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Evaluating Constituent Representation Among Southern Members of Congress: The Cases of Georgia and Kentucky

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EVALUATING CONSTITUENT REPRESENTATION AMONG SOUTHERN MEMBERS OF CONGRESS: THE CASES OF GEORGIA AND KENTUCKY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors that influence the representative relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. Given the foundational nature of representation in democratic republics, research on the communication between citizens and their representatives is needed. Because the relationship between constituents and their representatives is most frequently studied in the electoral context, studies on the factors that impact constituent representation by their members of Congress are lacking. Using a mixed methodology of quantitative logistic regression analysis and qualitative interviews, I examine constituent-initiated contact of the office of their member of Congress and interpersonal interactions between representatives and their constituents as a measure of the federal representational relationship. Regression analysis finds that high certainty, high income and low trust in the federal government increase the likelihood that a constituent will contact, and that southern constituents are less likely to contact their member of Congress than non-southern constituents.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who gave me a love of learning, my siblings and friends who push me to keep learning, and to the faculty and staff at Western Kentucky University who have shaped my journey through higher education.

"The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts."
– C.S. Lewis

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STUDY RATIONALE

The study of Congress and its members enjoys a privileged position in political science research, in part because of the importance of Congress in both national policy and politics. The 435 United States Representatives and 100 US Senators are tasked by the United States Constitution with representing geographic areas of the population across the country at the national Congress. It is through these legislators that individual citizens connect to both national government policy by sharing their opinions on legislation with their member and also to federal government agencies from which citizens may receive services. The offices of members of Congress, then, serve as both practical avenues for the facilitation of representation and the symbol of government responsiveness to the citizen.

Much of the research that is conducted about Congress, however, focuses on the electoral function of Congress and its members. Research on the post-election relationship between a member of Congress and his or her constituents is lacking, even though this representative relationship, as described above, serves both practical and symbolic functions that are fundamental to the American system of democracy. In order to add to the body of literature about this topic, I examine in this study the most basic interaction between a constituent and the office of a member of Congress – constituent-initiated office contact. By understanding who contacts congressional offices and the factors that motivate them to contact, we may be able to better understand the practical facilitation of representation that takes place in congressional offices today.

Because of the applicability of communication theory to any topic that examines interactions between human beings, I examine this representation relationship through the lens of both communication and political science theory. The relationship between constituents and their representatives, is, in fact, just that – a relationship. Therefore, the application of both interpersonal and public communication theory proves helpful in this study. This posits another potential measure of congressional representation on the district level: that of the interpersonal interactions between members of Congress and their constituents. Based on this approach to the topic of representation, I propose the following research questions:

R1: What factors impact the contact between a constituent and their member of Congress?

R2: What factors impact the interpersonal interaction between a constituent and their member of Congress?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

American democracy is built upon the relationship between representatives and those they represent. In his *Thoughts on Government*, John Adams writes, "In a large society, inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble to make laws. The first necessary step, then, is to depute power from the many to a few of the most wise and good," (Adams, 1776). The relationship between the "wise and good" and "the many," their constituents, not only constitutes the organizational structure of our political system but rises out of the principles declared in the Declaration of Independence: consent of the governed and equality in representation.

In American political thought, a representative democracy is the manifestation of a larger ideal for the relationship between leaders and citizens in a political system. In classical liberal thought, as described by John Locke and other thinkers, government should be responsive to the people. Today, representation at the federal level is administered by the offices of elected members of Congress with whom constituents communicate their policy preferences.

Stephen J. Wayne (2004) writes that representation, responsiveness and decisional rule "tie public input to policy output and thereby link government to the governed," (Wayne, p. ix). Democracies are governments formed for the citizens and directed by the citizens of the nation. Therefore, in American democracy, the way individuals interact with their government is not just important; it is the determining factor of a healthy democratic system. Because the founding thinkers in America believed that a pure

democracy was impractical and unattainable, especially in a nation as geographically large and populous as even the colonies during the time of the War for Independence, they embedded in the system republican principles of government, as well. Republican systems, they argued, would protect minorities and facilitate good government in America.

In Federalist Essay 10, James Madison states that the cure for factional tyranny is a republican system of government. Madison argues that the wisdom of elected representatives acts to "refine and enlarge" the interests of the citizens (Federalist Essay 10, p. 56). Representatives, in Madison's view, exist to enhance the public good. In fact, Madison writes, "It may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good, than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose," (Federalist Essay 10, p. 56). Madison argues that elected representatives will represent citizens better than citizens could represent themselves through a direct democracy. Similarly, Madison argued that the capacity for 'closeness' of a representative to his constituents, or the relative size of a district that allowed for physical and political closeness, was important (Federalist Essay 10, p. 57). Madison believed that enlightened representatives would not only represent their constituents but promote the public good and reduce the risk of factional control.

Similarly, in Federalist Essay 35, Alexander Hamilton writes that, in a republic, representative and constituent have a 'dependence' on one another. Hamilton writes:

> Is it not natural that a man who is a candidate for the favour of the people, and who is dependent on the suffrages of his fellow citizens for the continuance of

> his public honors, should take care to inform himself of their dispositions and inclinations, and should be willing to allow them their proper degree of influence upon his conduct? This dependence, and the necessity of being bound himself, and his posterity, by the laws to which he gives his assent, are the true, and they are the strong chords of sympathy between the representative and the constituent. (Fed 35, p. 186).

The relationship, Hamilton argues, between constituent and representative resembles that of a bond; the representative has a duty to understand the interests and wishes of his constituents, and the constituents are given the power to hold the representative to that obligation. It is the duty, therefore, according to Hamilton, of representatives to engage with their constituents in understanding their "dispositions and inclinations." Hamilton's "strong chords of sympathy" tie a representative to those he or she represents.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French diplomat and political scholar, observed American democracy at work in the 1830s. On political participation in government life, de Tocqueville writes, "It is therefore the people who direct, and although the form of government is representative, it is evident that the opinions, the prejudices, the interests and even the passions of the people can find no lasting obstacles that prevent them from taking effect in the daily direction of society," (Democracy in America, p. 165). This "daily direction of society" is facilitated, practically in 21st century America, by organized efforts of members of Congress to communicate with and hear communication from their constituents through constituent service and offices in Washington D.C. This is also facilitated, as de Tocqueville would perhaps point out on a 21st century visit to America, through citizen-led movements like lobbying efforts, social media and

referenda. These are examples of citizens working through other means besides elections to "take effect in the daily direction of society."

The relationship between a constituent and their representative is also foundational to a republican system. According to John Locke, the most important relationship between an individual and the state is that relationship obtained when individuals relinquish their personal liberty to the state. John Locke writes of the relationship,

> To this end it is that men give up all their natural power to the society which they enter into, and the community put the legislative power into such hands as they think fit, with this trust, that they shall be governed by declared laws, or else their peace, quiet, and property will still be at the same uncertainty, as it was in the state of nature (Locke, Second Treatise, Chapter XI, Section 136).

The significance of trust - a state that the legitimate creation of government by consenting individuals is reliant upon - is important to note in this relationship.

In his *Second Treatise on Government*, trust is a central concept in Locke's view of the relationship between government and the governed. Often, the word trust refers to the reliance in the government placed there by the people (as in 'entrusted'), rather than a bond between two or more people, what Merriam-Webster defines as "a firm belief in" the characteristics of someone or something ("trust," Merriam-Webster). This is a nuanced difference but is important in understanding Locke and his thought on trust in government. The questions that I ask in this study consider the levels of trust that constituents place in government, rather than the broader concept of entrusting to the government the duty to carry out good of the public. Both forms of trust are significant to

the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives, however, and to the integrity of representation as a whole.

According to American political thinkers and those who influenced them, then, representation and the relationship between constituents and their representatives forms the fabric of democracy. This relationship has been studied by scholars throughout the years since the founding of the nation, and in various contexts. The literature review below examines the application of these theoretical concepts in previous literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern decades, scholars have undertaken to understand and explain how representatives should best execute their duties in their representative relationship with constituents. Citizen representation is the process upon which the American representative democracy is founded and is important to understand and facilitate well. Today, this process is practically coordinated by congressional district and Washington offices that serve as the liaisons between a member of Congress and those they represent. Contact with these offices is available to any citizen who lives within a member's district but is not frequently utilized. Constituent attitudes and characteristics like income level, trust in government, gender, race and uncertainty about a representative have the potential to impact the representation process, facilitated practically by communication with district and Washington member offices, either inhibiting or defining representation of constituents by their members of Congress. This contact process could also take place in less traditional venues, like interpersonal interactions between constituents and representatives, which might impact the representation relationship even further.

