Are Politicians Democratic Realists?

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Abstract

Political scientists have long debated whether citizens meet the expectations of a "folk theory" of democratic representation, in which voters correctly reward and punish politicians for their actions, make choices primarily on the basis of policy preferences, and orient their decisions to the future rather than the past. But how do elected politicians themselves theorize voting behavior? In this paper, we report results from an original survey of more than 2,000 elected politicians in Canada and the United States which allows us to characterize politicians' own democratic theories. We uncover substantial variation in politicians' theories of democracy, and we find examples of a number of well-known theoretical traditions (democratic realism, partisan retrospection, folk theory) among politicians themselves. We also show that politicians' theoretical perspectives are related to how they undertake representation when in office. We conclude with an outline of a comparative research agenda on the causes and consequences of politicians' democratic theories.

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1 Introduction

Democratic responsiveness depends not only on voters' actions, but also on politicians' expectations of those voters. Whether politicians campaign on future promises or past accomplishments; whether they focus on concrete policy issues or appeal to voters' identities; whether they follow public opinion or dismiss it as a noisy and irrational signal – all of these choices follow from politicians' own beliefs about voters. What politicians think about voters – their theory of democracy – is likely to shape their behavior, and thus the democratic process itself.

In this paper, we explore politicians' democratic theories and their consequences. We focus on three theoretical axes that have dominated theoretical debates among political scientists in recent decades: policy versus identity voting, myopic versus clear-sighted retrospection, and prospective versus retrospective voting. Using data from three surveys of elected politicians, with a combined sample of more than 2,000 American and Canadian politicians, we uncover substantial variation in politicians' theoretical perspectives on each of these axes. When we combine these dimensions to identify broader clusters of beliefs, we find that several well-known theoretical traditions, such as folk theory and democratic realism, are commonly held by politicians themselves. Moreover, these theoretical perspectives predict important representational behaviors by politicians.

These findings illustrate the need for political scientists to understand the content and consequences of politicians' democratic theories. In our analysis below, we find that politicians' theoretical perspectives are related to how they allocate their scarce time as representatives. We expect these theories to be related to many other important representational behavior, including responsiveness to constituents, legislative productivity, and choices about how to mobilize voters during campaigns. We also see good reason to expect substantial variation in politicians' democratic theories across electoral and legislative institutional contexts, providing an important mechanism connecting institutional environments to representational behaviour. We thus conclude with a call for, and an outline of, a novel comparative research

agenda on politicians' theories of democratic politics.

2   The Case for Studying Politicians' Theories of Democracy

Three related sets of elite beliefs are necessary to furnish a satisfactory account of political representation: politicians' *motivations*, their *role perceptions*, and their *beliefs about voters*. On the motivations of politicians, there is now a classic and well-explored distinction between office-seeking and policy-seeking politicians, which some have linked to politicians' role perceptions and beliefs about citizens (Kitschelt, 2000; Caselli and Morelli, 2004). Similarly, a long tradition of research has focused on the roles that politicians believe they should play as representatives, which is often organized around concepts of delegates and trustees (Fox and Shotts, 2009) or representational styles (Fenno, 2003). These are important strands of work, and they are supported by good empirical evidence (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 2017).

These first two dimensions – motivations and role perceptions – illustrate that politicians' beliefs can strongly shape how they do their jobs as representatives. But they overlook an important third dimension of beliefs: what politicians think about voters. Do politicians believe that voters are collectively wise, able to select the best candidates, and able to reward incumbents for good policy outcomes? Or are politicians "democratic realists" (Achen and Bartels, 2017), who believe that retrospection is often blind and policy figures little in voters' decisions? In short, what are politicians' theories of democracy?

At present, we have few answers to these questions. More than fifty years ago, in an important but neglected study, John Kingdon explicitly sought to describe "explicit or implicit theor[ies] of voting behavior" among election candidates, with a particular focus on differences between winning and losing candidates (Kingdon, 1967, 137). Two more recent studies have explored politicians' theories of election outcomes and voting behavior in the Swedish context (Ekengren and Oscarsson, 2011; Strömbäck, Grandien and Falasca, 2013). Strik-

ingly, however, we are aware of no studies that explore elite theories of voting behavior using (a) methods that enable systematic, comparative analysis of politicians in diverse institutional and electoral settings, and (b) focus on the debates about retrospective or prospective voting, myopic or clear-sighted accountability, and policy or identity-oriented voting that are at the heart of contemporary debates about and understandings of democratic theory.

