The Second Time's the Charm: How U.S. House Members Recover Their Electoral Standing Two Years After the Initial Post-Redistricting Election

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The ability of U.S. House members to recover from the initial loss of the "personal vote" among new constituents added to their districts by redistricting has been well documented in the literature. But the reasons for this recovery two years later, which may thwart the designs of gerrymandering carried out against the opposition party, are not well understood. In this study of the 2012 round of redistricting and its aftermath, we find that constituent cognitions of the incumbent in 2014 related to contact, overall approval, and ideological distance are as favorable among those redistricted two years earlier as they are among the non-redistricted. So, none of these cognitions impairs reelection safety in 2014. Three other cognitions - awareness of special projects by the member, evaluations of representational quality, and knowledge of the member - - - are less incumbent-friendly in 2014 among the redistricted than the non-redistricted. But among these three, however, only representational quality affects voting that year, and the magnitude of the damage is modest. There further is tentative evidence that reduction in the magnitude of the ideological distance variable -- the sole variable for which both 2012 and 2014 data exist -- is at least a part of the reason redistricted constituents return to pro-incumbent voting two years after the boundary shifts. Thus, a plausible explanation emerges for the restoration of members' safety two years after the initial postredistricting election, which centers on their own ability to steer constituents' cognitions in their direction.

Students of congressional redistricting have been sensitive to the risks to members' electoral security posed by the initial post-redistricting election (Murphy and Yoshinaka 2009, 965-66; Herrnson, Panagopoulos, and Bailey 2020, 25). Regardless of how a district may have been transformed in partisanship, the addition of transplanted constituents in and of itself means new voters lacking attraction to the incumbent on the

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basis of the "personal vote"; i.e., the residuum of goodwill developed by constituents over time as a result of member casework, pork barreling, and name recognition (Seabrook 2017, 19-20). Essentially, transplanted constituents are akin to non-redistricted constituents facing an open seat election, where neither candidate possesses the electoral advantages of incumbency (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000, 26; Hood and McKee 2008, 63; McKee 2008a, 124; Hayes and McKee 2009, 1010-11; Hood and McKee 2010, 345; Bullock 2021, 147). Thus, members, in general, prefer minimal changes to their existing district lines (Cain 1984, 116).

One full term after redistricting, however, a number of studies have found that margins rebound in the appended areas as constituents' familiarity with their new incumbent grows, albeit not quite to the safety levels existing in areas maintaining the same representative (Rush 1992, 106-11; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000, 27-28; Rush 2000, 257; Desposato and Petrocik 2003, 25-26; Desposato and Petrocik 2005, 55).¹ A case in point is Texas Republican Pete Sessions, whose two-party reelection margin in 2012 slumped to 59.6 percent after new district lines retained only 34 percent of his previous constituents.² This was despite a 2.2 percent increase in GOP partisanship (measured in terms of the difference between his old district's actual 2008 vote for John McCain and the McCain vote recomputed within the new district boundaries). 2014, however, saw Sessions' vote rebound to 63.6 percent, slightly below the 64.2 percent margin of 2010.

Further reduction in the incumbent safety differential between old and new areas then occurs over subsequent terms at a diminished pace (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000, 28-29). Thus, a straightforward explanation exists for the observed trend of aggregate incumbency safety gradually rising from the first to the last election year that redistricting plans are in effect. This is different than explanations for the trend that emphasize the behavior of opposition party elites, such as speculation that the non-incumbent party learns through trial and error over the course of a decade not to expend substantial campaign

¹ An exception exists for southern Democratic members in 1994, however, who actually did worse than they did among new constituents two years earlier because of the strong pro-Republican realigning trend in the latter year. See Petrocik and Deposato (1998, 629).

² Data for determining what percentages of a new district are comprised of old and new constituents may be accessed from the Missouri Census Data Center's Geographic Correspondence Engine.

resources in districts that proved impervious to their early efforts (Jacobson 2006, 30-31), or speculation that viable challengers are more likely to emerge earlier in the redistricting cycle when, were they victorious, uncertainty about how future redrawing might impair their own reelection fortunes would be a longer term and hence less pressing concern (Cox and Katz 2002, 162-71; Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti 2003, 1223-27; Cox 2005, 27).³

Incumbents themselves, therefore, seem to possess agency in being able to rebound from initial redistricting damage, which may frustrate the long-term plans of the opposition party to capture their seat. We know little, however, about the important specific question of just <u>how</u> the rebounding in members' electoral support among new constituents is generated. It certainly seems possible that over the twoyear period following the immediate post-redistricting election, different kinds of electorally relevant incumbent assessments by newcomers will evolve at different rates toward the levels of those held by retained constituents. The simplest such factor, of course, might be greater name recognition arising over the course of one term's experience with the new representative.

On the other hand, perhaps of greater importance is what happens to the <u>content</u> of such recognition rather than recognition by itself. Two years' time, for example, affords opportunity for the incumbent to convince newcomers of alignment between his or her ideological positioning and their own. Boatright (2004, 441) and Crespin (2010, 854-55) find that reelected incumbents modify their roll call voting from the term just before redistricting to the term immediately afterward, presumably in accordance with changes in district demography. In more expansive research, Hayes, Hibbing, and Sulkin find changes in roll call voting within specific issue domains to be direct responses to related demographic changes caused by redistricting, e.g., greater support for positions espoused by the Alliance for Retired Americans when the district's percentage of senior citizens is increased

³ Hetherington, Larson, and Globetti, (2003, 1223, 1228-31) also find that adverse national economic conditions have the strongest effect in inducing quality challengers of the non-presidential party to run in the first post-redistricting election when uncertainty about the incumbent's electoral standing is at its peak. The incumbent's prior margin, however, affects whether a quality challenger runs to a greater extent later in the redistricting cycle, when the incumbent's electoral situation has become more established.