Representation

Representation is perhaps one of the most frequently studied topics in constituent-representative relations. In his analysis of sitting members of Congress, Richard Fenno pioneered the study of members of Congress's relationship with their districts (Fenno, 1978). In *Home Style*, Fenno writes that a member's home style is important to

understand in addition and in contrast to his or her Washington style. Home styles are defined by a member's efforts in his district to explain his Washington activity, present a concept of self, and allocate resources (Fenno, 1978). These activities have implications not only for the study of political science, but are also grounded in communication theory, including expectancy violations theory, uncertainty reduction theory, and face management theory. The concepts within the study of home styles are closely linked with the topics undertaken in this paper, as well as the communication theories they embody.

Because of its formative impact on the study of the district role a member of Congress plays, rather than just in Washington, *Home Style* provides a helpful frame of reference for the conceptualization of representation. Since the publishing of *Home Style*, research has recognized the importance of constituent service and district activities to the study of Congress. In their discussion of congressional district activities, Tacheron and Udall (1970) write that, "For, as viewed by most Congressmen, job security and constituency service are like love and marriage - you can't have one without the other," (Tacheron and Udall, p. 64).

Research has been undertaken to better understand representation from both an individual level, focusing on constituents, and an aggregate level, analyzing how a legislator interacts with their entire district. The role that an elected representative chooses also plays an important role in how the district is represented both in the state legislature and in Congress. Pitkin categorizes these roles into two sections: trustee and delegate (Pitkin, 1967). Delegates see their role as a voice for the people, while trustees see their role as a trustee of the people's vision. Cooper and Richardson find that female and racial minority legislators are more likely to consider themselves delegates (Cooper

and Richardson, 2006). Alpert (1979), on the other hand, argues that representation behavior of legislators stems not from their chosen roles but from the desire to reduce uncertainty about constituent opinion in an effort to win elections.

Descriptive representation

Descriptive representation is one of the most widely studied forms of representation. According to Pitkin (1967), descriptive representation is "how the legislature is composed," in contrast to "what the legislature does," (Pitkin, p. 61). This form of representation represents a narrower focus than the typical understanding of representation, because it focuses on the identities of both the citizens and the representatives. For a representative to be descriptive, they must possess the same identifying attributes as those they represent. These could be gender, race, region of the country, or other identifiers.

Though it has been established by some researchers and theorists as a goal of representation, true descriptive representation is impossible. In fact, in Federalist Essay 35, Alexander Hamilton writes, "the idea of actual representation of all classes of the people by persons of each class, is altogether visionary," (Fed 35, p. 184). Descriptive representation, however, is important for various reasons. James Madison writes that it is necessary for "all classes of citizens" to be represented by someone of their own class in order for their interests to be understood and represented (Federalist Essay 35, P. 185).

Constituents can be represented descriptively through gender. In the United States, fewer females are elected to office than men, though women comprise a larger portion of the American population. In the 116th Congress, the most diverse Congress to date, only 130 members, or 24%, are women (Congressional Research Service,

Membership of the 116th Congress: A Profile). Though this ratio has increased in the past 35 years, it remains small. Researchers have undertaken the study of the impact of gender in legislative politics. Lawless (2004) hypothesizes that women represented by women in Congress would more favorably evaluate their members of Congress, would have more positive attitudes towards government, and would be more politically engaged than women represented by men. She found little support for the evaluation of government or the political engagement hypotheses, finding that sex of representative did not have an overwhelmingly significant effect on women's feelings toward government or direct engagement with politics. She did, however, find support for the political evaluation hypothesis, suggesting that women are more likely to positively evaluate their female representatives than their male representatives (Lawless, 2004).

In a similar study, Costa and Schaffner (2017) find that though women have more positive evaluations of their female representatives, they contact their female representatives less frequently. They found that in 2012 and 2014, "22.4 percent of women make contact if their representative is a male, compared with just 14.7 percent who do so if the representative is a female," (Costa and Schaffner, p. 52). As one of the only studies that analyzes the effect of gender on constituent contact with their representative, the study concludes that descriptive representation of gender does impact female constituents' perception of their representative but does not impact constituent-initiated contact.

Further research evaluates self-efficacy among female candidates for Congressional offices. Fox and Lawless (2011) find that women are less likely to view their credentials as qualifiable for a congressional run. This impacts potential female

candidates' perceived political efficacy, which in turn impacts the number of women who run for and are elected to Congress, helping to explain the small percentage of female legislators in Congress today. Literature on the uniqueness of women serving as representatives finds that women are focused in general on issues that affect women, including women across the country rather than just in their districts, than do male legislators (McDonald and O'Brien, 2011).

Research in gender and substantive representation focuses heavily on electoral issues rather than the post-election representation and constituent service. Some studies, as noted above, discuss legislative and policy representation among female members of Congress, but few have studied the impact of a representative's gender in constituent service and trust of government after the election process and during the term of a representative. This further confirms the need for more study of a variety of independent variables on the post-election representation process.

Socioeconomic Status

In *Home Style*, Fenno writes that constituents who had a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to interact in person with their member of Congress. One reason he gives for this is that higher socioeconomic individuals are more likely to already be organized into groups, like professional or church organizations, that a member of Congress can easily access for a speaking engagement or appearances (Fenno, 1978). Therefore, according to Fenno, it is likely that low socioeconomic constituents have interacted less frequently in person with their member of Congress than have high socioeconomic constituents. If personal contact between constituent and legislator does have an impact on a constituents' trust in government or likelihood to seek assistance

from their member of Congress's office, this lack of contact has serious implications for democracy in general.

Previous research is conflicted regarding the impact of socioeconomic status on representation. Brunner, Ross and Washington (2013) find that the votes of legislators frequently reflect the opinions of both high- and low-income voters, whose opinions are generally similar to one another. Hayes (2013), on the other hand, finds that US senators were more likely to be responsive to upper-income individuals than lower-income individuals. Using regression analysis to test legislative responsiveness with constituent conservatism and legislator ideology variables, Hayes found a significant positive relationship between higher-income individuals and responsiveness to their opinions from their legislator (Hayes, 2013). These results reveal valuable information about legislator responsiveness to constituents' policy opinions, which is an important aspect of constituent-legislator contact. Because they test only legislative responsiveness to policy concerns of constituents, however, they do not definitively answer questions regarding the impact of constituent socioeconomic status in legislator responsiveness to constituent contact regarding casework or general requests.

Home styles in the literature

Congressional activities play a major role in a members' formation of their home style, and thus their relationship with constituents in their district. Parker and Goodman (2012) analyze the interaction between junior and senior senators from the same state and the difference in their chosen representational styles. They conclude that members' actions do have an effect on their constituents' perceptions of their home style. Hassell and Monson (2016) find that franked mail and campaign mail are utilized as avenues for

members of Congress to not only connect with their constituents but to formulate their presentation of self and to explain Washington activity, and as a campaign tool.

Similar research focuses on legislators' responses to constituent contact with their offices as a way to understand their home styles. Butler, Karpowitz and Pope (2012) address the question of how a representative formulates their home style, stating that "representatives must choose what sort of relationship they will construct with the constituents in their district," (Butler, Karpowitz and Pope, p. 475). Their research finds that both members of Congress and state legislators prioritize constituent service, or casework, over policy representation when communicating with constituents. They argue that this prioritization is determined by how each office is structured (Butler, Karpowitz and Pope, 2012).

Communication Theory

Interpersonal communication theory has not enjoyed extensive study in political science. Several studies, however, have focused on this unique combination of disciplines. Gilkerson and Southwell (2016) analyze the effects of interpersonal relationships in political campaigns. They write that "the strategic communication efforts of political campaigns can be both moderated by and mediated through an individual's interactions with others," (Gilkerson and Southwell, p. 1). Several other studies that include interpersonal communication theory and representation will be reviewed below.

Uncertainty Reduction

The first communication paper to study uncertainty reduction theory was authored by Berger and Calabrese in 1975. Published in *Human Communication*, the study focused

on initial interpersonal interactions between strangers. At the base of their paper, Berger and Calabrese theorize that humans seek to reduce the number of possible outcomes of an interaction between two interactors. They write that uncertainty is both proactive, in which interactors reduce uncertainty about future actions of the other person, and reactive, in which interactors seek to reduce the amount of "plausible alternative explanations for the other person's behavior," (Berger and Calabrese, p. 101). Out of the authors' seven axioms regarding uncertainty reduction, the third is perhaps most pertinent to the topic at hand. It states that "high levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behavior decreases," (Berger and Calabrese, p. 103). Berger and Calabrese write that information-seeking is a natural instrument of uncertainty reduction. This is important to note because information seeking and sharing make up a large portion of the literature related to constituent contact with representatives and representatives' relationships with constituencies.