This is an important omission, because we have good reason to expect that politicians' ideas about the democratic process will shape the way they behave as representatives. In elite politics and public policy, considerable research has shown that "ideas matter" – politicians' empirical beliefs and expectations shape the priorities they adopt and the policies they choose to pursue (E.g. Hall, 1993; Jacobs, 2011; Lieberman, 2002; Stone, 1989). Moreover, research on political representation suggests that distinct democratic theories imply varying behavioral responses from politicians; for example, Jane Mansbridge's distinction between "promissory" and "anticipatory" representation is premised on the argument that politicians who are operating in a "promissory" mode will interact very differently from politicians who are operating in a "anticipatory" mode (Mansbridge, 2003). More recently, the "constructivist" turn in representation theory has similarly insisted on the importance of politicians' own beliefs for the constituencies they seek to mobilize and represent (E.g. Disch, 2021; Saward, 2010). In short, politicians' theories of democracy are likely to have important consequences for the character of political representation.

What would these theories look like, if politicians did have them? We define a politician's democratic theory as a set of beliefs about the causes of voters' decisions. These theoretical beliefs have three main features (Gopnik, 1988): they are *organizational*, providing conceptual machinery with which to organize empirical phenomena; *predictive*, enabling the development of expectations about individual behavior and aggregate outcomes; and *explanatory*, implicitly or explicitly providing causal accounts of political action.[1] Like social

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[1]The "intuitive theory" or "folk theory" literature has been helpful for our thinking about politicians' theories of democracy. See Gopnik and Meltzoff (1998), Gelman and Legare (2011), Morris, Ames and Knowles (2001). We have also been influenced by political science research on the causal beliefs and normative principles that animate elite and mass behavior (E.g. Lieberman, 2002; Stone, 1989), along with a rich

scientists, when political elites say a candidate was defeated "because voters are frustrated about the economy" or "because voters rejected the party's policy agenda," these claims rest on beliefs about the causal processes that drive voting behavior (Ekengren and Oscarsson, 2013).

These theories are distinct from other ideas and attitudes. Most importantly, they are distinct from politicians' *normative* beliefs about the proper ends of politics. In practice, of course, normative beliefs and democratic theories may be related; normative beliefs have empirical implications, and empirical theories imply that some normative positions are more plausible than others. Still, the two modes of argument are distinguishable, and we focus here on *empirical* democratic theories.

If politicians do hold such theories, we would expect them to have at least two important qualities. First, theories are dynamic: they are subject to change in light of new evidence, persuasive arguments, and appealing alternative accounts. While politicians may remain stubbornly attached to theories even in the face of considerable anomalies and contradictions, we would still expect their theories to evolve as they repeatedly submit themselves to voters' judgments and engage in conversation with colleagues, strategists, and advisors. The character and extent of this dynamism is an important priority for research on politicians' democratic theories.

Second, politicians' democratic theories should inform their behavior. If politicians believe voters are informed and policy-focused, they should provide voters with information about their policy accomplishments and their policy agenda for the next term. If they believe instead that voters' judgments reflect "blind retrospection", we would expect them to put more emphasis on providing voters with upbeat messages about the character of the times – or perhaps to simply ignore attempts at public persuasion and focus on accomplishing whatever they can before the sword of Damocles falls on them. Importantly, however, while

scholarship on how specific policy trajectories have been shaped by elite theories (Hall, 1993). In International Relations, Kertzer and Mcgraw (2012) have also explored if citizens hold attitudes that would incline them toward a "realist" interpretation of the international arena.

we would expect to find that politicians' democratic theories have behavioral consequences, we can not assume that politicians hold specific theories merely on the basis of their revealed behavior.

To assess the *content* of these democratic theories, we believe an excellent starting point is the theoretical debate outlined in *Democracy for Realists* by Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels. Achen and Bartels describe three axes of theoretical disagreement in political science that together capture much of what concerns us – and is likely to concern politicians – when we think about voters: whether they are prospective or retrospective in their judgments; whether their choices are driven by policy preferences or deeply held social and political identities; and whether they are capable of correctly rewarding or punishing politicians for their actions. As Achen and Bartels argue, each of these debates has profound implications for the quality, and even the viability, of contemporary democratic representation.

If politicians do have beliefs on these three debates, such beliefs could meaningfully be called democratic theories: they help to *organize* concrete experience into categories, provide *explanations* for voters' decisions, and allow politicians to *predict* how voters might respond to their choices as representatives. Politicians' views on these three theoretical dilemmas provide valuable insight into their democratic theories. We thus see *Democracy for Realists* as an excellent starting point for a research agenda on politicians' own democratic theories.

3 Evidence from Local Politicians in Two Countries

As a test of the presence and character of politicians' democratic theories, we use data from surveys of elected local politicians in the United States and Canada. In Canada, our data are from the Canadian Municipal Barometer, an annual survey of mayors and councillors in more than 400 municipalities across Canada. We included our democratic theory questions in the 2021 and 2022 annual surveys, with a total of 1,517 responses (a 22% response rate in 2021, and a 23% response rate in 2022). Our sample is well-balanced on observable population

characteristics, such as gender, population size, and region (see Supplementary Information 7.1). In the United States, we have a total of 581 survey responses from the CivicPulse Spring 2022 Local Policymaker Omnibus Survey, a survey drawn from a random sample of elected officials and governing board members in U.S. local governments with populations above 1,000. Across the two countries, we have 2,098 responses – one of the largest surveys of active elected politicians yet conducted.

