of simple, bivariate estimations in the top panel of Table 1. Throughout our analyses, we report the estimates of separate models for whites and African Americans for presentational purposes, but note that models using a race interaction yielded results supporting all our conclusions. According to the first set of results, whites are more likely than African Americans to hold their legislator accountable at election time. For all three measures of distance, the coefficient for whites is of greater magnitude than that for African Americans. Substantively, this indicates that when they make voting decisions, white respondents, more than African American respondents, are sensitive to the ideological distance of their incumbent.

Next, we controlled for other considerations affecting incumbent support, most notably co-partisan status and each incumbent's party affiliation. By accounting for co-partisan status in these models, we determine the extent to which citizens' voting decisions are based on absolute distance, over and above citizens' knowledge that they do or do not share their legislator's party affiliation. We also control for respondent characteristics such as education, income, gender, and age, respondent attitudes such as party identification and ideological orientation, and Representatives' party affiliations.²⁶ All three estimations for whites continue to reveal a negative, statistically significant relationship between absolute distance and incumbent electoral support (see bottom panel of Table 1). Substantively, a white citizen located at the 75th

²⁶ Gender was coded male=0, female=1; party identification and ideology are measured on 1-7 scales, Republican and conservative higher; Representative party affiliation coded Democrat=0; Republican=1.

percentile in the distribution of the distance measure is about 8% less likely than a white citizen who is located at the 25th percentile to vote for their incumbent.

TABLE 1: EFFECT OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE ON INCUMBENT ELECTORAL SUPPORT, BY RACE

	<i>MAB</i>		<i>Wright</i>		<i>Binned</i>	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Absolute Distance	-.400** [.015]	-.210** [.054]	-.512** [.020]	-.408** [.071]	-.324** [.034]	-.062 [.132]
Constant	1.236** [.028]	1.474** [.109]	1.220** [.028]	1.654** [.114]	1.071** [.064]	1.005** [.235]
N	8,205	714	8,205	714	1,287	106
Absolute Distance	-0.215** [0.020]	-0.105 [0.086]	-0.279** [0.026]	-0.133 [0.112]	-0.173** [0.044]	-0.125 [0.234]
Co-Partisan	1.449** [0.042]	1.297** [0.290]	1.441** [0.042]	1.299** [0.291]	1.877** [0.113]	0.700 [0.703]
MC Republican	-0.007 [0.042]	-0.984** [0.279]	0.074 [0.041]	-0.937** [0.277]	0.238* [0.110]	-1.639* [0.716]
Constant	0.130 [0.153]	-0.109 [0.800]	0.223 [0.154]	-0.086 [0.805]	-0.933* [0.426]	-0.141 [2.362]
N	6,515	589	6,515	589	1,103	86

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models in bottom panel also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent education, ideology, party identification, income, age, and gender.

The mechanism of electoral accountability, however, continues to be much weaker among African Americans. In all three cases, the estimates for African Americans are considerably smaller in magnitude than those for whites. Although all three are also statistically insignificant, this is made more likely by the much smaller sample sizes for African Americans. Still, the twice-larger (in magnitude) estimates for whites point to considerably different behavior at the ballot box.

Other results indicate that white and African American co-partisans are much more likely to vote for incumbents, as we would anticipate. African Americans with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to vote for incumbents, while African Americans are much less likely to vote for Republican incumbents. Given the generally larger ideological distance between African Americans and Republicans, voting for Democrats is one important way that African Americans hold their Representatives accountable. After accounting for their heavy use of party cues, however, African Americans are less likely to rely on ideological proximity to hold their Representatives accountable at election time.

We note that this finding is robust to a number of alternative approaches. First, we recognize that if one racial group is more likely than another to be ideologically “external” to both the incumbent and the challenger in the ideological space, members of that group will disproportionately be faced with the unpalatable choice of supporting an incumbent who may not be very proximate, or supporting an even more distant challenger. To allow for the possibility that African Americans may be more likely than whites to be faced with this quandary, we estimated two supplementary models. First, we allowed citizens to abstain from voting in a multinomial logit estimation with the same specification as the models in Table 1. We found that whites were still more sensitive to their distance from the incumbent, and that whites, more than African Americans, were more likely to abstain as their distance from their incumbent increased, [Reviewers see Additional Analyses Table R-1].

