

Polarized Defense: the NDAA in an Era of Partisan Polarization

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Abstract

This study examines whether increased congressional polarization has diminished bipartisan support for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), traditionally a bipartisan piece of legislation. Using DW-NOMINATE scores to measure polarization and analyzing House voting patterns from the 101st to 117th Congress (1989-2022), this research finds that more polarized members are significantly more likely to vote against the NDAA. The effect has intensified over time, with polarization having a stronger negative impact on NDAA support in the post-2002 period compared to earlier years. Linear regression analysis reveals that a one-unit increase in polarization score corresponds to a 0.749 decrease in likelihood of supporting the NDAA. These findings suggest that as the NDAA increasingly serves as a vehicle for non-defense policies, it becomes vulnerable to the same partisan dynamics affecting other legislation, potentially threatening its 60-year streak of passage and America's defense policy stability.

1 Introduction

“The annual National Defense Authorization Act . . . cleared the House in a near-party-line vote, 219-210” (Quinn 2023). This was the headline of an article covering the latest National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024 (ibid.). The NDAA is an annual must-pass bill that authorizes appropriations for the Department of Defense (DoD) and other defense-related activities as well as sets organizational policies for the armed services. By setting priorities and authorizing programs for the DoD, the NDAA is a major component of the United States' foreign policy arsenal. It has been successfully passed for 60 consecutive years regardless of the party in power.

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There were two areas of disagreement in the 2024 NDAA: a proposed change to the DoD's abortion policy and a ban on the DoD paying for transition surgeries and treatments for transgender servicemembers (Mitchell and Dress 2023). The roll call vote was split almost perfectly along party lines, only four Democrats and four Republicans voted against the majority of their party (Quinn 2023). A few years ago, such a vote breakdown would have been unheard of. However, the NDAA has increasingly become a lightning rod for polarized politics. Polarization has impacted every aspect of American life. This is exemplified by Congress' decreasing effectiveness, local government officials aligning with the president on national-level policies, and the increased ideological alignment of the parties.

As polarization in Congress has increased and the parties have become more polarized, members have fewer avenues to pass substantive bills. This has resulted in decreased legislative output in terms of the number of bills because non-defense-related policies are being attached to major must-pass bills such as the NDAA. This makes the traditionally bipartisan NDAA less resilient to partisanship and a target for strategic disagreement. This leads to this paper's core question: Has increased polarization in Congress resulted in decreased bipartisan support for the National Defense Authorization Act? The results of this research support the hypothesis that increased polarization, measured using the absolute value DW-NOMINATE dimension 1 scores, has resulted in the more polarized members of the House of Representatives voting against the NDAA, and this effect is becoming more prevalent over time.

2 Literature Review

Contemporary Polarization Theory. Polarization in political science is defined as when the public and its leaders have become divided into two distinct groups (N. M. McCarty 2020). Broadly, polarization can be categorized in three ways: policy polarization, ideological polarization, and partisan polarization (ibid.). Policy polarization is defined as the condition in which extreme views on a matter have become more commonplace. This means that the discussions on any given policy are divided on a bimodal distribution on a liberal-conservative spectrum (ibid.). Ideological polarization refers to the increasing ideological distance between the two major parties (relatedly, others have noted an increasing frequency of voters identifying as being liberal or conservative, as opposed to identifying as centrists) (ibid.). Partisan polarization in the American political system describes the phenomenon by which polarization is organized around parties leading to the ideological divergence between the Democratic and Republican parties (ibid.). For example, a system is more polarized on a partisan dimension if liberals primarily identify with one party and conservatives identify with another and there is little crossover between the two. This results in decreased ideological overlap between the two parties, resulting in less compromise when legislating (Hare and Poole 2014).

