Descriptive Representation in an Era of Polarization

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Studies of descriptive representation find that voters more positively evaluate representatives who share their ascriptive characteristics. I argue that this pattern can be upended when voters develop more positive affect toward outgroups. In the United States, Democrats have increasingly expressed more positive views toward marginalized groups, while Republicans' attitudes about these groups have not shifted. Under such conditions, my argument predicts that the effect of representatives' race and gender on constituent evaluations should vary more by constituents' partisanship than by their own ascriptive characteristics. Applying a difference-in-differences design to 2008–2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study data, I find that Democrats of all backgrounds now approve more highly of Congress members from historically marginalized groups, whereas Republicans' approval is unrelated to member identity. Democrats also give women and minority representatives leeway to diverge ideologically. These findings demonstrate that polarizing attitudes about race and gender can disrupt classic patterns in how constituents evaluate representatives.

Studies of descriptive representation have provided decades of theory and evidence on constituents' more positive attitudes toward representatives who share their race or gender (e.g., Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Gay 2002; Henderson et al. 2021; Lawless 2004; Pitkin 1967). One of the reasons why citizens typically evaluate members of their own identity groups more positively is potentially rooted in symbolic politics theory (Sears 1993): people who have more positive associations with their own identity groups could transfer these positive connections to politicians who also share their identity. However, citizens' strongest positive associations are not always with their own identity group. Indeed, in recent years in the United States, Democratic voters have developed more positive attitudes toward people of color (POC) and women, regardless of their own race or gender (Engelhardt 2021; Hopkins and Washington 2020; Schaffner 2022). I theorize that, under such conditions, classic patterns related to descriptive representation can be upended: individuals of all races and genders could have the most positive attitudes toward representatives of newly favored racial and gender groups, not necessarily their own identity groups.

In this article, I test this theory in the context of contemporary US politics. Given the surge in positive attitudes toward historically marginalized groups specifically among Democrats from historically dominant groups, the lack of such a change among Republicans, and the salience of identity in the current political moment, this theory predicts that voters' attitudes toward identity-congruent politicians should differ more by voters' partisanship than by voters' own race or gender, conditional on their representatives' party. As Democrats, on average, liberalize in their attitudes about race and gender, their attitudes about women and racial minorities in office should become more positive, independent of their own race or gender. Republicans, who have not significantly shifted in their racial and gender attitudes in recent years, should instead maintain traditional attitudes, showing greater support for politicians who share their ascriptive characteristics. Thus, my argument predicts that as attitudes about identity shift within the parties, Democrats, particularly men and whites, will evaluate women and POC representatives more positively, and Republicans, to the extent that they factor ascriptive identity into their evaluations of representatives, will maintain more positive attitudes toward their identity ingroups. The literature on descriptive representation acknowledges that party is a more powerful determinant than ascriptive identity of how constituents evaluate representatives, and I expect to find

the same. However, contrary to previous literature, my argument suggests that the effects of descriptive representation should vary by party.

To assess this argument, I merge Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data from 2008 to 2020 with a dataset of member-of-Congress characteristics from the 110th to the 116th Congress to evaluate attitudes toward identity-congruent members of Congress (MCs) within each party. Using a difference-in-differences (DiD) design, where identity congruence between MCs and constituents is the treatment, I analyze the effects of both racial and gender congruence on evaluations of MCs (MC approval). As I elaborate below, this research design allows me to credibly uncover the causal effects of identity congruence because it holds constant attributes of districts and time that could otherwise bias causal inference.

Consistent with my theoretical argument, I find that the effect of identity congruence among Democratic respondents is positive for women and POC MCs, but negative for men and whites, meaning that these groups also approve more highly of women and POC MCs. Among Republicans, I find mostly null effects of identity congruence on MC approval. These results among Democrats are driven in part by recent shifts in attitudes. While in earlier years in the period of study, I replicate some classic findings that Democrats more favorably evaluate MCs of their own race and gender (e.g., Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Costa and Schaffner 2018; Gay 2002; Lawless 2004); by the end of this period, Democrats of all identities evaluate representatives who are women or racial minorities more positively. Among Republicans, MC identity remains an insignificant factor in evaluations of MCs over time for all respondent subgroups, aside from Republican POC who approve more highly of POC MCs.

I next show that attitudes about ascriptive identity interact with views on ideological identity to alter patterns of accountability within each party. Constituents who have more positive affect toward a specific identity group might not only translate that attitude into more positive evaluations of representatives, but they could also resist incorporating information inconsistent with their views about that group, such as ideological incongruence, into their evaluations of members of that group. Therefore, when representatives from marginalized groups are ideologically distant from Democratic voters, constituents will resist assigning such negative evaluations as they would to other groups. To demonstrate this, I use a measure of symbolic ideological congruence between constituents and their MCs (perceived ideology) to assess how identity congruence moderates the effects of ideological congruence. I find that Democratic men, whites, and POC give greater "leeway" to women and POC politicians—they pe-

nalize female MCs and MCs of color less for symbolic ideological incongruence. Politicians of such groups do not enjoy this additional flexibility with Republican constituents, who punish men and women and white and POC MCs similarly for ideological incongruence. Among Republicans, however, the effect of ideological congruence, all else equal, is greater than among Democrats, consistent with evidence that Republicans value symbolic ideology to a greater extent than Democrats (Cayton and Dawkins 2020).

Finally, I perform a series of analyses that provide evidence consistent with my theoretical explanation for why attitudes about identity-congruent representatives have shifted in ways that coincide with other trends among a polarizing public. Specifically, I demonstrate how ideological misperceptions and the effectiveness of representatives are not clearly driving this relationship between identity congruence and MC approval, but racial and gender attitudes appear to be one important mechanism that contributes to this relationship.

These findings demonstrate that partisan polarization is accompanied by changes in classic patterns found in the descriptive representation literature. As attitudes about race and gender have polarized along partisan lines, Democrats' positive affect toward marginalized groups has translated into higher approval of women and POC in office and more leeway for these groups to be ideologically distinct from their constituents. Republicans' evaluations of their MCs have remained largely unaffected by ascriptive identity. Instead, Republicans prioritize ideological identity congruence in this context. Importantly, these attitudes demonstrate which characteristics of representatives factor into constituents' feelings about sitting politicians. In an era of high levels of dissatisfaction with the government, it is important that we understand when and why people are content with their elected leaders, especially if this differs by party.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENT: DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION AND POLARIZATION

A long line of research finds that constituents tend to have more positive attitudes toward politicians who share their gender or racial identity, identity-congruent politicians (e.g., Badas and Stauffer 2019; Bejarano et al. 2021; English, Pearson, and Strolovitch 2019; Philpot and Walton 2007; Schildkraut 2013, but see Casellas and Wallace 2015).[1] These attitudes can be independent of substantive policy outcomes, hinging on the expectation of greater symbolic benefits, which include, but are not limited to, feelings of democratic legitimacy and a sense of

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1. People have partisan, ideological, and other identities, but in this article, "identity congruence" without a qualifier is assumed to mean gender or racial identity.

satisfaction with decision-making in government (Hayes and Hibbing 2017). Symbolic politics theory offers an account for one reason why symbolic representation might translate into constituent evaluations (Sears 1993): more positive affect toward an identity group could result in positive connections with politicians who are members of this group. Consistent with this explanation, scholars have demonstrated that voters in both historically dominant and marginalized identity groups have more positive attitudes about ingroup than outgroup politicians, holding other factors constant (Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993). For example, Gay (2002) finds that Black and white constituents assign higher approval ratings to Black and white MCs, respectively. Lawless (2004) similarly finds that women evaluate women MCs more highly and men approve more highly of men MCs.

