

## CHAPTER 1

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# Representation, Spending, and the Personal Vote

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT HOW POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OCCURS on government spending decisions—one of the most consequential powers of government. The Constitution empowers Congress to “pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general welfare of the United States.” Federal spending has a pervasive influence—impacting nearly every aspect of American life. How Congress allocates money affects the quality of infrastructure in American cities, the availability of health care in rural towns, and the provision of affordable housing across the country. Spending helps guard against harm—helping local governments prepare for natural disasters, protect against crime and fire, and deter terror attacks. It also sustains a powerful military, a network of federal law enforcement officials, and the flow of commerce and citizens across international borders. Government spending buoys local economies and even supports universities with funding for research.

Political representation in Congress is, in large part, about how elected officials decide how to spend federal money. While a large literature analyzes how district expenditures affect support for congressional incumbents it remains unclear how constituents hold legislators accountable for expenditures—how constituents attribute spending to legislators, how constituents evaluate those expenditures, and how constituents reward or punish legislators for spending on projects.<sup>1</sup> One reason for this lack of clarity is that constituents are unlikely to learn about the projects on their own. Constituents’ inability to track spending is not an indictment of their democratic competence. Instead, it reflects the many activities representatives perform and the subtle ways that federal expenditures occur. Constituents lack the time, capacity, and incentives to carefully track what their representatives do in Congress to direct spending to the district. Even when spending reaches the district, it is difficult for constituents to attribute that spending to their representative. Projects in the district often do not have an obvious connection to the federal government.<sup>2</sup> And even if constituents do recognize that a project in the

<sup>1</sup> Stein and Bickers (1994); Levitt and Snyder (1997); Lazarus (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Mettler (2011).

district comes from the federal government, they may fail to link the project to their representatives.<sup>3</sup>

Constituents' inattention to spending creates a problem for representatives. Legislators want to use spending to bolster their standing in the district, but inattentive constituents are unlikely to learn about expenditures on their own. Political scientists have long argued that legislators use federal expenditures to cultivate support with their constituents and build a personal vote—support based on neither partisan affiliation nor ideological agreement.<sup>4</sup> For spending to have a direct effect on constituent support, constituents must at least know that the spending has occurred in the district. But legislators also want constituents to attribute the spending to the representative and to view the spending as beneficial to the district.

Representatives solve this problem with communication—turning the problem of constituent inattention into an opportunity to receive credit for much more than just spending as it occurs in the district. Legislators use credit claiming messages—statements intended to “generate a belief” that a representative is responsible for spending in the district—as part of a broad marketing campaign to ensure that constituents learn about spending projects in the district and attribute responsibility to their representatives.<sup>5</sup> The goal is to create an impression of influence over expenditures—a reputation of being effective at delivering money to the district. To do this, members of Congress issue press releases announcing new projects, send newsletters to describe work done in Washington to secure expenditures, make appearances at groundbreaking ceremonies as projects begin, and cut ribbons when projects are finished.

We show that this marketing effort is effective. Using a large collection of political texts, a series of experiments, and extensive case studies, we demonstrate that legislators' credit claiming affects constituent credit allocation and leads to a personal vote. To demonstrate how legislators claim credit for spending we analyze a large new collection of House press releases. We show that legislators strategically vary their association with spending, depending on their incentives to cultivate a personal vote. Representatives who need the support of independents and opposing partisans to win elections engage in higher rates of credit claiming than legislators who can rely on the support of copartisans to win election. When claiming credit for spending, legislators lay claim to a broad set of activities and grants. Representatives do claim credit for expenditures as they occur in the district, but members of Congress also

<sup>3</sup> Kriner and Reeves (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Fiorina (1977); Fenno (1978); Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987).

<sup>5</sup> Mayhew (1974).

claim credit for expenditures they had only an indirect role in securing and expenditures that are unlikely to reach the district soon. And they tend to claim credit for relatively small projects in their district.