A different approach to contemporary polarization discusses the origin of voter policy preference gaps. Partisan sorting theory posits that voters do not have enough information to have an informed opinion on any given issue. Therefore, instead of voters switching their

party to match their ideology and ideologically sort, voters switch their ideology to match their party and sort on partisan lines (Levendusky 2010). Dan Wood and Soren Jordan find that the Ronald Reagan presidency (1981-1989) was the start of modern polarization because Reagan attacked the New Deal social contract and consensus (Wood and Jordan 2017). Consequentially, voters who were born in the 1960s and came of age during the 1980s are more likely to sort than older voters (Levendusky 2010). This has resulted in voters who are more loyal to their party, making parties more ideologically homogenous, which in turn forces candidates to take more extreme positions in order to win primary elections (Abramowitz 2018). These forces combine to create a negative feedback loop of partisan, party, and elite polarization.

Congressional Polarization. Congress has seen drastic changes because of the polarization of the elites and the electorates with tangible consequences for policymaking. However, before discussing the consequences of congressional polarization, it must be quantified and measured. DW-NOMINATE is a statistical model that measures the ideological positions of members of Congress based on their roll call voting behavior (*Voteview — About Us* 2024). The higher the score, the more conservative the legislator; the lower the score, the more liberal the legislator. There are two dimensions of the DW-NOMINATE score. The first-dimension score measures ideology on a traditional economic and role-of-government scale. This means that liberals on this scale support larger government and more conservative members support less government. The second-dimension score measures differences within one party on the social issues of the time (*ibid.*). Poole in 2017 notes that the second dimension has collapsed onto the first dimension, meaning that intra-party splits on social issues are rare (*voteviewblog* 2017). Calculating the average members' scores allows for a comparison of levels of polarization in Congress across time. Nolan McCarty found that polarization in Congress has steadily increased since the 1970s and the pace of polarization has only accelerated (N. McCarty 2017). He measured this by taking the difference in the average DW-NOMINATE score for Republicans and compared it to the average score for Democrats. McCarty also found that increased polarization is not uniform across both parties. In the House of Representatives specifically, Republicans have increasingly become more polarized while Democrats' DW-NOMINATE scores have remained relatively stable since the 1940s (*ibid.*).

Research by Mansbridge and Martin found that Congressional polarization began in the 1970s, based on an analysis of the average distance between members' ideologies using DW-NOMINATE scores (Mansbridge and Martin 2016). Their research finds that Congress in 2016 was at its highest levels of polarization since 1886 and that the levels of polarization only continue to rise (*ibid.*). While many theories attempt to explain the cause of this phenomenon, they can be grouped into two main schools of thought: bottom-up polarization and top-down polarization.

Further analysis of DW-NOMINATE scores shows that there was a convergence of the ideological scores of the parties between 1940 and 1970 (Hare and Poole 2014). After this point, DW-NOMINATE scores diverge in both chambers; however, the House's divergence is

more drastic (*ibid.*). This is proven in research by Poole that measures the fit of congressional voting on issues of abortion, gay rights, gun control, and immigration for DW-NOMINATE scores calculated on both dimensions (*ibid.*). Poole found that first-dimension scores fit member roll call voting from 1973 to 2009 because beliefs on these issues have condensed onto a liberal-conservative dimension. However, instead of the masses polarizing, it is the politically informed elites who are polarized, while the moderate middle becomes increasingly politically inactive (*ibid.*).

When each party can hold and claim a distinct position on an issue such as abortion, voters can easily decide which party they want to vote for based on its stance on that issue. Outcomes of House elections are no longer tied to how well or poorly an individual member of Congress provides constituent services and resources but to the party makeup of their district (Abramowitz 2018). This incentivizes members of Congress to focus on national policy in line with the view of the President and the national party instead of local and state concerns.

Party polarization in Congress has also resulted in increased gridlock, decreased congressional power, and less effective policymaking in all policy areas because of increased incentives for legislators to engage in brinkmanship when parties are united and governments are divided (Mansbridge and Martin 2016). Polarization makes it harder to build legislative coalitions necessary to enact new policies. It also exacerbates the difficulty of bipartisan cooperation and decreases Congress' legislative capacity (N. McCarty 2007). This decreased legislative capacity is being replaced by strategic disagreement.

