PARTISAN RHETORIC AND POLARIZATION

THE YEAR IN C-SPAN ARCHIVES RESEARCH

Volume 10

edited by
ROBERT X. BROWNING

PARTISAN RHETORIC AND POLARIZATION

THE YEAR IN C-SPAN ARCHIVES RESEARCH

The C-SPAN Archives houses the online C-SPAN Video Library, which has recorded all of C-SPAN's television content since 1987. Extensive indexing, captioning, and other enhanced online features provide an unparalleled chronological and internally cross-referenced record for deeper study. The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research series presents the finest interdisciplinary research utilizing tools of the C-SPAN Video Library. Developed in partnership with the Center for C-SPAN Scholarship & Engagement (CCSE) in the Brian Lamb School of Communication and with support from the C-SPAN Education Foundation, this series is guided by the ideal that all experimental outcomes, including those from our American experiment, can be best improved by directed study driving richer engagement and better understanding.

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES

The C-SPAN Archives: An Interdisciplinary Resource for Discovery, Learning, and Engagement

Exploring the C-SPAN Archives: Advancing the Research Agenda

Advances in Research Using the C-SPAN Archives

The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research: Volume 4

President Trump's First Term: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 5

The Evolution of Political Rhetoric: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 6

Democracy and the Media: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 7

Political Rhetoric and the Media: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 8

Power and Politics in the Media: The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, Volume 9

PARTISAN RHETORIC AND POLARIZATION

THE YEAR IN C-SPAN ARCHIVES RESEARCH

Volume 10

edited by
Robert X. Browning

Purdue University Press • West Lafayette, Indiana

Printed in the United States of America.
978-1-61249-984-0 (hardback)
978-1-61249-985-7 (paperback)
978-1-61249-986-4 (epub)
978-1-61249-987-1 (epdf)

Cover image: Photo of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building by Jason Kostansek/iStock via Getty Images Plus

To Robert L. Bauman,

friend, counselor, and advisor

over many years

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

AS IT WAS IN THE ANALOG ERA, THE C-SPAN VIDEO LIBRARY TODAY IS ONE OF THE PREMIERE DATA SOURCES FOR studies about politics and government in the digital age. The C-SPAN Archives' holdings are vast, containing at this time over 280,000 hours of political video, including coverage of U.S. presidential campaigns, elections, and administrations as well as extensive video records of all three branches of American government, special hearings and investigations, impeachments, foreign leader addresses to Congress, prime ministers' questions from the U.K., historical documentaries, panels and discussions, specials on First Ladies, African American history, student leaders, the Civil War, and more.

With a growing number of researchers in the U.S. and beyond now leveraging video as data, whether employing computational techniques, content analysis, rhetorical methods, or other interpretive approaches, political communication as a field of study is advancing as never before. The C-SPAN Archives is an important player in this growth. This edited series, ably guided by Robert X. Browning and the team at Purdue University, captures the breadth and innovation of research discovery the C-SPAN Video Library enables.

My first encounter with C-SPAN as a research resource occurred during graduate school at the University of Maryland in the mid-1990s. It was a different era, politically and technologically, and videotape still ruled the day. With dissertation research on my mind, I attended a C-SPAN workshop on political communication research and encountered the dynamic John Splaine of Maryland's School of Education, whose insistence on neutrality helped establish the medium shot as C-SPAN's default frame.

As fellow C-SPAN junkies, John and I had much to discuss. Prior to the academy, I had worked as a print journalist in Los Angeles covering breaking news. My paper's closure hastened a career transition, first into politics as Jerry Brown's scheduler and deputy press secretary during the 1992 presidential campaign and

then into academic research. The campaign opened my eyes to the power of television to focus public attention and reach mass audiences.

Among other things, John had developed an eye for the structural features of broadcasts and could identify the constituent elements of political video—the shot lengths, speaking times, camera angles, editing cuts, zoom movements, and other measurable qualities—as well as anyone. He read the literature and knew the operational categories. Political coverage was something that could be parsed and held accountable, an outlook that dovetailed with my own.

In need of some additional news coverage and presidential speeches for my dissertation research, I queried John for advice, and he gifted me $400 worth of C-SPAN videotapes, which was more than enough to compile the stimuli for my experimental study on political appropriateness. When I completed my dissertation, I thanked John for his generosity and encouragement in the acknowledgments.

I mention all this not only because John's way of seeing political video influenced my own outlook but also because he was my first personal connection to C-SPAN and shared the network's sense of mission. C-SPAN started as, and remains, a pioneering and essential player in the civic media space. John's enthusiasm and generosity of spirit embodied the essence of the C-SPAN remit—to document American politics at the national level and cover international politics to the extent possible, all the while providing a valuable resource for the analysis of democracy and public life more broadly.

This latest volume of The Year in C-SPAN Archives Research, the tenth in the series, features a broad collection of original studies on partisan rhetoric and polarization befitting these contentious times. Chapter topics range from congressional debates over abortion and discourse surrounding the January 6 insurrection to extrajudicial appearances by Supreme Court justices and deep learning approaches to emotion in televised debates. Suitably for an interdisciplinary area, the chapters feature a mix of topics and methods.

Consistent with the series' aim to advance interdisciplinary research utilizing tools of the C-SPAN Video Library, the volumes are now open access and downloadable as e-books. As with previous work in the series (including some of my own), the chapters that follow explain techniques for analyzing political video from the Archives, then draw sound conclusions from that research. Expect to glean insights from the pages ahead.

Erik P. Bucy
Marshall and Sharleen Formby Regents Professor of Strategic Communication
Texas Tech University

PREFACE

POLARIZATION IS RAMPANT IN AMERICAN POLITICS. EACH PARTY HAS EXTREMES IN THE ELECTORATE AND THE elites—such as members of Congress. In this volume of The Year in C-SPAN Research, we present 10 papers that address polarization in American politics. These papers were presented at the 2023 annual conference held at Purdue University, where scholars gathered virtually to demonstrate how the C-SPAN Video Library could be used to advance research on these topics. This conference was the tenth in a series of annual conferences sponsored by the Center for C-SPAN Scholarship & Engagement in the Brian Lamb School of Communication.

Each author was tasked with extracting video and text from the C-SPAN Video Library to illustrate their idea. Topics ranged from a paper on humor and politics, to the use of TikTok in Congress, to constructions of the middle class in Congress, to the framing of abortion in Congress, to debate surrounding January 6. There is a paper that looks at reactions to sex scandals. There is a unique analysis of spiritual advisors in the White House as well as an examination of Supreme Court justices' speeches off the bench. Finally, there is a paper that measures emotions in presidential debates. Although each paper takes a different methodological approach, the common thread is that they use C-SPAN video as the basis for their analysis. The result is a somewhat eclectic collection that is instructive for others who want to follow in the pioneering footsteps of these scholars.

The book begins with a chapter on humor and politics based on the popular White House Correspondents' Dinner. At this annual event, a well-known comedian gives a speech often roasting the president in attendance. In Chapter 1, Windsor and colleagues examine the type of humor and targets during these speeches, questioning the effect of polarization on comedians, their speeches, and jokes as well as gestures, posture, attention, and text. Their exploration helps us understand the way that humor has changed in an era of polarization.

TikTok is a controversial, yet popular, social media platform that has gained attention worldwide because of its short, fast-paced video content. Its ownership by a Chinese company has led to efforts to ban it by the U.S. government, universities, and organizations. In a well-designed study, Deyoe and Zulli look at the framing of TikTok by congressmembers as well as by journalists, which they examine in three media outlets: CNN, Fox, and CBS, selected because of the variety of their viewpoints. They also discuss the regulation of social media in their chapter. Chapter 2 is a thorough look at an important social media platform and controversy.

Another look at polarization is in Chapter 3 by Park-Ozee. This chapter explores the rhetorical construction of the middle class in congressional debate, important because it examines party and income. The chapter helps us to understand who the Congress sees as the middle class as it designs policies that target benefits and reveals interesting insights into how the parties characterize the middle class in debates.

In Chapter 4, Russell also examines how members of Congress view digital communication. The study looks at the use and reference to Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. We learn how members reference these forms of digital communication in Congress. This study is useful in that it traces the first references to this technology in Congress, and it adds to our understanding of congressional use of digital technology in communication.

Hoewe and Jackson use moral framing literature in Chapter 5 to look at the discussion of abortion in Congress. Clearly, polarization of the parties is seen in the characterization of this issue as "pro-choice" or "pro-life." These differences in rhetoric are seen throughout this chapter. In light of recent Supreme Court and state court decisions, this is a particularly timely piece. Through their use of moral foundations theory (MFT), these authors add an important dimension to their study.

Yet another framing study is that of Walker, who looks at congressional discussions of January 6. Titled "Framing False Information," Chapter 6 evaluates the presentation of false information in the January 6 Committee hearings, provides an analysis of that information, and outlines how false information can lead to distrust and polarization.

In Chapter 7, Brooks and Lilly write about a too familiar topic of sex and politics. The analysis of the response of spouses and politicians to the individual scandals is insightful. The authors ground their study in the theory of crisis communication and find "that C-SPAN open phones callers often demonstrated party

allegiance when reacting to political sex scandals." This study adds to our knowledge with a creative use of the C-SPAN Video Library.

Andrea Terry submits a unique chapter that looks at spiritual advisors to the president in the White House. This is something that we hear about, but outside the popular press is not commonly discussed. From Reagan to the present, Chapter 8 explores the roles of these advisors with a typology. Examining both the academic literature as well as the manifestation in the White House, this study looks at the rhetorical functions of spiritual advisors. It also assesses how these functions have changed over time.

We are used to seeing images of Supreme Court justices appearing in black robes on the Court bench. What is less common is seeing these same justices giving speeches off the bench. This occurs more than you might think before law schools, judicial conferences, and think tanks. The appearances and messages in these off-Court speeches are the subject of Chapter 9 by Cota. Given some controversies about trips and funding, the topics and occurrences of these speeches are more important than ever. This study finds that the goals and focuses have shifted strategically over time and contributes to our understanding of the Court and the appearances of the justices.

Finally, Chapter 10 presents a study of emotions in televised debates. Termed a multimodal approach, this analysis goes beyond looking at text to analyzing other elements, including "gestures, facial expressions, pitch, tone, and speech." From this study, we move beyond what we know about candidate appearances to a deeper level in recent televised debates. These nonverbal cues add another important dimension to our understanding of candidates in debates.

In sum, these ten papers all utilize the C-SPAN Video Library to provide a variety of techniques, topics, and findings about politics and communication and a wide range of questions. A good number address polarization directly in framing and communication analysis. Others address it indirectly since polarization is underlying so much of American politics today. Each demonstrates the depth of the C-SPAN Video Library and how it can be used to examine so many topics.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK IS A RESULT OF A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE HELD IN THE FALL OF 2023. TEN PAPERS WERE PRESENTED BY the participants via Zoom. Andrea Langrish, managing director of the Center for C-SPAN Scholarship & Engagement (CCSE) in the Brian Lamb School of Communication, helped with all the details of the conference. She was assisted by Madia Bickett, who helped with the program and execution at every step of the way. Interns Samuel Reusze, Cara Smith, Matt Stachler, and Keely Tyrer helped with conference details.

Marifran Mattson, professor and head of the Purdue University Brian Lamb School of Communication, is a steadfast supporter of the CCSE and all its activities. She was assisted by Donna Wireman and Caitlin Zahn in the school's Business Office. David Reingold, Justin S. Morrill Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, can always be relied upon for support of the CCSE mission and program, as can Cherie Maestas, professor and head of the Department of Political Science.

Professors Bart Collins and James McCann helped review proposals. It would be difficult to thank Professor Bryce Dietrich, research scholar of the CCSE, enough for all he did, from introductions, to chairing panels, to reading proposals, to editing papers. Professors Jesse Crosson, Diana Zulli, and Jessica Collier, as well as postdoc Jake Truscott, all expertly handled the moderator duties. Professor Josh Boyd introduced the winners of our student research competition: Brayden Walters and Alex Kubon. Other speakers included Professor Kathryn Cramer Brownell, Jonathan Slapin, Dhavan Shah, Erik Bucy, Peter Kiley, and Brian Lamb.

From C-SPAN, Brian Lamb, Susan Swain, and Robert Kennedy provide support throughout the year. The C-SPAN Education Foundation contributes a grant for the stipends to the presenters. Their support is so important for the mission of CCSE and the success of our conference and book series.

The Purdue University Press, led by Justin Race, is instrumental in supporting this book and the series. This is the tenth book in the series, and from the first meeting, the press leadership has always been supportive of publishing a series on original C-SPAN research. Katherine Purple, Bryan Shaffer, and Andrea Gapsch of the press staff help at each step of the publishing process.

The editorial board assisted in reviewing manuscripts.

Matthew Bergbower, PhD, department chair and professor, Department of Political Science at Indiana State University

Porismita Borah, PhD, professor, Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University, and editor in chief, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*

Nadia Brown PhD, professor of government, director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program, and affiliate in the African American Studies program at Georgetown University; lead editor, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*

Kathryn Cramer Brownell, PhD, professor, Department of History at Purdue University, and senior editor, "Made by History" at *Time*

Bryce Dietrich PhD, associate professor, Department of Political Science at Purdue University, and research scholar, Center for C-SPAN Scholarship & Engagement

Jennifer Hoewe, PhD, associate professor, Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University, and director of the Media and Politics Research Group at Purdue

Alison Novak, PhD, associate professor, Edelman College of Communication & Creative Arts at Rowan University

Terri Towner, PhD, professor, Political Science Department at Oakland University, and co-editor in chief, *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*

1

HUMOR AND POLARIZATION IN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' DINNER COMEDY SPEECHES

Leah C. Windsor, Alistair Windsor, Christian Kronsted, Deborah Tollefsen, J. Elliott Casal, Nicholas W. Simon, Shaun Gallagher, James Russell Haner, and August White

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

This chapter explores variation in humor over several decades of White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches during times of high and low political polarization. The guest speakers, mostly comedians, are invited to offer their perspectives on current events, and often roast politicians and the media across the political spectrum during their remarks. At the White House Correspondents' Dinner, no one is safe from their sardonic wit; pundits and comedians take aim at both sides of the aisle. Using the C-SPAN Video Library, we examine the contours of political humor in White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches between 1992 and 2023 to better understand how humor changes during administrations, across political parties, and over time as the U.S. has become an increasingly inhospitable environment to shared political values. We find that there's less laughter and applause, fewer personal pronouns and references to "us" and more references to "them."

We take a multimodal approach to understanding how humor manifests when the political climate is tense, and when the spirit of bipartisanship is strong and relations more relaxed.

This research is predicated on the concept of embodied cognition, sometimes called 4E cognition, a philosophical framework that suggests that communication

is *embodied* in vocalization and gesture, *extended* in the use of communicative technologies, *embedded* in the relevant temporal and social context, and *enactive* in dynamic relationships between the speaker, audience, and context (Gallagher, 1986, 2017; Kronsted et al., 2023).

Embodied cognition presents a holistic perspective on communication and helps us understand the epistemological foundations of political polarization and humor. How do we know what we know about the "feel" of politics when we watch the White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches? Embodied cognition provides a framework for the way we evaluate political messages by marrying disparate concepts like linguistic analysis, gesture interpretation, and acoustic features. It considers the role of the audience, communicative technologies (microphone, television broadcast), and even the physical aspects of the room in which the speech is given. Embodied cognition provides a unified framework for making meaning and making sense of disparate communication signals.

The magnitude of political polarization can influence what jokes are told, and how they are received. Humor can be deployed as an icebreaker, to soften the blow of a particularly poignant or cutting remark. High-level humor is especially cognitively demanding and requires considerable heavy lifting on behalf of the audience to incorporate the presumptions and contextual information into the joke. What's *not* said is as important as the actual words spoken. In other words, if you must explain the punchline, the joke ceases to be funny. Humor is sometimes in the innuendo, where the audience supplies the implied meaning. This requires considerable common ground, which can vary in the White House Correspondents' Dinner audience (comprised of media, politicians, and celebrities) depending on the political climate. Political polarization has steadily increased in the past few decades, indicating less common ground and shared perspectives among members of Congress (Dagnes, 2019; Martin & Yurukoglu, 2017).

THAT'S NOT FUNNY

Scholars have noted distinct increases in partisan polarization in the U.S. compared to other countries (Boxell et al., 2022), at least in part due to the ubiquity of cable news (Martin & Yurukoglu, 2017). Prior to the internet and unlimited access to news, constituents read print media with carefully vetted and back-sourced stories and had a choice of three channels (ABC, CBS, or NBC) for nightly news. People in the U.S. all sat down to dinner at 6:00 p.m. and got their information

from a common source. This is clearly no longer the case. The advent of the internet and real-time news has ushered in an era of ubiquitous—and often dubious—access to information, where members of the public can curate their own reality by excluding viewpoints that are not congruent with their beliefs. Partisan constituents elect partisan representatives, and the chasm of shared reality grows ever wider. Times are more tense, people are less generous and forgiving, and life is less funny. The implications for humor in the annual, ritualized White House Correspondents' Dinner gala are significant.

While comedians tend to skewer both liberal and conservative politicians, the type of humor differs. Jokes made by more liberal comedians tend to be more inclusive and broadly targeted, while jokes made by more conservative comedians tend to have a personal twinge that retains some plausible deniability (CPMA, 2010). Perhaps it's not solely the political leaning of the individual comedian that matters most, though. The political climate, marked by varying levels of hostility or generosity, may help to characterize the type of humor lobbed at the audience. For example, Stephen Colbert (a left-leaning comedian playing the role of a right-wing pundit in his 2007 Correspondents' Dinner speech, where he stayed in character the entire time) quipped: "Guys like us, we don't pay attention to the polls. We know that polls are just a collection of statistics that reflect what people are thinking in 'reality.' And reality has a well-known liberal bias" (C-SPAN, 2007). This sweeping generalization does not target any particular person; it provides a characterization of liberal and conservative perspectives. On the other hand, Michelle Wolf, a politically liberal comedian, personally addressed Sarah Huckabee Sanders in her 2018 address: "I actually really like Sarah. I think she's very resourceful. She burns facts, and then she uses the ash to create a perfect smoky eye. Maybe she's born with it; maybe it's lies. It's probably lies" (C-SPAN User, 2018).

In 1994, Al Franken used another comedic strategy by finding a common "enemy" in the Dutch Foreign Press, who had asked him which Republican candidate he supported. Franken replied, "Bob Dole," to which the Dutch reporter said, "But he's so old!" Franken elicited laughter and cheers from the Correspondents' Dinner audience with the punchline, "He wasn't too old to save your Dutch ass" (C-SPAN, 1996). Humor can help identify in-groups and out-groups, and provide the opportunity to unify opposing sides, at least for the moment while the joke lands.

Research echoes anecdotal examples, showing that conservatives and liberals find different things humorous (Ariely, 2008; Stewart, 2012; Warner & McGraw,

2012). Dan Ariely and Elisabeth Malin asked 285 people who self-identified as either liberal or conservative to rate how funny a variety of jokes were across a range of categories. Interestingly, conservatives rated the jokes funnier overall—but when asked to rate their *own* level of funniness, liberals rated themselves as funnier. As Ariely and Malin point out, this does not mean that liberals are objectively funnier, only that they *think* they are (Ariely, 2008). Consequently, one would expect different types of comedians to be invited to the White House Correspondents' Dinner depending on the president's party affiliation.

Another complicating factor is polarization. Indeed, polarization has steadily increased in the past three decades in the United States. Using the polarization measure in the V-Dem dataset (https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/), we plotted the speakers at the White House Correspondents' Dinner from 1994 to 2022 according to the political party of the sitting president. Two interesting trends became visible: first, polarization tends to stay stable during Democratic leaders' time in office, with the exception of Obama's last year in office; and second, polarization increased incrementally during the George W. Bush (R) presidency and rose precipitously between the election of Donald J. Trump (R) and the end of his presidency. Polarization retreated slightly in 2022 after the election of Joseph R. Biden (D). The question becomes whether jokes themselves have to become more biting when such a political environment exists. Said differently, Do jokes tend to be more polarized in such instances? These trends suggest that such incentives may exist; however, this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

WOMEN AREN'T FUNNY

Instead, this chapter will focus on another trend that is striking. During the time period we studied, only four women took center stage at this event: Aretha Franklin (who performed in lieu of a comedy routine given the precarious political environment surrounding President Clinton's impeachment in 1999), Wanda Sykes (2009), Cecily Strong (2015), and Michelle Wolf (2018). Of these women, only one performed during a Republican presidency, and in a year and term where the president flouted custom and precedent, and declined to attend the dinner. A functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study from 2005 evaluated differences in brain activation in men and women to better understand how humor is contextualized by different sexes (Azim et al., 2005). The researchers found that women are prone to more critically scrutinize messages than are men, and that women moderate their expectations of a funny punchline more than men do—a

point that led political commentator Christopher Hitchens (2017) to write that "women aren't funny."

Moreover, gendered expectations of women provide rigid boundaries for how they perform their identities: Women are expected to be compassionate, gentle, and acquiescent, while men are expected to be competitive, strong, and verbal. Men who exhibit traditionally feminine characteristics are deemed "weak," while women who exhibit traditionally masculine characteristics are labeled "brash" or "pushy." The arena of political commentary rewards masculine Socratic exchanges, which tend to be combative and incisive—behavior that would be indelicate for women to partake in. For example, comedian Michelle Wolf contravened gender norms in her speech in 2018, for which she received the most lukewarm reception of all the comedians in the sample we analyzed, something we explore in a later section. However, to say that the jokes delivered during the White House Correspondents' Dinner are of a particular type is fairly obvious for those who have watched these speeches on C-SPAN. Nevertheless, the ability to statistically identify such patterns will help us to better understand how comedian Michelle Wolf deviated from those norms, which is something we turn to now.

LANGUAGE IS FUNNY

We can learn quite a lot about the political environment from somewhat unglamorous and invisible linguistic constructs, like function words and closed class items. Table 1.1 shows the strength of correlation between linguistic features and political polarization in the United States between 1994 and 2022. For the first 5 rows, the linguistic features decline in usage alongside increases in polarization. For rows numbered 6 through 12, the linguistic features increase in usage alongside increases in polarization. The linguistic features in Table 1.1 represent a category of words called "closed-class items"; this means that there are very few new words introduced into these categories and that they are remarkably stable over time. Pronouns have traditionally fallen into this class, although it is noteworthy that English and other languages have been changing pronoun use and are including new pronoun variations such as *xie* and *hir* in the list of longstanding pronouns. Other closed class categories include prepositions, conjunctions, and articles.

Polarization has steadily increased over the past several decades. Figure 1.1 shows the decreases in the use of some closed-class lexical items. During this time, for example, rates of usage for the pronouns "I" and "us" have decreased in

TABLE 1.1 *Correlation of Political Polarization With Lexical Categories*

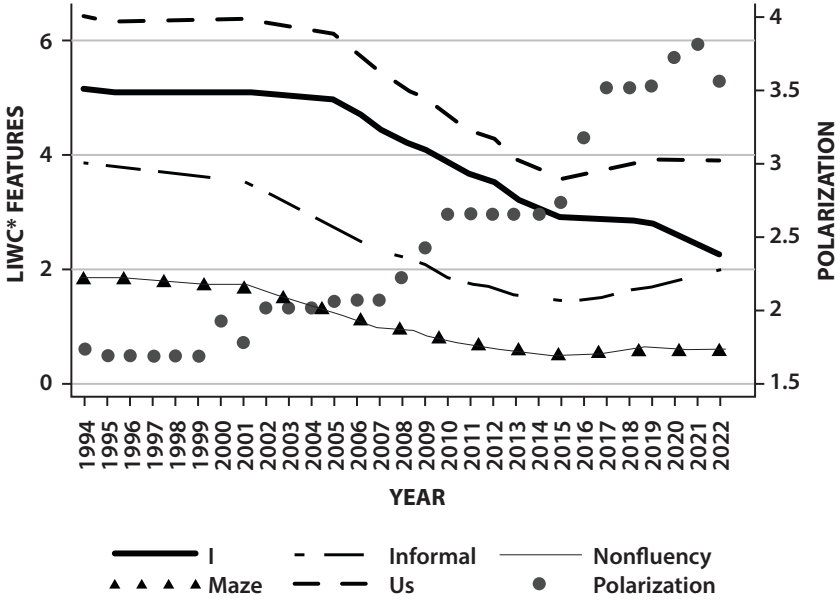
	Lexical category	Political polarization
1	I	−0.608**
2	Informal	−0.466*
3	Nonfluency	−0.483*
4	Maze	−0.494*
5	Us	−0.577**
6	Preposition	0.597**
7	Adjective	0.646**
8	Compare	0.613**
9	Tentative	0.537*
10	Certainty	0.508*
11	Time	0.660**
12	Them	0.456*

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches, as has the use of informal language. The comedians also used fewer references to "us" during this time, which is reflective of growing polarization.

Nonfluencies and mazes, which include the use of nonfluencies, have also decreased during this time (Fagan, 1982; Salt Software, 2021). Nonfluencies include words like "um," "well," and "hmm" and serve as placeholders in speech. Linguistic mazes happen when a speaker starts an utterance, and perhaps stops mid-utterance or backtracks, makes a correction or adjustment, or starts down a different utterance path. Small children, for example, are notorious for linguistic mazes as they attempt to organize their thoughts and convert them into words. According to Loban (1976), linguistic mazes are defined as "linguistic nonfluencies (filled pauses, repetitions, revisions, and abandoned utterances) that are not part of the intended message and that detract from its efficient communication." Figure 1.2 shows the overall trends of polarization and linguistic mazes in our sample.

That mazes declined as polarization increased is interesting in itself. Mazes are indicative of informal language, a feature that also declined during this time. Less formal language indicates more familiarity and a relaxed setting. More formal language indicates less shared common ground, less familiarity, and a more



*Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

FIGURE 1.1 Lexical categories in decline as polarization increases.

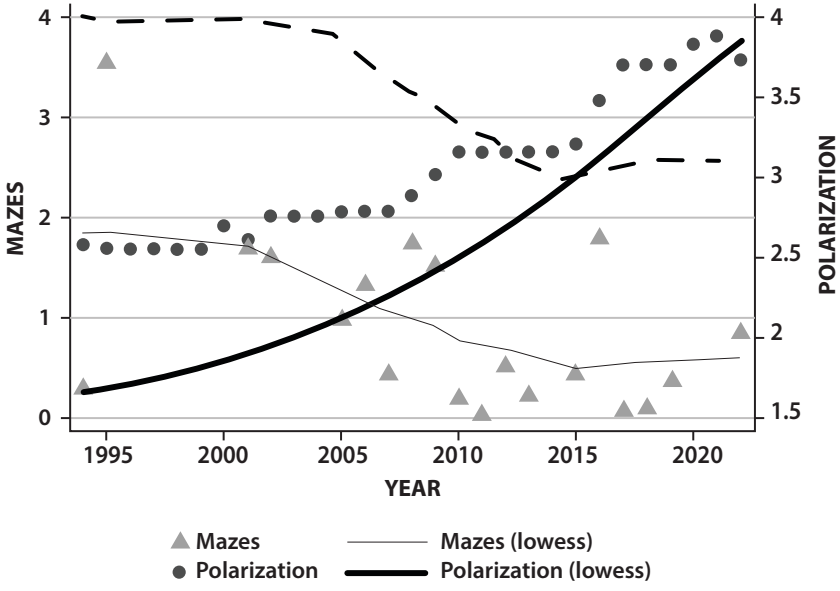


FIGURE 1.2 Scatter and lowess plots for mazes and polarization.

tense setting where information is conveyed in deliberate and careful ways. This certainly squares with the experience of living in an increasingly polarized political environment. People are less free and less casual with their words and speak with more clarity and often more scripted preparation.

On the other hand, some categories of words increased alongside polarization, as shown in Figure 1.3. The comedic speeches included more prepositions, adjectives, comparisons, temporal terms, and references to tentative and certain words. Importantly, the comedians used more terms related to "they" and "them," an indicator of in-group and out-group status alongside the decreased use of inclusive terms like "us." More "them" and less "us" is truly emblematic of more polarized politics.

From these analyses it seems as though the type of jokes delivered during these speeches have ebbed and flowed with polarization in the electorate. Although this provides an initial answer to the question we posited above regarding the nature of jokes in the partisan era, we present it here to emphasize that there is a certain style that is and is not adhered to during White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches. We now are interested in whether laughter occurs during these speeches, with an eye toward our broader point regarding Michelle Wolf's speech, which deviated from some of these norms, even with respect to her nonverbal cues.

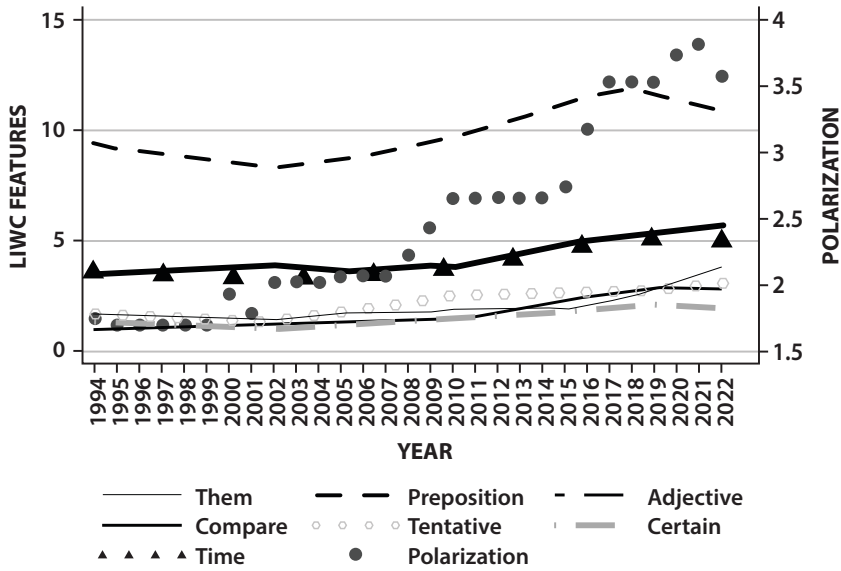


FIGURE 1.3 Lexical categories increasing with polarization.

THAT SOUNDS FUNNY

Multimodal analysis can provide information not only about what is said, but also how it is said. Acoustics can demonstrate how sound is produced and experienced, and in the aggregate can show trends over time that help us understand the acoustic contours that contextualize polarization. Figure 1.4 shows the minimum, mean, and maximum values for fundamental frequency (f0) for men and women comedians' speeches at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. Men and women have different baseline fundamental frequencies, so it is important to plot them both as distinct trends rather than overall averages: men's baseline f0 varies between 80 and 175 Hz, and women's baseline f0 varies between 160 and 270 Hz (Fouquet et al., 2016; Oliveira et al., 2021; Pisanski et al., 2021). To generate this data, we analyzed the MP3 audio files with Praat using the Prosody Pro script (Arvaniti, 2020; de Jong & Wempe, 2009).

Fundamental frequency is experienced by the listener as pitch, and it is measured in Hertz (Hz). To compare men's and women's acoustic features, we convert the raw f0 values to semitones. In Figure 1.4, two important trends are visible in this data: first, women's and men's acoustic norms fall within predicted,

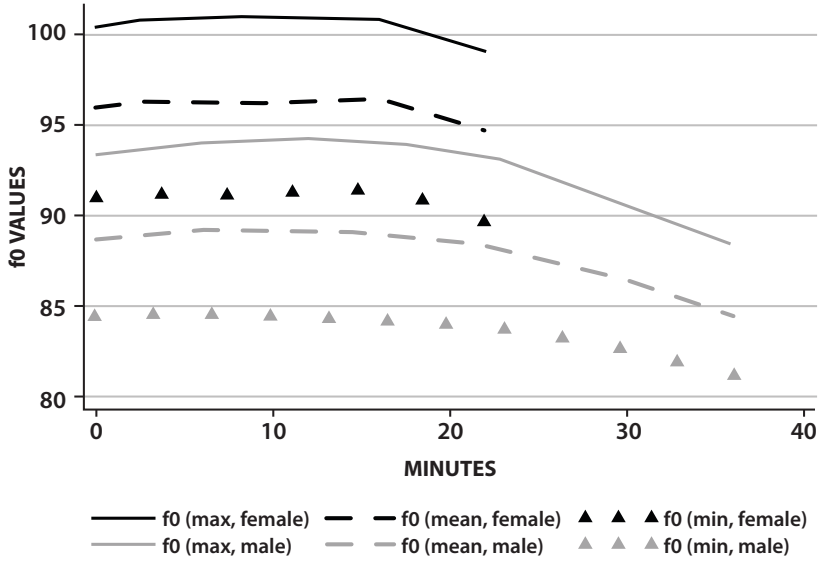


FIGURE 1.4 Fundamental frequency (f0) for men and women comedians in White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches.

population norm-referenced values; second, men talk almost twice as long in their speeches as do women, on average.