Second, using one of the proximity measures we estimated a multinomial logit vote choice model of citizens represented by Democratic incumbents, excluding from the estimation individuals who were located to the ideological “left” of these Representatives, and sampling randomly among whites so they were equal in number to African Americans. This allows us to

assess whether voters with a viable means of “punishing” their incumbent by voting for a more attractive challenger actually do so. In other words, this model tests whether voters who are more distant from their Democratic incumbent (and presumably closer to the Republican challenger), tend to vote for the challenger. In this model, only the estimate for whites was statistically significant [Reviewers see Additional Analyses Table R-2]. Whites and African Americans located to the ideological “right” of Democrats were systematically less likely to vote for Democratic incumbents, but whites are much more sensitive to their distance from their Democratic incumbent.

Voting, though at the center of the accountability process, is nonetheless a blunt instrument in that it does not reveal the intensity of voters’ preferences. To provide additional evidence concerning racial differences in accountability, we also evaluated whether citizens’ absolute distance from their Representatives affected how favorable they felt toward them. To do so, we regressed citizens’ favorability ratings of their incumbents, measured in the NES on a 0-100 scale (with a higher score indicating a more favorable evaluation), on their absolute distance from their Representative. These models contain many more observations than our vote choice analyses, because we are not limited by the smaller number of respondents who were queried about, and actually identified, the locations of their incumbents.

Bivariate models of these variables tell us descriptively whether the effect of absolute distance on incumbent favorability is greater for whites than for African Americans. The results of these estimations, reported in the top panel of Table 2, indicate that whites are much more likely than African Americans to hold their Representatives accountable. Specifically, the magnitude of the estimates for whites is three to five times the magnitude of the estimates for African Americans.

Next, we add a series of control variables to examine the mechanisms by which absolute distance affects incumbent ratings. We find that white citizens who are ideologically further from their representatives systematically rate them less favorably, even after accounting for other factors (see bottom panel of Table 2). There is a statistically significant, negative relationship between absolute distance and favorability for all three measures of distance. Substantively, the estimates indicate that a white citizen who was located at the 75th percentile in the distribution of the absolute distance measure would rate their Representative about 3 to 5 points lower than a citizen located at the 25th percentile in the distribution, with other considerations held to their mean values.²⁷

TABLE 2: EFFECT OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE ON INCUMBENT FAVORABILITY

	<i>MAB</i>		<i>Wright</i>		<i>Binned</i>	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Absolute Distance	-5.068** [0.219]	-1.040 [0.649]	-6.973** [0.278]	-2.810** [0.853]	-5.317** [.482]	-.112 [1.541]
Constant	70.024** [.374]	68.008** [1.198]	70.415** [.367]	69.613** [1.187]	68.084** [.859]	65.992** [2.855]
N	9,778	1,019	9,778	1,019	1,712	189
Absolute Distance	-3.593** [0.264]	0.154 [0.771]	-4.815** [0.333]	-0.090 [0.978]	-3.467** [0.523]	1.054 [1.731]
Education	-0.883** [0.291]	2.601** [0.985]	-0.931** [0.291]	2.602** [0.985]	-0.868 [0.704]	-0.509 [2.701]
Turnout	1.422* [0.598]	-0.145 [1.673]	1.384* [0.597]	-0.134 [1.674]	3.295* [1.565]	0.556 [4.651]
MC Republican	-0.012 [0.507]	-8.336** [2.641]	1.398** [0.502]	-8.378** [2.631]	-0.248 [1.155]	-9.093 [5.362]
Co-Partisan	11.019** [0.520]	8.578** [2.556]	10.759** [0.522]	8.499** [2.558]	15.634** [1.196]	12.203* [5.155]

²⁷ By comparison, co-partisans rate their incumbents 11-15 points higher than non-co-partisans.

Constant	53.260** [1.769]	49.501** [6.001]	55.378** [1.798]	49.651** [6.024]	42.268** [4.305]	82.193** [15.113]
N	7,407	809	7,407	809	1,392	141
R ²	0.15	0.13	0.15	0.13	0.21	0.23

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models in bottom panel also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent ideology, party identification, income, age, and gender.

As Table 2 shows, the direct effect of distance on incumbent favorability is not only weaker among African Americans, it is nearly *nonexistent*. For only one of the three measures does the estimate for African Americans even fall below zero. Instead, African Americans are less likely to support Republicans, which is a somewhat effective but weaker shortcut to holding their Representatives accountable. The case counts for African Americans are much smaller than those for whites, so the statistical insignificance of these estimates is not unexpected; but the estimates themselves point to the conclusion that African Americans who are less well represented, in a substantive sense, are no less likely to rate their Representative favorably except via a tendency not to support Republican incumbents. In sum, white citizens who are further from their Representatives rate them less favorably while African Americans do not.²⁸

Explaining Racial Differences in Accountability

In this section we test the two explanations we have offered to elucidate why African Americans are less likely to hold their Representatives accountable. First, we assess whether African Americans have a more difficult time than whites acquiring information about their

²⁸ The estimates displayed in Table 2 for other terms are also notable – white (but not African American) voters are more likely to evaluate their Representatives' favorably. Educated African Americans rate their incumbents more favorably; educated whites rate them less favorably. African Americans consistently rate Republicans less favorably.

