Leaving Office: The U.S. Senator's Representation, Ideological Adoption, and Strategic Retirement

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Abstract

This study focuses on the incumbent senator's ideological congruence causing strategic retirement in the United States. The extent of ideological congruence between a senator and her constituency can be interpreted as the degree of electoral vulnerability. Senators out of steps with constituents are more likely than those toeing the line with constituents' preferences to choose voluntary retirement over being risk losing the general election. This study finds that senators with legislative records of relatively ideological incongruence to their state ideology will be more likely to decide to retire strategically.

Keywords: U.S. senator, strategic retirement, representation, ideological congruence, constituency, reelection

1. Introduction

Five U.S. senators—Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Dan Coats (R-IN), David Vitter (R-LA), and Harry Reid (D-NV)—surprised political observers by announcing that they would not run for reelection in 2016. Voluntary retirement of politicians is a rarely occurring political event in the United States. As a rule, ambitious politicians seek long political careers. Usually, they do not voluntarily retire without good reason. A sudden surge of voluntary departures from members of the same party, prompts the question as to what happened to them?

This study posits that the ideological vulnerability of incumbent senators, primarily created by ideological congruence, plays a critical role in explaining why some incumbent senators opt for voluntary departure from the U.S. Senate. The assessment of ideological congruence will be relevant to understanding electoral consequences of incumbent senators, because legislative performance by senators in office may structure their electoral prospects. Building on the assertion that a senator's representational link to her constituency interests becomes a critical factor comprising of voters' evaluations on incumbents, we claim that senatorial retirements are attributed to the ideological congruence of incumbent senators.

By voting with the ideological line of constituents, members of Congress are able to enhance their chances of winning the election. However, on liberal-conservative ideological continuum, the incumbent who stands more distant from her constituency ideology is likely to receive less vote shares in the general election. In light of electoral prospects, senators who stray from their constituencies in terms of ideological representation can be thought to be ideologically vulnerable. Following the electoral connection thesis, this study explores ideological congruence between a senator and her constituency that provides the underlying theoretical foundation accounting or a senator's strategic retirement.

More specifically, linking the representational process to electoral prospects, this study focuses on incumbents' ideological congruence causing as a primary reason of strategic retirement. Incumbents can be electorally vulnerable depending on their legislative positions while in office. If senators take legislative positions out of step with their constituents, they will get lower vote shares, even losing reelection (Erikson & Wright, 2000; Canes-Wrone, Brady, & Cogan, 2002; Carson & Engstrom, 2005; Ansolabehere & Jones, 2010; Carson, Koger, Lebo, & Young, 2010; Kassow & Finocchiaro, 2011). In this sense, it is reasonable to believe that the probability that the incumbent decides to retire is largely structured by the probability of electoral success. Incongruent legislative voting behavior may induce incumbents to choose strategic retirement of senators (Schmidt, Kenny, & Morton, 1996), while anticipating electoral losses due to the emergence of the quality challenger (Jacobson, 2009; Cox & Katz, 1996; Carson, 2005; Stone, Maisel, & Maestas, 2004).

The previous study of the rational calculus of strategic politicians has traditionally been used to account for decision-making regarding the incumbent's congressional careers (Frantzich, 1978; Kiewiet & Zeng, 1993; Cooper & West, 1981). One important implication from previous literature is that politicians are strategic when making decisions in seeking candidacy. When deciding whether to seek reelection, for instance, incumbents have placed the most important calculation on perceptions of electoral success. As Theriault (1998) point out, incumbents generally go on running for reelection until the costs outweigh benefits from seeking reelection as shown in rarely occurring congressional retirements. Stating simply, the senator who is confident about winning reelection will decide to seek reelection. When anticipating stiff competition, however, senators need to choose between a run for a reelection and retirement. If a senator is not convinced about her electoral success, she will step down voluntarily.

As a factor that determines incumbents' electoral competitiveness, we draw the attention to the role of ideological congruence. Previous work has found that incumbents who are not responsive to constituency preference face competitive elections (Abramowitz & Segal, 1992; Krasno, 1994; Canes-Wrone, Brady, & Cogan, 2002; Griffin, 2006). This line of work suggests that incumbents' ideological congruence to their constituencies will become essential in the incumbent's decisions to run. Given that this deliberation will be essentially based on the probabilities of winning a seat and that ideological congruence shapes electoral prospects, such calculation is partially made by employing information on how vulnerable the incumbent is in ideological positioning. Therefore, the probability of strategic retirement of incumbent senators is affected in part by their legislative performance in the Senate.