Strategic disagreement is another way polarization leads to legislative stagnation. Strategic disagreement is a situation in which a president, party, or political actor refuses to compromise with the opposite party in order to gain an electoral advantage (*ibid.*). McCarty contends that strategic disagreement is becoming a more prevalent method of political discourse (*ibid.*). In the absence of legislative action, the executive branch is empowered to circumvent traditional legislative functions through executive orders (*ibid.*). Presidents are now more likely to take unilateral action rather than follow the legislative process due to polarization (Mansbridge and Martin 2016).

The impact of political parties on electoral politics is well documented by political scholars. In the past, scholars called for increased polarization of the parties to enable an ideologically cohesive majority to govern and give Americans distinct vote choices (**apsr1950summary**). However, this potential benefit is negated when control of the executive and legislative branches is split, an increasingly common occurrence in American politics (N. McCarty 2007). When this happens, it is assumed that bargaining will occur between party leaders, but when there are increased policy differences between elites, there are fewer compromises that both parties will accept. This increases the likelihood of brinkmanship in negotiations, making compromise unlikely (*ibid.*).

3 Defense Policy, Foreign Policy, and Polarization

Defense policy is traditionally resistant to partisan conflict because of the bipartisan support needed to address and combat security threats. While a nation must have a healthy debate about its place in the world, a polarized environment prevents the nation from making rapid decisions which in turn could have global repercussions. The discourse over defense policy has traditionally been bipartisan. When the nation is under attack or faces an external threat, partisan politics are put aside for a time to allow the president to act decisively.

Senator Arthur Vandenberg is famously quoted as saying that “politics stops at the water’s edge” (*U.S. Senate: Arthur Vandenberg: A Featured Biography* 2024). However, this does not mean that there is consensus in Congress on the conduct of defense policy. Congress is constitutionally mandated to be actively engaged in foreign policymaking by controlling appropriations, confirming ambassadors, and approving treaties. Conversely, the president is empowered to be the commander in chief of the Armed Forces, receive foreign diplomats, and recommend ambassadors for approval by the Senate. Because of the increasing complexity of issues and the post-World War II national security state, the executive branch has gradually gained power in defense policymaking. This results in the executive branch being energetic and proactive in defense policy, leaving Congress only to react to its actions. This dynamic leaves America’s defense policy vulnerable to partisan politics because of the effects of congressional polarization. Defense policies may be supported or opposed based on the electoral incentives that arise from strategic disagreements with the president and not on the merits of the policy itself.

The NDAA is considered defense policy because it defines and influences how the nation confronts foreign danger utilizing armed force. The founders defined defense policy as a policy that is focused on “security against foreign danger” (Deering 2005). Foreign policy is defined as “intercourse with foreign nations” (ibid.). The former would be dominated by the legislative branch because of its serious consequences while the latter would be controlled by the executive branch to ensure one voice represented the nation to the outside world. This is why the president is empowered by the Constitution to make treaties, appoint ambassadors, and receive foreign ambassadors and ministers. In the realm of national security, the president is only constitutionally charged to be the commander in chief (ibid.). Conversely, Congress is given authority to declare war, establish an army and a navy, control immigration, and regulate foreign commerce (ibid.). Ideally, this results in the dominance of Congress in the realms of defense and commerce and the dominance of the executive branch in diplomacy. Even in the president’s diplomatic role, Congress would function as an active advisor and critic because of the constitutional requirement of senatorial consent on appointments and treaties. This division of labor between the two branches no longer holds. The president now dominates foreign and defense policy, and Congress’ defense policy power has decreased drastically (ibid.). This has forced Congress into a reactive role and shifted authority to the president (ibid.). Overall, this combines foreign policy and defense policy into a singular entity that is dominated by the national security presidency.