Constituents are responsive to legislators' credit claiming efforts. Using a series of experiments, we show that constituents evaluate the actions that legislators report performing and are responsive to who receives the funding. The result is that constituents reward legislators for work throughout the expenditure process—even if the expenditures have yet to be secured, will be delivered only to the district in the distant future, and even if constituents recognize the project has only a small chance of actually occurring. But constituents are largely unresponsive to the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. Even large increases in the size of expenditures cause only slight increases in support for legislators.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process we characterize helps explain the institutions that disburse federal funds. We show legislators value the mere opportunity to announce expenditures—even if they had only an indirect role in securing the expenditure. Bureaucrats at competitive grant programs recognize this and create opportunities for legislators to announce expenditures. Legislators take advantage of the opportunities, using subtle language to imply that they are responsible for expenditures—even though they never literally claim credit for the project. Constituents allocate credit in response to the messages, inferring that legislators are responsible for the spending. And, in turn, representatives support the grant programs when their budgets are threatened.

We also show that the value of credit claiming is contingent on what other political actors say about spending. We show that after the election of Barack Obama congressional Republicans decreased their credit claiming rate and instead criticized government expenditures. The criticism undermines other legislators' credit claiming efforts—it dampens constituents' response to messages, creates opposition to spending programs, and even affects constituents' attitudes about prior credit claiming efforts.

We demonstrate how representation occurs around federal spending. It occurs through a dynamic process, with legislators anticipating how constituents will react to particular kinds of messages, constituents rewarding legislators for their credit claiming statements, and other actors attempting to affect how legislators cultivate this support.<sup>6</sup> Because legislators are entrepreneurial and anticipate constituents' reactions, constituents are able to exercise indirect control over their legislator,

<sup>6</sup> Mansbridge (2003); Disch (2012).

making it possible for legislators to be responsive to their constituents and creating conditions for democratic accountability.<sup>7</sup> The form of this control, however, is distinct from the usual notions of control and accountability in ideological representation.<sup>8</sup> A large literature seeks to measure how well legislators align with constituents' stated political preferences. This literature provides insights into how well legislators adopt constituent preferences, but is a less useful framework for studying representation around spending. It is less useful because constituents are unlikely to have the strong preferences over spending necessary to be located in ideological space. Rather than reacting to clearly articulated preferences, legislators anticipate constituents' reactions to credit claiming messages. And because legislators want to cultivate support, they will attempt to deliver and claim credit for projects popular with constituents. The result of the process is that constituents can have their underlying preferences enacted in the expenditure process.<sup>9</sup> But the process also creates new challenges for assessing the quality of representation and reveals new risks in representation. The risks arise because legislators may fool constituents, which may make it difficult for constituents to hold legislators accountable for actual spending that occurs in the district. And if we prioritize the reasoned exchange of ideas, we may criticize legislators for deceiving constituents.<sup>10</sup> But the potential benefits may outweigh the risks. Legislators' deceptions of constituents can lead to more efficient spending decisions and create incentives for legislators to work harder throughout the appropriations process.

The findings in this book provide an expansive characterization of how legislators claim credit for spending and how this affects constituent credit allocation. To do this, we make use of new data, introduce new statistical techniques, and deploy new experimental designs. To measure how legislators claim credit for spending, we use a new collection of nearly 170,000 House press releases—every press release from each House office from 2005 to 2010. To measure the content of the press releases, we use text as data methods, providing efficient means for identifying press releases that claim credit for spending. To uncover the effects of the credit claiming statements we introduce new experimental designs that enable us to isolate how features of legislators' credit claiming messages affect constituent credit allocation. We embed the experiments in surveys but also use more realistic settings to replicate how constituents may actually encounter credit claiming messages.

<sup>7</sup> Ashworth (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Miller and Stokes (1963); Achen (1978); Bafumi and Herron (2010).

<sup>9</sup> Arnold (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Kant (1983); Gutmann and Thompson (1996); Applbaum (1999); Mansbridge (2003).