(2010, 103-04). Even stronger responses to demographic change are generated in the form of bill sponsorships or co-sponsorships within relevant issue areas (Hayes, Hibbing, and Sulkin 2010, 100-03). Improvement in the content of incumbent assessment could also arise with regard to cognitions derived from relatively policy-thin interactions, such as visitations, townhall forums within the appended territory, and email communications. Evidence exists of members establishing unofficial district offices within the new areas even before the initial post-redistricting election takes place (Boatright 2004, 447-50; McKee 2008b, 973), and it seems likely that further concentration on these areas would continue afterward as well. There further is the possibility through such subsequent interaction to inform new constituents about both pre- and post-redistricting federal project money brought into the district, even though the former service may not be particularly relevant to those who were not constituents at the time.

In contrast, it may be more difficult for the member over a twoyear period to strengthen newcomers' perceptions of how well he or she represents the district. At the core of the representational relationship is constituent trust in the member, and trust takes considerable time to develop. In the words of Fenno:

Trust is, however, a fragile relationship. It is not an overnight or a one-time thing. It is hard to win, and it must be constantly renewed and rewon....So, it takes an enormous amount of time to build and to maintain constituent trust (1978, 56).⁴

Overall approval of the member, however, may be quicker to grow than favorable appraisals of representational quality, as a consequence of its shorter-term components. Favorable approval, for example, could emerge from first-termer activities noted above, such as sponsorship or co-sponsorship of popular legislation, even if attempts to establish lasting representational relationships with the constituency over this time span had only marginal payoff.

⁴ For a reiteration of the theme that representational relationships between members and constituents may be slow to evolve, see Jacobson and Carson 2020, 140).

We thus hypothesize on the basis of this literature review that convergence with regard to the foregoing factors will, in general, be evident between new and old constituents two years after redistricting. The two possible exceptions to the hypothesis involve representation, where convergence may well take more than two years to develop, and awareness of federal project money obtained by the member, where old constituents would have experienced a longer period of time over which such monies were delivered.

Of course, discovering convergence between various member cognitions held by continuing and new constituents one term past redistricting would in itself be insufficient grounds for explaining the improvement in members' electoral performance. Evidence must be found as well that the cognitions in question actually made a difference in voting behavior.

Ideally, panel data across a long-term series of elections would be available to track the trajectory by which redistricted and retained constituents converge in their incumbent cognitions and voting behavior over time. No existing survey dataset, however, includes re-interviews with respondents that extend more than a single election past the year when the new district lines went into effect. Being constrained to focus on this second election alone should not pose a problem, though, since the greatest improvement in the member's electoral standing, as pointed out above, occurs over the initial two-year period.

Data and Methods

The data to be analyzed come from the 2010-2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) Panel Survey.⁵ Aside from the wealth of questions in the questionnaire specifically directed at U.S. House elections, the parts of the study applicable to our research purposes have the virtue of substantial sample size: 9500 total respondents interviewed online by YouGov before and after both the 2012 and 2014 national elections. While respondents are not directly coded in the CCES to indicate whether they were shifted into a new district by 2012 redistricting, it is possible to identify such transplanted respondents indirectly by making use of a variable that only codes respondents' perceptions of member ideology in cases where the

⁵ As of 2020, the name of these studies has been shortened simply to the "Cooperative Election Study" (CES).

preexisting incumbent (i.e., the incumbent elected in the 2010 election) is absent from their 2012 ballot.⁶ After eliminating cases where this absence results from incumbent retirement or renomination defeat, the remaining respondents therefore are those who have been redistricted into a new district with a different incumbent running.

For the most part, we shall focus on differences in 2014 between constituents who were or were not redistricted into new districts two years earlier. Wherever possible, however, differences between the two kinds of constituents will be analyzed in 2012 as well, at the very start of the new redistricting cycle. But while this can obviously be done with regard to the incidence of pro-incumbent voting in 2012, it cannot be done with regard to most of the cognitions concerning the incumbent we are interested in; i.e., for transplanted constituents the relevant 2012 CCES questions in all but one case were directed at preexisting members rather than new members appearing on the ballot. The exception is perceived placement of incumbent ideology, which we use to construct respondent ideological distance from the incumbent. Here in the 2012 survey, respondents were asked for placements of both candidates on the ballot, one of whom (except in the case of open seat districts) was the incumbent running for reelection, whether new to the respondent or the respondent's preexisting member.7

The term "cognition" is used in this study in a broad sense to refer to six specific evaluations of, knowledge of, or recalled interactions with the member. They are as follows:

Contact (1 if constituent has had any contact with the member over the past two years in the form of visiting or calling the member's office, sending to or receiving from the member a letter or email, receiving a phone call from the member, meeting the member at a public event, or experiencing some other form of contact; 0 otherwise)

Project (1 if constituent is aware of any special project brought into his or her area by the member; 0 otherwise)

⁶ The relevant variable is CC12_341M.

⁷ Placements of the Democratic and Republican candidates are coded in CC12_341K and CC12_341L, respectively.

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Represent (3 if member is thought to represent district very well, 2 if somewhat well, 1 if not well)

Approve (4 if constituent strongly approves of member, 3 if approves, 2 if disapproves, 1 if strongly disapproves)

Knowledge (1 if constituent claims to have heard of member and to know his or her party affiliation; 0 if never heard of member)

Ideological distance (absolute value of difference between self-placement of constituent on seven-point ideological scale and placement of member).⁸

These cognitions, which have been used as standard independent variables in past studies of congressional voting behavior, all relate to the three forms of electorally useful activities outlined by Mayhew in his classic work, Congress: The Electoral Connection (1974, 49-73). "Advertising," intended to enhance awareness of the incumbent in a largely issue-less context (e.g., name recognition), should most directly affect placement on the Knowledge cognition. "Credit claiming," through which members publicize providing material benefits to constituents (e.g., pork barrelling), can be expected to have the greatest impact on Project. Finally, "Position taking," which involves staking out judgmental stances on items of interest to constituents (e.g., roll call votes), should be most relevant to Ideological distance. Above and beyond this, all three of Mayhew's activities presumably relate to the more general Represent and Approve cognitions, while more opportunity for members to communicate word about the activities would be available when constituents have positive scores on Contact.