Local politicians in the United States and Canada provide a useful test bed for this study. Local governments in both countries are responsible for important and contested areas of public policy, oversee substantial budgets, and local politicians compete for election in contests that feature meaningful ideological disagreement and incumbent-challenger dynamics that are similar to elections at other levels of government (Lucas, 2021; Lucas and McGregor, 2020; Sances, 2018; Trounstine, 2011). Recent studies suggest that Canadian and American local politicians resemble their state/provincial and federal counterparts in policy responsiveness and political representation (Lucas and Armstrong II, 2021; Schaffner, Rhodes and La Raja, 2020; Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014), particularly amidst increasingly partisan and "nationalized" policy debates in the United States (Hopkins, 2018; Lee, Landgrave and Bansak, 2022). More generally, many political scientists are increasingly relying on samples of local politicians to understand core features of elite political behavior (Butler et al., 2017; Butler and Hassell, 2018; Dynes, Hassell and Miles, 2022; Lee, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Öhberg and Naurin, 2016; Richardson and John, 2012; Sheffer, 2019; Pereira, 2021; Soontjens and Walgrave, 2021). While we expect that local politicians' theories of democracy will differ from politicians in other levels of government, other countries, and other institutional and electoral contexts – indeed, as we will suggest, understanding these similarities and differences is central to the comparative research agenda we propose – we also see our study of more than 2,000 local politicians as an especially rich data source for an exploratory analysis of politicians' democratic theories.

As discussed above, we focused our attention on the three theoretical debates described

in *Democracy for Realists*: blind versus clear-eyed retrospection, policy-oriented versus identity-oriented voting, and retrospective versus prospective voting. We summarize our survey questions, and the theoretical debates they are intended to capture, in Table 1. Our results suggest that respondents understood and were comfortable answering each of the three questions, with very low percentages of respondents selecting "Don't know" for each question (3%, 5%, and 2%, respectively).

Debate	Question Wording	Minimum Value (0)	Maximum Value (10)
Clear-sighted vs. blind retrospection	Some say that voters often blame or reward politicians for events that are totally outside the politician's control. Others say that voters are good at knowing which events politicians are and are not responsible for. Where would you position yourself in this debate?	Unfairly blame and reward	Fairly blame and reward
Policy vs. identity voting	Some say that voters make their decisions based on their policy preferences. Others say that voters' choices have much more to do with their deeply held partisan, ideological, or other identities. Where would you position yourself in this debate?	Policy preferences	Deeply held identities
Prospective vs. Retrospective voting	Some say that voters make decisions based on candidates' policy commitments and promises for the next term. Others say that voters base their decisions on "rewarding" or "punishing" their mayor or councillor for how well they have performed in the previous term. Where would you position yourself in this debate?	Look to the future	Look to the past

Table 1: Politicians' Democratic Theories: Question Wordings

To assess the possible behavioral correlates of politicians' positions on each of these theoretical debates, we used responses on self-reported time allocation from the 2020 Canadian Municipal Barometer survey, which asked respondents to report the number of hours they spent each week on three representational tasks: keeping in touch with constituents (constituent communication), helping constituents with problems (service work), and studying

or developing policy and meeting with other policy makers (policy work).[2] These responses offer a concrete behavioral quantity with which to compare politicians who hold differing theoretical perspectives. We emphasize that Canadian municipal politicians have substantial autonomy in choosing the number of hours they spend on each task: some choose to emphasize policy work and spend as little time as possible on other tasks, while others minimize policy responsibilities and maximize time on service and communication work. In total, we have 444 responses available for this second analysis.

4 Results 1: Are Politicians Democratic Realists?

We begin with an overview of politicians' positions on the three theoretical debates described above. Figure 1 summarizes the distributions for the three questions, with Canadian politicians in the first row and American politicians in the second row. Looking across all of the distributions, we find that each of the three theoretical debates is indeed a *debate* among elected politicians, with responses distributed across the full 0-10 range for each question. In both countries, mean values for the three distributions (reported in the top corner in each panel, along with 95% confidence bounds) reflect an overall tendency toward democratic realism: unfair blame (4.61 in Canada, 4.22 in the United States), identity-oriented voting (5.21 in Canada, 5.83 in the United States), and retrospective rather than prospective voting (5.3 in Canada, 5.7 in the United States). While the 95% confidence intervals in each panel confirm that these mean values are significantly distant from the center of the distribution (5), the overall distributions clearly reflect a wide variety of theoretical positions rather than convergence on one theoretical position.

