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Going off the Rails on a Crazy Train: The Causes and Consequences of Congressional Infamy

Justin Buchler

Abstract

Legislators like Michele Bachmann and Alan Grayson become nationally infamous for their provocative behavior, yet there is little scholarly attention to such infamy. This paper examines the predictors of congressional infamy, along with its electoral consequences. First, infamy is measured through the frequency with which internet users conduct searches of legislators' names, paired with epithets attacking their intelligence or sanity. Then, ideological extremism and party leadership positions are shown to be the best statistical predictors. The electoral consequences of infamy follow: infamous legislators raise more money than their lower-profile colleagues, but their infamy also helps their challengers to raise money. In the case of House Republicans, there appears to be an additional and direct negative effect of infamy on vote shares. The fundraising effect is larger in Senate elections, but there is no evidence of direct electoral cost for infamous senatorial candidates.

KEYWORDS: Congress, Elections, polarizing, internet

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As Congress has become more polarized, some Members of Congress have gained an additional degree of national infamy for their provocative statements and actions, aided by opinion-based cable news programs that thrive on the controversy generated by these political provocateurs. Consider Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and former Rep. Alan Grayson (D-FL). During the 111th Congress, Representatives Bachmann and Grayson were serving their second and first terms, respectively (in Grayson's case, his only term, since he lost his first re-election campaign in 2010). Neither held a critical position within Congress¹ and neither had any important legislative accomplishments, yet Bachmann and Grayson were two of the more well-known figures within the House of Representatives, based on a history of inflammatory public statements.

Recently, Bachmann has announced a 2012 presidential campaign, with her reputation as a provocateur serving as the "hook" for her candidacy. Bachmann's infamy began with an appearance on *Hardball with Chris Matthews* on October 17, 2008. While discussing liberals in Congress, and particularly then-Sen. Barack Obama, she said, "the news media should do a penetrating exposé and take a look, I wish they would, I wish the American media would take a great look at the views of the people in Congress and find out, are they pro-America or anti-America." Grayson worked his way onto the public stage on September 29, 2009, when he made a speech on the House floor accusing Republicans of telling sick people to "die quickly".

Through regular appearances on cable news programs and provocative speeches, Bachmann and Grayson achieved a level of national recognition that might be better described as infamy rather than fame, and they are not alone. The rise of such political provocateurs in Congress remains an unstudied phenomenon. Much of our understanding of the ways that Members present themselves to the public comes from Fenno (1978), but those models revolve around the ways that Members of Congress present themselves to their own constituents, and the behavior of legislators like Bachmann and Grayson does not fit cleanly into any traditional model of legislative behavior. So, the purpose of this paper is to begin to study legislative infamy.

If we want to understand congressional infamy, the first task is to measure it. So, this paper proposes a measure of infamy for Members of Congress based on the frequency with which their names are used as internet search terms paired with epithets attacking either their intelligence or their sanity. Using that measure, the paper examines the statistical predictors of internet infamy. Not surprisingly, the results suggest that ideological extremism increases the likelihood of a legislator attaining such infamy, as does a leadership position in Congress. Ideological extremism may have asymmetric effects on Senate infamy—

¹ Bachmann has since formed the House Tea Party Caucus, although this informal organization has yet to demonstrate any direct policy effects.

conservative extremism may have a greater effect than liberal extremism. Though the appearance of asymmetry may also be the result of idiosyncratic case exclusion.

Finally, the paper examines the electoral consequences of infamy. One might argue that infamy could be either advantageous or harmful. Consider the possible harmful effects. An infamous legislator might draw stronger challengers because the opposing party would be particularly motivated to defeat her, particularly if the incumbent's infamy is the result of frequent provocative statements. That would be compatible with the observation that legislators with highly partisan voting records draw stronger challengers (see, for example, Carson 2005). Similarly, a challenger facing an infamous incumbent may have an easier time raising money, because donors of the opposition party may be strongly motivated to defeat her. Finally, voters might be turned off by whatever made the legislator infamous, so the same behavior that leads to infamy might alienate swing voters and cost votes. After all, if ideological extremism reduces vote shares (Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Canes-Wrone et al. 2002), then so might other forms of provocative behavior.

However, it is equally plausible that political infamy might be advantageous. Consider the case of Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC). During an address by President Barack Obama to a joint session of Congress, Wilson shouted, "you lie," at the President. In the following week, he raised approximately \$1.5 million on the basis of the outburst, because a certain segment of the population likes to hear their representatives make inflammatory remarks. So, perhaps infamous legislators actually have an electoral advantage because they can raise more money by leveraging their public behavior. Ideological extremism may make it easier to raise money (see, for example, Ensley 2009; Gimpel et al. 2008; Moon 2004), so perhaps rhetorical extremism has a comparable effect. Similarly, infamous legislators could potentially win more votes on election day simply because their own electoral base is more likely to turn out to vote for a rhetorical bomb-thrower than a milquetoast congressional wallflower.

The results in this paper suggest that infamy is more electorally harmful than beneficial. While infamous legislators raise more money than their lower-profile colleagues, their infamy also provides a fundraising boon to their opponents, and in House elections, infamy appears to have a direct negative effect on vote shares, at least for Republicans. Most surprisingly, these results are robust even controlling for ideological extremism. So, while ideological extremism predicts infamy, infamy itself is a better statistical predictor of electoral variables than ideological extremism.

Measuring Infamy

Measuring infamy among Members of Congress is a difficult task because, while most political observers can recognize names like Michele Bachmann and Alan Grayson, most survey respondents cannot. So a survey of several thousand individuals nationwide is unlikely to yield very many respondents who actually know the names of the figures in question. So, this paper proposes a unique way to measure infamy among Members of Congress—by using internet search data. When an internet user types a set of characters into the popular search engine, Google, the engine will suggest up to ten searches (fewer when the “instant search” feature is enabled) based on the most popular searches conducted using the characters typed up to that point.

For example, when typing, “michele bachmann,” followed by a space, the ten suggested searches on November 1, 2009, were: “michele bachmann quotes,” “michele bachmann wiki,” “michele bachmann census,” “michele bachmann photos,” “michele bachmann crazy,” “michele bachmann blog,” “michele bachmann minnesota,” “michele bachmann racist,” “michele bachmann youtube,” and, “michele bachmann for congress.”² The fact that two of the suggested searches included epithets is important information. It demonstrates that when users conduct internet searches about Michele Bachmann, it is often in the context of negative statements about her. The fact that Google suggests these searches, then, tells us something important about Michele Bachmann’s position in the political scene.

The specific number of hits that any of these searches would yield, or even the hits themselves, are of questionable importance. After all, any page that mentions Michele Bachmann and uses the word “crazy” will appear as a hit for the search “michele bachmann crazy,” even if the use of the word “crazy” is not in reference to Rep. Bachmann. What is more informative is the fact that Google will suggest “michele bachmann crazy,” as a search in the first place. That fact demonstrates something important about what kind of searches people conduct in reference to Rep. Bachmann.

So, consider the following epithets, attacking a person’s intelligence or sanity: “idiot,” “stupid,” “moron,” “insane,” “crazy,” “nuts,” and, “bats**t.” The final epithet does not refer to zoological scatology: the phrases “bats**t insane” and “bats**t crazy” refer to a particularly extreme lack of psychological stability. The purpose of focusing on these specific epithets is that they are generic. Some epithets have a partisan bias. For example, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to be accused of racism, while Democrats are more likely than Republicans to have their patriotism challenged. Similarly, accusations of

² Search suggestions are subject to change over time based on the relative popularity of each search, which will be addressed later.

corruption are idiosyncratic. Other epithets may be used with disproportionate frequency against a particular gender. The seven epithets examined in this paper are useful precisely because they are generic.