One way we can examine differences in f0—or pitch if we are taking the perspective of the audience—is by looking at the pattern of outliers across speakers and years. Figure 1.5 shows a count of the number of times each speaker's f0 was greater or less than 1 standard deviation from the mean. The speakers are sorted according to year, with Al Franken in 1994 and Trevor Noah in 2022. This shows, on average, the high and low contours of the speaker's pitch. In general, the highs vastly outnumber the lows. Because the recording does not isolate the speaker's voice, the f0 captures the audience's responses as well, including laughter and applause. Laughter differs from normal speech production in that the Hz is substantively higher, with men's laughter registering on average 282 Hz and women's 421 Hz (Bachorowski et al., 2001).

From this we might infer that the audience perceived Jimmy Kimmel the funniest of all the comedians in our sample, and Michelle Wolf the least funny. This is of course not a referendum on their actual comedic value or skill, but rather a function at least in part of the level of polarization in society. Jimmy Kimmel benefited from the Obama honeymoon phase, while Wolf delivered her speech as Trump's influence reached its apex. We also see, as shown in Figure 1.10 in the

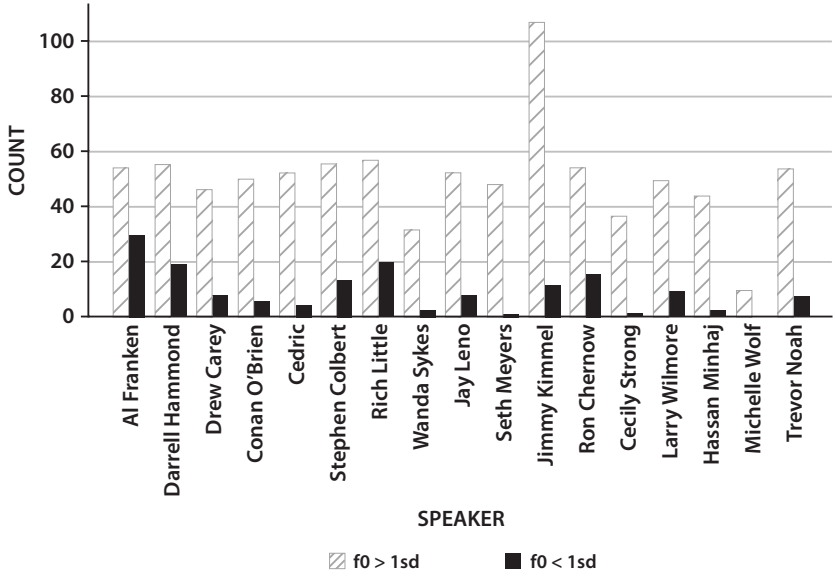


FIGURE 1.5 f0 outliers greater and less than 1 standard deviation from the mean.

Appendix to this chapter, that in years where the sitting president is a Democrat, there are more outliers.

As explained above, when it comes to humor, men and women are often evaluated differently, something we can clearly see when the fundamental frequency of Al Franken's and Michelle Wolf's speeches are compared. Beginning with the box plots in Figure 1.6, we find that Al Franken's 1994 speech was marked by mean frequencies in the population norm-referenced range, as well as outliers all above the mean. As the C-SPAN video of his performance showed, the audience thought he was funny. Figure 1.7, on the other hand, shows that Michelle Wolf's speech had very few outliers above the mean, and many *below* the mean, indicating that the audience found her distinctly *unfunny*. However, we cannot say for sure that this is attributed to gender, since (a) the speeches were given in different political climates and (b) her speech was about half the time in minutes than was Al Franken's.

THAT LOOKS FUNNY

We now turn to gesture analysis. We focus on hand gestures, but this is a broad topic that could include facial gestures and postures, also visible in Figures 1.8 and 1.9. In Figure 1.8 we see four different hand gestures made by Al Franken

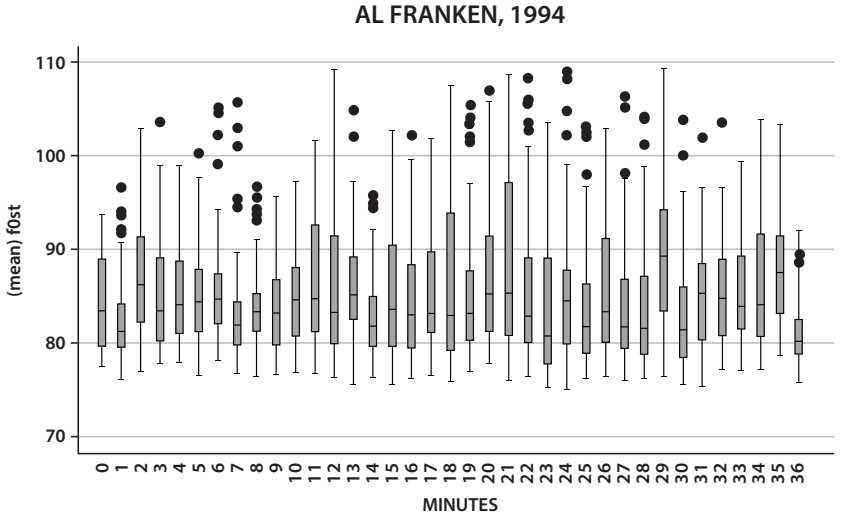


FIGURE 1.6 Acoustic analysis of Al Franken's 1994 White House Correspondents' Dinner speech.

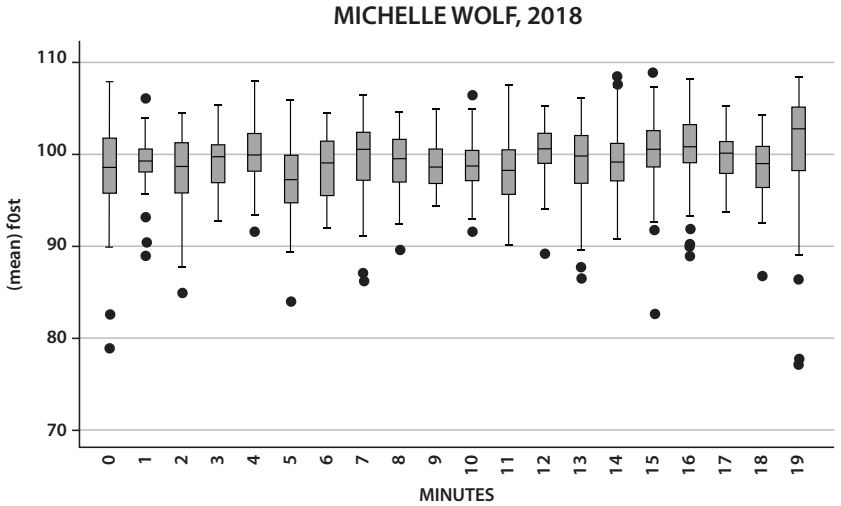


FIGURE 1.7 Acoustic analysis of Michelle Wolf's 2018 White House Correspondents' Dinner speech.

during his 1994 White House Correspondents' Dinner speech. *Top left:* He makes this gesture when he apologizes to his wife for the joke he made (gesture shows shame). *Top right:* He makes this gesture while chastising presidential hopefuls (or never-will-be's) by talking about the enormous buffet on Air Force One as he reenacts stuffing his face with the cornucopia of food. *Bottom left:* He makes this emphatic fist-closed gesture while talking about how we should merge the issues of caring for senior citizens with NASA's space program—the idea being to send the elderly into space to reduce end-of-life costs. *Bottom right:* He engages in a self-soothing gesture after making a joke about the Montana Freemen, a group who started an 81-day armed standoff with the FBI in 1996.

In Figure 1.9 we see four different hand gestures made by Michelle Wolf during her 2018 White House Correspondents' Dinner speech. *Top left:* She makes a common gesture when people are referring to themselves (telling the audience a bit about herself). *Top right:* She deviates from a common gesture used during her speech (open hand, turned sideways with the pinkie finger out, or palm flat to the audience), and she makes a gentle closure with her fingers over the heel of her hand. She went from an open hand turned sideways to this closed gesture when talking about political divisions. *Bottom left:* She's pointing at the audience when talking about a specific scenario related to Robert Mueller's subpoenas. *Bottom right:* She makes an "elbow poke" gesture when talking about abortion—one of the more expressive gestures she makes during the speech and the only time she makes this gesture.

FIGURE 1.8 Four gestures during Al Franken's 1994 speech.

FIGURE 1.9 Four gestures during Michelle Wolf's 2018 speech.

Gestures can augment words spoken, and they can also replace words in some cases, such as the finger-to-the-lips gesture that says, "Shhh," or "Be quiet." Gestures can resemble the language, emphasize a point, and direct one's attention to a particular place or space. Although gestures can be characterized and measured precisely in regard to timing (vis-à-vis speech acts) as well as morphological and topological properties (McNeill, 2008), their meaning depends highly on context. Accordingly, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about what gestures mean since they can be specific to the individual and the context. The analysis of gestures, therefore, cannot be done in isolation and requires the type of multimodal analysis we are employing here. One of the exciting possibilities for research on gesture in politics is identifying gesture typologies specific to politics, and aligning gestures with speech acts (McNeill, 2008; Searle et al., 1980).

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Humor helps us laugh at ourselves and take ourselves less seriously, and under ideal circumstances, it helps us learn about the world around us. Comedians at the White House Correspondents' Dinner give speeches during which they are able to lay bare the scandals and mishaps in American politics precisely because they are said with a wink and a smile. As political polarization has increased over time in the U.S., the nature of the speeches has changed, including the language content, the acoustics, and the overall communicative package as viewed through the lens of embodied cognition.

The framework of embodied cognition provides the opportunity to consider the entire communicative package: the speaker and their personal characteristics, the setting and physical environment where communication is taking place, and the general political zeitgeist. These features all help to characterize what is said, how it is said, and how it is received. Liberals and conservatives may have different baseline thresholds and criteria for what they find funny, but the mood of the nation influences what jokes are told and how they land. We advocate for this holistic approach to analyzing political language because of the complementary information provided by language, gesture, and acoustics. The value of computational linguistics analysis is that by turning words into numbers, we can effectively "merge" at some arbitrary unit of analysis (Perhaps a second? A minute?) the language and the acoustic data, for example. We can then overlay gesture images used to emphasize, extend, or amplify the message, and analyze their patterns of usage.

Overall, the political arena has become less forgiving and more caustic since the early 1990s, and the comedic speeches reflect this reality. People are not laughing as hard or as loudly, and comedians are not as relaxed as in previous, less polarized times. Humor is a window into the health of a system, and these trends do not bode well for our society. The multimodal framework can help researchers track changes and prognosticate about social and political resilience. Being able to laugh at (or laugh with, or at least laugh *near*) ourselves and each other should signify more bipartisan politicking, and more cooperation on shared issues that affect everyone. Laughter is both the best medicine, and the best indicator that the medicine is working.

APPENDIX

Although not reported in the main text of this chapter, we also estimated a latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic model to determine whether certain topics have been more or less discussed in White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches (Blei et al., 2003). Table 1.2 shows the results of a topic model with 10 topics for the White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches between 1994 and 2022. The column on the left lists the topic ID, the middle column lists the qualitatively assigned topic labels, and the column on the right lists the list of the top 20 key terms for that particular topic.

Because the comedians tend to tailor their speeches to current events and politically relevant commentary, the content of the speeches tends to be more idiosyncratic. However, there are some constants over time, including references to the Founding Fathers and "dangerous themes" like torture, and licentious references to scandals, women, and sex.

Figure 1.10 shows the number of outliers in the acoustic analysis of the comedians' speeches. Outliers indicate significant departures from the mean fundamental frequency (f0). Comedians giving White House Correspondents' Dinner speeches during years in which a Democrat holds the office of the president have twice as many outliers as do those giving speeches during Republican presidencies.

One of the challenges of operationalizing embodied cognition in multimodal analysis is that it requires deep interdisciplinary wisdom to accurately depict and interpret the meaning of communicative signals that may have distinct meanings from different disciplinary perspectives. Gestures are a good example. Acoustics is another. Table 1.3 shows the problem with acoustics. On the left, we have the

TABLE 1.2 *Topic Model Results*

Topic ID	Label	Top 20 co-occurring key terms
1	Founding Fathers	press text show washington applause reporters truth newspapers media vaccines jefferson presidents presidential political grant relations fighting facts pen hamilton
2	Generic introductions	president don people good man time mr lot show tonight house white ve guy great news back thing yeah years
3	Unfunny comedians	fun hell um women chicago love poke deer lot ve song car bar heart richard time good oil sing canadian
4	Dangerous themes	laughter applause feels steve pay give bannon needed minority business takes muslim defend stranger trust hope queen arms torture administration
5	Comprehension	uh yeah um sir span hey conan bob ll listen understand kevin hand nafta relevant crime race ve renaissance 96
6	Formal	sir gentlemen bob government fact gore gut huh heart type jack bradley dole helen investigation attention ads pat trump action
7	Trump	trump tonight guys biden donald cnn hilton black msnbc joe fox ted chris hillary cruz women span bernie fun event
8	Potpourri	party paul born span brian jokes hillary rand obama journalists tonight dream canada sounds fox agree bit amazing clean garden
9	Obama-era Democrats	obama kerry bush john blah geraldo romney french hilary boehner howard music dean reporters jay cable health election fooled huge
10	Women and sex	women sex men incredible gonna wonderful kill hear live tuna mother education put don hostages sexual hundred drugs parents man

measure as it exists when produced by the speaker. On the right, we have the perceptual experience from the perspective of the listener or audience. The acoustic measure of sound is produced as frequency, and it is measured in Hertz (Hz). It requires a conversion to semitones as the perceptual unit to normalize the measure so it can be interpreted on a common scale. (An equivalent transformation

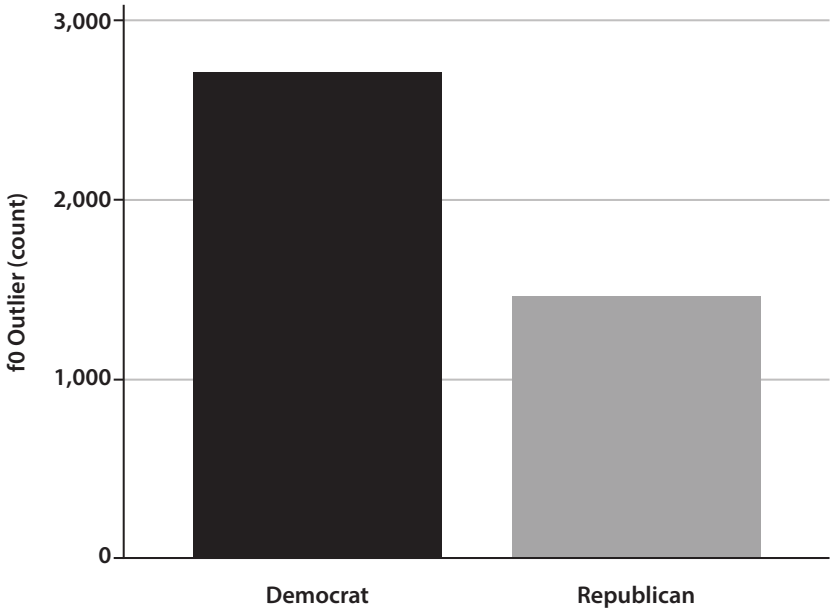


FIGURE 1.10 Count of f0 outliers by presidential party.

is found in logistic regressions where the coefficient must be exponentialized or viewed in terms of marginal effects to understand the substantive meaning.) The perceptual experience is in terms of pitch. Acoustic intensity follows a similar model: a speaker produces intensity, measured in decibels. The perceptual experience of the listener is loudness, and the perceptual unit is phons or sones.

Frequency is to pitch as intensity is to loudness. Understanding these terms, and using them appropriately, is critical to maintaining accuracy and fidelity not only to the disciplinary norms where the measures are traditionally studied, but also to the audiences who are ingesting this information. *Intensity* is as specific to audiology and communication sciences as *rational* is to political science. These terms can be used casually (such as when someone talks about an *intense experience*), but they require precision in academic and research contexts.

TABLE 1.3 *Measures (production), Units, and Measures (perception)*

Measure	Physical unit	Conversion	Perceptual unit	Perceptual experience
Frequency	Hertz (Hz)	C*log (f0/reference)	Semitones	Pitch
Intensity	Decibels	—	Phons, sones	Loudness

REFERENCES

Ariely, D. (2008, October 23). Who enjoys humor more: Conservatives or liberals? *Psychology Today.* https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/predictably-irrational/200810/who-enjoys-humor-more-conservatives-or-liberals

Arvaniti, A. (2020, July 30). The phonetics of prosody. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.411

Azim, E., Mobbs, D., Jo, B., Menon, V., & Reiss, A. L. (2005). Sex differences in brain activation elicited by humor. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *102*(45), 16496–16501. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0408456102

Bachorowski, J.-A., Smoski, M. J., & Owren, M. J. (2001). The acoustic features of human laughter. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, *110*(3), 1581–1597. https://doi.org/10.1121/1.1391244

Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent Dirichlet allocation. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, *3*(March), 993–1022.

Boxell, L., Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2022). Cross-country trends in affective polarization. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *106* (2), 557–565. https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01160.

Center for Media and Public Affairs (CPMA). (2010, November 1). *Jay Leno is red, Jon Stewart is blue*. CPMA. https://cmpa.gmu.edu/jay-leno-is-red-jon-stewart-is-blue/

C-SPAN (Producer). (1996, May 4). *1996 White House Correspondents' Dinner* [Video]. https://www.c-span.org/video/?71604-1/1996-white-house-correspondents-dinner

C-SPAN (Producer). (2007, April 21). *2007 White House Correspondents' Dinner* [Video]. https://www.c-span.org/video/?197644-1/2007-white-house-correspondents-dinner

C-SPAN (Producer). (2018, April 28). *Comedian Michelle Wolf headlines White House Correspondents' Dinner* [Video clip]. Clip of *2018 White House Correspondents' Dinner* (April 28, 2018). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4727074/comedian-michelle-wolf-headlines-white-house-correspondents-dinner

Dagnes, A. (2019). Us vs. them: Political polarization and the politicization of everything. In A. Dagnes (Ed.), *Super mad at everything all the time: Political media and our national anger* (pp. 119–165). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-06131-9_4

de Jong, N. H., & Wempe, T. (2009). Praat script to detect syllable nuclei and measure speech rate automatically. *Behavior Research Methods*, *41*(2), 385–390. https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.2.385

Fagan, W. T. (1982). The relationship of the "maze" to language planning and production. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *16*(1), 85–95.

Fouquet, M., Pisanski, K., Mathevon, N., & Reby, D. (2016). Seven and up: Individual differences in male voice fundamental frequency emerge before puberty and remain stable throughout adulthood. *Royal Society Open Science*, *3*(10), 160395. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.160395

Gallagher, S. (1986). Body image and body schema: A conceptual clarification. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 541–554.

Gallagher, S. (2017). *Enactivist interventions: Rethinking the mind*. Oxford University Press.

Hitchens, C. (2007, January 1). Why women aren't funny. *Vanity Fair.* https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2007/01/hitchens200701

Kronsted, C., Gallagher, S., Tollefsen, D., & Windsor, L. (2023). An enactivist account of lying. *Adaptive Behavior*, *32*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/0.1177/10597123231166421

Loban, W. (1976). *Language development: Kindergarten through grade twelve. NCTE committee on research report no. 18.* https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ed128818

Martin, G. J., & Yurukoglu, A. (2017). Bias in cable news: Persuasion and polarization. *American Economic Review*, *107*(9), 2565–2599. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20160812

McNeill, D. (2008). *Gesture and thought.* University of Chicago Press. https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226514642/html

Oliveira, R. C., Gama, A. C. C., & Magalhães, M. D. C. (2021). Fundamental voice frequency: Acoustic, electroglottographic, and accelerometer measurement in individuals with and without vocal alteration. *Journal of Voice: Official Journal of the Voice Foundation*, *35*(2), 174–180. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2019.08.004

Pisanski, K., Groyecka-Bernard, A., & Sorokowski, P. (2021, September 29). Human voice pitch measures are robust across a variety of speech recordings: Methodological and theoretical implications. *Biology Letters*, *17*(9), 20210356. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2021.0356

Salt Software. (2021, February 26). *Mazes and abandoned utterances: Why they matter.* https://www.saltsoftware.com/blog/mazes-abandoned-utterances

Searle, J. R., Kiefer, F., & Bierwisch, M. (Eds.). (1980). *Speech act theory and pragmatics.* Springer. http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-94-009-8964-1.pdf

Stewart, P. A. (2012). *Debatable humor: Laughing matters on the 2008 presidential primary campaign* (Illustrated edition). Lexington Books.

Warner, J., & McGraw, P. (2012, October 23). Scientifically speaking, who's funnier: Democrats or Republicans? *Wired.* https://www.wired.com/2012/10/humor-democrats-vs-republicans/

2

A UNITING ISSUE?

A Framing Analysis of TikTok Ban Discourse by Congressional Representatives and Journalists

Diana Deyoe and Diana Zulli

Policies governing social media platforms operate within a gray space. While social media companies, such as Meta and Twitter (now X), are ultimately responsible for regulating the content posted and shared on the platform, governmental legislation exists to protect social media companies and individual users (Brannon, 2019). For example, people often discuss laws such as Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act (protecting online organizations regarding user-generated content) and the First Amendment (freedom of speech) when debating user behavior and data security on these platforms (Jaffer, 2023; O'Hara & Campbell, 2023). Still, there are many issues and concerns about social media governance and the rights of individuals (Brannon, 2019). Who is responsible for the content posted and shared on social media? Should the government control the availability of content and platforms? How far do the provisions of the First Amendment extend? Should internationally owned social media companies be approached and regulated differently than U.S.-owned companies? These are all questions being asked and grappled with in the United States and beyond, and TikTok is central to this conversation.

The short-form video platform TikTok is at the center of the U.S. national debate regarding government regulation of social media platforms. The concerns about TikTok stem from the ownership of the company and its immense success in the U.S. ByteDance Ltd., a privately held company based in China, owns TikTok (McDonald & Soo, 2023), but the app is used by over 170 million Americans (at the time of this writing), which is more than half of the entire population

(TikTok, 2024a). Accordingly, U.S. lawmakers have questioned the influence of TikTok and whether the platform functions as an agent for the Chinese government (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2024). These concerns resulted in TikTok being banned from government devices and a congressional hearing where the House Energy and Commerce Committee members questioned TikTok's CEO, Shou Zi Chew, about the platform's data security and continued presence in the U.S.

The goal of the current study is to explore how TikTok's potential ban was framed during the House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing and in news coverage, recognizing that there are many potential sides to and arguments about this issue. Framing theory suggests that how an issue is presented to the public via word choices, images, contextualization, and so forth can impact perceptions and public opinion of that issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Mass media and political elites often frame issues and events in accordance with their agenda to "promote specific meanings within a plural competition and negotiations of meanings" (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023, p. 15). These elite voices thus hold the power to shape public narratives through their issue framing. We engage this framing analysis by qualitatively coding the C-SPAN transcript from the 2023 TikTok ban congressional hearing and news coverage from Fox News (right-leaning cable network), CNN (left-leaning cable network), and CBS (broadcast network). Through this analysis, we examine how lawmakers discussed the TikTok ban and whether ideological biases impacted these discussions, contributing to the larger conversation about social media regulation, data security, and ideological biases in news/issue framing.

We start this study by reviewing the conversations about social media regulation. We then cover the relevant framing literature with an eye toward emphasis framing, discussing how TikTok presents a unique case study to examine social media regulation framing. Next, we discuss our methodological approach of thematically analyzing the C-SPAN video footage of the TikTok congressional hearing and relevant news discourse. Finally, we discuss the findings and implications of this analysis.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE U.S.

Social media companies are both regulated and protected by the U.S. government. In 1996, the 104th United States Congress enacted Section 230 as part of the Communications Decency Act. Section 230 protects internet providers and

online organizations (now including social media companies) from legal repercussions that may result from the content posted and shared by users (O'Hara & Campbell, 2023). Although social media companies do have policies governing content on their platforms and will remove content and users (either manually or through automated content moderation) (Brannon, 2019), Section 230 recognizes that these providers merely facilitate the opportunity for individuals to communicate or engage on these platforms and therefore are not responsible for an individual's online behavior.

However, Section 230 has recently come under scrutiny for being extended and applied well beyond the original intentions of the provision. For example, Section 230 has protected companies like Facebook and Twitter from legal liability when people have used these platforms to promote violent acts, such as the January 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol insurrection (Bond, 2021; Liptak, 2023a). Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Section 230 in a pair of lawsuits against Twitter and Google (Liptak, 2023a). One lawsuit claimed that Twitter was responsible for algorithmically spreading terrorist messages and platforming terrorist groups, which resulted in a 2017 attack on a Turkish nightclub (Liptak, 2023a). The Supreme Court ruled that Twitter was not responsible, saying that the company's failure to remove harmful content from the platform was "not enough to establish liability for aiding and abetting" terrorism (Liptak, 2023a, para. 12). Ultimately, critics of Section 230 claim that "courts and corporations have expanded it [Section 230] into an all-purpose legal shield that has acted similarly to the qualified immunity doctrine that often protects police officers from liability even for violence and killing" (Angwin, 2023, para. 3).

Both Democrats and Republicans have expressed dissatisfaction with Section 230 (Cramer, 2020), with President Joe Biden and President Donald Trump both calling for its repeal (Diaz, 2020; Feiner, 2020), albeit for different reasons. Democrats have been vocal about reforming Section 230 to curb hate speech and mis/disinformation online, like the disinformation that spurred the January 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection (Patterson, 2022). Republicans, on the other hand, have called for reform based on "discrimination against conservative speech" (Patterson, 2022, p. 312). Many Republican lawmakers have criticized social media companies for using political viewpoints or affiliations to supposedly determine content moderation practices and social media participation (i.e., who is allowed to have an account) (Feiner, 2021). Despite this bipartisan desire for reform, no clear path or action has been taken to amend Section 230, likely due to concerns about how amending Section 230 will dampen free speech, which we turn to next.

The First Amendment is also often cited in social media regulation conversations (Hurley, 2023; Jaffer, 2023; Liptak, 2023b), although this amendment was developed long before the advent of social media. The First Amendment "protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (White House, n.d., para. 13). While the First Amendment protects U.S. citizens from governmental censorship, this amendment does not prevent private organizations, such as social media companies, from setting and enforcing their own regulations (Brannon, 2019). Technically, companies like Twitter (now X) and Meta have discretion over what content and users they allow on their platforms. These companies do have community guidelines, outlining what content and behaviors are (in)appropriate. However, due to their profit-driven nature, social media companies are incentivized to be lenient or inconsistent with moderating inflammatory content and users to generate engagement (Ghosh, 2021). Still, the First Amendment is often named both to justify free expression online (private companies should not be allowed to regulate or censor user content on a "whim") and to limit content and deplatform users when they post harmful content (social media discourse is extremely powerful, and companies should prevent their users from causing harm).

Several examples demonstrate this First Amendment challenge regarding social media regulation. Conservative users in the U.S. have alleged unfair shadowbanning (hiding content) and censorship on social media (Stack, 2018; Vogels et al., 2020), saying such practices violate their First Amendment rights. Shadowbanning and content censorship do happen (although often denied by social media companies) (Savolainen, 2022), but this censorship disproportionally affects Black and LGBTQIA+ users (Haimson et al., 2021). Interestingly, although President Trump claimed that Facebook and Twitter violated his First Amendment rights after they de-platformed him for using his social media accounts to incite the U.S. Capitol insurrection (Segers & Sganga, 2021), he also was accused of violating other users' First Amendment rights online by blocking users who expressed disapproval of him online (Roberts, 2019). Indeed, a federal appeals court ruled in 2019 that since Trump used his Twitter for official presidential business, he was not allowed to block users and prevent "otherwise open online dialogue," stated Judge Barrington D. Parker, just because "they say things that the official [Trump] finds objectionable" (Savage, 2019, para. 4). Still, publics have criticized social media companies for not moderating harmful content enough, calling for even more content regulation and user restrictions (Barr, 2022).

We see First Amendment concerns raised in the attempts to ban TikTok nationally and at the state level (e.g., Montana; see Hanson, 2023). The American

Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Democracy and Technology have opposed the TikTok ban, arguing that such a decision would decrease the flow of information between individuals and inhibit political organizing (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023; Vogus, 2023); TikTok has already proven effective at facilitating collective action and political discourse (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023). Understandably, many TikTok users disapprove of governmental attempts to silence users by banning the app. These users voiced their frustrations on TikTok and lobbied in Washington to block the ban during the hearing (Seitz-Wald & Kapur, 2023). Passing a TikTok ban, or at minimum, swaying public opinion to support the need for more governmental regulation of TikTok, would thus require strategic framing of the threats and risks of the platform. Next, we turn to the importance and effects of framing.

FRAMING THE TIKTOK BAN

The foundational proposition of framing theory is that an issue can be perceived in myriad ways depending on how it is packaged and presented to the public (Chong & Druckman, 2007). To "frame" an issue means to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Media often frame issues, providing "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Journalists and strategic actors do this through variations in a story's topical focus (e.g., emphasis framing; Cacciatore et al., 2016), the word choices or small cues they use to describe certain events (e.g., domestic terrorism vs. protest; Shah et al., 2010), and the contextualization or lack thereof that accompanies an issue (e.g., thematic vs. episodic framing; Iyengar, 1994).

Emphasis framing is particularly relevant to our discussion of the TikTok ban. Emphasis framing involves "manipulating what [content] an audience receives" by "emphasizing one set of considerations over another" (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 10). This is compared to equivalence framing, which involves "manipulating the presentation of logically equivalent information" (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 8). Whereas with equivalence frames the content remains the same yet is stated differently (e.g., loss vs. gain frames), emphasis frames "focus on qualitatively different yet potentially relevant considerations" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 114) (e.g., public order vs. free speech frames; Nelson et al., 1997).

Partisan media organizations, politicians, and interest groups often use emphasis framing to sway public opinion. For example, strategic actors in the abortion debate have long battled over the use of "pro-life" or "pro-choice" language in public discourse, with both sides attempting to influence the media to adopt their preferred term (Andsager, 2000; Terkildsen et al., 1998). Similarly, partisan organizations are known to diverge in their framing of the gun debate, with some organizations like the Brady Campaign emphasizing the need for gun reform to enhance public order and safety. In contrast, other organizations like the National Rifle Association often cite the Second Amendment right to bear arms (Steidley & Colen, 2017). In a recent example, Shurafa et al. (2020) found that Republicans blamed China for the COVID-19 pandemic spread, while Democrats blamed Trump and Republicans. Although these frames are understandable given the philosophical differences between the parties, such emphasis framing via small cues or otherwise can have weighty consequences. Indeed, a wealth of literature finds evidence that frames can affect information processing, emotional responses, political learning, public opinion, and behavioral outcomes (see Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, for an overview).

Several elements of the TikTok ban debate make for an interesting and warranted framing inquiry. First, TikTok bans in the United States are already underway. In December 2022, months before the congressional hearing, President Biden signed the No TikTok on Government Devices Act, which prohibits the app on federal devices (CBS/AP, 2023). Most U.S. states followed suit, partially or fully banning the app on governmental devices (Fung, 2023). Importantly, some politicians are still active on their personal TikTok accounts, recognizing the messaging and outreach power of the platforms (Amiri, 2023). There exists a tension, then, between the concerns over TikTok use in the United States and the recognition that the platform is useful for strategic messaging and outreach. The framing of the TikTok ban could reflect these tensions.