When legislators engage in credit claiming they cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures and build a personal vote with constituents. To illustrate how this process works, and how legislators use credit claiming as part of a broader rhetorical strategy, we examine how one representative, Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin, used credit claiming to bolster support in South Dakota—and how this credit claiming became a liability when she was attacked by an antispending Republican.

### 1.1 CREATING A PERSONAL VOTE WITH CREDIT CLAIMING

In 2002, Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin—a Democrat from South Dakota—narrowly lost election to the state’s lone seat in the House of Representatives to Bill Jankalow, who was serving as governor. But Herseth-Sandlin would soon have an opportunity to claim the seat—Jankalow was forced to resign after a vehicular manslaughter conviction. Herseth-Sandlin ran and won in the June 2004 special election over Larry Diedrich, securing 51% of the vote, and beat Diedrich again in the fall, expanding her support to 53% of the vote. By winning the November election, Herseth-Sandlin would join the 109th Congress as South Dakota’s lone representative in the House, equipped with the power of incumbency and a full term in office to expand her electoral base.

To use the office to build support, however, Herseth-Sandlin would need to be responsive to her constituents—and in particular to moderates who supported the Republican Party in national elections. While South Dakota voters tend to elect both Democrats and Republicans to Congress, the state is solidly Republican in presidential elections. Recent elections have seen dismal returns for Democratic presidential candidates—John Kerry carried only 39.1% of the two-party vote in 2004 and Barack Obama won only 45.9% of the vote in 2008 and 39% in 2012. The recent results are in line with a long historical trend: since 1932 only two Democratic presidential candidate have won the state. The election results reflect the ideological views of South Dakota voters, who are known as morally conservative, agrarian, and pragmatic. And polls confirm a sizable Republican advantage in party identification: over 47% of the state identifies as Republican, while 38% identify as Democratic.<sup>11</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin would also need to maintain the support of her Democratic base, many of whom reside on Indian reservations in some

<sup>11</sup> Jones (2011).

of the poorest parts of America. For example, Shannon County, which contains the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, is the most Democratic county in the country, with over 90% of the voters supporting Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. It is also one of the poorest counties: it has a median household income around \$25,000 and over 53% of the residents fall below the federal poverty line.<sup>12</sup> Other Democratic counties in the state have a similar profile. They contain impoverished reservations, full of Democratic voters who reside in towns that need federal funds to sustain local services.

To cultivate support among both the poor Democrats in her base and the independents necessary to bolster her appeal, Herseth-Sandlin cultivated an impression of influence—creating a reputation as effective at delivering money to the district. Herseth-Sandlin would regularly appear in the district, issue statements from her office, and distribute newsletters to make sure that constituents attributed spending to her. To create a reputation for being effective at delivering money to the district, Herseth-Sandlin made use of a broad set of expenditures at many different stages in the appropriations process. She sometimes claimed credit for expenditures as construction on a project began. For example, Herseth-Sandlin attended a groundbreaking ceremony for a \$29 million renovation of the South Dakota National Guard Headquarters. At the ceremony, Herseth-Sandlin praised the investment, stating that “it represents an eye towards the future.”<sup>13</sup> She also claimed credit for spending that was still far from reaching the state—including a \$1.3 million earmark to improve an airfield that had only recently passed in the House,<sup>14</sup> and money for the South Dakota School of Mines in a recently passed House bill.<sup>15</sup> Herseth-Sandlin also claimed credit for projects even further from the district, projects that had been approved only by the Appropriations Committee. For example, she used a press release to announce “that significant funding for several South Dakota priorities has passed the House Appropriations Committee,” though they had not yet been voted on by the full House.<sup>16</sup> Other times, Herseth-Sandlin claimed credit for merely requesting that funding be directed to the state. One newspaper story describes how she asked for \$150 million in funds to manage forests in South Dakota. Herseth-Sandlin justified the requested expenditure, arguing that “[u]sing even a small portion of the Forests Service’s...funds for the timber program will help to create jobs

<sup>12</sup> Census (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Kokesh (2009).

<sup>14</sup> Herseth-Sandlin (2009*a*).