Based on symbolic politics theory, we should expect that more positive evaluations of co-identity representatives result in part from constituents' affect toward their identity groups. But a surprising corollary of this expectation is that if constituents' attitudes toward outgroups improve, these associations could also translate into higher evaluations of politicians from these other groups. The conditions for such a shift are occurring in contemporary American politics. In the years since much of the research highlighting relationships between ascriptive identities and politicians' evaluations was conducted, citizens in the United States have increasingly diverged in their views about different racial and gender groups (e.g., Engelhardt 2021; Holman and Kalmoe 2021; Hopkins and Washington 2020; Schaffner 2022; Tesler and Sears 2010).

Among Democrats, average levels of racial resentment and hostile sexism have decreased, suggesting more positive attitudes toward minority racial groups and women (Engelhardt 2021; Schaffner 2022). Particularly, Democratic constituents from historically dominant groups have formed positive associations with identity outgroups: women and racial minorities. These positive associations come in the form of attitudes about members of these groups (Schaffner 2022), decreased discrimination against these groups (Dolan 2014), and emphasis on inclusion of these groups in spaces where they were once excluded (Stauffer 2021). While scholars are still debating the cause of this shift in racial and gender attitudes, many have converged around the idea that Trump's candidacy and events that surrounded it (e.g., the MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter protests) were, at least in part, responsible for attitude shifts. I expect male and white Democrats' increasingly positive associations with these groups will translate into more positive attitudes toward representatives from these groups than in the past. Given an external emphasis from Democratic elites on the inclusion of marginalized groups, the salience of marginalized identities in the party (Engelhardt

2021), and decreasing attachment to historically dominant ingroups (Jardina, Kalmoe, and Gross 2021), attitudes toward representatives from these groups should not only be positive but also more salient than attitudes toward historically dominant groups. Therefore, I expect that positive attitudes toward representatives from these groups may exceed positive views constituents have of historically dominant groups. I hypothesize the following:

> **H1a.** Democrats of all races and genders now have more positive attitudes toward both women and POC MCs than men and white representatives.[2]

For Republicans, who have, on average, not shifted in their views toward marginalized groups, I do not expect to find the same pattern of increasingly positive attitudes among historically dominant groups toward historically marginalized groups. Instead, there are two potential outcomes one could expect among white and male Republicans. First, given their lack of shifting racial and gender attitudes, they could maintain positive affect toward representatives from their racial and gender ingroups, matching past findings. Second, recent work on far-right parties from the comparative politics literature has shown that parties on the right might strategically elect representatives from marginalized groups, like women and POC, to improve outcomes for their party, like increasing turnout (Weeks et al. 2023). Republicans may follow a similar strategy, supporting women and POC in office to aid their party image. This support could potentially transfer into more positive attitudes about women and POC representatives. Though, persistent negative attitudes among the historically dominant group in the Republican Party toward women and POC could counter these strategic positive attitudes (see Schaffner 2022), likely mitigating the development of positive evaluations of members of their outgroups in office. Namely, I expect men and white Republican constituents to still approve more highly of their ingroups, but the gap between approval for MCs from the historically marginalized and historically dominant groups could be shrinking. There is also no evidence to suggest women and POC in the Republican Party would shift their attitudes about ingroup representatives, and therefore, we should observe stable positive ingroup affect. I hypothesize the following:

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2. This does not mean that attitudes toward men and whites have become more negative. Rather, attitudes toward members of historically marginalized groups have become more positive relative to those toward men and whites.

H1b. Among women and POC Republicans, the effects of identity congruence on approval continue to be positive. Among men and white Republicans, there are two competing potential outcomes: (1) lack of changing racial and gender attitudes results in stable ingroup affect, or (2) strategic support for women and POC MCs results in higher approval for these MCs in more recent years than in the past.

These expectations depart from past work in important ways. Prior literature showed that the effect of MC gender or race on MC evaluations differed mainly by the race or gender of the constituent (e.g., women approved more highly of women and men approved more highly of men within their party). However, much of the research demonstrating these patterns was conducted with pre-2016 data (e.g., Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Gay 2002; Lawless 2004), in an era where the parties were not as starkly polarized on attitudes about identity as they are now (Dimock and Wike 2021). Further, this work was conducted before Trump, at a time when gender and racial identity were not as salient as during or after the Trump presidency (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019, 2021). Research on the effects of gender and race on constituent evaluations has been a mainstay of the descriptive representation literature, but table A1 in the appendix shows that no previous research has deployed a rigorous empirical design to trace whether these relationships have changed in the current era.

Ideological identity, ascriptive identity, and their interaction

Ideology is also important for understanding the effects of identity congruence on evaluations of representatives for two primary reasons. First, both symbolic (identity-based) and operational (issue-based) ideology are strong predictors of constituents' approval of representatives (Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki 2021). Voters in both parties are more supportive of ideologically congruent politicians, even when they do not share the same issue positions (Scala 2018). For Republican constituents, symbolic ideology is more central to holding politicians accountable than it is for Democrats (Cayton and Dawkins 2020). Specifically, Republicans should be more motivated by shared ideological identity than Democrats are. While Democrats and Republicans should both evaluate ideologically congruent representatives more positively, other identities, like race and gender, could be more salient for Democrats than for Republicans. Therefore, I expect that constituents in both parties will evaluate ideologically congruent representatives more positively when using a measure of symbolic ideology, but Republicans should be more concerned with ideological

identity than Democrats are when evaluating their MCs.[3] Specifically, I hypothesize the following:

H2. Among Democratic constituents, the effect of identity congruence on approval is greater in magnitude than among Republicans,[4] and among Republican constituents, the effect of ideological congruence is larger than among Democrats (positive for both Democrats and Republicans).

Second, the negative effects of ideological incongruence on MC evaluations might vary depending upon whether representatives share ascriptive characteristics with their constituents. Scholars have long recognized that some representatives succeed in earning "leeway" from their constituents (i.e., to escape punishment for taking different positions than their constituents prefer; Fenno 1977). Generally, this leeway is given to representatives that constituents trust. Formally, Bianco (1994) demonstrates that trust exists when a constituent provides a positive evaluation of their representative independent of how that representative votes on a policy. Here, trust is interchangeable with leeway. If Democrats now have a strong positive connection to representatives from historically marginalized groups, this might translate into greater trust, which could result in more leeway for MCs from these groups. Some research has considered how a representative's identity and ideological congruence might interact as constituents form their evaluations, but this existing research reaches conflicting findings. On the one hand, scholars have found that when evaluating Supreme Court Justices (Badas and Stauffer 2018) or hypothetical elected officials (Hayes and Hibbing 2017) who diverge ideologically from citizens, identity congruence might compensate for a lack of symbolic ideological representation. On the other hand, some scholars have shown that when women representatives (Kaslovsky and Rogowski 2021) and senators (Jones 2014) do not align with constituents in their policy preferences, men and women constituents penalize them more than they do comparable male representatives, suggesting voters might hold members of marginalized groups to a higher standard for substantive accountability. However, these studies either use survey experiments, aggregate data on MCs only as late as 2018, or focus solely on one marginalized identity.

My empirical approach improves on all of these dimensions. Importantly, considering Democrats' recent shift in

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3. For the remainder of the article, symbolic ideology and ideological identity are used interchangeably. Operational ideology (issue-based) will be explicitly discussed as such.

4. See hypotheses 1a and 1b for specifics about the direction of the effects.

attitudes toward marginalized groups, stronger positive connections to women and POC lead me to expect that compensation is stronger in more recent years. Democrats should resist incorporating negative information about these groups they now view positively: they should give women and POC MCs leeway to be ideologically divergent. While I still expect all out-of-step MCs to be given worse evaluations than those who are ideologically congruent, representatives who diverge ideologically and are members of historically marginalized groups should be punished less than men and whites for their divergence. If Republicans' attitudes are not shifting similarly, racial and gender identity congruence should not moderate the effects of ideological identity incongruence on approval. In my analysis, I present a causal test that contributes to the compensation side of the debate in the descriptive representation literature. In particular, I hypothesize the following:

H3a. Among Democratic respondents, the effects of ideological incongruence are greater for men and white MCs than women and POC MCs.