Congress' relationship is now deferential to the executive branch in defense policy, and this deference constrains its options to act in this space. One of the first factors that affects post-World War II congressional behavior is public threat perceptions. When Americans believe that the country faces an external threat, they believe that the president must decisively lead, and congressional dissent is unacceptable (Lindsay 2003). Members of Congress lean into this and allow the president to take the political risk of combating an external threat and the potential backlash that could follow. Decision-making power during the Cold War shifted multiple times between congressional and presidential power with presidential power climaxing in 1960 and culminating in the imperial presidency during the Nixon administration (ibid.). However, as public opinion on the Vietnam War shifted, the need for congressional reassertion of defense policy power became evident. Taking advantage of the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, Congress was able to retake some power in defense policymaking. A second factor in determining decision-making power in defense policy is the success or lack thereof of the president's defense policy (ibid.). If a president has a track record of successful foreign policy, Congress is more deferential to him to continue to exercise power, resulting in the preservation of presidential supremacy in defense policy (ibid.).

On the opposite end of congressional deference is congressional defiance. Congressional defiance was born out of a lack of public knowledge of defense and foreign policy issues (ibid.). When Americans were asked to name a foreign policy issue that worried them in 1998, the most common response was "don't know" (ibid.). This lack of public awareness reduced the electoral risks posed to members of Congress who disagreed with the president because the public did not have clearly defined policy preferences.

Not only does polarization increase the amount of special interest influence in foreign policy, there are also tangible challenges that have arisen from it. Kenneth Schultz believes that four challenges have arisen from increased polarization that makes it difficult for the United States to conduct foreign policy (Schultz 2017). These new challenges are highlighted in this quotation:

It is more difficult to get bipartisan support for ambitious or risky undertakings, particularly the use of military force and the conclusion of treaties. It is hard to agree across parties on the lessons of foreign policy failure, therefore complicating efforts to learn and adapt. The risk of dramatic policy swings from one administration to another of the opposite party complicates our ability to make long-term commitments to allies and adversaries. If dramatic swings become the norm, allies and adversaries will expect volatility. The fourth and final peril of polarization is that few, if any people anticipated prior to 2016: The vulnerability to foreign intervention in our political system (Schultz 2017).

The first and second challenges are caused by polarization. Strategic disagreements exacerbate a lack of bipartisanship in foreign policy. The inability to get bipartisan support results in the president being incentivized to act unilaterally. While presidential unilateral action is expedient, it can inject partisanship into decisions that may be unpopular politically but necessary for the successful conduct of foreign policy such as military deployments. However, without congressional consent, the president incurs electoral risk alone and Congress

can strategically disagree and benefit electorally. This matters because when the president acts alone, it leaves few levers for Congress to express its opinion on a foreign policy decision. The NDAA, by nature of being an annual must-pass bill, has become one of these levers.

The National Defense Authorization Act. Since 1961, a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has been passed and signed under both Democrat and Republican majorities and presidents (Thornberry 2021). This piece of legislation authorizes appropriations for the Defense Department and establishes defense policies and restrictions based on congressionally established requirements. It does not provide any money to be spent as with appropriations bills (Congressional Research Service 2024). For a new ship to be built, the NDAA must authorize the ships to exist, then a defense appropriations bill gives to money to build the authorized ships. This isolates the NDAA as solely a priority and policy-setting bill. The path to pass an NDAA is a clearly defined process that traditionally involves compromise between both parties and both chambers. Examples of mechanisms within the process that incentivize compromise and collaboration are the months of hearings, committee markups and amendments, and full debate and amendments by the full House and Senate (Thornberry 2021). After both chambers pass their respective bills, a conference committee is appointed to debate and reconcile differences between the two (ibid.). The final conference report is sent back to both chambers and if passed is sent to the president. In modern congressional policymaking, this is an extremely rare show of bipartisanship.

The NDAA is Congress' primary method to shape the defense policy that, as established previously, is now dominated by the executive branch. This fact, paired with its consistent passage, has made it a vehicle for non-defense-related bills to be passed. An example cited by Congressman Mac Thornberry is the 2019 NDAA "granting paid parental leave to all federal employees" (Thornberry 2021). He describes the NDAA as "a sturdy ox" pulling a legislative wagon on which a lot of legislative baggage is carried. He concludes in his essay that the NDAA remains bipartisan because of its 63-year streak of being signed into law: Members know that there must be an NDAA passed every year, therefore they are incentivized to compromise (ibid.). Each NDAA offers a member to advance their priorities, and no member wants to be responsible for destroying the last vestiges of good governance (ibid.). Generally, the consensus around this process and the bill is based on the fact that both political parties generally support America being engaged in world politics that is enabled by a strong military. The NDAA is now being drawn into partisan conflict, leading to decreased bipartisan vote totals. The lack of other vehicles for Congress to express its opinion on defense policy has caused this "legislative wagon" to begin to collapse, slowly forcing it into the mud of partisanship and polarization.