Representative's voting behavior. Second, we evaluate whether African Americans have different expectations of their Representatives, and how these unique expectations affect the link between how well African Americans' are represented and their incumbent evaluations. Finally, we discuss how descriptive representation relates to citizens' information and expectations.

Race, Political Information, and Accountability

We continue our analysis by assessing whether a citizen's relative distance from their Representative, measured as the MC's DW-NOMINATE score less the constituent's ideological location, predicts constituents' perceived distance. Where previous studies of citizens' knowledge of their Representatives' voting measures accuracy at the individual level, however, our approach assesses the accuracy of citizens' knowledge as a racial group, through the parameter estimate of the relationship between Representatives' relative distance and citizens' perceptions of this distance.

As above, for robustness we employ three proximity measures. Using OLS, we compare actual and perceived relative distance, controlling for other factors that relate to citizens' perceptions of representation. In this model, a *positive* parameter estimate for the relative distance term indicates that as Representatives become more conservative relative to their constituents, citizens recognize that their Representatives are relatively more conservative – with an estimate of 1.0 indicating that a group is perfectly accurate. Once again, we estimate separate models for whites and African Americans, but the results of models using a race interaction are consistent with those we report. We expect that ideological conservatives and Republicans will be less likely to place their incumbents more conservatively than themselves.²⁹ Mirroring the

²⁹ Both measures are coded with conservative values higher.

models above, we also account for citizen income, gender, educational attainment, age, tendency to vote in elections, and co-partisan status, as well as Representatives' party affiliations and the year of the observation.³⁰

TABLE 3: RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN CITIZENS' INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR REPRESENTATIVE

	<i>MAB</i>		<i>Wright</i>		<i>Binned</i>	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Relative Distance	0.435** [0.033]	0.315** [0.104]	0.503** [0.038]	0.364** [0.121]	0.163** [0.030]	-0.016 [0.131]
Ideology	-0.411** [0.035]	-0.349** [0.109]	-0.478** [0.031]	-0.397** [0.095]	-0.702** [0.042]	-0.699** [0.155]
Co-Partisan	0.326** [0.092]	0.215 [0.289]	0.326** [0.092]	0.215 [0.289]	0.438** [0.167]	0.175 [0.426]
MC Republican	0.132 [0.120]	-0.271 [0.400]	0.132 [0.120]	-0.271 [0.400]	0.840** [0.190]	0.311 [0.545]
Constant	1.966** [0.169]	2.086** [0.582]	2.096** [0.163]	2.180** [0.566]	2.476** [0.261]	2.167 [1.114]
N	4,558	518	4,558	518	1,209	124
R ²	0.57	0.35	0.57	0.35	0.64	0.41

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent education, turnout, party identification, income, age, and gender.

The results of these estimations indicate that, regardless of the measure of distance used, whites are quite a bit more successful than African Americans in discerning how well they are

³⁰ In these models, co-partisanship is coded 0 if co-partisan, -1 if citizen identifies with the Republican Party and their MC is a Democrat, and +1 if the citizen identifies with the Democratic Party and their MC is a Republican. MC Party affiliation coded 0=Democrat; 1=Republican.

represented (see Table 3).³¹ As expected, the results also show that citizens who identify themselves as conservatives and Republicans are less likely to perceive that their Representative is more conservative than they are. Even after accounting for these factors, however, the results indicate that the relationship between citizens' perceived and actual representation is quite a bit stronger for whites than for African Americans.

Next, we assess whether the racial differences in accountability we have found are attributable, in part, to the racial differences in information we have just shown. To do so, we re-estimated the models of incumbent favorability reported in Table 2, adding a term that interacts knowledge with absolute distance. We measure knowledge as $-1 * (\text{abs}(\text{Relative Distance} - \text{Perceived Relative Distance}))$. This measure reflects a respondent's "error" in assessing their ideological location relative to that of their incumbent, based on our estimations reported in Table 3. If the interaction term is negative and statistically significant, more knowledgeable citizens are more likely to hold their Representatives' accountable, which suggests that differences in political knowledge help to explain African Americans' lesser tendency to hold their Representatives accountable.

