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FACTORS INFLUENCING SENATE VOTING PATTERNS ON  
SOCIAL WORK RELATED LEGISLATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes several influences on Senate voting patterns on key legislation selected by NASW. Party affiliation, region, ratio of NASW registered social workers to state population, liberal and conservative ideology, and judgment of social work were found to be significantly associated with voting patterns. Results of a questionnaire distributed to each Senator indicate a favorable perception of the field of social work.

The Carter Administration and the 95th and 96th Congresses have demonstrated a conservative trend. Social programs have been reduced in favor of increased military spending, apparently in heed of vocal conservative groups who criticize social program funding as a major cause of inflation (Dewar, 1980; "Social Program Cuts," 1980).<sup>1</sup> In view of the increasingly conservative approach evidenced in federal budget spending priorities and in light of the fact that major social service decisions are made in the political arena, it is important that social workers, in order to have an impact on policy formulation, continue developing greater understanding of political process. Knowledge of legislators' voting behavior is fundamental to understanding and influencing policy decision-making. The central question raised in this article is what factors influence voting behavior.

Political scientists have identified many pressures that influence legislative voting decisions. These pressures emanate from a large number of directions and may be summarized in terms of six types: (1) political parties; (2) members' constituencies; (3) interest groups; (4) members' personal values, preferences and beliefs; (5) the executive branch; and (6) colleagues within the Congress (Froman, 1963; Jackson, 1974; Kingdon, 1973; Turner, 1951). In addition to these pressures, there are always budgetary constraints which may conflict with the policy interests of the Congressman. This study examines some major variables selected from the first four types of influences on Congressional decision-making.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) selected ten important pieces of legislation during the 95th Congress and tallied roll call votes of Senators, supporting or opposing the NASW position, in order to assess Senators' compatibility with its philosophy. Although a Senator's voting record is only one of the many components of his political stance, it remains the best single objective indicator of his position on a specific issue and of his general ideological persuasion (Barone, Ujifusa, Matthews, 1977; xv). The authors also examined the perception Senators have of the field of social work through a questionnaire given to each Senator. The questionnaire was designed to determine his attitude toward social work, his general knowledge of the profession, and his judgment as to its importance. Studies focusing on such areas have been used to ascertain the way social work is perceived by the general public (Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss, Kane, 1978; Kadushin, 1958; Weinberger, 1976; White, 1955), and by other professions (Brennan and Khinduke, 1971; Ferris, 1968; Garrett, 1968; Olsen and Olsen, 1967; Robinson, 1967), but the authors' review of the literature uncovered no study of Senators' views of the profession. The number of times a Senator voted in line with NASW's position was compared with six empirical variables and with responses to the questionnaire to determine if there was a significant association between these variables and the voting patterns of the Senator.

#### DESIGN

The general plan of the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are some of the major variables associated with voting patterns of Senators on significant pieces of legislation selected by NASW?
2. How do members of the United States Senate perceive the field of social work, and does this perception have an influence on their voting patterns?

The population under study was the 95th Congress of the United States Senate (100 members), serving in office as of January 1978. One recently appointed Senator was discounted (thereby reducing the population to 99) in that he replaced a deceased Senator who had cast the votes under study. In order to answer the first research question, the population was analyzed in terms of votes cast in line with NASW's position on ten legislative items and in terms of six empirical variables. The second question was investigated by a questionnaire designed to ascertain each Senator's perception of the field of social work. The answers were analyzed in terms of votes cast in line with NASW's stand.

The following six hypotheses were postulated and tested:

Hypothesis 1: Age is associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

Hypothesis 2: Party of affiliation (Democrat, Republican) is associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

Hypothesis 3: Region represented (Northeast, South, North Central, West) ("Statistical Abstracts", 1978), is associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

Hypothesis 4: Ratio of NASW registered social workers ("Annual Report of Membership", 1978) in each state to state population ("Current Population Reports", 1978) is associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

Hypothesis 5: Liberal (Americans for Democratic Action) (Barone et al., 1977)<sup>2</sup> ratings are associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

Hypothesis 6: Conservative (National Taxpayers Union) (Barone et al., 1977) ratings are associated with voting patterns of Senators on key pieces of legislation selected by NASW.