All investigations will be carried out with multilevel analysis, in which individual respondents are nested within the congressional districts that were created in 2012. Fixed effects for the intercept and slope coefficients are computed at the individual level (i.e., these are the independent variable effects on individual respondents). Random effects variances are computed at the district level (i.e., these are the variances of the intercepts across districts). Simply including at a single

⁸ Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki (2022, 130-36) present evidence that constituents' perceptions of how their Congress member voted on important roll call votes correspond well to the actual votes that were cast. They also determine that perceived agreement with roll call votes strongly affects approval of the member and election support.

level all variables, regardless of whether they apply to individual respondents or to House districts, would bias downward the standard errors of the parameters, owing to non-independence among each district's respondents (Steenbergen and Jones 2002, 220; Bickel 2007, 9-12).⁹ Only respondents casting U.S. House votes in districts where an incumbent faces off against a major party challenger will be considered. Furthermore, respondents in races involving two incumbents thrown together by redistricting are excluded from the 2012 analyses.¹⁰

The Effects of Redistricting on Voting and on Incumbent Cognitions

We start straightforwardly with an examination of proincumbent voting by redistricted and retained constituents in the 2012 and 2014 House elections. The findings mentioned above that redistricting's impairment of pro-incumbent voting ebbs over the twoyear period following the immediate post-redistricting election have been based upon data from earlier election years, and we first wish to ascertain whether this phenomenon is replicated for the more recent such election year pair. The 2012 and 2014 equations, which are the basic starting points for the analysis, exclude cognition variables. Later, these cognitions, which, of course, are more abundant in the latter election year, will be added to the equations. The respondents analyzed in 2014 exclude those whose incumbent is a first termer, since non-redistricted constituents with first-term members are identical to redistricted constituents in the sense of having had their member for only two years. In both election years as well constituents who resided at their current address for two years or less are excluded, because those who had moved from another district might for this reason alone know little about their new incumbent regardless of whether they had been redistricted.

Table 1 contains the results of the multilevel logit analyses, in which 1 on the dependent variable represents a vote for the incumbent and 0 a vote for the challenger. The independent variables are:

⁹ Estimation of differences between redistricted and non-redistricted constituents is performed with Stata's meglm, melogit, or meologit set of routines, depending upon whether the cognition being analyzed is continuous, dichotomous, or ordinal, respectively. ¹⁰ Additional grounds for exclusion include residency in a Louisiana district where there was two-party competition, but multiple candidates from either party on the ballot. This is possible under the state's "jungle" election law; if no candidate receives a majority of the November vote, the top two finishers irrespective of party compete in a subsequent December run-off.

Redistricted (1 if respondent was redistricted into new incumbent's district in 2012, 0 if not redistricted)

Sameparty (1 if respondent identifies strongly or not very strongly with incumbent's party, or leans that way; 0 if independent; -1 if identifies strongly or not very strongly with challenger's party, or leans that way)¹¹

Incumbent's party (1 if member is Republican, 0 if Democrat)

Age (age of the respondent in years)

Interest (4 if respondent follows what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, 3 if some of the time, 2 if only now and then, 1 if hardly at all)

Political activity (1 if respondent engaged in at least one political activity over past year, 0 if no political activity)

Economy (for respondents with Democratic incumbent, 5 if nation's economy seen as having gotten much better over past year, 4 if better, 3 if about the same or not sure, 2 if worse, 1 if much worse; for respondents with Republican incumbent, codes are in reverse order)

Coattails (only used in 2012 analysis) (for respondents with Democratic incumbent, 1 if 2012 presidential vote is for Barack Obama, 0 if for Mitt Romney; for respondents with Republican incumbent, codes are in reverse order).

The need for SameParty and Incumbent's Party as control variables is obvious. (No direction of the relationship is hypothesized for the latter variable.) Older constituents are expected to favor the incumbent more as a result of a political decision-making process reliant upon more circumscribed information about candidates. Thus, there should be a falling back upon a handful of highly salient, easily accessible cues, such as party, general ideology, or, in our case, incumbency (Lau and Redlawsk 2008, 169, 173). Interest and Political activity are included as indices of constituent political engagement, but the direction of the

¹¹ Independent leaners are grouped together with party identifiers, given the tendency of leaners and weak partisans to support candidates of their favored party at about the same rate. See Jacobson and Carson (2020, 166-67).

relationship is not clear. On one hand, more engaged voters would better be able to identify which candidate on the ballot was the incumbent, who, in contrast to the challenger, would become more likely to possess through previous experience the ability to confer upon the district material benefits like project money and casework services. But on the negative side of the ledger, greater political engagement can mean heightened awareness of factors detrimental to the incumbent, such as unpopular positions taken on roll call votes or the perception that the distance of the incumbent's ideological position from the respondents exceeds that of the challenger. Finally, two variables that strongly contribute to the nationalization of the House vote across districts are included. Economy registers the effect of perceptions of change in the national economy over the past year, and Coattails (only in 2012) accounts for the partisan effect of presidential election choice. Given the coding scheme for these two variables, both will have a positive impact on incumbent voting.

The significant negatively signed parameter for Redistricted in the first column of Table 1, of course, indicates that constituents who have been thrown into a new incumbent's district by redistricting have smaller odds of voting for that incumbent in 2012 than constituents retaining the same member.