The results of these estimations, reported in Table 4, indicate that as a group, citizens who are more knowledgeable are somewhat more likely to hold their Representatives

³¹ It is notable for both groups that the parameter estimates for ideological congruence are greater than zero but less than one. Substantively, this implies that as Representatives become more conservative relative to their constituents, citizens' place them in a more conservative position, relative to themselves, but at a smaller rate. Stated another way, citizens place their Representatives nearer to themselves than they actually are. We suspect that this is caused in part by citizens' tendency to "project" their own preferences onto their representatives (e.g., Wilson and Gronke 2000). In addition, measurement error may attenuate this relationship.

accountable, though the estimates are statistically significant for only one of the measures (columns 1 and 4). Perhaps more importantly, a comparison of the results in columns 2 and 5 to those in columns 3 and 6 indicates that African Americans' ability to hold their Representatives' accountable is aided more by political information than is whites'. Put another way, knowledgeable African Americans are more likely to hold their Representatives accountable, and the effect of knowledge is greater for African Americans than for whites. These results make us more confident that African Americans' lesser tendency to hold their Representatives accountable is in part attributable to racial differences in information.

TABLE 4: DISTANCE, POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND INCUMBENT FAVORABILITY

	<i>MAB</i>			<i>Wright</i>		
	All	Whites	Blacks	All	Whites	Blacks
Information*	-2.463**	-2.173**	-2.422**	-0.346	0.716	-4.001**
Absolute Distance	[0.309]	[0.380]	[0.649]	[0.431]	[0.485]	[1.091]
Information	3.938**	3.726**	3.116*	3.983**	3.581**	3.716*
Absolute Distance	[0.606]	[0.701]	[1.461]	[0.602]	[0.672]	[1.523]
MC	-6.639**	-6.742**	-3.661*	-4.642**	-4.216**	-5.174**
Republican	[0.497]	[0.560]	[1.420]	[0.656]	[0.714]	[1.938]
MC	-0.825	0.032	-15.313**	0.523	1.557*	-14.818**
Republican	[0.629]	[0.667]	[3.415]	[0.616]	[0.649]	[3.440]
Co-Partisan	12.598**	12.162**	4.022	13.008**	12.227**	4.684
Constant	[0.658]	[0.706]	[3.321]	[0.652]	[0.698]	[3.312]
Constant	66.343**	64.739**	73.744**	67.652**	66.843**	72.270**
N	[2.364]	[2.567]	[8.254]	[2.376]	[2.569]	[8.211]
R ²	5,089	4,362	482	5,089	4,362	482
	0.19	0.20	0.22	0.19	0.21	0.21

The dependent variable in these models is incumbent favorability. Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent education, ideology, turnout, party identification, income, age, and gender.

Race, Expectations, and Accountability

Next, we examine the role that African Americans' unique expectations of their Representatives plays in the likelihood that they will hold them accountable. Citizens may be quite distant from their Representatives, but if they do not expect their Representatives to be ideologically near to them, this distance will not likely have much effect on their incumbent evaluations and whether they will support their incumbent's re-election. One way to examine this possibility is to isolate groups of citizens based on whether they are more or less likely to expect that their Representatives will mirror their ideological preferences.

Past work has shown that racial minorities possess a greater expectation that their Representatives will focus their energies on making sure the district gets its fair share of appropriations (Tate 2003), and a lesser expectation that their Representatives will direct their energies toward representing their constituents' attitudes (Davidson 1970). We add to this empirical literature by analyzing a July 1992 national telephone sample of registered voters conducted for NBC News and the Wall Street Journal by Hart-Breglio Research Companies.³² The survey asked Respondents a number of items about the upcoming presidential election and the economy. Of interest to this study, Respondents were asked if the three-candidate presidential election were decided by the House of Representatives, on what basis should their Representative vote.³³ The response alternatives offered to the Respondents included “based on

³² Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Study Number USNBCWSJ1992-4029.

³³ The actual item wording was as follows: “If none of the three major candidates for president receives a majority of votes in the Electoral College this fall, the next president will be chosen by the House of Representatives. If this happens, how should your own Representative vote – for the candidate who received the most votes in your district, for the candidate who received the most votes nationally, for the

how the district voted,” and “based on his or her conscience.” Using probit, we modeled the probability that a respondent selected one of these alternatives, as a function of Respondent race (white (0) or African American (1)), educational attainment, party identification, income, age, and ideological orientation.³⁴

We found that African Americans were substantially less likely than whites to indicate that their Representative should vote in a manner consistent with the district, and substantially more likely to indicate their Representative should vote their own conscience [Reviewers see Additional Analyses Table R-3]. Marginal effects based on these estimates revealed that African Americans were about 14% *less* likely than whites to indicate that their Representative should cast such a vote based on the district vote, and about 10% *more* likely than whites to indicate that their Representative should cast such a vote based on their own conscience.³⁵ We are mindful that these results could be affected if African Americans, more often than whites, reside in districts that preferred a candidate other than the one they supported. However, we take this as suggestive evidence that African Americans are less likely to expect policy congruence with their Representatives.