The dependent variable, voting patterns of members of the 95th Congress, was defined as Senate votes cast in line with NASW's position on ten bills and amendments dealing with the following subjects: revision of the Criminal Code (S.1437), fiscal 1978 supplemental defense appropriations (H.R. 9375), federal funds for abortion (H.R. 9555), loan guarantees for New York City (H.R. 12426), labor law revisions (H.R. 8410), the CETA Program (S.2570), District of Columbia voting representation (H.J. Res. 554), court-ordered busing (S.1753), appropriations for HUD (H.R. 12936), and health planning (S.2410) ("Senate Votes Compiled", 1979).

The questionnaire contained 15 items (summarized in results section). Two items designed to measure attitude focused on the status of the field of social work and licensing regulations for social workers. One item asked if there was a need for more social workers in the Senator's state. It was assumed that both attitude and knowledge of the Senator would be reflected in his awareness of whether the current number of social workers in each state is sufficient to meet the needs of the population. Knowledge of social work was also ascertained by asking about nine practice settings. It is well known that social workers are employed by public welfare agencies and protective services, but many people are unaware of the numerous diverse settings in which social workers practice ("Social Work Month", 1979). Over 300 professional social workers currently hold political office (Humphreys, 1979; 6), indicating that social workers are not only implementors of social policies but actual decision-makers as well. The Senator's judgment as to the extent of decision-making authority which should be properly invested in social workers was addressed by three items. To determine if the Senator's attitude toward, knowledge and judgment of social work had any significant influence on voting patterns, each item was analyzed as an independent variable.

A cover letter and questionnaire were hand-delivered to the office of each Senator. For those Senators failing to respond, a second letter and questionnaire were issued. The cover letter, delivered to the staff Legislative Assistant

responsible for social welfare/work related issues, requested that the Senator personally fill out the questionnaire. However, since studies have found that staff members have a high degree of fundamental agreement with the attitudes and beliefs of their Congress member, as well as with the voting position taken by the Congress member (Kingdon, 1973; 192-197), it was requested that the Legislative Assistant fill out the questionnaire if the Senator was unable to do so.

Fifty-eight completed questionnaires were returned: 9 percent from Senators, 72 percent from Legislative Assistants, and 19 percent from other professional staff members. Seven questionnaires filled out by staff members were, in addition, reviewed by Senators. In order to see if there were differences between the 58 questionnaire respondents and 41 non-respondents in terms of the six empirical variables investigated in this study, Chi Square tests were run. No significant difference was found between Senators responding and those failing to respond to the questionnaire for each of the empirical variables, thus indicating that respondents were representative of the total Senate population in terms of the variables analyzed in this study.

## RESULTS

The distributions of the dependent and six empirical independent variables in the population are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Analysis of the six hypotheses found that age is the only variable of the six tested which was not significantly associated with voting patterns of Senators on the ten key pieces of legislation selected by NASW. Analysis of the six hypotheses is as follows:

1. Age. The mean age of the Senators is 55.5 years. A Pearson product-moment correlation, [ $r = -.07$ ;  $p < .26$ ] was obtained signifying that age is not significantly associated with how Senators voted on legislation selected by NASW.
2. Party Affiliation. A pooled variance estimate for the means of voting patterns by party revealed a significant difference between Democrats ( $\bar{X} = 6.05$ ) and Republicans ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ ), [ $t(3.37) = 5.03$ ; d.f. = 97;  $p < .001$ ] signifying that Democrats voted more in line with NASW than Republicans.
3. Region of the Country. A one-way analysis of variance of region by voting patterns yielded a significant difference between Senators from the Northeast region ( $\bar{X} = 7.28$ ), North Central region ( $\bar{X} = 6.04$ ), West region ( $\bar{X} = 4.31$ ) and South region ( $\bar{X} = 3.55$ ) of the United States in terms of voting patterns [ $F(3.98) = 10.994$ ; d.f. = 3,95;  $p < .001$ ] signifying that Senators from the Northeast and North Central regions voted more in line with NASW than Senators from the West and South regions.
4. Ratio of NASW Registered Social Workers to State Population. The national mean ratio of NASW registered social workers to state population is one social worker to 3,831. A Pearson product-moment correlation, [ $r = -.463$ ;  $p < .001$ ] was obtained showing a significant negative correlation of ratio of social workers per

state capita with voting patterns, indicating that the smaller the difference between number of NASW registered social workers and state population (i.e., higher the ratio of social workers per capita), the more the Senator votes in line with NASW's stand and the larger the difference between the number of NASW registered social workers and state population (i.e., the lower the ratio of social workers per capita), the less the Senator votes in line with NASW's stand.