Although there has been much empirical research documenting incumbents' decisions about whether to choose voluntary retirements (Brace, 1985; Frantzich, 1978; Groseclose & Krehbiel, 1994; Hall & van Houweling, 1995; Livingston & Friedman, 1993; Wolak, 2007; Masthay & Overby, 2017), the literature mainly focuses on scandal (see Bernstein & Wolak, 2002; Praino, Stockemer, & Moscardelli, 2013). Less attention has been given to how the ideological congruence between the legislator and her constituency shapes the incumbent's incentive with respect to strategic retirement. Building on the theoretical conjecture that the senator's strategic retirement is largely decided by her electoral prospects, this study develops the theoretical argument and provides empirical evidence about senatorial retirements. The extent of ideological congruence is essential to explaining the senator's decision on retirement. To test for the strategic decision making, we assess the incumbent senator's ideological congruence that influences the incumbent's decisions about congressional careers.

Perhaps, retiring senators have a variety of motivations for voluntary retirements. These reasons include personal, political, electoral reasons. Some senators will retire due to involvement in scandals. However, this study is not interested in the disaggregation of various sources to drive the senator to step down from the Senate. Instead, it focuses on the condition under which incumbent senators decide to seek strategic retirements. Though the analyses below do not provide full answers for each senator's reason for decision about retirement, it is sufficient to present the empirical evidence to reveal whether strategic retirement is the function of ideological congruence. Using the senator's decision making with respect to retirement from 1976 through 2014, we test if the degree of ideological congruence really acts to constrain incumbents' decisions about whether to choose retirement.

This paper proceeds as follows. Building on the rational model of candidate entry, in the next section, we explain strategic retirement caused by the incumbent's electoral vulnerability. In the third section, we illustrate the theoretical relevance of the incumbent senator's ideological congruence to her constituency in explaining how the extent of ideological congruence shapes the incumbent's utilities with regard to electoral prospects. In the fourth section, we explain the data and methods used to assess the electoral significance of ideological congruence, by highlighting how we generate the degree of ideological congruence on the basis of each senator's ideological position in the Senate and her constituency ideological preferences. The fifth section presents empirical results showing that ideological congruence acts to affect the incumbent's decision on whether to retire. And then, we briefly discuss implications of ideological congruence in congressional and election studies.

2. Strategic Retirement

The previous study of incumbents' decisions about running for reelection has been developed on the theoretical grounds of ambition theory and congressional retirements.

Indeed, the substantial portion of the research on incumbents' seeking reelection has been undertaken through questioning what motivate incumbents to voluntarily retire from Congress or to run for higher elective offices over to choose to run for reelection. However, these different theoretical arguments have in common in predicting which incumbents will seek for reelection.

The rational model of candidate entry has commonly claimed that the incumbent's decision in seeking reelection is made on the basis of cost-benefit calculations (Stone, Maisel, & Maestas, 2004; Lazarus, 2008). They have specified theoretical calculations on the condition under which potential candidates, along with incumbents, decide to run for

election, formulizing the simple but convincing calculus. That is,

$$U(O) = PB - C$$

where $U(O)$ = the utility of seeking the office, P = the probability of winning the election, B = benefits holding the office, and C = costs for running for the office. The theoretical insights from this calculus are twofold. First, incumbents decide to run for election only when their utilities are greater than zero. If the costs running for election is higher than their expected utilities obtained from the probabilities of winning the election times benefits from holding the office, then their utilities become negative, thereby deciding not to run for election.

Second, and more importantly to the theoretical conjecture, this calculus proposes that assuming benefit and cost are fixed at certain amount, the decision to run for election will be largely decided by the likelihood of electoral success, because higher probabilities of winning the election will give candidates higher utilities.

Two expectations from the calculus of candidate entry provide a good guide to the strategic behavior of incumbent senators up for reelection. In particular, incumbents up for reelection need to choose between run for reelection and voluntary retirement particularly when perceiving electoral threats. In deciding whether to seek reelection, some senators chose to depart the Senate because of disaffection with congressional affairs, the opportunity cost such as desire of spending more time with family, spending resources (Brace, 1985; Lazarus, 2008).

