

# Surprisingly Normal: Recognition of Black Issues by Non-Black Members of Congress

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January 24, 2008

## **Abstract**

Debates in the race and representation literature have been focused on whether race matters for the substantive representation of black interests. However, this debate has overlooked the basic reality that the vast majority of black issue legislation is sponsored by non-black members of Congress. I introduce a problem-solving framework to analyze sponsorship of black issue legislation from 1948 to 1997. The results show that black issue recognition has changed over time, but ideology, institutional position, and district composition are the core determinants of member decisions to recognize black issues. Rather than relying upon the outsider pressure of protest or the insider influence of descriptive black representation, black Americans can expand the scope of conflict by simply electing white liberal representatives. Contrary to expectations of the exceptional quality of black agenda setting, in post-war America black politics is surprisingly normal.

William Fitts Ryan is the greatest substantive black representative of the post-war era. Over the course of his eleven years as representative from the 20th Congressional District of New York, Ryan averaged eight bill introductions on black issues a year. Although his focus was on housing issues, Ryan also sponsored legislation on lynching, voting rights, jury discrimination, and commemorating the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. Ryan's particular level of legislative activity on behalf of black interests is extraordinary, but in terms of the broader phenomenon which he represents, he is far from exceptional. William Ryan is one example of how black Americans follow Schattschneider's assertion that disadvantaged groups must expand the "scope of conflict" in order to place new issues onto the agenda. In that sense, he is only one of the 1,263 non-black members of Congress who account for 89% of the black issue bills introduced between 1947 and 1998. In terms of both theory and practice, black agenda setting is about white recognition of black issues. We cannot understand black agenda setting or black representation unless we understand William Fitts Ryan.

Studies of race and representation have struggled to grasp this reality. One segment of the literature deemphasizes descriptive representation and only examines roll call votes on black issues (Swain 1993; Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997; Whitby 1997). The other segment emphasizes the race of representatives as critical to legislative behaviors that recognize black issues (Canon 1999; Whitby 2002; Baker and Cook 2005). Both sides are right. Those who diminish the importance of descriptive representation show that black issues cannot become policy without white support. Those who seek to rehabilitate descriptive representation show that black Americans have some agency in determining how policy affects them. I seek to move beyond the "race matters" debate by incorporating both of these perspectives in answer to the question, why do non-black members of Congress (MCs) sponsor black issue bills? I argue that sponsoring legislation helps MCs build reputations as problem-solvers. Black protests and descriptive black representation are used to convince non-black MCs that black issues are problems worth solving. Using data on the bill sponsorship of every non-black member of Congress from 1948 to 1997, I find that contextual factors do shape how individual members of Congress recognize black issues. However, sponsorship of black issue bills is driven largely by ideology and institutional positions. Fifty years after the great victories of the civil rights movement, successful black agenda setting is

still reliant upon having white liberals in positions of power. The difference is that black Americans can now use their votes to influence who holds these positions.

The paper proceeds in five sections. Section 1 defines black issues and stresses the importance of non-black MCs to black bill sponsorship. Section 2 uses the conceptualization of legislators as problem-solvers to derive hypotheses. Section 3 details the new data source I compiled on black issue legislation from 1948 to 1997, and discusses the methods used to analyze the data. Section 4 employs multilevel modeling techniques to evaluate the hypotheses from section two. Section 5 concludes with a discussion of the overall importance of this research to our understanding of black representation, bill sponsorship more generally, and the implications of both for agenda setting.

## 1 Defining the Puzzle

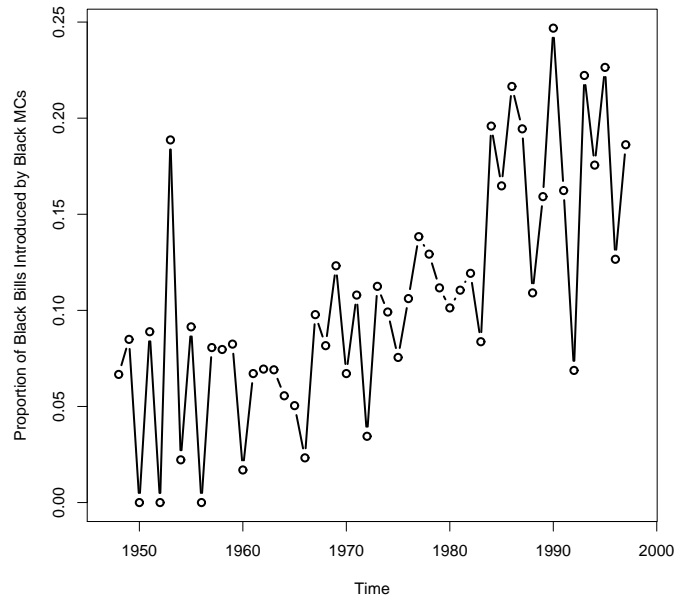
The first step in the investigation of why non-black MCs sponsor black issue bills is to define what black issues actually are. Regardless of individuals' self-identification, people who are recognized by society as being phenotypically black are vulnerable to racism, and that shared vulnerability can be the basis of political solidarity (Shelby 2005). Therefore, I define black issues as policies that attempt to fight racism and/or promote racial justice in the United States. In a less abstract sense, black issues must satisfy at least one of the following conditions:

1. **Anti-Racist:** Policies that erect legal protections against racial discrimination and remedies for the negative effects of past discrimination. Hate crime legislation, civil rights bills, the voting rights acts, minority set asides, and affirmative action are all examples of this criterion.
2. **Cultural:** Cultural policies are those landmarks, commemorations, holidays, and monuments that celebrate black achievements and history while simultaneously undermining negative racial stereotypes of inferiority.
3. **Social Welfare:** Social welfare is limited to policies which explicitly address some racial disparity; explicitly attempt to remedy urban poverty; and those which disproportionately impact black Americans. These policies must foster non-stigmatizing, non-discriminatory social programs such as full employment, a guaranteed income, federal control over programs, or an opposition to work requirements. This encompasses a wide range of policies from expanding benefits under AFDC to funding research on sickle cell anemia to increasing federal funding of elementary and secondary education.

Throughout the paper, whenever I speak of black issues I am referring to a policy topic that meets at least one of the criteria outlined above. The next question is why we should care about non-black MCs sponsoring issues that fit the above criteria.