So, for each legislator serving in either the House of Representatives or the Senate during the 111th Congress, their names³ were typed into the search window of Google with the “instant search” feature disabled.⁴ A space was then typed. For each of the seven epithets, the letters of the epithet are sequentially entered into the search window. If “[legislator’s name] [epithet]” appears as a suggested search at any point before reaching the final letter of the epithet in question, that is recorded as an affirmative for that legislator and that epithet. The precise number of characters into the epithet that are required in order to produce that epithet as a suggested search are not important.⁵ What matters is simply whether or not Google ever offers “[name] [epithet]” as a suggested search.

At no point was the “search” button pressed, so as not to affect Google’s search suggestion algorithm in the process of the study. The question is merely whether or not Google offered a legislator’s name along with an epithet as a suggested search. The coding is strict. For example, if Google offers the combination in question form, such as “is [name] an idiot,” that is recorded as a negative, as is “[name] stupid quotes” unless “[name] stupid” is also offered as a search suggestion. Such rules are inevitably arbitrary, but consistency in the data is critical, given that the data are somewhat crude by their very nature.

Two sweeps of Google search suggestions were conducted. The first was between October 30 and November 2, 2009, and the second was almost precisely a year later, between October 29 and October 31, 2010, during the weekend immediately preceding the 2010 general elections. The purpose of conducting two sweeps is the fact that popular searches change over time, so Google’s search suggestions change over time as well. Two sweeps of the data permit a better measure of internet infamy during the 111th Congress.

In addition to the two sweeps of search suggestions for Members of Congress, I conducted a single sweep of search suggestions for all major non-incumbent Senate candidates in the 2010 general election, because some high-profile non-incumbents, like Sharron Angle in Nevada and Christine O’Donnell in Delaware, may be subject to similar effects. For obvious reasons, this sweep could not have been conducted in 2009, so only a single sweep was done, on

³ For legislators known by multiple variations of their names, each variation is tested. For example, the searches for Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) are done using both, “Charles Schumer,” and, “Chuck Schumer.”

⁴ When the “instant search” feature is enabled, *Google* conducts the search as each character is typed.

⁵ Data were compiled regarding the number of characters required to produce the search suggestion, but such data exhibited no statistical patterns.

October 31, 2010. Finally, as a point of reference, I conducted searches in both sweeps for several other national political figures (Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin), and a variety of opinion-based cable news personalities.

It should be noted that data compiled in this manner can in no way be construed to measure actual intelligence or sanity. These data only measure the degree to which Members of Congress are accused of lacking same by internet users. Similarly, these data cannot be used as a proxy for general public disapproval. In essence, they measure the breadth and intensity of one's political opposition on the internet, and the degree to which that opposition takes the form of ridicule and *ad hominem* attack. A political figure whose name is associated with many epithets in Google searches may be neither unintelligent nor psychologically unstable, but simply polarizing to the point of infamy.

Nevertheless, if one Member of Congress has several epithets attached to his or her name as suggested Google searches, and another has none, that indicates something important about the degree of ridicule to which these Members are subjected, and that is informative about their niche in the political system. So, while Google epithet suggestions are a direct measure only of internet ridicule, this paper uses internet ridicule as a proxy for a more general form of infamy, which would be much more difficult to quantify directly. It will be important throughout the analysis to keep in mind the limitations of such an unusual measurement system.

Raw Data

The list of legislators and other figures with epithets as search suggestions, and the suggestions for each, are presented in Tables 1 through 4. The methodology used to compile these data was highly unorthodox, though if an avid Congress-watcher were to list the most infamous and polarizing figures in the 111th Congress, the results would probably look very similar to the list of legislators with Google-suggested epithets, particularly for the House of Representatives. This lends a certain amount of credence to the use of internet ridicule as a quantitative measure of more general infamy. After all, the legislators for whom Google suggested epithets are, generally speaking, high-profile, polarizing figures like Bachmann and Grayson.

Table 1. Representatives from the 111th House with Epithets

Representative	Party	Crazy	Insane	Nuts	Bats**t	Idiot	Stupid	Moron	Total
Michele Bachmann (MN)	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Alan Grayson (FL)	D	2	2	2		2	2	2	6
Ron Paul (TX)	R	✓	✓	✓		✓	1	✓	6
Nancy Pelosi (CA)	D	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	5
Maxine Waters (CA)	D	✓				✓	✓	2	4
Barney Frank (MA)	D	1				✓	1	✓	4
Joe Wilson (SC)	R	1				1	1	1	4
Louie Gohmert (TX)	R	2	2			✓		2	4
Sheila Jackson Lee (TX)	D	✓				✓	✓	1	4
Anthony Weiner (NY)	D	2				2		2	3
Paul Broun (GA)	R	1				✓			2
Mike Pence (IN)	R	2				✓			2
Steve King (IA)	R	2				✓			2
Virginia Foxx (NC)	R	✓				1			2
John Boehner (OH)	R					✓	2		2
Marsha Blackburn (TN)	R	1				1			2
Zach Wamp (TN)	R	2				2			2
Gabrielle Giffords (AZ)	D					2			1
Zoe Lofgren (CA)	D					2			1
Loretta Sanchez (CA)	D					2			1
Pete Stark (CA)	D					✓			1
Diane Watson (CA)	D					1			1
Henry Waxman (CA)	D					✓			1
Corrine Brown (FL)	D					✓			1
Henry "Hank" Johnson (GA)	D					✓			1
John Conyers (MI)	D					✓			1
Russ Carnahan (MO)	D					1			1
Peter King (NY)	R					✓			1
John Hall (NY)	D	✓							1
Mary Fallin (OK)	R	2							1
Dennis Kucinich (OH)	D	1							1
Patrick Kennedy (RI)	D					1			1
Joe Barton (TX)	R					2			1
Jason Chaffetz (UT)	R					1			1
Eric Cantor (VA)	R					✓			1
Paul Ryan (WI)	R					2			1

Coding for epithet columns: 1 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 1), 2 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 2), check mark (epithet was suggested in both sweeps)

Table 2. Senators from the 111th Senate with Epithets

Senator	Party	Crazy	Insane	Nuts	Bats**t	Idiot	Stupid	Moron	Total
Al Franken (MN)	D	✓	1			✓	1	✓	5
Barbara Boxer (CA)	D					✓	✓	✓	3
Jim DeMint (SC)	R	2				✓	✓		3
Patty Murray (WA)	D					2	2	2	3
Jeff Sessions (AL)	R					✓		1	2
John McCain (AZ)	R					✓	✓		2
Jim Bunning (KY)	R	✓				1			2
John Kerry (MA)	D					1	✓		2
Harry Reid (NV)	D					✓	2		2
Tom Coburn (OK)	R	✓				✓			2
James Inhofe (OK)	R	1				✓			2
Richard Shelby (AL)	R					1			1
Lisa Murkowski (AK)	R					2			1
Jon Kyl (AZ)	R					1			1
Christopher Dodd (CT)	D					1			1
Joe Lieberman (CT)	D*					1			1
Johnny Isakson (GA)	R			1					1
Chuck Grassley (IA)	R					1			1
Mitch McConnell (KY)	R					2			1
Scott Brown (MA)	R					2			1
Max Baucus (MT)	D					1			1
Ben Nelson (NE)	D					2			1
Charles Schumer (NY)	D					1			1
Arlen Specter (PA)	D*					1			1
Lindsey Graham (SC)	R					✓			1
Orrin Hatch (UT)	R					1			1
Bernard Sanders (VT)	I					1			1