5. Liberal (Americans for Democratic Action) Ratings. Eighty-three of the 99 Senators were rated by ADA on a scale from 0 to 100 ( $\bar{X} = 51.34$ ). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, [ $r = .80; p < .001$ ] was obtained showing a significant positive correlation of liberal ideology with voting patterns (i.e., the more liberal the Senator is rated the more he voted in line with NASW's stand).

6. Conservative (National Taxpayers Union) Ratings. Eighty-three of the 99 Senators were rated by NTU on a scale of 0 to 100 ( $\bar{X} = 40.92$ ). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, [ $r = -.67; p < .001$ ] was obtained showing a significant negative correlation of conservative ideology with voting patterns (i.e., the more conservative the Senator is rated the less he voted in line with NASW's stand).

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF DEPENDENT VARIABLE IN STUDY POPULATION:  
VOTING PATTERNS OF SENATORS AGREEING WITH NASW'S POSITION

Number of votes cast in agreement with NASW's position on 10 key bills	Number of times Senators voted in agreement with NASW's position
	Number
0	3
1	12
2	9
3	11
4	6
5	11
6	10
7	12
8	13
9	12
10	0
	Total 99
Mean = 5.03	

TABLE 2

## DISTRIBUTION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN STUDY POPULATION

Variables	Frequency	
	Number	Percentage
<u>Age</u>		
35-50	33	33.3
51-59	35	35.4
60-80	<u>31</u>	<u>31.3</u>
Total	99	Total 100.0
<u>Party</u>		
Democrats	60	60.6
Republicans	<u>39</u>	<u>39.4</u>
Total	99	Total 100.00
<u>Region</u>		
Northeast	18	18.2
South	31	31.3
North Central	24	24.2
West	<u>26</u>	<u>26.3</u>
Total	99	Total 100.0
<u>Ratio of NASW Social Workers Per State Population</u>		
1,000-2,599	22	22.2
2,600-3,399	24	24.2
3,400-4,999	28	28.3
5,000-8,999	<u>25</u>	<u>25.3</u>
Total	99	Total 100.0
<u>ADA Ratings</u>		
0 - 26	28	33.7
31 - 75	28	33.7
79 - 100	<u>27</u>	<u>32.6</u>
Total	83	Total 100.0
<u>NTU Ratings</u>		
0 - 30	27	32.6
31 - 46	28	33.7
47 - 83	<u>28</u>	<u>33.7</u>
Total	83	Total 100.0

Through the use of a 4-way analysis of variance, the authors were able to test for the effects of each of the four independent variables on voting patterns as well as for interaction effects. Three of the independent variables were found to be significant: party ( $F = 11.228, p < .01$ ), region ( $F = 3.475, p < .05$ ), and liberal ratings ( $F = 16.256, p < .001$ ). Ratio of NASW registered social workers to state population was not found to be significant. Of the two- and three-way

interactions, only party by area was significantly related to voting patterns ( $F = 3.13, p < .05$ ). In terms of hypotheses tested, the analysis of interaction effects indicated that no important combinations of the independent variables account for more than the independent variables taken singly.

Questionnaire results, shown in Table 3, indicate that generally the majority of Senators (79 percent) have a positive attitude toward social work, considering it a profession. Most Senators seem to have a broad knowledge of settings in which social workers practice. The majority indicated hospitals (95 percent), prisons (95 percent), community action programs (93 percent), schools (88 percent), police departments (81 percent), and armed forces (71 percent) as appropriate places for employment of social workers. Most Senators (62 percent) indicated that the Bureau of the Budget was not an appropriate place for social workers. Senators were split on seeing a mayor's office (59 percent) and private practice in psychotherapy (50 percent) as appropriate social work practice settings. The majority of Senators (90 percent) judged that having an identifiable clientele should not disqualify social workers from making policy decisions regarding social programs in Government. Senators were divided in their attitude toward state licensing for social workers: 47 percent of the Senators were in favor of state licensing and 35 percent were opposed. Most comment answers supported leaving licensing up to the states.