H3b. Among Republicans, the effects of ideological incongruence do not vary based on identity congruence.

The interaction between racial and gender congruence and ideological congruence is important because it could result in distinct standards of accountability in the two parties. For example, some Democrats might give women and POC MCs more leeway to vote based on personal preferences when these conflict with constituents' preferences than they would give men and white MCs. If these attitudes continue to only hold among Democrats, then the standards for accountability could increasingly differ by party.

METHOD

To test my theoretical argument, I merge preelection CCES data from 2008 to 2020 with data on MC characteristics from the 110th Congress (elected 2006) to the 116th Congress (elected 2018). The Cumulative CCES Common Content includes common variables across all years of the survey. I collected MC characteristics using Carnes's (2016) Congressional Leadership and Social Class Dataset, Daily Kos Comprehensive Congressional Guides for the 113th–116th Congresses, MC websites, and the Congressional Biographical Directory.[5] Descriptive statistics for the sample are included in

appendix B. My main analysis uses preelection, even-numbered years, but analysis with odd-year data (2007–2019) shows similar effects to the even-year estimates.[6]

My main dependent variable is MC approval rating. The CCES asks respondents to rate their member on a five-point job approval scale, where 1 is "strongly disapprove" and 5 is "strongly approve." I recoded "don't know" and skipped responses to the median scale value, 3, and then converted the scale to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpreting the regression coefficients.[7] The main independent variables are dummies for (1) MC–constituent gender congruence[8] and (2) MC–constituent racial congruence (both are coded 0 for incongruent and 1 for congruent).[9]

One of this article's contributions is to use a method of causal inference to test the effects of descriptive representation. Previous work assessing the effects of descriptive representation on voters' attitudes has struggled with the challenge of selection bias: members of historically marginalized groups might be especially likely to be elected in places that have more positive attitudes toward these groups, potentially confounding comparisons between constituents' attitudes in districts that do and do not elect members of these groups. To address these concerns, I leverage a DiD design with two-way fixed effects (TWFEs). The treatment of interest is a shift from an identity-incongruent MC to an identity-congruent MC, and the outcome of interest is the MC approval ratings assigned by constituents. Recent econometric work has found that using

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5. I first matched the coding of MC race from Carnes (2016) and DailyKos data to the MCs in my dataset. For MCs not included in these datasets, I coded race by hand, using MC websites, campaign websites,

congressional caucuses, and news sites. I generated binary race variables, assigning MCs 1 for each race with which they identified (e.g., if an MC identified as Black and Hispanic, they would be coded 1 for the Black MC variable and 1 for the Hispanic MC variable).

6. I use even years because (1) the survey takes place over the course of congressional campaigns when voters might be most aware of MCs' identities, (2) MCs have served in office longer than in odd-years, and (3) there are more CCES respondents, providing additional power. Odd-year estimates can be provided upon request.

7. Coding missing data as missing or at the mean does not influence estimates (app. P).

8. Sex and gender are different, but the CCES has used the two interchangeably. Following this, respondent sex and gender are used interchangeably in the article (e.g., male/man).

9. Racial congruence indicates the MC and constituent identify with the same racial group. I generated variables for each race, coded 1 if the MC and constituent matched, 0 otherwise. I combined these into a racial congruence measure (1 for congruence, 0 otherwise). I split the data into POC and white respondent subsets. POC respondents have a racially congruent MC if that MC matches their race, not simply if the MC is POC. The POC subset is also disaggregated to explore the effects for Black, Asian, and Hispanic respondents separately (app. C). Ideally, I would use a measure of perceived gender/race, but the CCES does not include measures of perceived gender and only includes perceived race for some respondents.

TWFEs to analyze DiD designs can result in biased estimates and recommends using alternative methods as a robustness check (e.g., Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021; Goodman-Bacon 2021). In appendix F, I explain these potential biases, employ an alternative method, and find that the results are not substantively different.

This DiD design presents important advantages for causal inference. The FEs for district and Congress absorb any unobservable district-level characteristics or nationwide time-varying shocks or trends.[10] The design holds constant unobservable district characteristics, meaning difficult-to-measure constructs that could affect both my outcomes of interest and the treatment cannot confound the results. It also holds constant any national trends.[11] For example, if polarization led constituents in every district to simply approve of their MCs more, this would not lead to bias in my design as this would be absorbed by the Congress FEs.

The DiD setup does have some assumptions: most importantly, the parallel trends assumption. This assumption requires that, if there were no effect, the outcomes under both treatment and control conditions would follow the same trends. For example, districts that elect women MCs would have only increased or decreased their MC approval ratings as much as districts with men MCs, were there no effect from electing a woman MC. While this assumption is not directly testable, I follow best practices in the DiD literature (e.g., Sances and You 2022) and present an analysis with lags and leads in appendix E to demonstrate that future and past treatment do not predict current approval ratings, which suggests the assumption is likely satisfied. I also perform two additional placebo tests with senator approval as the outcome to further support this assumption by demonstrating that identity congruence between MCs and constituents is not predictive of outcomes that should not be connected to treatment (see app. E).

Additionally, I include several controls to help ensure this assumption is met. First, because any shifts in MC party within a district will likely affect approval ratings, I include MC party as a control, using district × MC party FEs, to avoid comparing districts that experience a shift in the party of their MC from one session to the next. That is, I compare constit-

uents within the same district who are represented from one session to the next by different MCs of the same party but with different identities.[12] Additionally, any characteristic of a district's MC that shifts from one session to the next could influence approval ratings. To account for expected sources of heterogeneity of MC identity, I include controls for MC gender (in the race models), MC race (in the gender models), and MC seniority. MC differences that are a result of these characteristics should then be accounted for as well. The resulting model is shown in equation 1:

$$Y_{ijt} = \alpha_j \times \text{MC Party}_{jt} + \delta_t + \beta_1 \text{Identity Congruence}_{ijt} + \omega_1 X_{jt} + \epsilon_{ijt}.$$

$$(1)$$

The model presented in equation 1 estimates the effect of racial/gender congruence on MC approval. MC approval is regressed on MC–constituent identity congruence (coded as 1 when the identities of the MC and constituent align) with controls, TWFEs, robust standard errors clustered at the district level, and CCES survey weights. β_1 is interpreted as the effect of identity congruence on approval. X_{jt} is a vector of controls for MC seniority (years served recoded to a 0–1 scale) and MC race/gender, where race is coded as white (0) or POC (1) and gender is coded as man (0) or woman (1). $\alpha_j \times MC$ $Party_{jt}$ is district × MC party FEs, and δ_t is Congress FEs. ϵ_{ijt} is a random error term. To reduce confusion in interpreting estimates, I exclude interactions in this equation by running the model on multiple subsets of respondents, corresponding with both forms of identity and the two parties. The gender analysis has men and women Democratic and Republican subsets. For the racial congruence analysis, I use POC and white respondent subsets for both parties.

RESULTS
Distinct effects of descriptive representation in the two major parties

I first consider hypotheses 1a and 1b by evaluating whether identity congruence between MCs and constituents affects MCs' approval ratings. I start by pooling data from 2008 to 2020, replicating past work but using relatively recent years and a stronger identification strategy. The estimates presented in table 1 correspond to β_1 in equation 1. Panels A and B show the results for gender congruence and racial congruence, respectively.[13] The table shows the effects estimated from

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10. Variation that might have occurred due to 2012 redistricting does not influence the estimates in any significant way (app. D).

11. The use of survey data in DiD designs to measure dependent variables that vary at a geographic level is common in economics (e.g., Bertrand, Duflo, and Mullainathan 2004), provided standard errors are clustered at the level at which treatment is assigned (e.g., Congressional district). The presence of sampling error in the dependent variable is a form of random measurement error, which will increase standard errors but not bias estimates.