Black bill sponsorship by non-black MCs is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, black issues need white recognition before they can be adopted onto the formal agenda. Recognition is the term for when the public or Congress signifies that an issue is worthy of being considered for government intervention; this is also known as reaching the public agenda (Cobb, Ross and Ross 1976). MCs recognize issues by introducing legislation. Sponsorship of black

Figure 1: Black Bills Introduced by Black MCs, 1948-1997



issue bills by non-black MCs shows that Schattschneider’s “scope of conflict” has been expanded beyond black Americans, thus changing the nature of the policy debate and increasing the chance that black issues will reach the formal agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972; Schattschneider 1975; Baumgartner and Jones 1993). From a practical perspective, the vast majority of black issue bills are introduced by non-black MCs. Over the fifty-year period from 1948 to 1997, 8,843 black issue bills (black bills hereafter) were introduced in Congress. Of those, only 997 (11%) were sponsored by

black MCs. Figure 1 shows the proportion of black bills sponsored by black MCs over the period of this study. The proportion has increased as the number of black MCs has grown over time, but the maximum value in the sample is still less than twenty-five percent. Any understanding of congressional recognition of black issue bills must address the bill sponsorship of non-black MCs.

## 2 Problem-Solving Legislators

It is still an open question as to why members sponsor any bills at all, let alone bills on black issues. Given that most bills never receive serious consideration by Congress (Krutz 2005), it is difficult to view sponsorship as a rational, purely policy-motivated exercise. As such, bill sponsorship is characterized as a component of reputation-building (Schiller 1995). Members use these reputations to pursue their intra- and inter-institutional ambitions (Herrick and Moore 1993; Wawro 2000); ward off campaign challenges (Mayhew 1974; Sulkin 2005); and attract PAC contributions (Box-Steffensmeier and Grant 1999). Although there appears to be some consensus on bill sponsorship as a reputation-building tool, it is not exactly clear what that reputation is. I argue that bill sponsorship is used by MCs to cultivate reputations as problem solvers.

### 2.1 What are Problem-Solvers?

Problem-solvers are those members who identify existing social problems, define new problems, and provide policy solutions. Rather than constituting a goal in and of itself, problem solving fits within the standard motivations of reelection, institutional advancement, and good public policy (Fenno 1973; Arnold 1990). Electorally, problem-solving is used to convey policy responsiveness to constituents (Mayhew 1974; Sulkin 2005; Highton and Rocca 2005). In terms of institutional advancement, problem-solving provides a valuable public good (Wawro 2000), expands committee jurisdiction (Jones, Baumgartner and Talbert 1993), performs needed oversight (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984), and shows expertise (Herrick and Moore 1993). Lastly, solving perceived social problems would fall under any reasonable definition of good public policy. Regardless of what motivates a particular member of Congress, developing a problem-solving reputation would further their interests.

The first step toward becoming a problem-solver is identifying problems. Following the model of problem definition provided by Wood and Doan (2003), I make some assumptions about problem identification: individuals prefer for their evaluations of problems to match those of the public; individuals only have perceptions of what the public's evaluations are; individual perceptions can be shaped by exogenous factors such as media; and individuals face cognitive costs for changing their evaluations of problems. Members of Congress cannot process all of the information available to determine the public's true evaluations, so they rely on a small set of indicators to identify social problems (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; Jones and Baumgartner 2004). When an MC's evaluation differs from the perceived public evaluation and the cost of changing their own evaluation is low, then an MC will identify a new problem. The second step is crafting policy solutions to identified problems. Since bill sponsorship is not costless, members with more resources (Schiller 1995; Box-Steffensmeier and Grant 1999), members who have institutionalized power through committee and/or majority status (Frantzich 1979; Garand and Burke 2006), and those with extreme preferences relative to their party or chamber (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Taylor 1998) should be more willing to offer solutions to problems.

## **2.2 Problem-Solving and Bill Sponsorship**

Based on this conceptualization of problem definition and legislative behavior, individual bill sponsorship decisions should be influenced, primarily, by three types of factors: 1) macro-indicators at the national or district level; 2) factors that determine the cognitive costs and perceived public evaluations; 3) institutional factors that enable some members to more effectively solve problems than others. Previous research has found supporting evidence. Jeon and Haider-Markel (2001) show that congressional hearings define issues in similar terms as media accounts. Studies on descriptive representation have found that identity (in terms of race and gender) shapes the problems MCs address through bill sponsorship and cosponsorship (Canon 1999; Whitby 2002; Baker and Cook 2005; Swers 2005). Finally, Schiller (2006) demonstrates that the types of bills sponsored changes as standards of "legitimate" government intervention change.

I argue that non-black MCs sponsor bills on black issues because they perceive the social

conditions underlying these issues to actually be social problems. As such, sponsoring bills on these issues helps to build their reputations as problem solvers. There are two primary indicators for when black issues are problems: black protest activity and the information provided through descriptive black representation. Given the costliness of political activity, black protests send a signal to legislators that underlying conditions have reached a level of unacceptability (Lohmann 1993, 1994). Similarly, the legislative behavior of black MCs conveys information about pressing problems for black Americans. MCs who are similar in terms of constituency demographics, geography, or ideology may use the actions of black MCs as an indicator of important policy problems. Some key hypotheses emerge from this discussion:

1. *Non-black MCs will sponsor more black bills when there are more protests.*
2. *Non-black MCs will sponsor more black bills as black descriptive representation increases.*
3. *The racial composition of a district should shape how black issues are perceived, so Non-Black MCs will sponsor more black bills as the percentage of black citizens in their district increases.*
4. *The ideological composition of the chamber should impact members' perceptions of how the public evaluates problems. Non-black MCs will sponsor more black bills when the chamber becomes more liberal.*
5. *Identity will determine how individual members interpret the world and view problems. Liberals, women, Democrats, and those on relevant committees will sponsor more black bills.*
6. *Members who are out of step with the policy wishes of their party or the chamber at large will generally sponsor more legislation. Non-black MCs will sponsor more black bills as their ideological distance to the party and chamber medians increases.*

The next section discusses the data and methods used to evaluate these hypotheses.

### 3 Data and Methods

In order to evaluate the above hypotheses, I need appropriate measures of bill sponsorship, black protest, and black descriptive representation. The Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson 2007) has compiled a database of all bills<sup>1</sup> that have been introduced from 1948-1997. Using the

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<sup>1</sup>By bills I am referring to legislation of class h.r. or s. This means that resolutions and amendments are not included.

criteria for black issues presented in Section 2, I coded these bills as addressing black issues or not. Table A-6 provides examples of black bills, and the appendix contains a brief description of how these bills were coded.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1 Dependent Variable and Basic Model Choice

Member-years are the unit of analysis, so the dependent variable is the number of black bills introduced by a given MC in a given year. Once I exclude black MCs, there are 26,349 member-year observations. Of these, 21,863 member-years are recorded as sponsoring zero black bills. Table A-1 breaks down where these zero observations come from. First, there are 127 member-

Table 1: Frequency of Zeroes by Sponsorship Behavior

People who Sponsor ...	Number of Observations
No Bills	127
Bills, No Black Bills	8790
Black Bills, No Bills this Year	864
Black Bills, Bill this Year, No Black Bills this Year	12082
Total	21863

years belonging to those who never sponsor any legislation at all. This group consists primarily of people who were appointed or elected to fill vacancies in the middle of a Congress but were never reelected.<sup>3</sup> Second, there are 8,790 member-years for people who have sponsored bills but never sponsor black bills. Third, there are 864 member-years for those who have sponsored black bills at some point in their careers but have not sponsored any legislation in a given year. Lastly, there are 12,082 member-years for those who have sponsored black bills at some point in their careers, are sponsoring some bills in a given year, but none of those bills are black bills.