The great majority of Senators (78 percent) were of the opinion that trained social workers should play decision-making roles in the Office of Management and Budget determining the budgets for HEW/HUD and other federal social programs. Senators were divided in their judgment as to where social workers' decision-making authority should stop: 48 percent believed this authority should stop at the federal level and 22 percent placed authority at the state and more local levels. Thirty percent of the Senators did not answer the question. As to their knowledge of the need for more social workers in their states, 43 percent indicated there was currently a need for more social workers while 12 percent said there was no need, and 45 percent did not know if there was a need.

In order to see if judgment, knowledge, and attitude of the Senator were associated with voting patterns, a test of analysis of variance was performed on each question. Two of the 15 items, both measuring judgment, were found to be significantly associated with voting patterns of Senators on the ten key bills. One of these items asked, "Should the fact that social workers have an identifiable clientele disqualify social workers from making policy decisions regarding social programs in the Government?" Ninety-nine percent of the respondents answered this question. A pooled variance estimate revealed a significant difference between those who responded yes ( $M = 5.13$ ) and those who responded no ( $M = 2.2$ ) in terms of voting patterns [ $t(2.01) = 2.32; d.f. = 55; p < .05$ ] indicating that Senators who responded no to the question, voted more in line with NASW's stand, than those responding yes.

TABLE 3

## DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES (N=58)

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
<u>Attitude</u>		
Social work is:		
profession	46	79
para-profession	9	15
other	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>
	58	100
In favor of state licensing for social workers:		
yes	27	47
no	20	35
comments	<u>11</u>	<u>18</u>
	58	100
<u>Attitude and Knowledge</u>		
Need for more social workers in state:		
yes	25	43
no	7	12
don't know	<u>26</u>	<u>45</u>
	58	100
<u>Knowledge</u>		
Practice settings checked:		
Hospitals	55	95
Prisons	55	95
Community Action Programs	54	93
Schools	51	88
Police Department	47	81
Armed Forces	41	71
Mayor's Office	34	59
Private Practice in Psychotherapy	29	50
Bureau of the Budget	22	38
<u>Judgment</u>		
Identifiable clientele disqualifies social workers from making policy decisions regarding social programs in Government:		
yes	5	9
no	52	90
comments	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	58	100
Trained social workers are qualified to play decision-making roles in government:		
yes	45	78
no	8	14

comments	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>
	58	100
Level where social worker's decision-making authority should stop:		
direct service to clients	6	10
managing agency	1	2
authority at county level	3	5
authority at state level	3	5
authority at federal level	28	48
no answer	<u>17</u>	<u>30</u>
	58	100

The second item asked, "Where should social workers' decision-making authority stop: local to state level or federal level?" A pooled variance estimate for the 70 percent who answered this question revealed a significant difference between those who felt authority should stop at the local to state level ( $\bar{X} = 5.0$ ) as opposed to the federal level ( $\bar{X} = 2.3$ ), in terms of voting patterns [ $t(2.70) = 12.45$ ; d.f. = 39,  $p < .001$ ]. Senators who believe that decision-making authority should stop at the federal level voted more in line with NASW's stand than those who favored the more local to state level. The above analyses of questions indicate that Senators with a more favorable judgment of social work vote more in line with NASW's position. This suggests that a Senator's judgment of social work significantly influences his voting on social work related legislation.

Two additional items were found to be significantly associated with voting patterns slightly over the .05 probability level. One item which measured knowledge asked if schools were an appropriate setting in which social workers practiced. A pooled variance estimate on the 65 percent who responded revealed a significant difference between those who recognized schools as a social work practice setting ( $\bar{X} = 5.2$ ) and those who did not ( $\bar{X} = 3$ ), in terms of voting patterns [ $t(1.67) = 1.99$ ; d.f. = 56;  $p < .052$ ]. This indicates that Senators checking schools voted more in line with NASW's stand than those who did not.

The second item which measured both knowledge and attitude asked, "Is there currently a need for more social workers in your state?" There was a 100 percent response to this question. A one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant difference between those Senators answering yes ( $\bar{X} = 5.96$ ), no ( $\bar{X} = 4.14$ ), and do not know ( $\bar{X} = 4.19$ ), in terms of voting patterns [ $F(3.17) = 2.99$ ; d.f.=2,55;  $p < .058$ ]. It is interesting to note that those Senators who said there was a need for more social workers voted more in line with NASW's position than those who did not indicate a need and those who did not know.