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12. Constituents from both parties are represented by similar numbers of women and POC MCs.

13. All models include FEs and controls for seniority and race/gender, but the estimates without FEs and controls do not differ in any meaningful way (app. G).

Table 1. Effects of Identity Congruence on MC Approval Ratings (Pooled Across 2008–2020)

Panel A: Gender Congruence	(1) Democratic Women Respondents	(2) Democratic Men Respondents	(3) Republican Women Respondents	(4) Republican Men Respondents
Gender congruence = 1	.032***	−.024*	−.006	.002
	(.009)	(.010)	(.010)	(.011)
Congress FE	No	No	No	No
MC party × district FE	No	No	No	No
N districts with MC gender change	108	108	108	108
N	107,191	73,263	67,861	75,538

Panel B: Racial Congruence	(1) Democratic POC Respondents	(2) Democratic White Respondents	(3) Republican POC Respondents	(4) Republican White Respondents
Racial congruence = 1	.052***	−.020	.052*	−.001
	(.011)	(.014)	(.020)	(.016)
Congress FE	No	No	No	No
MC party × district FE	No	No	No	No
N districts with MC race change	58	58	56	58
N	61,982	118,472	17,876	125,523

Note. Panels A and B present models corresponding to equation 1. The dependent variable is MC approval (0–1). MCs are coded as either gender/race congruent (1) or incongruent (0). The models include district × MC party and Congress FEs and controls for MC seniority and MC race/gender. Standard errors are clustered at the district level for weighted CCES data for even years from 2008 to 2020. "N districts with MC gender/race change" includes only within-party shifts and is the number of districts switching to a woman/POC MC. Coefficients for controls are included in appendix G.
+ $p < .1$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

regressing MC approval on MC identity congruence among subgroups of respondents.

The first two columns of panel A reveal that among Democrats, the effect of identity congruence is positive for women and negative for men, meaning all Democrats approve more positively of women MCs, and these effects are statistically significant. Democratic women and men respondents assign women MCs approval ratings around 3.2 percentage points ($p < .001$) and 2.4 percentage points ($p < .05$) higher than men MCs, respectively. The difference in the absolute size of these coefficients is insignificant (see app. table G8). Columns 3 and 4 of panel A demonstrate that the effects among Republican men and women respondents are indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that among these constituents, there is neither an ingroup nor outgroup approval advantage for MCs.

Columns 1 and 2 in panel B show that both white and POC Democratic respondents assign higher approval ratings to POC MCs than white MCs. The effect of descriptive representation for POC respondents is statistically significant—they assign racially congruent MCs approval ratings around

5.2 percentage points ($p < .001$) higher than white MCs. White respondents also give POC MCs higher approval ratings, but the 2.0 percentage point effect is not statistically significant ($p = .174$).[14] This indicates, again, that Democratic voters now give an approval advantage to MCs from the historically marginalized group no matter their own identity, but the lack of certainty on the estimate for whites does call into question whether this result fully supports hypothesis 1a. Column 3 shows that Republican POC respondents also assign higher approval ratings to POC MCs ($\beta = .052, p < .05$). In column 4, the coefficient for white Republicans is nearly zero ($\beta = −.001$) and statistically insignificant.

The estimates in columns 1 and 3, as well as columns 2 and 4, are significantly different from one another in both panels (see app. G). These differences indicate that the effects of identity congruence among the same identity groups in different parties are distinct, while the absolute value of the effects

14. Importantly, practical and statistical significance are not the same (Gelman and Hill 2006).

among different identity groups within party are not, suggesting that significant effects of descriptive representation, whether positive or negative, exist primarily in the Democratic Party. Moreover, men and white respondents in the Democratic Party assign higher approval ratings to the outgroup than members of their identity ingroup.

These results provide partial support for hypotheses 1a and 1b. Among Democrats, identity congruence has positive effects on the historically marginalized groups and negative effects on the historically dominant groups. Among Republicans, there is a general indifference about identity in these evaluations, aside from the effects among POC respondents. This could be genuine indifference, or it could be strategic positive attitudes countering negative affect. However, pooling the data only allows us to compare these estimates to past work, not to compare estimates over time in the period where attitudes about race and gender have shifted most recently. My hypotheses outlined the expectation that these effects would be part of a new pattern of attitudes, and therefore, in the next section, I look at how these effects have changed across Congresses.

The changing effects of identity congruence over time

Using data from the early 2000s, scholars found that constituents from both historically marginalized and dominant groups were more likely to assign higher approval ratings to MCs with shared ascriptive characteristics (Ansolabehere and Fraga 2016; Gay 2002; Lawless 2004). The analyses presented in the prior section suggest otherwise—Democratic constituents, from both historically marginalized and dominant groups, assign higher approval ratings to women and POC MCs, and most Republicans do not factor the race and gender of their representatives into their evaluations. My theoretical argument offers an explanation for this contrast: previous research was conducted before recent shifts in Democrats' attitudes toward women and POC. To further test this explanation, I analyze the effects of MC identity congruence on MC approval across Congresses within each party. I replicate patterns closely matching prior research in earlier years, though some shifts had already begun by the start of my data. Then, in later years, I find that these patterns change significantly, providing more support for hypothesis 1a and partial support for hypothesis 1b.

$$Y_{ijt} = \alpha_j \times \text{MC Party}_{jt} + \delta_t + \sum_{t=110}^{116} \gamma_t (\text{Identity Congruence}_{jt} \times C_t) + \omega_1 X_{jt} + \epsilon_{ijt}.$$

(2)

I update the model from equation 1 by adding an interaction between identity congruence and each Congress. In

equation 2, C is Congress. γ_t is interpreted as the approval advantage or disadvantage in each Congress. Figure 1 plots the γ_t coefficients for each subgroup of interest.

Figure 1 reveals that Democrats of all races and genders increasingly approve of POC and women MCs relative to white and men MCs, whereas for Republicans, there is no clear trend in identity being a meaningful predictor of approval. On the left side of figure 1A, among Democrats in 2008, the effect of gender congruence is not distinguishable from zero. By 2012, the coefficients are positive for women and shifting negative for men. In 2020, the final year in the data, the figure shows that women evaluate their ingroup more highly ($\gamma = .080$, $p < .001$) and men evaluate their outgroup, women, more highly ($\gamma = -.059$, $p < .001$), aligning with the results found in table 1.

Figure 1B reveals similar results for racial descriptive representation. Among Democrats in 2008, both whites and POC approve more highly of their coracial representatives. By the last two years of the data, POC evaluate their ingroup more highly and whites evaluate their outgroup more highly. In 2020, POC MCs had a 6.1 percentage point advantage among POC respondents ($p < .001$). This result is similar for white Democrats. Toward the beginning of this period, white Democrats approved more highly of other whites, but, by the end of this period (the year 2020), white Democrats were 7.1 percentage points more approving of POC MCs than of white MCs ($p < .001$). In table 1, the effects in earlier years masked the increasing significant negative effect of descriptive representation among white Democratic respondents. Among Republicans, there is no trend over time for either racial or gender congruence.[15]

These results both replicate some classic patterns found in the descriptive representation literature and show that these patterns have changed substantially over time. Identity has become a significant consideration for all Democrats when evaluating their representatives, specifically in recent years, supporting hypothesis 2.[16,17] Republicans' evaluations, however, are less dependent on ascriptive identity—they neither

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15. The differences in the absolute marginal effects between respondents of the same identity group across the parties are significant, but differences between respondents of different identity groups within-party are not significant. These results can be provided upon request.

16. It is possible that the difference in approval for men and women or POC and whites could be due to a decrease in approval for men/whites, but in app. B, I show that trends in fig. 1 are primarily a result of increasing approval for MCs from the historically marginalized groups.