*While Sen. Lieberman lost his primary for the Democratic nomination in 2006, he won the general election as an independent candidate, and currently calls himself an, “independent Democrat,” hence the coding. This table classifies Arlen Specter as a Democrat because he was a Democrat for most of the 111th Senate, and he was a Democrat at the time of both sweeps. A case could be made, though, for coding him as a Republican because he only had an epithet suggested in the first sweep, which was conducted very shortly after his party switch, so the frequent searches of “arlen specter idiot” may have been conducted while he was still a Republican. However, the substantive findings of the paper are the same regardless of how we code Specter’s party. Coding for epithet columns: 1 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 1), 2 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 2), check mark (epithet was suggested in both sweeps)

Table 3. Senate Candidates with Epithets (10/29/10-10/31/10), Sweep 2 Only

Candidate	Party	Crazy	Insane	Nuts	Bats**t	Idiot	Stupid	Moron	Total
Christine O'Donnell (DE)	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Sharron Angle (NV)	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
Rand Paul (KY)	R	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	5
Carly Fiorina (CA)	R	✓				✓	✓		3
Alvin Greene (SC)	D	✓				✓	✓		3
Ken Buck (CO)	R	✓				✓			2
Ron Johnson (WI)	R	✓				✓			2
Linda McMahon (CT)	R	✓				✓			2
Marco Rubio (FL)	R	✓				✓			2
Joe Miller (AK)	R	✓				✓			2
Dino Rossi (WA)	R					✓			1
Pat Toomey (PA)	R	✓							1

Table 4. Epithets for Other National Political Figures and Cable News Personalities

Political Figure	Crazy	Insane	Nuts	Bats**t	Idiot	Stupid	Moron	Total
Sarah Palin	✓	✓	1	1	✓	✓	✓	7
Joe Biden	2				✓	1	✓	4
Barack Obama					✓	✓	1	3
Hillary Clinton	1				1			2
Glenn Beck (Fox News Channel)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Lou Dobbs (CNN) (sweep 1 only)	1	1	1		1	1	1	6
Keith Olbermann (MSNBC)	✓	✓	2		✓	✓	✓	6
Ed Schultz (MSNBC)	2	2	2		✓	2	✓	6
Sean Hannity (Fox News Channel)	✓	1			✓	✓	✓	5
Bill O'Reilly (Fox News Channel)	✓	2			✓		✓	4
Rachel Maddow (MSNBC)	2				✓	✓	✓	4
Chris Matthews (MSNBC)			1		✓	2	✓	4
Jon Stewart (Comedy Central)					✓	✓	2	3
Stephen Colbert (Comedy Central)					✓	2		2

Note that searches for Lou Dobbs were only conducted during sweep 1 because he had left CNN well before sweep 2, and both sweeps for Keith Olbermann were conducted, who left MSNBC after both sweeps. Coding for epithet columns: 1 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 1), 2 (epithet was suggested only in sweep 2), check mark (epithet was suggested in both sweeps).

By the measurement system proposed here, Bachmann is the most infamous legislator in either chamber. She is the only legislator in either chamber for whom Google suggested “bats**t crazy” or “bats**t insane” as a search, and the only legislator for whom Google suggested all seven epithets. In fact, it was difficult to find a generic epithet that Google would not suggest as a search term associated with Bachmann. Only Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and Christine O’Donnell matched Bachmann for Google-suggested epithets. To be sure, Bachmann is not the most *famous* Representative. Other legislators surely have higher name recognition. Even within the House (hence excluding the 2008 Republican presidential nominee), Nancy Pelosi’s name is probably more widely known than Bachmann’s, and as a controversial figure, there are probably more people in the country with negative opinions of Nancy Pelosi than Michele Bachmann for purely partisan reasons.⁶

However, Nancy Pelosi was the first female Speaker of the House rather than a rhetorical bomb-thrower, so her name recognition is probably at least as much a function of her position as it is of being an intrinsically provocative figure. In contrast, as a second-term legislator in the 111th Congress, Michele Bachmann’s name recognition was more or less *entirely* a function of being a provocative figure. This paper is concerned with infamy, not fame, so it is reasonable to rank Bachmann as somewhat more “infamous” than Pelosi. In general, though, Table 1 lists those whom observers would generally agree were the high-profile polarizers in the 111th House.

With respect to the Senate, it should be no surprise that Sen. Al Franken (D-MN) had more epithets attached to his name as Google search suggestions than any other Senator. His experience prior to the Senate included his involvement with *Saturday Night Live*, a liberal talk radio show, and books with titles such as, *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big, Fat Idiot*, and *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. While Franken’s inflammatory rhetoric was somewhat different from Bachmann’s, in that Franken’s objective was comedy, we should expect the effect to be similar, given the polarizing nature of both sets of comments.

It is interesting to note that the most infamous Representative and the most infamous Senator represent the same state, Minnesota, which also elected former professional wrestler and provocateur Jesse Ventura as Governor. It is also interesting to note that the most infamous members of each chamber represent different parties, confirming that infamy can cross party lines. It should also be unsurprising that Senate candidates like Sharron Angle and Christine O’Donnell seemed to be roughly as infamous as Bachmann, given the amount of national attention devoted to their unusual statements during the 2010 campaign.

⁶ This may change, depending on the dynamics of the 2012 presidential campaign, but during the 111th Congress, it was almost certainly true.

While most of the other infamous legislators will also be unsurprising to those who follow legislative politics, a few names are somewhat more so. It is possible that some of the names have epithets associated with them as search suggestions because of other people with the same names. It is also possible that some legislators acquired epithets simply by virtue of a high-profile campaign in 2010. These are unavoidable flaws in the methodology that must be acknowledged, but the lists in Tables 1 and 2 consist primarily of the names that Congress-watchers should predict, suggesting that the measurement approach has validity.

One final note of interest—the most common epithet by far is “idiot.” Almost every legislator who had at least one epithet had “idiot” as a suggested search term. This probably indicates more about American culture and the epithets that people reflexively use than about whether it is more common for political opponents to question legislators’ intelligence or sanity.

Predicting Infamy

Why do some legislators have epithets associated with their names as suggested searches, and others not? Why do some legislators have more epithets associated with their names in suggested searches than others? Anecdotal explanations are simple to construct for most, though not all, of the names in Tables 1 and 2, particularly the legislators with many epithets. Most of those anecdotes revolve around patterns of inflammatory statements, as with Representatives Bachmann and Grayson. One might expect ideological extremists to be more likely to make such statements, so we can hypothesize that ideological extremists are more likely to have epithets associated with their names than relative centrists.

We might also hypothesize a party leadership effect. One of the most infamous legislators in the 111th House was former Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who is a regular political target as a symbol of liberalism both because she was the Speaker of the House during the 111th Congress and because she represents the famously liberal city of San Francisco with the type of policy positions one might expect from her home. Both the Minority Leader and Minority Whip from the 111th House also had epithets as search suggestions. Thus, we might expect party leaders to be more likely to receive epithets as suggested search terms.

Electurally, we might expect those who represent safe districts and those who win by larger margins to feel more comfortable with inflammatory rhetoric, and hence acquire epithets. Alternatively, a high-profile, competitive election might result in the incumbent acquiring epithets. So, it is not clear whether we should expect safe legislators or vulnerable legislators to acquire more epithets; either effect would be conceivable. However, it is also possible for infamy to have

electoral consequences, so we must address the issue of endogeneity in the analysis.