Distinguishing between the causes of zeros is important because the substantive implications vary. The 127 member-years for people who never sponsor bills are relatively uninteresting in terms

<sup>2</sup> [http://mail\[dot\]rochester\[dot\]edu/\[tilde\]plat/dissertation\[dot\]html](http://mail[dot]rochester[dot]edu/[tilde]plat/dissertation[dot]html) provides a more exhaustive list of coding decisions.

<sup>3</sup> A notable exception in this group is Sam Rayburn, who served as Speaker or minority leader for every year he is in the sample.

of the question I am asking, while those in the fourth category can provide insight into temporal variation within the bill sponsorship of individual MCs. Ideally, the statistical analysis should make use of the differences in the origins of zeros to answer distinct substantive questions. The large number of zeros in the data mean that it is overdispersed, and standard errors will appear smaller than they actually are (Cameron and Trivedi 1998). I employ a hurdle poisson to address both of these issues. The basic idea is to simultaneously estimate the probability that an MC sponsors at least one black bill and the number of black bills sponsored, given that at least one has been sponsored (Zorn 1998).

### 3.2 Independent Variables

The primary independent variables are protest and black descriptive representation. Protest is measured as the number of protest events recorded by the *New York Times* from 1948 to 1997. That data was collected by Jenkins, Jacobs and Agnone (2003).<sup>4</sup> Black representation is measured as the number of black members of Congress as recorded by the Congressional Research Service (Amer 2005). The enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 potentially altered the nature of both protest and representation. To try and capture this, I use a pre-1966 dummy taking a value of one for those years prior to 1966, and then that dummy is interacted with the protest and descriptive representation variables.

While these are the variables of primary interest, the problem-solving conceptualization of bill sponsorship suggests a number of other variables. The first set of variables measure characteristics that could determine how individuals perceive problems and the cognitive costs associated with changing those perceptions. Party and gender are measured dichotomously with values of one for Democrats and women respectively. There are three separate measures of ideology: both dimensions of an MC's common space W-Nominate scores; the absolute distance of these scores from the party and chamber medians; and the scores for the chamber medians. The racial composition of districts is measured as the proportion of a district's population that is black. Lastly, committee assignment is measured as a binary indicator for serving on any of the four following committees:

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<sup>4</sup>Unfortunately, I have not been able to access a finer-grained, more transparent data set on protest activity, so the coding decisions are somewhat opaque.

House Education and Labor, House Banking, Finance, and Urban Development, Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, and Senate Labor and Human Resources.<sup>5</sup>

The second set of variables deal with how some members are able to more readily identify and solve problems than others. A dummy is included for whether an MC is a freshman. Committee chairmen are coded as a dummy variable to capture the idea that leadership have more resources to devote to drafting and passing legislation (Frantzich 1979; Campbell 1982; Schiller 1995). To distinguish between the House and Senate, a dummy for senators is included. Finally, since the data is measured at the member-year level, we include a dummy for the first session of Congress.

### 3.3 Multilevel Hurdle Poisson

The third set of variables deal with the macro-indicators and contextual factors that shape issue recognition. The primary variables of interest – protest, descriptive representation, and their interactions with the pre-1966 dummy – fall under this category. Rather than trying to include an exhaustive list of control variables, I take advantage of the multilevel structure of the data. The third set of variables are modeled as intercepts that vary by year and by state. Any individual MC’s bill sponsorship is relative to a generic MC in a given year from a given state.

Equations might be helpful in expressing these ideas more clearly. As discussed in Section 3.1, I estimate a hurdle poisson model. Equation 1 shows that the expected number of black bills introduced is the probability of introducing any black bills ( $p_i$ ) multiplied by the rate of black bill introduction ( $\lambda_i$ ).

$$E(Y_i) = p_i * \lambda_i \tag{1}$$

In turn  $p_i$  is modeled using a logit specification as shown in Equation 2, and  $\lambda_i$  is specified by Equation 3.

$$p_i = \frac{\exp(\gamma_{state} + \gamma_{year} + \gamma * z_i)}{1 + \exp(\gamma_{state} + \gamma_{year} + \gamma * z_i)} \tag{2}$$

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<sup>5</sup>Committee assignments are taken from Stewart and Woon (2005) and Nelson (2005). These four committees were selected because they had the highest mean number of black bills introduced in their respective chambers. Substantively, they make sense as well. The standing committees are: agriculture, appropriations, armed services, banking, budget, commerce, District of Columbia, foreign affairs, government operations, interior, judiciary, public works, space/science, post office, veterans, small business, and rules committees in the House and Senate. The Senate also includes finance and labor. The House also includes ways and means, merchant marines, standards, and un-American activities.

$$\lambda_i = \exp(\alpha_{year} + \alpha_{state} + \beta * x_i) \quad (3)$$

In words, the probability and rate of introducing black bills are functions of a state-intercept, a year-intercept, and the explanatory variables measured at the member-year level. Finally, the year-intercepts are normally distributed with  $\mu_{year}$  as a function of the yearly variables (protest, pre-1966 dummy, descriptive black representation, interaction terms, median ideal points for each chamber, and the dummy for the first session of a Congress), and the state-intercepts are normally distributed with  $\mu_{state}$  as a function of regional dummies.<sup>6</sup>

## 4 Results

For ease of discussion, the results are grouped by variable type – individual, regional, and yearly. However, these results all come from the same model, which was estimated using WinBUGS. Convergence was satisfactorily achieved after 50,000 iterations, and the first 25,000 were discarded. In all of the tables that follow, starred variables are statistically significant, and the parentheses contain the 95% confidence interval.

### 4.1 Individual Characteristics and Black Issue Recognition

Table A-2 presents the results for variables measured at the individual level.<sup>7</sup> The “Hurdle” column has the results for the logit component of the model – the probability of sponsoring at least one black bill, and the “Count” column contains the results for the truncated poisson – the number of black bills sponsored, given that at least one has been sponsored. There is some support for most of the hypotheses. Non-black MCs sponsor more black bills as black people form a larger proportion of their constituents. Women, liberals, those on relevant committees, senators, non-freshmen, extremists, and committee chairmen all are more likely to sponsor black bills and sponsor higher numbers of black bills. Contrary to expectations, Democrats sponsor fewer black bills than Republicans, and extremists on the race/civil rights/social issues ideological dimension are less

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<sup>6</sup>The regions are New England, mid-Atlantic, eastern north central, western north central, mountain states, border states, and Pacific states. The Pacific states provide the excluded category.