4 Research Design

The objective of this quantitative analysis is to determine if increased polarization is resulting in less bipartisanship in NDAA roll call votes.

- **Hypothesis 1:** More polarized members of Congress are more likely to vote against the NDAA.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Polarization has increased over time, exacerbating the negative vote effect on the NDAA.

To test these two hypotheses, this study conducted an ordinary least squares regression analysis and logistic regression using the equation below where “vote” is an individual member vote on the NDAA, β_1 is the absolute value of dimension 1 DW-NOMINATE scores for members of Congress, β_2 is the sum of variates, and ε_i is the standard error:

$$Vote_i = \beta_1|Dimension1| + \beta_2X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Dependent Variable. The vote variable represents the vote outcome of the NDAA. In the dataset, a yes vote on the NDAA is coded as “1” and a no vote is coded as a “0.” The dataset covers the 101st Congress to the 117th Congress, corresponding to the calendar years 1991 to 2023. The votes are based on congressional roll call voting in the House on the final conference report.

Independent Variables. The polarization score variable, —Dimension1—, is interpreted as how polarized a member is regardless of ideology. DW-NOMINATE gives an individual member’s partisanship from -1 to 1. From this, the ideology and level of partisanship can be derived. When the absolute value is taken, this indicates how polarized an individual member is regardless of party. A score of 0 means a member is not polarized and a score of 1 means the member is extremely polarized.

Control Variables. The *Intra-Party Conflict* variable, —Dimension2—, is interpreted as how a member splits with their party. Dimension 2 of DW-NOMINATE is interpreted as intra-party conflict on social issues of the day that cut across party lines. For example, from the late 1930s to 1970s this dimension picks up the party conflict over the civil rights movement. The *Effectiveness* variable is the ratio of the legislative effectiveness score to the benchmark score from each member of Congress. It captures the ability of a legislator to advance their policy priorities through Congress and into law. When used in conjunction with a legislator benchmark score, they are above expectations if the ratio between their LES is greater than 1.50. A member meets expectations if the ratio is between .50 and 1.50. A member is below expectations if the ratio of their LES to their benchmark score is less than .50. This metric was developed by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.

The *Party* variable controls whether a member of Congress is a Democrat or not. If the value is 1, the member is a Democrat; if the value is 0, the member is a Republican.

The *Party in Power* variable controls if a member is in power at the time they vote for the NDAA. If the value is 1, the member is in the majority at the time of their vote; if the value is 0, the member is within the minority at the time of their vote.

The *Majority Party Leadership* variable controls if a member of Congress is within the leadership of the majority party. If the value is 1, the member is a majority party leader; if the value is 0, the member is a not majority party leader.

The *Minority Party Leadership* variable controls if a member of Congress is within the leadership of the minority party. If the value is 1, the member is a minority party leader; if the value is 0, the member is not a minority party leader.

5 Results and Discussion

NDAAs Support Trends. This research aims to find if polarization is causing more no votes on the NDAA, and finally, if this effect is increasing over time. First, a baseline of trends of NDAA support must be established. From the Fiscal Year 1991 NDAA (1990) to the Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA (2022), the average percentage of “yea” votes on the NDAA is 81.77%. When broken down by party over the same period, Democrats have an average support level of 76.39 and Republicans have an average support level of 83.07. Table 1 shows the average support from the 101st to 117th Congress. Overall, this shows that the NDAA has been a reliable source of bipartisanship during the studied period. Some outliers of support from both parties are the Democrats’ support in the 111th Congress and the Republican lack of support in the 101st. One condition that may have affected Republican support is presidential disagreement over the bill. The must-pass nature of the NDAA and the lack of a congressional majority may have forced President Bush to sign the Fiscal Year 1990 NDAA. Historical research finds that President Bush had major reservations about signing the bill. Areas of contention included the reduction of presidential authority to conduct foreign policy negotiations and the lack of funding for the Strategic Defense Initiative (*Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991 — The American Presidency Project* 1991). A possible explanation for the outlier of Democrat support and Republican opposition in the 111th Congress is the inclusion of hate crime legislation; this was extensively mentioned by Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, Representative McKeon (Armed Services Republicans 2009). Figure 1 highlights the percentage of support by the party and the president in power at the time.