However, political observers seem to doubt their principal motivation for voluntary retirements from the Senate. They have asserted that electoral vulnerability stands out as a primary cause of senators to leave the Senate. However, previous research on senatorial retirements has consistently found potential electoral threats as a strong force to prompt incumbents to voluntarily leave Congress (Livingston & Friedman, 1993). In the case of the representative in the House, the incumbent's perception about her electoral prospects is seriously considered as the motivation for voluntary retirements (Moore & Hibbing, 1998; Theriault, 1998; Carson, 2005; Highton, 2011). In making decisions about reelection, senators perceiving serious electoral threats tend to choose to step down voluntarily over to risk losing election, believing this option is not the best and not the worst one, but the next best one. By choosing voluntary retirements, incumbents are able to retain their senatorial reputations as former senators who voluntarily retired from public office but could otherwise win the next election if they would run for reelection. If this is the case, it is reasonable to believe that not all retiring senators' decisions to leave office are purely voluntary.[1] Instead, the fear of an electoral loss has forced them to make a more honorable and reasonable choice regarding senatorial careers.

This theoretical conjecture suggests that ideological congruence plays a critical role in explaining senatorial retirements. The theoretical expectation is that senators with legislative records of relatively ideological incongruence to her state ideology will be less likely to seek reelection. They are more likely to prefer voluntary retirement over being risk losing the general election that may tarnish entire congressional careers as electoral losers. They do not want to be branded as electoral losers. Rather, they may want to end their congressional careers in a more honorable way. As a consequence, many senators perceiving severe electoral threats will not be observed in general elections. Instead, the senators confident about toeing with their constituents in the representational process will seek reelection.

3. The Incumbent Senator's Ideological Congruence and Her Utilities

The theoretical expectation underlying the role of ideological congruence is that the more the incumbent casts roll call votes congruent with her constituents' preferences, the lower the incumbent senator's strategic retirement.

The incumbent's ideological congruence can be compatible with her electoral prospects. Previous works examining the relationship between extreme roll call voting and reelection chances have offered consistent findings that extreme party voting decreases the incumbent's vote share in the election, thus lowering reelection probability The extent which the incumbent has represented constituents' ideological preferences plays a critical role in determining the probability of winning elections.

To elaborate this theoretical argument, we have presented Figure 1 that explains the theoretical, if hypothetical, shape of

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[1] While the previous literature seems to offer the significance of electoral success in deciding about seeking reelection, there is a discrepancy between retiring senators' explanations for voluntary retirements and the scholarly findings. As Frantzich (1978) claims, no single retiring senator admitted the fear of an electoral defeat as a main reason for congressional retirement. In a sense, this discrepancy can be explained by looking at indirect effects of the perceptions of electoral insecurity. For instance, increased electoral threats may make those retiring senators to weigh considerations on the value of time spending with family rather than continued congressional service. It is clear that perceptions of electoral fear are reflected on senators' career decisions.

the relationship between the incumbent's utilities and her ideological distances from the median point of the state.[2]

In Figure 1, m represents the median voter, and S_i and S_j represent a senator's ideological locations. Figure 1 also denotes the incumbent's two utilities. In this figure, U_i is the expected utility of the incumbent when a Republican senator is ideologically placed on S_i, and U_j is the expected utility when a senator is located on S_j. The utility of the incumbent represents the chance of winning the election against the challenger.
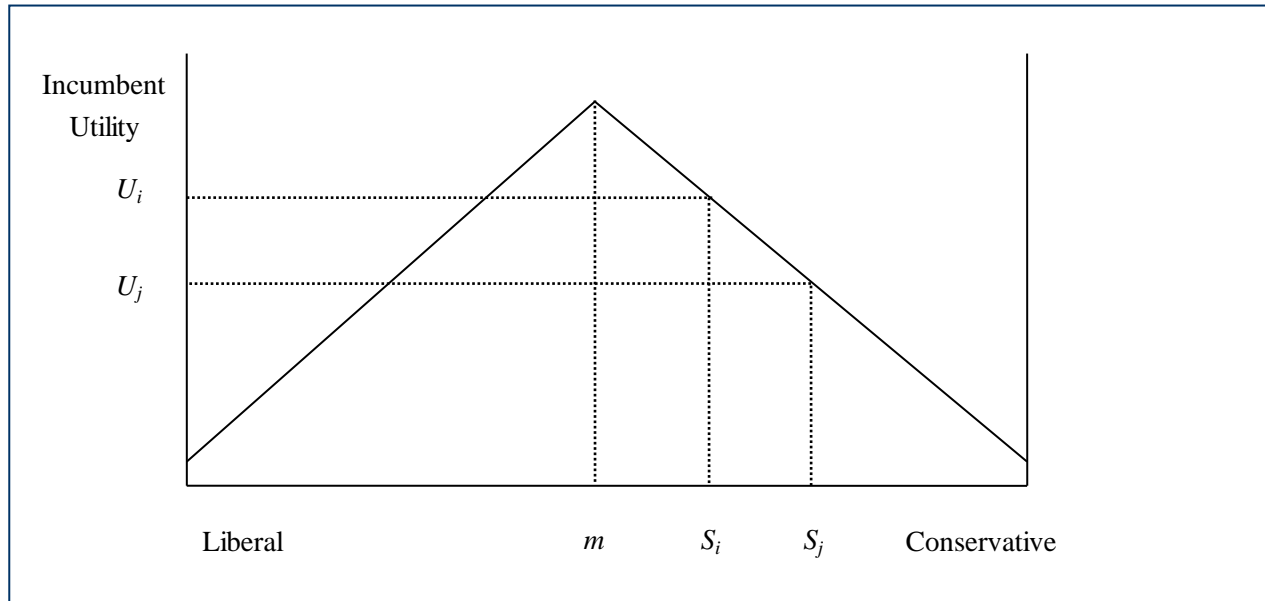