17. Obtaining consistently positive or consistently negative results repeatedly in separate analyses across years, even if not significant, bolsters confidence that the insignificant estimate among whites in table 1 does not hold as a null effect (see Gelman and Hill 2006).
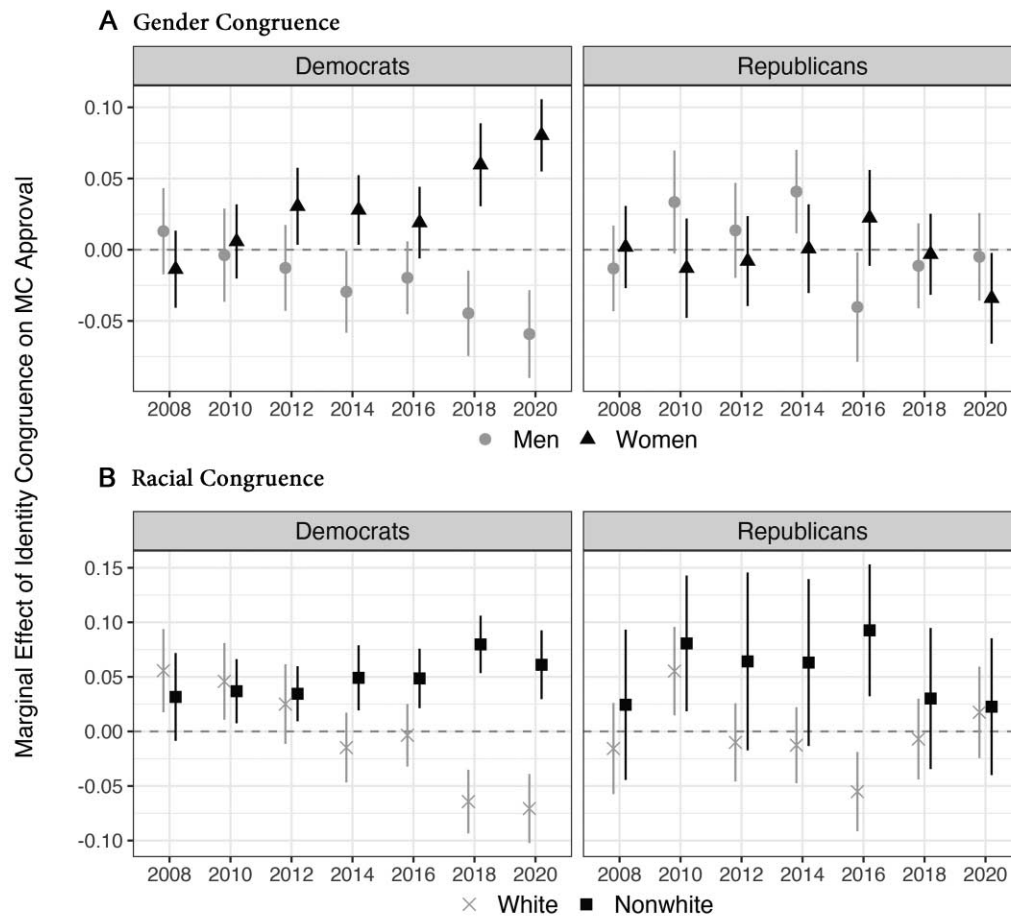
Figure 1. Marginal effects of MC identity congruence on approval by year. This figure presents models corresponding to equation 2. Marginal effects of gender (*A*) and racial congruence (*B*) on MC approval in each year are presented for women, men, white, and POC respondents. Coefficients are presented in appendix H, as are the effects among respondents' subset by MC party.

consistently provide an advantage to a specific group nor appear to discriminate on the basis of identity in their evaluations.

Identity and ideology

Thus far, the results show that ascriptive identity factors more into Democrats' than Republicans' evaluations of their MCs. In this section, I test two important implications of my argument with respect to ideology. First, I hypothesized (hypothesis 2) that Republicans weight symbolic ideological congruence more than Democrats do when assigning approval ratings. Second, I expect (hypothesis 3a) Democrats from all racial and gender groups may resist punishing representatives from marginalized groups for ideological incongruence as much as they will penalize comparable men and white MCs.

To test these predictions, I generate an additional explanatory variable for perceived ideological congruence, which uses each respondent's estimate of their representative's ideologi-

cal position and respondents' self-placement on an ideology scale.[18] Depending on the year, respondents either placed themselves and their representatives on seven-point Likert scales from very liberal to very conservative or on 0 (very liberal) to 100 (very conservative) scales. I convert these to 0–1 scales for consistency across years. I subtract each respondent's ideological self-placement from where they placed their MC on the same scale. This variable is the absolute difference

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18. While a measure of policy congruence could be useful for directly comparing the distance between an MC's policy stances and their constituents' operational ideology, the policies available in the CCES are inconsistent across years, resulting in too noisy of a policy congruence measure. I did construct a measure using MCs' DW-NOMINATE scores and respondents' ideological self-placement. This measure produces similar, but not identical estimates, to the perceived measure. Further discussion and results with this measure are included in app. G. Importantly, the operational and perceived measures of ideology are highly correlated.

(0 indicating complete congruence and 1 indicating perfect incongruence).[19]

I use a measure of perceived ideological congruence, rather than issue-based congruence, because this measure best captures constituents' views of how distant their MCs' ideological identities are from their own, not only how distinct they are on specific policy preferences. The ideological identities that respondents assign themselves and their representatives can encompass ideas about policy preferences, considerations for increasing diversity in Congress, or attitudes about racial and gender groups. Whichever way constituents conceptualize ideology, this measure provides the distance between how the concept is applied by respondents to themselves and how they apply the same concept to their representatives. Therefore, two constituents might understand ideological identity differently, but I expect they are consistent in their understanding when assigning themselves and their MCs ideological positions.

I assess both the main effect of ideological congruence on constituents' evaluations of their MCs and how MCs' identities moderate the effects of ideological congruence. This second analysis requires additional modifications to the model from equation 1, shown in equation 3:

$$
\begin{aligned}
Y_{ijt} = {} & \alpha_j \times \text{MC Party}_{jt} + \delta_t \\
& + \sum_{c=0}^{1} \gamma_c (\text{Identity Congruence}_{ijt} \times \text{Ideology Congruence2}_{ijt}) \\
& + \sum_{c=0}^{1} \lambda_c (\text{Identity Congruence}_{ijt} \times \text{Ideology Congruence3}_{ijt}) \\
& + \omega_1 X_{jt} + \epsilon_{ijt}.
\end{aligned}
$$

$$(3)$$

Equation 3 includes interactions between the identity congruence variable and a tercile version of the ideological congruence measure (tercile 1 is congruence, 2 is mid-congruence, and 3 is incongruence).[20] In this model, γ_c represents the estimated effect of moving from ideological congruence to mid-level ideological congruence for identity congruence and incongruence. λ_c is interpreted as the effect of identity-congruent and identity-incongruent MCs moving from ideological congruence to ideological incongruence. In figure 2, I present only the marginal effects of ideological incongruence shifting from tercile 1 to tercile 3 for identity incongruence and congruence.

19. Constituents might react differently to MCs who they perceive as more liberal than themselves compared to MCs they perceive as more conservative. In app. I, I show that the effects of identity congruence are slightly larger for Democratic constituents with MCs who are more moderate than themselves than those with more extreme MCs.

20. Interaction models with continuous measures assume linear interaction effects (Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu 2019). I do not want to assume the effect of ideological congruence on MC approval can only linearly change with identity congruence at a constant rate. Therefore, I convert the variable to a tercile measure.

The estimates corresponding to γ_c and controls are presented in appendix G.