Figure 1 also reveals some interesting differences between our Canadian and American respondents. On all three questions, American respondents appear to lean more strongly toward democratic realism than their Canadian counterparts, with fewer respondents selecting the "mixed" option at the center of the distribution and a more noticeable overall tendency

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[2]Note that this is a subset of the larger sample used for our first set of results.
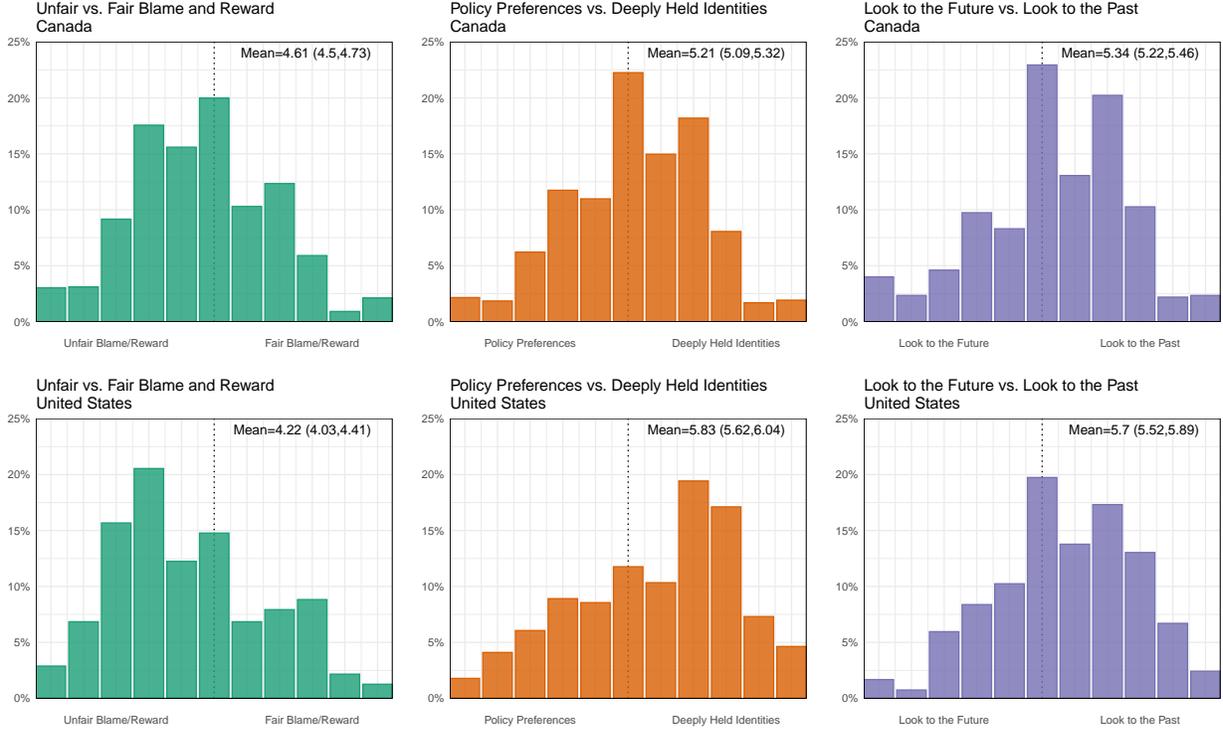
Figure 1: Distribution of Politicians' Responses to Theory Questions, by Country

toward unfair blame and identity-oriented voting. We return to these differences below.

In Figure 2, we summarize the relationships among the three items, once again summarising Canadian respondents in the first row, and American respondents in the second. We provide the correlation coefficient, along with the statistical significance of the correlation, in the top corner of each panel. Most of the correlations are significantly different from zero, but the size of all of the relationships are substantively small. While elected politicians hold positions on *each* of the three theoretical debates, their positions on one debate are only weak predictors of their position on the others.