<sup>7</sup>Ideological variables are marked with a 1 or 2 corresponding to the first and second dimensions of the ideological space. For example, “Party Distance 1” is the distance from the party median on the first ideological dimension.

Table 2: Effects of Personal Characteristics on Black Bill Sponsorship by Non-Black MCs

	Hurdle	Count
Female	0.339* (0.18/0.50)	0.421* (0.28/0.56)
Senate	0.243* (0.15/0.34)	0.180* (0.08/0.27)
Democrat	-0.234* (-0.44/-0.02)	-0.645* (-0.97/-0.36)
Ideology 1	-1.828* (-2.10/-1.56)	-3.467* (-3.84/-3.12)
Ideology 2	-0.864* (-1.06/-0.68)	-0.856* (-1.08/-0.62)
Freshman	-0.428* (-0.54/-0.32)	-0.461* (-0.58/-0.34)
Committee Chair	0.439* (0.31/0.57)	0.655* (0.54/0.76)
Party Distance 1	0.446* (0.09/0.79)	-0.319 (-0.73/0.11)
Party Distance 2	0.324* (0.08/0.57)	0.354* (0.07/0.61)
Chamber Distance 1	0.794* (0.52/1.07)	0.724* (0.44/1.01)
Chamber Distance 2	-0.383* (-0.68/-0.10)	-0.097 (-0.37/0.20)
Percent Black	1.086* (0.62/1.55)	1.323* (0.94/1.70)
Committee	0.768* (0.69/0.85)	0.810* (0.74/0.88)
N	26349	

likely to sponsor black bills. The first impression of Table A-2 is that identity, ideology, and institutional factors shape how non-black MCs recognize black issues as problems. However, we need to move beyond coefficients to explore the substantive impacts of these factors on black bill sponsorship.

Table A-3 provides the first differences for the dichotomous variables discussed in Table A-2. Take note of the lack of substantive effects for the number of black bills sponsored. Serving on one of the four committees who focus on black issues has the largest impact on the recognition of black issues with a negligible increase of 0.034 black bills sponsored. The lack of substantively significant effects for the count of bills sponsored implies that crossing the hurdle into black bill sponsorship is the most important step. In that sense, expanding the scope of conflict should come in terms of

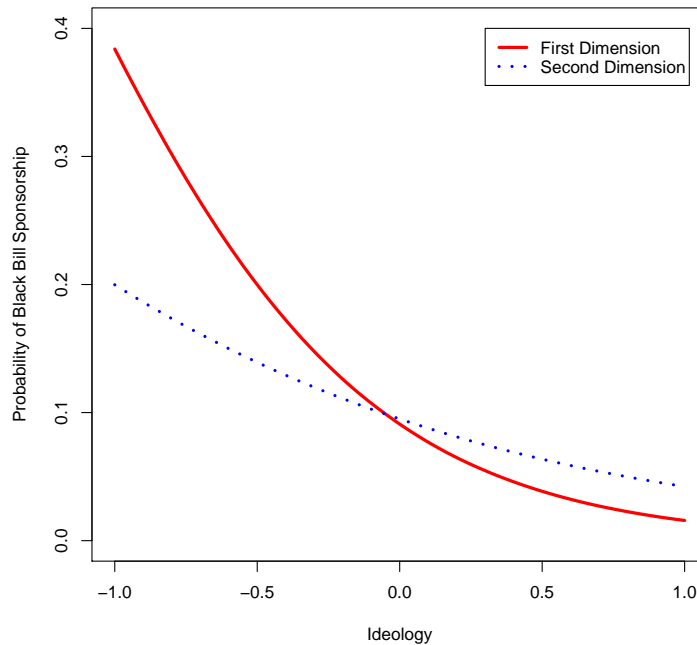
Table 3: First Differences for Dichotomous Variables

	Probability of Sponsorship	Count of Bills Sponsored
Female	0.056 (0.035/0.078)	0.014 (0.009/0.021)
Senate	0.022 (0.010/0.035)	0.005 (0.002/0.009)
Democrat	-0.058 (-0.073/-0.038)	-0.013 (-0.016/-0.009)
Freshman	-0.045 (-0.055/-0.034)	-0.010 (-0.012/-0.008)
Committee Chair	0.094 (0.074/0.117)	0.025 (0.019/0.033)
Committee	0.122 (0.106/0.141)	0.034 (0.028/0.041)

increasing the number of MCs willing to recognize black issues rather than increasing the numbers of issues recognized by any given MC. I argued that members would be more likely to recognize problems that fall under the jurisdictions of their committees or tap into some sense of identity. Serving on the committees that deal with issues of labor, education, and urban development raises the probability of recognizing black issues by 12.2%. Hawkesworth (2003) argues that race and gender intersect to shape the congressional experience. Perhaps the 5.6% increase in the probability

of non-black women to recognize black issues speaks to this intersection. Institutional factors are also important. Committee chairs use their agenda setting power to be more effective legislators (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier and Sinclair-Chapman 2003). As a result, chairmen are 9.4% more likely to recognize black issues. The biggest surprise thus far is that Republicans are 5.8% more likely to recognize black issues. Previous research has stressed that black substantive representation is maximized by having more Democrats in office (Swain 1993; Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997). Table A-3 shows that the situation is slightly more complicated. In particular, the key factor is not party so much as ideology.