Congress	Year	Democrat Support (%)	Republican Support (%)
101	1989-1990	81.10%	37.57%
102	1991-1992	78.99%	75.63%
103	1993-1994	92.13%	31.38%
104	1995-1996	48.43%	85.78%
105	1997-1998	65.50%	91.90%
106	1999-2000	84.73%	96.72%
107	2001-2002	77.75%	98.37%
108	2003-2004	85.24%	99.76%
109	2005-2006	84.10%	99.55%
110	2007-2008	83.41%	97.68%
111	2009-2010	88.15%	59.10%
112	2011-2012	54.30%	84.40%
113	2013-2014	55.21%	85.84%
114	2015-2016	77.87%	97.27%
115	2017-2018	70.37%	97.39%
116	2019-2020	83.08%	87.20%
117	2021-2022	88.28%	86.63%
Average		76.39%	83.07%

Table 1: Average NDAA Support by Party

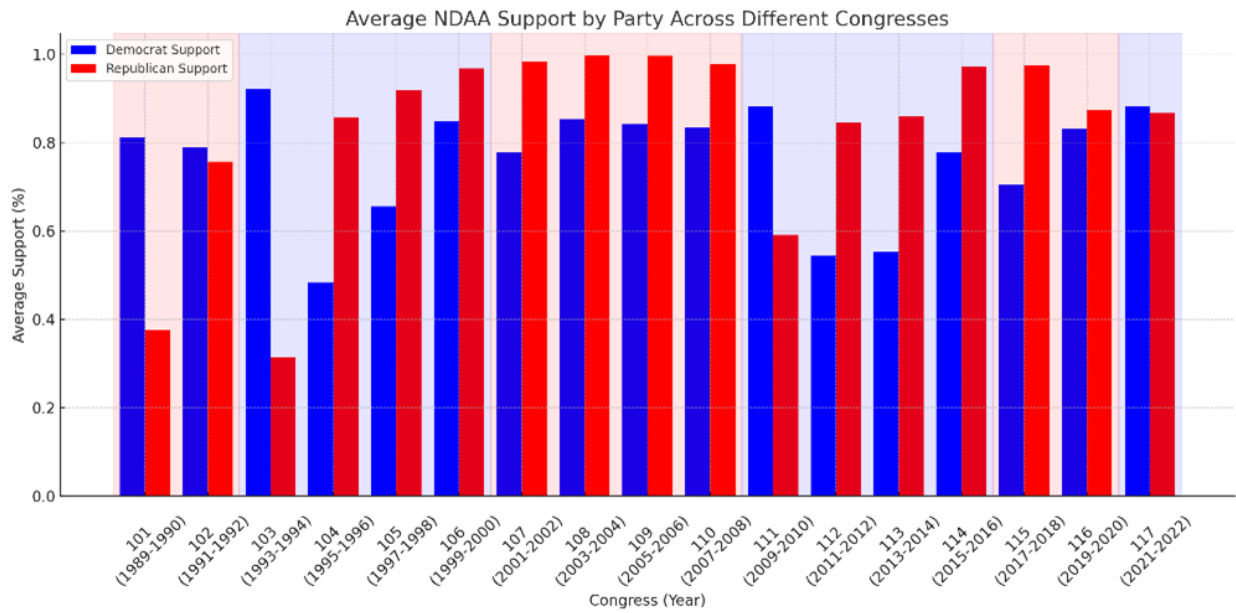


Figure 1: Average NDAA Support by Party Across Different Congresses

Polarization Trends. This study looks at two time periods that are demarcated by the end of public support for the war in Iraq. This is based on a Gallup poll on the question “Do you favor or oppose the U.S. war with Iraq?” (Gallup.com 2007). Public support for the war in Iraq flipped to a plurality in November 2004, marking the end of public consensus on support for the war in Iraq as a major part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) (ibid.). The post-consensus split attempts to filter out the ‘rally around the flag’ effect that occurred after 9/11 and in subsequent military operations. Figure 2 shows the distribution of members’ partisanship. This is calculated using the absolute value of the dimension one DW-NOMINATE scores. Taking the absolute value removes the liberal-conservative scale from dimension one DW-NOMINATE scores and measures how polarized an individual member is. Figure 2 shows that the House of Representatives is becoming more partisan over time using this pre- and post-consensus GWOT split.