Fixed Effects of	2012	2012	2014
Variables			
Redistricted	.533**	455**	264
	(.202)	(.194)	(.387)
Sameparty	1.864***	2.867***	3.389***
	(.140)	.121)	(.191)
Incumbent's party	022	192	.551*
	(.203)	(.190)	(.286)
Age	.017**	.019**	041**
	(.006)	(.006	(.015)
Interest	149	164	449**
	(.151)	(.135)	(.172)
Political activity	09	282	201
	(.249)	(.213)	(.265)
Economy	421***	1.149***	.906***
	(.109)	(.102)	(.179)
Coattails	3.652***		
	(.278)		
Constant	-2.629***	-2.977***	-2.992**
	(.624)	(.596)	(1.027)
Variances of Random			
Effects Intercepts			
House District Level	1.320***	1.243***	1.940***
	(.254)	(.234)	(.407)
Log-likelihood	-901.253	-1113.817	-593.128
N of Respondents	6362	6533	3693
N of House Districts	337	337	261

Table 1: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of 2012 Redistricting on Voting for House Incumbent in 2012 and 2014

Note: Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. One-tail tests were used to determine significance for Redistricted, Sameparty, Age, Economy, and Coattails; two-tail tests used for Incumbent's party, Interest, and Political activity.

***Significant at .001 level; **significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

More specifically, the expected proportions of redrawn and continuing constituents backing the incumbent can be calculated by maintaining each respondent's actual values on all independent variables except Redistricted, where values of 1 and 0, respectively, are substituted for all respondents (population average impacts have been generated with regard to the prior distribution of the random effects).¹² Redrawn constituents are then estimated to have .599 odds of proincumbent voting, versus .621 odds for retained constituents. To enhance the comparability of the analyses across the two election years, column two repeats the 2012 analysis, now, however, removing Coattails so that the exact same independent variables appear in both 2012 and 2014. Here, Redistricted continues to be significant, and the procedure for estimating the impact of redistricting for redrawn and retained constituents yields .595 and .619 odds, respectively, of pro-incumbent voting, a slightly bigger impact than before. In contrast, the considerably insignificant Redistricted parameter in the third column shows that having been redistricted no longer weakens voting for the incumbent in 2014. Estimated odds of backing the incumbent at Redistricted values of 1 and 0 are .603 and .616, respectively, meaning a smaller, albeit not negligible, impact of redistricting in 2014 compared to 2012. But the inability to statistically distinguish the 2014 coefficient from 0 makes inferring an effect of any magnitude hazardous. Despite the growth of party-based voting over recent decades, therefore, the loss of an incumbent's personal vote among constituents newly added to a district still matters initially, as does the restoration of a major part of the personal vote after these constituents have spent two years being represented by this member.

Also of relevance in Table 1 is that Republican incumbents are advantaged in 2014. Older age, as expected, is related to greater incumbent support. More politically interested respondents, in contrast, are less pro-incumbent, significantly so in 2014. Negative (but insignificant) signs in both years also occur for Political activity, the other measure of engagement, where a direction of relationship likewise was not hypothesized. Highly significant effects of Economy and Coattails, not surprisingly, always exist. Finally, congressional districtlevel random effects are significant in both years, specifying that proincumbent voting still varies among districts even with all fixed-level effects accounted for.

¹² See Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh (2009, 673-81) for an explication of this procedure.

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In Table 2, rather than focusing separately on the 2012 and 2014 elections, we consider inter-election transition in voting behavior on the part of redistricted and non-redistricted voters. A potential pitfall with separate analyses is the decline in midterm turnout disproportionately caused by less partisan voters dropping out of the electorate. It is possible, therefore, that voters comprising the more solidly partisan electorate of 2014 were less affected by whether or not they had been redistricted than were the voters of 2012, simply because they more faithfully adhered to party-line voting. Now, only panel respondents who voted both times in districts with the same incumbent on the ballot are analyzed in order to control for the possible confounding effects of differential turnout in the two elections. Greater movement in a pro-incumbent direction by redistricted voters relative to that by non-redistricted voters thus could fairly be attributed to the restoration of the formers' personal vote that had been disrupted in 2012.

For this analysis, we explain incumbent voting in 2014 in terms of the same independent variables employed in Table 1, plus the lagged variable Incvote12 for the respondent's 2012 vote (1 for the incumbent, 0 for the challenger), and the interaction of the lagged vote with whether the respondent was redistricted in 2012. A negative interaction term would then indicate that the lagged vote for redistricted respondents is less predictive of 2014 voting than it is for retained respondents. The results of Table 2 uphold this expectation, revealing a significantly negative parameter for the interaction term (-1.178).

In order to gauge substantive impact, we can compute the expected probability of casting a pro-incumbent ballot in 2014 for redistricted voters who supported the challenger in 2012. (Once again, population average impacts are calculated, this time fixing Redistricted at 1 and Incvote12 at 0.) Fully .362 of the redistricted non-incumbent voters in 2012 are expected to have voted for the incumbent two years later. Presumably for a considerable minority of respondents in this group, therefore, 2012 failure to back their new member on the ballot was indeed a temporary, redistricting-induced phenomenon resulting from a lack of personal vote-style acquaintanceship

Table 2: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of 2012 Redistricting on Voting for House Incumbent in 2014: Determining the Extent to Which Redistricted Voters Opposing Incumbent in 2012 Rebound in Incumbent's Favor Two Years Later

	2014
Fixed Effects of Independent Variables	
Redistricted	.479
	(.422)
Sameparty	2.265***
	(.222)
Incumbent's party	.552
	(.345)
Age	.052**
	(.018)
Interest	538**
	(.197)
Political activity	028
	(.337)
Economy	.504**
	(.189)
Incvote12	5.392***
	(.516)
Incvote12*Redistricted	-1.178*
	(.692)
Constant	-5.233***
	(1.196)
Variances of Random Effects Intercepts	
House District Level	2.141***
	(.569)
Log-likelihood	-362.405
N of Respondents	3567
N of House Districts	257

Note: Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. One-tail tests were used to determine significance for Redistricted, Sameparty, Age, Economy, and Coattails; two-tail tests were used for Incumbent's party, Interest, and Political activity.