To assess the effect of expectations on accountability, we modeled incumbent favorability and incumbent electoral support using citizens' subjective perceptions of their

candidate of your Representative's political party, or should your Representative vote his or her own conscience?"

³⁴ Estimations of all response alternatives using multinomial logit yielded similar results.

³⁵ Tabular comparisons revealed that African Americans were about twice as likely (40% to 20%) to indicate that Representatives should vote based on their conscience, and about half as likely (17% to 35%) to indicate that Representatives should vote based on the district election outcome.

incumbent's proximity and a series of familiar controls.³⁶ In doing so, we assess whether citizens hold a more negative opinion of and are less likely to vote for a Representative they perceive as ideologically distant from their own preferences. If there are racial differences in the connection between perceived distance and incumbent evaluations, we attribute these, reasonably we believe, to differences in expectations. First, we regressed incumbent evaluations on a 0-100 scale on citizens' perceived absolute distance. Recall that the perceived absolute distance measure is created using citizens placements of themselves and their Representatives *on the same ideological scale*. The results of these estimations reveal a considerable difference between the effect of perceived absolute distance on incumbent evaluations for whites and African Americans (see Table 5). The effect of perceived absolute distance on incumbent favorability is more than twice as great for whites as it is for African Americans. Put simply, African Americans appear less likely than whites to hold an unfavorable opinion of their incumbent *even if they subjectively perceive that the incumbent is not representing their preferences*.

To determine if the unique expectations of African Americans also affect the relationship between their representation and their willingness to support their incumbent's re-election, we estimated probit models of all respondents who voted for their Congressional incumbent (coded 1) or the challenger (coded 0). The explanatory variables for this model were identical to those we employed in the incumbent favorability model just discussed. The results of the electoral support models revealed that the impact of perceived distance also is much greater for whites than for African Americans (see Table 5).

³⁶ In the interest of space, we report only the models using the Wright (1978) measure of proximity.

TABLE 5: EFFECT OF PERCEIVED ABSOLUTE DISTANCE ON INCUMBENT FAVORABILITY AND ELECTORAL SUPPORT, BY RACE

	<i>Incumbent Favorability</i>		<i>Incumbent Electoral Support</i>	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Perceived Absolute Distance	-6.837** [0.264]	-3.162** [0.783]	-0.411** [0.026]	-0.258* [0.110]
MC Republican	0.111 [0.623]	-16.393** [3.419]	0.054 [0.065]	-1.365** [0.419]
Co-Partisan	9.372** [0.659]	3.318 [3.312]	1.373** [0.066]	0.924* [0.412]
Constant	66.393** [2.281]	70.641** [8.113]	0.779** [0.256]	1.186 [1.333]
N	4,397	498	3,124	291
R ²	0.27	0.21	---	---

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent education, ideology, party identification, income, age, and gender.

Taken together, these findings suggest that African Americans are less likely to hold their Representatives accountable because they are less likely to acquire the necessary information to do so and because African Americans possess unique expectations of their Representative in Congress. In unreported analyses we peer one step further back in the causal chain of accountability – to one of the possible sources of racial differences in information and expectations. Namely, for reasons developed above we ask whether descriptive representation accounts from some, or all, of these differences. In the interest of space we simply summarize our findings [Reviewers see Additional Analyses Figure R-1 and accompanying text). We found that, consistent with previous work (e.g. Tate 2003), African Americans represented by an African American Representative tend to be more informed about their member of Congress than African Americans who are not descriptively represented. Although descriptive representation increases information among African Americans, we also found *greater* disparities in

information among African Americans and whites who are represented by an African American MC. Our findings indicate that, somewhat surprisingly, the racial gap in information is not because African Americans are less informed when they are descriptively represented, but instead stems from whites being extremely well informed when represented by an African American MC. Put differently, the *relative* gap in information between whites and African Americans is largest when African Americans are descriptively represented, even though, in absolute terms, African Americans are more informed about their Representative under these conditions. We also found that African Americans who are descriptively represented tend to hold somewhat less exacting expectations of substantive representation compared to African Americans with a white, Latino, or Asian Representative, which is consistent both with our expectations developed above and previous theoretical work (e.g. Mansbridge 1999). In sum, descriptive representation is an important factor affecting the relative information and expectations of African Americans.³⁷

Accountability and Issue Importance

In our final series of estimations, we test the proposition that African Americans are more likely to hold elected officials accountable on the issues they deem most important. Since African Americans likely hold more information about and have more exacting expectations of their Representatives on these issues (Hutchings 2003), these models provide a further test of the importance of information and expectations in the accountability mechanism. To measure

³⁷ We also found in unreported analyses that campaigns are less effective learning mechanisms for African Americans. Specifically, as campaign spending in a race increases, whites' information gains outpace those of African Americans.