As Eugene J. Alpert (1979) argues in his study of representational role theory, uncertainty reduction plays an important role in legislator-constituent relationships. Alpert suggests that reducing uncertainty and issue salience are two fundamental factors in a legislators' choice of representational role. He argues that rather than Burkean ideals of representation as delegates and trustees, members' representational roles are related to their uncertainty about constituents' opinions. In an effort to reduce uncertainty about constituent opinions, legislators will become 'information maximizers.' Alpert writes,

> Thus, what has been considered a delegate style of representation evolves less from a desire to follow district opinion, regardless of one's own preferences, than

from an effort to decrease uncertainty about district opinion in order to make optimal choices for attaining political goals.

Therefore, according to Alpert, uncertainty reduction is important for both representation and elections. Uncertainty thrives in a world of strangers, and the relationship between constituents and representatives is inherently composed of strangers. Members of Congress are faced with the challenge of creating electoral supporters out of as many of these strangers in their districts as possible for both elections and constituent service.

Besides Alpert's study, only limited research has been undertaken to study uncertainty reduction in the political science field. Bonfiglioli and Gancia (2013) analyze electoral accountability as a function of informational frictions and uncertainty. They find that uncertainty is negatively related to myopia, or shortsighted policy concerns by politicians in the face of risking electoral stability. Mitchell Sanders (2001) studied the role that uncertainty about political candidates plays in voter turnout, finding that strength of preference between two candidates is affected by levels of uncertainty. Conceptualized on a four-by-four grid, these results include an x-axis of uncertainty and a y-axis of weak or strong preference for a candidate. Greater uncertainty about a candidate will lead to more abstention from voting only if the preference for the candidate is weak. If uncertainty is low, abstention is likely to be low as well. Interestingly, uncertainty about a representative's character was found to be statistically significant but uncertainty about their ideology was not. Based on these findings, I posit that personal character, in addition to electoral positions, matters to constituents in elections and representation.

In their work on political perceptions and voter uncertainty, Alvarez and Franklin (1994) find that respondents were much more certain in their own stances than they were

of their US senator's stance. Conversely, "uncertainty about senator placements is far greater," (Alvarez and Franklin, p. 675). Placements, here, refers to the placement of a senator's issue stance on a scale. Uncertainty, they find, is related to information availability and cost, but that uncertain voters are less likely to use information to inform their perceptions of candidates than certain voters. Their results also indicate that issue 'closeness' to an individual, or how directly the issue affects the individual, will impact their certainty of their stance on that issue (Alvarez and Franklin, p. 679).

Bartels (1986) utilized 1980 national election survey data to analyze voters' uncertainty when responding to a survey about the current presidential candidates. Bartels writes, "The basic result of the model is that, for each issue, voters add the variance of their perceptions of the candidates to the squared distance between the expected positions of the candidates and their own position in weighing the total impact of the issue on a candidate's expected utility," (Bartels, p. 717). In other words, voters use perception of the person whom they are evaluating, in addition to the traditionally expected factors of candidate position and how 'good' the candidate will be for the voter, when assessing a candidate. Bartels writes further that this uncertainty is "*in the mind*" of the voter, which indicates that this uncertainty cannot be compared to other, subjective uncertainties (Bartels, p. 710).

Glasgow and Alvarez (2000) find that in addition to uncertainty about candidate issue positions, voters exhibit uncertainty about candidate personality traits, like morality and perceived ability to "get things done," (Glasgow and Alvarez, p. 45). This demonstrates that uncertainty about candidates spans a broad range of subjects and is not limited to just uncertainty about candidate issue stances. In this case, the study focuses on

federal candidates for office, rather than federally elected officials. This and other studies can assist political candidates practically in formulating a campaign strategy. These studies regarding uncertainty demonstrate that uncertainty does play a large role in the political relationships and processes, and that uncertainty often reduces the frequency of citizen political behavior, while certainty increases the frequency of citizen political behavior. This informs the uncertainty hypothesis suggested in this study.

Presentation of Self and Face Management Theory

Richard Fenno argues that one aspect of a legislators' interaction with their district is their presentation of self. He draws this theory from sociologists' Erving Goffman, who first articulated the presentation of self theory (Goffman, 1959). In the communication discipline, this theory is closely connected to Face-Negotiation Theory, which states that people engage in behaviors to manage their outward perceptions and appearances.

Members of Congress use various forms of technology to engage in facework. In a study of the first use of websites by members of Congress, Adler, Gent and Overmeyer (1998) find that Democrats frequently used websites to engage in casework with constituents, and that Republicans, younger representatives, and those that represented more affluent constituencies were most likely to have a website. Though this article was published over twenty years ago at the dawn of websites' use in campaigns and representation, members of Congress have continued to use websites to connect with constituents, facilitate contact, and formulate their home styles.

Many representatives have also moved to newer platforms of Internet engagement. Social media, particularly Twitter use, has been studied as an extension of a

members' ability to formulate and facilitate their home styles. Recent research around this topic has focused on presentation of self via social media (Hearn, 2017). Interestingly, Straus, et. al found that senators who were more ideologically inclined and who represent states with higher populations are more likely to be a frequent Twitter user (Straus, et. al, 2016). They also note that social media has changed the definition of constituent, because it is almost impossible for members or their staff to verify whether or not their Twitter followers or interactors live within their district. This opens questions of ethics involved with a member's use of social media and whether or not it is a viable avenue for legislative or casework correspondence.

Explanation of Washington activity is another example of Fenno's work on legislative-constituent relations which has been studied in previous political science and communication theory. How a member of Congress explains activity and votes to their constituents tells us how they might interact in other contexts of constituent-legislator communication, like constituent-initiated communication. In a field experiment of senators, Grose, Malhotra and Van Houweling (2014) found that instead of ignoring constituent-initiated communication on policy stances in opposition to their vote on those stances, senators tailor their responses using several face management tactics. Explanations have power in elections and governance and can impact constituent opinions and electoral outcomes.

Personal Contact

Personal contact is an important aspect of relationships between those with authority and those over whom they have authority. Woodrow Wilson, in his speech 'A New Freedom,' (1913) states,

> Most of our laws were formed in the age when employer and employees knew each other, knew each other's characters, were associates with each other, dealt with each other as man with man. That is no longer the case. You not only do not come into personal contact with the men who have the supreme command in those corporations, but it would be out of the question for you to do it (Wilson, 1913).

Here, Wilson contends that the working man's subjugation to his employer is in part due to the lack of human contact between the two employment classifications. Personal interactions between powerful individuals and those they have power over happen infrequently but might prove to have a significant impact on a system's viability, in Wilson's view.

Research on the relationship between personal contact between constituents and legislators is relatively slim. In a study of trust of U.S. House members by their constituents, Parker and Parker (2017) define personal contact as "personal forms of interaction with the legislator such as meeting with him or her or attending a meeting where he or she spoke," (p. 445). They also include interaction with a member of the legislators' staff and knowing someone who had a personal connection with the legislator in their definition. They find that personal contact and trust in representatives are positively correlated, with a gamma coefficient of 0.46 (Parker and Parker, 2017). This is a reasonably strong correlation and supports their hypothesis that trust and contact are positively related. Because of this, I hypothesize that both trust and personal contact will

be related to other constituent behaviors, specifically their contact with their member of Congress's office.

Costa and Schaffner (2017) analyze the impact of a representative's gender on the contact that their constituents initiated. They find that gender has only a minimal effect on constituent-initiated contact with congressional offices. In their study, the most frequently utilized platforms of contact were email, while reported in-person contact at political events - 4.6% for women and 3.0% for men in 2014 - and office visits - 0.6% for women and 1.4% for men - were minimal.