***Significant at .001 level; **significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

The question then becomes determining how cognitions of the incumbent potentially relevant to the personal vote are related to whether the constituent was redistricted. Cognitions that are equally incumbent-friendly among the redistricted and non-redistricted alike as of 2014 would help explain why the redistricting variable in Table 1 had no significant effect on the likelihood of 2014 pro-incumbent voting. Each of the six cognitions listed above that can be derived from the 2014 CCES will be analyzed toward this end as dependent variables. Once again, only respondents voting in races with a non-first-term incumbent facing a major party challenger are included. The explanatory variables in the analyses replicate those employed in Table 1, with the exception of the two bearing upon nationalization of the House vote. An additional difference is that in the case of the three cognitions of the member that are of a strictly factual nature (Contact, Project, and Knowledge), respondent educational level (Education) is also added (6 if postgraduate, 5 if four-year college degree, 4 if two-year college degree, 3 if some college, 2 if high school graduate, 1 if no high school). More educated voters simply should have better recall of interactions with the member, more familiarity with projects brought into the district by the member, and a greater ability to recognize the member in the first place. Furthermore, aside from being more likely to recall interactions with the member, better-educated respondents should be more aware of the value of initiating these interactions, such as requesting casework assistance.

Table 3 presents the equation parameters of these six analyses.¹³ Also included is the parallel 2012 analysis, which will be addressed after first examining the core question of whether incumbent cognitions two years after redistricting are equally incumbent-friendly for the redistricted and non-redistricted alike. As expected, Education matters in the three 2014 equations where it is entered.¹⁴ Where the key independent variable of redistricting makes a difference is in the 2014 equations for Project, Represent, and Knowledge. Redistricted respondents compared to the non-redistricted are less likely in 2014 to be aware of any special project by the member, less positive about his or her quality of representation, and less likely to have heard of the member. Results for the first and third of these variables seem very straightforward. The project question sets no time limit as to the date of the member's accomplishment; thus, respondents having the same member for more than one term would naturally be at an advantage in saying they remember such a project being brought into the district (even were members to try to publicize pre-redistricting projects at community forums or in the media subsequent to 2012). Likewise, a longer history with the same member would make one more likely to have some basic familiarity with that incumbent. The finding pertaining to representation, while less straightforward, nevertheless aligns with Fenno's aforementioned observation that constituent-member relationships built on trust require extended periods of time to evolve.

¹³ The cut points for the multilevel ordered logit equations employing Represent and Approve as the dependent variables, which are not of substantive importance, are the estimated thresholds differentiating regions on the unobservable continuous variables being proxied by the ordinal variables actually used in the analysis, when all independent variables equal zero.

¹⁴ Because of the principally exploratory purpose of our investigations into the determinants of incumbent cognitions, in Table 3 we opt for more conservative two-tail significance tests throughout, even when the expected direction of relationship is clear-cut (e.g., the effect of shared constituent-member partisanship on approval of the member). In no case involving the key Redistricted variable, however, does this affect the conclusion about the variable's significance.

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For the other three dependent variables, redistricted respondents in 2014 are not significantly distinctive. However, while perceived ideological proximity to the member that year does not depend upon redistricting, the 2012 result is different. As explained above, the 2012 CCES data do permit contrasting old and new constituents in this regard, unlike the case with the other five cognitions. Questions directed at respondents in both years were addressed in terms of ideological perceptions of the two House candidates rather than just in terms of their preexisting incumbent, so by identifying the candidate with incumbency status we have the necessary information to determine where redistricted constituents place the new incumbent. Here,

	2012	2014					
	Ideological Distance	Contact	Project	Represent	Approve	Knowledge	Ideological Distance
Fixed Effects of Independent Variables							
Redistricted	.231**	169	661***	617***	261	663*	.055
	(.087)	(.140)	(.207)	(.179)	(.180)	(.281)	(.084)
Same Party	-1.127***	451***	.447***	1.895***	1.897***	.436***	-1.241***
	(.046)	(.080)	(.087)	(.102)	(.106)	(.120)	(.044)
Incumbent's Party	388***	560***	151*	.267	.326*	542*	678***
	(.084)	(.147)	(.177)	(.162)	(.160)	(.260)	(.086)
Age	.014***	.010**	022**	.015*	.014	.016	005
	(.003)	(.007)	(.008)	(.006)	(.007)	(.011)	(.003)
Interest	182**	.412**	.275**	.069	.002	1.130***	023
	(.059)	(.132)	(.182)	(.145)	(.107)	(.148)	(.066)
Political activity	.132	.738***	.572**	.010	.069	.461	.061
	(.086)	(.163)	(.182)	(.143)	(.138)	(.249)	(.073)
Education		.202*** (.051)	.129* (.056)			.164* (.084)	
Constant	3.945*** (.269)	3.251*** (.607)	-4.352** (.786)			-2.293* (.966)	3.052*** (.331)
Cut1				.051 (.658)	-1.182* (.464)		

Table 3: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of 2012 Redistricting on Cognitions of House Incumbent in 2012 and 2014

Cut2				2.866*** (.658)	.660 (.420)		
Cut3					3.801*** (.436)		
Variances of Random Effects Intercepts							
House District Level	.355*** (.043)	.683*** (.124)	.905*** (.164)	.861*** (.149)	.926*** (.182)	2.016*** (.386)	.215*** (.043)
Log-likelihood	-12064.038	-1734.85	-1264.847	-1979.785	-2836.848	-733.212	-4714.897
N of Respondents	6935	3695	3468	3325	3610	3683	3599
N of House Districts	339	261	259	254	255	261	261
Note: Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients (Contact, Project, and Knowledge), ordinal logit coefficients (Represent and Approve), and regression coefficients (Ideological distance). Robust standard errors are in parentheses.							