Finally, we can test for a partisan difference. The only four figures for whom all seven epithets occur as suggested search terms are Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN), Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and Christine O'Donnell. So, perhaps Republicans are particularly likely targets of such epithets.

Thus, we have four possible predictors of infamy: ideological extremism, party leadership, electoral circumstance, and party affiliation. These propositions are simple to test. We can specify the dependent variable in two ways. First, we can use a dichotomous variable, taking a value of 1 for any legislator for whom Google suggested at least one epithet as a search term in at least one sweep, and 0 otherwise. Alternatively, we can use the raw count of epithets Google suggested in at least one sweep.⁷

For independent variables, there are two electoral variables to test: the legislator's share of the two-party vote in the 2008 election, and the presidential candidate's share of the two-party vote within the legislator's district. Both variables come from Gary Jacobson's dataset. We can also include a *party leader* variable, taking a value of 1 for the Speaker of the House, a Majority or Minority Leader, or a Majority or Minority Whip, and a 0 otherwise. We can then include a *party* dummy variable, taking a value of 1 for Republicans, and 0 for Democrats.

We can measure ideological extremism using DW-NOMINATE scores from the 111th Congress. To allow for the possibility of asymmetric ideological effects, we can create two separate variables. The first variable is *liberal extremism*, which has a value of 0 for anyone with a DW-NOMINATE score greater than or equal to 0, and the absolute value of the DW-NOMINATE score for any legislator with a negative score. Thus, higher values indicate more extremism in the liberal direction. Similarly, we can compute a *conservative extremism* variable, which takes on a value of 0 for any legislator with a DW-NOMINATE score less than or equal to 0, and the DW-NOMINATE score itself for any legislator with a score greater than 0.

Only legislators serving at the time of sweep 2 are included in any model. For obvious reasons, separate models should be run for House and Senate. For the House of Representatives, the paper presents three models predicting infamy. The first uses a dichotomous measure of whether or not Google suggested any epithets as the dependent variable. This model is a probit. The second model predicting House epithets uses a raw count as the dependent variable. Since the methodology only checked for seven epithets, I model the count first using a tobit model,

⁷ For example, Google suggested six epithets for Rep. Grayson in sweep 2, but none in sweep 1 because sweep 1 was conducted too close to the speech with which he entered the public consciousness. In the dichotomous coding system, he would be coded as 1 rather than 0, and in the counting system, he would be coded as 6 rather than 0.

bounded by 0 and 7. The third model predicting House epithets also uses the raw count as the dependent variable, but it ignores the upper bound on the count and uses a negative binomial specification. After all, only one legislator actually achieves the upper bound (Rep. Bachmann). The results of these regressions appear below in Table 5.

Table 5. Predicting Epithets for House Members

	Probit DV: At least 1 epithet	Tobit DV: Epithet count	Negative Binomial DV: Epithet count
District Pres. Vote Share	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.03)
2008 Vote Share	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)
Republican	-0.71 (0.76)	-3.08 (2.99)	-0.77 (1.88)
Party Leader	1.63** (0.60)	5.80** (2.20)	2.32† (1.48)
Liberal Extremism	2.62** (1.03)	10.54** (4.36)	6.72** (2.68)
Conservative Extremism	2.93*** (0.93)	12.16*** (3.78)	5.86** (2.40)
Constant	-2.82 (0.65)	-11.50 (3.10)	-4.25 (1.34)
Ln(alpha)			2.22 (0.28)
alpha			9.21 (2.61)
N	433	433	433
LR Chi-Square	32.60	33.29	22.97

† p<.1, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

The results are robust across model specifications. Not surprisingly, the best and most consistent statistical predictor of infamy is ideological extremism. Both extremism variables have positive and statistically significant coefficients in all three House models. Hence, ideologically extreme legislators, regardless of the direction of their extremism, are more likely to have Google suggest at least one epithet as a search term, and are likely to have Google suggest more total epithets as search terms. The coefficients for liberal extremism and conservative extremism are comparable to each other in each model, suggesting that the effects

of extremism on infamy are relatively symmetric. No other variable predicts infamy as robustly as extremism.

However, party leadership positions also appear to predict infamy. The party leadership dummy variable has a positive coefficient in each model, and it is statistically significant at the .01 level for the probit and tobit models, and at the .1 level in the negative binomial regression. Thus, party leadership positions also appear to increase the likelihood that Google will suggest at least one epithet and, possibly to a lesser extent, the total number of epithets Google suggests as search terms.

In contrast, neither party affiliation nor the electoral variables predict infamy in any specification. It is possible that legislators are more likely to say provocative things, and hence develop infamy, if they represent safer districts, but that they lose votes in the process. If that is the case, then the two effects might cancel each other out, leading to a zero coefficient for the vote-share variable. Yet since the district presidential-vote variable is also statistically zero and endogeneity should not be a concern for district *presidential* vote, it is unlikely that this is the case. Infamy, as measured with Google search suggestions, is predicted primarily by ideological extremism and party leadership positions, not electoral circumstances or party label.

Table 6. Predicting Epithets for Senators

	Probit DV: At least 1 epithet coded as 1	Negative Binomial DV: Number of epithets
Republican	-.63 (.85)	-.29 (1.34)
Party Leader	1.40* (.76)	.70 (.80)
Liberal Extremism	-.79 (1.54)	2.56 (2.36)
Conservative Extremism	1.85† (1.20)	3.26* (1.57)
Constant	-.64 (.61)	-2.09 (1.00)
Ln(alpha)		.28 (.57)
alpha		1.32 (.75)
N	99	99
LR Chi-Square	10.90	7.52

† p<.1, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

Table 6 shows the results for Senate analysis. Since Senators hold staggered terms, their electoral backgrounds are more complex, and since there are no apparent effects of 2008 electoral variables on epithet counts for the House of Representatives, the Senate models exclude vote share and state presidential vote. Also, since no Senator has all seven epithets suggested by Google, there is no right-censoring in the Senate data, meaning that there is no reason to use a tobit model rather than a negative binomial model. Thus, there are only two Senate models: a probit model in which the dependent variable is whether or not Google suggests any epithets, and a negative binomial regression in which the dependent variable is the number of epithets Google suggests.

The results from the Senate analysis differ significantly from the House analysis in two important ways. First, the party leadership effect is only statistically significant in the probit model predicting whether or not Google suggests at least one epithet for the Senator in question. (Recall that the party leadership variable was significant at the .1 level in the negative binomial model for the House of Representatives). More importantly, while conservative extremism appears to increase the likelihood that Google will suggest at least one epithet for Senators and increase the total number of epithets Google suggests, there appears to be no such effect for liberal extremism.

However, that asymmetry may be illusory, and caused by idiosyncrasies in the data. First, three high-profile, polarizing liberals from the 110th Senate were no longer serving in the 111th Senate as a result of the 2008 election: Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Hillary Clinton, all of whom had epithets suggested by Google (see Table 4). Yet since they were no longer Senators, they could not be included in the models, because they were no longer comparable cases. Also, polarizing liberal Senator Bernard Sanders (I-VT) was excluded because the model includes a party dummy variable, and Sanders is officially independent (hence the Senate models include 99 cases rather than 100). It is possible that the lack of an effect of liberal extremism comes from these case exclusions. For whatever reason, though, the data do not present the same symmetric effect for ideological extremism in the Senate that it has in the House.