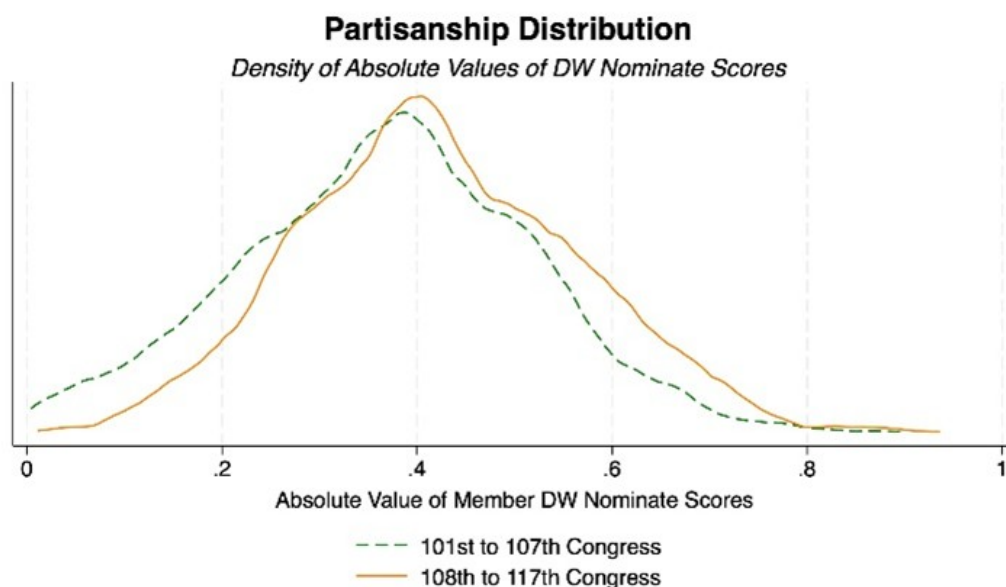


Figure 2: Partisanship Distribution

Increased Polarization and Decreased NDAA Support. To support hypothesis 1, a linear regression was run to assess the impact of elite polarization in the House on the likelihood of voting for or against the NDAA after controlling for intra-party conflict, party, party in power, majority party leadership, minority party leadership, and effectiveness. Table 2 shows the results of that regression. First, a one-unit increase in the polarization score of a House member is associated with a -0.749 decrease in voting for the NDAA. This means that as a member gets closer to 1 on the polarization score scale, they are more likely to vote against the NDAA. Another result of note is that Democrats are more likely to vote against the NDAA. Both results are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The 99% confidence interval for polarization score ranges from -0.792 to -.707 and does not include zero. This means that this effect is very likely to not be due to random chance. A surprising effect

is that legislative effectiveness has little to no effect on a member voting on the NDAA and is not statistically significant. Overall, this model explains 15.7% of the variance in House members' votes on the NDAA. This is an acceptable level of explanatory power in social science research because most of the variables are significant (Ozili 2022). Overall, the model is statistically significant as shown by the F Statistic.