Figure 1. Relationship between an Incumbent Senator's Ideological Congruence and Her Utility

As formulated in Figure 1, S_i is closer than S_j to the median voter (m), indicating that senator i is relatively more moderately positioned than senator j in casting roll calls. It is expected from the utility function that S_j gains a lower utility (U_j) than S_i who is supposed to get a higher utility (U_i).

The theoretical conjecture derived from Figure 1 provides a significant implication for the study of strategic retirement. That is, the senator's decision regarding strategic retirement is shaped by her ideological congruence that determines reelection success. The ideological distance between the incumbent senator and her constituency's median voter creates the condition that determines whether to retire strategically from the Senate.

This expectation has been assured in earlier works of Erikson and Wright (2000), Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan (2002), and Griffin (2006) showing lower electoral margins of party extreme voting behavior. Indeed, extreme party voting behavior reflected as a longer ideological distance from the median voter in a figure indicates "poor" representation in ideologically balanced states such as middle-of-the-road states. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that senators taking positions on extreme party line are less likely to satisfy their constituencies, thereby increasing the likelihood of strategic retirement.

However, we argue that the probability of the senator's strategic retirement is an interactive function of ideological positions of senators and state ideological predispositions. The ideological congruence, rather than ideological position itself, plays a more crucial role in shaping the senator's incentive with respect to retirement. By the ideological congruence, we mean the ideological distance to show how closely individual senators have represented their

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[2]This hypothetical relationship is extended on three assumptions that specify ideological locations of senators related to the median voter, ideological locations of Democratic and Republican senators, and the distribution of voters. First, all the senators are more liberal or conservative than median voters of the states that they represent. Second, it is assumed on the basis of the two-party competition that in all the states, Democratic senators are located on the left to the median voter of the state, whereas Republican senators are placed on the right to the median voter. Third, the theoretical relationship presumes a single peaked preference on a single liberal-conservative dimension with regard to the distribution of voters, indicating that the median voter is a vote-maximizing location (Downs, 1957). Building on these three assumptions, a figure presented here shows the relationship between extreme party voting behavior and vote shares in two Republican senators. Drawn from three assumptions, particularly the third assumption, it can be expected to see a higher utility of the senator when her ideological position is closer to the median voter.

constituents' ideological preferences in the Senate. Though this assertion has been extended on the theoretical basis of extreme voting behavior thesis, its empirical prediction is slightly different: it is anticipated that extreme voting behavior has different effects according to state ideological dispositions. More specifically, it is possible to see that extreme voting behavior have no, or less marginal effects in very conservative or liberal states if extreme party positions formulated by senators are not so deviate from state ideological positions. We expect that the assessment of the effects of the ideological congruence between the senator and her constituency can make it possible to reveal the senator's strategic retirement up for reelection. Taken together, with the ideological congruence of incumbent senators to their constituency, we assess the probability of the incumbent senators' strategic retirement.