<sup>15</sup> Herseth (2006*b*).

<sup>16</sup> Herseth (2005*b*).

in rural areas, cut down on catastrophic wildfires and promote healthy forests.”<sup>17</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin also implied that she deserved credit for expenditures that she had only an indirect role in securing, regularly claiming credit for money allocated through executive branch grant programs. This included funds to bolster firefighting at the Rapid City airport<sup>18</sup> and money to “help ensure access to health care in rural communities in South Dakota.”<sup>19</sup> Herseth-Sandlin also regularly shared the credit for projects with her Senate colleagues Tim Johnson and John Thune<sup>20</sup> and with high-ranking officials from the presidential administration.<sup>21</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin was particularly attentive to money allocated to Indian reservations, the poorest and most Democratic counties in South Dakota. When claiming credit for projects on reservations, she clarified her goal of improving her constituents’ well-being. For example, she claimed credit for \$3 million for housing on an Indian reservation, arguing that the expenditure was needed because “affordable housing is a critical component in the development and prosperity of tribal communities.”<sup>22</sup> Herseth-Sandlin articulated a similar goal when announcing new highway funds for some Indian reservations—arguing that “the funding for Wakpa Sica and St. Joseph’s Indian School, as well as the paving of an important highway through the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, are key investments in Indian Country.”<sup>23</sup> And when claiming credit for securing “critical funding for Indian country” in a bill that passed the House, she argued that “funding in this legislation will improve infrastructure on reservations and assist with economic development efforts by attracting investment to Indian Country.”<sup>24</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin also claimed credit for many other types of expenditures in order to cultivate support with residents throughout South Dakota. She claimed credit for law enforcement expenditures, including “more than \$5 million to hire, retain 30 police officers”<sup>25</sup> and “\$250,000 for Methamphetamine Awareness and Prevention Project.”<sup>26</sup> She also claimed credit for infrastructure improvements, including \$22 million for the Lewis and Clark Water Project and \$32 million for the

<sup>17</sup> Staff (2010*b*).

<sup>18</sup> Staff (2009*a*).

<sup>19</sup> Herseth (2005*a*).

<sup>20</sup> Herseth (2006*a*).

<sup>21</sup> Staff and Press (2009).

<sup>22</sup> Herseth-Sandlin (2009*b*).

<sup>23</sup> Herseth (2006*c*).

<sup>24</sup> Herseth-Sandlin (2009*d*).

<sup>25</sup> Herseth-Sandlin (2009*c*).

<sup>26</sup> Herseth (2005*c*).

Mni Wiconi project. Herseth-Sandlin explained that the projects were vital, because “[t]he importance of a clean, reliable source of drinking water to rural economies can not be overstated.”<sup>27</sup> She claimed credit for funds that would help her constituents during the winter. In one press release, she “announced...more than \$629,000 specifically for heating communities in South Dakota,”<sup>28</sup> and in another she “announced that South Dakota will receive an additional \$620,264 in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.”<sup>29</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin used public statements, appearances, and press releases to make the case that she was an effective advocate for South Dakota. This was part of Herseth-Sandlin’s broader strategy in Congress to appeal to independents and moderate Republicans. As a Blue-Dog Democrat she often voted against her party. She declared publicly that “I’ve worked with both political parties. I’ve stood up to both political parties to do what’s right for South Dakota.”<sup>30</sup> After her reelection in 2006 she declared that her win is “an affirmation of the idea that South Dakotans expect and deserve representation from the center, not the ideological extremes.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Herseth-Sandlin’s nonpartisan reputation was so effective that local newspapers would occasionally misidentify her as a Republican.<sup>32</sup>

Herseth-Sandlin’s strategy worked for her first two terms in office. Her base of support grew in the 2006 and 2008 elections, capturing over 67% of the vote in both elections. Exit polls in the 2008 election reveal how effectively she grew her support. She maintained her high level of support among Democrats—securing 94% of the vote—while also securing 72% of the independent vote and even 40% of the Republican vote.<sup>33</sup> After she outperformed Obama by almost 23 percentage points in the 2008 election, political pundits viewed Herseth-Sandlin’s seat as safe for the upcoming midterm elections.