Perhaps the most relevant study to this research was conducted by Diana Evans Yiannakis (1981), who studied the factors that contribute to a constituent's decision to contact their legislator for casework. The study also analyzes whether or not this casework proves a beneficial electoral advantage for incumbents. Yiannakis hypothesizes that lower socioeconomic status individuals are more likely to be in need of "an ombudsman" to guide the constituent through the difficult procedures of federal government agencies (Yiannakis, 1981, p. 570). Yiannakis also contends that constituents must first be aware that services are offered by their representatives, and contact is "likely to be related to the constituent's exposure to the representative, either through meetings or mass communications," (p. 570). This mirrors our hypothesis regarding personal contact. In the study, interestingly, Yiannakis finds that personal contact between constituents, out of all variables - income, having friends who had contacted a representative, party identification, contact and education - had the largest effect on whether a constituent contacted their representative or not, with a standardized discriminant function coefficient of 0.438 (Yiannakis, 1981).

Constituent Service and Casework

In *Home Style*, Fenno (1978) writes, "the dominant constituent expectation - in nearly every district and among all groups of constituents - is *access,*" (Fenno, p. 191). Contacting one's member of Congress is perhaps the most fundamental form of access to their representatives that constituents have at their disposal. Typically, as reported by the Congressional Research Service, contact with a constituent service office includes: "Help with federal government (casework, grant work and business), opportunities for students (internships, Service Academy nominations, Congressional art contest), assisting with Washington, DC Visits, and commemorations and recognition (congratulations, flag requests, and Presidential Greetings)," (Congressional Research Service, 2018). Members' offices serve as an avenue through which constituents tell their representative how they feel about a policy issue. This communication, in theory, helps representatives know how their constituency feels about a certain issue, and might inform them on how to vote on that issue.

A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Coleman (2005) asked participants to scale how closely connected they felt to various people, like a next-door neighbor, a local elected official, and their currently serving member of Parliament. 7% of respondents reported feeling connected or above on the scale to their MPs. Conversely, 79% felt disconnected from their MPs. Interestingly, 12% of respondents said they had met their MP face-to-face in the past year. Coleman's study defines "having contact" with an MP as any of the following: having written to the MP, met the MP, visited MP's website, watched MP on TV, read a letter or leaflet from MP, or listened to a speech by MP (Coleman, p. 201). This is a somewhat broader definition of contact than I employ in

this study. I define contact as constituent-initiated, which includes calling a congressional office, writing a letter, sending an email, visiting the district office, or attending an event or town hall meeting. In general, this definition requires more intentionality on the part of the constituent and defines the reason for the contact more narrowly: a casework request, to share on opinion on a policy issue or any other miscellaneous office request.

Southern Identity

Research demonstrates that the state and region in which one lives is a predictor of political attitudes and behavior (Erikson, McIver and Wright, 1987). Erikson, McIver and Wright find the effect of regional identity on political party identification and ideological identification to be as powerful as race or religion (p. 801). Daniel Elazar pioneered the study of political culture distinctiveness in the 1960s with this work *American federalism: A view from the states*, which outlines three distinct political cultures in the United States: individualistic, traditionalistic and moralist. Studies testing Daniel Elazar's categorization of US states in one of three political cultures, moralistic, traditionalistic or individualistic, find that southern states are most likely to be traditionalistic (Morgan and Watson, 1991). Traditionalistic states, according to Elazar, believe in preserving the established political order and elite (Elazar, 1966). Social status of political leaders is recognized as important in the traditionalistic political culture. This political culture is characterized by a highly deferential attitude towards elected officials from citizens (Elazar, 1966). In explaining the traditionalistic southern political culture, Woodard (2006) writes, "The persistence of traditional values in the South is an understood part of the cultural legacy," (Woodard, 2006, p. 3).

The uniqueness of the southern political has been studied in regard to legislators and representation. Employing the Big Five personality indicators, Turner, Kash and Lasley (2019) find that southern legislators are more likely to be open and extraverted (Turner, Kash and Lasley, 2019). This southern distinctiveness among state legislators might have implications for southern constituent attitudes towards their elected representatives.

Southern identity is solidly established for some US states, and elusive for others. Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia are commonly regarded as the eleven solidly southern states (Woodard, 2006). Several other states which geographically and historically border the US South are less solidly but increasingly commonly considered southern. These include West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Missouri (Woodard, 2006).

While Georgia is solidly considered a southern state, Kentucky has a less solid classification as southern. Based on the paper presented by Binnix, Turner, Lasley and Kash at the Symposium on Southern Politics and the thesis presented by Binnix (2016) which finds that southern identification among Kentucky residents is high, I include Kentucky as a southern state in this study. I refer to it a 'moderately southern state,' however, to account for the variance of scholarship and popular opinion about its regional identity. Because of its distinctions from solidly southern states, however, I compare Georgia and Kentucky as two iterations of how southern identity might present itself in the issue at hand.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the findings of the previous literature, I propose the following hypotheses to better understand the relationship between the constituent and representative.

R1: What factors impact the contact between a constituent and their member of Congress?

H1: Constituents with higher levels of income will be more likely to contact their member of Congress.

H2: Constituents with higher levels of trust in the federal government will be more likely to contact their member of Congress.

H3: Constituents with higher levels of certainty will be more likely to contact their member of Congress.

H4: Southerners will be more likely to contact their member of Congress.

R2: What factors impact the interpersonal interaction between a constituent and their member of Congress?

H5: Constituents with higher levels of income will be more likely to personally interact with their member of Congress.

H6: Constituents with higher levels of trust in the federal government will be more likely to personally interact with their member of Congress.

H7: Constituents with higher levels of certainty will be more likely to personally interact with their member of Congress.

H8: Southerners will be more likely to personally interact with their member of Congress.

DATA AND METHODS

The study of political science has been approached primarily through quantitative methods. The science of quantitative research through data analysis has been heralded as the most valuable method of inquiry to study political science questions. Studies have been conducted in the political science field, however, using other methods of inquiry. These methods are helpful in the study of political science because they open up other perspectives on these questions. The study of political science, like any discipline with a variety of subdisciplines and applications, should be studied using a variety of inquiry methods. In order to understand even the basic understanding of political science, we must understand the habits, inclinations, interactions, and nature of human beings. These qualities are difficult to study, however, through only quantitative methods.

Because of the emphasis on human behavior in the communication discipline, qualitative analysis is given a place of distinction in the discipline. Both disciplines do, however, regularly conduct mixed method studies. It is because of the close integration of communication theory into a primarily political science study that I also employ a mixed methods study. Quantitative data analysis will form the majority of the study but will be supplemented and explained by qualitative interview data.

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative data used in this study were collected from two online Qualtrics surveys conducted in Georgia and Kentucky, each with a sample size of 600 participants.

Survey data was coded and analyzed using SPSS and Stata software. Survey participants were asked to answer questions regarding demographics and their past behavior and attitudes toward their members of Congress in closed-response answers.

In order to test H1 through H8, which state that constituent-initiated contact of the office of their member of Congress and interpersonal interaction between a constituent and their member of Congress are a function of the constituent's income level, trust in federal government, certainty levels and regional identity, I created a binary logistic regression model. A logistic regression model is employed because both dependent variables are dichotomous, predicting that a constituent will either contact or not contact the office of their member of Congress, or interact or not interact in person. I employ the proposed independent variables to create the following model:

$$Y_{(1,2)} = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7 + b_8X_8 + b_9X_9 + b_{10}X_{10}\, e$$

where Y_1 = whether or not the respondent contacted the office for their member of Congress within the past year, Y_2 = whether or not the respondent interacted personally with their member of Congress; X_1 = income, X_2 = certainty, X_3 = correct identification of member of Congress, X_4 = correct identification of US senators, X_5 = trust, X_6 = regional identity, X_7 = sex, X_8 = Republican party, X_9 = Democratic party and X_{10} = race. In the output of this logistic regression, I expect that each coefficient will be positive, indicating that as the independent variable increases, constituent-initiated contact of the office of the member of Congress will increase. Variables for sex, party and race were employed as controls. This model was tested three times, with data from the Georgia survey, from the Kentucky survey, and from the two surveys combined. In the combined regression model, a variable was added for state. This variable was coded as Georgia = 0 and

Kentucky = 1. Therefore, a positive regression coefficient indicates that more Kentucky respondents contacted or interacted in-person with their members of Congress than did Georgia respondents.

The certainty variable employed in this model was created by coding responses from four survey questions that measured constituent certainty into one variable. The four questions asked respondents to indicate their feelings about how certain they were that they would know who to contact if they needed help with a government agency, that their member of Congress would be willing and able to assist them, how certain they were about their member of Congress' stance on any given issue, and how well they feel they know the character of their member of Congress. Question responses, coded 1 through 5, were assigned the same values in the certainty index. If a constituent responded a 2 on an uncertainty question, meaning they were "Sure," they would receive a 2 on the certainty index. Therefore, index scores range from 4, meaning the constituent was very certain, to twenty, indicating that they were very uncertain. These values were then recoded into four categories, in which 0 represented very low certainty and 3 represented very high certainty.