Figure 2: The Impact of Ideology on Black Bill Sponsorship

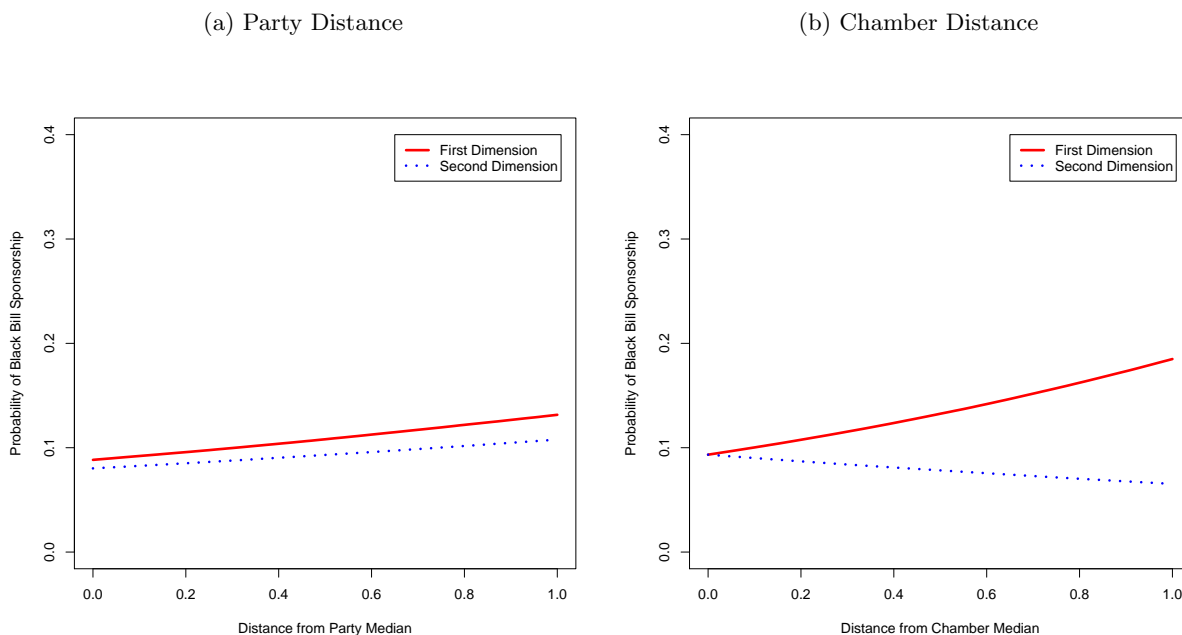


An individual's ideology was important for two reasons. First, liberals should be more willing to view existing conditions as problems worthy of government intervention, so ideology shapes how an MC views problems. Second, those who are ideologically extreme relative to one's party and chamber will be more likely to recognize problems that have been ignored by others. Figure 2 plots the expected probability of sponsoring a black bill as ideology increases from liberalism to

conservatism on each dimension of the ideological space.<sup>8</sup> Looking at the first dimension of general liberalism/conservatism, the probability of recognizing black issues falls quickly as an individual moves from liberal to moderate. Once a person crosses over into conservatism, there is little chance of sponsoring a black bill. However, liberalism/conservatism along the second dimension of race, civil rights, and social issues has a less shallow slope. The benefits of liberalism to black issue recognition and the harm of conservatism are both smaller than for the first dimension. Previous research has used ideology as the dependent variable (Swain 1993; Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997; Grose 2005), so party was the key determinant in their models. Figure 2 shows that, regardless of party, the recognition of black issues is heavily determined by ideology.

Figure 3 explores how individuals' ideology relative to their party and chamber impact problem recognition. Figure 3(a) shows that the probability of sponsoring black bills increases as distance from the party median grows from zero to one. Interestingly, there is little difference between the

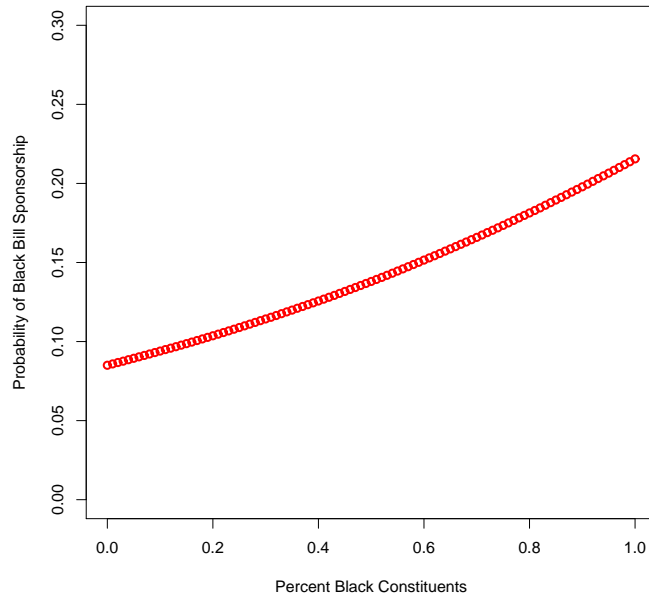
Figure 3: The Impact of Ideological Distance on Black Bill Sponsorship



<sup>8</sup>Continuous variables are held constant at their means and, with the exception of party, dichotomous variables are held constant at zero. The profile is a non-freshman, male Democratic representative from Rhode Island who is not a committee chair, not a member of a relevant committee, and is the chamber median in 1970.

first and second dimension. In addition, the distance from one's own party seems to have little or no impact on individuals' black bill sponsorship. Conversely, Figure 3(b) displays completely separate trajectories for ideological distance from the chamber median along the first and second dimensions. Chamber extremists along the basic liberal/conservative dimension recognize more black issues the further they are from the median. This is the expected relationship. However, extremists on racial/civil rights/social issues recognize fewer black issues as they move further from the median. One potential explanation for this pattern is that extremism on the second dimension is driven largely by segregationists such as Olin Johnston (South Carolina senator), Herman Talmadge (Georgia governor and senator), B. Everett Jordan (North Carolina senator), and James Eastland (Mississippi senator). Rather than offering counter-proposals on black issues (such as the anti-affirmative action bills of Jesse Helms or Orrin Hatch), these MCs relied upon defensive tactics. As a result, the probability of bill sponsorship decreases. The bill sponsorship of these southern segregationists raises the larger question of how MCs' behaviors are structured by their geographic context. Any exploration of race, representation, and geography begins with district composition.

Figure 4: The Impact of Racial Composition on Black Bill Sponsorship



Most studies of race and representation have not been able to distinguish between the impact of descriptive representation and the racial composition of the district. Grose (2005) is able to circumvent this difficulty by using a larger sample in which there are black districts without black representatives. Since the data for this project precedes the creation of most majority-minority districts, I am able to fully explore the separate effects of the racial composition of constituencies. Figure 4 shows how the probability of sponsoring a black bill increases according to the percentage of black people in the district's population. As expected, non-black MCs are more likely to sponsor black bills as the proportion of black constituents grows. However, the substantive shifts in probability are not particularly large. Moving from zero black people to an all black district increases the probability of sponsoring a black bill by 12.5%. More realistic movements from twenty to forty percent black raise the probability of recognizing black issues by 2.2 percentage points. If recognizing black issues is an important element of substantive black representation, then merely increasing the black population of a district does not seem to be the most effective strategy.

This examination has provided insight into how members use bill sponsorship to recognize black issues. First, identity and institutional roles matter. Women, those who serve on labor, education, and urban affairs committees, committee chairs, and senators are more likely to introduce bills on black issues. Second, ideology is key in terms of how problems are identified and an MC's willingness to offer solutions. Third, those with larger black populations in their districts are more likely to sponsor black bills, showing how problem recognition varies according to the members' political needs. Lastly, once ideology is controlled for, Republicans are more likely to sponsor black bills than Democrats. These findings add nuance to the literature: the recognition of black issues is not best-served simply by electing more Democrats to Congress; this element of substantive representation is maximized by the infusion of liberals.

## **4.2 Regional Influences on Black Issue Recognition**

The initial reaction to finding that Democrats sponsor fewer black bills than Republicans is to blame the Dixiecrats. Given the South's entrenched opposition to civil rights, MCs from southern states should rarely recognize black issues as problems. In a broader sense, the problems that MCs

recognize through legislation should reflect state and regional concerns. Regional and state effects were included in the model to allow for this variation. Thus, the Dixiecrats cannot be blamed for the lack of black issues recognized by the Democratic Party. Even when controlling for states and region, Democrats sponsor fewer black bills than Republicans.