But Herseth-Sandlin’s strength—a reputation for delivering federal money to her state—would become a liability in the 2010 midterm elections. After Barack Obama’s election in 2008, the Republican base and political elites mobilized in opposition to stimulus-spending measures and proposed policy reforms—such as the Affordable Care Act, financial reform, and cap-and-trade environmental regulations. Tea Party Republicans attacked Democrats for expenditures arguing that the

<sup>27</sup> Herseth (2006*a*).

<sup>28</sup> Herseth (2006*d*).

<sup>29</sup> Herseth-Sandlin (2008).

<sup>30</sup> Brokaw (2010).

<sup>31</sup> Lammers (2006).

<sup>32</sup> Staff (2006*a*).

<sup>33</sup> Staff (2008).



particularistic district spending was wasteful—an attempt to undermine the value of spending to cultivate a personal vote.

In the 2010 midterm elections Herseth-Sandlin faced Kristi Noem, a South Dakota legislator and Tea Party member. Noem’s campaign worked to undermine Herseth-Sandlin’s reputation as a nonpartisan advocate for South Dakota. Undermining Herseth-Sandlin’s image as a moderate legislator, Noem portrayed Herseth-Sandlin as a liberal who supported Nancy Pelosi. At one debate, Noem asked Herseth-Sandlin, “In 2005 you voted for Nancy Pelosi [for speaker], again in 2007, and again in 2009. If you had the opportunity to represent South Dakota again in the House, would you vote for Nancy Pelosi again?” At the same time, Noem attacked Herseth-Sandlin for contributing to “out of control” spending in Washington. Noem’s campaign regularly remarked that Herseth-Sandlin was far from a fiscal conservative and that “South Dakotans are frustrated with politicians in Washington spending like there is no tomorrow.”<sup>34</sup> Noem’s attacks forced Herseth-Sandlin to work even harder to portray herself as a moderate. And this further eroded Herseth-Sandlin’s already diminished support among the relatively small group of liberal South Dakotans. At a McGovern Day event—an annual event for the South Dakota Democratic party—several audience members refused to hold Herseth-Sandlin signs, to protest her increasingly moderate positions.<sup>35</sup>

Noem’s campaign was successful—securing a narrow 7,000-vote margin of victory over Herseth-Sandlin. Noem’s victory—and Herseth-Sandlin’s attempts to hold her seat during an election that favored Republicans—reveals trade-offs in how legislators can use particularistic spending to cultivate support. Legislators can engage in credit claiming to cultivate support with poor constituents and opposing partisan voters. But this risks alienating ideological partisans. And claiming credit for spending also creates a risk that a legislator will be portrayed as fiscally irresponsible and undermines her ability to use credit claiming to cultivate support.

## 1.2 THE IMPRESSION OF INFLUENCE: PREVIEWING OUR ARGUMENT

Herseth-Sandlin’s broad credit claiming efforts are indicative of how legislators create an impression of influence over expenditures and how representation occurs around federal spending. Across congressional districts the credit claiming occurs regularly. We characterize legislator

<sup>34</sup> Palmer (2010).

<sup>35</sup> Woster (2010).

credit claiming across all House members—that is, how often legislators claim credit for spending, what they claim credit for obtaining, and how much legislators obtain. We then use a series of experiments to show how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages—demonstrating how constituents are responsive to the actions that legislators report, but are less responsive to the amount that legislators claim credit for securing. We show how this process matters for the way the federal government spends money, demonstrating how legislators support grant programs because they provide the opportunity to announce expenditures. We also show how criticism of federal expenditures undermines the value of credit claiming.

Our findings have broad implications for the political economy of government spending, the design of political institutions, and political representation in Congress. In this section we preview our argument and the evidence for our conclusions that legislators cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures with credit claiming messages and this leads to a personal vote.