To further measure constituent certainty, this constituent certainty index variable was supplemented by variables for correct identification of US elected representatives. Survey respondents were asked to identify their two currently serving US senators and one US Representative by name and from memory. Responses were then coded by correct identification and incorrect identification of the representatives.

Qualitative Methods

In order to approach the proposed questions from the perspective of individuals who are engaged with constituent-initiated contact with their elected representatives' offices daily, I include a qualitative portion of the study. This consisted of two twenty- to thirty-minute phone interviews with a constituent service staff member of a currently serving member of Congress.

Participants for these interviews were selected using two criteria: that they worked in a district office of a currently serving member of Congress, and that that member of Congress served in either Georgia or Kentucky. I contacted members of Congress' offices in both Kentucky and Georgia seeking interview participants. One female constituent service district director from a congressional district in Georgia, and one female constituent service staff member from a congressional district in Kentucky responded as willing participants. The participants each represented members of Congress from the Republican and Democratic parties. Participants were interviewed separately in twenty- to thirty-minute interviews, conducted over the phone. Interview questions focused on the participants' experience in constituent service, and fact-gathering questions about constituents' contacting behavior, like which mediums of contact constituents most frequently used, and how confident constituents feel when contacting their office.

Interview data from these two interviews was transcribed and coded. I then analyzed the interview data to identify common themes present in both interviews. Quotes from both interviews are included in this paper to provide qualitative supplementation to quantitative results.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Initial bivariate data analysis of both surveys shows that, on the whole, constituent contact of the office of their member of Congress is low. In Georgia, 22.2% of respondents reported that they had contacted their member of Congress or US senator in the past year, while 14.3% of Kentucky respondents reported that they had contacted their member of Congress or US senator in the past year. The reasons respondents listed for not contacting their federal representatives are perhaps not surprising (See Table 1). The four most frequently selected responses were that the constituents: did not need help with a federal agency, did not think their representatives would listen, were too busy to contact their representatives and didn't trust elected representatives to help. This suggests that the largest barriers to constituent-initiated contact are not those outside the constituents' control, like lack of information about congressional offices, but rather are preferences made by constituents based on their circumstances, like not needing help with a federal agency and their attitudes towards their elected representatives.

Of the 22.2% of Georgia respondents who reported having contacted their member of Congress or US senator in the past year, 84.6% reported having contacted their members of Congress 1 to 2 times in the past year, while 15.4% reported having contacted their member of Congress 3 to 5 times in the past year. Of the 14.3% of Kentucky respondents who had contacted their member of Congress, the spread of frequency of contact ranged more widely than in Georgia: 52.2% of Kentucky respondents had contacted 1 to 2 times and 26.9% 3 to 5 times. Constituents used a variety of methods to contact their

representatives. The most frequently selected form of contact in both states was Email, followed by Phone Call and Attended an event or a town hall meeting. In Georgia, the category 'Other' received 56 selections, suggesting a variety of avenues of contact, besides email, phone call, letter, attending a meeting, visiting the district office, or social media. Constituents who responded that they did contact their member of Congress in the past year listed a variety of reasons for the contact. The most frequently selected in both states was 'Policy Issue or Concern.' Few respondents contacted requesting assistance with an issue they were having with a government agency, a service request related to visiting Washington, and nominations to service academies or other services.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the frequency of interpersonal interactions with their currently serving member of Congress. In Georgia, 23.9% of respondents reported that they had interacted at least once with their member of Congress in person in the past year. In Kentucky, 14.7% of respondents indicated that they had interacted in person with their member of Congress at least once in the past year. The way in which each respondent interpreted the meaning of "interacting in person" likely varied among constituent, but most reported these interactions occurred at professional organization events or at social gatherings. Demographics of southern identity in the survey results are consistent with previous research regarding regional identity. Many more Republicans considered themselves proud southerners. In Georgia, 91.8% of Republican respondents considered themselves proud Southerners, while 45.5% of Democratic respondents considered themselves proud southerners.

Similarly, in Kentucky, 93.1% of Republicans consider themselves proud southerners, while 34.4% of Democrats considered themselves proud southerners. In Georgia, region and party identification are relatively correlated, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.188 for Republicans, and -0.238 for Democrats, both significant at the 0.01 level. In Kentucky, correlation between region and party identification was not statistically significant.

Regression Analysis

H1 through H4 suggest that four factors – constituent trust in the federal government, certainty and income level and southern regional identity - impact whether or not a constituent will contact their member of Congress. Three logistic regression models were created and run using data from Georgia (see Tables 2 and 3), data from Kentucky (see Tables 4 and 5) and data from both states (see Tables 6 and 7). In both individual state regression models and the combined state regression model, the unweighted beta coefficients in the models react as hypothesized for certainty and income level but do not react as hypothesized for trust and regional identity. Outside of the control variables, each coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.01 level in all three models. Tables 2, 4 and 6 report regression coefficients from each model.

Because logistic regression coefficients cannot be interpreted directly like they can be in linear regression, I employ predicted probabilities as a way to more fully interpret the results of the logistic regressions. Predicted probabilities, though they also cannot be interpreted as direct percentages, give a helpful understanding of the magnitude

of effect of independent variables on the dependent variable. Tables 3, 5 and 7 report predicted probabilities from each model.

As hypothesized, higher income and higher certainty are related to more office contact. The regression results indicate that income is positively correlated to contact, meaning that constituents with higher income are more likely to contact their representatives. Interestingly, certainty revealed the largest gap in predicted probabilities between low and high values out of all covariates. In Georgia, for example, low and high certainty revealed a gap from 0.013 to 0.507. In each model, higher certainty led to a greater probability of office contact, while lower certainty led to a lower probability of contact. Therefore, if constituents feel confident in the knowledge that their member of Congress and their staff will assist them and confident in the character of their member of Congress, they are much more likely to engage in constituent-initiated contact than those constituents who do not feel confident in these conditions.

Whether a constituent can identify their member of Congress and two US senators by name from memory, another measure of certainty, is also positively related to whether a constituent contacts the office of their member of Congress. In the combined state regression, if a constituent could not correctly identify their currently serving member of Congress by name, they had a 0.095 probability of contacting. If they could correctly identify their member of Congress, they had a 0.248 probability. Similarly, there was little difference between whether a respondent could correctly identify one or two of their US senators, but there was a significant difference if they could not identify one. In other words, if a constituent can correctly identify at least one of their US senators by name, their likelihood of contacting increased.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, the direction of the relationship between trust and contact was negative; higher trust is related to less frequent constituent-initiated contact. In the combined state regression, respondents who had high levels of trust had a 0.078 probability of contacting their member of Congress, while respondents who had low levels of trust had a 0.167 probability. This indicates that constituents with high trust in government are very unlikely to contact their member of Congress, compared to constituents with low trust.

Similarly, the regional identity variable was negative, indicating that southerners are less likely to contact their members of Congress than non-southerners, with a 0.115 probability for southerners and 0.202 for non-southerners in the combined states regression. These results dispute the hypothesis that southerners are more likely to engage in contact with their federal elected officials.

The three datasets were also used to test Research Question 2, which asks about the factors that impact whether or not a constituent will interact in-person with their member of Congress. In this model, I maintained the independent variables from the first model, but changed the dependent variable to interpersonal interaction between a constituent and their member of Congress. Therefore, this second model seeks to predict the likelihood of a constituent having interacted in person with their member of Congress in the past year.

In the interpersonal interaction regression model, southerners were slightly less likely to have interacted in person with their member of Congress than non-southerners. Predicted probabilities from the Georgia regression show that southerners have a 0.114 probability of interacting in person with their member of Congress, while non-

southerners have a 0.198 probability. Similarly, probabilities from Kentucky show that southerners have a 0.107 probability of interacting in person while non-southerners have a probability of 0.236. In the combined states, southerners have a predicted probability of in-person contact of 0.123 and non-southerners that of 0.222. The largest difference, then, in the effect of regional identity on in-person interaction between constituents and their representatives is in Kentucky. This suggests that regional identity might have a small but significant effect on interpersonal interaction. Trust and correct identification of member of Congress do not gain statistical significance in this model. Predicted probabilities for income, certainty and correct identification of US senators remain largely the same as those in the constituent-initiated contact model.