Electoral Consequences of Infamy

We can now turn our attention from the predictors of infamy to its consequences. Do high-profile polarizers and provocateurs benefit from their infamy? Alternatively, do they pay an electoral price for their behavior?

The Effects of Infamy in House Elections

The first question regarding the electoral consequences of infamy is whether or not infamous legislators face stronger challengers. So, for every House incumbent running for re-election on the general election ballot in 2010,⁸ I examine the relationship between their epithet count and the strength of the challengers they faced. As a dependent variable, I use Jacobson's experience measure, taking a value of 1 for incumbents who faced a challenger who had held elected office before, and 0 otherwise. For purposes of this analysis, I treat unchallenged incumbents simply as incumbents who did not face an experienced challenger, although the results are consistent in alternative specifications. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, I use a probit model.

The key independent variable is the incumbent's epithet count. As before, since I conducted two sweeps of the data, I count an epithet if it appeared in at least one sweep, which will be the coding system for all House analysis (although the Senate analysis will be different). I include two statistical controls—the two-party vote share of the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party in the district from 2008 (again from Gary Jacobson's dataset) and the incumbent's ideological extremism, measured with the absolute value of the incumbent's DW-NOMINATE score from the 111th Congress. The results of this model are reported in Table 7.

Table 7. Determinants of 2010 House Challenger Experience, Probit Estimates

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Incumbent epithet count	0.13	0.10
District presidential vote	-0.07***	0.01
Incumbent extremism	-1.61***	0.44
Constant	3.56	0.56
N	392	
LR χ^2	100.38	
Pseudo R ²	0.26	

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

Table 7 shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between an incumbent's epithet count and whether or not the incumbent faced an experienced challenger in 2010. Results are similar when the sample is separated by party. However, epithet counts have more predictive power with respect to

⁸ Since I focus on the general election stage, I exclude Representatives who lost their primaries.

House incumbent fund-raising. The dependent variable in the next set of models is the total amount of money received by the incumbent by December 31, 2010, in thousands of dollars, as reported to the FEC. Again, only incumbents running on the general election ballot are included, and in this set of models, I separate the sample by party and run separate models for Democrats and Republicans, since results differ for incumbents of each party. Using OLS with White standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity, I regress total receipts on the incumbent's epithet count, and a battery of four control variables.

As statistical controls, I include the incumbent's level of ideological extremism (measured, again, by the absolute value of the incumbent's DW-NOMINATE score for the 111th Congress), the two-party vote share of the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party in the district from 2008, the total amount of combined spending by the Democratic and Republican House candidates in the district in 2008 in thousands of dollars (provided again by Gary Jacobson), and a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if the incumbent faced an experienced challenger in 2010, and 0 otherwise. The results of these regressions are reported in Table 8.

Table 8. House Incumbent Fundraising in 2010, OLS with White SE

	Democrats	Republicans
Incumbent epithet count	282.845** (108.419)	830.763** (329.060)
Extremism	-362.274 (394.468)	-789.741 (785.585)
District presidential vote	-19.228*** (4.894)	-16.124* (9.322)
Total Spending from 2008	0.283*** (0.042)	0.336*** (0.092)
Experienced challenger	17.171 (130.586)	395.616* (237.880)
Constant	2.413 (285.609)	1.975 (548.010)
N	236	156
R ²	0.539	0.513

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

Table 8 shows that while epithet counts did not predict challenger quality, they do predict incumbent fundraising. A Democratic incumbent received, on average, an additional \$282,845 for each epithet suggested by Google. Even more impressively, a Republican incumbent received, on average, an additional

\$830,763 per epithet.⁹ Both effects are statistically significant at the .01 level. It is particularly important to observe that these are the apparent effects of infamy controlling for ideological extremism. In fact, when we control for epithet counts, ideological extremism does *not* predict incumbent fundraising. While the previous section demonstrated that ideological extremism predicts epithet counts, it is epithet counts, not extremism, that predict fundraising.

This suggests that potential donors are not motivated to contribute to ideologically pure candidates. Instead, they are motivated to contribute to political provocateurs. This is especially so for Republicans. These results are particularly surprising because they run directly contrary to previous findings that money follows ideological extremism (again, see Ensley 2009; Gimpel et al. 2008; Moon 2004). However, the results make substantive sense. Most donors do not closely examine NOMINATE scores. Instead, they observe behavior, and provocative statements are more visible than voting scores to most potential donors.

Table 9. House Challenger Spending in 2010, OLS with White SE

	Democrats	Republicans
Incumbent epithet count	477.967*** (89.339)	160.645* (79.577)
Incumbent extremism	-764.373* (407.176)	-3.245 (506.049)
District presidential vote	-26.811*** (8.500)	-32.939*** (8.179)
Total Spending from 2008	0.070 (0.070)	0.145*** (0.035)
Experienced challenger	200.534 (182.457)	70.047 (167.062)
Constant	2.010 (473.475)	2.522 (485.676)
N	109	209
R ²	0.458	0.265

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

However, we cannot be so quick to conclude that infamy is electorally advantageous. After all, infamy might help one's challenger raise money, too. Since challengers spend all or nearly all of the money they raise, I use 2010 challenger spending, again generously provided by Gary Jacobson, as a proxy for

⁹ Recall that the dependent variable is coded in thousands of dollars, so a coefficient of 282 for the epithet count translates to a \$282K increase in total receipts per epithet.

challenger fundraising. Using that as the dependent variable, again in thousands of dollars, I run a set of models otherwise identical to those reported in Table 8, using challenger spending as the dependent variable. The results of these regressions are reported in Table 9.

Table 9 shows that incumbent infamy leads to a better-funded *challenger*, although challengers receive less money per incumbent epithet than incumbents do. The partisan difference remains, nonetheless. Democratic challengers spend an additional \$477,967 for each epithet Google suggests for the Republican incumbent, which is statistically significant at the .001 level. Republican challengers spend an additional \$160,645 for each epithet Google suggests for the Democratic incumbent, and that is statistically significant at the .05 level.¹⁰ Again, Republican epithet counts seem to have a larger effect on campaign finance. It is also important to note that these effects still exist independently of incumbent ideological extremism. In fact, controlling for the epithet count, Democratic challengers spent *less* money the more extreme their incumbent opponents were. It is not ideological extremism that motivates campaign contributors. It is political infamy.

At this point, it would seem that infamy is a net benefit for incumbents since the amount of money they raise on the basis of their infamy is greater than the amount of money their infamy helps their challengers to raise. However, there are two more issues to address before we can assess the net benefits and dangers of infamy. First, while incumbents raise more money on the basis of their infamy than they help challengers to raise, the money may be more valuable to challengers. Empirically, it generally appears that challengers gain more by spending money in elections than incumbents do (see, for example, Jacobson 2009), either because they need more money to improve their name recognition, or simply because spending is subject to diminishing marginal returns. So perhaps the nearly \$500K that Democratic challengers raise per Republican epithet does more to hurt an infamous Republican incumbent than the incumbent's additional \$800K does to help.

The other issue is that infamy may have *direct* electoral effects. In order to assess the benefits and drawbacks of infamy, we must account for both of these issues. So, in the final set of House analysis, I regress incumbent vote shares on their epithet counts, and a battery of controls. Again, I separate the sample by party. For the dependent variable, I use the incumbent's share of the two-party vote (provided again by Jacobson), ignoring third party candidates. Using OLS, I regress the incumbent's vote share on the incumbent's epithet count, the incumbent's level of ideological extremism, the 2008 two-party vote share of the presidential candidate of the incumbent's party in the district, a dummy variable

¹⁰ Recall that coefficients must be multiplied by 1000 for the dollar effect because the dependent variable is coded in thousands of dollars.

taking a value of 1 when the challenger has held elected office before and 0 otherwise, and the proportion of total spending in 2010 made by the challenger. In this set of models, I exclude incumbents who ran unopposed in 2010. The results of these regressions are reported in Table 10.