In Chapter 2 we explain when strategic legislators will associate themselves with spending and how constituents are likely to allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages. The complicated appropriations process makes it nearly impossible for constituents, on their own, to track their legislators' activities. This complexity creates a need for legislators to explain their work to constituents. Reelection-oriented legislators face a trade-off between adopting a nonpartisan reputation as an effective advocate for the district or cultivating an image as a partisan who effectively advocates for their party. As a result, who legislators represent affects how legislators balance these considerations in their public messages. Constituents are responsive to legislators' credit claiming efforts, but lack both the context and the information necessary to be responsive to the amount legislators claim credit for securing. Instead, constituents will seize on information they are better equipped to evaluate: the action legislators report, the recipient of the expenditure, and the purported benefits.

In Chapter 3 we characterize legislators' credit claiming efforts, demonstrating how often legislators claim credit for spending, what legislators claim credit for securing, and the amount legislators tout. We develop accurate measures of legislators' credit claiming rates and then show how legislators' credit claiming strategies reflect the types of districts they represent. Legislators with the greatest incentive to cultivate a personal vote claim credit more often than colleagues who can win reelection with appeals to their partisan base. We also illuminate how members of Congress claim credit broadly and not just for money that is earmarked during the appropriations process. This behavior

includes claiming credit for requests made during the appropriations process even if the expenditures only have a small chance of actually reaching the district. What is more, legislators claim credit for more than funds earmarked during the appropriations process. They also claim credit for grants that executive agencies allocate. And legislators claim credit for relatively small amounts of money—often claiming credit for expenditures that appear inconsequential relative to the federal budget.

We then show the distinct effects of legislators' credit claiming messages. In Chapter 4 we demonstrate that legislators' credit claiming efforts do more than simply bolster name recognition—they also cultivate an impression of influence over federal funds. We report the results of an experiment conducted on a major social media website—a setting where constituents regularly receive messages like the ones we use in our experiment from their member of Congress. Using our experimental design, we show that credit claiming messages do make constituents more familiar with their representative, but the credit claiming messages also lead constituents to infer that their legislator is more effective at delivering money to the district. The result is that credit claiming messages cause a larger increase in overall support than other types of messages.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how credit claiming messages cause this larger increase in support. We present the results of a series of experiments that show constituents are more responsive to the action that legislators report and the type of expenditure they claim and less responsive to the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. Constituents allocate nearly identical credit for securing an expenditure during the appropriations process and merely requesting an expenditure. This support occurs even though constituents believe that money that has already been secured is more likely to reach the district. Constituents are responsive to the type of expenditure legislators claim credit for securing, but are generally unresponsive even to large increases in the amount of money allocated to a project. In an experiment conducted over several days, we show that increasing the number of credit claiming messages legislators send has a much larger effect on constituent credit allocation than increasing the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. We then provide evidence that the processes documented in our experiments occur with actual representatives. Using legislators' actual credit claiming rates, we show that legislators with higher rates of credit claiming are evaluated as more effective at delivering money to the district.

Legislators, therefore, have reason to value the opportunity to claim credit for spending, even if they are unable to influence the disbursement of funds. In Chapter 6 we show how legislators—with the help of a subtle linguistic deception and strategic bureaucrats—claim credit for

grants that the representative had only an indirect role in securing. Bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities to cultivate support for their program, particularly when the bureaucrats are otherwise unable to manipulate grant decisions. Legislators take advantage of the opportunity to announce the expenditure, while never explicitly taking credit. We use an experiment to show this linguistic deception is effective, leading constituents to believe that legislators who only “announce” a grant are responsible for securing it. Once we reveal that legislators are only implying they deserve credit, however, legislators’ credit is decimated. The credit claiming opportunities are also effective for bureaucrats because members of Congress take advantage of the opportunities to defend the agency when their budget is threatened.