Second, no inciting incident motivated the TikTok hearing, which likely influenced the TikTok ban framing. In previous social media hearings, CEOs were questioned after an explosive scandal or damaging event. For example, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified before Congress in 2018 about how the Cambridge Analytica scandal impacted the 2016 presidential election (Confessore, 2018). Similarly, in March 2021, Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Dorsey (Twitter CEO), and Sundar Pichai (CEO of Google's parent company, Alphabet) were questioned about how disinformation and extremism on their platforms contributed to the January 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection (Bond, 2021). In contrast, the TikTok hearing and ban

conversation were not connected to any exemplary event where the ills of the platform were on full display. Certainly, TikTok has been used to track several U.S. journalists, which was discussed during the hearing (Baker-White, 2022). However, without an inciting catalyst to anchor the TikTok ban discussion, the threat of TikTok was more abstract, which likely impacted how lawmakers and journalists framed the risks and rationale for the congressional hearing.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the TikTok ban hearing was unique in that TikTok is owned and operated by a Chinese company, ByteDance, which set up the potential for Democrats, Republicans, and partisan media organizations to be in consensus about the app's risk to the U.S. (Collier & Wong, 2023). Such consensus would significantly depart from how other issues are often framed by actors on opposite sides of the partisan aisle (see Shurafa et al., 2020; Terkildsen et al., 1998). Previous social media congressional hearings have also illustrated the stark divide between how the political parties interpret the social media debate (e.g., whether social media contributed to the January 6 insurrection; the validity of Trump's deplatforming) (McClain & Anderson, 2021; Tucker & Balsamo, 2021). Consensus on banning TikTok would thus represent a rare moment in recent political history. That said, Republican politicians, news organizations, and the public do see China more negatively than do Democrats (Silver et al., 2020), often taking a harsher stance when it comes to U.S./China relations. Therefore, despite a potential consensus about banning TikTok, it was possible that partisan differences and ideological biases still impacted the framing of this debate. Therefore, to explore these possibilities, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1a: How did politicians and journalists frame the TikTok ban?

RQ1b: How did politicians' and journalists' partisan affiliations impact how the TikTok ban was framed?

METHOD

This study employed close textual analysis to interrogate how politicians and journalists framed the TikTok ban during the congressional hearing and in news discourse during that time (Curtin, 1995; McKee, 2003). In March 2023, the CEO of TikTok, Shou Zi Chew, was questioned by the House Energy and Commerce Committee about TikTok's influence in the United States. The hearing lasted approximately 4 hours and 59 minutes, with Democratic and Republican

representatives taking 5-minute turns questioning Shou Zi Chew. Republican representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers from Washington chaired the committee.

To conduct this analysis, we used data from the C-SPAN Video Library and news transcripts. The first text in the analysis is the C-SPAN video coverage of the March 23, 2023, hearing of TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew before the House Energy and Commerce Committee (C-SPAN, 2023). We downloaded the hearing from the C-SPAN Archives and transcribed it using Otter.ai. To understand how the news media framed the TikTok ban and the impact of ideological bias on this framing, we collected news transcripts from CNN, Fox News, and CBS using Nexus Uni. CNN represents the left-leaning perspective, Fox represents the right-learning perspective, and CBS represents more neutral reporting (AllSides, n.d.).

To focus the analysis, we collected the news transcripts published two weeks before and two weeks after the March 23 House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing (from March 3 to April 6, 2023). We searched for the terms "TikTok ban," "TikTok banned," and/or "TikTok bans." The search yielded 114 CNN transcripts, 71 Fox transcripts, and 36 CBS transcripts. We manually scanned each article for relevance, discarding any article that did not address the TikTok ban in some way but instead referenced "bans" and "TikTok" as part of other discussions (e.g., banning assault weapons; TikTok trends). This process left us with 107 CNN transcripts, 55 Fox transcripts, and 31 CBS transcripts. We then engaged in a systematic random sampling procedure to maintain coding manageability and to ensure we coded relatively the same number of transcripts per news source. We analyzed every third CNN transcript, randomly starting on the second transcript (n = 36), every other Fox transcript, randomly starting on the first transcript (n = 28), and every CBS transcript (n = 31). We coded all 4 hours and 59 minutes of the C-SPAN congressional hearing transcript.

The data were analyzed using a close textual analysis (Curtin, 1995; McKee, 2003), where we carefully attended to the texts "to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). As a first step, we familiarized ourselves with the data by independently watching/reading the transcripts. We then identified primary codes through a second reading of the texts (Saldaña, 2021). The two authors then triangulated their readings and developed themes, or "extended phrase[s] or sentence[s] that identif[y] what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 258), relative to the research questions. Importantly, this process was fluid as we repeatedly returned to the text to refine and solidify our analysis. As a final step, we named the themes

and extracted exemplar quotes to illustrate the themes. We report on these themes below.

ANALYSIS

This study questioned how politicians and journalists framed the TikTok ban (RQ1a) and whether partisan differences—between politicians and news organizations—impacted this framing (RQ1b). The textual analysis revealed three main themes related to RQ1a: (1) the TikTok ban was necessary given its two-pronged threat; (2) the TikTok ban was a bipartisan effort; and (3) the TikTok ban was representative of larger geopolitical and social media concerns. Regarding the partisan differences in this framing (RQ1b), the analysis revealed two subthemes connected to the main themes. Despite the TikTok ban being framed as a bipartisan effort (theme 2), partisan news organizations differed slightly in their discussions about which president was responsible for initiating the ban (subtheme 1). And, although there was unified concern over TikTok and other social media companies' harmful practices (theme 3), partisan news organizations differed in their discussions about the political consequences of banning TikTok (subtheme 2).

Theme 1: TikTok Ban as Necessary Given Two-Pronged Threat

Lawmakers, journalists, and news contributors (e.g., politicians and guests on news shows) all framed the TikTok ban as necessary given the immense and "urgent" (CNN anchor Victor Blackwell) threats the platform poses to the United States. Two main reasons were unanimously and consistently given for the ban: the national security implications of TikTok as a Chinese-owned platform and the negative impacts of TikTok on American users. First, lawmakers and journalists repeatedly highlighted the potential for and likelihood of China using TikTok to gather data and surveil American users, which "screams [of] national security concerns" (Fox News correspondent Aishah Hasnie). This potential for data mining and user surveillance was attributed to the Chinese national intelligence law allowing the Chinese government to collect data from any Chinese-operated business, even businesses that operate internationally, like TikTok (Hadero, 2023). Due to this law, Democratic representative Yvette Clark from New York stated during the congressional hearing that "foreign adversaries having direct access

to Americans' data, as well as the ability to influence the content Americans see on a prolific social media platform, represents an unprecedented threat to American security and to our democracy." Republican representative Richard Hudson from North Carolina echoed this concern, saying:

> As Fort Bragg's Congressman, I have serious concerns about the opportunities TikTok gives the Chinese Communist Party to access the nonpublic sensitive data of our men and women in uniform. This personal data and location information can be harvested and could be used for blackmail, to conduct espionage, and possibly even reveal troop movements. (C-SPAN User, 2024)

Due to TikTok's Chinese ties, lawmakers and journalists likened the app to "spyware" (Republican representative Randy Weber, Texas), a "spy tool" (Fox News contributor Raymond Arroyo), and an opportunity for the Chinese government to "infiltrate" and track the American people (CNN chief congressional correspondent Manu Raju, reporting on the congressional hearing). Accordingly, Republican representative John Joyce from Pennsylvania argued that "TikTok as a company cannot be trusted and that Americans remain significantly at risk because of the TikTok app." Banning TikTok was thus framed as necessary to "protect and defend our Constitution and the national security of our country" (Democratic representative Anna Eshoo, California).

Politicians and journalists also framed the TikTok ban as vital due to the negative effects of TikTok content on American users. Politicians and journalists were concerned about China using TikTok to spread propaganda and misinformation. Indeed, Democratic representative Marc Veasey from Texas explained during the congressional hearing, "I also worry that TikTok is the world's most powerful and extensive propaganda machine, allowing the Chinese Communist Party to use TikTok's platform to influence public opinion and undermine the integrity of our democratic elections." Democratic senator Mark Warner from Virginia, who was interviewed on CBS, expressed similar concerns, saying, "One of my bigger fears, we got 150 million Americans on TikTok, average of about 90 minutes a day, and how that channel could be used for propaganda purposes." Multiple topics were raised as being subjected to this propaganda, from "eras[ing] events and people China wants the world to forget" (Republican representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Washington) to "casting doubt on the safety and efficacy of life-saving vaccines" (Democratic representative Raul Ruiz, California).

Politicians and journalists also harshly condemned TikTok for negatively impacting youth mental health through addictive platform features (e.g., contin-

uous scrolling) and insufficient or nefarious content moderation practices (or lack thereof). For example, Republican representative Troy Nehls from Texas argued on Fox that "TikTok is killing Americans. . . . Our teenagers are being killed, destroyed, committing suicide as a result of this app." CNN political analyst Nia-Malika Henerson commented that what is happening on TikTok reflects a "tipping point" because social media in general have become "so addictive," with Caitlin Chin, fellow for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, likening TikTok to "digital opium, or like fentanyl" on CNN. News and hearing discourse highlighted how the majority of TikTok users are below the age of 35, with adolescents comprising a substantial component of users in the United States. TikTok's proprietary algorithm, famous for tailoring content to users' engagement patterns (Smith, 2021), was also argued to be "fine-tuned to optimize growth and engagement without necessarily taking into account the potential harm to users" (Democratic representative Frank Pallone, New Jersey). Collectively, then, much of the congressional hearings and news discourse surrounding a potential TikTok ban was oriented around protecting American users—from data mining and surveillance at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party and from dangerous content that could lead to detrimental changes in public opinion and even physical harm.

Theme 2: TikTok Ban as a Bipartisan Effort and Goal

Whereas most political issues easily fall along the familiar Republican/Democrat divide, thus making it challenging to accomplish a consensus in Congress, journalists and politicians framed the TikTok ban as a uniquely bipartisan initiative. Indeed, across CBS, CNN, and Fox News, numerous journalists, politicians, and contributors emphasized the TikTok ban as a "bipartisan bill," "bipartisan proposal," "bipartisan issue," "bipartisan rebuke," "bipartisan move," "bipartisan effort," "bipartisan consensus," and "bipartisan cooperation." There was said to be "bipartisan outrage" and "bipartisan concern" over TikTok spying on American users. And the TikTok hearing where lawmakers questioned CEO Shou Zi Chew was described as a "bipartisan grilling," "bipartisan berating," "bipartisan bashing," and "bipartisan onslaught."

Lawmakers vocalized this bipartisan support for the TikTok ban during the congressional hearing as well. In fact, Republican representative Buddy Carter from Georgia opened his time by saying, "Welcome to the most bipartisan committee in Congress. We may not always agree on how to get there. But we care about our, our national security." Similarly, Democratic representative Debbie

Dingell from Michigan expressed that "colleagues on both sides of the aisle have raised legitimate concerns about protecting children online, misinformation, and securing our data. Concerns that I share, and it's been said by many of my colleagues are bipartisanly [*sic*] shared."

Importantly, because both Republican and Democratic lawmakers were jointly resolute in banning TikTok, this issue was framed as a *rare* moment in recent political history to actually accomplish positive change. For example, Democratic representative Tony Cardenas from California sarcastically "praised" CEO Chew for uniting Congress, saying, "It might sound a little funny, but you have in fact been one of the few people to unite this committees' members, Republicans and Democrats, to be in agreement that we are frustrated with TikTok, we're upset with TikTok." Republican representative August Pfluger of Texas echoed this response, saying to CEO Chew:

> You've actually done something that in the last three to four years has not happened except for the exception of maybe Vladimir Putin. You have unified Republicans and Democrats. And if only for a day, we're actually unified because we have serious concerns. (C-SPAN User, 2023a)

With these discourses, politicians and journalists highlighted the stark partisan divides that have plagued Congress in recent years and this rare and unique opportunity to bridge those divides through joint action against TikTok.

Subtheme 1: TikTok Ban Responsibility

Although the journalists, news commentators, and lawmakers during the congressional hearing emphasized the TikTok ban as a bipartisan effort to address national security and youth safety, there were differences in how the news organizations discussed who was responsible for *initiating* the TikTok ban. CBS and CNN emphasized President Biden's role in proposing and supporting the TikTok ban, whereas Fox News highlighted how former president Donald Trump attempted to ban TikTok in 2020. Both CBS and CNN commonly led their discussions by saying that "the Biden administration has issued an ultimatum to the popular video-sharing app to part ways with its Chinese-owned parent company, or face a national ban over national security concerns" (CBS reporter Norah O'Donnell), or "The White House is giving TikTok an ultimatum: cut ties with China or be banned" (CNN anchor Kate Bolduan). On CBS, the attribution for

the TikTok ban typically ended there. However, on CNN, journalists and contributors were much more likely to disparage Trump's failed efforts to ban TikTok while touting Biden's progress. For example, CNN media analyst Sara Fischer noted that Trump "tried to do it [ban the app] and forced [*sic*] it to sell. They lost in court. Then an administration came in, the Biden administration, and . . . took another look at it." CNN correspondent Vanessa Yurkevich similarly said, "The Trump Administration tried and failed to ban TikTok in 2020." With this framing, CNN, a left-leaning news organization, clearly credited Biden and his administration for spurring the TikTok ban conversation despite the ban ultimately being a bipartisan effort.

Unsurprisingly, journalists, politicians, and contributors on Fox News, the right-leaning media organization in the sample, emphasized President Trump's earlier attempt to ban TikTok, discrediting the claims that Biden was the leader of this charge. In some commentary, this claim was implicit, such as when Fox News correspondent Marianne Rafferty stated that "former president Trump threatened to ban it in 2020, and even tried to get the owner, ByteDance, to sell to a U.S. company," or when Republican representative Troy Nehls from Texas historicized the TikTok contention in the U.S. on Fox News by saying, "Oh, yes, TikTok's been around a few years, but if you don't recall, under Donald Trump, he wanted to ban it. He wanted to ban it when he was in office."

In other commentary, however, attempts to discredit Biden while promoting Trump's hard stance against TikTok and China were more explicit. For example, Fox News correspondent Aishah Hasnie claimed that Biden actually "rescinded that Trump TikTok ban," even though "this time, they are actually urging Congress to act quickly on this and send that bill to the president's desk," noting the hypocrisy of Biden's actions. In another example, Fox News host Laura Ingraham claimed this renewed interest in TikTok proved that "Trump was right. And as we approach a 2024 announcement from Biden, it's just the latest example of that admission." Moreover, Biden was positioned as too weak to carry through with his threats against China, with *Washington Post* columnist Josh Rogin saying on Fox, "I don't think the Biden administration has the guts to go through with it [banning TikTok] and fight the legal battle that would follow." With these discussions, Biden is positioned as opportunistic, motivated by political gain, and incapable of accomplishing the ban. Instead, Fox praised Trump's instinct to take on the social media giant while discrediting or questioning Biden's seemingly new concern over TikTok's threat to the United States.

Theme 3: TikTok/TikTok Ban as Representative of Larger Geopolitical and Social Media Concerns

TikTok was the central focus during the congressional hearing. However, politicians and journalists framed the app as representative of larger geopolitical and technological concerns. Namely, media and political elite discussed TikTok as just one "tentacle" of the Chinese government (Fox News host Martha MacCallum; CNN national security analyst Juliette Kayyem) and illustrative of the power of social media platforms, hence needing to be curbed. Banning TikTok specifically was thus framed as essential because this was a convenient way to send a strong signal to China and critique other social media companies for their harmful data mining and content moderation practices.

The catalyst for the TikTok congressional hearing and news discourse surrounding the TikTok ban was the Restricting the Emergence of Security Threats that Risk Information and Communications Technology Act, also known as the RESTRICT Act (Collier & Wong, 2023). Although this legislation would give the government "expanded powers" to respond to national security threats posed by applications owned by U.S. adversaries, including TikTok, the bill did not specifically name TikTok as the target of this legislation (Collier & Wong, 2023). As confirmed by CBS reporter Ed O'Keefe, "The legislation which doesn't directly named [sic] TikTok would give the Commerce Department broader powers to outright ban or at least restrict TikTok and other apps tied to China and five other nations deemed US adversaries." Consequently, TikTok became somewhat tangential to or merely representative of the bigger tensions between the U.S. and China.

Some news discourse questioned why TikTok was the target of lawmakers, noting that other social media platforms collect the same type and amount of information from their users. As expressed by CBS correspondent Tony Dokoupil: "Do you think we'd be having this kind of conversation if TikTok were owned by say a Swedish company or a Finnish company like Angry Birds or Spotify, for example? Is it about it being Chinese that is really driving all this concern?" CNN host John King had similar questions, saying, "That gets to the big questions. You've seen this outrage, Democratic and Republican, at Facebook, at Twitter, at different social media platforms at different times. Is this different? Is it because it's China?"

In other news and congressional hearing discourse, lawmakers were explicit in saying that TikTok must be banned to keep China from "impos[ing] their will on the rest of the world" (Republican senator James Lankford, Oklahoma, on Fox) and enacting their "2,000-year plan to destroy this country" (Republican

governor Kristi Noem, South Dakota, on Fox), suggesting that there are more significant concerns to consider and banning TikTok is a first step. The rationale for this discussion was that China, and therefore TikTok, does not have similar values as the U.S. For example, CBS reported Republican representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers from Washington saying, "We do not trust TikTok will ever embrace American values," suggesting that TikTok is more than a technology company. Republican representative Bob Latta of Ohio offered similar thoughts during the congressional hearing, saying, "Unlike the Chinese Communist Party, [the] United States believes in individual freedom, innovation, and entrepreneurship." For these politicians, TikTok represented much larger moral and philosophical differences between rival nations. Banning the platform was thus seen as a convenient and concrete step in thwarting China's "long-term goal" of the "demise of the American power" (Republican representative Daniel Crenshaw, Texas, congressional hearing).

TikTok also became representative of larger concerns about the power and influence of social media platforms. The U.S. is well versed on the data mining practices and negative influence of platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X), having experienced the Cambridge Analytica election scandal during the 2016 presidential elections and the January 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol insurrection attempt (Bond, 2021; Confessore, 2018). Although these platforms have come under intense scrutiny, they remain operable and mostly protected by Section 230. Therefore, TikTok once again became a convenient catalyst for critiquing social media practices in general. For example, Democratic representative Yvette Clark from New York argued during the congressional hearing that "the problems of social media platforms content moderation, algorithmic discrimination, and safety are neither new nor unique to TikTok." Similarly, Republican representative Jay Obernolte from California explained during the hearing:

> Social media companies, and TikTok is unique in this—is not unique in this—gather a tremendous amount of user data, and then use powerful AI tools to use that data to make eerily accurate predictions of human behavior and then seek to manipulate that behavior. That's something that it's not just TikTok, it's all our social media companies that are doing this. (C-SPAN User, 2023b)

Journalists also questioned the sole focus of TikTok when other social media companies engage in similar data mining and content moderation behavior. Indeed, CNN anchor John Berman made "an important point to note that a wide

range of U.S. tech companies can gather data about us that we would not want them to be gathering if we—if we really had a full, in-depth understanding of it." Similarly, CNN political analyst Margaret Talev argued that "there should be an effort to regulate all social media. That you can't just look at TikTok . . . this has to be the rationale for a broader effort that's much more likely to fail, much more like [*sic*] to come under." Collectively, TikTok's Chinese ownership and scale helped lawmakers and journalists differentiate the U.S. from China and turn a critical eye toward other social media companies for similar practices, albeit less harshly than TikTok due to differences in ownership.

Subtheme 2: TikTok Consequences

Using TikTok as an exemplar, lawmakers generally agreed during the congressional hearing that we should question and potentially regulate the practices of social media companies. Still, news discussions acknowledged that banning TikTok could/would have political consequences for some of the lawmakers advocating for the ban. These conversations differed along partisan lines.

Fox highlighted how Democrats and Progressives benefit from keeping TikTok, noting some hypocrisy and performativity in their attempts to be tough on the Chinese-owned platform. For example, Fox News correspondent Jacqui Henrich suggested that "some progressives are seizing on its [TikTok's] popularity with Gen Z," despite the bipartisan cooperation to ban the app. In fact, Fox News host Greg Gutfeld described TikTok as a "gravy train" for "Democrats from the top down . . . to reach Gen Z" voters. In the same segment, Gutfeld sarcastically suggested that the "downside to banning TikTok" was that there would be no "libs of TikTok," implying that Democrats have used TikTok unabashedly to spread their messages. Part of this justification in claiming that Democrats did not fully intend to ban the app was that President Biden had recorded videos for TikTok and hosted TikTok influencers at the White House during his administration. Fox News host Raymond Arroyo also linked Democratic lawmakers to TikTok lobbying, saying, "My final wish is that when congressmen who have spent far too many hours with lobbyists try to defend TikTok, I wish they would come up with better arguments than this," referring to a clip of Democratic representative Jamaal Bowman from New York saying that the hysteria around TikTok was racist. Even with the bipartisan efforts to ban TikTok, commentators on Fox News claimed that "worries" about a potential ban were "seeping into Biden's Cabinet" (Fox News correspondent Jacqui Henrich).

CBS and CNN were also forthright about how politicians had much to lose if the U.S. government banned TikTok. However, journalists and contributors

geared these discussions around how TikTok's main user demographic, individuals under age 35, are an increasingly influential voting bloc, and how banning TikTok would eliminate an incredibly potent communication tool, primarily for Democrats. For example, CBS repeatedly reported on their poll, saying that "61 percent of those surveyed favor a ban, but that number is smallest among young people who are more likely to use TikTok." The implication was that by banning the app, politicians were "literally going to lose every voter under 35 forever" (quote by commerce secretary Gina Raimondo, reported on CBS by Margaret Brennan). Understandably, CNN often emphasized that Biden and Democratic politicians' preferred outcome in this debate would be for ByteDance to sell their stake in the company to an American company as opposed to a total ban. As part of this discussion, CNN hosted Democratic politicians who actively use TikTok to communicate with constituents. Indeed, Democratic representative Jeff Jackson of North Carolina was interviewed on CNN, saying, "TikTok just has more viewers on it" and provides an unparalleled opportunity "to be transparent with my constituents." Therefore, the "best-case scenario is not to be [a] clear banning [of] TikTok across the country." Because Democrats have been active on TikTok, a total TikTok ban was speculated to be "too much for some Democrats" (*Washington Post* reporter Leigh Ann Caldwell on CNN).

CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to understand congressional and news framing during the TikTok ban threat in 2023, with an eye toward emphasis framing (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Social media companies have long been scrutinized for their (often negative) societal influence. Depending on the specific inciting event, debates on social media regulation range from these companies being too protected by Section 230 and too lenient with content moderation to their infringing on users' First Amendment rights. The TikTok ban debate was unique in that no specific or singular catalyst sparked concern and motivated the congressional hearing. Instead, TikTok represented an external threat from the Chinese government, reflected in the discourse surrounding the ban.

Our analysis clarifies why TikTok was perceived as a threat and how ideological differences can impact framing despite broad partisan consensus. In general, both Republican and Democratic lawmakers recommended banning TikTok, or at least forcing its Chinese owners to sell their shares to an American company due to national security and content concerns. The congressional hearing and

news discourse reflected this consensus. Lawmakers and journalists also highlighted how the TikTok ban was a bipartisan concern, acknowledging this rare moment of cooperation and collaboration. Still, our analysis shows how even slight changes in the framing between right- and left-leaning news organizations can impact the presentation of an issue. Most notably, Fox and CNN differed substantially in who they attributed the TikTok ban efforts to. Unsurprisingly, Fox highlighted President Trump's efforts to ban TikTok in 2020, critiquing President Biden's late and "politically motivated" attempts to accomplish the same goal. CNN, and to a lesser extent CBS, led most of their discussions by centering Biden and his administration. Although these framing nuances are understandable and expected given the partisan differences of these media organizations, even slight variations can have significant consequences on issue framing and perceptions, consistent with a wealth of research (see Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Media organizations should thus be mindful of how even variations in the framing of a bipartisan issue can dramatically impact perceptions, lest they want to contribute to the growing divide in American politics (see Dimock & Wike, 2020).

Practically, this analysis highlights the value of C-SPAN for distributing political information to the American people. Whereas our reading of TikTok discourse on CNN, Fox, and CBS revealed differences in emphasis framing that could lead publics to think negatively of Trump, Biden, and Democrats/Progressives for various reasons (e.g., failing to pass the ban, being weak on China and taking up the TikTok issue too late, capitalizing on TikTok despite the security risks, respectively), lawmakers agreed about TikTok's threat to the U.S. during the congressional hearing, raising similar concerns and asking similar questions of TikTok's CEO. CNN, Fox, and CBS did report clips from the hearing in their news coverage, but the opening segments, contextualization, and closing segments frequently diverged along partisan lines, especially on CNN and Fox. This analysis thus underscores the necessity and value of C-SPAN's unfiltered coverage of political events.

Despite the bipartisan concern over TikTok, the platform is still allowed in the U.S. (at the time of this writing). In May 2023, Montana passed a statewide TikTok ban. However, a federal judge halted the ban in November 2023 before it took effect (Allyn, 2023). In April 2024, President Biden signed a law to ban TikTok within the year unless ByteDance sells the app to a non-Chinese parent company (Allyn, 2024). In response, CEO Chew created a TikTok video and posted an online statement opposing the ban, saying it is "unconstitutional," promising to "challenge it in court" (TikTok, 2024b, para. 1). Interestingly, many U.S.

politicians have incorporated TikTok into their communication and outreach repertoire in some way, despite their expressed data security and content moderation concerns (Alba et al., 2023; Moore, 2023). In fact, both President Biden and President Trump joined TikTok ahead of the 2024 presidential campaign. (Alba et al., 2024; Colvin et al., 2024).

Still, the TikTok hearing commanded attention for weeks (agenda-setting) and activated U.S. TikTok users on and off the platform. The congressional hearing also showed a rare unity among Republican and Democratic lawmakers, allowing Congress to appear "tough" on China, despite politicians' continued use of the platform. Moving forward, scholars will do well to continue monitoring TikTok use and debate in the U.S. Depending on how TikTok facilitates political messages in upcoming elections and who benefits from its use, lawmakers will likely revisit this conversation.

REFERENCES

Alba, M., Memoli, M., & Lee, C. E. (2023, June 22). *Biden's campaign won't be on TikTok, but it wants its message there.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/joe-biden/bidens-campaign-wont-tiktok-wants-message-rcna90583#

Alba, M., Shabad, R., & Tolentino, D. (2024, February 12). *Biden campaign joins TikTok after sources said it wouldn't.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/biden-campaign-joins-tiktok-saying-wouldnt-rcna138364

AllSides. (n.d.). *AllSides media bias chart*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart

Allyn, B. (2023, November 30). *Federal judge blocks Montana's TikTok ban before it takes effect.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2023/11/30/1205735647/montana-tiktok-ban-blocked-state

Allyn, B. (2024, April 24). *President Biden signs law to ban TikTok nationwide unless it is sold.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2024/04/24/1246663779/biden-ban-tiktok-us

American Civil Liberties Union. (2023, March 23). *Congressional efforts to ban TikTok in the U.S. remain a danger to free speech* [Press release]. https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/congressional-efforts-to-ban-tiktok-in-the-u-s-remain-a-danger-to-free-speech

Amiri, F. (2023, April 6). *Members of Congress on TikTok defend app's reach to voters.* Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-congress-ban-national-security-14d60d562d2550cd483f4c7d8a8de5af

Andsager, J. L. (2000). How interest groups attempt to shape public opinion with competing news frames. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *77*(3), 577–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900007700308

Angwin, J. (2023, February 20). It's time to tear up big tech's get-out-of-jail-free card. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/20/opinion/facebook-section-230-supreme-court.html?searchResultPosition=3

Baker-White, E. (2022, December 22). Exclusive: TikTok spied on Forbes journalists. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/12/22/tiktok-tracks-forbes-journalists-bytedance/?sh=d368d557da57

Barr, L. (2022, November 16). *Social media companies prioritizing profits over harmful content: Senate report.* ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/social-media-companies-prioritizing-profit-harmful-content-senate/story?id=93360057

Bond, S. (2021, March 25). *Facebook, Twitter, Google CEOs testify before Congress: 4 things to know.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2021/03/25/980510388/facebook-twitter-google-ceos-testify-before-congress-4-things-to-know#:~:text=Tiny%20Desk-,Facebook%2C%20Twitter%2C%20Google%20CEOs%20Testify%20Before%20Congress%3A%204%20Things,%2C%20COVID%2D19%20and%20vaccines

Brannon, V. C. (2019). *Free speech and the regulation of social media content*. Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45650

Cacciatore, M. A., Scheufele, D. A., & Iyengar, S. (2016). The end of framing as we know it . . . and the future of media effects. *Mass Communication and Society*, *19*(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1068811

CBS/AP. (2023, March 1). *TikTok banned on U.S. government devices, and the U.S. is not alone. Here's where the app is restricted.* CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tiktok-banned-us-government-where-else-around-the-world/

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *10*, 103–126. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054

Collier, K., & Wong, S. (2023, March 7). *White House backs bipartisan bill that could be used to ban TikTok.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/restrict-act-bill-tiktok-rcna73682

Colvin, J., Weissert, W., & Kinnard, M. (2024, June 3). *Trump joins TikTok and call it "an honor." As president he once tried to ban the video-sharing app.* AP. https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/elections/2024/trump-joins-tiktok-and-calls-it-an-honor-as-president-he-once-tried-to-ban-the-video-sharing-app/

Confessore, N. (2018, April 4). Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The scandal and the fallout so far. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html

Cramer, B. J. (2020). From liability to accountability: The ethics of citing Section 230

to avoid the obligations of running a social media platform. *Journal of Information Policy*, *10*, 123–150. https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.10.2020.0123

C-SPAN (Producer). (2023, March 23). *TikTok CEO testifies at House Energy and Commerce Committee Hearing* [Video]. https://www.c-span.org/video/?526609-1/tiktok-ceo-testifies-house-energy-commerce-committee-hearing

C-SPAN User. (2023a, December 20). *TikTok hearing: Republican representative August Pfluger of Texas on bipartisan support* [Video clip]. Clip of *TikTok CEO testifies at House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing* (March 23, 2023). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5098923/user-clip-tiktok-hearing-republican-representative-august-pfluger-texas-bipartisan-support

C-SPAN User. (2023b, December 20). *TikTok Hearing: Republican representative Jay Obernolte from California on social media tracking* [Video clip]. Clip of *TikTok CEO testifies at House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing* (March 23, 2023). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5098918/user-clip-tiktok-hearing-republican-representative-jay-obernolte-california-social-media-tracking

C-SPAN User. (2024, August 17). *TikTok hearing: Republican representative Richardson Hudson from North Carolina on national security* [Video clip]. Clip of *TikTok CEO testifies at House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing* (March 23, 2023). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5128563/user-clip-tiktok-hearing-republican-representative-richardson-hudson-north-carolina-national-security

Curtin, P. A. (1995, August 9–12). *Textual analysis in mass communication studies: Theory and methodology* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C.

Diaz, J. (2020, December 2). Trump vows to veto defense bill unless shield for big tech is scrapped. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/02/941019533/trump-vows-to-veto-defense-bill-unless-shield-for-big-tech-is-scrapped

Dimock, M., & Wike, R. (2020, November 13). *America is exceptional in the nature of its political divide.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Feiner, L. (2020, January 17). *Biden wants to get rid of law that shields companies like Facebook from liability for what their users post.* CNBC. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/17/biden-wants-to-get-rid-of-techs-legal-shield-section-230.html

Feiner, L. (2021, April 15). *House Republican staff outline principles to reform tech's liability shield.* CNBC. https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/15/house-republicans-outline-principles-for-reforming-section-230.html

Fung, B. (2023, January 16). *TikTok access from government devices now restricted in*

more than half of US states. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/tech/tiktok-state-restrictions/index.html

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1987). The changing culture of affirmative action. *Research in Political Sociology*, *3*(1), 137–177.