Table 10. Predicting House Incumbent Vote Shares in 2010, OLS

	Democratic incumbents	Republican incumbents
Incumbent epithet count	-0.31 (0.40)	-0.84* (0.39)
Incumbent extremism	-6.18* (2.72)	-2.01 (2.35)
District presidential vote	0.78*** (0.03)	0.61*** (0.05)
Experienced challenger	-1.73* (0.80)	-0.99 (0.96)
Challenger spending share	-15.47*** (1.98)	-8.75*** (2.19)
Constant	17.57 (2.11)	36.19 (3.05)
N	232	132
R ²	0.88	0.70

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

Table 10 shows the risks of infamy. While infamy helped incumbents of both parties raise large sums of money, and in fact, more money than their challengers, voters can respond negatively to infamous incumbents. There is no statistically significant relationship between the epithet counts of Democratic incumbents and their vote shares in 2010. So, the effects of Democratic infamy may be based solely on financial implications. However, the picture is different for Republican incumbents. For each epithet Google suggested for a Republican incumbent, that incumbent lost about 0.84 percentage points from her two-party vote share, controlling for spending, extremism, challenger experience, and district partisanship, and that effect is statistically significant at the .05 level. So, Republican incumbents raise money on the basis of their infamy, but they also help their opponents to raise money, and controlling for relative spending, they lose votes.

On balance, the question is whether the financial benefit of infamy outweighs the combination of the direct electoral costs, plus the cost of helping one's opponent to raise money. It should be noted that the only House incumbents

with epithets who lost in 2010 were Alan Grayson and John Hall, and since there is no statistically significant relationship between Democratic epithet counts and Democratic incumbent vote-shares, we cannot infer with any confidence that they lost because of their infamy. However, we can examine the most infamous Republican, Michele Bachmann. Michele Bachmann was, by the measure in this paper, the most infamous incumbent. She was the only legislator in either chamber for whom Google suggested all seven epithets. Moreover, Google suggested all seven epithets for her in both sweeps, and she was the only legislator for whom Google ever suggested “bats**t” as a search term, although Google also suggested that as a search term for Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Sharron Angle, and Christine O’Donnell.

If Bachmann lost 0.84 percentage points for each of her seven epithets, that is a direct loss of 5.88 percentage points from her two-party vote share. However, we must also account for the indirect effects of her fundraising. In her 2010 campaign, she spent \$11,652,650, and her opponent spent \$4,690,169 according to Jacobson’s data. That yielded a challenger spending share of approximately .29. However, if Bachmann raised an additional \$830,763 for each of her seven epithets, then without those epithets, she would have had \$5,815,341 less to spend. If her opponent spent an additional \$477,967 for each of her seven epithets, then without those epithets, her opponent would have spent \$3,345,769 less. So, if we subtract those amounts from the candidates’ actual spending totals in 2010, we can impute a challenger spending figure of \$1,344,400 and an incumbent spending figure of \$5,837,309 assuming an epithet count of zero. That would yield a challenger spending share of approximately .19.

So, despite the fact that Bachmann raised more money on the basis of her infamy than her challenger did, the spending ratio would have been more favorable to Bachmann without the additional fundraising on each side.¹¹ When Michele Bachmann spends over \$11 million in one campaign, one should expect her spending to be subject to heavily diminished marginal returns, and given those diminished marginal returns, the additional \$3.3 million that she helped her challenger to raise could reasonably have cost her more than she gained from the additional \$5.8 million she raised. Based on a coefficient for the challenger spending share of -8.75, the .29 challenger spending share reduced Bachmann’s vote share by 2.54 points, and a .19 challenger spending ratio would have reduced her vote share by only 1.66 points. The difference between those two figures is .88, so by helping her challenger to raise money that was more electorally important than her own additional fundraising, Bachmann lost another .88 percentage points from her two-party vote share.

¹¹ Recall, again, the asymmetric effects of incumbent and challenger spending.

Finally, when we combine the direct and indirect effects of Bachmann's infamy, the results in this paper suggest that she lost 6.76 percentage points from her two-party vote-share in 2010 due to her infamy. There are other ways to specify spending in the model, and some of those specifications can shift the effects of the fund-raising differences and epithet counts, but in every reasonable specification with reasonable imputed scores on the independent variables, infamy for Republican incumbents is a net electoral loss.

As a result, we have a strange partisan split. Democratic incumbents gain more money from their infamy than their challengers do, so the question of whether or not they benefit from infamy depends on the relative value of the money they raise and the money their challengers raise, given the diminishing marginal returns of campaign spending for incumbents. Republicans, though, seem to suffer more directly from infamy, and in a year in which the partisan balance does not favor Republicans as much as it did in 2010, an infamous Republican like Bachmann could reasonably lose her seat. After all, Bachmann won only 57% of the two-party vote in 2010, which heavily favored Republicans. Without her infamy, the results in this paper suggest that she would have won with a more comfortable margin—an estimated 64%. Infamy is electorally dangerous, particularly for Republican incumbents in the House, and as Rep. Bachmann contemplates a presidential campaign, such numbers should dampen any optimism she may have about her chances.

The Effects of Infamy in Senate Elections

Despite the fact that I conducted two sweeps of the data, the analysis of Senate elections uses exclusively epithets from the second sweep because the analysis will examine both incumbent and non-incumbent candidates. Since epithet data on non-incumbent candidates could only be gathered in the second sweep, using first- and second-sweep data for incumbents in the same analysis would lead to comparability problems. It should be noted that the samples will be small in each of the Senate models because Senate terms are staggered. The small samples suggest that we should remain more skeptical of the Senate than the House results.

The first empirical question for Senate elections is whether or not infamous Senators attracted stronger challengers for the 2010 general election. The dependent variable, then, will be challenger strength. The analysis below uses a simple dichotomous measure, taking a value of 1 for challengers who have held elected office before, and 0 otherwise. The primary independent variable of interest is the number of second-sweep epithets Google suggests for each Senate incumbent running for reelection in 2010. As control variables, I include the share of the two-party vote in the state received by the presidential candidate of the

incumbent's party in 2008, along with ideological extremism, measured by the absolute value of the incumbent's DW-NOMINATE score during the 111th Senate.

Note that one incumbent's campaign is excluded from this part of the analysis—Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). This race is excluded because of the unusual nature of the election. Murkowski was defeated in the Republican primary, but chose to run as an independent write-in candidate anyway, leading to a two-way contest between the official Republican nominee, Joe Miller, and the incumbent Republican Senator. The results of the probit analysis predicting challenger quality for all other Senate incumbents are reported in Table 11.

Table 11. Determinants of Experienced Senate Challengers in 2010, Probit Estimates

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Incumbent epithet count	0.07	0.27
State presidential vote	-0.02	0.04
Incumbent extremism	-3.33†	2.45
Constant	3.05	2.58
N	21	
LR χ^2	3.21	
Pseudo R ²	0.11	

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

The results of the probit analysis suggest that internet infamy is unrelated to whether or not Senators draw an experienced challenger, since the coefficient for the incumbent epithet count is near zero and statistically insignificant. This should not be entirely surprising, since vulnerable incumbent Senators are likely to draw experienced challengers regardless of whether or not they are infamous, and there was no effect of infamy on challenger quality in House elections either.