Two-tail significance tests were used for all coefficients. ***Significant at .001 level; *significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

the leftmost column in Table 3 shows that in contrast to 2014, the redistricting variable is significant. New constituents in 2012 are likely to see themselves as ideologically more distant from the perceived position of the member (.231 units further removed on average than are retained constituents).¹⁵ Whether through member efforts over the two-year post-redistricting period to actually shift issue stances in the direction of new constituents or as a result of new constituents on their own coming to see greater compatibility, members clearly are more advantaged in this regard the second time they seek support from these constituent newcomers.¹⁶

Table 4 presents a more fine-grained examination of contacts with the member experienced by new and old constituents in 2014. Aside from asking the general question of whether the respondent had any contact with the member, the CCES also inquired about the particular form this contact, if any, took. In some cases, the contact was member-initiated (e.g., a communication sent from the member's office). In other cases, the constituent likely took the initiative, perhaps in response, however, to prior messaging by the member encouraging such interaction (e.g., publicizing a community forum hosted by the member). Even though overall contact did not depend in Table 3 upon whether the constituent had been redistricted, perhaps specific forms of contact were affected. The categories of contact are the following:

¹⁵In some cases, ideological estrangement experienced by centrist transplants in the immediate post-redistricting election might result from their assumption that the new member on the ballot would merely vote as a party loyalist, despite actually having compiled a moderate roll call voting record in the past. Brown cites the case of moderate Utah Democratic House member Jim Matheson, who decided to shift to a newly created district in 2012 because of fear that Republican constituents moved into his old district would see him merely as a generic liberal Democrat (2013, 38-42).

¹⁶ We also investigated whether the effects of redistricting uncovered in Table 3 varied depending upon whether constituents did or did not identify with the party of the incumbent. The equations of Table 3 were thus re-estimated, adding an independent variable for the interaction between Redistricted and Same party. Insignificant interaction terms, however, resulted in five of the total seven analyses, with the sole exceptions occurring in the equations for Knowledge in 2014 and Ideological distance in 2012, where negative and positive terms, respectively, were obtained. This signifies that when same-party partisans are contrasted with opposition-party partisans, redistricting for the former takes a greater toll on knowledge of the incumbent in 2014 and on perceived ideological distance from the incumbent in 2012.

Visit (visiting the member's office) Call (calling the member's office) Send (sending email or a letter to the member) Receive mail (receiving mail or email from the member) Receive call (receiving a call from the member) Meet (meeting the member at a public event) Other (some other form of contact).

With each form of contact employed separately as the dependent variable in multilevel logit analysis in Table 4, where 1 indicates contact and 0 no contact, the redistricting variable fails to attain significance six times.¹⁷

The sole exception is receiving a call from the member, where redistricted constituents are less likely to experience this. Overall, though, regardless of how constituent-member interaction may have arisen over the two-year period following boundary realignment, members are just as much in touch with their new constituents as with old constituents.

¹⁷ As in Table 3, two-tail significance tests are employed in Table 4 to accord with the exploratory nature of the analysis. Also as before, this makes no difference for conclusions about the significance of Redistricted.

	2014						
	Visit	Call	Send	Receive Mail	Receive Call	Meet	Other
Fixed Effects of Independent Variables							
Redistricted	.255	303	127	004	565*	297	084
	(.534)	(.318)	(.161)	(.146)	(.260)	(.339)	(.349)
Sameparty	.694**	.098	.151	.414***	.349**	.609***	.085
	(.221)	(.127)	(.085)	(.080)	(.125)	(.143)	(.177)
Incumbent's party	.368	148	.199	.493***	1.011***	.377	042
	(.409)	(.229)	(.169)	(.135)	(.230)	(.251)	(.298)
Age	018	.009	-0.010	.009	.003	015	.033**
	(.022)	(.011)	(.007)	(.007)	(.011)	(.013)	(.010)
Interest	.709	1.093*	1.002***	.601***	.097	.239	303
	(.420)	(.506)	(.173)	(.154)	(.231)	(.314)	(.261)
Political activity	2.352***	1.373***	.924***	.606***	.450*	1.886***	.016
	(.625)	(.313)	(.169)	(.159)	(.222)	(.302)	(.321)
Education	.116	.172***	.231***	.135**	032	.329***	.188*
	(.127)	(.083)	(.055)	(.046)	(.076)	(.084)	(.090)
Constant	9.294***	9.453***	-6.388***	-4.297***	-3.693***	-6.159***	5.847***
	(1.482)	(1.977)	(.677)	(.653)	(1.108)	(1.331)	(1.100)
Variances of Random Effects Intercepts							
House District Level	1.282***	.608***	.702***	.481***	1.246***	.998***	1.100*
	(.615)	(.275)	(.185)	(.104)	(.224)	(.215)	(.562)
Log-likelihood	-182.777	-463.117	-1192.342	-1733.718	-942.18	-550.249	-194.818
N of Respondents	6695	3695	3695	3695	3695	3695	3695
N of House Districts	261	261	261	261	261	261	261

Table 4: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of 2012 Redistricting on Components of Contact with House Incumbent in 2014

Note: Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Two-tail significance tests were used for all coefficients.