Before estimating effects with equation 3, I reestimate equation 1 with ideological incongruence rather than gender/racial congruence, presenting the effects of ideological incongruence, all else equal. The results demonstrate that the effects of perceived ideological incongruence on MC approval are negative for all respondents—as MCs diverge ideologically from constituents, constituents assign lower approval ratings (see app. J). This encourages confidence in the measure of ideology because we would expect to see constituent dissatisfaction with MCs who do not align with them ideologically. Appendix table J1 also presents evidence consistent with my expectation that Republicans penalize ideological incongruence more than Democrats. Democrats and Republicans both react negatively to ideological incongruence, but this incongruence is more dominant in shaping Republicans' evaluations than Democrats', supporting hypothesis 2.

Next, I test hypothesis 3a, that Democrats grant greater ideological leeway to women and POC MCs than they do to comparable men and white MCs. Figure 2 reports the results. Figures 2A and 2B display the marginal effects of ideological incongruence (shifting from congruence to incongruence) on MC approval for identity-congruent and incongruent MCs.

Race and ideology. In figure 2A, POC and white Democrats give more ideological leeway to POC MCs: approval is higher for identity-congruent MCs among POC respondents ($\beta_{\text{incongruent}} = -.288$ vs. $\beta_{\text{congruent}} = -.158$) and identity-incongruent MCs among white respondents ($\beta_{\text{incongruent}} = -.332$ vs. $\beta_{\text{congruent}} = -.381$) at high levels of ideological incongruence. The effects for identity-incongruent and identity-congruent MCs are significantly different from each other (see app. table G10). It appears that both white and POC Democratic respondents resist punishing POC MCs for ideological divergence as much as they do white MCs. To put these results in context, for example, a liberal POC respondent who assigns their perceived conservative, white Democratic MC a 40.0% approval rating (the average for this type of MC among these constituents) would assign a 53.0% approval rating if their MC were perceived to be equally conservative, Democratic, and racially congruent. Among both POC and white Republicans, the effects of ideological incongruence do not differ by whether an MC is identity-congruent or incongruent.

Gender and ideology. Figure 2B presents slightly different results for gender. Among male Democrats, the negative effects of ideological incongruence are greater for identity-congruent representatives. That is, identity-incongruent MCs are given greater leeway to diverge ideologically. Male
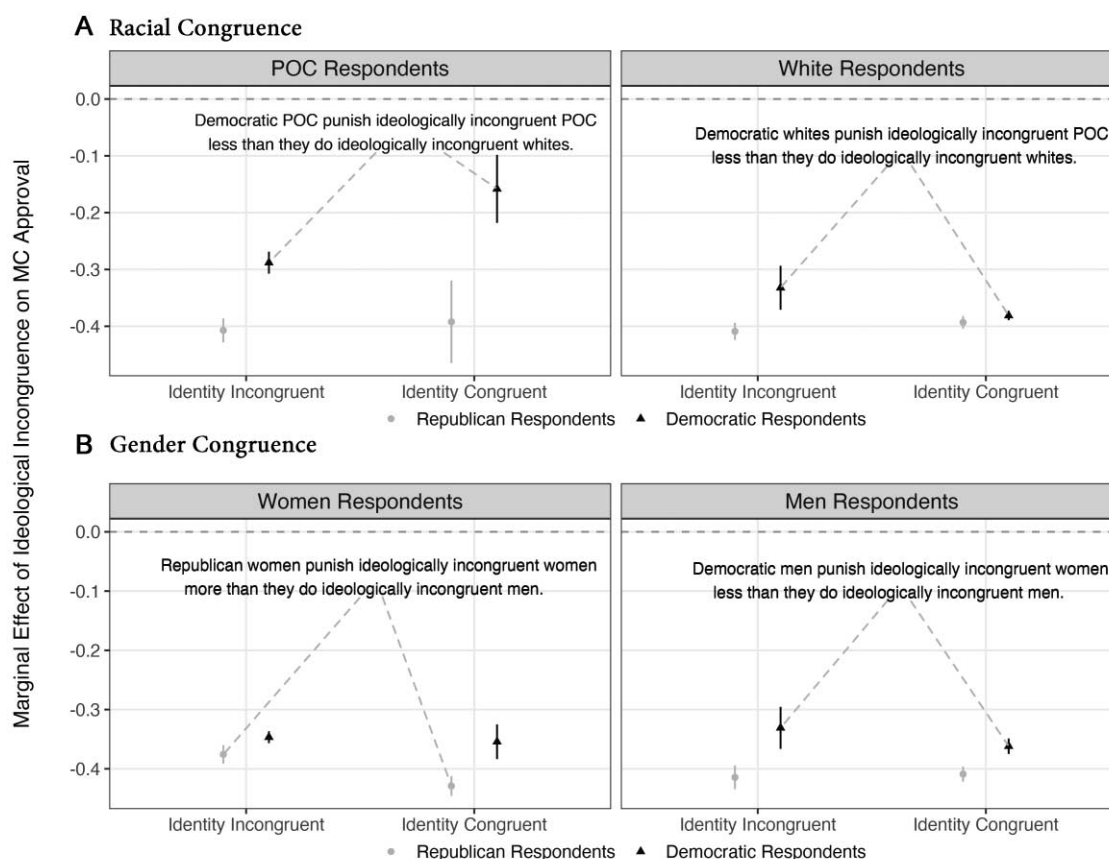
Figure 2. Effects of ideological congruence on MC approval by identity congruence. This figure presents coefficients from models corresponding to equation 3: the marginal effect of shifting from ideological congruence to ideological incongruence on MC approval for even years from 2008 to 2020. Corresponding tables are included in appendix G.

respondents give ideologically incongruent women higher approval ratings ($\beta = -.331$) than comparable men MCs ($\beta = -.362$). However, female respondents give ideologically incongruent men and women MCs similar approval ratings ($\beta = -.374$ and $\beta = -.354$, respectively), with men being penalized marginally less than women representatives, but the coefficients are not significantly different from each other (see app. table G9). These findings indicate that despite all MCs' approval ratings suffering when they fall out of step ideologically with constituents, women MCs in the Democratic Party have more leeway to fall out of step than men MCs among male respondents. Women are not given this additional leeway by female respondents, suggesting resistance to negative information about women representatives might only apply to the historically dominant group.

Again, Republican respondents' evaluations are distinct from Democrats'. Among men, neither men nor women MCs are given higher approval when ideologically incongruent, consistent with the average null gender approval gap. Among female respondents, however, women MCs are given significantly lower approval ratings ($\beta = -.429$) than male MCs

($\beta = -.376$) when the representatives are ideologically incongruent. Female Republicans penalize women MCs for diverging ideologically more than they do comparable men MCs, similar to findings from Kaslovsky and Rogowski (2021) with policy congruence. Importantly, effects among Republicans are different from findings among Democrats, suggesting the effects of ideological congruence vary more by party than by gender identity.

Together with the results for racial congruence, these findings support the idea that among three of the four Democratic identity subgroups, ascriptive identity compensates for ideological incongruence: respondents resist incorporating as much negative information about women and POC MCs as they do for men and whites. Unlike women, POC respondents do give ideological leeway to their co-identity representatives, suggesting different historically marginalized groups might view accountability distinctly. Republican respondents demonstrate indifference to identity congruence in their evaluations of representatives, except for female Republicans, who penalize women MCs more than men for ideological incongruence. Aside from the results among women in both parties,

these findings align with my expectations in hypotheses 3a and 3b. Importantly, constituents in the Democratic Party do appear to have different standards of accountability for women and POC MCs than men and white MCs who do not share their symbolic ideology. While the magnitude of these effects are of course smaller than the effects of predictors such as party, they mean that on the margin, MCs from historically marginalized and dominant groups can make different assumptions about how they are being held accountable for certain types of policymaking.

One potential explanation for these results is that Democratic constituents engaged in motivated reasoning might be willing to accept any reason to approve more highly of copartisan MCs—either based on ascriptive or ideological identity—and when confronted with ideological incongruence, ascriptive congruence becomes a reason to approve more highly of MCs. If this were the case, then the figure 2 estimates for identity congruence would be driven by respondents with copartisan MCs. In appendix K, I demonstrate that my findings are neither primarily driven by nor limited to copartisan MCs.