Ghosh, D. (2021, January 14). Are we entering a new era of social media regulation? *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2021/01/are-we-entering-a-new-era-of-social-media-regulation

Hadero, H. (2023, February 28). *Why TikTok is being banned on gov't phones in US and beyond.* Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/why-is-tiktok-being-banned-7d2de01d3ac5ab2b8ec2239dc7f2b20d

Haimson, O. L., Delmonaco, D., Nie, P., & Wegner, A. (2021). Disproportionate removals and differing content moderation experiences for conservative, transgender, and Black social media users: Marginalization and moderation gray areas. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*(CSCW2), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1145/3479610

Hanson, A. B. (2023, November 30). *Montana's first-in-the-nation ban on TikTok blocked by judge who says it's unconstitutional.* Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/montana-tiktok-ban-25c561396e85fee8926309daf4ad4b4f

Hurley, L. (2023, October 29). *Supreme Court wades into social media wars over free speech.* NBC. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/supreme-court-wades-social-media-wars-free-speech-rcna121716

Iyengar, S. (1994). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. University of Chicago Press.

Jaffer, J. (2023, March 24). There's a problem with banning TikTok. It's called the First Amendment. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/24/opinion/tiktok-ban-first-amendment.html

Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C. H. (2019). *News framing effects: Theory and practice*. Taylor & Francis.

Liptak, A. (2023a, May 18). Supreme Court won't hold tech companies liable for user posts. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/18/us/politics/supreme-court-google-twitter-230.html

Liptak, A. (2023b, September 29). Supreme Court to hear challenges to state laws on social media. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/29/us/supreme-court-social-media-first-amendment.html

Literat, I., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2023). TikTok as a key platform for youth political expression: Reflecting on the opportunities and stakes involved. *Social Media + Society*, 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157595

Maheshwari, A., & Holpuch, A. (2024, June 20). Why the U.S. is forcing TikTok to be

sold or banned. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/article/tiktok-ban.html#:~:text=Since%20November%2C%20more%20than%20two,data%20to%20use%20the%20app

McClain, C., & Anderson, M. (2021, January 27). *Republicans, Democrats at odds over social media companies banning Trump.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/01/27/republicans-democrats-at-odds-over-social-media-companies-banning-trump/

McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Sage.

McDonald, J., & Soo, Z. (2023, March 24). *Why does US see Chinese-owned TikTok as a security threat?* Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-bytedance-shou-zi-chew-8d8a6a9694357040d484670b7f4833be

Moore, E. (2023, November 1). *Democrats consider how TikTok may fit into their 2024 campaign strategy.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2023/11/01/1209857239/democrats-consider-how-tiktok-may-fit-into-their-2024-campaign-strategy

Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, *91*(3), 567–583. https://doi.org/10.2307/2952075

O'Hara, K., & Campbell, N. (2023, February 24). *What is Section 230 and why should I care about it?* Internet Society. https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2023/02/what-is-section-230-and-why-should-i-care-about-it/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwzdOlBhCNARIsAPMwjbyhP18KYW3BZSvRJHQXXitCpGhnmq8plvR3Q_14iAmxrGl9RYp85CAaAgvxEALw_wcB

Patterson, T. R. (2022). Private solutions to a public problem: Next steps for Section 230. *Arizona State Law Journal*, *54*, 305–331. https://arizonastatelawjournal.org/2022/12/13/private-solutions-to-a-public-problem-nextsteps-for-section-230/

Roberts, J. (2019). Trump, Twitter, and the First Amendment. *Alternative Law Journal*, *44*(3), 207–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X19831102

Roslyng, M. M., & Dindler, C. (2023). Media power and politics in framing and discourse theory. *Communication Theory*, *33*(1), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtac012

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.

Savage, C. (2019, July 9). Trump can't block critics from his Twitter account, appeals court rules. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/09/us/politics/trump-twitter-first-amendment.html

Savolainen, L. (2022). The shadow banning controversy: Perceived governance and algorithmic folklore. *Media, Culture & Society*, *44*(6), 1091–1109. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221077174

Segers, G., & Sganga, N. (2021, July 7). *Trump sues Facebook and Twitter for banning*

his accounts after January 6 attack. CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-sues-facebook-twitter-first-amendment/

Seitz-Wald, A., & Kapur, S. (2023, March 22). *TikTok ban would be a "slap in the face" to young Democratic voters, activists warn.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/joe-biden/tiktok-ban-slap-face-young-democratic-voters-activists-warn-rcna76142

Shah, D. V., Boyle, M. P., Schmierbach, M., Keum, H., & Armstrong, C. L. (2010). Specificity, complexity, and validity: Rescuing experimental research on framing effects. In P. D'Angelo & J. A. Kuypers (Eds.), *Doing news framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 215–232). Routledge.

Shurafa, C., Darwish, K., & Zaghouani, W. (2020). Political framing: US COVID19 blame game. In S. Aref et al., *Social informatics* (pp. 333–351). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60975-7_25

Silver, L., Devlin, K., & Huang, C. (2020, July 30). *Republicans see China more negatively than Democrats, even as criticism rises in both parties.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/07/30/republicans-see-china-more-negatively-than-democrats-even-as-criticism-rises-in-both-parties/

Smith, B. (2021, December 5). How TikTok reads your mind. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/05/business/media/tiktok-algorithm.html

Stack, L. (2018, July 26). What is a "shadow ban," and is Twitter doing it to Republican accounts? *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/us/politics/twitter-shadowbanning.html

Steidley, T., & Colen, C. G. (2017). Framing the gun control debate: Press releases and framing strategies of the National Rifle Association and the Brady Campaign. *Social Science Quarterly*, *98*(2), 608–627. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12323

Terkildsen, N., Schnell, F. I., & Ling, C. (1998). Interest groups, the media, and policy debate formation: An analysis of message structure, rhetoric, and source cues. *Political Communication*, *15*(1), 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/105846098199127

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *27*(2), 237–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748

TikTok. (2024a, January 31). *TikTok CEO Shou Chew's opening statement—Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on online child sexual exploitation crisis—January 31, 2024.* https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/opening-statement-senate-judiciary-committee-hearing

TikTok. (2024b, April 24). *Statement on enactment of the TikTok ban.* https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/statement-on-enactment-of-the-tiktok-ban-april-24-2024

Tucker, E., & Balsamo, M. (2021, May 12). *Hearing on Jan. 6 violence exposes stark partisan divisions.* Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-capitol-siege-riots-government-and-politics-a58c37305c9b4c9dcb04cd4fa2443a83

Vogels, E. A., Perrin, A., & Anderson, M. (2020, August 19). *Most Americans think social media sites censor political viewpoints.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/08/19/most-americans-think-social-media-sites-censor-political-viewpoints/

Vogus, C. (2023, March 22). *Crunch time for TikTok and Americans' freedom of speech.* Center for Democracy & Technology. https://cdt.org/insights/crunch-time-for-tiktok-and-americans-freedom-of-speech/

The White House (n.d.). *The Constitution*. https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/the-constitution/#:~:text=The%20First%20Amendment%20provides%20that,the%20right%20to%20bear%20arms

3

POLARIZATION OF PARTY AND INCOME

Rhetorical Constructions of the Middle Class During the 117th Congress

Dakota Park-Ozee

Much of the scholarly work on polarization in the United States is focused on political polarization among the electorate, candidates, and office-holders (Abramowitz, 2010; De Nooy & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Dodd & Schraufnagel, 2012; Druckman et al., 2019; Jacobson, 2016; Thomsen, 2017; Wolf et al., 2012). Yet, this is not the only ongoing polarization plaguing the nation and its governance. Income polarization—the movement of residents from the middle to lower quartile of annual earnings—is an increasing concern. Middle-income households—those between 50% and 150% of median income—shrank from 58% to 48% of total households in the last 50 years (Alichi & Mariscal, 2018). This phenomenon is tied to policy, which is increasingly influenced by growing partisan polarization (DeSilver, 2022).

The economic and political centers are shrinking in the United States. Research finds that these trends are not entirely independent; partisans are increasingly aligned on beliefs about socioeconomic inequality (Suhay et al., 2022). This study further probes this intersection from a communicative lens by assessing how the two major parties, as increasingly polarized ideological camps, talk about the shrinking economic middle when debating U.S. policy. In essence, I ask how members of the United States Congress—during the contemporary era of extreme income and partisan polarization—rhetorically construct this increasingly precarious "middle class" to advance their policy preferences.

While Congress may not have the broad powers of definition available to presidents (Zarefsky, 2004), as the source of all federal legislation, its internal debates over terminology are not without rhetorical and material consequences (Dixon &

Hapke, 2003; Guetzkow, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 2012; Strauss, 2013; Subtirelu, 2013). For example, Congress used, accepted, and challenged the different labels of abuse, enhanced interrogation, and torture differently across time during the second Bush administration and the Iraq War (Del Rosso, 2014b, 2014a). These shifts in terminology ultimately aligned with a shifting policy preference to end CIA torture practices and close the political prison at Guantanamo Bay (Del Rosso, 2015). Congress normalizes the perception of immigrants as a "flood" or "threat" when they repeat these labels (Strauss, 2013, p. 288) or as outside the national identity when they are called out as English language learners (Subtirelu, 2013).

Furthermore, Congress uses discourse to promote policy choices. Members of the federal legislature use terminology to justify who has access to welfare and social services (Guetzkow, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 2012) and who should receive which benefits from the farm bill (Dixon & Hapke, 2003)—two areas that account for hundreds of billions of dollars in federal spending in any given year (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, n.d.; U.S. Senate Committee, 2023). Thus, who Congress declares as belonging to the middle class and which policies it promotes as aligned with their best interests may have material legislative consequences and broader effects on already skewed perceptions of the middle class in the United States (Cloud, 2002; Collins, 1997; Pew Research Center, 2015; Schettino & Khan, 2020; Wenger & Zaber, 2021).

To interrogate how Congress constructs a shrinking middle class among a growing partisan divide, I use the 117th Congress as a snapshot of the body's discursive constructions. In doing so, I first review scholarly research on the ambiguity of the middle class and the political utility of such ambiguity in pursuit of policy. Then, I detail my mixed method approach wherein I conducted both quantitative demographic analyses of the congressional speakers choosing to invoke the middle class and a qualitative textual analysis of those invocations focused on identity, value, issues, and narratives. I find that while both parties rely on shared identities like family, nation, and job status, and shared values like wealth, there is a stark divide between a Democratic vision of hope and a Republican portent of doom.

OVERESTIMATION AND UNDER-EXPLICATION OF THE U.S. MIDDLE CLASS

The United States possesses an inflated belief in its own middle class. A key part of the cultural and economic self-image of the nation is the fantasy that the United States is a "middle-class society without unjustifiable extremes of wealth

and poverty" (Cloud, 2002, p. 352). The middle class is in many ways a rhetorical mechanism by which these extremes are hidden (Collins, 1997). The obfuscation and justification of class inequality contributes to a culture that "routinely overestimates the percentage of people in the 'middle-class'" (Collins, 1997, p. 825). This overestimation persists, even as the material middle class shrinks (Pew Research Center, 2015; Wenger & Zaber, 2021). In the U.S., as few as 1% of people think of themselves as upper-class and 10% think of themselves as lower-class (Wenger & Zaber, 2021), leaving 89% of the nation to consider itself in the middle. Essentially, the rhetorical and social construction of the middle class as desirable and ubiquitous creates a cultural context where more people believe themselves to belong to this group than is statistically possible.

The distinct lack of clarity surrounding middle-class membership belies both the affiliation of the label with a particular desirable social status and the potential political utility of maintaining such vagueness (Cloud, 2002). The lack of specific popular definitions or political understandings of the middle class makes it difficult to identify. That said, in U.S. political discourse, groups and values are often constructed via association (Walton & Macagno, 2009). These associations may function as a "group cue" to flag for audiences the presence and importance of a group (Aroopala, 2012, p. 195).

Associations can heighten the conflictual nature of the legislative process. For example, research on populism—an ideology based on group competition, often among economic classes—shows "most ordinary people consider the business class as part of the elite" (Akkerman et al., 2014, p. 1335). These associations can make clear the boundaries of group membership. Moreover, given there can be variation in in-group salience and prioritization (Hardy et al., 2019), associating the middle class with multiple groups may increase effectiveness of identity-based legislative appeals. So, I ask:

RQ1: What groups or individuals are associated with the middle class in the 117th Congress? Do these differ by party? If so, how?

Further, few—if any—would claim the policymaking process is not a strategic one. As Williamson (2018) found in the case of "the taxpayers," the identity of and information about a potentially ambiguous or misunderstood group can have implications for self-evaluation and policy outcomes. Moreover, as in the case of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as prime minister of the United Kingdom, the values of the middle class can be manipulated by political actors and spread to those holding other class-based identities (Harvey, 2005). Thus, ambiguous and desirable groups

like the middle class may serve as an ideal context for persuasive definition. The naming of a particular idea, or in this case group, can convey an argument tied to key values (Zarefsky, 2006). The more a group is positively invoked, the more audiences assume it is held in high esteem and the more weight they give to that portion of their own identity (Aroopala, 2012).The middle class clearly possesses some cultural and political value, but it is less clear what values it invokes. Here I ask:

RQ2: What do Republicans and Democrats of the 117th Congress discursively construct as the value of the middle class? What, in turn, do they say the middle-class values?

Finally, narrative is an important tool in its tendency to aggregate and classify events as a single kind or as representative of a group or situation (Zillmann, 1999). Though exemplars are rarely perfect, exemplification via narrative is a common and useful heuristic (Zillmann, 1999). These narratives require familiar characters. The imagining of the middle class—much like imagining a nation (Anderson, 2006)—may be a process that changes with political context (Hart, 2005). The middle class "brought into being" to advance policy preferences may have specific situations, roles, actions, or opponents that advance a particular narrative (Hart, 2005, p. 115). Congressional narratives about potential "paragons of middle-class virtue" may have instructive or persuasive components beyond mere representation (Cloud, 1996, p. 133).

The identities and values of the middle class espoused as narrative on the floor of Congress presumably serve a legislative purpose. These stories are told to promote issue stances, cultivate public support, and steer policy debates (Maltzman & Sigelman, 1996). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has long posited that salient in-group identities can shift support for a policy or course of action (Aroopala, 2012)—which in this case may matter to both legislators and constituents. Moreover, research has shown that economic indicators have direct ties to voting behavior. For instance, across the European Union, increasing unemployment was shown to be directly tied to decreased voter turnout and increased vote share for antiestablishment parties (Algan et al., 2017). Thus, I ask:

RQ3: What stories do members of the 117th Congress tell about the middle class and what policies are these narratives used to support? Do these vary by party? If so, how?

To answer these questions, I perform a both quantitative demographic and qualitative textual analysis of mentions of the middle class by the 117th Congress. The details of that approach are the subject of the next section.

FINDING THE MIDDLE

To answer this project's driving question—Who, to Congress, is the middle class?—I need to identify discourses that are most relevant to the work of governing, as distinct from the work of campaigning, publicizing, or fundraising. Though the permanent campaign blurs the lines among these communicative pursuits, the work of crafting policy is still done in the two chambers of the U.S. Congress. Thus, I turn to the C-SPAN Video Library.

Text Selection

The potential influence of partisan polarization and income polarization on rhetorics mentioning the middle class will be most apparent at the extremes. As such, I selected the most recent completed Congress for analysis. The corpus I analyze here consists of every utterance invoking the "middle class" by a member—voting or nonvoting—of the U.S. House of Representatives or U.S. Senate during the 117th Congress. I compiled this corpus by searching the C-SPAN archives for the term "middle class" and downloading all mentions between January 3, 2021, and January 3, 2023.

I then cleaned these to eliminate any C-SPAN programming beyond live coverage of congressional activity (e.g., book reviews, interviews, and White House briefings) and removed all duplicates. I retained both activities on the House and Senate floors as well as committee hearings. Then, I ensured each utterance was made by an identifiable member of the U.S. Congress—rather than outside experts, witnesses, or other nonmembers. This is important because it allows each piece of discourse to be tied to a political party. Finally, I used publicly available data compiled by Congress itself to include demographics for the members of the 117th Congress who invoked the middle class (Manning, 2022; Office of the Historian, n.d.). I created individual variables for partisanship, chamber (House or Senate), age of representative, seniority (length of tenure in current chamber), race, and gender.

Analytic Approach

After compiling the corpus, I split the data into separate text files for each segment, labeling each with the party of the speaker. Then I ran the full set of each party's files through the concordance feature on WordSmith 7. Concordance isolates the mentions of a given keyword or phrase ("middle class") and a chosen number of characters (300) on either side of the phrase, preserving context while eliminating the bulk of unrelated content (e.g., a 20-minute speech that mentions the middle class once). Running all the Democratic and Republican segments through separately using the same parameters allows for easy comparison of those groups, values, and identities closely tied to the middle class.

Next, I imported these concordances into NVivo 14, a qualitative analysis software. I then hid all identifying information from view so the texts would be coded without outside confirmation of speaker, partisanship, or other variables. I then generated a randomized list of the numerical identifiers for all segments and began semi-open coding in this randomized order to generate a list of prevalent groups, values, identities, and policies. The coding was not purely open because of the preestablished deductive categories of identity, issue, narrative, and value (Charmaz, 2014). However, there were not preestablished codes within these categories, allowing what emerged within them to follow from the text in the style of open coding (Afifi et al., 2016; Pitts, 2016).

Semi-open coding also allowed me to identify new themes while remaining mindful of previously accumulated knowledge about partisan rhetorical differences (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Freeman, 1993; Morris, 2001; Park-Ozee & Jarvis, 2021) and political rhetorics tied to class, wealth, and money in politics (Bennett, 2013; Cloud, 2002; Jerit, 2006; Park-Ozee, 2022). I proceeded until I reached thematic saturation, the point when further creation of new codes "would produce no new information" (Manojlovich et al., 2014, p. 4). At that point, I returned to the concordances—600-character segments centered on the term "middle class" and divided by partisanship—and assessed the relative proportions of each theme from the list generated by open-coding.

It is conceivable—even probable—that characterizations of the middle class vary along gender (Cook, 2016; Devitt, 2002), racial (Isaksen, 2017; McGinley, 2009), geographic (Abrams, 1980; Disarro et al., 2007), or other dimensions. These identities may inform definitions of the middle class as much as partisan ones. Yet each of these identities, and their intersections, are relevant in partisan

alignment (Pew Research Center, 2018), and research increasingly shows partisan alignment functions as a social identity (West & Iyengar, 2022) and is effectively modeled as an expressive, rather than purely instrumental, variable (Huddy et al., 2015). Thus, the partisan divide is a good place to start when assessing identity-based variations in congressional characterizations of the middle class, especially through a qualitative or rhetorical approach that highlights the nuances of these expressions along a single, easily bifurcated dimension.

To account for some portion of this, I used Stata/BE 18.0 to run basic descriptive statistics to assess which demographic groups were most likely to invoke the middle class on the floor of Congress. Given that studies show that different groups demonstrate different propensity to speak on the floor—at least during Morning Hour (Maltzman & Sigelman, 1996; Morris, 2001)—and that context shapes the extent of debate (Shoub, 2018), trends in who invokes this key group may be revealing. Because the corpus includes the full census of mentions during the 117th Congress, these can be directly compared to the composition of the body without the use of inferential statistics (Coe & Scacco, 2017). This allows me to assess whether certain groups made disproportionate use of the middle class in their policymaking efforts. It is this portion of the analysis to which I first turn.

RESULTS[1]

The 117th Congress invoked the middle class during official proceedings—on the floor and in committee—in 817 distinct speeches, statements, or questions. Notably, none of these sessions, debates, or hearings had the middle class as its stated, core subject. These included invocations from 254 different members, just under half the membership of the federal legislative branch, ranging from statements made by newly elected first-term representatives to those made by members nearly 50 years into their tenure. The speakers' ages ranged from 28 to 90. There were even statements made by the nonvoting representatives from the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands (which I include in this analysis). Despite the statements—in these and other ways—reflecting the range of demographics present in the U.S. Congress, they are not proportionally representative of the body at large. The next section explicates these differences, stemming from the demographic portion of my analytic approach.

Demographic Skew

The members voicing statements, speeches, and questions invoking the middle class during the business of the 117th Congress are notably skewed from the composition of the body (Table 3.1). First, the average age of those invoking the middle class is higher than the average age of each chamber's membership—by over 1.5 years in the House and over 2.5 years in the Senate. These may not strike readers as meaningfully significant, but considering the median age of the nation is 38.9 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), any older skew in the already generationally unrepresentative U.S. legislative branch is notable. This deviation may be tied to the higher seniority of the speakers invoking the middle class (Table 3.1). Though there is little research on the relationship between seniority and speaking time, the segments mentioning the middle class are made by those with an average tenure significantly higher than the chamber in question—over 3 years in the House and over 6 years in the Senate.

Gender and partisanship show both insignificant and large deviations by chamber. The segments mentioning the middle class are composed of only about 1.3% fewer women than the House itself for the lower chamber of Congress, showing relative representativeness. Similarly, the proportion of statements referring to the middle class made by Democrats in the Senate (50.4%) does not meaningfully deviate from the percentage of Democrats in the body (50%). On the other hand, the gender deviation in the Senate is large. While women make up 24% of the upper legislative chamber of the United States, less than 11% of the statements discussing the middle class are made by them, reflecting a masculine skew even more stark than already exists in that body. There is also a significant—though smaller—skew in the partisan composition of the House's middle-class invokers. Here Democrats make up just over 4% more of the segments than they do representatives in the chamber.

Both chambers of the United State Congress are, and have long been, racially unrepresentative—a gap that has not narrowed in the last four decades (Schaeffer, 2021). The segments invoking the middle class amplify this skew. In both chambers, there are proportionally fewer statements made by Black representatives (by just over 1.5% each), Hispanic representatives (by nearly 5% in the House and nearly 6% in the Senate), Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) representatives (approximately 0.8% in the lower chamber and 1.2% in the upper), and Indigenous representatives (1% in the House). The only case where racial representation is equivalent is among Indigenous representatives in the Senate.

TABLE 3.1 *Comparing Composition of the 117th Congress With Those Invoking the Middle Class*

	117th Congress	Middle-class segments[1]
	Mean age (years)	
House	58.4	60.1
Senate	64.3	67.0
	Mean tenure (years)	
House	8.9	12.2
Senate	11.0	17.1
	% women[2]	
House	28.6	27.3
Senate	24.0	10.3
	% Democrat[3]	
House	50.3	54.6
Senate	50.0	50.4
	% Black	
House	12.7	10.9
Senate	3.0	1.4
	% Hispanic/Latine	
House	10.2	5.5
Senate	7.0	1.4
	% AAPI	
House	4.3	3.5
Senate	2.0	0.8
	% Native/Indigenous	
House	1.4	0.4
Senate	0.0	0.0
	% white/other[4]	
House	74.4	80.6
Senate	89.0	96.4

AAPI, Asian American and Pacific Islander.

[1]For segments mentioning the middle class, each segment counts toward the total reflected here. For example, Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) spoke of the middle class in 18 distinct segments. His descriptives are thus counted 18 times in these calculations.

[2]There were no nonbinary, gender-fluid, or genderqueer members of the 117th Congress.

[3]Independents were categorized as belonging to the party with whom they caucus.

[4]The House of Representatives and Congressional Research Service only report four racial categories: Black, Hispanic, AAPI, and Indigenous American. The reports imply the remaining members are white but do not clearly account for other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Arab or Middle Eastern Americans).

Unfortunately, this is because there are no Native Americans in the Senate, so there were no statements made by Native senators. Though the differences in percentage composition are in the single digits, these reflect far larger gaps in representation. For example, though the difference in composition for AAPI senators is a little over 1%, that means AAPI senators' proportion of middle-class mentions is less than half their proportion of the chamber. For Hispanic members of the Senate, that skew is less than one-fifth.

Essentially, when the middle class is invoked in the course of legislative business in the U.S. Congress, the person highlighting this key group is more likely to be older, white, a man, and a Democrat than the Congress as a whole. Considering that each of the first three groups (older folks, white people, and men) are already disproportionately represented in the U.S. legislative branch, these skews are worth noting. Even more remarkable is that the racial and gender skew persists despite a propensity for Democrats to invoke the middle class more regularly than their Republican counterparts. Of racialized minorities in Congress, 83% are Democrats (Schaeffer, 2021). Women make up 38% of the Democratic caucus and only 14% of the Republican caucus. Yet both groups are starkly underrepresented when accounting for mentions of the middle class, mentions made more often by the party to which they predominantly belong.

Partisan Themes

Now I turn to the second part of my approach—a rhetorical analysis stemming from semi-open coding—to assess partisan differences in characterizations of the middle class. The similarities among the identities (RQ1), values (RQ2), and issues (RQ3) invoked by both parties in the 117th Congress reflect the consistency of both the political context (e.g., debating the same bills) and of the cultural milieu of U.S. national politics. The differences, however, reveal stark divides in the rhetorical maneuvering of the two parties.

Identities

The most prominent group affiliated with the middle class (RQ1) on the floor of the 117th Congress is families. Though there are slightly more mentions invoking this association made by the Democrats (147) than the Republicans (131), the former also had a higher number of overall invocations. For both parties, the family is the foundational unit of the middle class (Fineman, 1995; Gring-Pemble, 2003).

After foregrounding middle-class families, the partisans invoking the middle class begin to diverge in their identifications.

For Republicans, the most important identity for members of the middle class beyond their familial status is their nationality. Representatives of the GOP repeatedly specify the American-ness of the middle class to whom they refer. Though such a trait would likely be implied when discussing domestic policy on the floor of the United States Congress, Republicans make no fewer than 122 references to the middle class as American. Democrats only make 68 such mentions. Though unsurprising in a context where right-leaning ideologies have stronger ties to nationalism (Cloud, 2009), the difference is stark. Meanwhile, Democrats foreground the labor-based identities of their middle-class constituents. The middle class is consistently figured as workers or working by Democratic representatives (111) and is discussed in these terms less often by their Republican counterparts (72)—a trend mirrored in other contexts (Bucci & Reuning, 2021). These secondary identity themes reveal a Republican tendency to foreground nationalism in their policy appeals centering the middle class, while Democrats foreground the role of the middle class as a significant portion of the nation's workforce.

Another notable difference is that only one of the two parties consistently associates the middle class with another economic class. The Republicans make over 100 close associations between the middle class and the poor, working poor, or lower class. Meanwhile, this identity does not rise to any level of prominence for Democratic speakers. Likewise, the Republicans identify the middle class alongside taxpayers (13) more often than their Democratic counterparts (2). Republicans of the 117th Congress focus more regularly and directly on the position of the middle class in the U.S. economic strata and their relationship to the business of Congress (appropriations) than do the Democrats.

Values

For the Democrats of the 117th Congress, their invocations of the middle class reveal that the value (RQ2) of this group is their role as the "backbone" of the nation and its economy. It is imperative that the middle class is and remains strong to support the body of the nation (Amdani, 2023). The root of this middle-class strength, for Democrats, is the core value of hard work—much in line with their identity as workers and working people referenced above. Democrats in the 117th Congress repeatedly laud members of the middle class for their work ethic, which

these representatives believe should be rewarded "instead of rewarding wealth." Yet, wealth, it seems, is the reward.

The hard-working middle class should be put in a position to build wealth from their work, per the Democrats of the 117th Congress. Left-leaning representatives frequently reference the need for, or the creation of, "good-paying" middle-class jobs. It is notable that there is no mention of physically easier, intellectually stimulating, morally fulfilling, or creatively satisfying jobs. The reward for the efforts of the middle class of the United States is not the opportunity to engage in work that may provide joy or relief in any number of ways but simply work that brings in a bigger check. This is because Democrats invoking the middle class are clear that the ongoing "loss of wealth [among the middle class] stands as a great and lasting blight." Thus, the opportunity "to build wealth" is paramount, despite the constant reminder that those who already have it are unfairly rewarded for their class status.

Fairness is itself a central middle-class value espoused by the Democrats of the 117th Congress. There need to be equal opportunities for all people in the United States to enter the middle class. The wealthy must pay their "fair share" and everyone else must have a "fair shot." The Democrats imagine a nation where "everyone has a chance" to achieve the so-called American Dream. Still, this dream and the path to it remain unclear. For example, one Democratic representative declares, "We will have priorities in this country that represent the needs of working families and [the] middle class," but does not specify what those priorities might be, the value of setting these priorities, or what values they might uphold.

For the Republican members of the 117th Congress who chose to speak about the middle class, it is clear the group is valuable, but it is absolutely unclear what their value is. One Republican representative chastises the body because they "have put [their] own political convenience ahead of the interests of poor and middle-class Americans." What those interests are remains largely unstated. There are some nominal references to hard work and "good-paying" jobs, but these are far less frequent than those from their colleagues across the aisle. They do share a bipartisan goal of "wealth" and "prosperity" for the members of the middle class, with the key difference that for Republicans this should be an "independence-fueled prosperity." Economic success comes from both energy independence for the nation and the independence of the people from the government.

At their most extreme, the Republican representatives do not embrace their own values so much as they reject the disreputable values of their partisan

counterparts. They assure their colleagues that "mainstream middle-class America does not want socialism and they don't want far-left radicals" at the helm of the legislature. Radicals and radicalism are repeatedly derided by members of the Republican caucus, including references to Marx and to those on the left as "stupid" or "too blind." Thus, the GOP members of the 117th Congress imply that the value of the middle class is not just their place in the economic middle but their place in the ideological middle. The supposed extremism and radicalism espoused by the Democrats is antithetical to the moderatism and reasonableness of the U.S. middle class.

Issues

The Democrats of the 117th Congress who discuss the middle class largely do so in the context of economic and monetary policy (RQ3). Many of the middle-class invocations from both parties are tied to the Build Back Better Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Infrastructure Bill, all of which are centered on economic policy and development (Lahiri, 2022). As the major legislative initiatives for a Democratic president, these bills and issues are adhered to closely by the congressional representatives from that party. The issues of concern for the middle class are figured as almost exclusively tied to taxes, wages, inflation, cost of living, jobs, and unions.

Democrats invoking the middle class talk about the need for "tax cuts" for this group or remind their colleagues that a particular piece of legislation will "not raise" taxes on them. The Child Tax Credit (see Ludden, 2024), for example, is consistently framed as "the biggest tax cut for working and middle-class families in American history." Likewise, funding for the IRS (see de Visé, 2023) is said to "reduce the odds of an audit for middle-class taxpayers" because the money will go toward tracking down "wealthy tax cheats." Some of the Democratic representatives also tie the middle class to the strength of organized labor in the United States, saying, "To have a strong growing middle class, we have to have strong unions," and urging support for specific labor protections.

In contrast, those representatives across the aisle take on a broader range of issues. What the Republicans of the 117th Congress lack in direct articulation of values, they make up for in an unwavering focus on particular political issues. However, the Republicans widen the range of issues up for discussion by connecting several hot-button cultural or social issues to the middle class. The members of the 117th Congress who caucus with the GOP do, of course, spend their fair share of time talking about taxes. In particular, they consistently refer

to Democratic legislation as "tax and spend," or a "spending spree" that would in fact raise taxes on the middle class. They also spend a great deal of time discussing inflation, particularly its impact on real wages and fuel prices. Republicans invoking the middle class like to use statistics to report on the toll of inflation as "a 36% plus tax increase on middle-class and working families" or to point out that "gasoline at the pump is up 42% this year," which far outpaces wage growth.

The key difference between the issue focuses of the Republicans and Democrats of the 117th Congress who invoke the middle class is not merely the tone with which they discuss economic issues but the presence of the culture war (Grondin, 2012). Republican representatives tie the middle class to one of the most long-standing and intractable policy issues of the last 40 years: immigration. Representatives of the GOP scorn the Democrats for "trying to give free college tuition to people who come in this country illegally while the middle class" suffers. They repeatedly emphasize that "middle-class Americans are the most harmed" by the "incursion" of immigrants who depress wages. Ultimately, Republicans argue any policy favorable toward undocumented immigrants is "a magnet" to bring more people to the United States and "shows contempt for the American middle class." Injecting immigration into largely fiscal discussions of the middle class during the 117th Congress both broadens the scope of issues to which the Democrats must respond and further defines the middle class through comparison to an antithetical group. To Republicans, the middle class are not immigrants and are never undocumented; the middle class stands opposite these groups, and anything given to them is taken from the middle class.

Narratives

Unsurprisingly, Democrats—as the party with a two-chamber majority in the 117th Congress and control of the White House—tell a story (RQ3) of hope and opportunity. Of course, their narrative is not without acknowledgments of contemporary economic reality—stagnant wages, rising costs, and a "shrinking," "squeezed" middle class. The Democrats of the 117th Congress state plainly that "inequality" puts the middle class "out of reach" for many in the United States, and policy decisions—made by their Republican colleagues—meant those on the cusp of these comforts across the last several decades "watched the American dream fall out of reach." Yet the "erosion of the American middle class" provides an avenue for renewal in the Democratic view.