Representatives' roll call liberalism on issues more salient for African Americans, we follow Lublin (1997), Canon (1999), and others and use Representatives' Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) scores for the 107th Congress. We turn to a new source of opinion data to measure citizens' opinions on issues more salient for African Americans – the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES). One advantage of the NAES is its inclusion of several opinion items related to issues which have been shown to be more important to African Americans – including whether the federal government should spend more to provide health insurance, whether the federal government should do more to end job discrimination against African Americans, and whether poverty is a serious national problem (Frymer 1999).³⁸ Another advantage is its large number of respondents, over 60,000. We create a factor score for each NAES respondent who replied to these items using principal components factor analysis and term this “LCCR Opinion.”³⁹ As we did above, we then calculate the absolute distance between Representatives' LCCR scores and their constituents' LCCR Opinions using the MAB and

³⁸ The question wording of these items was as follows: Health Insurance: Providing health care for people who do not already have it - should the federal government spend more money, on this, the same as now, less, or no money at all? Job Discrimination: Trying to stop job discrimination against blacks - should the federal government do more about this, the same as now, less, or nothing at all? Poverty: The amount of poverty in the United States - is this an extremely serious problem, serious, not too serious, or not serious at all?

³⁹ The eigenvalue of the lone retained factor was 1.54. The loadings for the items were .56, .57, and .60, respectively.

Wright techniques.⁴⁰ Finally, we regress citizens' favorability ratings of their incumbents on this measure of absolute distance, doing so separately for whites and African Americans.

Columns 1 and 5 and 2 and 6 in Table 6 report bivariate estimates for whites and African Americans for each measure of distance. These estimates tell us, given all the factors that link distance and incumbent evaluation, whether there is a difference between white and African American behavior on these issues. The results indicate that as African Americans become more distant from their Representatives on these issues, they rate them less favorably at a rate that rivals, and may even surpass, that of whites. In short, on issues most important to African Americans, this group's tendency to hold their Representatives accountable is very much improved.

TABLE 6: RACE AND ACCOUNTABILITY, LCCR VOTES

	<i>Wright</i>				<i>MAB</i>			
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Absolute Distance	-8.95** [0.396]	-8.049** [1.587]	-6.148** [0.455]	1.957 [2.099]	-9.612** [0.823]	-19.49** [2.310]	-17.22* [1.316]	-3.465 [6.305]
MC Republican			0.503 [0.510]	-11.24** [2.810]			8.911** [0.745]	-7.940 [4.861]
Co-Partisan			15.268** [0.626]	6.512* [2.749]			15.490** [0.623]	6.206* [2.745]
Constant	70.80** [0.453]	71.617** [1.639]	39.822** [2.160]	61.668** [8.653]	66.283** [0.436]	70.910** [1.108]	37.389** [2.116]	63.714** [8.548]
N	12,744	1,249	10,121	1,017	12,744	1,249	10,121	1,017
R ²	0.04	0.02	0.10	0.09	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.09

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models in columns 3, 4, 7, and 8 also include indicators for observation year and controls for respondent education, ideology, party identification, income, age, and gender.

⁴⁰ Because the Binned technique relies on citizens' placements of their incumbents, something not queried in the NAES, we cannot adopt this approach for this set of analyses.

After we add nearly all the controls that were utilized in Table 2,⁴¹ the accountability advantage of African Americans on these issues “disappears.” The reason, it appears, is that African Americans consistently rate Republican incumbents lower, and on LCCR votes incumbent party affiliation is a very good proxy for absolute distance.

Conclusion

We find that racial differences in levels of political information and expectations of representation help to explain disparities in democratic accountability, an important mechanism in establishing and maintaining congruence between public opinion and legislative action. Specifically, African Americans’ lesser information about their Representatives’ aggregate voting behavior helps to explain racial differences in accountability. African Americans also are less likely to sanction their Representatives at election time even when they perceive ideological distance between them. However, we also find that, on the issues that are most salient to them, African Americans are just as likely as whites (in some cases more likely) to hold their legislators accountable, and this process of accountability may function through different mechanisms for whites and African Americans.