Legislators use rhetoric to ensure they receive credit from constituents for spending and that constituents evaluate the expenditures positively. This leaves legislators open to attacks from opponents that they are fiscally irresponsible—an attack that has become increasingly common. After Barack Obama’s election, Republican activists mobilized to oppose the Obama administration’s policies and perceived government overreach—creating the Tea Party movement. As we show in Chapter 7, the emergence of the Tea Party movement corresponds with a spike in antispending rhetoric among congressional Republicans, who criticized particularistic projects that other legislators use to cultivate a personal vote. We use two experiments to show how this criticism undermines credit for spending, causing constituents to be much less supportive of expenditures in the district. And we show that the effect of the criticism extends beyond the experiment. Once budget criticism is introduced, it causes constituents to evaluate legislators who claim credit at high rates more negatively.

In Chapter 8 we conclude, examining the implications of our argument for representation. The credit claiming, credit allocation process we characterize enables accountability, but it also forces us to reconsider our priorities in representation and how we might privilege transparent communication at the expense of efficient policy outcomes, and vice versa. If we prioritize truthful and transparent discussion, then the credit claiming, credit allocation process is problematic. We also suggest some reforms in reporting and congressional credit claiming that could make the process more transparent and limit legislators’ ability to engage in systematic deception. But if we prioritize the consequences of the credit claiming, then the process we describe may work well, by incentivizing legislators to work throughout the appropriations process and ensuring legislators support efficient expenditures. We also explain how our work could be extended, and highlight yet-to-be-answered questions about how legislators build support.

Cumulatively, our evidence demonstrates how legislators claim credit for spending and how constituents respond to those messages in controlled experiments. The use of experiments ensures that our results are internally valid. Throughout the book we also attempt to demonstrate that our results are externally valid—that our text and experimental evidence capture how constituent credit allocation actually occurs. We demonstrate external validity using a variety of evidence. We use survey evidence to link legislators' actual credit claiming rates with constituent credit allocation. This reveals a persistent relationship between legislators' credit claiming rates and constituents' evaluations of their representatives. We also provide evidence about how constituents encounter legislators' messages—both press releases in local newspapers and representatives' posts on social media sites. And finally, we use case studies to illuminate how legislators think they are affecting constituents' beliefs. The evidence we present suggests that the type of process we document in this book occurs broadly. Like other studies in observational social science, we are unable to definitively and conclusively demonstrate the external validity of our findings. But we provide evidence for their external validity and explain why our results are important on their own.

In this book we document how legislators use credit claiming to ensure they receive credit from constituents. Of course, we do not view this as the only way spending may develop support in the district, because some constituents are particularly motivated to track spending decisions. For example, owners of construction companies are likely to track additional highway expenditures, and local elected officials may have more intimate knowledge of local budgets, so they may be more responsive to the size of the grants. Our focus, however, is on the audience for legislators' credit claiming messages—that is, how legislators use credit claiming statements to cultivate broader support with their reelection constituency.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.3 CONCLUSION

The credit claiming, credit allocation process that we describe is at the heart of American political representation. It also reveals the dynamic way in which representation often occurs in a democracy.<sup>37</sup> When legislators engage in this credit claiming, they act as entrepreneurs. They anticipate how constituents will react and attempt to tailor their message to create support. Legislators make the case as to why they are responsible for government actions and why constituents should

<sup>36</sup> Fenno (1978).

<sup>37</sup> Arnold (1992); Mansbridge (2003); Ashworth (2012).

reward the legislator for those actions. Constituents, in turn, evaluate and respond to the messages.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process ensures that constituents exercise control over their legislator's actions, though this is not the reactive control common in quantitative models of ideological political representation.<sup>38</sup> Throughout this book, then, we examine the implications of legislators' entrepreneurial activities for representation and legislators' personal vote. Legislators' marketing efforts enable them to influence the terms of evaluation and to receive credit for activities that constituents might otherwise never associate with a representative. They also create new possibilities for institutional design and risks when politicians criticize spending as wasteful. We begin this examination in the next chapter, where we explain when and how legislators engage in credit claiming and how constituents respond to legislators' credit claiming efforts.

<sup>38</sup> Miller and Stokes (1963).