Table A-4 presents the results for the regional variables.<sup>9</sup> There do not appear to be many regional effects. The only statistically significant coefficient is for the West North Central states (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, and SD) whose MCs sponsor a higher number of black bills. This lack of regional effects becomes even clearer upon examining the separate state intercepts. Figure 5

Table 4: Regional Effects on Black Bill Sponsorship

	Hurdle	Count
South	0.227 (-0.27/0.75)	0.697 (-0.32/1.83)
New England	0.293 (-0.24/0.86)	0.575 (-0.56/1.78)
Mid-Atlantic	0.423 (-0.16/1.03)	1.044 (-0.18/2.36)
East Central	0.229 (-0.32/0.81)	0.887 (-0.25/2.15)
West Central	0.336 (-0.19/0.88)	1.249* (0.19/2.43)
Mountain	0.251 (-0.26/0.79)	0.525 (-0.54/1.71)
Border	0.375 (-0.19/0.97)	1.102 (-0.05/2.38)
Intercept	-5.156* (-5.91/-4.55)	-3.505* (-5.18/-2.32)
$\sigma_{state}$	0.393 (0.30/0.52)	0.832 (0.63/1.11)

contains shaded maps of the United States with darker values representing higher expected values. The expected probability of sponsoring a black bill is presented by Figure 5(a), and the expected count of black bills is presented by Figure 5(b). For both maps, the expected values were calculated

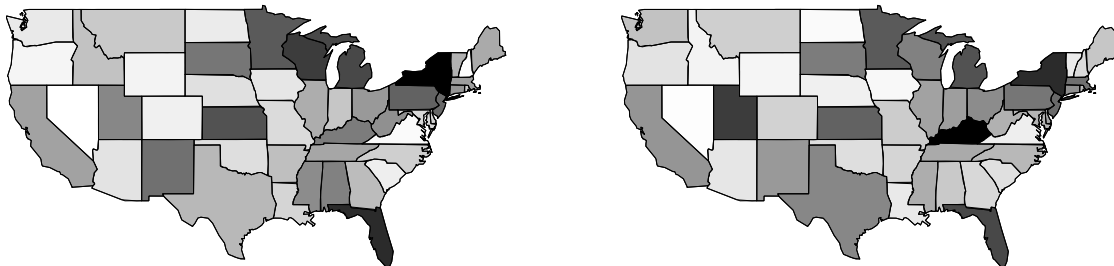
<sup>9</sup>Pacific states are the excluded category.

by holding everything constant while allowing the state intercepts to change.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 5: Recognition of Black Issues by State

(a) Probability of Black Bill Sponsorship

(b) Number of Black Bills Sponsored



There are no discernible, regional patterns in Figure 5. Nonetheless, the ranking of states could lend clues to how context shapes individual black bill sponsorship. New York, Florida, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Kansas are the top five states for the probability of sponsoring at least one black bill. New York, Florida, and Michigan have black populations that comprise more than twelve percent of the state's total population, but the inclusion of Wisconsin and Kansas is not intuitive. Kansas has a top ranking due primarily to the efforts of Bob Dole. We know that Dole was motivated, at least in part, by inter- and intra-institutional ambition, so perhaps this led to the recognition of a larger number of problems in broad areas. Dole introduced legislation on workplace discrimination, unemployment compensation, domestic food programs, education and child care benefits for the disadvantaged, and various health care initiatives. Wisconsin is a different story. William Proxmire recognized problems of urban development and housing; Gaylord Nelson

<sup>10</sup>The profile is Representative Graham Purcell in 1965. He is a male, democrat, non-freshman, non-committee chair, non-relevant committee member, has a 5.4% black district population, is the chamber median at -0.131 on the first dimension, has 0.696 as the ideal point on the second dimension, with party distances of 0.14 and 0.67, and chamber distances of 0 and 0.827.

emphasized job training programs for the disadvantaged; Robert Kastenmeir recognized the single issue of felony disenfranchisement; and Henry Reuss dealt with basic civil rights, housing, and public employment programs. Kansas shows that state effects do not necessarily reflect a broader contextual influence, and Wisconsin suggests that state effects might tap into pockets of general liberalism.

The confluence of ideology, institutional motivations, and geography is also seen through Figure 5(b). Kentucky, New York, Utah, Florida, and Michigan are the top five states for the counts of black bills. Carl Perkins, whose name is attached to major government initiatives on student loans and vocational education, is responsible for the top ranking of Kentucky. In particular, Perkins served as the chair of the Education and Labor committee from 1967 to 1984, so he had the institutional position to solve problems that related to black Americans.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Orrin Hatch is the driving force behind Utah's ranking because he offers several conservative alternatives to solving issues important to black Americans. Aside from states with large black populations concentrated in liberal cities (such as New York, Florida, and Michigan), black issues may not follow regional or state cleavages. Figure 5 demonstrates that lack of patterns.

### **4.3 The Recognition of Black Issues Over Time**

The story thus far has emphasized the importance of individual characteristics such as ideology and institutional position. I hypothesized that individuals' recognition of black issues would also be influenced by macro-factors such as the levels of black protest and descriptive representation. Table A-5 shows that neither protest nor politics are effective strategies for expanding the scope of conflict. The only variable that is statistically significant is the senate median along the race/civil rights/social issues dimension of ideology. As the senate becomes less liberal on this second dimension, MCs sponsor fewer black bills. This result brings us back to the lesson offered by the analysis of individual characteristics: black agenda setting requires white liberals in order to be successful.

Table A-5 suggests that black bill sponsorship is driven primarily by personal characteristics. However, there are indications that the recognition of black issues has changed over the fifty years

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<sup>11</sup>The House Committee on Education and Labor was the most active committee in both chambers at recognizing black issues.

Table 5: Year Effects on Black Bill Sponsorship

	Hurdle	Count
Session	0.018 (-0.05/0.08)	-0.086 (-0.19/0.02)
Protest	0.058 (-0.02/0.13)	-0.006 (-0.13/0.13)
Black MCs	0.042 (-0.23/0.30)	-0.272 (-0.72/0.18)
Pre-1966	0.126 (-0.65/0.90)	-0.476 (-1.77/0.83)
Pre-1966 Protest	-0.046 (-0.14/0.05)	0.009 (-0.14/0.16)
Pre-1966 Black MCs	-0.009 (-0.34/0.33)	0.184 (-0.36/0.72)
House Ideology 1	0.197 (-0.41/0.79)	-0.691 (-1.68/0.31)
House Ideology 2	-0.331 (-1.49/0.83)	0.003 (-1.95/1.95)
Senate Ideology 1	-0.343 (-0.99/0.36)	-0.076 (-1.24/1.09)
Senate Ideology 2	0.396 (-1.55/2.27)	-3.433* (-6.70/-0.09)
Intercept	2.296* (1.41/3.22)	0.111 (-1.52/1.90)
$\sigma_{year}^2$	0.044 (0.01/0.11)	0.182 (0.13/0.29)

after World War II. Figure 6 plots the expected values for black bill sponsorship when the year intercepts change and all other variables are held constant.<sup>12</sup> Starting with Figure 6(b), the expected values from the count component of the hurdle model do not exhibit a time trend. Instead, the expected number of bills sponsored by an individual fluctuates very little between 1.03 and 1.06. This reinforces the idea in Table A-3 that variables have a greater impact on changing the probability rather than the level of black bill sponsorship.