Given the widespread belief that African Americans have less political influence compared to whites (e.g., Verba and Orren 1985; Guinier 1994), these findings suggest at the very least that the accountability mechanism is not a promising avenue to correct racial imbalances in representation. More disconcertingly, the breakdown of the accountability mechanism among African Americans may actually contribute to this group’s weaker influence

⁴¹ We omit the control for turnout because a large proportion of the NAES data were acquired prior to election day.

on the decisions government makes. This is a troubling finding for those concerned with the representation of African Americans' interests, and an important avenue for future research among scholars of race and politics and those studying both the sources and consequences of political inequality.

Our finding that descriptive representation does not encourage “blind loyalty” among African American constituents provides an empirical test of an important and potentially troubling conjecture (Mansbridge 1999). Descriptive representation appears to contribute to racial differences in information, not because African Americans are less informed when they are descriptively represented, but instead because whites represented by African Americans are even better informed. At the same time, since racial differences in representational expectations are present regardless of the Representative's race, racial differences in accountability reach beyond descriptively represented districts.

Our findings also have highlighted the importance of information and expectations in the accountability process more generally. The finding that informed citizens are more likely to hold their Representatives accountable illustrates the importance of political knowledge for accountability, and provides yet another reason to encourage citizen knowledge of and interest in politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Our observation that some citizens appear to hold different expectations of their Representative than others implies that efforts to promote legislative accountability must also focus on citizens' attitudes. Finally, since individuals are more likely to obtain information on and have more demanding expectations about issues salient for them (Hutchings 2003), our evidence that African Americans hold their Representatives more accountable on issues this group cares more about further emphasizes the important role of information and expectations in the accountability mechanism.

Additional Analyses for Reviewers

Results of Robustness Checks for Table 1

TABLE R-1: EFFECT OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE ON INCUMBENT SUPPORT, INCLUDING ABSTENTION

<i>Distance Measure</i>	<i>MAB</i>				<i>Wright</i>			
	Whites		Blacks		Whites		Blacks	
	Challenger	Abstain	Challenger	Abstain	Challenger	Abstain	Challenger	Abstain
Absolute Distance	0.662** [0.026]	0.149** [0.022]	0.393** [0.098]	.079 [0.058]	0.836** [0.033]	0.262** [0.029]	0.743** [0.127]	.147 [0.076]
Constant	-2.021** [0.050]	-.573** [0.036]	-2.509** [.211]	-.184 [0.102]	-1.976** [0.049]	-.642** [0.035]	-2.829** [0.221]	-.228* [0.101]
N	11,646		1,191		11,646		1,191	

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE R-2: EFFECT OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE ON INCUMBENT SUPPORT, CITIZENS LOCATED TO THE “RIGHT” OF DEMOCRATIC MCs AND SAMPLING AMONG WHITES

	<i>Whites</i>		<i>African Americans</i>	
	Challenger	Abstain	Challenger	Abstain
Absolute Distance	-0.561** [0.103]	-0.171 [0.090]	-0.385* [0.171]	-0.053 [0.073]
Constant	-1.690** [0.211]	-0.496** [0.161]	-3.411** [0.412]	-0.311* [0.142]
N	668		668	

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Note: due to variable coding, negative estimates for the absolute distance term in Table R-2 indicate that as the respondent is more distant from the incumbent, the respondent is more likely to either vote for the challenger or abstain.

Results of Constituent Expectations Models

Table R-3 analyzes data from a July 1992 NBC News and the Wall Street Journal poll which asked respondents, should the presidential election be thrown to the House of Representatives, whether Representatives should vote for President based on how their district voted, whether they should vote based on their own conscience, or whether they should rely on alternative bases for voting. Based on the results of probit analyses of the probability that

respondents selected one of these alternatives, we find that African Americans were more likely than whites to prefer that their Representative vote based on his/her conscience and less likely to prefer that their Representative vote based on the district electoral outcome.

TABLE R-3: RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN EXPECTATIONS OF REPRESENTATION

	<i>Vote Based on District Vote</i>	<i>Vote Based on Conscience</i>
African American	-.403* [.176]	.363* [.160]
Education	.131** [.026]	-.074* [.031]
Constant	.933** [.201]	-.034 [.236]
N	788	788

Standard errors in brackets; * denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; models also include controls for respondent ideology, party identification, income, and age.