Democrats paint the middle class as the foundation of a nationwide construction project aimed at equality and prosperity. Their goal is to "build," "rebuild,"

"secure," or "create" the middle class by "shoring up," "strengthening," "reinvigorating," and "restoring" economic programs and opportunities. The heroes of these stories are labor unions and workers aided by the tools of policy, the "building blocks" of the middle class—education, affordable health care, and a just tax distribution. A "bill that protects" these tools provides a "ticket" or in some cases a "rocket . . . to a middle-class life." The Democrats of the 117th Congress wish to provide "expanded opportunities" that "build the architecture for the future," which includes "ladders" that "[give] middle-class families a hand-up" to "ascend to" economic security.

The narrative crafted by Democrats in the 117th Congress is situated in a historical context. The members of the party invoking the middle class know that this is not the first time the middle class has faced challenges, nor would it be the first time they—with the help of Congress—(re)built their stable economic footing. Democratic discussions of the middle class frequently talk about the emergence of a true middle class in the United States in the 1930s and again after World War II. This middle class was "something the world had never seen." This historic lauding goes as far as to argue, "The middle class built this country," and "The strength of America . . . lies in her middle class." If history shows that Congress and the nation have done it before, the 117th Democratic delegation believes there is "no reason [they] can't" do it again.

In contrast, the narrative told by the Republicans of the 117th Congress is one of violence, struggle, and "generations of dependency on the backs of the middle class." The story they tell about the middle class sounds as much like a sports commentator calling a boxing match, a war correspondent in the field, or a gory crime novel as a characterization of a segment of the U.S. populace. Per these representatives, the middle class are the downtrodden and neglected victims of Democratic governance. In the current economy, the suffering of the middle class is unparalleled. They are being "squeezed," "gouged," and "met with a kick in the teeth." In this story, Democrats are the villains and inflation is their weapon of choice. The middle class is being "crushed" by inflation, "the inflation bomb is exploding," and inflation will be "the death blow" dealt to the entire group.

What's more, any of the economic policies proposed by the Democrats (e.g., the Inflation Reduction Act, the Build Back Better Act) will lead to a stark increase in the suffering of the middle class. Democrats are already "crushing," "hammering," and "sticking it to the middle class." If any of the "Bidenomics" legislative packages pass, these economic stalwarts will have to "shoulder huge, huge new burdens." There will be a "devastating impact" because the Democrats will

need to "[shake] down" and "[rob] blind" the middle class with a "tidal wave of audits" to pay for their policies. The Republicans claim that the Democratic "policies are killing the middle class," who are forced to "[bear] the brunt" of their costs. Some members of the GOP go as far as to describe it as "economic warfare" on the middle class and to assert, "You want to kick people in the head, you want to destroy the middle class."

CONCLUSIONS

The rhetorical choices of the 117th Congress when discussing the middle class in the course of their business are rife with implications. First, the prominence of the family unit as the central, bipartisan, middle-class identity both reflects economic trends and reifies classed exclusions. The now fully adult millennial generation is both slower and less likely to form traditional family units or households. By all of the most common measures (living in a family unit, marriage rates, birth rates), millennials lag significantly behind prior generations at the same age (Mitchell, 2020). The prominence of the family in congressional speech excludes nontraditional households from the rhetorical middle class (Cloud, 1995; Gring-Pemble, 2003), and through that, the reasoning for economic policy. This exclusion amplifies extant trends where those millennials that want to engage in these behaviors are putting off traditional, lauded milestones like getting married, having children, or buying houses because they cannot afford them (Schulz & Wong, 2023). Increases in the cost of housing—both renting and buying—education, and childcare, combined with less opportunity for career advancement as older generations delay retirement, push these measures of family life out of reach (Schulz & Wong, 2023). When the 117th Congress focuses on families in their articulations of the middle class, they leave these people behind. This is not to mention the broad deracialization of the middle class by the disproportionately white speakers in this dataset. As Collins (1997) highlighted nearly three decades ago, "The African-American middle class remains structurally different than white, middle-class families," both in terms of overall wealth and structural barriers to the benefits of that wealth (p. 844). When the middle class is homogenized—whether as families, Americans, or workers—the important, material differences between types of labor and its rewards are hidden by rhetorical grouping (Park-Ozee, 2022).

Second, social identity theory suggests audiences prefer and gravitate toward positive portrayals of groups to which they see themselves belonging

(Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). Because such a large proportion of people in the United States see themselves as belonging to the middle class (Cloud, 2002; Collins, 1997; Wenger & Zaber, 2021), the strategic value of legislators tying their preferred policies to this group cannot be overestimated. Voters and constituents may be more likely to support policies their representatives consistently tie to the health of the middle class, whether or not such ties are plausible or those listening really fall in the center of national economic distributions. Moreover, in-group favoritism may lead audiences to prioritize these policies over those that are said to help or be important to other class groups like those in poverty (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). More research is needed to determine whether the tonal differences in middle-class-focused policy messages have different suasive power or audience appeal.

Third, and relatedly, there are few members of the federal legislative branch who belong to the middle class (Carnes, 2014; Evers-Hillstrom, 2020). There is consistent public discourse about the wealth of politicians, the cost of campaigns, and the disconnect between their economic status and that of most of their constituents ("Americans' views," 2015; Bump, 2014; Clymer, 1983; DeSilver & van Kessel, 2015; Godlasky, 2022; Lavin, 2019). It is possible the broad definitions of the middle class found here (and elsewhere) are tied to the distance between those invoking the class group and its actual members. Further, while there has been some investigation of whether these differences affect voter perceptions (Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Griffin et al., 2020) or the legislative process (Canes-Wrone & Gibson, 2019), there is little known about how the economic or class-based identity of elected officials affects reception of class-based messages or economic policy proposals—especially those tied to economic identities like the middle class. There is a risk that any affiliation constituents and voters build with particular policy platforms through positive identification with the middle class could be counteracted by disidentification with those making the association—wealthy politicians. Scholars would do well to focus on the intersection of politicians' economic status and their credibility on economic issues broadly and middle- or lower-class issues specifically.

Ultimately, the emotionality of income polarization creates an ongoing rhetorical tug-of-war between politically polarized actors. The shrinking of the U.S. middle class is an undeniable material reality that requires both solutions and blame. The lauded status of this group makes them ripe for partisan disputes over who put them in their precarious economic position and who—using which policies—is best suited to reduce that precarity. Tying a policy proposal to the fate of the middle class is a rhetorical strategy used to advance both party platforms by

figuring this group as each party's electoral base. There is bipartisan agreement that the middle class is vital to U.S. prosperity and requires assistance; there is little agreement on who they are and how they can be helped.

NOTE

1. All unattributed quotes in the Results section are taken from the analyzed corpus of videos from the C-SPAN Video Library. The corpus consists of every utterance invoking the "middle class" by a member—voting or nonvoting—of the U.S. House of Representatives or U.S. Senate during the 117th Congress between January 3, 2021, and January 3, 2023.

REFERENCES

Abramowitz, A. I. (2010). *The disappearing center: Engaged citizens, polarization, and American democracy.* Yale University Press.

Abrams, B. A. (1980). The influence of state-level economic conditions on presidential elections. *Public Choice*, *35*(5), 623–631. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00140090

Afifi, T. D., Afifi, W. A., Merrill, A. F., & Nimah, N. (2016). "Fractured communities": Uncertainty, stress, and (a lack of) communal coping in Palestinian refugee camps. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *44*(4), 343–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2016.1225166

Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, *47*(9), 1324–1353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013512600

Algan, Y., Guriev, S., Papaioannou, E., & Passari, E. (2017). The European trust crisis and the rise of populism. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 309–382. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/4_alganetal.pdf

Alichi, A., & Mariscal, R. (2018, May 15). Mapping income polarization in the United States. *IMF Blog.* https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2018/05/15/blog-mapping-income-polarization-in-the-united-states

Amdani, Y. (2023, June 6). 5 benefits of a growing middle class. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2023/06/06/5-benefits-of-a-growing-middle-class/

Americans' views on money in politics. (2015, June 2). *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/02/us/politics/money-in-politics-poll.html

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

Aroopala, C. (2012). Mobilizing collective identity: Frames & rational individuals. *Political Behavior*, *34*(2), 193–224. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9155-4

Bennett, J. (2013). Moralising class: A discourse analysis of the mainstream political response to Occupy and the August 2011 British riots. *Discourse & Society*, *24*(1), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926512463634

Bonikowski, B., & Gidron, N. (2016). The populist style in American politics: Presidential campaign discourse, 1952–1996. *Social Forces*, *94*(4), 1593–1621. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov120

Bucci, L. C., & Reuning, K. (2021). The state of labor in the Democratic Party coalition. *Party Politics*, *27*(6), 1243–1253. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820949372

Bump, P. (2014, April 21). How to influence politics if you're wealthy: A five-step guide. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/04/how-to-influence-politics-if-youre-wealthy-a-five-step-guide/360978/

Canes-Wrone, B., & Gibson, N. (2019). Does money buy congressional love? Individual donors and legislative voting. *Congress & the Presidency*, *46*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2018.1518965

Carnes, N. (2014, January 7). Millionaires run our government. Here's why that matters. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/07/millionaires-run-our-government-heres-why-that-matters/

Carnes, N., & Lupu, N. (2016). Do voters dislike working-class candidates? Voter biases and the descriptive underrepresentation of the working class. *American Political Science Review*, *110*(4), 832–844. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000551

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage Publications.

Cloud, D. L. (1995). The rhetoric of <family values> and the public sphere. In *Argumentation and Values: Proceedings of the Ninth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation* (Vol. 3, pp. 281–289). Speech Communication Association.

Cloud, D. L. (1996). Hegemony or concordance? The rhetoric of tokenism in "Oprah" Oprah rags-to-riches biography. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *13*(2), 115–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039609366967

Cloud, D. L. (2002). Rhetoric and economics: Or, how rhetoricians can get a little class. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *88*(3), 342–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630209384381

Cloud, D. L. (2009). Foiling the intellectuals: Gender, identity framing, and the rhetoric of the kill in conservative hate mail. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *2*(4), 457–479. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01048.x

Clymer, A. (1983, April 3). Campaign costs soar as median spending for Senate seat hits $1.7 million. *The New York Times*, 20. https://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/03/us/campaign-costs-soar-as-median-spending-for-senate-seat-hits-1.7-million.html

Coe, K., & Scacco, J. M. (2017). Content analysis, quantitative. In J. Matthes, C. S. Davis, & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods* (Vol. 1). John Wiley & Sons.

Collins, P. H. (1997). African-American women and economic justice: A preliminary analysis of wealth, family, and African-American social class. *University of Cincinnati Law Review*, *65*(3), 825–852.

Cook, J. M. (2016). Gender, party, and presentation of family in the social media profiles of 10 state legislatures. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116646394

De Nooy, W., & Kleinnijenhuis, J. (2013). Polarization in the media during an election campaign: A dynamic network model predicting support and attack among political actors. *Political Communication*, *30*(1), 117–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2012.737417

de Visé, D. (2023, November 9). Flush with new funding, the IRS zeroes in on the taxes of uber-wealthy Americans. *USA Today.* https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/11/09/irs-uses-funding-to-audit-wealthy/71486513007/

Del Rosso, J. (2014a). Textuality and the social organization of denial: Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and the meanings of U.S. interrogation policies. *Sociological Forum*, *29*(1), 52–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12069

Del Rosso, J. (2014b). The toxicity of torture: The cultural structure of US political discourse of waterboarding. *Social Forces*, *93*(1), 383–404. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou060

Del Rosso, J. (2015). *Talking about torture: How political discourse shapes the debate.* Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/delr17092

DeSilver, D. (2022, March 10). *The polarization in today's Congress has roots that go back decades.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/10/the-polarization-in-todays-congress-has-roots-that-go-back-decades/

DeSilver, D., & van Kessel, P. (2015, December 7). *As more money flows into campaigns, Americans worry about its influence.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/07/as-more-money-flows-into-campaigns-americans-worry-about-its-influence/

Devitt, J. (2002). Framing gender on the campaign trail: Female gubernatorial candidates and the press. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *79*(2), 445–463. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900207900212

Disarro, B., Barber, J., & Rice, T. W. (2007). The home state effect in presidential elections: Advances in the study of localism. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *37*(3), 558–566. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2007.02612.x

Dixon, D. P., & Hapke, H. M. (2003). Cultivating discourse: The social construction of agricultural legislation. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *93*(1), 142–164. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.93110

Dodd, L. C., & Schraufnagel, S. (2012). Congress and the polarity paradox: Party polarization, member incivility and enactment of landmark legislation, 1891–1994. *Congress & the Presidency*, *39*(2), 109–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2012.676382

Druckman, J. N., Gubitz, S. R., Levendusky, M. S., & Lloyd, A. M. (2019). How incivility on partisan media (de)polarizes the electorate. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(1), 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1086/699912

Evers-Hillstrom, K. (2020, April 23). *Majority of lawmakers in 116th Congress are millionaires.* OpenSecrets. https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2020/04/majority-of-lawmakers-millionaires/

Fineman, M. L. A. (1995). Masking dependency: The political role of family rhetoric. *Virginia Law Review*, *81*(8), 2181–2216.

Freeman, J. (1993). Feminism vs. family values: Women at the 1992 democratic and republican conventions. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *26*(1), 21–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/419498

Godlasky, A. (2022, May 19). *Dark money on the campaign finance beat.* National Press Foundation. https://nationalpress.org/topic/dark-money-campaign-finance-reporting-fec/

Griffin, J. D., Newman, B., & Buhr, P. (2020). Class war in the voting booth: Bias against high-income congressional candidates. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *45*(1), 131–145. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12253

Gring-Pemble, L. M. (2003). Legislating a "normal, classic family": The rhetorical construction of families in American welfare policy. *Political Communication*, *20*(4), 473–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244202

Grondin, D. (2012). Understanding culture wars through satirical/political infotainment TV: Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show*'s critique as mediated re-enactement of the culture war. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, *42*(3), 347–370. https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.42.3.005

Guetzkow, J. (2010). Beyond deservingness: Congressional discourse on poverty, 1964–1996. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *629*(1), 173–197. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716209357404

Hardy, M. M., Coker, C. R., Funk, M. E., & Warner, B. R. (2019). Which ingroup,

when? Effects of gender, partisanship, veteran status, and evaluator identities on candidate evaluations. *Communication Quarterly*, *67*(2), 199–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2019.1573201

Hart, R. P. (Ed.). (2005). *Political keywords: Using language that uses us.* Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism.* Oxford University Press.

Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, *109*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000604

Isaksen, J. L. (2017). The power of Obama's racio-rhetorical humor: Rethinking Black masculinities. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *28*(1), 6–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2016.1235517

Jacobson, G. C. (2016). Polarization, gridlock, and presidential campaign politics in 2016. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *667*(1), 226–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716216658921

Jerit, J. (2006). Reform, rescue, or run out of money? Problem definition in the Social Security reform debate. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *11*(1), 9–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X05283781

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., Mothes, C., & Polavin, N. (2020). Confirmation bias, ingroup bias, and negativity bias in selective exposure to political information. *Communication Research*, *47*(1), 104–124. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650217719596

Lahiri, U. (2022, December 2). *A divided Congress may still get things done.* Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/blog/divided-congress-may-still-get-things-done

Lavin, T. (2019, November 5). How "eat the rich" became the rallying cry for the digital generation. *GQ.* https://www.gq.com/story/eat-the-rich-digital-generation

Ludden, J. (2024, January 1). *To tackle poverty, more states will offer bigger child tax credits in 2024.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2024/01/01/1220874994/child-tax-credit-bigger-states-2024-poverty

Maltzman, F., & Sigelman, L. (1996). The politics of talk: Unconstrained floor time in the U.S. House of Representatives. *The Journal of Politics*, *58*(3), 819–830. https://doi.org/10.2307/2960448

Manning, J. E. (2022). *Membership of the 117th Congress: A profile*. Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46705

Manojlovich, M., Harrod, M., Holtz, B., Hofer, T., Kuhn, L., & Krein, S. L. (2014). The use of multiple qualitative methods to characterize communication events between physicians and nurses. *Health Communication*, *30*(1), 61–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2013.835894

McGinley, A. C. (2009). Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Michelle Obama: Performing, gender, race, and class on the campaign trail. *Denver University Law Review*, *86*(3). https://digitalcommons.du.edu/dlr/vol86/iss3/9/

Mitchell, T. (2020, May 27). As millennials near 40, they're approaching family life differently than previous generations [Pew Research Center]. *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/27/as-millennials-near-40-theyre-approaching-family-life-differently-than-previous-generations/

Morris, J. S. (2001). Reexamining the politics of talk: Partisan rhetoric in the 104th House. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *26*(1), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.2307/440405

Office of the Historian and the Clerk of the House's Office of Art and Archives. (n.d.). *Mapping Congress*. U.S. House of Representatives. Retrieved October 21, 2023, from https://history.house.gov/Map/Mapping-Congress/

Park-Ozee, D. (2022). *What does money mean? Frames of wealth and economic identity in U.S. politics, 1980-2020* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Texas at Austin. https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/43461

Park-Ozee, D., & Jarvis, S. E. (2021). What does rigged mean? Partisan and widely shared perceptions of threats to elections. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *65*(4), 587–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220979777

Pew Research Center. (2015, December 9). *The American middle class is losing ground.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/09/the-american-middle-class-is-losing-ground/

Pew Research Center. (2018). *Wide gender gap, growing educational divide in voters' party identification*. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/20/1-trends-in-party-affiliation-among-demographic-groups/

Pitts, M. J. (2016). Sojourner reentry: A grounded elaboration of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. *Communication Monographs*, *83*(4), 419–445. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1128557

Schaeffer, K. (2021, January 28). *Racial, ethnic diversity increases yet again with the 117th Congress.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/01/28/racial-ethnic-diversity-increases-yet-again-with-the-117th-congress/

Schettino, F., & Khan, H. A. (2020). Income polarization in the USA: What happened to the middle class in the last few decades? *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, *53*, 149–161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2019.12.003

Schneider, A. L., & Ingram, H. M. (2012). *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy*. State University of New York Press.

Schulz, B., & Wong, K. (2023, October 17). "They can't buy into that American Dream": How younger workers are redefining success. *USA Today.* https://www.usatoday

.com/story/money/2023/09/26/gen-z-millennials-face-unique-financial-challenges/70910672007/

Shoub, K. (2018, May 7–9). *Talking policy . . . or not: How context shapes when members of Congress discuss issues* [Paper presentation]. Visions in Methodology Conference, The Ohio State University. https://visionsinmethodology.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Shoub_WhoTalks.pdf

Strauss, C. (2013). How are language constructions constitutive? Strategic uses of conventional discourses about immigration. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *16*(2), 262–293. https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2012.18

Subtirelu, N. C. (2013). "English . . . it's part of our blood": Ideologies of language and nation in United States Congressional discourse. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *17*(1), 37–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12016

Suhay, E., Tenenbaum, M., & Bartola, A. (2022). Explanations for inequality and partisan polarization in the U.S., 1980–2020. *The Forum*, *20*(1), 5–36. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2022-2052

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Wadsworth.

Thomsen, D. M. (2017). *Opting out of Congress: Partisan polarization and the decline of moderate candidates*. Cambridge University Press.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. (n.d.). *Government current expenditures: Income security: Welfare and social services*. FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Retrieved February 2, 2024, from https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/G160371A027NBEA

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023, June 22). *America is getting older*. U.S. Department of Commerce. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/population-estimates-characteristics.html

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry. (2023, May 15). *Minority analysis: The May 2023 farm bill scoring baseline*. https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/newsroom/majority-blog/minority-analysis-the-may-2023-farm-bill-scoring-baseline

Walton, D., & Macagno, F. (2009). Reasoning from classifications and definitions. *Argumentation*, *23*, 81–107. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-008-9110-2

Wenger, J. B., & Zaber, M. A. (2021, May 14). Most Americans consider themselves middle-class. But are they? *The Rand Blog.* https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/05/most-americans-consider-themselves-middle-class-but.html

West, E. A., & Iyengar, S. (2022). Partisanship as a social identity: Implications for polarization. *Political Behavior*, *44*(2), 807–838. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09637-y

Williamson, V. S. (2018). Who are "The Taxpayers"? *The Forum*, *16*(3), 399–418. https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2018-0027

Wolf, M. R., Strachan, J. C., & Shea, D. M. (2012). Forget the good of the game: Political incivility and lack of compromise as a second layer of party polarization. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *56*(12), 1677–1695. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212463355

Zarefsky, D. (2004). Presidential rhetoric and the power of definition. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *34*(3), 607–619. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2004.00214.x

Zarefsky, D. (2006). Strategic maneuvering through persuasive definitions: Implications for dialectic and rhetoric. *Argumentation*, *20*, 399–416. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-007-9030-6

Zillmann, D. (1999). Exemplification theory: Judging the whole by some of its parts. *Media Psychology*, *1*(1), 69–94. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532785xmep0101_5

4

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN CONGRESS, 2000–2023

Annelise Russell

In a congressional climate where a series of tweets can derail the legislative agenda, for example, when President Trump tweets about members of Congress, lawmakers' digital norms and social media practices are at the core of their political narratives and self-presentation. Many members of Congress are seeking new ways to communicate their political brand and control their narrative, and digital platforms have increasing become central to the dialogue about Congress (Russell, 2021). Twitter's ability to give even the most basic lawmaker a national or global platform is one reason why social media has inserted itself into the political process and why lawmakers are using it to defend their policy proposals and condemn political opponents.

Digital media platforms are woven into the recent history of Congress and the way information moves within the institution, despite the increasing uncertainty of X, formerly known as Twitter.[1] Social media play a central role aggregating the information journalists and others report about Congress, and digital communication as means for governance outside of the campaign environment remains a constantly evolving and lesser studied aspect of congressional behavior. A search of C-SPAN speeches between by lawmakers between 2006 and 2020 reveals members of the House and Senate referenced Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok more than 3,500 times. Digital communication has become integral to lawmaker agendas and to the business of policymaking, and it provides insight into elected leaders' priorities for how they connect to their constituencies using new technology.

This chapter examines how members of Congress self-describe the digital shifts in Congress and how rhetoric around new media technology and its usage has shifted over time. Using a C-SPAN dataset of lawmakers' rhetoric about

digital and media engagement over 15 years, I identify lawmakers' strategic communication strategies around digital communication when addressing their colleagues on the floor. I analyze the frequency and context of lawmaker rhetoric about Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to understand how these digital means of self-presentation appear in the most traditional venues for congressional presentation. I show how digital tools became a central piece of the conversation in Congress and how the rhetoric in lawmakers' speeches about digital communication provides context for the evolution behind digital shifts in Congress.

The results of the case study on digital mentions by lawmakers in Congress capture the context of increased digital discussions and their connections to escalating polarization, negative partisanship and overall emotional rhetoric that have escalated within the institution. I pair these digital trends with 10 interviews with congressional staffers who provide context and clarity for the digital shifts within the institution that parallel the political rhetoric. Communications directors and digital staff illuminate how lawmakers approached new digital challenges and the ways social media quickly became central to the narratives of Congress.

This chapter offers a new perspective on the scope of digital communication and how members of Congress blend digital rhetoric and messaging with traditional messaging opportunities. To understand legislative politics in a digitally driven political culture, we need to know how and when lawmakers began to consider the impact of digital tools that shape policy and the political discourse in Congress. The findings suggest systematic patterns of digital dialogue on the floor that likely extend to their rhetoric online. Lawmakers are competitive problem-solvers seeking new platforms and opportunities to champion their priorities while spending more time on the game of blame avoidance whether that be on Twitter or the chamber floor (Russell, 2021). The power of communication in Congress is not just in the ability to rally votes, but also in the ability to shape the policy and political problems that make it to the table—or on Twitter—for debate.[2]

EARLY YEARS OF DIGITAL INTEGRATION IN CONGRESS

Congress was not an institution designed with digital in mind, so the story about how Congress addresses digital communication is complicated. Congress is a traditional institution using older technology to solve emerging problems (Russell,

2024). In the 1980s, C-SPAN became a regular feature, offering new access to the policy process. Changes in media and lawmaker messaging continued into the 2000s, including blogs and social media–shaped reputation-building and norms for engagement. Over the last 40 years, Congress has adapted to satellite television, cable news, email, and online blogging—all examples of an institution attempting to retrofit its historic communication for a modern media atmosphere.

One of the first mentions of digital tools, like Facebook, is under the umbrella of internet safety. In 2006, the House held a two-day hearing about how to address children's safety online—much like recent discussions about how to ensure safety on social media platforms. Facebook was founded in 2004 and became a public networking site in 2006—amid congressional discussions about what children were exposed to on the internet and before students were distributed iPads as part of an elementary education.

The first discussion of Facebook on the House floor comes out of the Suburban Caucus agenda in 2006, where Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (R-PA) referenced social networking sites like Facebook when describing that "for children, they open the door to many dangers, including online exposure to child predators that have turned the internet into a virtual hunting ground for children." (C-SPAN, 2006, 09:56:44). Fast forward to 2023, where numerous senators proposed to ban social media content for people under the age of 13 and the rhetoric starts to feel familiar. "Big tech has exposed our kids to dangerous content and disturbed people," said one of the bill's sponsors, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) (Elbeshbishi, 2023).

In 2006 and 2007, before Twitter existed, digital content in Congress was primarily considered in terms of its capacity to threaten safety, the potential harm of internet predators, and dangers of too much information online. By 2009, those conversations remained, but they were mixed by conversations about economic recovery and the realities of economic success in a changing technology climate. Members of the House talked about Facebook when highlighting members of their district or paying tribute to those who had passed away (Russell, 2021).

The first mention of Twitter during a House session was during a speech by Rep. John Culbertson (R-TX) in 2008, who was speaking about energy supply and superconductors—but was specifically talking about how he communicates his work with his constituents on Twitter. This early mention of Twitter reflects initial characterizations of the platform as a mechanism for constituent outreach. Early reports in 2010 by CRS described social media, specifically Twitter, as a platform for increasing constituent communication, and researchers studying the impacts of new media regularly turned to evidence from the Arab Spring of 2010 to show the democratizing effect of new media platforms (Glassman et al., 2010).

In 2009, the platform was again discussed, this time by Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX) as a messaging strategy, not as much for constituent engagement but rather publicity for a health policy caucus trying to engage its audience. Soon staffers realized that getting people to pay attention to C-SPAN was harder than using webcasts, and allowing for questions submitted on Twitter was a strategy for advertising. Burgess explained the role and value of Twitter by saying, "Questions can be submitted over a device called Twitter [that] many people use for instant message communications" (C-SPAN, 2009, 02:01:07). Over time, conversations about digital became more common. Members no longer questioned the existence or value of digital communications platforms but rather questioned their safety, utility, and effectiveness as Congress increasingly became more of a digital institution.

DIGITAL RESPONSE IN CONGRESS

In 2023, politics may still be, as Max Weber said, a "slow boring of hard boards," but that no longer describes the information climate among the professionals in Congress whose job is to be responsive to fast-paced information. Congressional staff and journalists describe a communications climate where congressional offices continue to make strategic choices, but increasingly those choices play out across digital platforms and are amplified across communication platforms. Interviews with congressional staff and journalists shed new light on the perpetual problem of deciding how to manage communications when the institution is constantly on alert. To understand the development of digital practices in Congress, I conducted a series of 10 interviews with communications professionals in and around Congress. I recruited communication professionals from within lawmakers' offices, D.C. public affairs, and journalists covering congressional politics. Participants gave their informed consent and confirmed their participation in the research study. They were interviewed between March 2021 and June 2022 and asked to discuss their professional practices and the relationship between communication and policymaking reputations. These professionals were either currently working in or around Congress or former staffers who worked in Congress during the last 10 years. These interviews speak to the role of digital for messaging and the trajectory of digital representation for how an office is managed. I asked respondents about their experience with digital communication development and the differences in communication strategies across Congress.

ANALYSIS METHOD

I used a semi-structured interview approach (Weiss, 1995) with consistent questioning for each respondent and flexibility in the conversation so that respondents could speak to their unique perspectives. A snowball sampling approach was used to gather these perspectives, and I inductively identified themes via a close reading of the transcripts. Significant and meaningful statements were collected and categorized into similar clusters of meaning (see Kvale, 1996) and I used those clusters to extract themes from the interviews with communication professionals.

Interviews with staffers in the early 2000s reveal that as lawmakers began to grapple with the policy implications of digital practices, staffers were also wrestling with how to convince others to invest in digital communications efforts. "When I first started doing Twitter . . . I feel like it was like an unpaid job like it wasn't technically part of my job description. It was just myself and then a few other people on the team thought it was so important" (Interview 1). Early adopters saw the internet as a potential boon for connections to new voters and the ability to grow a political reputation, but the value add for going digital remained largely uncertain.

"I would say that everybody knew this thing was out there and was important, but they didn't really know how to deal with it. So people hired separate people, to talk to bloggers . . . but I'll subsume bloggers under social media. So they hired people to talk to them specifically as blogs and social media got more prominent. That eventually just got folded into communications" (Interview 2).

Some lawmakers were ready for the digital transition and sought out new platforms for engaging in a digital world, but others were more reticent. Going into Obama's second term, the digital aspect of communications was being carried out but it wasn't being invested in at a high level until you had celebrities and journalists going there (Interview 3). New members were often more willing to try things compared to members who had been elected in an analog world where the appeal of digital wasn't there. "Some of the older members just didn't see a point in doing it, or, or they just saw it as all risk and very little reward" (Interview 4). The risk of digital—doing something that would live online in infamy—was a real threat after the Howard Dean scream in 2004 went viral and was largely labeled as a political gaffe. But the appeal of digital tools was only increasing with the growth of blogs and the integration of platforms like Facebook into the early political digital dialogue. "I went from trying to convince members of Congress I

worked for, that they needed to build out a presence on social media" (Interview 4). Social media in the 2000s was not about making the most of your digital presence, but trying to figure out how to create a profile, who the audience was going to be, and what were the expectations from constituents and staff.

Facebook was the first social media platform to capture the eyes of people in Congress, with the potential to talk to constituents and co-partisans and to self-direct a message outside the traditional media environment. While millions of dollars would eventually be spent on political advertising a decade later, the early Facebook pages were more like fancy websites rather than a political advertising tool.

"The first stage, I think, was Facebook, and the early Facebook pages were very basic—here's how to reach our office, we're going to link to our press releases, and sort of just announcements like, 'Here's a photo with our constituent'" (Interview 4). Staffers across both parties found that senior staff and members were hesitant to adopt digital practices and the institution itself had no guidance for managing this new frontier.

Once Facebook took hold, Twitter and YouTube also became part of the daily digital diet of most folks on Capitol Hill, where digital operations wasn't merely a choice but rather a norm to be exercised. "I went from trying to talk them into doing social media to now having almost everything being conducted on social media" (Interview 4). Twitter had the potential to rapidly aggregate and share information within the institution and those beyond the halls of Congress, but YouTube offered an advantage that Twitter didn't: videos that could go viral.

"We really saw video as kind of the place where, like most of members of Congress, time is spent either on the floor or committee rooms. And that is where the majority of legislation happens. But like, most of that stuff was closed off to the American people, or they only have access to it via reporters for the *National Journal* . . . you know, good coverage, but like, not for your average person. Only . . . only the big stuff kind of circled out. And so video was the thing" (Interview 5).

Over time the novelty of social media wore off and the norm of communicating throughout the day across multiple platforms was established. The election of Donald Trump further solidified the role of digital communication to move information quickly, giving lawmakers the chance to comment and criticize in real time. And as the distrust of traditional media escalated, the ability to speak directly to digital constituencies without a mediator or distortion further reinforced social media habits (Interview 6).

Technological changes in digital and the threat of security around platforms like TikTok dominated discussions between House staffers and members in 2021 and 2022, where the success of the Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) campaign in Georgia highlighted the power of new platforms and digital constituencies (Interview 8). In many ways, the debates around digital use and the hesitancy the members had in the early days of digital adoption returned as the technology changed and members had to anticipate both what would be coming next for digital communication in Congress and the security risks of new platforms (Interview 9).