4. Measurement for the Ideological Congruence

The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of the ideological congruence between the senator and her constituency on senatorial retirements. The data about the effects of ideological congruence with respect to incumbents' senatorial retirements have been collected and assessed in the analysis below. The dependent variable used in the model is strategic retirements. Strategic retirements are measured as dichotomous, 1 indicating senators choosing congressional retirements and 0 senators having sought reelection.

To test the degree that the senator is responsive to constituency preference and if the senator's position has a discernible effect on her strategic considerations on senatorial departure, it is necessary to have a common measurement that can be evaluated in two different dimensions. How can the senator's legislative voting be connected to constituency preferences in a way that can be used to assess her decision about retirement? We believe that ideological positions of the senator's legislative voting and constituency predispositions are compatible with each other. These two dimensions of ideological positions, in turn, function to influence the likelihood of incumbents' retirements. With ideological positions of the senator and her constituency placed on a common metric, we have conducted empirical assessments of the conditional nature of decisions concerning incumbents' strategic retirements.

In order to measure the ideological congruence between the state and the senator representing that state, we have constructed ideological congruence scores. These congruence scores measure the relative distance between a senator's DW-NOMINATE score and her state ideology score. We have generated the ideological congruence scores by employing a linear transformation. First, we have regressed state ideological dispositions on the senator's DW-NOMINATE scores.[3] In the next step, the residuals obtained from the regression estimated have been used to calibrate the distance between the DW-NOMINATE scores and state ideology scores.[4] The distance indicated by residuals captures the "relative" ideological distance to tap into the underlying senator-constituency ideological congruence: the lower the score, the closer between the two ideological positions. In other words, low scores reflect that the senator has by and large voted roll calls in the way that closely reflects constituency ideological predispositions. We believe the procedure used here substantiates the extent of the ideological congruence between the senator's roll call positions and her constituency ideological dispositions.

Figure 2 presents a scatter plot and the regression line that both show the relationship between constituent ideological preferences and the incumbent senator's ideological positions. Overall, this figure shows that senators are responsive to their constituent preferences, but there exist considerable variations of the degree of ideological congruence among incumbent senators.

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[3]For a measure of state ideology, we have used the data produced and expanded by Berry, Ringquist, Fording, and Hanson (1998).

[4]To make consistent empirical results showing the effect of ideological congruence for senators of both Republican and Democratic parties, we have switched the signs of residuals obtained for Democrats, indicating lower values being closer to state ideology.
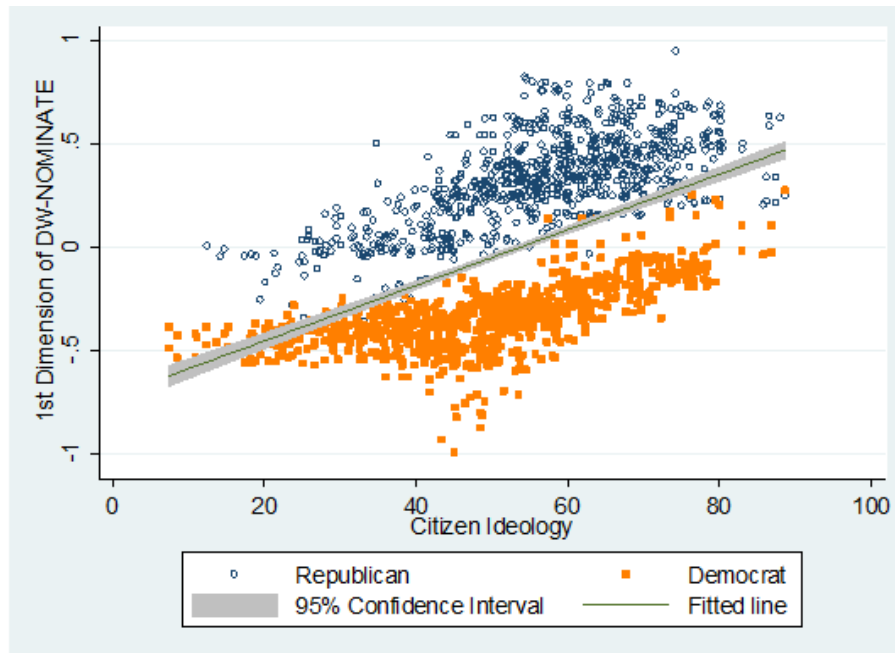
Figure 2. The Senator's Ideological Congruence to Constituent Preferences

In this figure, rectangular dots represent Democratic senators' ideological positions while circular dots reflect ideological positions taken by Republicans. This figure exhibits interesting patterns that merit further attention. First, as evident in the results, the figure shows that there is a positive relationship between state ideology and the senator's DW-NOMINATE scores. As state ideological preferences move toward conservative, their senators also take conservative positions. Also in the figure, there are two separate groups divided by around 0 of DW-NOMINATE scores. Democrats are in the lower portion whereas Republicans occupy an upper portion of the figure. These two separate groups reflect party influence that pulls the senator's ideological positions. Using the degree of ideological congruence, we assess the senator's strategic retirement.