These results suggest that elected politicians combine their responses to the three questions in a wide variety of ways. Table 2 summarizes the ten most common combinations of theoretical perspectives in the CMB responses. To construct the table, we simplified each question response into three categories (0-4 for one side of the debate, 5 for a "mixed" position, and 6-10 for the other side) and then combined the three responses to capture
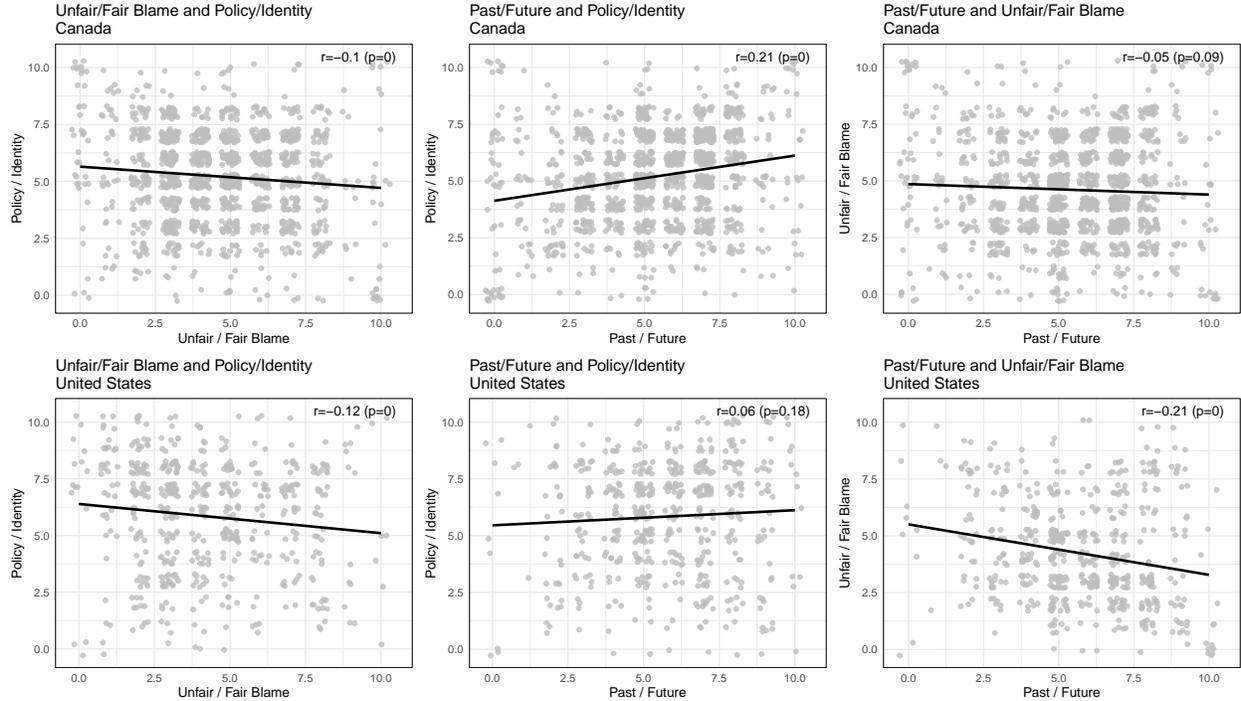
Figure 2: Correlation Between Items, by Country

each respondent's overall theoretical position. Each of the 27 possible combinations of theoretical positions is held by at least 1% of respondents, confirming once again that elected representatives can combine their positions on the three debates in diverse ways.

Despite this diversity, the ten most common theoretical perspectives, summarized in table 2, are strikingly familiar from contemporary political science debates, and they account for two-thirds of respondents. The most common position, held by 16.6% of respondents, is democratic realism: unfair blame, identity voting, and retrospection. Another 17.8% of respondents can be characterized as "weak" democratic realists, endorsing the "unfair blame" position along with at least one other democratic realist position. In total, then, more than a third of the politicians in our sample hold positions that either fully embrace or incline toward democratic realism.

While democratic realism is most common among both Canadian and American respondents, the two final columns in table 2 reveal that American local politicians are much more likely than Canadian local politicians to embrace the democratic realist position. Nearly a

Type	Subtype	Blame	Identity	Time	N	Pooled	Canada	USA
Realism	Democratic Realism	Unfair	Identity	Past	298	16.6%	13.8%	23.3%
	Weak Realism 1	Unfair	Policy	Past	131	7.3%	6.5%	9.1%
	Weak Realism 2	Unfair	Identity	Future	94	5.2%	4.8%	6.3%
	Weak Realism 3	Unfair	Identity	Mixed	96	5.3%	4.6%	7.2%
Retrospection	Identity Retrospection	Fair	Identity	Past	164	9.1%	10.0%	7.0%
Folk Theory	Folk Theory 1	Unfair	Policy	Future	107	6.0%	6.3%	5.1%
	Folk Theory 2	Fair	Policy	Future	89	5.0%	5.6%	3.4%
Mixed	Mixed	Fair	Policy	Past	88	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%
	Mixed	Fair	Identity	Future	71	4.0%	3.1%	6.1%
	Mixed	Unfair	Mixed	Past	66	3.7%	4.1%	2.7%

Table 2: Politicians' Theoretical Positions: Ten Most Common Combinations

quarter of American respondents accept all three democratic realist positions, and when we add the "weak realism" combinations, the percentage rises to 46%. In other words, nearly half of the politicians in our American sample fully or partly embrace the democratic realist account of a blindly retrospective and identity-oriented American voter.

Most of the subsequent combinations in table 2 are equally recognizable from empirical democratic theory. The second most common combination, which we call "identity retrospection", concurs with democratic realism on identity-oriented retrospective voting, but is more optimistic about voters' ability to accurately punish and reward politicians – a position akin to the partisan retrospection theory of Morris Fiorina (1981). Two variants of folk theory are also popular among politicians: one (row 5) endorses prospective voting and the other (row 6) supports retrospective voting, but both support the folk theory vision of a well-informed and policy-oriented electorate. Three mixed positions complete the top ten combinations we observe in the data.