IMPACT OF DIGITAL RHETORIC

Social media has induced a cycle of rapid response within American political institutions that implies constant communication and public exposure. Members of Congress work with their team like a small business or enterprise (Salisbury & Shepsle, 1981) to mitigate threats to their credibility and legitimacy, minimizing any electoral risk. If we consider lawmakers as single-minded reelection seekers (Mayhew, 1974), then the choices they make about how to present themselves and communicate their political brand are likely directly correlated to mitigating threats to their reputation. The evolving communication culture in Congress and the adaptation to new technology mirror that of a crisis communication operation where social media has fostered a permanent brand of rapid response that tests the capacity of the institution. A global pandemic punctuated digital operation in Congress, but digital media transitions reflect a much broader, long-coming shift in how information is shared, the role of social media, and the effect on the political climate in Congress. On any given day, a single statement by a lawmaker on Twitter, in the hall, or on the floor can start a political firestorm that burns hot and fast. For example, in the wake of the 2022 debate over President Joe Biden's Build Back Better plan, the entire package was pronounced "dead" after X contained tales of a hallway conversation with Sen. Joe Manchin (see Figure 4.1). Regardless of whether the bill was toast or where policy negotiations stood, the digital narrative that February 2022 day remained Manchin's declaration.

Similarly, the president could announce via tweet details of a new executive order, a journalist could suggest that a pivotal lawmaker may balk on appropriations, or a member might offer a few too many details that communications staff will have to walk back with variable consequences. Congress's daily

FIGURE 4.1 A tweet by the Associated Press picturing Sen. Joe Manchin, referencing his role in the Build Back Better legislation when the Democratic senator referred to the bill as "dead."

operations are defined by the rapid cycling of information between political institutions, meaning the logistics of daily engagement in Congress mirror that of a crisis response. Lawmakers and senior staff still coordinate their messages for the week—organizing around new legislation, upcoming votes, and planned events back home—but the expectation is that the schedule is never "normal" and is likely ripe for revisions as conflicts are reframed and political agendas revised (Interview 7).

The integration of social media and the ongoing X cycle continue to leave Congress in rapid-response mode—both responding to the threat of technology and trying to manage a political environment defined by that technology. Similar to political scandal, the risk of miscommunication fosters coordination and consistency, precipitating control (Baumgartner & Jones, 2018). Communication becomes even more fundamental to congressional operations when everything is

moving through centralized channels and the inputs are monitored more than even before. This emphasis on coordination, and the resulting power asymmetries (Curry, 2015), means that powerful voices become louder and those with resources are better positioned to shape the narrative. Communication hierarchies are maintained by funneling information through the same channels, further testing capacity by constraining inputs and outputs that only momentarily slow the exchange.

Congressional policymaking has only gotten more complex over time and the breadth of what Congress can do has expanded (Jones et al., 2019); digital communication is part of that complex dynamic. The realities of a fire alarm response driving congressional behavior is nothing new (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Scher, 1963), but social media fuels that fire with increased attention, more information, and a news cycle that churns fast (Russell, 2024). This information-rich environment with high expectations for rapid response challenges Congress's ability to do its job when the norms for policymaking remain unchanged. In the House, communications are often managed by a single staffer. In the Senate, that effort is shared by two to four people—but even with additional staff, the chamber remains similarly constrained by outsized demands from journalists and larger constituencies. Congress is not allocating new resources to meet the demands of digital engagement, meaning trade-offs that limit legislative capacity and reorient priorities. Congress needs greater capacity in terms of its lawmaking abilities (LaPira et al., 2020), but addressing that demand is made more difficult by the pace of information being channeled through these political institutions.

ANALYZING DIGITAL RHETORIC IN CONGRESS

How we understand the impact of digital communication is measurable by the output on X, but just as important is the extension of that influence across traditional messaging opportunities—importantly, those uttered during deliberations recorded on C-SPAN. The impact of social media is not just in the growth of Twitter but also in the way that lawmakers talk about digital communication on the floor. More specifically, does one party discuss social media more than the other? If so, then it may give some insights into potential political hurdles that must be overcome to more fully address issues related to those platforms. Similarly, we know that marginalized groups often must turn to the floor to advance their group's issues (Dietrich, Hayes, & O'Brien, 2019), which likely means these

same groups would want more, not less, access to social media platforms so they can leverage them for similar purpose. Thus, we may expect those groups to be similarly excited about discussing those platforms during formal deliberations.

Regardless, this chapter will conclude with an assessment of the extent to which party and gender influenced the discussion of social media platforms over the last 20 years. To collect data for this study, the C-SPAN Video Library Automated Programming Interface (API) was used to download videos whose closed-captioning included a small dictionary of digital-related words, including "Twitter," "TikTok," and "Facebook." To study the evolution of digital rhetoric during the last 20 years, the collection was limited to the period of January 1, 2003, to January 1, 2023, given that digital tools were not widely used in Congress prior to the 2004 presidential election. Then, the dataset was narrowed to include only speakers who are members of Congress, rather than C-SPAN guests, callers, or program moderators. Importantly, this period allows for the identification and coding when lawmakers take part in digital discourse and the political context for that digital rhetoric.

The study of congressional communication is important because how we talk about Congress and the incentives for engagement have changed over time. How members present themselves—and the changing incentives for engagement—present new opportunities to understand the true complexity of representation. In short, studying congressional rhetoric sheds new light on how lawmakers integrate digital communication into the fabric of the institution. Scholars often consider congressional capacity in terms of policymaking personnel (LaPira et al., 2020), but how Congress adapts to the communication climate has a direct impact on its ability to function. Digital technology—from satellite trucks to social media—has changed the relationships that form the foundation of Congress, and this new environment means looking at trends in digital discussions (see Figure 4.2).

Social media discussions as a feature of congressional floor debates have trended upward over time, as the mentions of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become a regular feature in discussion by lawmakers. While those numbers remained rather small between 2010 and 2016 (with the total number of posts equaling 992), since then the rise in digital discussion has increased 168%, mirroring the role that social media plays in the daily lives of members of Congress and their staff (Russell, 2021). And trends in that rise are similar among members of both parties and between male and female lawmakers (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The consistency in the trend speaks to the normalization of social media as a central feature of congressional communication.

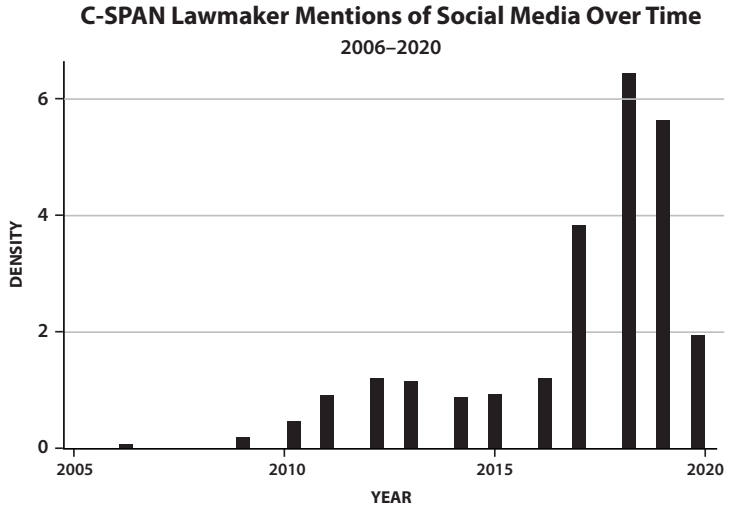


FIGURE 4.2 Lawmaker mentions of social media on the floor.

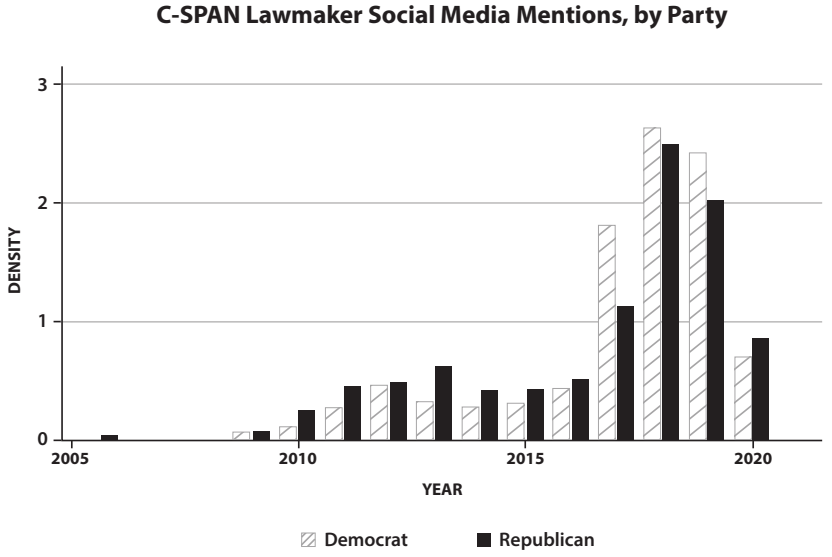


FIGURE 4.3 Lawmaker mentions of social media on the floor, by party.

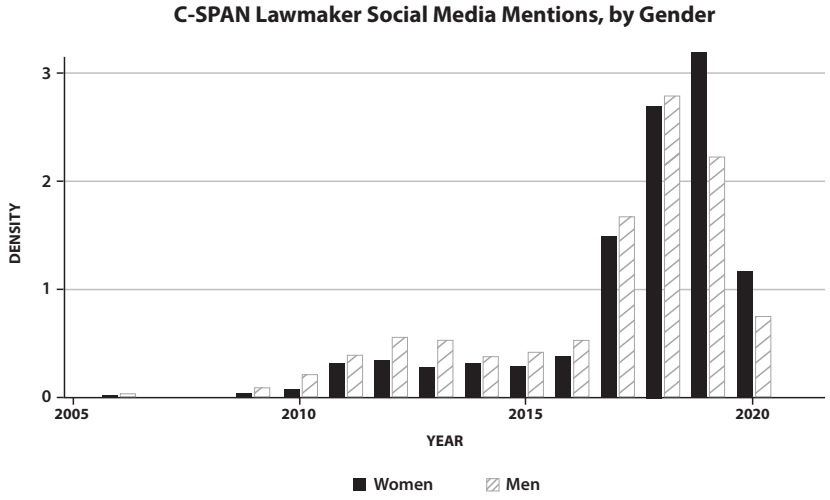


FIGURE 4.4 Lawmaker mentions of social media on the floor, by gender.

I find consistent patterns across party lines, with both parties totaling fewer numbers between 2010 and 2016 (Democrats, 469; Republicans, 524). As digital tools became more prevalent in Congress, both parties escalated their social media rhetoric on the floor, with Democrats totaling 1,578 and Republicans 1,084. And trends in that rise are similar between male and female lawmakers.

Measuring Congress's adoption and normalization of digital media has never been easier with public, accessible data spanning social media, newsletters, and press releases. Between 2013 and 2018, members of the House of Representatives sent more than 1.37 million tweets, and in the campaign for 2020 they totaled more than 20,000 posts to Facebook (MacDonald et al., 2023). Many members of Congress, especially senators, are political celebrities online with followers in the hundreds of thousands or millions. Lawmakers use social media to define themselves and build a national reputation (Russell, 2021), but behind those messages is a communication system and network of professionals whose daily lives and professional success are tied to those messages and information flow. The mechanisms behind the 240-character tweets remain comparatively unknown, yet they signal the ability of Congress to adapt to new media environments and test the capacity of the institution. What a lawmaker says on X or CNN can illuminate a lot about representation, but to understand how the minute-by-minute information exchange shapes the business of communication in Congress, we need first-person perspectives to shed light on the strategies of those trying to adapt to the new information environment.

CONCLUSION

In the summer of 1993, the House of Representatives entered the internet era by setting up an email pilot program that allowed seven members of Congress to communicate with their constituents through email—and to no surprise, one of those members was former Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich (House of Representatives, n.d.). When external email began in the mid-1990s, this permitted the public to contact members' offices 24 hours a day—providing a new level of accessibility to Congress. Most people had only ever interacted with their congressmember through personal connections or through mail sent via the post office. Digital technology is now ingrained into the lawmaking and presentation activities of Congress in ways that continue to evolve, as Congress struggles with the future of X, the safety of platforms like TikTok, and the viability of using advertising platforms for reputation-building.

This chapter used video from the C-SPAN Video Library, along with congressional staffer interviews, to understand the ways in which digital communication is integrated into the traditional information flows within Congress. The discussions about how to use digital communication and the policy implications of new technology mirror similar conversations between staff members and lawmakers who had to decide what digital and social media platforms meant for congressional communication. This mixed-methods approach illustrates the complexity behind lawmakers' communication and examines how digital communication amplifies both political and policy messages within the institution.

Research continues to unpack the implications of social media for partisan politics and policy debates in Congress (Barbera et al., 2019; Straus & Glassman, 2014; Theoharis et al., 2020), but this chapter looks more closely at the institution and the people within it to understand the relationships at the core of that communication. Scholars and politicians once lauded Twitter's utility to connect constituents to what is going on in Washington, but in reality, the impact of digital media is felt far beyond what lawmakers say to their constituents. In the era of YouTube and X, a digital constituency is formed alongside a geographic base of support.

For an institution in the 1990s that went from primarily trying to triage the influx of constituent mail to the 2000s where email has sent constituent contact into the hundreds of millions (Shogan, 2010), Congress has adapted but also had its capacity to channel that information stretched to a breaking point. The media landscape has fragmented audiences, and members of Congress, along with staff and journalists, have become even more entrepreneurial in the face of an

accelerating news cycle such that lawmakers are investing in digital practices that give them more control over the message while still connecting them to journalists (Sellers, 2000). Members of Congress face individual and collective responsibilities that compete for their scarce time and attention, and congressional capacity is tested by adding new, sophisticated digital operations with fewer staffers and increasingly complex policy. The investment in digital communication means new responsibilities for an organization that was already struggling with staffing capacity and investment in personnel. How members adapt to this new information environment is revealed through their presentations via the C-SPAN Video Library, which offers a window into the amplification of digital messages and the context for that amplification.

The demands of social media and digital technology place new constraints on how lawmakers, staff, and journalists function on a daily basis. New tools for engagement offer new opportunities to redefine what it means to be successful in Congress, but the cost of digital content creation and customizing a message to match the preferences of audiences are increasingly more than lawmakers or their staffs can afford. The changing velocity of information in Congress has implications for what issues get addressed, the power of constituent input, and the diversity of voices that are heard. Social media has fundamentally changed expectations about accountability, engagement, and transparency, but it has also reinforced political hierarches that elevate leadership, make long-term policy collaboration tenuous, and raise the stakes of political soundbites. The normalization of social media use means that political dialogue is accessible to anyone with a smartphone, but new technology doesn't necessarily mean the voices at the decision-making table sound any different.

NOTES

1. Both names, X and Twitter, are used in this chapter depending on the context.
2. A version of this chapter is in publication. Russell, A. (2023). *Congressional crisis communication and constrained capacity* [Manuscript submitted for publication].

REFERENCES

Barberá, P., Casas, A., Nagler, J., Egan, P. J., Bonneau, R., Jost, J. T., & Tucker, J. A. (2019). Who leads? Who follows? Measuring issue attention and agenda setting by legislators and the mass public using social media data. *American Political Science Review*, *113*(4), 883–901. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2018, March 1–2). *Why congressional capacity is not enough* [Paper presentation]. The State of Congressional Capacity Conference New America, Washington, D.C.

Curry, J. M. (2015). *Legislating in the dark: Information and power in the House of Representatives.* University of Chicago Press.

C-SPAN (Producer). (2006, June 29). *Making the internet safe for children, Day 2* [Video]. https://www.c-span.org/video/?193197-1/&mention=c446020&mentionSearch=facebook

C-SPAN (Producer). (2009, March 31). *House session* [Video]. https://www.c-span.org/video/?284952-102/&mention=595212230&mentionSearch=new%20media

Dietrich, B. J., Hayes, M., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2019). Pitch perfect: Vocal pitch and the emotional intensity of congressional speech. *American Political Science Review*, *113*(4), 941–962. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000467

Elbeshbishi, S. (2023, April 29). Kids under 13 would be banned from social media under new bipartisan bill. Here's what parents want. *USA Today.* https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2023/04/29/social-media-bill-ban-children-13/11734815002/

Glassman, E. M., Straus, J. R., & Shogan, C. J. (2010). *Social networking and constituent communications: Member use of Twitter during a two-month period in the 111th Congress.* Report no. R41066. Congressional Research Service. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41066.pdf

House of Representatives: History, Art, Archives. (n.d.). *Email me: Congress and the Internet.* Retrieved from https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/Electronic-Technology/Internet/

Jones, B. D., Theriault, S. M., & Whyman, M. (2019). *The great broadening: How the vast expansion of the policymaking agenda transformed American politics.* University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Sage.

LaPira, T. M., Drutman, L., & Kosar, K. R., eds. (2020). *Congress overwhelmed: The decline in congressional capacity and prospects for reform.* University of Chicago Press.

Macdonald, M., Russell, A., & Hua, W. (2023). Negative sentiment and congressional cue-taking on social media. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *56*(2), 201–206. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096522001299

Mayhew, D. R. (1974). Congressional elections: The case of the vanishing marginals. *Polity*, *6*(3), 295–317. https://doi.org/10.2307/3233931

McCubbins, M. D., & Schwartz, T. (1984). Congressional oversight overlooked: Police patrols versus fire alarms. *American Journal of Political Science*, *28*, 165–179.

Russell, A. (2021). *Tweeting is leading: How senators communicate and represent in the age of Twitter.* Oxford University Press.

Russell, A. (2024). Senate communication in the era of Trump. In S. Theriault (Ed.), *Disruption? The Senate during the Trump era.* Oxford University Press.

Salisbury, R. H., & Shepsle, K. A. (1981). US congressman as enterprise. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 559–576.

Scher, S. (1963). Conditions for legislative control. *Journal of Politics*, *25*(3), 526–551. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127971

Sellers, P. J. (2000). Manipulating the message in the US Congress. *Harvard International Journal of Press-Politics*, *5*(1), 22–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X00005001003

Shogan, C. J. (2010). Blackberries, tweets, and YouTube: Technology and the future of communicating with Congress. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *43*(2), 231–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510000041

Straus, J., Williams, R., Shogan, C., & Glassman, M. (2014). *Social media as a communication tool in Congress: Evaluating Senate usage of Twitter in the 113th Congress.* APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2452781

Theoharis, Y., Barberá, P., Fazekas, Z., & Popa, S. A. (2020). The dynamics of political incivility on Twitter. *SAGE Open*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020919447

Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies.* Simon and Schuster.

5

CONGRESSIONAL DISCUSSIONS OF ABORTION

Moral Framing in Context

Diane Jackson and Jennifer Hoewe

While legislation about and access to legal abortion has varied throughout the history of the United States, the demand for safe access to this reproductive care has remained consistent (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022). Abortion regulation has been a legislative focus for a large part of U.S. history, with states introducing restrictive abortion laws as early as the mid- to late 19th century (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022). In 1973, when the Supreme Court struck down a Texas abortion ban on the basis that it infringed on women's constitutional right to privacy in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, the Court ruled to effectively legalize abortion in the U.S. (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022).

Notably during this time, Republicans and Democrats voted similarly in favor of abortion (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022). However, Republican politicians began voting against abortion more consistently in 1979 in an effort to align the Republican party with pro-family values (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022), rooted in the traditionalism that resonates with the religious right (Bendroth, 1999). These stirrings of political division on the issue of abortion seemingly tie back to some of the initial signs of ideological polarization among U.S. congressmembers in 1980 and 1981 (Desilver, 2022). The partisan divide in Congress and among the American electorate has persisted from that period into today, even becoming exacerbated during and immediately following former U.S. president Donald Trump's presidency (Desilver, 2022; Gramlich, 2016).

Because conditions of political polarization can strengthen partisan identities (Nicholson, 2012), it is likely that the "pro-life" (i.e., pro-abortion restrictions) and "pro-choice" (i.e., pro-abortion rights) identities that Republicans and Democrats, respectively, adopted have grown stronger and more salient in recent years. The climate of political polarization and ideologically divisive rhetoric in

U.S. politics over the past 40 years, particularly with regard to abortion issues in the wake of the Trump presidency, set the groundwork for the most recent change in U.S. abortion rights legislation. Trump's appointment of three conservative Supreme Court justices (Gramlich, 2021) was key in the reconsidering of *Roe v. Wade*. This came to pass on June 24, 2022, when the Supreme Court reinstituted power to legislate abortion rights to individual states in their decision on the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, thereby overruling its previous decisions from *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* that federally legalized abortion (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022; Whittum & Rapkin, 2022).

Given the generally politically divisive climate and the contention surrounding the issue of abortion legislation in the U.S., one reflection of public sentiment may be exemplified in how abortion is discussed by those elected to represent U.S. citizens. Despite the predominantly conservative Supreme Court at the time of this decision, Democrats had control of the House, Senate, and Oval Office. Given the role that political elites, such as members of Congress, have in both influencing and shaping public opinion and discourse (Minozzi et al., 2015), this chapter considers how members of Congress framed their discussions of abortions immediately before and after the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision.

Politically distinct interpretations of current political issues are likely to include arguments that foreground appeals to morality and moral decision-making (e.g., Hoewe & Ziny, 2020). Existing research using moral foundations theory (MFT) has established that moral elements tend to accompany politically distinct stances on political issues (Hoewe et al., 2022) and that political actors connect these moral elements to their issue positions when discussing them (Bowe & Hoewe, 2016; Clifford & Jerit, 2013). For instance, an analysis of U.S. Senate speeches about abortion from 1989 to 2006 found that while Republican senators tended to talk about abortion in relation to purity and in terms of abstinence and celibacy, Democratic senators emphasized issues of fairness for women (Sagi & Dehghani, 2013). Because the issue of abortion rights has prompted controversy over definitions of life and death, it has been the subject of much discourse regarding morality and ethics (Sharma et al., 2017) and offers a relevant context to which MFT applies (see Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2024). Examining how members of Congress incorporate principles of morality in their discussions of abortion provides a lens through which to consider how they see the future of abortion legislation in the U.S. In particular, MFT provides a way to examine the

moral language used in these discussions, which lends itself to studying political divisions in rhetoric (Graham et al., 2009, 2013). This research also considers the subject of these statements made by members of Congress (e.g., whether the mother/woman or child/unborn fetus were the focus) to better understand how they contextualized their stances on abortion.

PUBLIC OPINION AND MEDIA RHETORIC ABOUT ABORTION

Partisan divisions surrounding language-based framing and voting about issues related to abortion began in the early 1980s (Whittum & Rapkin, 2022) and have persisted since (Andsager, 2000; de Saint Felix, 2017; Sharma et al., 2017; Woodruff, 2019). However, public opinion poll results indicate that most U.S. adults do not approve of the Supreme Court's decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case; they believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Doherty et al., 2022). Political discourse regarding this issue is not so straightforward. A content analysis of discourse used by pro-life and pro-choice advocacy organizations in the mid-1990s revealed that frames employed by pro-life organizations tended to carry stronger influence on the way that abortion issues were framed in newspaper coverage (Andsager, 2000), despite the majority public support for abortion at that time (Doherty et al., 2022).

Historically, Americans have categorized their issue positions regarding abortion as either pro-life or pro-choice (Andsager, 2000; Sharma et al., 2017). Mainstream media and press coverage about abortion have tended to refer to female individuals as "women" when discussing the pro-choice position, while female individuals are framed as "mothers" when pro-life frames are applied (Andsager, 2000). Further, mainstream pro-choice coverage emphasized the rights, choice, and privacy that women should have from government interference in their family planning; whereas pro-life coverage has centered more around the defenselessness and harm brought upon the unborn, particularly leading up to the *Roe v. Wade* decision (Andsager, 2000; de Saint Felix, 2017). Although pro-choice abortion arguments did not exclusively center on women's rights before the *Roe v. Wade* decision (Ziegler, 2009) and anti-abortion movement leaders and members have since begun using more feminist, pro-woman framing (see, e.g., Brysk & Yang, 2023; Rose, 2011), U.S. political party members and leaders have continued to rely on pro-choice and pro-life labels when communicating their positions on abortion (Sagi et al., 2013; Tsirkin et al., 2023).

Thirty years later, similar patterns of rhetoric in public discourse persist. Despite public polls indicating that more than 60% of U.S. adults support abortion being legal (Doherty et al., 2022), news coverage may undermine this public support (Woodruff, 2019). In a critical discourse analysis of tweets about abortion, posts using anti-abortion rhetoric tended to represent a greater amount of Twitter conversations about abortion than neutral or pro-abortion rhetoric (Sharma et al., 2017).

Abortion rhetoric holds important implications, having served as a cornerstone of presidential platforms (e.g., de Saint Felix, 2017) and with close relationships to other bioethical issues, such as cloning (see Jensen & Weasel, 2006). Further, discourse about this topic carries significant religious, social, and moral facets (Sharma et al., 2017). Given the extensive history of partisan framing about the issue of abortion and the growing amount of public support for abortion legalization in the U.S. (Doherty et al., 2022; Whittum & Rapkin, 2022), this chapter considers the moral framing that members of Congress used surrounding the recent *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court decision.

MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY

Moral foundations theory (MFT) was developed to study the underlying structures of values, behaviors, and psychological mechanisms that regulate selfishness and form individuals' morality (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt, 2008). This theory proposes five different moral foundations (i.e., care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation), which stem from cultural and moral factors and intuitively appeal to individuals at relatively distinct levels (Graham et al., 2013). Prior research has illustrated the application of these moral foundations across numerous cultures and contexts (Graham, et al., 2009). Furthermore, these five moral foundations can be categorized into individualizing and binding foundations (Hadarics & Kende, 2017; Weber & Federico, 2013). Individualizing foundations (i.e., care/harm and fairness/cheating) are based on considerations of individual rights. Binding foundations (i.e., loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation) are based on efforts made to support group cohesion.

Research shows that people of different political ideologies emphasize these moral foundations in different ways. Politically liberal individuals are more likely to place greater importance on individualizing foundations when forming

judgments, while politically conservative individuals are more likely to value binding foundations (Weber & Federico, 2013). This is true for political individuals as well as political entities. For example, more liberal partisan news outlets tend to rely on individualizing moral foundations, while more conservative partisan news outlets tend to use loyalty and authority moral foundations when framing issues like abortion, climate change, and police violence (Fulgoni et al., 2016). Further, Fulgoni et al. (2016) found that liberal partisan media discussed aspects of these issues where the individualizing foundations (i.e., care/harm and fairness/cheating) were both present and absent, while conservative partisan media tended to emphasize primarily aspects of these issues where loyalty and/or respect for authority were lacking.

Because the most contentious political conflicts tend to involve issues where each political party centers a moral foundation that is not equally valued by the other party (Fulgoni et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2009), the issue of abortion offers an important context to consider in light of recent political developments. While care/harm tends to be a moral foundation prioritized by liberal individuals, traditional framing of abortion by media outlets and conservative political elites has emphasized the foundation of care/harm with regard to the protection of the unborn, in addition to prioritizing purity and sanctity by emphasizing abstinence and celibacy (Andsager, 2000; Sagi & Dehghani, 2013; Sharma et al., 2017). Thus, given the emphasis that liberal and conservative frames of abortion have placed on care/harm (Andsager, 2000; Sharma et al., 2017), the goal of this study is to understand whether congressmembers' use of moral foundations in their discussions of abortion coincide with this existing research. As political elites and strategists who publicly represent the interests both of geographic regions and their political parties and who establish the political legislative agenda in the United States, congressmembers' attitudes and behaviors can have tangible effects on public opinion (Minozzi et al., 2015; Morris & Witting, 2008). For these reasons, congressional speeches provide an important metric for studying political elites' use of moral rhetoric about abortion legislation surrounding the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*: the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court decision. Therefore, this study examines the following research question:

RQ1: How did members of Congress use moral language to discuss abortion surrounding the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court decision?

METHOD

For this study, video evidence of congressmembers' language use in their speeches about abortion was collected. Using the C-SPAN Video Library, we searched within C-SPAN video footage for mentions of "abortion," "Dobbs," "Roe," "pro-choice," and "pro-life." The time frame included three months before and after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision (March through September 2022). While the decision occurred on June 24, 2022, a Politico report of the draft opinion indicating that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned was released in May 2022 (Saperstone, 2022), so this time frame offers an opportunity to study the rhetoric leading up to the case, during the leak, and immediately following the decision. The sample included all videos within the "U.S. Senate" and "U.S. House of Representatives" series classification in the C-SPAN Video Library. This sampling procedure produced 29 unique videos.

Using this sample, we then collected the language used by members of Congress through the closed-captioning provided in the C-SPAN Video Library. Errors within the closed captioning were not corrected. The unit of analysis was each unique speech given by a single member of Congress. Only speeches that included a reference to abortion were included in the sample. This process resulted in 215 speeches from members of Congress about abortion; 129 were from the House and 86 were from the Senate.

Each unit of analysis was trimmed to include only language relevant to the discussion of abortion. For example, procedural language was removed (e.g., "I yield my time") as were formalities (e.g., "Thank you, Madam Speaker").

VARIABLES

Each unit of analysis was coded for several features. Since MFT predicts different uses of moral language based on political affiliation (e.g., Graham et al., 2009; Weber & Federico, 2013), each moral foundation was assessed and compared with the party affiliation of the member of Congress. First, we coded for the party of the speaker[1]; 78 speeches were given by Republicans and 137 were given by Democrats. Second, we analyzed the moral language used in these discussions of abortion. Using the computer-assisted content analysis software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), we quantified the text data collected using LIWC dictionaries and their associated variables (Boyd et al., 2022). Specifically, LIWC

was used to analyze the data with the extended Moral Foundations Dictionary (eMFD; Hopp et al., 2021). Each of the five moral foundations was given a score for each unit of analysis, where that score represents the percentage of usage of words associated with that moral foundation in that unit of analysis. Across the entire sample, the dispersion of these moral foundations was as follows: care (M = 3.88, SD = 0.67), fairness (M = 3.77, SD = 0.60), loyalty (M = 3.47, SD = 0.53), authority (M = 3.43, SD = 0.53), and sanctity (M = 3.21, SD = 0.51).

Finally, within these descriptions, we also considered the subjects of the discourse. Using LIWC to count mentions of the words, two additional variables were created. Use of the words "mother," "woman," "female," and "caretaker" were categorized into a variable representing women, and use of the words "baby," "fetus," and "child" were categorized into a variable representing children. Across the entire sample, the dispersion of these variables was as follows: women (M = 0.21, SD = 0.18) and children (M = 0.18, SD = 0.40). To correct for skewness and kurtosis, the square root of these two variables was taken, resulting in a more normal distribution, and used for the subsequent analyses.

RESULTS

A MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was run to test the relationship between the speaker's political party and the moral language used in their statements. That is, party was the independent variable, and the five moral foundations variables were the dependent variables. Table 5.1 illustrates the mean values for each moral foundation as used by congressmembers of each political party.

The omnibus test for the MANOVA was statistically significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .85$, $F(5, 209) = 7.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. An examination of the between-subjects effects in the model revealed one significant relationship. The political party of the speaker was related to the use of moral language focused on fairness, $F(1, 213) = 5.77$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. In their speeches about abortion, Republicans and Democrats discussed fairness in significantly different amounts; using the estimated marginal means with the Sidak correction, Democrats (M = 3.84) used language about fairness significantly more than Republicans (M = 3.64). Also, it is worth noting that the moral foundation of care/harm was the most frequently used, and it was used equally among Republicans and Democrats (see Table 5.1).

A second MANOVA was run to test the relationship between the speaker's political party and their use of language related to women and/or children in their

TABLE 5.1 *Descriptive Statistics for Use of Moral Language*

	Republicans		Democrats	
Moral foundation	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Care/harm	3.86	0.65	3.89	0.69
Fairness/cheating	3.64	0.59	3.84	0.59
Loyalty/betrayal	3.44	0.57	3.49	0.50
Authority/subversion	3.37	0.56	3.48	0.51
Sanctity/degradation	3.27	0.56	3.17	0.48

M, mean; *SD*, standard deviation.

discussions of abortion. The omnibus test was statistically significant, Wilks' Λ = .88, F (2, 212) = 14.39, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. The political party of the speaker was related to the use of language related to women, $F(1, 213) = 6.89$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, and children, $F(1, 213) = 16.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. The estimated marginal means with the Sidak correction showed significant differences based on the political party of the speaker. In their speeches about abortion, Democrats ($M = 0.32$) discussed women significantly more than Republicans ($M = 0.18$), and Republicans ($M = 0.35$) discussed children significantly more than Democrats ($M = 0.14$).[2]

DISCUSSION

This study examined the use of moral language in discussions of abortion among members of Congress surrounding the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* U.S. Supreme Court decision. Political polarization can prompt stronger party identities (Nicholson, 2012), which in the U.S. has historically resulted in increased partisan conflict and the growing tendency for partisans to vote exclusively along party lines (Brewer, 2005). Greater polarization can also be prompted around specific issues through behaviors like selective exposure to attitudinally congruent information (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Feldman & Hart, 2018; Mutz, 2006). As such, it is possible that these effects, brought on by the climate of growing ideological polarization in the U.S., have exacerbated the conflict and divide in rhetoric about abortion rights.