Based on these results, H4 and H8 are not supported. Non-southerners are more likely to engage in office contact, engage it in more frequently, and are more likely to have interacted in-person with their elected representatives than southerners. The likelihood that a Kentucky constituent would have interacted in-person with their member of Congress is greater than that of a Georgia constituent, which lends credibility to the rejection of hypothesis 8.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

These quantitative results are supported by qualitative results gathered from interviews with two constituent service staffers in Congressional district offices in Georgia and Kentucky. Several themes emerged from the interviews that shed light on the constituent service process. The two interviewees were asked the same basic questions, and each offered unique but consistent answers. Both these differences and these commonalities revealed several themes about constituent-initiated contact, constituent service and representation. On the whole, because both interviewees were constituent service caseworkers, the answers provided focuses most heavily on the casework process.

When asked about what factors influenced a constituent's decision to contact their member of Congress, Interviewee 1 stated that some constituents contact the office out of desperation. She states, "By the time that they are contacting us they feel completely at a dead end or loss and it's almost like a desperation." Interviewee 2 suggested that constituents feel nervous when contacting, stating they "at first might be nervous contacting us or walking into a congressional office… But once they see us and start talking to us, that goes out the door."

The interviewees noted that the method of contact used by constituents is varied, but that letters are much less frequent than emails, phone calls, and in-person visits. Interviewee 2 said of chosen method of contact, "It's rarely a letter. It's going to be either an email or a phone call or coming in or to one of our mobile office hours." Interviewee 1 stated, "The

two biggest ways, not as much snail mail, most [constituents] do the email or phone call." In addition, both interviewees noted constituents sometimes utilized word-of-mouth contact to share their experiences of the congressional office with others. Interviewee 1 identified the immigrant community in their district as frequently utilizing word-of-mouth, and Interviewee 2 identified the veteran community. In-person contact between constituents and staff was also frequent. Interviewee 1 stated, "I come into contact almost daily. There might be a week or two where it's every other day. But it's frequently."

Listening was also identified by both interviewees as an important aspect of their role as constituent service staffers. Interviewee 2 said of constituent contact with their office, "They will call or they will come in with complaints about an issue with a federal agency, or they just want to vent about how unhappy they are, or happy they are, about certain legislative things…" Similarly, Interviewee 1 said, "It's almost like being a parent, where you are putting on different hats all day long. Sometimes they just need you to listen, and they want to just tell you what's going on."

The need for education about the jurisdiction of the cngressional district office was also an emergent theme. Interviewee 2 stated, "Another thing is when they should contact the state and when they should contact the federal [government]...We will help them with that." She recounted an event at a veterans meeting in which she and a colleague were sharing about the work of their office. She says, "We played a game, "What do you know?" and it's kind of interesting. There are some people who, everybody gets them right, and then there are some that are like, no, we can't help with that." Interviewee 1 stated, "I feel like a lot of times, I am educating our community

about what's handled at the city level, state level and federal level. And that takes a lot of my time, too." These education endeavors are often not accounted for when analyzing or describing the role of constituent service staffers and congressional district offices, but they fill time in the constituent service staffers' role.

Another emergent theme is that of member interaction with constituents in the district. The quantitative hypotheses and results suggest that southern constituents are less likely to engage in personal interaction with their members of Congress than non-southerners. The perspective, then, of these two southern congressional districts is particularly interesting in light of that fact. Perspectives from non-south district staff would be helpful in better understanding member-constituent interaction in his or her district. Interviewee 1 stated that the member for which she works "loves being in the district. When he is in the district, his schedule is full… if anyone [involved] in my casework wants to meet with him, and he has some free time, he'll meet with them." Interviewee 1 reports that her member engages in district work on the weekends when he is home from Washington, DC. She says, "He likes to have a pulse on his constituents and his community and what's happening to people."

Last, customer service was a common theme in both interviews. Both interviewees labeled their work as "customer service" for constituents in their district. Interviewee 2 stated, "We call ourselves customer service for all federal agencies." Similarly, Interviewee 1 stated, "Customer service is really what it boils down to, providing that so people can feel comfortable to call and come back if they need us. So they know we were able to help them." The definition of district office activities as 'customer service' can both help explain the role of district offices and shape the role of

the offices. How constituent service staffers define their role is important to how they carry out that role. In this way, considering themselves a 'customer service' outlet for their member of Congress has the potential to shape the way they approach their roles.

Both interviewees, though constituent service staffers in two different states, working for two different members in two different parties, reported a similar philosophy of service to the constituent. Interviewee 1 stated, "For me, the most important thing is doing the best we can to assist the constituents. And we tell them, we don't always promise you a great outcome. But we can promise that we can get an answer, of some sort, to your problem." Similarly, Interviewee 2 said, "We have to always say although we can't guarantee the outcome, we'll do everything within our congressional jurisdiction to assist you."

Interviewee 1 also connected these liaison activities to reducing constituent uncertainty about their interactions with federal agencies. She states, "We have congressional offices that we can call and actually talk to a person as opposed to being on hold for hours at a time and it just helps take that burden off. And at least [constituents] can get an answer and go on with their lives. Again, maybe it's not the answer they wanted, but at least it's done."

DISCUSSION

Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study has analyzed constituent-initiated contact of the office of their member of Congress. Quantitative results reveal statistical findings about what factors most impact a constituents' contact with their member of Congress or his or her office. Qualitative results shed light on how constituent service staffers view their roles and provide anecdotal support for the attitudes of constituents contacting congressional offices found in the study's quantitative results.

I proposed two research questions and eight hypotheses to better understand the constituent-congressional relationship, which I tested using logistic regression. Several of the findings were particularly worth exploring. I hypothesized that higher trust in the federal government would lead to more office contact. The theory behind this hypothesis is that if constituents felt that the institution of Congress was trustworthy, then a constituent would judge it worthwhile to engage with that institution for either a personal casework need or a policy opinion. I found, however, that higher trust leads to fewer constituent-initiated office contacts. This suggests that if constituents trust that their elected federal representatives are already acting in their best interest, then they might feel that the need to share their opinion with their elected representative is not urgent or necessary, compared to those who do not have high levels of trust in the federal government.

Another significant finding is that southerners and non-southerners behave differently in the representation process with their federal representatives. Specifically,

southerners are less likely than non-southerners to engage in office contact or interpersonal interaction with their members of Congress. Perhaps one explanation for lower interpersonal interaction with members of Congress among southerners is found in Daniel Elazar's political cultures. Because the political culture of southern states is typically categorized as traditionalistic, we could posit that constituents see their elected representatives as elite and out-of-reach. In traditionalistic states, citizens often offer deference to political elites. Woodard explains that in traditionalistic political cultures, "political participation is discouraged, voter turnout is low, and leadership is entrusted to a governing elite, a body like a state senate or a group of legislative leaders," (Woodard, 2006, p. 6). This might be a useful explanation for why southern constituents engage in less frequent contact than their non-southern counterparts. This regional identity finding has implications for future place-based studies of Congress and its members; if regional political cultures impact how representation is conducted, it might also have implications for other aspects of congressional political science theory as well.

The regression results from each model demonstrate that constituents with a higher income are more likely to contact their member of Congress. This reaffirms literature regarding the effect of income on the representation process. Several studies analyze the effect of income on a members' position on issues and roll-call votes to determine to which income level a member is most responsive. The findings of this study could help shape studies like this, because if the constituent-initiated contact of a congressional office is used to measure constituent opinion, it is important to understand the demographics of the constituents who are contacting. It is important to note that the inclusion of education level data, had it been available, in this study might have impacted

the results. Because this data was not included in this study, the income level hypothesis results cannot accurately be compared to results of other studies that use more sophisticated socioeconomic status measures.

Perhaps most importantly, these results show that if congressional district offices seek to increase constituent contact, they should take measures to reduce uncertainty among constituents about their office and their member of Congress. This can be understood by Berger and Calabrese's uncertainty reduction theory, which suggests that people are uncomfortable with uncertainty. The results of the certainty variables and ability of constituents to correctly identify their federal elected officials indicate that certainty dictates constituent behavior not just in elections but in the representation relationship with their federally elected officials, and that certainty is a particularly powerful motivator in the decision to contact. The qualitative data also supports the important role of uncertainty reduction in the constituent service process. For example, as reported above, Interviewee 1 noted that part of her role in casework was to help reduce uncertainty about their case with a federal agency. Similarly, the constituent service staffers' need to educate constituents about the role of their office is a form of uncertainty reduction.