Taken together, we see three important implications in these results. First, politicians in both countries *do* have beliefs about the character of citizens' political behavior that political scientists would describe as "theoretical" beliefs. We find considerable variation in responses to all three of the questions we asked; responses cover the full possible range for each individual question, and when we combine positions across the three questions, each of the 27 possible combinations is held by at least 1% of respondents. Elected politicians do not uni-

formly embrace a single theory of democracy. Third, despite the wide variation in politicians' theoretical positions, the most common position of the 27 possible combinations is democratic realism: about one in seven Canadian politicians and one in four American politicians endorsed the full suite of realist positions in their survey responses. When we include "weak realism" in the total, about 30% of respondents in Canada and 46% of respondents in the United States embraced some version of the democratic realist view. Democratic realism is common in both countries, in other words, but especially pronounced among American politicians.

5   Results 2: Are Politicians' Theories Reflected in their In-Office Behavior?

We now turn to the behavioral correlates of politicians' democratic theories. As we explained above, we focus on a decision over which municipal politicians have considerable autonomy: how to allocate time among competing representational tasks[3]. Figure 3 summarizes the relationship between time allocation and theoretical positions for each theoretical variable and representational task. Each coefficient in the figure is drawn from a distinct OLS regression analysis which includes a control for the total number of hours a respondent spent on all three tasks. We have rescaled the "theoretical debate" variables to range between zero and one.[4]

The results in Figure 3 suggest that politicians' theoretical perspectives are meaningfully related to their work as elected representatives. Representatives who believe voters are identity-oriented report spending substantially more time on constituent communication tasks, and substantially less time on policy development, than politicians who believe citizens are policy-oriented. Similarly, politicians who see voters as retrospective in orientation spend

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[3]We remind readers that this analysis is limited to the subset of Canadian politicians who were asked about their time allocation decisions.

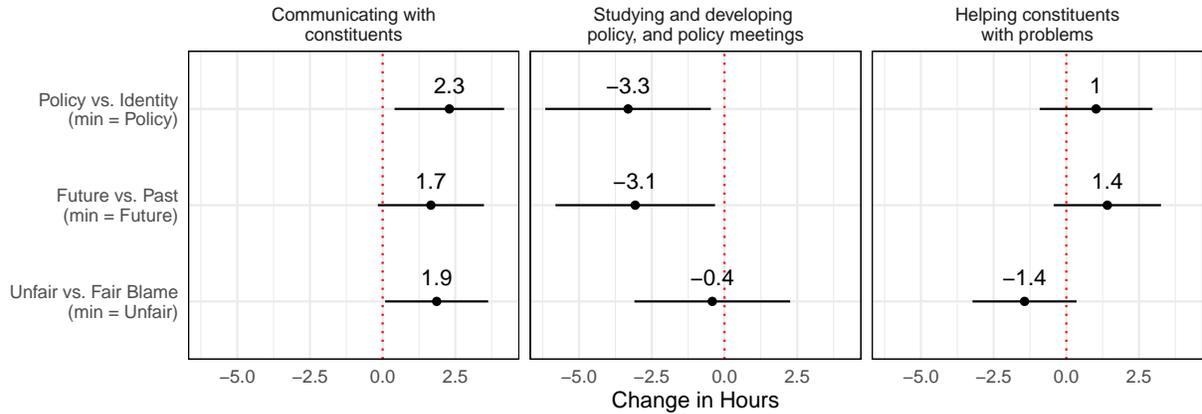[4]We provide full tables in the supplementary material.

Figure 3: Theoretical Positions and Hours Allocation

more time on communication and less time on policy development than politicians who see voters as prospective policy-seekers.[5] Communication activity is also higher among politicians who see voters as fair assessors of their performance. In general, then, we find substantial evidence that politicians' theories of voting behavior are related to their choices about how they spend their time as representatives in theoretically salient and intuitive ways.

In general, then, we find good evidence that politicians' theoretical perspectives are related to the choices they make about how to allocate scarce time over representational tasks. These results demonstrate the existence, in local politics, of a strong link between elected officials' abstract theoretical positions and their concrete, measurable time allocation decisions while in office. This pattern is especially striking because, in the local politics setting, the vote-seeking motivations that motivate time-allocation and constituent-service decisions among politicians in higher offices may not be as salient (Butler, 2019). We are certainly not suggesting that there is a single direction of causation in this relationship – politicians' theories may affect how they spend their time, but it is also possible that politicians' who spend their time on different tasks tend to develop different theories about voters. In our view, both of these causal accounts are important and interesting, and are well-worth exploring in other elected politics settings.

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[5]The first of these relationships is statistically significant at p<0.1.

6   Conclusion: Outlining a New Research Agenda

Our findings suggest that politicians hold meaningful democratic theories. A substantial fraction of politicians in both Canada and the United States - but especially so in the latter - are "democratic realists" who believe voters are retrospective, unfairly allocate credit and blame, and vote on the basis of deeply held identities. A smaller but nevertheless substantial share subscribes to folk theory, believing voters assign blame fairly and make choices primarily on the basis of their policy preferences. These theoretical beliefs are correlated with choices about how to undertake political representation. We thus see clear evidence in these findings that politicians not only vary in their democratic theories, but also that these theoretical positions are related to their behavior as representatives.