Figure 6: The Expected Recognition of Black Issues, 1948-1997

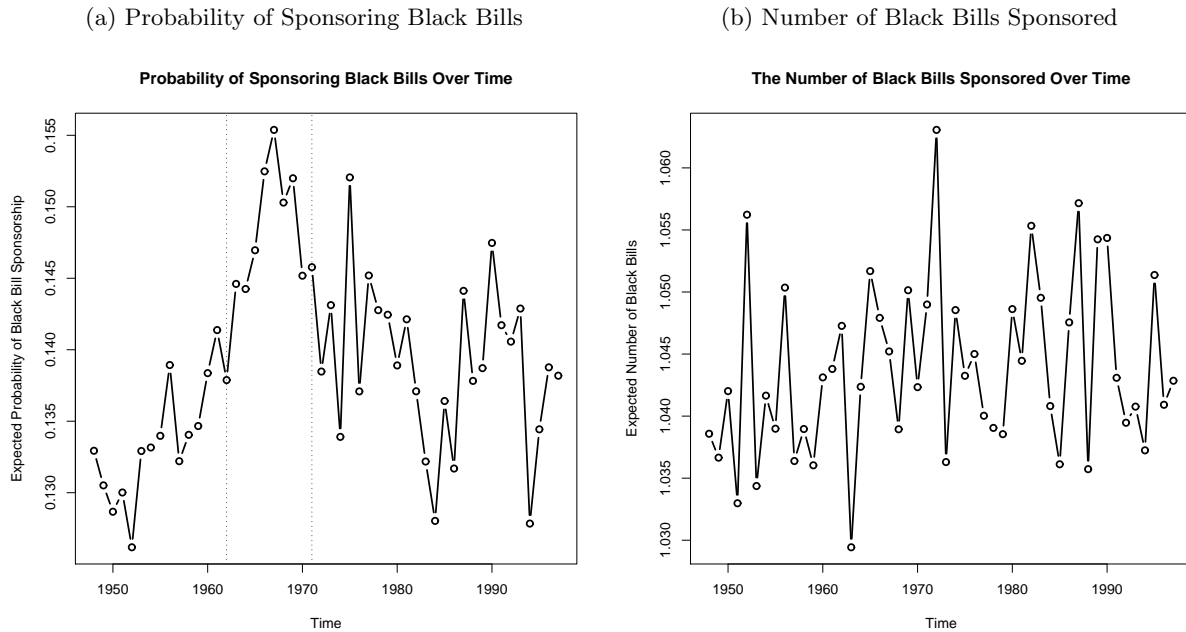


Figure 6(a) shows the probability of sponsoring at least one black bill. Here we see a clear time trend that is compatible with a broader story about the indirect effects of the civil rights movement. After Truman is reelected in 1948 with a strong civil rights plank, congressional recognition declines for his entire term. Beginning in 1953, the probability of sponsoring black bills steadily increases, peaking in 1967. In particular, there are spikes in 1956 and 1961— the years of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and sit-in movement respectively. The vertical dotted lines are structural breaks in

<sup>12</sup>The profile is the mean Democrat representative from California. That is, male, non-chairman, non-committee member, non-freshman, with ideal points of -0.060 and -0.104, party distances of 0.126 and 0.386, a racial composition of 0.050, and chamber distances of 0.356 and 0.212.

the expected values at 1962 and 1971.<sup>13</sup> Substantively, these dotted lines mean that the period from 1962 to 1971 was qualitatively different in terms of the congressional recognition of black issues. These breakpoints encompass the major civil rights victories of Birmingham and the March on Washington in 1963, passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the events leading to the Voting Rights Act in 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Interestingly, congressional recognition of black issues peaks in 1967, a year prior to what many recognize as the less-successful “Black Power” period of the movement (McAdam 1999). The probability of sponsoring black bills decreases after 1967 until the sudden spike in 1975. Perhaps this surge reflects the election of the more liberal “Watergate babies” in 1974. However, this renewed interest in recognizing black issues was short-lived, and the probability of black bill sponsorship is caught in the growing wave of conservatism that lasts until the end of Reagan’s first term. Curiously, the recognition of black issues rebounds over the last eight years of Reagan-Bush then drops precipitously in 1994 – the year prior to the Republican takeover of Congress.

Figure 6 illustrates some important points. First, the pattern for the expected probabilities of sponsoring black bills suggests that the recognition of black issues is driven by more than just personal characteristics. There is evidence that context matters for individual bill sponsorship. Second, the trend for the probabilities of sponsorship suggest that black issues have become a staple of the nation’s public agenda. Figure 6 shows that the probability of black bill sponsorship steadily increased throughout the civil rights movement, so that now – even though there are low points such as 1984 and 1994 – black bills are standard pieces of legislation. Third, the relatively static pattern for the expected number of black bills suggests that black people expand the scope of conflict by increasing the number of non-black MCs who sponsor black bills. Rather than encouraging existing allies to recognize more black issues, black agenda setting requires either an influx of new MCs to recognize black issues or persuading existing members to alter their patterns of bill sponsorship. Figure 6(a) demonstrates that an MC’s black bill sponsorship can change even when that individual remains the same. However, in practice, individual attributes are not held constant. The ideological balance in Congress shifts as the result of elections, and as Figure 3

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<sup>13</sup>These breaks were identified using the test developed by Bai and Perron (1998) implemented through the `breakpoints` function in the `strucchange` package in R.

illustrates, the recognition of black issues is partially shaped by MCs' ideological positions relative to their party and chamber. Black bill sponsorship by non-black MCs is driven by how individual attributes interact with broader social, political, and economic contexts.

## 5 Conclusion

I set out to explain the existence of William Fitts Ryan and the 1,262 other non-black members of Congress who sponsored legislation pertaining to black issues. The results from Section 4 show that identity, ideology, institutional positions, and district composition influence MCs' decisions to sponsor black bills. More importantly, the problem-solving framework outlined in Section 2 integrates bill sponsorship decisions into the agenda setting process. I conceive of bill introductions as the recognition of problems, define recognition as placing issues onto the public – rather than the formal – agenda, and situate this problem recognition within accepted motivations for congressional behavior. Future work should provide greater theoretical development of this framework and use it to explain how members design their legislative portfolios. Additionally, by constructing a data set that spans a fifty-year period, I was able to explore how black bill sponsorship varied across individuals, states, and years. Given the availability of data through the Congressional Bills Project, research on bill sponsorship can move beyond a few congresses to provide broad overviews. This paper serves as a valuable starting point.