***Significant at .001 level; **significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

How Pro-Incumbent Voting is Affected by the Six Cognitions

The analysis now shifts toward determining just how the six incumbent cognitions affect voting behavior. Cognitions that are less favorable among redistricted constituents than among continuing constituents and that also affect voting behavior work against the reelection fortunes of the member in 2014. Those that are no less favorable among redistricted constituents, or that do not influence voting regardless of whether they are any less favorable among the redistricted, mean that the member is insulated from electoral damage.

Table 5 replicates the prior analysis in Table 1 of voting decisions in 2012 and 2014, this time with the cognitions added to the equations. (Insert Table 5 here) Once again starting with the more central 2014 analysis, redistricting, of course, continues in column two to have no effect on proincumbent voting. The only differences from the control variable parameters appearing in Table 1 is that Incumbent's party and Age are no longer significant. Three of the cognitions - - contact with the member, belief that the district is well represented, and approval of him or her - - significantly improve the odds of incumbent support, while less ideological distance from the member barely falls short of significantly doing this (p=.054). The other two - - awareness of any project brought into the district by the member and familiarity with the member's name - - make no difference. Nonetheless, redistricted constituents were previously found in Table 3 to be less incumbent-friendly on project awareness and name familiarity than were the non-redistricted. So, these two cognitions still could have weakened incumbent safety if they related to voting for the redistricted despite failing to affect constituent voting generally. Column three tests this possibility by interacting the cognitions with Redistricted. However, the insignificance of both interactions demonstrates that the lack of electoral impact exists for redistricted and non-redistricted constituents alike, indicating that the depressed incumbent-friendliness of the cognitions among the former group does not reduce reelection safety.

Evaluation of how well the member represents the district is unique among the six cognitions in that it is weaker among new constituents at the same time that it influences 2014 balloting. Thus, this factor alone does impair incumbent safety. To address the question of how much impairment actually results, we first calculate the expected probability of pro-incumbent voting in 2014 were all voters to have the identical mean value on

Fixed Effects of Independent	2012	2014 (w/o	2014 (w/
Variables		interactions)	interactions)
Redistricted	362*	.304	.703
	(.211)	(.400)	(1.083)
Same Party	1.691***	3.117***	3.118***
	(.149)	(.285)	(.286)
Incumbent's Party	255	.384	.382
	(.229)	(.436)	(.433)
Age	.012*	.024	023
	(.007)	(.018)	(.017)
Interest	250	850**	862**
	(.157)	(.305)	(.301)
Political activity	.061	331	317
	(.277)	(.411)	(.411)
Contact		.651*	.664*
		(.384)	(.389)
Project		.452	.465
		(.477)	(.585)
Represent		1.822***	1.816***
_		(.441)	(.449)
Approve		2.632***	2.638***
		(.373)	(.374)
Knowledge		.277	.418
Ū.		(.707)	(.956)
Ideological Distance	561***	298	305*
U	(.078)	(.186)	(.193)
Economy	.316**	.693***	.692***
-	(.115)	(.213)	(.213)
Coattails	3.556***		
	(.296)		
Project*Redistricted			059
2			(1.036)
Knowledge*Redistricted			474
Ū.			(1.194)
Constant	277	-9.025***	-9.042***
	(.836)	(1.985)	(1.981)
Variances of Random Effects			
Intercepts			
House District Level	1.488***	1.986***	2.016***
	(.279)	(.593)	(.594)
Log-likelihood	-793.424	-194.448	-194.338
N of Respondents	6221	3018	3018
N of House Districts	337	251	251

 Table 5: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of 2012 Redistricting on Voting for House
 Incumbent in 2012 and 2014 Adding Cognitions of the Incumbent to the Equations

Note: Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. One-tail tests were used to determine significance for Redistricted, Sameparty, Age, Economy, and Coattails; two-tail tests used for Incumbent's party, Interest, and Political activity. ***Significant at .001 level; **significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

representation that obtains for non-redistricted respondents (2.074 on the three point Represent scale, where higher values indicate more favorable evaluations). Then, this probability is compared to the expected probability occurring when only non-redistricted voters are assigned the 2.074 value on Represent, at the same time that redistricted voters are all assigned their lower, actual 1.936 mean value. The two expected probabilities of proincumbent voting that result are then .623 and .621, respectively. So the lower ratings by new constituents of the incumbent's ability to represent the district have only a marginal effect in reducing incumbency safety levels.

Finally, the first column in Table 5 contains the results of the analogous analysis of voting in 2012, this time, of course, under the constraint of being able to add only ideological distance, the sole incumbent cognition variable available for redistricted constituents that year. The highly significant coefficient of this variable, combined with the fact that redistricted constituents in 2012, unlike in 2014, saw themselves as more ideologically divorced from their House member than were retained constituents, suggests that reduction in incumbents' ideological distance from redistricted constituents may have contributed to their electoral improvement in 2014.

A probe into this possibility is performed in Table 6, where change in the Ideological distance variable across the two elections is related to change in pro-incumbent voting behavior. The dependent variable takes the form of 1 for voters who shift from a non-incumbent vote in 2012 to a proincumbent vote in 2014, and 0 otherwise. Only respondents voting both times in districts with two-party competition and the same incumbent on the ballot are included. Ideological distance change, measured in terms of Ideological distance in 2014 minus that in 2012, can then be expected to have a negative coefficient if movement toward greater perceived closeness to the member leads to more incumbent support.¹⁸ Non-redistricted respondents, who, on the whole, do not move into greater ideological alignment with the incumbent across the two-year period (mean ideological distance change=.022 among cases included in the analysis), are analyzed in column one. Redistricted respondents, who do move into greater alignment (mean ideological distance change=-.178), are analyzed in column two. The expectation is that changes in ideological distance should matter more for

¹⁸A one-tail significance test is applied in Table 6 just to the Ideological distance change variable, where it is the only variable to have a hypothesized direction of relationship with the voting change dependent variable.

redistricted respondents. For non-redistricted voters owing to their longer term familiarity with the incumbent, perceived member ideology would remain relatively fixed from 2012-14, even if the incumbent did shift positions somewhat to appeal to new constituents. Consequently, much of the minimal individual movements in ideological distance that did occur likely would have a substantial random component with little impact on voting change. For redistricted voters, in contrast, much of their ideological distance change would be a real response to learning more about the new incumbent's ideology over two years, which should therefore make more of a difference on voting change.