In addition to ideological congruence, the model is estimated including personal, state, and national factors to influence the chance of senatorial retirement. These factors involve the incumbent senator's share of the two-party vote in the previous election, age, scandal, the length of tenure that the incumbent serves, logged number of potential candidate pool from the opponent party, the size of district measured as the log of the number of House seats, presidential two-party vote of the incumbent's party, presidential job approval ratings, the first difference of real disposable income of states, and mid-term elections.

5. Results

The incumbent senator's ideological congruence plays a crucial role in determining electoral prospects. Therefore, when showing the higher levels of ideological congruence, expected to help to shape favorable electoral prospects, incumbent senators will be more likely to decide to seek reelection over retirements. By contrast, senators demonstrating inconsistent ideological congruence may have been self-selected and more likely to opt out from the Senate.

We have estimated logit regression to assess the relationship between ideological congruence and the probability that incumbent senators decide to leave strategically from the Senate. Table 1 presents the results estimating the probability that the incumbent senator chooses to strategically retire from the Senate. The results indicate that the senator's ideological congruence, previous vote margins, age, scandal, appointed senators, length of tenure, state party strength, and national forces have statistically significant effects on senatorial retirement.

Table 1. Results for the Senator's Strategic Retirement

	Senatorial Retirement
Ideological Congruence	-1.622[*]
	(.784)
Previous Vote Share	-3.211[*]
	(1.419)
Age	.040[*]
	(.017)
Scandal	1.723[*]
	(.680)
Appointed	.634
	(.824)
Length of Tenure	.057[**]
	(.022)
ln (Opponent Candidate Pool)	-.159
	(.188)
ln (State size)	.172
	(.140)
Δ Presidential Approval Rating	-.001
	(.008)
Δ RID (Income)	.005
	(.022)
State Party Strength	-.025
	(.014)
Midterm Election	-.322
	(.317)
Constant	-5.342
	(2.324)
No. of Observations	621
Pseudo R^2	0.1102
Correctly Classified (%)	85.27

[*] $p < 0.05$; [**] $p < 0.01$; [***] $p < 0.001$, two-tailed test. Standard errors in parentheses

Specifically, Table 1 shows that one of the good reasons for voluntary retirements stem from ideological congruence. The results for the parameter of ideological congruence confirm the theoretical expectation advanced in this study that the incumbent's ideological incongruence produces the electoral condition that encourages the incumbent's retirement. In interpreting the results showing ideological congruence, one careful consideration should be given to the sign of the parameter of ideological congruence. To reiterate, we have generated the higher ideological congruence indicating the incumbent's faithful representation of constituency ideology. Thus, the negative sign of ideological congruence validates the theoretical assertion that the more the incumbent cast roll call votes congruent with the preference of her state, the lower the likelihood of strategic retirement.

The results here suggest that echoing the theoretical assertion of the rational model of candidate entry in the election, incumbent senators behave strategically when making career decisions using information on their ideological gap from representing constituency preferences. The results reveal that ideological stances that deviate from that of constituents strike fear into incumbents and voluntarily depart from the Senate.

The incumbent's senator's vote share in the previous election is also a significant predictor to account for the likelihood of the senator's strategic retirement. Vote margin is a good proxy to show the incumbent's electoral competitiveness (Carson, 2005). The incumbent's vote share of the two party in the previous senatorial race shows the anticipated level of electoral competition and, in turn, has a discernible impact on decisions about seeking election by incumbents. Actually, previous vote margins of incumbents are a simple and straightforward indicator to show the electoral success of the incumbent in the future (Krasno & Green, 1988; Jacobson, 2009). The results of Table 1 confirm that previous election results determine the incumbent senator's electoral prospects, thereby functioning as a critical factor to account for strategic retirements.