These findings lay the groundwork for an important new research agenda on the causes and consequences of political elites' democratic theories. We see at least four important and intersecting priorities for this research agenda. First, we need to better understand how elite theories relate to a wider range of elite behavior, including legislative activity, campaigning styles, and role perceptions. For instance, we would expect politicians who believe voters are policy-oriented to be motivated to increase their legislative output and to be more responsive to public opinion on substantive issues, compared to those who see voters as identity-driven. Beliefs about voters' past/future outlook, blame attribution, and identity should also translate into the campaigning choices politicians make during election cycles - such as their rhetoric, framing, and their substantive issue focus.

Understanding when and how politicians come to hold particular democratic theories, and how they evolve as politicians accumulate experience in office, would also be valuable. Do politicians of different ideological convictions, social backgrounds, or electoral standing also hold different democratic theories? What kinds of events or experiences prompt politicians to refine their theories? Both qualitative and quantitative research will be helpful to answer these questions. Related to this line of inquiry is the link we already document between politicians' theoretical perspectives and their in-office behavior - in the case outlined

here, how they choose to allocate their time between constituency service, communication, and policy work. These findings underscore the importance of disentangling the causal relationship between politicians' theoretical perspectives and their experiences and choices in office: it could be that politicians' theories are stable and help shape their representational preferences and choices once elected. But it is also possible that those same theories are shaped by what politicians do, either for strategic reasons (altering one's view of voters to match in-office constraints or preexisting goals), or because of acquired experience that changes a politician's theoretical outlook.

Third, we see considerable value in extending our analysis to a larger range of theoretical debates. While the three theoretical axes we have discussed are crucial for democratic theory, they are not exhaustive. Existing work has already pointed out additional sources of theoretical variance, such as politicians' perspectives on voters' preferences for individualistic or collective constituency service and their views on the benefits of programmatic policies (Deschouwer and Depauw, 2014). Other work has looked at how politicians theorize the sources of electoral success and voter responsiveness to campaign messages and election promises (Deschouwer and Depauw, 2014; Ekengren and Oscarsson, 2013; Strömbäck, Grandien and Falasca, 2013). Future research might also investigate politicians' positions on "pocketbook" versus sociotropic voting, fixed versus thermostatic policy preferences, or party-centered versus leader-centered voting, among others, providing a more complete picture of politicians' democratic theories. Political scientists may even wish to extend our approach to other theoretical debates, such as theories of the policy process, theories of the character of political bargaining, or principal-agent theories of the relationship between elected officials and the public service.[6]

Our results have obvious limitations. Perhaps most importantly, our data relies on sam-

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[6]These additional theories, while important in political science, focus on areas of politics with which some politicians may not engage; for instance, some politicians may interact little with the public service or serve in governments with little foreign policy role. In contrast, democratic theories deal with election-related beliefs that virtually every elected representative is likely to have developed, and should thus be applicable in a wide range of political contexts and representative roles.

ples of sitting local politicians. While our data are drawn from two countries - Canada and the United States - that have distinct histories, systems of government, and political characteristics (e.g. differences in levels of partisan polarization and partisan attachment, including at the local level), we nevertheless focus exclusively on elected representatives whose lived experiences and responsibilities differ from politicians at higher levels of government. Partisan elections feature predominantly in American local politics and are also a feature of many Canadian localities, but even when they are present, it is unclear whether partisan competition has the same effects in local elections as in national politics (Anzia, 2021). Despite the value and strengths of data from local politicians, and the increasing use of data from local government elites in many studies of elite behavior, these institutional and contextual differences mean that we must be cautious about generalizing our findings to other legislative contexts.

Despite this limitation, our measurement framework is designed to extend easily beyond the local context, enabling direct comparisons of politicians' theories across countries and levels of government. This leads to the fourth and final element of our proposed research agenda: a rigorous, comparative extension of the work we have undertaken here. Clarifying how politicians' theories vary in multi-party versus single-party systems, proportional and majoritarian electoral systems, or more and less polarized political environments can help to clarify not only the causes of politicians' democratic theories themselves, but also the ways politicians' democratic theories may serve as a mechanism connecting electoral institutions to political behavior and outcomes. A fully comparative research agenda on politicians' democratic theories, incorporating many relevant theoretical debates, diverse methodological and measurement approaches, and comparing across varying institutional and political contexts has the potential, in our view, to offer important insights into the the democratic implications of politicians' theorize of the voters they represent.

16

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7 Supplementary Information

7.1 CMB Survey: Additional Detail

In tables 3, 4, and 5, we compare our CMB sample to three observable characteristics of the full population of Canadian municipal elected representatives (above 9,000 population - that is, municipalities in the CMB sampling frame). The tables suggest excellent balance on gender and population size and very good balance by province, with the exception of modest over-representation in Alberta and under-representation in Quebec.