Perhaps the most important contribution is to the study of black representation and agenda setting. The prominent roles of ideology and institutional positions to the recognition of black issues implies that successful black agenda setting requires the recruitment of white liberals in positions of power. Taken by itself, this finding corresponds to social movements research that focuses on the connections between protest activity, public opinion, and institutional allies (Cress and Snow 2000; Lee 2002; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Stearns and Almeida 2004; Amenta, Olasky and Caren 2005). In combination with the lack of effects for either black protests or descriptive representation, it is unclear how black Americans are (were) able to secure liberal support. Figure 6(a) shows that black issue recognition is changing over time, so perhaps protest works more indirectly to influence members' decisions. Rather than being a question of protest versus politics, protests could shape

the politics themselves. There is anecdotal evidence that Democrats pressured the civil rights leadership to engage in fewer direct action campaigns during 1964, and the data on black protests shows a marked decline relative to 1963 and 1965 (McAdam 1999; Jenkins, Jacobs and Agnone 2003). However, I am not aware of any studies into the relationship between civic unrest and congressional or presidential elections. Future research should expand the possibilities for how black protests shape the electoral environment.

A connection between protest and elections would shed particular light on the transition to black political empowerment after passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Previous research has demonstrated that black voting power has altered the ideological composition of southern delegations (Bullock 1981), and the liberalization of civil rights attitudes has shaped presidential elections (Brooks 2000). These studies underline how the vote arms black people with the power to select representatives who fit their required liberal profile. Although scholars of race and representation make the point that majority-minority districts dilute that power (Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997), this paper has been more interested in uncovering the value of white liberals to black agenda setting. Our focus must now shift to how black representatives contribute to black agenda setting. I have found that black members of Congress play no significant role in influencing the legislative activity of their non-black colleagues, but how do they push a black agenda with their own activities? The next stage of this project will offer an in-depth examination of the bill sponsorship of every black person who has served in Congress since 1947. Future research must move beyond problem recognition to explore how descriptive black representation impacts the progression of black policy proposals throughout the legislative process.

The basic message is that black bill sponsorship does not differ dramatically from bill sponsorship more generally. Understanding what makes William Fitts Ryan a champion of black agenda setting is probably quite similar to understanding what made him the first member of Congress to denounce the Vietnam War. Ideology, constituency, and institutional position are the keys to legislative behavior. As a disadvantaged minority group in a pluralist democracy, black Americans must expand the scope of conflict to realize their policy goals. I have shown that – at the individual level – this expansion does not occur through exceptional outsider pressure but through the

standard determinants of legislative behavior. Given the difficulties black people have historically faced to be included as insiders, black politics is surprisingly normal. Whether this development signals progress remains an open question.

# Appendices

## A Bill Coding Decisions by Topic

Table A-1: Examples of Black Bills by Topic

Topic	Example
Macroeconomics	incentives for manufacturing in high unemployment areas
Civil Rights	extension of the Commission on Civil Rights
Health	tax deductions for medical care expenses or health insurance
Agriculture	domestic food programs for the needy
Labor/Employment/Immigration	earned income tax credit
Education	expand Title III programs under Higher Education Act
Environment	collecting demographic data for waste treatment sites
Energy	low-income home energy assistance
Transportation	public works employment for the long-term unemployed
Law/Crime/Family	racially discriminatory use of the death penalty
Social Welfare	establish national minimum for AFDC benefits
Community Development/Housing	revitalization and construction of public housing
Banking/Finance/Commerce	non-discrimination in insurance
Defense	pensions for soldiers in the Brownsville Massacre of 1906
Space/Science/Communication	diverse ownership of local broadcasting
Foreign Trade	job retraining for those displaced by foreign trade
International Affairs	funding domestic microloans programs
Government Operations	King holiday and its commission
Public Lands	national African-American history museum

1. Macroeconomics bills are predominantly about unemployment and what the government can do to provide more jobs for the poor. This includes full employment legislation, targeted jobs credits for the poor, incentives to develop economically distressed areas, and the creation of enterprise zones.
2. Civil rights bills deal with instances of discrimination in a variety of areas; voting rights issues that impact black people; administering existing civil rights provisions; and remedial actions such as reparations for slavery and minority set asides.
3. Black interest health legislation deals with expanding health care to the poor, caring for pregnant women, and funding for sickle cell and vitiligo research.

4. Agriculture bills use surplus products to provide food assistance to the needy and school children.
5. The labor and employment category consists of job training programs targeted towards the poor or black people.
6. Education legislation is coded as a black issue if it provides targeted benefits to “disadvantaged” students, reduces funding disparities, further Head Start programs, and sets aside funding for historically black colleges.
7. Environmental policies with the location of waste sites in minority communities.
8. Energy bills provide home energy assistance to the poor and compensate those who lost jobs as a result of the oil crisis.
9. Transportation black bills include extended public works projects intended to curb unemployment, representation of minorities and the poor on local transit boards, and amendments to the Urban Mass Transportation act that pertain to the poor.
10. Law, Crime, and Family issues are coded as black when they address disparities in sentencing, prohibitions of police brutality, hate crimes, and programs to help children or poor mothers.
11. Social welfare bills include guaranteed income, appropriations for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and expansions of the food stamp program. Mostly this topic is composed of changes to AFDC that increase benefits, federalize administration, avoid work requirements, and repeal punitive measures.
12. Community development and Housing legislation is coded as black when it expands or improves low-income housing, especially public housing. Issues of fair housing, community development block grants, enterprise zones, and economic development of depressed areas are also included under this heading.
13. Banking, Finance, and Commerce refers to discrimination in the ability of minorities to get reasonable credit and insurance rates. Targeted tax relief for low-income people and inducements to invest in minority business are also included.
14. Defense bills offer remedies to black soldiers for past racial injustices and create special offices for equal opportunity or minority affairs.
15. Space, Science, Technology, and Communications contains issues about the diversity of broadcasting ownership, media portrayal of racial/ethnic groups, and public works employment to build communication infrastructure.
16. Foreign trade bills include some affirmative action measures and job retraining for those displaced by foreign trade.
17. International Affairs does not include many black bills, given the emphasis on domestic policies. The exception is funding for domestic microloan programs.

18. Government operations relate to black interests when they commemorate black people or achievements, preferences for contracts in high unemployment areas, and applying civil rights laws to government offices such as Congress and the Supreme Court.
19. Public lands and water management is devoted entirely to monuments and landmarks that recognize important aspects of black history.

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