Table 2: OLS Regression Results

	Dependent Variables
Constant	1.16* (0.01) [1.14, 1.19]
Polarization Score	-0.749* (0.021) [-0.792, -0.707]
Intra-Party Conflict	-0.347* (0.015) [-0.377, -0.317]
Party (1=Democrat)	-0.124* (0.007) [-0.104, -0.079]
Party in Power	0.168* (0.006) [0.156, 0.181]
Majority Party Leadership	-0.081* (0.021) [0.038, 0.124]
Minority Party Leadership	-0.012* (0.002) [-0.029, -0.054]
Legislative Effectiveness	-0.006 (0.002) [-0.012, -0.002]
Observations	13,291
R ²	0.157
Adjusted R ²	0.156
Residual Std. Error	0.354 (df = 13283)
F Statistic	283.941* (df = 6; 13284)

Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses

99% Confidence Intervals in Brackets

*p<0.01

Table 2: Model with Controls

Finding 1. As House members become more polarized, they are more likely to vote against the NDAA.

Is this effect getting worse? To determine if this effect is getting worse over time, the observations were split between the 101st to 107th Congress (1989-2002) and the 108th to 117th Congress (2003-2022). These results are shown in Table 3. After splitting the period, the effect of polarization is stronger in the second period than in the first. A one-unit increase

in the polarization score is associated with a -0.877 decrease in the likelihood of a member of the House voting for the NDAA. If a member of the House's party is in power in the first period, they are more likely to vote for the NDAA, but this effect shrinks in the second period. The linear regression also shows that in the second period, Democrats were slightly more likely to vote for the NDAA but after 2002 they were more likely to vote no on the NDAA. These findings are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Legislative effectiveness still does not significantly predict voting behavior on the NDAA. Overall, the R squared increases from the first period to the second period.

Finding 2. This effect of increased polarization on NDAA votes is getting worse. Polarization has a greater effect on members in the 108th to 117th Congresses than on the 101st to 107th Congresses.

Table 3: OLS Regression Results for Votes during X Congress

Variables	NDAA Vote	
	101-107	108-117
Polarization Score	-0.747* [0.0392]	-0.877* [0.0297]
Intra-Party Conflict	-0.284* [0.0258]	-0.367* [0.0215]
Party (1=Democrat)	0.0233* [0.0114]	-0.172* [0.00812]
Party in Power	0.273* [0.0119]	0.104* [0.00789]
Majority Party Leadership	0.140* [0.0144]	0.0655* [0.0173]
Minority Party Leadership	0.0666 [0.0452]	-0.0140 [0.0296]
Legislative Effectiveness	-0.00883 [0.00403]	-0.00188 [0.00366]
Constant	0.977* [0.0233]	1.331* [0.0173]
Observations	5,401	7,890
R-squared	0.177	0.193

Note: Robust Standard Errors in Brackets.
*p<0.01.

Table 3: Regression Results Across Earlier, Later Sessions of Congress

6 Conclusion

This research finds that as members of the House become more polarized, they are more likely to vote against the National Defense Authorization Act and that this effect is getting worse. Future studies of this issue could use Representative Thornberry's legislative wagon dynamic to quantify the attachment of non-defense-related bills to the NDAA. It is possible that as the page count of the NDAA or as more non-defense related bills are included in the

NDAA, more members are more likely to vote against it. Additionally, research shows that the Senate is less polarized than the House, but as the more deliberative body of Congress, this effect could be less. Additionally, instead of looking at the final conference report, a study could look at the votes on the first bill presented to the House. Lastly, future research could analyze the effects of conflict around the world on the House voting for or against the NDAA. A hypothesis for this is that as conflict around the world increases, more members vote for the NDAA.

This research has implications for national security and legislative policymaking. Since the NDAA is a must-pass bill as discussed previously, members feel more willing to vote for it. This leaves it open to extraneous amendments and measures placed into it. If this trend continues and the House continues polarizing, there may come a year in the future in which the streak of passage is broken. This could send signals of weakness to our enemies and damage the morale of members of the military. The NDAA in the past has been used as a vehicle to increase pay, improve quality of life, and address sexual assault. To service members, an inability to pass the annual NDAA indicates the House is too polarized to care about the well-being of the military. Future leaders of the House must ensure that the legislative wagon of the NDAA does not collapse.

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