Table 1 also shows that scandals play a key role in explaining senatorial retirements. Previous works have examined the effects of scandals on congressional retirements, reaching the consistent conclusion that though moderate, members of Congress who got involved in scandals (i.e., check-kiting scandal in the House in 1992) or corruption tended to harm electoral prospects, increasing the likelihood of opting out from Congress (Alford, Teeters, Ward, & Wilson, 1994; Welch & Hibbing, 1997; Groseclose & Krehbiel, 1994; Hall & van Houweling, 1995; Jacobson & Dimock, 1994; Clarke, Feigert, Seldon, & Stewart, 1999; Bernstein & Wolak, 2002; Praino, Stockemer, & Moscardelli, 2013). Specifically, Welch and Hibbing (1997) have examined the electoral consequences of corruption charges, finding that incumbents with corruption charges received less vote margin by about 10% compared to their counterparts without corruption

charges.[5] Similarly, this study finds that senators involved in scandals are more likely to retire strategically.

Both the senator's age and seniority reach the statistical significance. As an individual factor, age is considered as a driving force to senators' departure from the Senate (Frantzich, 1978; Hibbing, 1982; Moore & Hibbing, 1992; Livingston & Friedman, 1993; Kiewiet & Zeng, 1993; Bernstein & Wolak, 2002). At the same time, results confirm that seniority is one of the factors to motivate senators to decide to end congressional careers.

Though a senator's seniority is closely related to her age, these two factors may drive the incumbent to move into two opposite directions. For example, age is inclined to function to facilitate retirement while seniority is a pull toward staying in the Senate for longer time. In practice, however, the substantial portion of the senators has advanced to senatorial positions through the ladder of opportunity structure (Rohde, 1979). In the period of 1976 to 2014 studied under the present study, an average age of senators elected to the Senate for the first time is in fifty four. Relatively late entering the Senate is compounded by advancing age in seeking to remain in the Senate.[6]

The model estimates party electoral strength at the state level and national factors to explain senatorial retirements. The results of Table 1 confirm that these factors are significant predictors to account for retirement decisions. The effect of ideological congruence on the senator's intention to retire from the Senate may vary by the level of state electoral competition. In particular, there is a possibility that some senators are still in safety zone, though they record the relatively low level of ideological congruence. In the states where ideological predispositions are lopsided toward favoring the incumbent party, small deviations of the incumbent whose overall ideological positions are consistent with state ideological preferences can be tolerated to voters, and these deviations may result in only trivial electoral impacts rather than substantive. In this case, it is quite difficult to observe the incumbent's voluntary retirement.

Therefore, the partisan advantage should be taken into account in deciding whether to retire. We include the third measure, the vote share of the two party of presidential candidates from an incumbent's party. Much of previous work has relied on vote shares of the two-party in previous presidential elections in order to measure district partisanship (Whitby & Bledsoe, 1986; Ansolabehere, Snyder, & Stewart, 2001; Fowler, 2005; Griffin, 2006; Erikson & Wright, 2000; Canes-Wrone, Brady, & Cogan, 2002). The vote share of two party in the presidential election is highly reliable (Levendusky, Pope, & Jackman, 2008), so it can be used for a good proxy for the partisan composition of the states. As shown in Table 1, the electoral strength of the incumbent party at the state level is statistically significant, assuring that the senator is reluctant to retire under favorable partisan climates.

Candidates are more willing to vie for electoral races when electoral environments are favorable for their parties (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981; Bianco, 1984). Specifically, economic conditions systematically affect electoral successes of incumbents (Wright & Berkman, 1986; Wolak, 2007). Good economic conditions are favorable to the incumbent of the president's party. Thus, when economic conditions have deteriorated, senators from the president's party are more likely to retire.

Among other indicators (unemployment rate and inflation rates) for economic conditions, we have used the first difference of real disposable income of states, because this indicator is most sensitive to voters' perceptions on economic conditions. Specifically, the change in real disposable income is calculated in state-level change as the first difference by subtracting fifth year's income from the previous year's income in the states of incumbent senators up for reelection.

Also, previous literature examining the effect of presidential coattails has suggested a theoretical perspective of how presidential popularity affects electoral outcomes (Campbell & Sumners, 1990; Cohen, Bond, Fleisher, & Hamman, 2000; Rivers & Rose, 1985). The incumbent senators of the president's parties may electorally benefit from high presidential job approval rates. However, these theoretical expectations are not supported by the results showing that these two national forces have no statistical effect on incumbents' decisions about retirements.