Broadly, both the qualitative and quantitative results demonstrate that constituent communication with their member of Congress is impacted by both internal and external factors. Constituents take into account their attitudes, like confidence and trust in their elected officials, towards the federal government and their elected representative when choosing to contact their congressional office. External factors, however, like income level, regional identity and interpersonal contact with their elected representative also

impact whether a constituent will contact their member of Congress. This has implications for how district congressional offices conduct their representation functions.

A Congressional Research Service report on constituent service writes that "member offices will often post constituent service links on their official websites or may mention available services in their newsletters or other constituent communications," (CRS Report). Activities such as this, as well as those identified by constituent service staff interviewees in this study like town halls and mobile office hours, are aimed toward increasing constituent knowledge about the functions of a congressional district office. These activities have the potential to decrease constituent uncertainty, therefore increasing the likelihood of constituent-initiated contact of the congressional office for both casework and issue concerns. These uncertainty-reduction activities could be continued and supplemented by others that continue to share information with the constituent about not only the services offered but the willingness of the office to assist constituents. Because of the potentially applicable nature of the results of this study to congressional offices, included in the Appendix is a one-page summary of the study results created to make the synthesis of these findings into congressional office activities as easily accessible as possible.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the factors that impact constituent attitudes and behaviors towards representation by their members of Congress. Of course, the study is subject to several limitations. The data employed in the study is sourced from surveys in only two states, which is not representative of the diversity of states within the South. Other factors that might impact the representation relationship, too, like differences between urban and rural districts, incumbency, and party identity of elected officials, were not analyzed. Similarly, education data was not available, so a more sophisticated measure of socioeconomic status, rather than only income, was also unavailable. The qualitative portion of the study, also, only included two participants, which does not provide the depth of data that makes a qualitative study methodologically rigorous. A comprehensive and rigorous qualitative study of constituent service staffers would likely result in a number of valuable findings that this study was unable to capture.

These limitations suggest several opportunities for future research. Practically, congressional district offices would be served by further studies regarding constituent attitudes toward the congressional constituent service function. Though theoretical and quantitative research is helpful to build the body of research regarding both constituent service and representation theory more broadly, this particular topic has the potential for significant practical applications for district congressional staff, Washington DC congressional staff, and members of Congress themselves. The answer to one survey question alone reveals the importance of studying congressional representation:

In Georgia, only 27.5% of respondents agreed that their member of Congress would listen to their concerns. In Kentucky, only 25.2% of respondents agreed to the same question. This demonstrates that both research on the representative relationship between federal officials and their constituents and normative questions about the health of representation in our representative democracy are warranted for present and future research.

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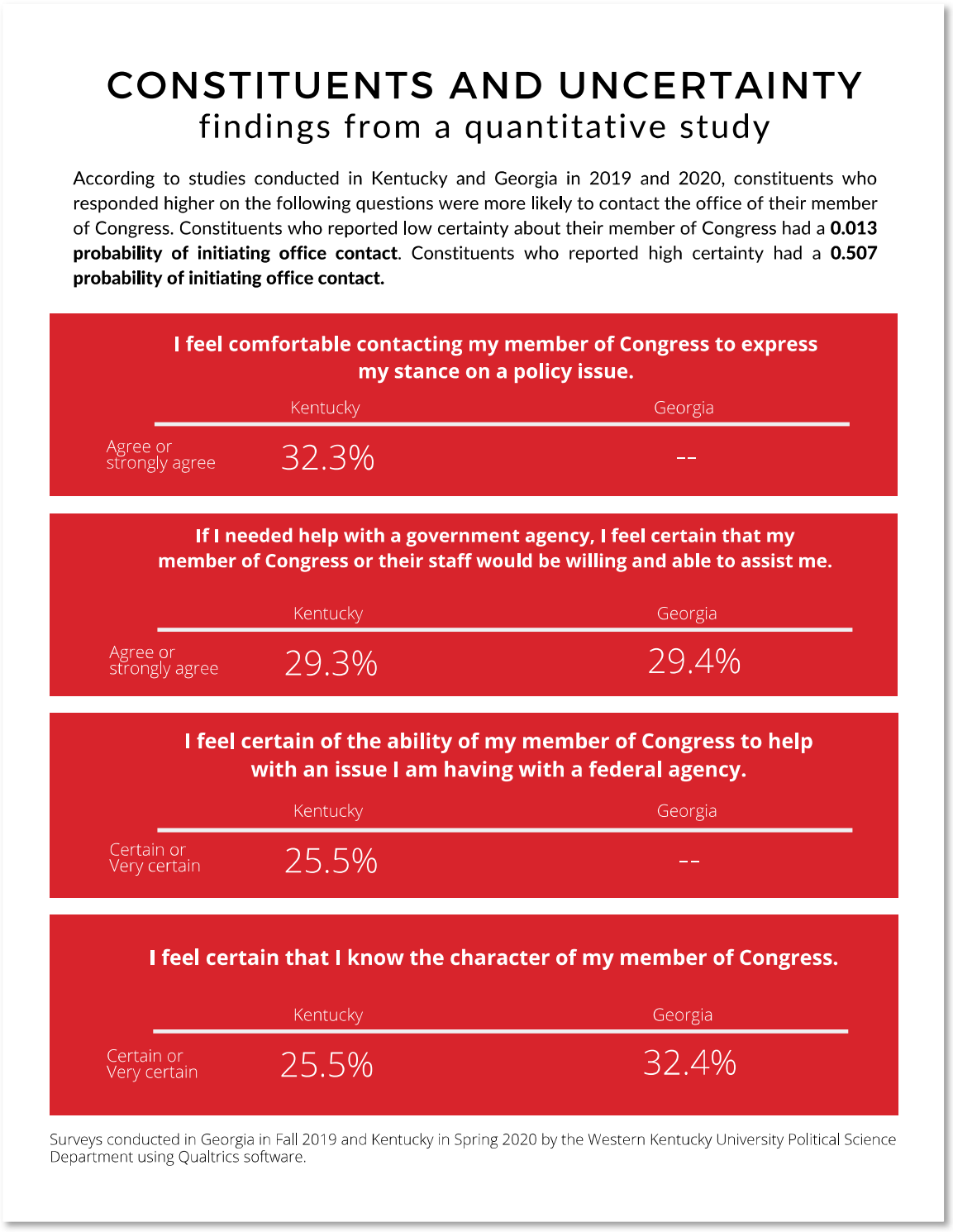
APPENDIX

Exhibit 1: An informational flier communicating the results of this study: Page 1



CONSTITUENTS AND UNCERTAINTY

findings from a quantitative study

According to studies conducted in Kentucky and Georgia in 2019 and 2020, constituents who responded higher on the following questions were more likely to contact the office of their member of Congress. Constituents who reported low certainty about their member of Congress had a **0.013 probability of initiating office contact**. Constituents who reported high certainty had a **0.507 probability of initiating office contact.**

I feel comfortable contacting my member of Congress to express my stance on a policy issue.

	Kentucky	Georgia
Agree or strongly agree	32.3%	--

If I needed help with a government agency, I feel certain that my member of Congress or their staff would be willing and able to assist me.

	Kentucky	Georgia
Agree or strongly agree	29.3%	29.4%

I feel certain of the ability of my member of Congress to help with an issue I am having with a federal agency.