#### DISCUSSION

This study has demonstrated that party affiliation, region, ratio of NASW registered social workers to state population, liberal and conservative ideology,

and judgment of social work, each has significantly influenced the way Senators voted on ten pieces of legislation selected by NASW. Age, knowledge and attitude toward social work were found to have no significance in terms of voting patterns. From these findings it can be concluded that Democratic Senators, with a liberal rating from Northeast states with a high ratio of social workers per population, tended to vote in line with NASW's stand on social work related legislation. Republican Senators, with a conservative rating from Southern states with a low ratio of social workers per population, tended to vote least in line with NASW's stand on social work related legislation. Although these results are somewhat predictable, NASW has not analyzed these specific factors, nor were the authors able to find any studies in which these factors were analyzed.

Results of the questionnaire indicate that the majority of Senators have a positive perception of the field of social work. Most of the respondents considered social work to be a profession and were aware that social workers function in a broad range of roles and practice settings. The majority also recognized that trained social workers are qualified to formulate and implement social policy. Recent articles suggest that the general perception of the field of social work is more favorable than in previous years (Alexander, 1979; Bartlett, 1970; Clearfield, 1973; Condie et al., 1978; Meyer and Siegel, 1977). The present study confirms this supposition in that Senators, as representatives of the public, likewise hold a favorable view of social work. The questionnaire results are encouraging for they suggest that social work is currently considered by Senators to be a valuable profession, whose practitioners are qualified to formulate and implement policy decisions. These findings should enhance the self-image of social work as well as encourage social workers to interpret and implement their unique understanding of people in policy decision-making activities.

Although the present study examines only some of the major factors which can be used to understand voting behavior of Senators on issues pertaining to social work, the findings suggest that some of the factors identified play a significant role in determining how Senators vote on social work related legislation. These factors may assist social work political practice by identifying Senators who are more likely than others to be receptive to arguments in favor of or against legislation upon which the social work community has taken a stand. The results suggest that social workers can influence political process in favor of social services by concentrating lobbying efforts where most effective, that is, on liberal Senators from northern states with a high ratio of social workers per population, who have a favorable judgment for the professional decision-making roles of social workers. This being an election year, it would be timely for social workers also to concentrate campaign efforts where they would have the most impact. The factors isolated in this study can be used to identify those candidates who are most likely to vote favorably in the future on social legislation.

On the other hand, some of the factors identified in this study do not play a significant role in determining how Senators vote on legislation pertaining to social work. A common assumption is that older Senators tend to vote more

conservatively on social issues. However, this study found that age does not play a significant role in determining how Senators vote on social work related legislation. It appears that social workers have done a good job in educating Senators about the field of social work. Results show that the majority of Senators are knowledgeable about and have a positive attitude toward social work. However their knowledge and attitude do not significantly influence their voting behavior. Accordingly, these results suggest that in the future the education of Senators about the field of social work need not be a priority focus.

Complex factors influence legislative voting decisions. This study, by isolating a few of these factors, is an important first step toward more wide ranging and intensive investigations of a larger number of complex influences. Important factors requiring further study include: composition of the Senator's constituency; number, size and types of social work agencies in each state; the extent of political activism of NASW state chapters; and social issues of primarily state-wide interest.

#### FOOTNOTES

This article is a revision of a research project which the authors conducted toward their Master of Social Work degrees, May 1979, National Catholic School of Social Service, The Catholic University of America. The authors wish to thank James Rooney, Ph.D. for his assistance.

<sup>1</sup>The anti-inflation strategy proposed by Administration and Congressional Budget Committees for fiscal 1981 requires wide-ranging cuts in social programs to accommodate increases in military outlays within the confines of a balance budget. Proposed domestic spending cuts are spread over broad categories of services, affecting primarily spending for social services, employment and income assistance programs.

<sup>2</sup>The Americans for Democratic Action rate Senate members on a broad spectrum of issues and the National Taxpayers Union rate members on every spending vote. These political interest groups represent the extremes of liberalism and conservatism, respectively.

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