The results demonstrate that this expectation is met. Only for the redistricted does the ideological distance change variable significantly affect change in the likelihood of voting for the incumbent.

Therefore, ideological distance change considered by itself seems responsible for at least some of the recovery in incumbent support manifested by redistricted respondents.

Table 6: Multilevel Analysis of Effects of Ideological Distance Change on
2012-2014 Electoral Movement from Challenger to Incumbent

Fixed Effects of Independent Variables	Non-Redistricted Constituents	Redistricted Constituents
Same Party	605*	.792
5	(.284)	(.453)
Incumbent's Party	.032	.576
-	(.426)	(.563)
Age	.031**	.042**
	(.010)	(.015)
Interest	388	549
	(.247)	(.380)
Political activity	.112	1.695
	(.338)	(.901)
Economy	.320	413
	(.276)	(.371)
Ideological Distance	094	442*
Change	(.166)	(.194)
Constant	-5.957***	-5.321***
	(1.254)	(1.579)
Variances of Random Effects Intercepts		
House District Level	.558	.616***
	(.641)	(1.525)
Log-likelihood	-142.106	-68.296
N of Respondents	2460	957
N of House Districts	245	198

Note:Fixed Effects entries for independent variables are binomial logit coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. One-tail tests used to determine significance for Ideological distance change; two-tail tests used for Sameparty, Incumbent's party, Age, Interest, Political activity, and Economy.

***Significant at .001 level; **significant at .01 level; *significant at .05 level.

Summary and Conclusions

While tentative, the evidence arising from this study suggests that reduction in the reelection threat to incumbents posed by redistricted constituents two years after boundary change is linked to improvement in cognitions of the incumbent across this same period. Three of the six cognitions considered here (Contact, Approve, and Ideological distance) relate to incumbent safety margins in 2014, but are equally positive that year among the redistricted and non-redistricted alike. Thus, they have no effect in lowering reelection margins. And of the three cognitions that are less positive in 2014 among redistricted constituents (Project, Represent, and Knowledge), only the second makes an electoral difference, but not to the point of causing much damage to the incumbent.

Underlying our analysis, of course, has been the assumption that compared to 2014, the corresponding cognitions in 2012 held by the redistricted would be less favorable to the incumbent than were those of continuing constituents. There is no obvious way to confirm this in the case of five of the cognitions, because of the non-existence of relevant data in 2012. For the one cognition that is available that year - - perceived ideological distance from the member - - the results are compatible with this assumption, in that redistricted constituents in fact see themselves as more distant than do the non-redistricted, whereas the difference did not persist into 2014. More directly, the reduction in perceived ideological distance by redistricted constituents across the two elections does relate to greater incumbent safety.

It is reasonable to think, however, that if 2012 data were available for the other five cognitions and comparable analysis undertaken, the cumulative effect of all cognitions would explain a good share of incumbent recovery across the two election period. Values of each cognition in 2012 would likely have been less incumbent-friendly for new constituents relative to those for old constituents than was the case in 2014.¹⁹ For example, given what has been said above about the importance of the passage of time for the

¹⁹ Note that in work relying upon American National Election Studies (ANES) survey data, McKee (2008b, 968-72) finds that in both 1992 and 2002 recognition of House incumbents was considerably higher among constituents who kept the same incumbent than among those redistricted into a new district (recognition is defined as the capacity to rate the incumbent on the 0-100 degree feeling thermometer scale). With regard to the ability on one's own to correctly recall the incumbent's name (where the ANES question was only asked in 1992), continuing constituents once again were significantly better informed than redistricted constituents.

development of trust in one's member, plus the fact that redistricted constituents in 2014 had less positive evaluations of their members' representational quality, it is hard to imagine that an imbalance of even greater magnitude would not have existed in 2012 (in addition to the likelihood that fewer new constituents in 2012 would have felt able to answer the question in the first place).

Perhaps most important from the standpoint of lower proincumbent voting in 2012, however, is the contact variable. Some new voters certainly would have been the target of outreach efforts by their new incumbent before election day in 2012 (e.g., through informal district offices established in the appended areas). Still, far fewer newcomers could be expected to have had such incumbent interaction in the relatively brief window before the election than the number of continuing constituents having contact during the prior two year pre-redistricting period. Furthermore, redistricted constituents seeking casework assistance in 2012 probably would be less likely on their own to initiate contact with the new member than with their preexisting member, who still officially represented them. But the next two years afford members ample opportunity to erase this deficit, as we have seen, with regard to almost all specific forms of interaction. So even in this period of hyper-polarization and intense partycentered voting, members still had the ability to ameliorate the electoral damage done by redistricting through vigorous employment of the perquisites available to enhance the contact component of their personal vote.

Since that time period, of course, the impact of the personal vote on reelection fortunes has continued to diminish in tandem with movement toward even more voting along partisan lines. Jacobson calculates that the electoral bonus derived from incumbency status per se declined from a high of 12.1 percent in 1986 to 3.7 percent in 2014 and 1.5 percent in 2022 (2023, 12). Thus, the overall urgency of constituency outreach activities for members may be less. On the other hand, as noted by Jacobson and Carson, from the standpoint of ideological outliers in Congress dedicated to fostering foundational policy transformation, the potential risks associated with such endeavors might well be offset by continued strong district focus (2020, 56). At least for these members, therefore, the emphasis on personal contact we have found to exist in the previous decade can be expected to persist.

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