This study's findings illustrate differences in how Democratic and Republican members of Congress discussed the moral foundation of fairness in their

speeches about abortion. Because more liberal individuals tend to emphasize the individualizing moral foundations of care/harm and fairness/cheating (Weber & Federico, 2013), this finding that Democratic members of Congress center fairness in their speeches more than Republican members of Congress affirms existing research. One example of this emphasis on fairness was demonstrated by a Democratic member of the U.S. House, Sylvia Garcia from Texas, when she spoke on July 13, 2022:

> I rise in outrage that extreme Republicans seek to control women in their most intimate health care decisions by banning abortions. These cruel efforts will hurt the already vulnerable women in our communities the most, especially poor women. Madam Speaker, there are more than 800,000 women of reproductive age with incomes under 100% of poverty, who live in states that haven't expanded Medicaid. These women are being left without access to comprehensive health care coverage and now many are being stripped of their abortion rights. These women are less likely to access birth control, will struggle to receive wellness exams, and now will not have access to abortion. This is the vision Republicans have for America. This is what the right wing wants. Well, I won't stand by quietly, and Democrats will not stand by quietly. I plan to fight for women because I trust women to make their most personal intimate health care decisions. (DJACKS, 2023c)

It is worth noting that there were not significant differences in the use of language related to the moral foundations of care, loyalty, authority, or sanctity. For these moral foundations, both Republicans and Democrats used this language, but not to significantly different degrees. This illustrates the extent to which each of these moral foundations could factor into both Republicans' and Democrats' perspectives on abortion legislation. Perhaps most noteworthy, the moral foundation of care/harm was used the most frequently among both Democrats and Republicans but not to a significantly different degree. This finding coincides with prior research that found both U.S. political parties emphasize this moral foundation in their discussions of abortion (Andsager, 2000; Sharma et al., 2017).

While use of the remaining moral foundations did not significantly differ across political parties, the extent to which Republicans and Democrats focused on women and children in their speeches did significantly differ. In keeping with the traditional framing that each party has used when discussing abortion (see Andsager, 2000; Sharma et al., 2017), Democratic members of Congress were

more likely to focus their discussions of abortion on women. For example, U.S. Representative Kim Schrier, a Democrat from Washington, spoke on July 15, 2022, about the importance of abortion for women:

> 100% of women who choose abortion make that decision on their own and for themselves. That's the way it needs to stay. This is a healthcare decision that only a women can make in consultation with her doctor. And that is why we're here today: to protect women's autonomy over their own healthcare, over their own life, over their own destinies. That's a fundamental right. When we talk about freedom, we want to talk, we need to talk about the freedom of a women to control her destiny, to make her own decisions. And that is why these bills are so important to protect a woman's right to choose and to make sure that if her state does not allow it, she can choose freely to travel to another state and get the care she needs. (DJACKS, 2023b)

Republicans, on the other hand, have historically centered a pro-family, pro-life approach when discussing the issue of abortion by emphasizing the harm caused to and defenselessness of unborn children (Andsager, 2000; de Saint Felix, 2017). In keeping with these patterns, Republican members of Congress who discussed abortion in this context were more likely to mention the impact of abortion on unborn children. Republican U.S. Representative John Joyce of Pennsylvania offered one such example in a speech he gave on July 15, 2022:

> When I was in medical school, I learned about the development in the journey of a child in the womb of a mother. Let me review that journey with you today. At six weeks, a child is developing a mouth, nose, ears, and most important, a heartbeat of their own. At 12 weeks, a baby has fingers and toes. Continue on this journey with me. At 15 weeks, a baby can sense light and even has taste buds. At 19 weeks, a child can hear and know the voice of their mother. These lives are precious, and they must be protected. By 22 weeks, many babies can survive outside the womb if they are born prematurely. Clearly, these are human lives. Clearly, we in Congress have an obligation to protect these human lives. I urge my colleagues, reject this bill. Support all human life. It is time for us to stand up for the American people and to stand up for all human life. (DJACKS, 2023a)

These findings affirm existing research, where more liberal and Democratic individuals and entities use pro-choice, female-forward framing to support abor-

tion legalization, while more conservative and Republican individuals use pro-life, pro-family, and child-centered framing to oppose abortion legalization. Recent voting and polling trends, however, suggest that these traditional rhetorical practices are resonating less with today's American electorate as abortion becomes more supported by both Republican and Democratic voters (Doherty et al., 2022; LeVine, 2023; Tsirkin et al., 2023). Campaign losses sustained by Republicans since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision have been attributed to the party's stubbornness in reconsidering its messaging strategy regarding abortion (LeVine, 2023). An NBC News report from September 2023 indicated that Republican Senate leaders met to reevaluate their messaging strategy for their party's stance on abortion legislation amid polling trends and voting results that indicated that "pro-life" framing no longer resonates with the American electorate. Senator Todd Young used the term "pro-baby" (Tsirkin et al., 2023), which is reflected clearly in the language used by the Republican members of Congress whose speeches were analyzed in this chapter. This finding and its appearance in recent political discussions underscore the importance of framing in political rhetoric.

Overall, these findings reinforce existing research on the moral foundations and framing foci that liberals and conservatives traditionally espouse in their political rhetoric. Democratic congressmembers emphasized women and the (lack of) fairness directed toward them in their speeches about abortion; Republican congressmembers were not distinctly using moral language, instead favoring the discussion of unborn children potentially impacted by abortion. The practical implications of these results suggest the importance of both political parties working to adapt their messaging to be more specific and resonant with their constituents in order to better appeal to voters' evolving policy stances as well as their moral foundations related to the issue of abortion.

NOTES

1. Nancy Pelosi was the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the time that this Supreme Court decision was made. Democrats were in control of the House of Representatives, and though the Senate was evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, Democratic vice president Kamala Harris was responsible for making the tie-breaking vote, thus establishing a Democratic majority in the Senate as well.
2. Controlling for the number of words used in these speeches did not significantly alter the results reported in either of these models.

REFERENCES

Andsager, J. L. (2000). How interest groups attempt to share public opinion with competing news frames. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *77*(3), 577–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900007700308

Bendroth, M. L. (1999). Fundamentalism and the family: Gender, culture, and the American pro-family movement. *Journal of Women's History*, *10*(4), 35–54. https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0537

Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, *58*(4), 707–731. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x

Bowe, B. J., & Hoewe, J. (2016). Night and day: An illustration of framing and moral foundations in the Oklahoma Shariah amendment campaign. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *93*(4), 967–985. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699016628806

Boyd, R. L., Ashokkumar, A., Seraj, S., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2022). *The development and psychometric properties of LIWC-22*. University of Texas at Austin.

Brewer, M. D. (2005). The rise of partisanship and the expansion of partisan conflict within the American electorate. *Political Research Quarterly*, *58*(2), 219–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290505800203

Brysk, A., & Yang, R. (2023). Abortion rights attitudes in Europe: Pro-choice, pro-life, or pro-nation? *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, *30*(2), 525–555. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxac047

Clifford, S., & Jerit, J. (2013). How words do the work of politics: Moral foundations theory and the debate over stem cell research. *Journal of Politics*, *75*(3), 659–671. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000492

DJACKS. (2023a, October 21). *JohnJoyce7.15.22* [Video clip]. Clip of *House session* (July 15, 2022). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5089522/user-clip-johnjoyce71522

DJACKS. (2023b, October 21). *KimSchrier7.15.22* [Video clip]. Clip of *House session* (July 15, 2022). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5089521/user-clip-kimschrier71522

DJACKS. (2023c, October 21). SylviaGarcia7.13.22 [Video clip]. Clip of House session (July 13, 2022). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5089520/user-clip-sylviagarcia71322

de Saint Felix, S. (2017). *From feminist activist to abortion Barbie: A rhetorical history of abortion discourse from 2013-2016.* (Publication No. 10607111) [Master's thesis, University of Arkansas]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Desilver, D. (2022, March 10). *The polarization in today's Congress has roots that go back decades.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/10/the-polarization-in-todays-congress-has-roots-that-go-back-decades/

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 597 U.S. (2022). https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/597/19-1392/case.pdf

Doherty, C., Kiley, J., Asheer, N., & Jordan, C. (2022, July 6). *Majority of public disapproves of Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/06/majority-of-public-disapproves-of-supreme-courts-decision-to-overturn-roe-v-wade/

Feldman, L., & Hart, P. S. (2018). Broadening exposure to climate change news? How framing and political orientation interact to influence selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(3), 503–524. http://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy011

Fulgoni, D., Carpenter, J., Ungar, L., & Preoţiuc-Pietro, D. (2016). An empirical exploration of moral foundations theory in partisan news sources. In N. Calzolari, K. Choukri, T. Declerck, S. Goggi, M. Grobelnik, B. Maegaard, J. Mariani, H. Mazo, A. Moreno, J. Odijk, & S. Piperidis (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation.* European Language Resources Association.

Graham, J., Haidt, J., Koleva, S., Motyl, M., Iyer, R., Wojcik, S. P., & Ditto, P. H. (2013). Moral foundations theory: The pragmatic validity of moral pluralism. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *47*, 55–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00002-4

Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *96*(5), 1029–1049. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015141

Gramlich, J. (2016, November 7). *America's political divisions in 5 charts.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/11/07/americas-political-divisions-in-5-charts/

Gramlich, J. (2021, January 13). *How Trump compares with other recent presidents in appointing federal judges.* Pew Research Center. https://pewrsr.ch/2Zx21cQ

Hadarics, M., & Kende, A. (2017). The dimensions of generalized prejudice within the dual-process model: The mediating role of moral foundations. *Current Psychology*, *37*, 371–379. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-016-9544-x

Haidt, J. (2008). Morality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *3*(1), 65–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2008.00063.x

Hoewe, J., Panek, E., Peacock, C., Sherrill, L. A., & Wheeler, S. (2022). Using moral foundations to assess stereotypes: Americans' perceptions of immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, *20*(4), 501–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1949657

Hoewe, J., & Ziny, M. (2020). Congress and immigration policy: Use of moral lan-

guage surrounding the Trump presidency. In R. X. Browning (Ed.), *President Trump's first term: The year in C-SPAN Archives research, Volume 5* (pp. 103–128). Purdue University Press. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/ccse/vol5/iss1/1

Hopp, F. R., Fisher, J. T., Cornell, D., Huskey, R., & Weber, R. (2021). The extended Moral Foundations Dictionary (eMFD): Development and applications of a crowd-sourced approach to extracting moral intuitions from text. *Behavior Research Methods*, *53*, 232–246. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-020-01433-0

Jensen, E., & Weasel, L. H. (2006). Abortion rhetoric in American news coverage of the human cloning debate. *New Genetics and Society*, *25*(3), 305–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/14636770601032940

LeVine, M. (2023, November 12). Republicans still struggle to find a winning strategy on abortion. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/11/12/republicans-abortion-election-defeats/

Minozzi, W., Neblo, M. A., Esterling, K. M., & Lazer, D. M. (2015). Field experiment evidence of substantive, attributional, and behavioral persuasion by members of Congress in online town halls. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *112*(13), 3937–3942. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1418188112

Morris, J., & Witting, M. (2008). Congressional partisanship, bipartisanship and public opinion: An experimental analysis. *Politics & Policy*, *29*(1), 47–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2001.tb00583.x

Mutz, D. C. (2006). How the mass media divide us. In P. S. Nivola & D. W. Brady (Eds.), *Red and blue nation? Characteristics and causes of America's polarized politics* (pp. 223–242). Brookings Institution Press.

Nicholson, S. P. (2012). Polarizing cues. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(1), 52–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00541.x

Paruzel-Czachura, M., Domurat, A., & Nowak, M. (2024). Moral foundations of pro-choice and pro-life women. *Current Psychology*, *43*, 6051–6061. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04800-0

Rose, M. (2011). Pro-life, pro-woman? Frame extension in the American antiabortion movement. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *32*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2011.537565

Sagi, E., & Dehghani, M. (2013). Measuring moral rhetoric in text. *Social Science Computer Review*, *32*(2), 132–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439313506837

Sagi, E., Diermeier, D., & Kaufmann, S. (2013). Identifying issue frames in text. *PLoS ONE*, *8*(7), e69185. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069185

Saperstone, J. (2022, June 24). *Timeline: Roe v. Wade Abortion Law from 1973-2022*.

NBC Boston. https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/timeline-roe-v-wade-abortion-law-from-1973-2022/2755969/

Sharma, E., Saha, K., Ernala, S. K., Ghoshal, S., & De Choudhury, M. (2017). Analyzing ideological discourse on social media: A case study of the abortion debate. In *Proceedings of CSSSA's Annual Conference on Computational Social Science.* ACM Digital Library. https://doi.org/10.1145/3145574.3145577

Tsirkin, J., Santaliz, K., Leach, B., & Brown-Kaiser, L. (2023, September 7). *Republicans are trying to find a new term for "pro-life" to stave off more electoral losses.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/republicans-try-find-new-term-life-stave-electoral-losses-rcna103924

Weber, C. R., & Federico, C. M. (2013). Moral foundations and heterogeneity in ideological preferences. *Political Psychology*, *34*(1), 107–126. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00922.x

Whittum, M., & Rapkin, R. (2022). History of abortion legislation in the United States. *Journal of Gynecologic Surgery*, *38*(5), 320–323. https://doi.org/10.1089/gyn.2022.0060

Woodruff, K. (2019). Coverage of abortion in select U.S. newspapers. *Women's Health Issues*, *29*(1), 80–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2018.08.008

Ziegler, M. (2009). The framing of a right to choose: Roe v. Wade and the changing debate on abortion law. *Law and History Review*, *27*(2), 281–330. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40646016

6

FRAMING FALSE INFORMATION

Examining Legislators' Discourse Surrounding January 6

Christina P. Walker

The proliferation of false information poses a threat to democratic processes as it undermines trust in institutions and exacerbates polarization (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Edelman, 2001; Marchetti, 2020). While considerable research has examined the impact of false political information on voter behavior and public opinion (Berinsky, 2017; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Weeks & Garrett, 2014), less attention has been paid to understanding how politicians themselves produce and disseminate such information. Knowing how politicians discuss and frame false information—encompassing both accidental misinformation and intentional disinformation—could offer insights into the mechanisms behind their dissemination and its strategic use in shaping public discourse, influencing political agendas, and manipulating public opinion. Therefore, I ask: How do politicians discuss false information?

This inquiry into how politicians talk about false information holds significant importance for researchers interested in the dynamics of political communication. While existing literature acknowledges the escalating prevalence of false information in contemporary discourse, a notable dearth remains in exploring the motivations that propel political elites to disseminate false information (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This study focuses on the specific context of the 2021 U.S. Capitol insurrection. It aims to unravel the discourse strategies political elites employ in discussing and framing false information and the potential motivations underlying the dissemination. Through a computational text analysis of data extracted from the public hearings of the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 attack, I conduct a thematic analysis to discern blame attribution for the event. The outcomes of this investigation hold the potential to understand

the shaping of political and discursive agendas. A nuanced understanding of elite framing of false information could facilitate more targeted efforts to counter false information and strengthen democratic processes, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the impact of false information in politics.

I capture how politicians discuss false information by analyzing the January 6 Committee hearings through transcripts made from C-SPAN recordings. By understanding the topics raised across the hearings, I discern the specific issues and concerns surrounding false information articulated by politicians. Examining the sentiment conveyed through the language employed provides insights into legislators' emotional tone and rhetorical strategies. Additionally, exploring the most frequently used words unveils the focal points in the discourse. This multifaceted approach to linguistic analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the politicians' discourse surrounding false information, serving as a foundation for interpreting the motivations and broader implications of political communication in the context of the January 6 Committee hearings. The findings suggest that the more neutral and sometimes positive tones within the hearings could have limited their impact on public opinion and the broader understanding of the depth of the issue of false information.

FALSE INFORMATION IN POLITICS

The literature on false information underscores its negative impact on democracy, emphasizing the changing media landscape and the rise of social media as pivotal factors (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Edelman, 2001; Marchetti, 2020). Scholars initially anticipated social media to fortify democratic norms, yet it has, paradoxically, facilitated the dissemination of false information, altering political campaigns and eroding democratic values (Diamond & Plattner, 2012; Persily, 2017; Rackaway, 2023; Tucker et al., 2018). The literature primarily focuses on the spread of false information among citizens, exploring echo chambers and mitigation strategies while neglecting the motivations behind political elites' dissemination of false information (Epstein et al., 2020; Nelimarkka et al., 2018). Consequently, gaps persist in understanding why politicians share false information.

The existing research explores citizen motivations for sharing false information, encompassing unintentional sharing models based on cognitive limitations and intentional sharing models rooted in psychological and material benefits

(Osmundsen et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2019; Temming, 2018). For example, there remain debates on the influence of reputation costs (Effron & Raj, 2020; Gao et al., 2018; Sunstein, 2018). Likewise, partisan benefits in sharing false information remain unclear. Scholars highlight the role of affective polarization, ideological preferences, and party identity in shaping these motivations (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Flynn & Krupnikov, 2019). The interplay between political misperceptions, polarization, and false information underscores the importance of examining the sender side of the causal chain.

However, politicians' role in spreading false information remains an underexplored dimension (Acemoglu et al., 2021; Tucker, 2023). While it is acknowledged that politicians share false information, scant attention has been paid to understanding the underlying motivations driving this behavior (Mosleh & Rand, 2022; Weeks & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021). I address this by focusing on elite discourse, utilizing computational text analysis of the January 6 Committee hearings transcripts to unveil how politicians discuss false information.

FRAMING FALSE INFORMATION

The framing literature provides a valuable framework for understanding how political elites shape and present information to the public, which is crucial in the context of false information and its impact on democracy. Framing can help in understanding political communication and the construction of political narratives (Matthes, 2012) as it offers insights into the strategic choices made by political actors in shaping public discourse and influencing public opinion via agenda-setting (Walgrave et al., 2018). While studies have applied framing theory to analyze political discourse and communication strategies in various contexts (Holbert et al., 2005; Roman et al., 2022), there is a need to extend it to encompass elite discourse, particularly in the context of political hearings and committee proceedings.

How elites frame false information and why it matters coincides with elite cue theory. This theory posits that political elites play a significant role in shaping public opinion by providing "cues" or signals about how to interpret complex political issues (Friedman, 2012). When elites have a consensus, the public is likely to follow, but when elites disagree, the public's opinions can become polarized. Congressional speeches and hearings act as a platform for elites' cues.

JANUARY 6 AS A CASE

The events of January 6, 2021, marked a watershed moment in American history when a mob of supporters of then-president Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol. The violent insurrection, fueled by false claims of widespread election fraud and the refusal to accept the outcome of the 2020 presidential election, shocked the nation and reverberated globally. The unprecedented breach of the Capitol highlighted the deep divisions within American society and raised questions about the state of democracy and the role of political leaders in shaping public discourse.

The subsequent establishment of the United States House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack presents a compelling case study for understanding how politicians discuss false information in the aftermath of a significant and contentious event. The committee's mandate was to examine the circumstances surrounding the attack, the security failures that allowed it, and the role played by various actors, including political leaders, in instigating or responding to the violence. This committee's hearings stand out as a case for studying discourse on false information for several reasons. First, the attack itself was fueled by false narratives and baseless claims of election fraud. The hearings, therefore, became a forum to address and confront the consequences of these falsehoods, making it a valuable case for understanding how political elites grapple with false information that directly contributed to a violent assault on democratic institutions.

Second, the hearings took place in a charged political atmosphere, with deep partisan divides over the legitimacy of the election results. The study of false information in this context becomes particularly relevant as it allows an exploration of how politicians navigate and contribute to the perpetuation of false information within a polarized political landscape. Finally, the hearings present an opportunity to observe how political leaders attribute blame and responsibility for the events of January 6. Understanding the framing of false information in the context of assigning accountability provides insights into the strategic communication employed by politicians to shape public perception and control the narrative surrounding a crisis.

The aftermath of January 6 also saw increased scrutiny of the role of social media platforms in disseminating false information and facilitating the organization of the attack (Ng et al., 2022; Timberg et al., 2021). This raises questions about the complicity or responsibility of political leaders in either countering or amplifying false information through these platforms. The committee hearings

provide a platform to examine how politicians address the intersection of technology, false information, and the potential impact on democratic processes.

METHODS

I used computational text analysis to extract insights derived from the C-SPAN Video Library to explore how politicians talk about false information. I transcribed the ten public hearings of the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack. I turned the transcripts into a dataset where each observation, or row, represents when a new person speaks or talks in a prerecorded video. I then employed a coding scheme to distinguish between speeches, evidence, and testimonies.

I conducted a three-step computational text analysis to extract meaningful insights from the dataset. The methods used were most frequent word analysis, topic modeling, and sentiment analysis. Most frequent word analysis is used to identify prevalent language and terms used in the hearing, providing insights into the key themes and concepts within the discourse (Dehghani et al., 2017). Topic modeling, specifically latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), is employed to uncover latent themes and patterns within the dataset, allowing for the identification of prevalent themes without prior assumptions (Marciniak, 2016). Sentiment analysis is used to gauge the overall attitude or tone across the hearings, with a focus on the emotional tone expressed in the text (Wang & Wu, 2013).

The analysis of political framing through computational text analysis has been a subject of interest in various academic works (Diesner, 2015), including through automated frame analysis to understand the narrative surrounding Europe's 2015 refugee crisis (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017) and measuring polarization in elite communication during the COVID-19 pandemic (Green et al., 2020). Incorporating sentiment analysis within framing theory helps us to understand how language and emotional tone influence the framing of political discourse as sentiment analysis provides insights into the emotional dimensions of framing, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how political messages are constructed and perceived.

To analyze the hearings, I first cleaned the data. I combined words that only make sense together. This included "january 6th," "white house," "united states," "vice president," and "thank you." I also made all versions of the United States (e.g., U.S., USA) equivalent. I then removed all punctuation and the standard English

stop words from the dataset and some additional words that did not add to the context. These included Mr., like, would, one, told, said, think, could, also, know, say, Donald, going, back, get, well, that's, thank, go, day, time, call, see, don't, yes. I then tokenized the data, splitting the sentences into fragments the algorithm can understand. To get the sentiment of each observation, I used the Sentiment Intensity Analyzer from the NLTK package in Python.

Most frequent word analysis involves identifying and totaling the occurrence of words within a dataset to discern patterns and highlight frequently used terms (Laver et al., 2003). This computational text analysis method is particularly useful for uncovering the prevailing language and central concepts within a body of text. Identifying the words that appear most frequently can provide insights into the key themes, concerns, or topics within the discourse. This provides a data-driven understanding of the language employed by political elites. Moreover, the most frequent word analysis serves as an initial step in unraveling the semantic structure of the text, which can help with further, more in-depth examinations of context, sentiment, and nuance.

Topic modeling uncovers latent themes and patterns within the dataset (Marciniak, 2016). To help us understand how politicians discuss false information during the January 6 hearings, topic modeling works by identifying clusters of words that frequently co-occur. I use an LDA, which is a probabilistic model commonly used in natural language processing to analyze large collections of text data (Yang & Zhang, 2018). The algorithm allocates words into topics, allowing the researcher to discern prevalent themes without prior assumptions. Selecting the optimal number of topics in an LDA model is a crucial aspect of the analysis, impacting the interpretability of the results. In this study, the number of topics was determined by a pragmatic approach rooted in the observed data characteristics. The process involved iteratively experimenting with different numbers of topics and evaluating the output based on interpretability and the presence of overlap. A key consideration was to strike a balance between granularity and coherence. After I tested multiple configurations, my choice to settle on three topics was motivated by my observation that increasing the number of topics led to overlap, hindering a clear distinguishing factor among the themes. Selecting three topics was deemed optimal for providing meaningful insights into the thematic structure of political discourse during the January 6 hearings, facilitating a more straightforward interpretation of the results.

Sentiment analysis is my final computational approach as it discerns the emotional tone or attitude expressed in text. This process involves using natural

language processing algorithms to analyze words and phrases within the text and determine whether they convey positive, negative, or neutral sentiments. The model reflects the overall sentiment expressed in each observation by assigning a numerical score to each analyzed text unit.

RESULTS

Analysis of the January 6 hearings reveals a dynamic interplay between words, topics, and sentiments that depict the narrative. Figure 6.1 provides a visual representation of the most frequently used words, showcasing the prominence of terms like "president," "trump," "election," "capitol," and "people." This underscores the hearings' central focus on blaming President Trump and discussing the consequences of the January 6 events. The subsequent topic model identifies three main themes: (1) the actions of President Trump and the White House; (2) President Trump's claims of election fraud; and (3) the impact on specific people. Each topic is characterized by distinct keywords, offering an overview of the hearings' narrative.

Moving to sentiment analysis, Figure 6.2 unveils the overall sentiment distribution, with a notable prevalence of neutral tones. Surprisingly, negative

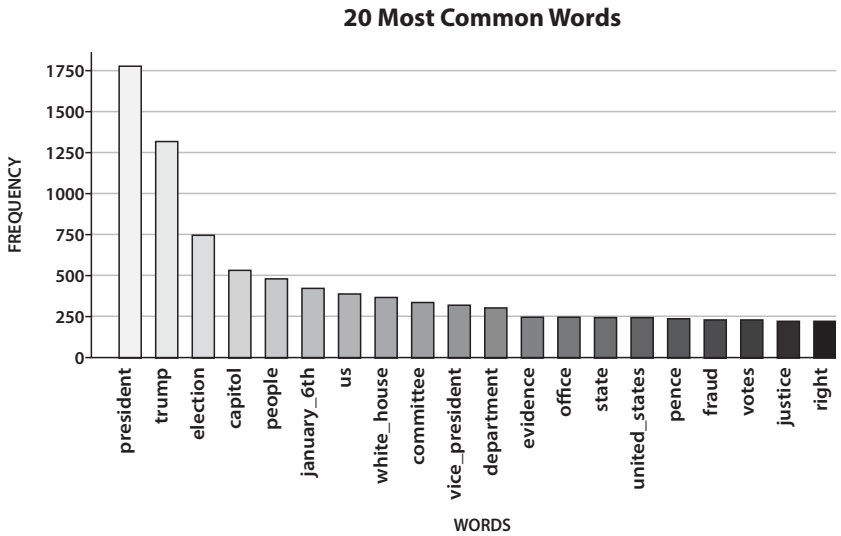


FIGURE 6.1 Top 20 most common words in the January 6 hearings.

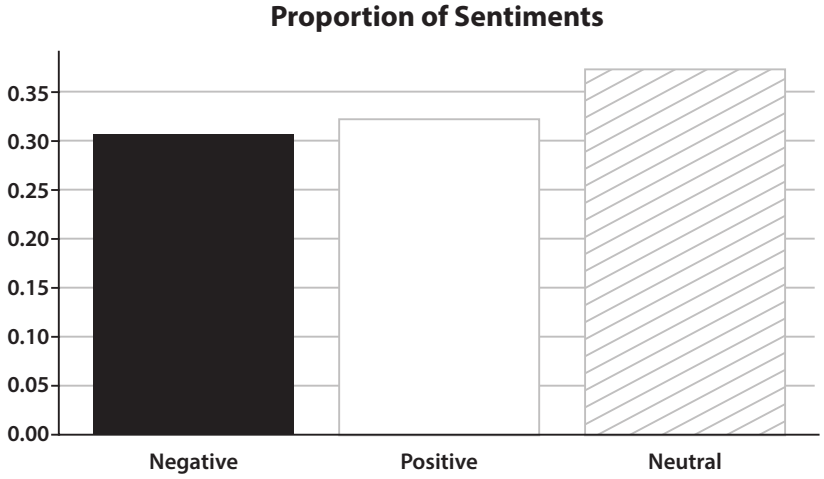


FIGURE 6.2 Proportion of negative, positive, and neutral sentiment across the entire dataset.

sentiment constitutes the smallest proportion, challenging expectations given the context and mission of the hearings. However, a deeper exploration of sentiment reveals intriguing patterns across different speech types and topics. The prevalence of neutral sentiment prompts speculation on the hearings' overall tone. One could hypothesize that while addressing a critical and contentious event, the hearings adopt impartial language to maintain objectivity, reflecting a strategic choice by committee members to navigate the polarized political landscape. Alternatively, it might indicate an effort to present the hearings as a fact-finding mission, emphasizing the pursuit of truth over emotive rhetoric.

Focusing on evidence from the hearings, Figure 6.3 shows a predominantly positive sentiment. This positivity could be attributed to the nature of the evidence, often comprising phone calls between President Trump and his inner circle justifying their actions and portraying their supporters positively. Noteworthy terms in evidence, as illustrated in Figure 6.4, include words like "need" and "right," reflecting a tone of justification and support. The positive sentiment observed in evidence could be strategically employed to present a cohesive narrative from the perspective of those involved, aiming to justify their actions and decisions. It is likely a strategic choice to provide evidence that frames the actors as seeing their actions as okay and showing the committee in a favorable light to highlight why action was needed, casting a positive light on their inquiries. This still raises questions about the rhetorical strategies employed during

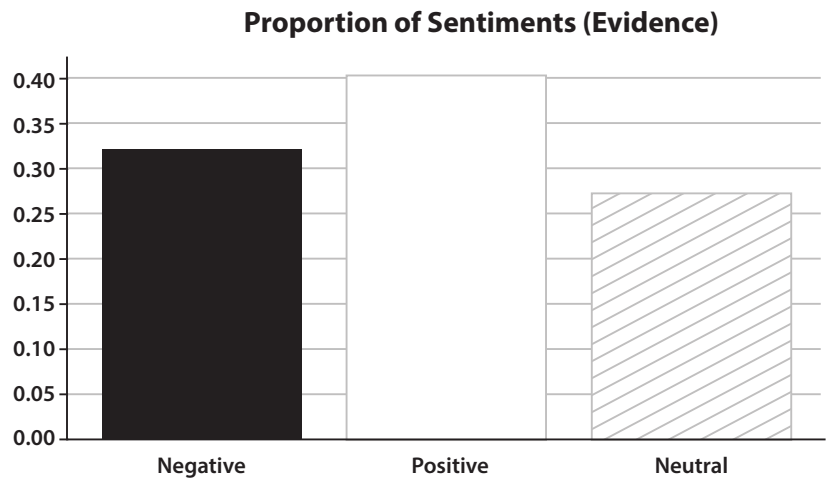


FIGURE 6.3 Proportion of negative, positive, and neutral sentiment across the observations that were evidence.

the hearings and how the presentation of evidence can influence the overall tone of the proceedings.

In contrast, as depicted in Figure 6.5, speeches exhibit a more neutral and slightly negative sentiment. Prepared remarks adopting a legalistic tone may contribute to this negativity, as speeches are likely to emphasize the severity of the

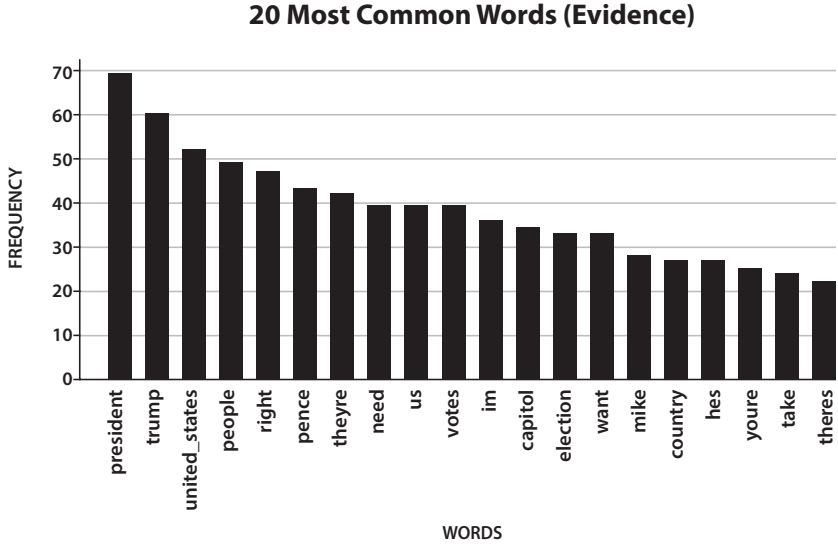


FIGURE 6.4 Most frequent words across the observations that were evidence.