Descriptive Representation, Information, and Expectations

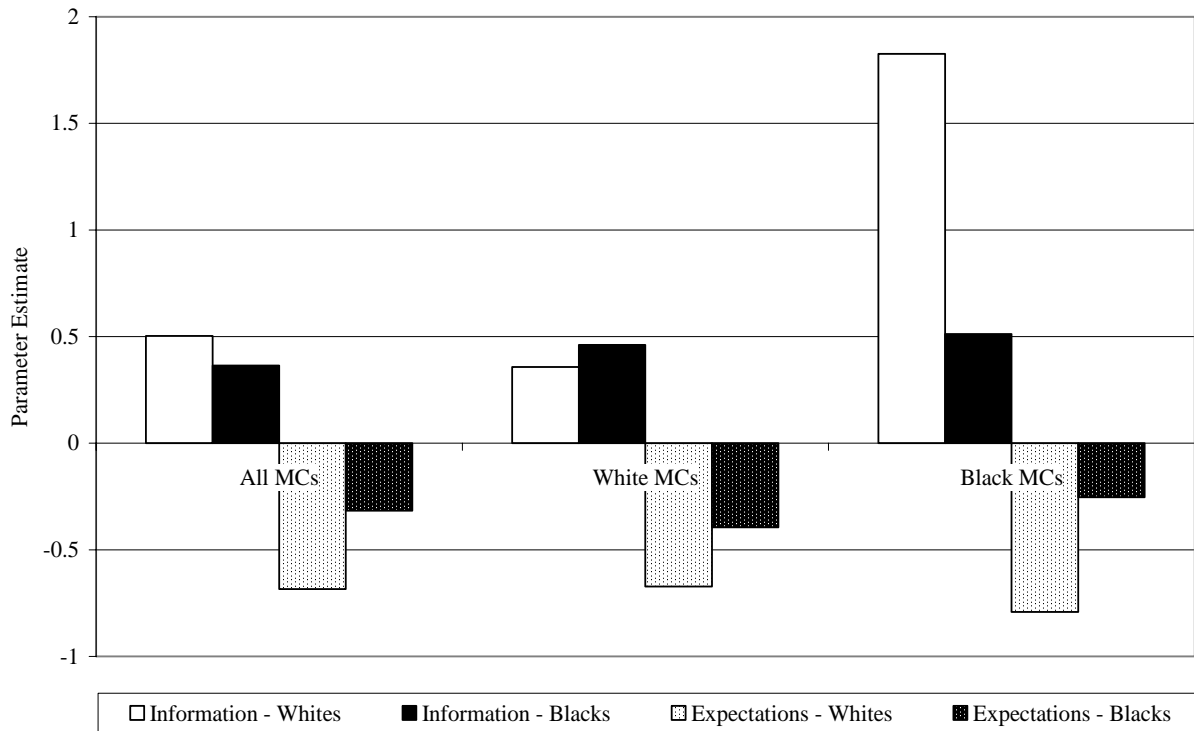
In this set of additional analyses, we assess whether African Americans' greater difficulty obtaining information about their Representatives' voting behavior is linked to descriptive representation. As discussed above, one reason that African Americans may be less likely than whites to recognize how well they are represented and have unique expectations of their Representatives is that many African Americans are represented by African American MCs. Mansbridge (1999) stated this view as follows: "the descriptive characteristics of a representative can lull voters into thinking their substantive interests are being represented even when this is not the case" (640).

To test the extent to which descriptive representation explains African Americans' greater difficulty discerning how well they are represented, we re-estimated the models reported in Table

3, for the subset of respondents represented by African American and non-African American MCs.⁴² If descriptive representation is the sole cause of the racial gap in information, then whites and African Americans represented by a white MC should be roughly equally informed, while African Americans should not be as well informed as whites when both are represented by African Americans. We found that descriptive representation contributes to the informational gap between whites and African Americans, but in an interesting and unexpected way. In Figure R-1, we display the parameter estimates for the relative distance coefficients of the Wright measure we obtained in Table 3 for all MCs, and the estimates we obtained when we limited the sample to white and African American MCs. The first thing that is noticeable when the three pairs of solid columns are compared is that when African Americans are descriptively represented the racial gap in information is largest. Although African Americans are most informed when they are represented by African Americans, whites are extremely well informed, leading to a large relative gap in information. In short, African Americans acquire somewhat more information about their Representative when he or she is African American, but the information of whites increases at an even larger rate, creating a large relative disparity in political information between African Americans and whites. This informational gap is smaller in the models of all MCs, and, somewhat surprisingly, African Americans are actually somewhat more informed about their Representatives when both racial groups are not represented by African Americans.

⁴² We identified African American Representatives using Amer (2004).

Figure R-1: Effect of Descriptive Representation on Racial Differences in Information and Expectations



Next, to examine whether descriptive representation explains African Americans' unique representational expectations, we re-estimated the incumbent favorability model in Table 5 by the race of a respondent's Representative. If African Americans' tendency not to hold their representative accountable is due to descriptive representation, then when this group is represented by whites they should hold their MCs just as accountable as whites. We find this is not the case (see Figure R-1, dotted columns).

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