

Political diversity in the American electorate and its association with the legislative effectiveness of elected members of the House of Representatives

Abstract:

Citizens desire representatives at each level of government who are going to advocate for them and their interests while in office. The political diversity of a representative's electorate therefore may influence how effective each representative is. In the current study, my aim was to determine whether a significant correlation exists between an elected representative's effectiveness (in this case a member of the House of Representatives) and the political diversity of their state's electorate. Two hypotheses were tested. The first suggested that more political diversity would be related to increased legislative effectiveness. The alternative hypothesis posited that more political diversity would be related to decreased legislative effectiveness. I tested these hypotheses using election data for 23 congresses (1973-2018) for each House of Representatives election, by calculating a score of state political diversity. Legislative effectiveness was measured with the scale created by Volden and Wiseman (2009), which takes into account the number of bills proposed, examined by Congress and passed by each representative. Correlations showed evidence for a weak positive association. In linear regression models controlling for key covariates (i.e., gender, race, number of terms in congress, etc.) this association remained significant, despite accounting for very strong predictors of legislative effectiveness. Overall, more political diversity was associated with more legislative effectiveness supporting the hypothesis that more diversity increases politicians' effectiveness, and refuting the alternative hypothesis. These findings are helpful for both the political and psychological community as they add to our understanding of what the effects of polarization are.