The next question is whether or not infamy helps Senators and senatorial candidates raise money. The dependent variable in this set of models is the total receipts reported by a given candidate to the FEC as of December 31, 2010. As in the House analysis, receipts are in thousands of dollars. Also consistent with the House approach, I conduct the analysis separately for candidates of each party. In this analysis, I exclude Alaska for reasons discussed earlier, along with the unusual race in Florida, pitting the official Republican nominee, Marco Rubio, against former Republican Governor-turned-independent, Charlie Crist, and an official Democratic nominee. I also exclude John Thune (R-SD), who ran unopposed in 2010. Since I examine the relationship between Democratic and

Republican nominees within the same race here, these cases had to be excluded because they were not conventional two-party contests.

Consider, first, the Democratic candidates. For Democratic senatorial candidates, I ran three models. The first model predicts receipts by all Democratic senatorial candidates. The second model is limited to Democratic incumbents. The third model is limited to Democratic challengers facing Republican incumbents. For each model, I include the total number of epithets Google suggested for the Democratic candidate, and the total number of epithets Google suggested for the Republican candidate. As control variables, I include state population, in thousands, as a proxy for the cost of running in a state, since running in a populous state should require more fund-raising than running in a less populated state. I also include John McCain's share of the two-party vote in the state in 2008, and where appropriate, incumbent ideological extremism. Where appropriate, I likewise include dummy variables for incumbency and experience. The models are OLS regressions with White standard errors. The results of the regressions for Democratic candidates are in Table 12.

While incumbent epithet counts did not seem to predict challenger experience, epithet counts do appear to predict fund-raising, as was the case for House elections. Interestingly, Democratic epithet counts are not a statistically significant predictor of Democratic fund-raising in any of the three models, so Democrats may neither profit nor suffer from their own infamy with respect to their own fund-raising. However, Republican epithet counts predict Democratic fundraising in the model combining all Democratic candidates and the model predicting incumbent fund-raising. The coefficients are impressively large, and they are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Consider the model predicting Democratic fund-raising for all Democratic senatorial candidates. In that model, each epithet Google suggests for the *Republican* candidate yields the *Democratic* candidate an additional \$810,124. In the model predicting fund-raising by Democratic incumbents, the effect is even more impressive. For each epithet Google suggests for the *Republican* challenger, the *Democratic* incumbent raises an additional \$1,811,340.¹² Since there does not appear to be an effect on Democratic challenger fund-raising from incumbent Republican epithets, the effect appears to be driven by nationally infamous challengers like Sharron Angle in Nevada, rather than by infamous incumbents like Jim DeMint (R-SC). For Democratic Senate incumbents in 2010, having an infamous challenger helped them to raise money. As in the case of House elections, these results suggest that there is some danger to being infamous. It helps one's opponent raise money.

¹² Recall, again, that the dependent variable is coded in thousands, so the coefficient must be multiplied by 1000 to compute the raw dollar effect for any given independent variable.

Table 12. Predicting Dem. Receipts in 2010 Senate Campaigns, OLS with White SE

	All Dems	Incumbents	Challengers
Dem. epithet count	28.205 (661.134)	-507.744 (1,658.178)	-343.810 (389.472)
Repub. epithet count	810.124* (434.006)	1,811.340* (698.256)	-442.528 (389.289)
State pop. (2009)	0.317** (0.102)	0.292† (0.179)	-0.537 (0.342)
Democratic incumbent	7,244.730** (2,295.859)		
Republican incumbent	-2,183.669† (1,655.400)		
Experienced Democrat	2,406.041† (1,696.958)		2,981.227† (1,472.830)
Experienced Republican	1,439.768 (1,598.882)	322.513 (2,555.101)	
McCain 2008 vote share	48.779 (89.650)	245.469† (149.532)	-190.640† (95.283)
Incumbent Extremism		2,994.85 (17,662.81)	4,817.085 (3,499.181)
Constant	-2,606.481 (5,768.186)	-4,302.272 (12,198.28)	11,101.89 (3,593.281)
N	34	12	9
R ²	0.719	0.742	0.832

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

Consider, next, the analysis for Republican senatorial candidates, which is structured the same way, with results reported in Table 13. In the model combining all Republican candidates, neither Democratic nor Republican epithet counts predict Republican fund-raising. However, the results become clearer when we separate Republican incumbents and Republican challengers facing Democratic incumbents. Consider, first, Republican challengers facing Democratic incumbents. In the model predicting Republican challenger fund-raising, both Democratic and Republican epithet counts predict Republican receipts. Each epithet suggested for the Democratic incumbent yields the Republican challenger over \$1.8 million dollars. So again, we see a possible danger to being infamous—it can help one's opponent raise significant amounts of money.

Table 13. Predicting Republican Receipts in 2010 Senate Campaigns, OLS with White SE

	All Republicans	Challengers	Incumbents
Dem. epithet count	1,899.100 (1,740.034)	1,845.961* (818.597)	-1,038.749† (371.789)
Repub. epithet count	1,142.496 (1,244.091)	3,133.533** (659.830)	3,495.339** (394.265)
State pop. (2009)	0.199 (0.208)	0.112 (0.106)	-0.588 (0.367)
Democratic incumbent	-3,176.780 (6,023.629)		
Republican incumbent	-2,356.024 (5,011.257)		
Experienced Democrat	6,028.674* (2,540.015)		7,575.499* (1,369.491)
Experienced Republican	-1,862.440 (5,155.382)	-2,521.052 (2,632.342)	
McCain 2008 vote share	-190.539 (286.815)	147.239 (188.214)	-12.724 (95.806)
Incumbent Extremism		2,530.852 (17,860.15)	-20,999.89* (3,670.873)
Constant	14,527.75 (20,173.91)	-4,177.078 (14,177.40)	17,203.38 (3,642.638)
N	34	12	9
R ²	0.323	0.915	0.978

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

As impressive as that effect sounds, though, each Republican epithet yields the Republican challenger over \$3.1 million. Hence, Republican challengers gain more money from their own infamy than from the Democratic incumbent's infamy. Furthermore, among Republican incumbents, their own infamy yields even greater dividends. Each epithet Google suggests for a Republican incumbent yields that incumbent nearly \$3.5 million. Consider, also, the fact that this effect persists even with a control for incumbent ideological extremism. So, it is not simply that infamous Republican Senators raise money on the basis of their extremism, which also makes them infamous. They raise money on the basis of their own infamy, even controlling for their levels of ideological extremism. In fact, the coefficient for the ideological extremism variable is negative and statistically significant. So, donors do not simply prefer to give

money to extremists. Instead, they prefer to give money to high-profile polarizing figures.

It should be noted that the coefficient for Democratic epithets in the model predicting Republican incumbent fund-raising has a negative sign, and is marginally statistically significant. This effect is due entirely to Alvin Greene in South Carolina. Greene was the surprise nominee to challenge incumbent Senator Jim DeMint, and Google suggested three epithets for him. However, his candidacy was nowhere near credible, so his weakness as a candidate may have reduced incentives for DeMint to bother raising money. In any case, infamy seems to have financial consequences for senatorial candidates, although Republican infamy seems to have more predictive power than Democratic infamy. Republican infamy helps Democratic incumbents raise some money, but it helps Republicans raise even more money.