Another potential explanation for leeway observed among Democrats is that Democrats might have a preference for a more inclusive government (Badas and Stauffer 2022; Stauffer 2021). Democratic constituents who prefer a more diverse Congress might be less willing to punish women and POC MCs. Men and whites in the Democratic Party would be gaining symbolic benefits from inclusion of their outgroups in government. However, this explanation and Democrats' resistance to incorporating negative information about groups with which they have formed positive connections are not mutually exclusive.

This ideological leeway could also depend on who constituents view as the members who best embody their party. Specifically, Ahler and Sood (2018) have shown that constituents perceive the Democratic Party to include a smaller percentage of whites than it does. Respondents in the CCES could view POC MCs as the archetype of the party, assigning those who fit their expectations of the Democratic mold higher approval ratings, regardless of whether or not they align with constituents ideologically. This is consistent with the theory presented in this article: certain ascriptive identities result in higher approval for MCs as attitudes about these identity groups shift, which can include attitudes about how these groups now represent the party.

Evidence consistent with the hypothesized theoretical mechanism

In this section, I provide suggestive evidence to rule out two explanations and support a third for why attitudes toward women and POC MCs now differ more by respondents' party affiliation than by their own gender or racial identity. These findings are consistent with my argument that shifting attitudes toward women and POC MCs results, in part, from broader changes in constituents' attitudes about gender and racial identities. I demonstrate that higher approval for MCs from historically marginalized groups cannot be explained by either the effectiveness of women and POC MCs or greater perceptions of ideological closeness to these MCs over time. Rather, consistent with Democrats' increasingly positive attitudes toward women and racial minorities, I find that racial resentment and hostile sexism contribute to the relationship between identity congruence and MC approval.

Ruling out the Jackie Robinson effect. Anzia and Berry (2011) introduce the idea of the Jackie Robinson effect, which operates as follows. Women might anticipate discrimination when considering running for office, which leads to only the most qualified women running. This results in a pool of highly qualified women and less qualified men, leading to more effective women in office. More effective representatives might receive higher approval ratings.

There are several reasons, however, why this does not explain the results (in the interest of space, I address these reasons in more depth in app. L). First, if constituents are assigning women and POC MCs approval advantages based on their effectiveness, controlling for a measure of MC effectiveness in the models presented in table 1 should reduce the magnitude and significance of the effects among Democrats. I reestimate equation 1 with an added control for MC effectiveness (Volden and Wiseman 2020) and find no significant changes in the effects of identity congruence on MC approval. Second, this alternative explanation cannot account for why we see these patterns differing over time. I reestimate the yearly effects with effectiveness added as a control, again finding no difference. To be more certain that changing effectiveness is not resulting in changing attitudes about identity groups, I plot effectiveness in each year for each identity subgroup in Congress, which results in no consistent change over time in effectiveness. Finally, for the Jackie Robinson effect to plausibly explain the over-time results, discrimination against women and POC candidates would have to be getting sharply worse over time in the Democratic Party, but racial and gender attitudes have actually become more liberal in the Democratic Party (Engelhardt 2021; Schaffner 2022). Moreover, several scholars have provided evidence of decreasing overt discrimination on the basis of race and gender (e.g., Dolan 2014; Hajnal 2001; Lawless and Pearson 2008).

Perceived ideological closeness. Might the advantage provided to women and POC MCs in the Democratic Party and

null effects in the Republican Party be a result of constituents' misperceptions about MCs' ideologies that are dependent on those MCs' ascriptive identities? For example, POC constituents might be more likely to think that POC MCs are ideologically congruent. Constituents could believe that their interests are better represented by MCs of certain identity groups because they perceive those groups to have substantive preferences that match their own (Mansbridge 1999). On average, women and POC are not only stereotyped as more liberal than male and white politicians, but they also do generally hold more liberal views (Karl and Ryan 2016; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). If the Democratic Party is becoming more liberal, POC and women MCs could become more attractive to the general Democratic constituency, not only voters who share their ascriptive identities. Among Republicans, if POC and women MCs' identities signal liberal ideology, and this is the primary metric by which constituents evaluate their MCs, we would expect to see a decline in approval for these groups as Republicans become more conservative.

Estimates in appendix G, comparing the effects of perceived ideological congruence and issue-based ideological congruence, and results in figure 1 are initially inconsistent with this explanation. Appendix G tables demonstrate that the effects of issue-based and identity-based ideological congruence are similar, which suggests that stereotyping MCs, specifically women MCs and MCs of color as more operationally liberal than comparable men and white MCs, is not contributing to the high approval of these MCs in the Democratic Party. Additionally, figure 1 shows neither an increase nor decrease in the approval ratings given to POC and women MCs among Republican respondents, demonstrating perceptions about certain identity groups being more liberal have not caused an increasingly conservative party to give lower approval ratings these groups.

To more directly assess whether ascriptive identity is associated with how respondents perceive ideology, and whether this influences attitudes about MCs, I evaluate how close constituents perceive themselves to be to both identity ingroup and outgroup MCs across the years in the dataset. If the perception of distance to MCs' ideologies does not shift from year to year, this is evidence to suggest that approval shifts across years are not dependent on Democratic constituents perceiving themselves to be closer to POC and women MCs over time. In appendix M, I plot the difference in average perceived ideological congruence between constituents with women/POC MCs and constituents with men/white MCs for each year to identify whether constituents perceive themselves to be closer to one set of MCs and whether this shifts across Congresses. I show that among all Republicans, there are no clear trends. Perceived closeness does not align with the average lack

of advantage or disadvantage to women or POC MCs, suggesting perceptions of closeness are not contributing to approval ratings among Republicans. Among all Democrats with Democratic MCs, I show there is no significant change in perceived closeness to MCs from historically marginalized groups. The same is true for Democratic POC and whites with Republican POC MCs. However, men and women Democrats with Republican women MCs do perceive these MCs to be significantly closer to them ideologically than they do male MCs in the Republican Party. Recall that the leeway Democratic men give to women MCs they perceived as ideologically incongruent is driven in part by evaluations of Republican women MCs. Here, identity might signal that female Republicans are closer ideologically to Democrats than male Republicans are. Generally, though, identity does not increase perceptions of ideological congruence (i.e., women and POC MCs receive greater leeway independent of what their ascriptive identity signals about ideology).

Racial and gender attitudes. Other patterns in the data are more consistent with the idea that diverging attitudes about race and gender between the two parties are responsible, in part, for the patterns I find. In particular, I show that racial and gender attitudes are predictive of the effects of identity congruence. Select years of the CCES include measures of racial resentment and hostile sexism. I generate two indices from these measures to evaluate the role of racial prejudice and gender discrimination.[21] I regress MC approval on an interaction between the racial/gender congruence indicator and racial resentment/hostile sexism measure with the same additional specifications as in equation 1. Despite many limitations of these measures, I present suggestive evidence in table 2 that low-resentment/low-hostility voters express greater favoritism of POC and women MCs than high-resentment/high-hostility voters. Negative estimates for all respondents indicate that higher resentment and sexism scores are associated with lower approval ratings for POC/women MCs relative to white/men MCs. The negative sign on the interaction term

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21. I interpret these estimates with caution because (1) racial resentment asks about Black Americans—I look at all POC MCs, (2) racial resentment and political ideology are difficult to disentangle (Peyton and Huber 2021), (3) several years only include some indicators of racial resentment or none (Agadjanian 2022), (4) hostile sexism measures are only included for 2018 and 2020, (5) the indices are not comprised of the same questions in every year, and (6) other measures of attitudes toward women do not follow the same polarizing trends as hostile sexism over time, and the results might be distinct for a separate measure, like modern sexism (see Archer and Kam 2021).