Table 3: Provincial Representation: Population and Sample

Province	Population	Sample	Difference
NL	1.4%	1.6%	0.2%
PE	0.7%	0.4%	-0.3%
NS	3.3%	3.9%	0.6%
NB	2.9%	2.9%	0.0%
QC	29.0%	31.5%	2.5%
ON	35.6%	30.7%	-4.8%
MB	2.8%	2.0%	-0.8%
SK	2.3%	2.6%	0.4%
AB	10.0%	14.0%	3.9%
BC	11.6%	10.0%	-1.6%
YT	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%
NT	0.2%	0.1%	-0.1%

Table 4: Gender Representativeness: Population and Sample

Gender	Population	Sample	Difference
F	0.33	0.34	0.01
M	0.67	0.66	-0.01

Table 5: Population Representativeness: Population and Sample

Pop. Cat.	Population	Sample	Difference	popcat
1	0.30	0.29	-0.01	<15,000
2	0.21	0.19	-0.01	15,000 - 25,000
3	0.16	0.16	0.00	25,000-50,000
4	0.12	0.12	0.00	50,000-100,000
5	0.14	0.16	0.02	100,000-500,000
6	0.07	0.08	0.01	500,000 +

7.2 Behavioral Implications: Full Tables

The tables below provide complete results of the regression analyses reported in the main text (table 6), along with tables that include region fixed effects (table 7).

Table 6: Behavioral Implications: Full Table (Main Text)

	Dependent variable:								
	Communication	Communication	Communication	Policy	Policy	Policy	Service	Service	Service
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Theoretical Position	1.857**	1.659*	2.293**	−0.420	−3.070**	−3.316**	−1.437	1.411	1.023
	(0.902)	(0.928)	(0.958)	(1.362)	(1.396)	(1.448)	(0.910)	(0.938)	(0.986)
Total Hours	0.247***	0.249***	0.246***	0.485***	0.484***	0.491***	0.267***	0.267***	0.263***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Constant	−1.129**	−1.211*	−1.429**	1.194	2.745***	2.603***	−0.065	−1.535**	−1.174*
	(0.563)	(0.649)	(0.629)	(0.851)	(0.976)	(0.951)	(0.568)	(0.656)	(0.648)
Observations	441	444	441	441	444	441	441	444	441
R^2	0.522	0.519	0.529	0.644	0.647	0.664	0.552	0.549	0.546
Adjusted R^2	0.520	0.517	0.527	0.643	0.645	0.662	0.550	0.547	0.544

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 7: Behavioral Implications: Full Table (Additional Controls)

	Dependent variable:								
	Communication	Communication	Communication	Policy	Policy	Policy	Service	Service	Service
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Theoretical Position	1.827**	1.797*	2.350**	−0.505	−2.697*	−3.506**	−1.322	0.900	1.156
	(0.905)	(0.941)	(0.963)	(1.354)	(1.401)	(1.436)	(0.897)	(0.933)	(0.967)
Total Hours	0.248***	0.248***	0.247***	0.485***	0.485***	0.489***	0.267***	0.267***	0.264***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Region: BC	−1.442*	−1.276	−1.002	4.099***	4.145***	3.986***	−2.657***	−2.869***	−2.984***
	(0.861)	(0.854)	(0.850)	(1.289)	(1.272)	(1.269)	(0.854)	(0.847)	(0.855)
Region: Ontario	−1.390*	−1.380*	−0.915	2.116*	2.381**	1.856	−0.726	−1.001	−0.941
	(0.801)	(0.792)	(0.792)	(1.198)	(1.180)	(1.181)	(0.794)	(0.786)	(0.796)
Region: Prairie	−1.483*	−1.355	−1.053	3.620***	3.713***	3.441***	−2.137**	−2.359***	−2.388***
	(0.855)	(0.849)	(0.846)	(1.279)	(1.265)	(1.263)	(0.848)	(0.842)	(0.851)
Region: Quebec	−0.461	−0.507	−0.136	2.586*	2.979**	2.582*	−2.125**	−2.473***	−2.446***
	(0.919)	(0.908)	(0.905)	(1.375)	(1.352)	(1.351)	(0.912)	(0.900)	(0.910)
Region: North	−1.749	−2.790	−2.682	3.685	4.696	4.733	−1.936	−1.906	−2.051
	(4.141)	(4.144)	(4.090)	(6.197)	(6.174)	(6.101)	(4.107)	(4.111)	(4.111)
Constant	0.091	−0.131	−0.664	−1.486	−0.387	0.181	1.395	0.518	0.483
	(0.922)	(0.974)	(0.950)	(1.380)	(1.451)	(1.417)	(0.915)	(0.966)	(0.955)
Observations	441	444	441	441	444	441	441	444	441
R^2	0.528	0.524	0.533	0.656	0.658	0.675	0.573	0.571	0.571
Adjusted R^2	0.521	0.517	0.526	0.650	0.652	0.670	0.566	0.564	0.564

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01