Finally, consider the question of whether or not infamy predicts senatorial election results. Conventional wisdom holds that Republicans lost senatorial races in Delaware, Colorado, and Nevada in 2010 because their nominees were fringe candidates incapable of winning a general election. Google suggested two epithets for Ken Buck in Colorado, six for Sharron Angle in Nevada, and all seven epithets for Christine O'Donnell in Delaware, so it is at least plausible that there is a direct effect of infamy on Senate election results. In response, I ran another regression in which the dependent variable was the Republican candidate's share of the two-party vote. Both the Alaska race between Miller and Murkowski, and the Florida race between Marco Rubio and Charlie Crist are excluded for obvious reasons, as is John Thune (R-SD), who ran unopposed in 2010.

The two key independent variables are the Democratic and Republican epithet counts. The first control variable is the "experience gap." This variable is computed by assigning a value of 2 to incumbents, 1 to experienced non-incumbents, and 0 to inexperienced candidates, and taking the difference between the Republican's experience score and the Democrat's experience score. I also include John McCain's share of the two-party vote in the state in 2008, and the proportion of total spending in the race spent by the Republican nominee. The results of this OLS model are in Table 14.

The coefficient for the Democratic epithet count is positive, and the coefficient for the Republican epithet count is negative, which would suggest that infamy reduces a candidate's vote share in Senate elections as it does in House elections, since the dependent variable here is the Republican share of the two-party vote. The magnitudes are also comparable to the magnitude of the effect of infamy on vote shares for Republican incumbents in the House. However, neither coefficient is statistically significant in the Senate analysis in Table 14.

Table 14. Predicting Senate Republican Vote Shares in 2010, OLS Estimates

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic epithet count	0.49	1.20
Republican epithet count	-0.65	0.63
Experience Gap	1.27	1.34
McCain 2008 vote	0.61***	0.14
Repub. spending share	0.17**	0.06
Constant	13.67	6.56
N	34	
R ²	0.83	

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, one-tailed probabilities

It may be that Sharron Angle, Christine O'Donnell, and Ken Buck lost because of their off-putting characteristics, but there is no evidence of a direct general effect of infamy on vote shares for senatorial candidates. So, the electoral effects of infamy in senatorial campaigns may be limited to their effects on fund-raising, where the effects are impressively large both on the candidates' own fund-raising and on their opponents' fund-raising. Whether infamy helps or harms senatorial candidates, then, may depend more on the degree to which each candidates' spending is subject to diminishing marginal returns.

It must be reiterated, though, that the samples for all of the Senate analysis are small, so the results in this set of analysis should be taken with several grains of salt. However, the fact that infamy appears to have comparable effects on fundraising in House and Senate elections seems to suggest that we can at least be confident in the financial consequences of infamy.

The Question of Causality

The first set of statistical analyses in this paper examined the *determinants* of infamy, and the results suggest a clear causal story. Ideologically extreme legislators are more likely than centrists to behave in a way that alienates people, such that they consequently become infamous. Party leaders, by virtue of their visibility, likewise become targets of derision. However, the causal question becomes murkier when we examine the *consequences* of infamy. The results in this paper suggest that infamy helps candidates raise money but that it also helps their opponents raise money, and for House Republicans, it seems to alienate voters as well.

Why? It is tempting to conclude that the provocative behavior that can lead to infamy is what motivates campaign contributors and voters. However, the

fact that provocative behavior is not the only cause of infamy suggests that we must be more cautious in such inferences. Recall that some legislators may be infamous, not because they behave provocatively, but because of their stature and visibility as party leaders. So, when we see an empirical relationship between infamy and campaign fundraising, it is difficult to determine whether that relationship is driven by the type of infamy that results from provocative behavior or the type of infamy that results from simple stature.

In principle, we might distinguish empirically between style-driven infamy and stature-driven infamy, and test for the effects of each separately. In the case of Michele Bachmann, it is clear that her infamy is style-driven, since she makes provocative statements on a regular basis but did not occupy a leadership position or have any tangible policy effects in the 111th Congress. In the case of Nancy Pelosi, the fact that she does not appear to make the same kind of deliberately provocative statements suggests that her infamy is more stature-driven. It is the result of having been a very liberal and particularly powerful Speaker of the House, and having consequently incurred the enmity of conservatives nationwide. In principle, then, we might go on to ask whether, for example, money flows to provocateurs or simply to highly visible legislators.

However, it is not always so easy to determine whether a legislator's infamy is style-driven or stature-driven. Consider Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA). Google suggested four epithets for Frank, making him one of the more infamous members of either chamber. Frank is well-known for his acerbic demeanor, so his infamy may be style-driven. However, Frank is also an important player in substantive policy debates, more so than some of the names in Tables 1 and 2. Indeed, consider that the recent and highly controversial financial regulation bill is known colloquially as the "Dodd-Frank Bill" because Rep. Frank was one of the driving forces behind it.

So, how much of Rep. Frank's infamy comes from his personal style, and how much comes from his role as a leading liberal in Congress? That is difficult to say. Unfortunately, without a way to distinguish between style-driven infamy and stature-driven infamy, we cannot be confident about the degree to which the financial consequences of infamy come from the financial effects of provocative behavior rather than the financial effects of simple visibility. This is merely an exploratory study, and with such a crude measure of infamy, the paper cannot make such distinctions. However, the fact that infamy seems to have more predictive power in the realm of campaign finance than ideological extremism suggests that it is important to explore the question further.

Conclusions

Pundits comment frequently on the rise of the political provocateur in Congress. Yet there has been essentially no scholarly attention to these individuals, or to the consequences of their behavior. In truth, generating a direct, systematic measure of infamy would be exceptionally difficult. So, this paper has proposed an *indirect* measure based on the degree to which Members of Congress are attacked and ridiculed by internet users. While the measure of infamy proposed by this paper is quite unusual, it did generate a list of infamous legislators that should make substantive sense to Congress-watchers. Furthermore, its predictive power is rather impressive, particularly with respect to campaign fund-raising. Though we must keep in mind the limitations of such an unusual measure.

Even with the limitations of the measure, however, the results in this paper are informative. Ideological extremists and party leaders are more infamous than centrists and rank-and-file legislators. This should not be surprising. What is more surprising is just how much predictive power Google epithet counts have with respect to electoral variables. Infamy seems to incur significant electoral risks. Infamous legislators raise dramatically more money than other legislators, but their challengers also raise more money than challengers facing lower-profile incumbents, and in the end, that may hurt incumbents more than the additional money they raise for themselves may help.

What is more surprising is that the fund-raising effects persist even controlling for the effects of ideological extremism. Hence, it is not simply that extreme legislators become infamous, and that money flows to extreme incumbents and their challengers. Instead, infamy is a better statistical predictor of fund-raising than ideological extremism. Perhaps more surprising, still, is the potentially large direct effect that infamy might have on vote shares. Michele Bachmann may have lost nearly six percentage points in 2010 as a direct result of her infamy, and another percentage point because of the challenger spending generated by her infamy.

While we cannot be confident in a direct effect of infamy on Senate vote shares, the financial effects of infamy in Senate elections appeared even larger than in the House. Nevertheless, the small sample sizes in the Senate analysis limit our ability to make inferences.

It appears, then, that being a political provocateur is a risky proposition. While infamy can help a candidate raise money, it can also help opponents, and legislators contemplating provocative behavior as an electoral strategy would do well to keep in mind that tactics that appeal to one's electoral base may not help in the end. It is curious that the consequences of infamy seem asymmetric. I offer no theoretical explanation for the partisan differences. However, Democrats considering adopting an inflammatory style like Bachmann's, or for that matter

Grayson's, would do well, in particular, to weigh the ultimate electoral risks against the short-term financial benefits.

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