Table 2. Effects of MC Race/Gender and Racial Resentment/Hostile Sexism on MC Approval

Panel A: Racial Resentment	(1) Democratic White Respondents	(2) Democratic POC Respondents	(3) Republican White Respondents	(4) Republican POC Respondents
POC MC × racial resentment	−.158***	−.097***	−.241***	−.347***
	(.017)	(.018)	(.030)	(.043)
District × MC party FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Congress FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	80,449	36,085	85,343	11,125

Panel B: Hostile Sexism	(1) Democratic Men Respondents	(2) Democratic Women Respondents	(3) Republican Men Respondents	(4) Republican Women Respondents
Woman MC × hostile sexism	−.146***	−.109***	−.003	−.047
	(.029)	(.020)	(.030)	(.030)
District × MC party FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Congress FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	19,093	30,139	18,506	19,055

Note. The models presented in this table regress MC approval on the interaction between the indicator for POC/woman MC and a measure of racial resentment/hostile sexism (composed of questions available from the CCES from 2010 to 2020 for racial resentment and 2016 to 2018 for hostile sexism). The models include district × MC party and Congress FEs and controls for MC seniority and MC gender/race. Standard errors are clustered at the district level for weighted CCES data. All coefficients are presented in appendix N.
+ $p < .1$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

informs us that the relationship between racial resentment/hostile sexism and approval is weaker for white/men MCs than for POC/women MCs. Specifically, as racial resentment increases, approval decreases more for POC MCs relative to white MCs, and as hostile sexism increases, approval decreases more for women MCs than for men MCs. These attitudes do not explain the entirety of the results, but they do account for some of the relationship found between identity congruence and MC approval ratings. This analysis presents evidence to suggest that the shift in gender and racial attitudes is likely to be one of the mechanisms driving the Democrats to focus more on ascriptive identity in their evaluations. I leave this possibility for other scholars to explore in greater depth.

Further robustness checks

I conduct a series of additional analyses to (1) assess the robustness of the findings to alternative codings of the main variables, (2) assess the plausibility of parallel trends, and (3) evaluate whether identity affects behavior in addition to attitudes. I include more in-depth discussions and the associated tables and figures in the appendix.

First, the party variable used in the main analysis includes party leaners, so I use an alternative party variable excluding leaners and find that the magnitude and standard errors of the effects are nearly identical for the leaner and nonleaner sets of models (app. O). Second, I generate two additional MC approval variables with "don't know"/skipped responses coded as "NA" (missing values) and the mean. These alternative versions of MC approval also produce almost identical results (app. P). Third, to interpret the estimates as causal, the assumption of parallel trends must be satisfied. While this assumption is not directly testable, a placebo test with lag and lead versions of the identity congruence variables provides suggestive evidence of parallel trends (app. E). A second placebo test with senator approval as the dependent variable provides additional evidence of parallel trends. And a final placebo test with senator approval as the dependent variable in the ideological congruence models provides more evidence to satisfy the assumption of parallel trends. A co-identity MC should not affect senator approval unless identity-congruent MCs improve respondents' overall view of politicians. The results presented in appendix figures E2 and E3 reveal that MC identity congruence has no consistent effect on senator

approval. Finally, MC approval reveals respondents' attitudes, not their behavior. As others have shown (e.g., Henderson et al. 2021; Lawless 2004), these attitudes often do not translate into electoral behavior because MC partisanship is a much more powerful predictor of vote choice than MC identity. In appendix Q, I provide suggestive evidence that identity congruence has neither a positive nor negative effect on whether a respondent voted for their current MC in the last election.

CONCLUSION

This article brings into conversation the expansive literatures on descriptive representation and partisan polarization. Voters' more positive attitudes toward descriptively representative politicians are, in part, dependent on the symbolic benefits of being represented by members of a group with which voters have positive associations. I argue that when citizens develop positive connections with identity groups that are not their own, this can translate into improved evaluations of representatives from identity outgroups. There is evidence that exactly this might be occurring in contemporary American politics: scholars of polarization have found that Democrats and Republicans are diverging from one another on multiple dimensions, including in their attitudes toward historically marginalized racial and gender groups (e.g., Schaffner 2022). In this context, my theory predicts that the effects of representatives' racial and gender identities on constituents' evaluations of them varies now more by party than by constituents' own ascriptive identities. Using CCES survey responses and MC characteristics from 2008 to 2020, I show that Democratic women, men, POC, and white respondents approve more highly of women and POC MCs than men and white MCs, and these positive evaluations increase over time. Among Republican respondents, there is a general indifference about MC identity when assigning approval ratings. Instead, the effect of ideological congruence is stronger among Republicans than among Democrats. These results demonstrate that, under certain conditions, our prior understanding of attitudes about descriptive representation can be upended. Importantly, when these conditions are only present in one party, we observe a partisan divergence in the effects of identity on constituents' evaluations of their representatives.

Beyond these initial results, I find that citizens may not only translate more positive affect toward outgroups into higher approval ratings for members of these groups, but they can also resist incorporating information inconsistent with their positive views. Specifically, Democratic men, whites, and POC give higher approval ratings to ideologically incongruent women and POC MCs than to comparable men and white MCs, demonstrating their resistance to issuing identical penalties to historically marginalized and dominant groups. Among Republicans, the effects of ideological incongruence are mostly unaffected by identity congruence. Thus, different relationships of accountability emerge in the two parties.

There are, however, several limitations to the analyses. First, I study attitudes, not behavior. It is possible that the effects found, particularly those for Democrats, could be expressive. Enthusiasm for a woman or POC MC might be expressed in survey responses, but in the voting booth or donations, these preferences might not be reflected (e.g., Grumbach and Sahn 2020). Second, I do not address questions about intersectionality. Multiple identities might interact to generate different outcomes. The number of MCs who are both women and POC in the House is limited, which severely restricts my ability to analyze the effects of intersectional identities, but several scholars have begun to explore how intersectional identities affect attitudes and behavior (e.g., Lemi 2022; Montoya et al. 2022). Third, the attitudes I study are restricted to approval ratings, potentially omitting how identity affects other political attitudes. Specifically, identity might influence Republicans' political attitudes in ways not related to the effects of descriptive representation on MC approval. Therefore, these results do not suggest that Republicans' political attitudes are unaffected by identity, but rather that in this context, identity operates differently for the two parties. Fourth, if whites and men in the Democratic Party now have more stable positive attitudes toward historically marginalized groups, we could expect these results to endure, but if attitude shifts are a result of more strategic action (e.g., men considering women more electable to counter gender appeals in the Trump era), we might question whether these trends are temporary. While this is beyond the scope of the data, it is worth considering how the theory might apply post-Trump. Fifth, the analyses are limited to the United States, but scholars should consider how this theory could extend to other country contexts.

One final limitation to the analysis is that I only explore attitudes toward sitting politicians, not toward nonincumbent candidates or challengers. However, attitudes about sitting politicians are still important: they demonstrate how people feel about the government officials currently serving them. At a time with high levels of disaffection with the government, it is important to know when and why people are happy with politicians. Questions of electoral outcomes are important though, beyond these attitudinal shifts, and therefore, other research should continue to explore the effects of identity in elections as well.

These caveats notwithstanding, I find that polarization has disrupted what scholars of descriptive representation have accepted for over a decade. While I partially replicate the pattern that Americans evaluate identity-congruent representatives more positively in the 2000s, I show that these trends

dramatically changed in the 2010s, with Democrats from all backgrounds now approving more highly of women and POC representatives than their male and white counterparts in office. The effects among Democrats differ from those among Republican constituents, who place less value on identity congruence when evaluating their representatives. Moreover, Democrats' positive attitudes toward marginalized groups have translated into resistance to punishing these members for ideological incongruence to the same extent that men and white representatives are penalized. Together, these results demonstrate how increasing partisan polarization relates to both what the parties value in representation and how historically marginalized groups are evaluated in office.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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