Taken together, the results in Table 1 clearly show that the incumbent senator's ideological congruence is relevant to explaining the likelihood of senatorial retirements. The incumbent's senator's decision about a run for reelection is substantively affected by the extent to which she took a close step with her constituency in advancing constituency preferences in the Senate. These findings assert that the extent of ideological congruence serve to hinder or prompt the incumbent's decision on whether to step down voluntarily from the Senate.

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[5]With respect to scandal, Alford, Teeters, Ward, and Wilson (1994) suggest the need to make distinction between institutional scandals and individual ones. Specifically, they point out "institutional scandals are very distinct from scandals affecting individuals. Voters discount the culpability of their own members for a scandal that is perceived as attached to an institution" (Alford, Teeters, Ward, & Wilson 1994, 790).

[6]While average age of senators in the sample is 57.6 years, the age of retiring senators is around 70.9 years. Only ten senators were retired under sixty years old. In addition to age, it is worthwhile to look at the distinguished feature of the Senate given that seniority in the Senate is less crucial in influencing the law-making process (Wolak, 2007).

6. Conclusions

We have thus far advanced the theoretical assertion and empirical findings that the extent of the incumbent senator's ideological congruence to constituent preferences produces the condition to encourage or discourage strategic retirement. While previous research has revealed a variety of motivations for voluntary retirements, almost no study pays attention to the ideological congruence of the senator to her constituency. From the results showing the effects of ideological congruence on senatorial retirements, an inference can be made about the electoral and representational significance of the incumbent's ideological positioning. The incumbent is able to continue to seek reelection by taking positions consistent with their constituents. In other words, the senator should seek to take an optimal ideological position in a way to satisfy her constituents.

Obviously, some senators are electorally more vulnerable than their counterparts. The senator's ideological deviation to their constituents' preferences acts as a fundamental condition to step down voluntarily, while the probability senators seek reelection is in part dependent on senators staying in step in with their constituents. In fact, incumbents who decided to seek and thereby appeared in reelection can be thought as electorally strong. Knowing tough election or even the loss of reelection due to inconsistent ideological positions with state ideological preferences, weak incumbents in terms of a lack of being attentive to constituents' interests and changed partisan composition presumed to lead to unfavorable election outcomes had been self-selected prior to the time of elections (Alford, Teeters, Ward, & Wilson, 1994). In light of this, incumbents who decide to run for reelection, on average, can be regarded as relatively strong candidates who, at least in the subjective judgments of incumbents, took steps with their constituents.

The findings for the electoral consequences of ideological congruence have important implications for the representational process and American democracy. In the context of representative democracy, one of the most important factors to ensure the incumbent's reelection is how well she advanced the constituency's interests regarding ideological representation on roll call votes. Though different retiring senators had been motivated by different sources that encourage them to discontinue senatorial careers, the results suggest that senators' decisions are affected by the extent of ideological representation of constituency preferences.

This study also expands the strategic politician thesis into the representational process by incorporating incumbents' ideological congruence to their constituencies. As the linkage between seeking reelection and the representational process, this study takes a close look at the incumbent senators' ideological congruence to their constituency preferences. The traditional view of strategic politician theory proposed by Jacobson and Kernell (1981) have focused on national forces, such as national economic conditions and presidential job approval rates, that shape favorable and unfavorable electoral environments, and that, in turn, influence politicians' strategic calculus about running for election. While the theoretical ground of the present study also center on the incumbent senator's strategic decision making, this study has connected politicians' strategic calculus into the representational process.

Incumbent senators' ideological congruence serves as a strong signal to incumbents themselves up for reelection. Because the scrupulous representation of constituency ideological preferences is a primary role supposed to be played by the representative in representative democracy, the failure to fulfill this role as a representative induces constituents to find the alternative candidate expected to better represent constituent preferences in the future. Therefore, senators straying away from constituents' ideological preferences are supposed to get less electoral supports from constituents, particularly from those who are dissatisfied with legislative positions of incumbent senators, producing favorable electoral contexts that boost the probability of the challenger's unseating the incumbent. Because of the lower probability of electoral success, incumbent senators out of steps with constituents are more likely than those toeing the line with constituents' preferences to choose to leave the Senate voluntarily. In light of anticipated unfavorable electoral environments, the ideological congruence functions through self-selection of incumbents in deciding whether to seek reelection.

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