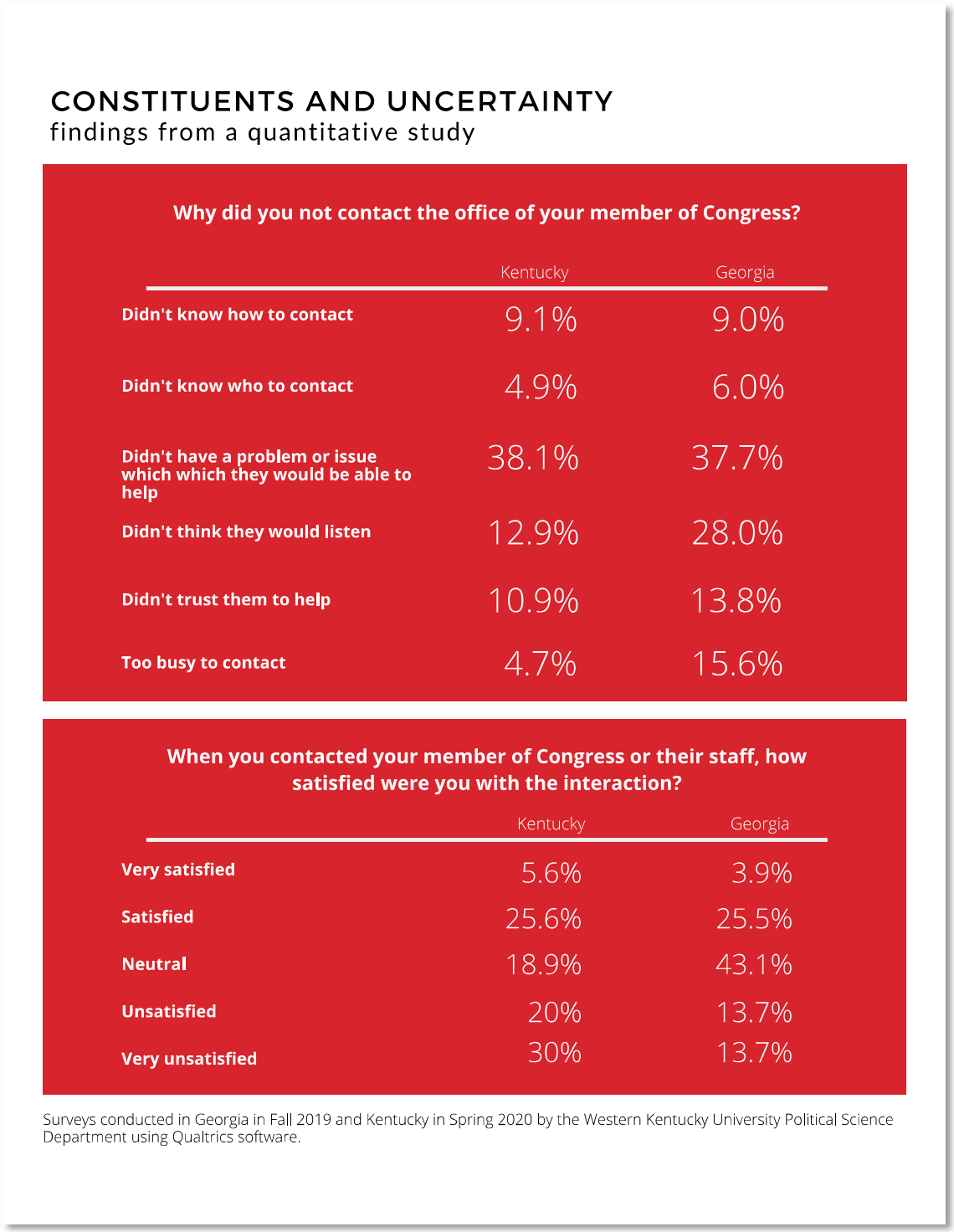
	Kentucky	Georgia
Certain or Very certain	25.5%	--

I feel certain that I know the character of my member of Congress.

	Kentucky	Georgia
Certain or Very certain	25.5%	32.4%

Surveys conducted in Georgia in Fall 2019 and Kentucky in Spring 2020 by the Western Kentucky University Political Science Department using Qualtrics software.

Exhibit 2: An informational flier communicating the results of this study: Page 2



CONSTITUENTS AND UNCERTAINTY

findings from a quantitative study

Why did you not contact the office of your member of Congress?

	Kentucky	Georgia
Didn't know how to contact	9.1%	9.0%
Didn't know who to contact	4.9%	6.0%
Didn't have a problem or issue which which they would be able to help	38.1%	37.7%
Didn't think they would listen	12.9%	28.0%
Didn't trust them to help	10.9%	13.8%
Too busy to contact	4.7%	15.6%

When you contacted your member of Congress or their staff, how satisfied were you with the interaction?

	Kentucky	Georgia
Very satisfied	5.6%	3.9%
Satisfied	25.6%	25.5%
Neutral	18.9%	43.1%
Unsatisfied	20%	13.7%
Very unsatisfied	30%	13.7%

Surveys conducted in Georgia in Fall 2019 and Kentucky in Spring 2020 by the Western Kentucky University Political Science Department using Qualtrics software.

Table 1. Reported reasons for not contacting member of Congress

Reason	**Georgia**	**Kentucky**
Didn't know how to contact	60	58
Didn't know who to contact	40	31
Didn't have a problem or issue with which they needed help	252	242
Didn't think they would listen	120	82
Don't trust them to help	92	69
Too busy to contact	104	30

Table 2. Georgia Regression Table

	Constituent-initiated contact		Interpersonal interaction	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Income	0.760**	0.185	0.632**	0.178
Trust	-0.436**	0.121	-0.014	0.106
Certainty	1.466**	0.251	2.194**	0.288
ID Member of Congress	1.910**	0.341	0.258**	0.312
ID Senator	0.498**	0.193	0.372**	0.176
Regional Identity	-0.851**	0.316	-0.653**	0.311
Sex	-0.373	0.280	-0.192	0.263
Republican	0.589	0.418	-0.148	0.349
Democrat	0.864**	0.420	-0.825**	0.368

Table 3. Georgia Predicted Probabilities

	Predicted Probabilities	
	Constituent-initiated Contact	Interpersonal Interaction
Low Income	0.059	0.076
Middle Income	0.118	0.134
High Income	0.222	0.226
Low Trust	0.165	Not statistically significant
High Trust	0.034	Not statistically significant
Low Certainty	0.013	0.005
High Certainty	0.507	0.769
Identified 0 US senators	0.070	0.093
Identified 1 US senator	0.111	0.129
Identified 2 US senator	0.170	0.177
Did not correctly identify US rep	0.058	Not statistically significant
Correctly identified US rep	0.292	Not statistically significant
Southern	0.094	0.114
Non-southern	0.196	0.198

Table 4. Kentucky Regression Table

	Constituent-initiated contact		**Interpersonal interaction**	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Income	0.352	0.240	0.972**	0.263
Trust	-0.110*	0.048	0.081	0.121
Certainty	0.256**	0.047	0.846**	0.199
ID member of Congress	0.540	0.339	0.183	0.401
ID Senator	-0.130	0.180	-0.399	0.207
Regional Identity	-0.590*	0.278	-0.941**	0.311
Sex	-0.429	0.265	-0.396	0.298
Republican	0.302	0.349	0.322	0.381
Democrat	0.218	0.338	0.177	0.386

Table 5. Kentucky Predicted Probabilities

	Predicted Probabilities	
	Constituent-initiated Contact	Interpersonal Interaction
Low Income	0.107	0.102
Middle Income		0.231
High Income	0.257	0.443
Low Trust	0.150	Not statistically significant
High Trust	0.085	Not statistically significant
Low Certainty	0.044	0.045
High Certainty	0.345	0.371
Identified 0 US senators	0.140	Not statistically significant
Identified 1 US senator	0.120	Not statistically significant
Identified 2 US senator	0.102	Not statistically significant
Did not correctly identify US rep	0.108	Not statistically significant
Correctly identified US rep	0.165	Not statistically significant
Southern	0.107	0.107
Non-southern	0.187	0.236

Table 6. Combined Regression Table

	Constituent-initiated contact		Interpersonal Contact	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Income	0.550**	0.080	0.676**	0.141
Trust	-0.275**	0.141	0.006	0.075
Certainty	1.031**	0.150	1.319**	0.150
ID Member of Congress	1.186**	0.231	0.233	0.229
ID Senator	0.145	0.132	0.049	0.124
Regional Identity	-0.693**	0.208	-0.713**	0.203
Sex	-0.464*	0.193	-0.333	0.187
Republican	0.319	0.274	-0.336	0.259
Democrat	0.072	0.272	0.032	0.248
Race	-0.165	0.123	0.148	0.093
State	0.548*	0.240	0.456*	0.238

Table 7. Combined Predicted Probabilities

	Predicted Probabilities	
	Constituent-initiated Contact	Interpersonal Interaction
Low Income	0.107	0.097
Middle Income		0.175
High Income	0.208	0.294
Low Trust	0.167	Not statistically significant
High Trust	0.078	Not statistically significant
Low Certainty	0.035	0.023
High Certainty	0.404	0.554
Identified 0 US senators	0.140	Not statistically significant
Identified 1 US senator		Not statistically significant
Identified 2 US senator	0.102	Not statistically significant
Did not correctly identify US rep	0.095	Not statistically significant
Correctly identified US rep	0.248	Not statistically significant
Southern	0.115	0.123
Non-southern	0.202	0.222
Georgia	0.106	0.119
Kentucky	0.170	0.176