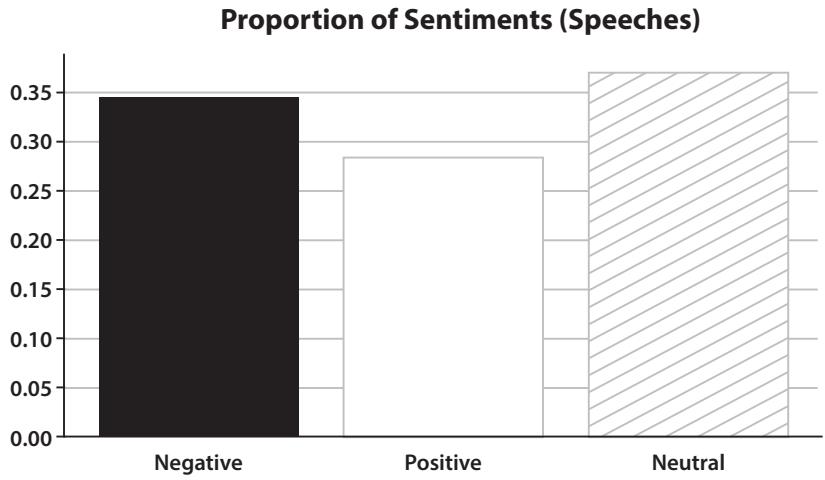


FIGURE 6.5 Proportion of negative, positive, and neutral sentiment across the observations that were speeches.

issue and the reasons for the hearings. Committee members may have opted for neutrality to avoid accusations of partisanship in a politically charged environment. The most common words in speeches, shown in Figure 6.6, highlight a focus on attributing blame, featuring terms like "trump," "president," and "election."

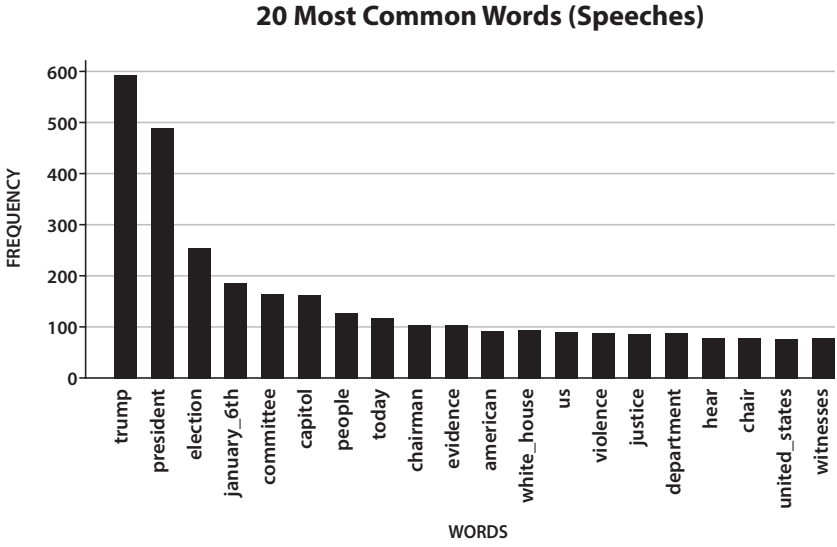


FIGURE 6.6 Most frequent words across the observations that were speeches.

Legalistic language often employed in prepared remarks tends to lean toward formality and objectivity, which may contribute to a more negative sentiment. Alternatively, the slight negativity could reflect the challenging task of framing the hearings as a bipartisan effort to uncover the truth, balancing the need for a thorough investigation with the political realities of a divided audience.

Testimonies, illustrated in Figure 6.7, strike a predominantly neutral tone, with a slight inclination toward positivity. The legal setting and the presence of lawyers contribute to a more measured and consoling tone. Common words in testimonies, as shown in Figure 6.8, revolve around blame attribution ("President," "Trump") and broader consequences ("Capitol," "People," "White House"). This could be a strategic response to the gravity of the January 6 events and the need to address the public's concerns. Testimonies, a more formal and structured aspect of the hearings, likely aim to project a sense of authority, reliability, and empathy. The neutrality in tone may be a deliberate effort to avoid inflaming emotions or being perceived as biased, especially considering the sensitive nature of the events under scrutiny. The slight positivity could reflect the committee's acknowledgment and appreciation for those willing to testify, potentially aimed at fostering cooperation and maintaining a constructive atmosphere during the hearings. It may also serve as a subtle reassurance to the public that the proceedings are conducted with a commitment to fairness and justice.

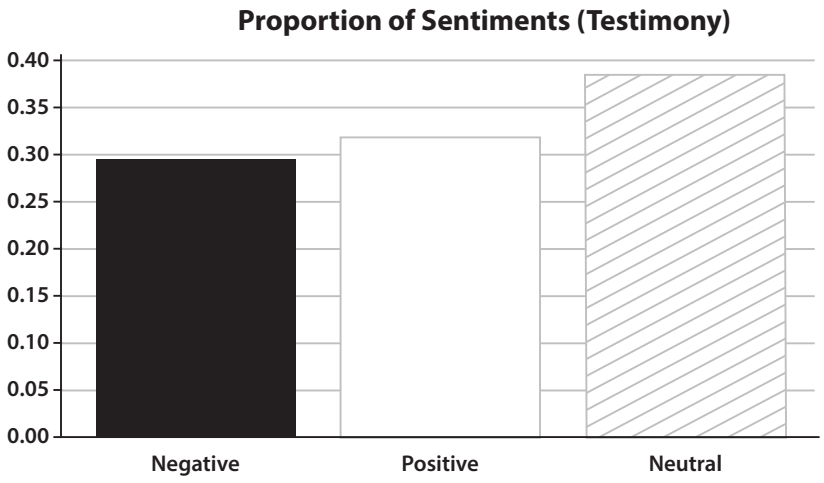


FIGURE 6.7 Proportion of negative, positive, and neutral sentiment across the observations that were testimony.

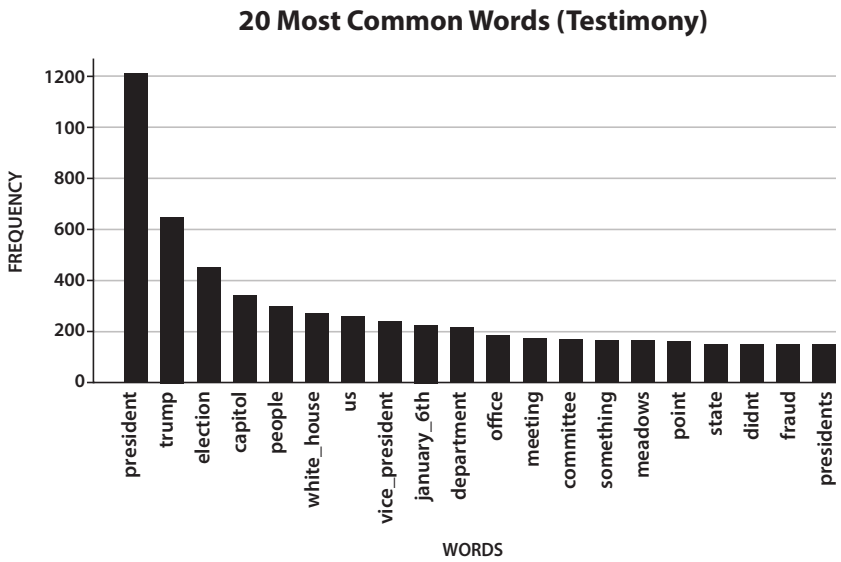


FIGURE 6.8 *Most frequent words across the observations that were testimony.*

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the January 6 hearings reveals a complex interplay between words, topics, and sentiments, which is indicative of the framing literature and understanding the construction of political narratives (Matthes, 2012). The most frequently used words, such as "President," "Trump," "Election," "Capitol," and "People," underscore the central focus on blaming President Trump and discussing the consequences of the January 6 events. The results of this study shed light on the nuanced dynamics of sentiment, topics, and speech types within the January 6 hearings, offering valuable insights into how politicians frame and discuss false information, thereby potentially influencing public opinion via agenda-setting (Walgrave et al., 2018). The initial impression of more positive sentiment is nuanced upon closer examination, revealing an overarching tendency toward neutrality, potentially influenced by the formal and legal tone set by the hearings. This observation prompts questions about the potential consequences of this neutrality, such as signaling to the public that false information may not be as significant a problem as anticipated (Friedman, 2012).

There is also the possibility that the tone of the hearings caused the general public to lose interest. Leading up to the hearings, there was a lot of talk about

what would happen in the hearings. However, there was limited reporting following them. The story that gained the most media traction was the video of Nancy Pelosi and others hiding in the Capitol, as it was more sensationalist. If the committee's goal is to get people to pay attention and realize the problems with false information, is it a disservice to not use a more salacious negative tone when discussing it?

Overall, the tone is neutral with a predominant focus on the attribution of blame and a secondary focus on the impact. But for the impact on people, the sentiment is positive, as if the committee members are trying to console them. By subgroup, the evidence is much more positive, as those involved in the January 6 attack try to preemptively justify their actions.

This research serves as a starting point to provide insights into how politicians frame and discuss false information. Future research could use video analysis to capture more subtle differences in how legislators talk about false information—for example, capturing facial expressions or body language. It would also be useful to compare the framing of this hearing to other hearings and political events, particularly since that would provide more variety in partisanship. It would also be interesting to compare to see how the discourse has changed over time or context.

REFERENCES

Acemoglu, D., Ozdaglar, A., & Siderius, J. (2021). *A model of online misinformation* (Working paper 28884). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w28884

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Bennett, W. L., & Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European Journal of Communication*, *33*(2), 122–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323118760317

Berinsky, A. J. (2017). Measuring public opinion with surveys. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *20*(1), 309–329. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-101513-113724

Dehghani, M., Johnson, K. M., Garten, J., Boghrati, R., Hoover, J., Balasubramanian, V., Singh, A., Shankar, Y., Pulickal, L., Rajkumar, A., & Parmar, N. J. (2017). TACIT:

An open-source text analysis, crawling, and interpretation tool. *Behavior Research Methods*, *49*(2), 538–547. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-016-0722-4

Diamond, L. J., & Plattner, M. F. (Eds.). (2012). *Liberation technology: Social media and the struggle for democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Diesner, J. (2015). Small decisions with big impact on data analytics. *Big Data & Society*, *2*(2), 205395171561718. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715617185

Edelman, M. (2001). *The politics of misinformation*. Cambridge University Press.

Effron, D. A., & Raj, M. (2020). Misinformation and morality: Encountering fake-news headlines makes them seem less unethical to publish and share. *Psychological Science*, *31*(1), 75–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619887896

Epstein, Z., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. (2020). Will the crowd game the algorithm? Using layperson judgments to combat misinformation on social media by downranking distrusted sources. In *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1–11). Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376232

Flynn, D. J., & Krupnikov, Y. (2019). Misinformation and the justification of socially undesirable preferences. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *6*(1), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2018.12

Friedman, J. (2012). Beyond cues and political elites: The forgotten Zaller. *Critical Review*, *24*(4), 417–461. https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2012.807639

Gao, S., Ling, S., & Liu, W. (2018). The role of social media in promoting information disclosure on environmental incidents: An evolutionary game theory perspective. *Sustainability*, *10*(12), 4372. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10124372

Green, J., Edgerton, J., Naftel, D., Shoub, K., & Cranmer, S. J. (2020). Elusive consensus: Polarization in elite communication on the COVID-19 pandemic. *Science Advances*, *6*(28), eabc2717. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abc2717

Greussing, E., & Boomgaarden, H. G. (2017). Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *43*(11), 1749–1774. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1282813

Holbert, R. L., Tschida, D. A., Dixon, M., Cherry, K., Steuber, K., & Airne, D. (2005). *The West Wing* and depictions of the American presidency: Expanding the domains of framing in political communication. *Communication Quarterly*, *53*(4), 505–522. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370500102228

Laver, M., Benoit, K., & Garry, J. (2003). Extracting policy positions from political texts using words as data. *American Political Science Review*, *97*(2), 311–331. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000698

Marchetti, G. (2020). The role of algorithms in the crisis of democracy. *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, *6*(3), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajms.6-3-2

Marciniak, D. (2016). Computational text analysis: Thoughts on the contingencies of an evolving method. *Big Data & Society*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951716670190

Matthes, J. (2012). Framing politics: An integrative approach. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *56*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211426324

Mosleh, M., & Rand, D. G. (2022). Measuring exposure to misinformation from political elites on Twitter. *Nature Communications*, *13*, Article 7144. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-34769-6

Nelimarkka, M., Laaksonen, S.-M., & Semaan, B. (2018). Social media is polarized, social media is polarized: Towards a new design agenda for mitigating polarization. *Proceedings of the 2018 Designing Interactive Systems Conference*, 957–970. https://doi.org/10.1145/3196709.3196764

Ng, L. H. X., Cruickshank, I. J., & Carley, K. M. (2022). Cross-platform information spread during the January 6th capitol riots. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, *12*, Article 133. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-022-00937-1

Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, *32*, 303–330. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2

Osmundsen, M., Bor, A., Vahlstrup, P. B., Bechmann, A., & Petersen, M. B. (2021). Partisan polarization is the primary psychological motivation behind political fake news sharing on Twitter. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(3), 999–1015. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000290

Persily, N. (2017). The 2016 U.S. election: Can democracy survive the internet? *Journal of Democracy*, *28*(2), 63–76. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025

Rackaway, C. (2023). "Fake news" in a mobile world. In C. Rackaway (Ed.), *Communicating politics online: Disruption and democracy* (pp. 45–56). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24056-0_4

Roman, N., Beasley, B. A., & Parmelee, J. H. (2022). From fiction to reality: Presidential framing in the Ukrainian comedy *Servant of the People*. *European Journal of Communication*, *37*(1), 48–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211012172

Sunstein, C. R. (2018). *#Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media*. Princeton University Press.

Talwar, S., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., Zafar, N., & Alrasheedy, M. (2019). Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *51*, 72–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.026

Temming, M. (2018, July 26). People are bad at spotting fake news. Can computer programs do better? *ScienceNews*. https://www.sciencenews.org/article/can-computer-programs-flag-fake-news

Timberg, C., Dwoskin, E., & Albergotti, R. (2021, October 22). Inside Facebook, Jan. 6 violence fueled anger, regret over missed warning signs. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/10/22/jan-6-capitol-riot-facebook/

Tucker, J. A. (2023). Computational social science for policy and quality of democracy: Public opinion, hate speech, misinformation, and foreign influence campaigns. In E. Bertoni, M. Fontana, L. Gabrielli, S. Signorelli, & M. Vespe (Eds.), *Handbook of computational social science for policy* (pp. 381–403). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16624-2_20

Tucker, J. A., Barberá, P., Guess, A. M., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018, March 18). *Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature.* Available at SSRN: https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139

Walgrave, S., Sevenans, J., Van Camp, K., & Loewen, P. (2018). What draws politicians' attention? An experimental study of issue framing and its effect on individual political elites. *Political Behavior*, *40*(3), 547–569. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9413-9

Wang, F., & Wu, Y. (2013). Exploiting hierarchical discourse structure for review sentiment analysis. In *2013 International Conference on Asian Language Processing* (pp. 121–124). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/IALP.2013.42

Weeks, B. E., & Garrett, R. K. (2014). Electoral consequences of political rumors: Motivated reasoning, candidate rumors, and vote choice during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *26*(4), 401–422. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edu005

Weeks, B. E., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2021). What's next? Six observations for the future of political misinformation research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *65*(2), 277–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878236

Yang, S., & Zhang, H. (2018). Text mining of Twitter data using a latent Dirichlet allocation topic model and sentiment analysis. *International Journal of Computer and Information Engineering*, *12*(7), 525–529.

7

SEX AND POLITICS

Analyzing Political Figures' Response and Public Reaction to Sex Scandals

Katelyn E. Brooks and Amanda E. Lilly

The current American political climate is becoming increasingly polarized. Political polarization started increasing in the 1970s and saw a dramatic acceleration from the 2000s onward (Grumbach, 2018). Political polarization negatively affects democracy and public civility by eroding trust in the government, lowering voter turnout and public interest in politics, and decreasing the public's ability to have civil political debate (Layman et al., 2006). A major component in the polarization of politics is the occurrence and publicization of scandals (von Sikorski et al., 2019). Sex scandals are particularly relevant to this impact because sex tends to be a shameful topic in American society (Clark, 2017) and these scandals potentially lead to deeper levels of mistrust and disappointment. Americans who see politicians embroiled in sex scandals can lose faith in the American democratic process because of the resulting disgrace of these important public figures. A more detailed understanding of how politicians handle these crises could help counteract some of the negative effects of the publicization of these scandals. Understanding why and how politicians handle these crises could help to restore faith in them and the government, whereas merely seeing the sensationalized scandal through the media could spark breakdowns in trust and political interest along with potentially furthering political polarization.

Crisis communication and scholarship related to understanding how public figures and entities handle issues is a growing field that is engaging in multiple

different contexts. Crisis communication is often rooted in public relations, but its theories have since been applied to political contexts. Some research has already explored how politicians handle crises (e.g., Eriksson & McConnell, 2011; García, 2011; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006), but more research could focus on how sex scandals in the political arena are handled since sex scandals are occurring more frequently due to the increased scrutiny of politicians (Rosentiel, 2011). Scholars who examine political crisis communication can use the findings from work that focuses on sex scandals both theoretically and practically. They can test the parameters of existing crisis communication theories by employing them in a new context such as political sex scandals. Finding that existing theories are relevant to new contexts can also help to provide more credibility and validation to the theories. Further, finding useful real-world applications of theories can help scholars craft interventions and guidelines that can be employed when crises occur. These employed strategies in the context of political sex scandals can help to reduce the negative effects seen when a political scandal occurs. Reducing these negative effects is vital to creating a less polarized political climate, which would improve American democracy.

The current project is designed to help both the public and scholars have a better understanding of how politicians handle sex scandals and how the public reacts to such scandals. An examination of the strategies that have been used by politicians responding to sex scandals provides an understanding of how these scandals are currently being addressed. However, simply understanding how sex scandals are addressed is just one piece of the puzzle and possibly a less important piece. Knowing how constituents view and feel about a politician after their handling of a sex scandal is essential in understanding whether the strategy the politician employed was effective. Using real-world data from the C-SPAN Video Library allows the current project to examine both sides of this phenomenon. Videos of politicians directly addressing their embroilment in sex scandals were first examined using situational crisis communication theory to understand the strategies utilized. To understand how effective these strategies were, open phones segments were then viewed to understand how people viewed the politician after the addressment of their sex scandal. The findings indicate the importance of correctly addressing a sex scandal and how culture climate impacts these responses. The next section will highlight situational crisis communication theory and how this theory provided background for the current project.

SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is a prominent theory of crisis communication. It posits that a crisis response is most effective when it accounts for organizational and crisis variables. SCCT creates a conceptual bridge connecting Benoit's image repair theory and attribution theory (Coombs, 2007). Image repair theory posits that an individual's or organization's image or reputation is a critical strategic tool and protecting that image is priority (Benoit, 2015). SCCT extends and categorizes Benoit's image repair strategies. There are 10 individual tactics that are organized into three primary response strategies and one secondary response strategy (see Table 7.1). SCCT argues that response strategies are most effective when they are paired with their appropriate crisis types: victim, accidental, and preventable (Coombs, 2007). Crisis types are categorized by the level of perceived responsibility attributed to the individual or organization undergoing the crisis. Victim crises (e.g., natural disasters) have the least amount of perceived responsibility, whereas preventable crises have the greatest amount of perceived responsibility. When faced with rumors, though, SCCT recommends denying when possible (Coombs, 2007).

Although SCCT is most frequently applied to corporate and organizational contexts, it has been used to analyze political and sex scandals. Spaulding (2018) used SCCT to analyze same-sex sex scandals across four high-profile Evangelical pastors. He found that the pastors generally adhered to SCCT's recommended strategies; however, their success depended less on their response strategy and more on marital status and job retention instead. SCCT is further applicable to sex scandals in a political context. Boyle et al. (2023) applied SCCT to Joe Biden's and Donald Trump's presidential campaigns in which they faced sexual misconduct allegations. Interestingly, they found that Biden was successful utilizing a strategy not recommended by SCCT (Boyle et al., 2023). Whereas SCCT recommends a denial strategy for scandals based on presumed rumors, Biden's campaign shifted to a rebuild approach, which led to electoral success, even if not as much reputational repair. Even though SCCT was not designed for political crises (Coombs et al., 2021), its recommended strategies may prove effective in political and sex scandals. To investigate its applicability further, we propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What SCCT image repair strategies do political figures use when responding to a sex scandal in which they are implicated?

TABLE 7.1 *SCCT Response Strategies*

Response strategy	Tactic	Definition
Primary strategies		
Deny	Attack the accuser	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization
	Denial	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis
	Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis
Diminish	Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to cause harm and/or claiming inability to control events that triggered the crisis
	Justification	Crisis manager minimizes perceived damage caused by the crisis
Repair/rebuild	Apology	Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness
	Compensation	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims
Secondary strategy		
Bolstering	Ingratiation	Crisis manager praises stakeholders
	Reminder	Crisis manager tells stakeholders about the past good works of the organization
	Victimage	Crisis manager reminds stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too

Note: Adapted from Coombs (2007).

RQ2: Are there partisan or longitudinal differences in SCCT image repair strategies used by political figures when responding to a sex scandal in which they are implicated?

In addition to providing guidance about how to respond to crises, SCCT connects crises to potential outcomes. SCCT posits that the more reputational damage created by a crisis, the less support an organization or individual will receive from stakeholders (Coombs, 2007). In the context of politics, this could result in stakeholders intending to not vote for the political figure in the next election,

calling for an impeachment or removal, or other similar behavioral intentions. SCCT has often accurately predicted crisis response outcomes in organizational settings (e.g., Sisco, 2012); however, political sexual misconduct scandal outcomes may not be as consistently predicted. Although Boyle et al. (2023) consider Biden's and Trump's respective elections as indicators of their success, they also note that elections are not a perfect measure of success in responding to a political sex scandal because other factors, like affective polarization, could enhance or inhibit the political figure's reputation repair. To understand the applicability of SCCT for political sex scandals, we propose the following research questions:

RQ3: How do C-SPAN open phones participants react to political figures' sex scandals?

RQ4: Are there partisan, gendered, or longitudinal differences in how C-SPAN participants react to political figures' sex scandals?

METHODS

This mixed-method project employs both a quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis to investigate how high-profile political figures responded to a sex scandal in which they were involved and how C-SPAN open phones viewers reacted. A total of 11 video responses from political figures were used for a quantitative content analysis. Although a relatively small sample size, these videos gave good indication of how a variety of political figures respond to sex scandals and included tactics from SCCT. The criterion for inclusion in the sample was that the video must be the political figure directly addressing the sex scandal. While this did limit the sample size, it was vital to ensure that the videos were the direct response to a sex scandal so that the theory could be applied holistically. We also wanted to ensure that as many videos as possible included open phones segments for the next portion of the study.

To code the political figures' response to sex scandals, three independent coders consisting of the two authors of this manuscript and a graduate research assistant worked to identify tactics from SCCT that were used to handle personal and professional fallout from these scandals. Three coding meetings were held. The first revolved around familiarizing each coder with the project, SCCT, and the coding frame. After this meeting, each of the three coders analyzed and coded training videos of celebrities and other politicians responding to sex scandals

not seen on C-SPAN. The second meeting held discussion to answer any questions surrounding SCCT tactics and to ensure each coder was capable of accurately coding the final data. Once agreement was reached, each of the coders then coded the C-SPAN politician response videos. A final meeting was held to discuss any major discrepancies, but there were not many. See Table 7.2 for the descriptions and Krippendorf's alphas of each code.

TABLE 7.2 *Content Analysis Codebook and Reported Intercoder Reliability Results*

Code	Description	Krippendorf's alpha
Apology	Political figure takes full responsibility for the allegations and asks for forgiveness	1.000
Attack	Political figure attacks the accuser(s) by verbally confronting or disparaging the person or people making allegations	0.746
Compensation	Political figure offers money or other gifts to the victim(s)	N/A
Deny	Political figure explicitly denies the allegations	1.000
Excuse	Political figure minimizes responsibility by denying intent to harm the victim(s) and/or claiming an inability to control events surrounding the allegation	0.603
Ingratiation	Political figure praises their supporters	0.763
Justification	Political figure minimizes perceived damage caused by the allegation	0.771
Party	Political figure's party affiliation as either a Democrat, Republican, or other	1.000
Reminder	Political figure highlights their past good works that are specific actions, not simply their policy positions and/or vote history	0.754
Scapegoat	Political figure blames someone else for the allegations	0.508
Time	Year range in which the scandal response occurred (1980–1995, 1996–2011, 2012–2027)	1.000
Victim	Political figure claims that they are a victim of the allegations	0.759

Note: Krippendorf's alphas were calculated using Freelon's (2013) ReCal OIR (reliability calculator for ordinal, interval, and ratio data).

For the inductive thematic analysis of the C-SPAN open phones segment reactions, the C-SPAN Video Library was combed for any video with an open phones segment that included a caller's response to a politician's sex scandal. A total of 447 videos of unique callers were collected reacting to sex scandals of 11 political figures, 9 of which had scandal responses included in the previous content analysis. From these 447 videos, 100 were sampled for coding. The choice for inductive thematic analysis was made because Braun and Clarke's (2006) method allows for coders to translate and extricate implicit themes from a larger dataset while providing a malleable yet consistent coding process. The two authors acted as the coders for the inductive thematic analysis and had a total of four meetings. The first meeting was to familiarize themselves with the data and talk through any potential problems or limitations that may occur during the coding process. After this meeting the coders worked through 20% of the data. The codes for the first 20% of the data were then discussed in meeting two to develop a coding frame. The coders then coded another 20% of the data. During the third meeting the coders discussed any issues with the coding frame and worked to further refine the themes and their definitions. After completing the coding frame refinement, the coders then completed coding the remaining 60% of the data. A final meeting was held to discuss the remaining codes and work through any disparities. During this final coding meeting each coder agreed that saturation had been reached around video 76, but they decided to finish coding all 100 videos for more robustness in the analysis. Using two coders helps to provide project validity through investigator triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Extensive note keeping also occurred during meetings and through each coder's coding process to produce an audit trail.

FINDINGS

Political Figures' Responses

Our first research question asked what SCCT strategies political figures use when responding to sex scandals. Table 7.3 summarizes the frequency of strategies, including by partisanship and over time. The majority (66.7%) of responses utilized multiple SCCT strategies, and responses utilized an average of 4.27 strategies. Other than compensation, which was not used at all, justification was the least used strategy (identified in only 2 responses). The most frequently used

strategies were attacking the accusers and claiming victimhood, both of which were identified in 7 responses. Political figures also frequently used apology and deny strategies; these strategies were observed in 6 responses each. We conducted correlation analyses to determine whether specific strategies were related and likely to appear together. Although most correlations were not statistically significant, some were. Of note, attack was significantly correlated with scapegoat ($r = 0.690$, $p = 0.019$) and victimhood ($r = 0.607$, $p = 0.048$), and ingratiation was significantly correlated with excuse ($r = 0.671$, $p = 0.024$) and reminder ($r = 0.833$, $p = 0.001$). These significant correlations indicate that these strategies are often co-present within a response. For example, political figures who attack accusers are likely to also blame someone else or claim that they are a victim. Other strategies that were not significantly correlated may be due to either appearing with a greater variety of strategies or the lack of statistical power from our small sample size. For example, Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas used 8 strategies, including both denial and apologizing for potential misunderstandings that were unintended but contributed to Anita Hill's allegations.

Most political figures' responses are consistent with SCCT recommendations. When addressing rumors, SCCT recommends a denial or diminish approach. Roy Moore's (R-AL) response, for example, followed SCCT recommendations in part by denying the allegations. We found that 6 of the 11 responses denied allegations, 5 of which were by Republican political figures. Some of these sex scandals, though, required a rebuild approach. For example, Sen. Al Franken's

TABLE 7.3 *Code Frequencies*

Code	Total frequency	Partisan frequency Republican, Democrat	Longitudinal frequency 1980–1995, 1996–2011, 2012–present
Apology	6	1, 5	1, 2, 3
Attack	7	4, 3	1, 2, 4
Deny	6	5, 1	1, 2, 3
Excuse	4	1, 3	2, 0, 2
Ingratiation	5	2, 3	2, 0, 3
Justification	2	0, 2	0, 0, 2
Reminder	5	3, 2	2, 0, 3
Scapegoat	5	3, 2	1, 1, 3
Victim	7	3, 4	1, 2, 3

(D-MN) and Rep. Anthony Weiner's (D-NY) responses both only utilized apologies, which fall under rebuild. Notably, these sex scandals were not as clearly based on rumors; instead, they were accompanied by photographic evidence. Because of the images associated with these scandals, these political figures likely faced a higher level of perceived responsibility. SCCT posits that the greater the responsibility, the more rebuild approaches should be used rather than denial (Boyle et al., 2023). Few political figures used mismatched strategies. For example, Sen. Gary Hart's (D-CO) response contradicted SCCT recommendations by neither denying the allegations nor apologizing; instead, he minimized his responsibility (excuse strategy), appealed to his supporters (reminder and ingratiation strategies), and claimed victimhood.

Our second research question asked whether there were partisan or longitudinal differences in political figures' responses to sex scandals. Ultimately, there were no statistically significant differences either between parties or across time. We suspect that nonsignificant differences are primarily caused by the small sample size of responses; however, there are interesting qualitative differences worth discussing further. The largest partisan difference was observed for apology and deny strategies; both strategies were observed 6 times in the dataset. Apologies were used by 5 Democratic figures and 1 Republican figure, and vice versa, denials were used by 5 Republican figures and 1 Democratic figure ($\chi^2 = 2.667$, $p = 0.1025$). Over time, apologies and denials became more frequently used in political figures' responses ($\chi^2 = 1.000$, $p = 0.0.6065$), along with attacking accusers ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = 0.3679$). These differences may be driven by differing crisis details or differing partisan attitudes in how to manage sex scandals. Although all of these political figures were responding to crises involving sexual misconduct, the allegations varied widely in the evidence, recency, and severity of misconduct. Additionally, it is worth noting that the Democratic party has engaged in issue ownership to position itself as a party that is more responsive to issues of sexual misconduct (Holman & Kalmoe, 2024).

C-SPAN Open Phones Participants' Reactions

In addition to analyzing political figures' responses to their sex scandals, we also collected and analyzed public reactions to the sex scandal and responses using C-SPAN open phones segments. SCCT theorizes that crisis responses are most effective when the strategies and tactics used are appropriate for the crisis type (Coombs, 2007); thus, evaluating public reaction can help researchers

understand SCCT's applicability to political sex scandals. We collected a total of 447 videos of unique callers responding to 11 different political sex scandals. Of these 447 videos, we randomly sampled and thematically analyzed 100 videos. First, we identified how callers evaluated the accusers. Next, we identified five themes across the 100 scandal reactions: (1) perceptions of hypocrisy, (2) political weaponization, (3) bigger picture, (4) personal and communal experiences, and (5) (un)shifting societal norms (see Table 7.4) Lastly, we observed longitudinal, partisan, and gendered differences among reactions.

Many callers either had a firm opinion on the allegations' legitimacy or an unclear opinion. We identified four types of evaluations callers articulated: believes, doubts, mixed, and unclear. Twenty-three callers explicitly believed the accusers' allegations as true; 28 callers doubted the accusers' allegations. Callers who believed accusers often coupled their belief with a disgust of the allegations, both for the accused figure and societal norms like rape culture and misogyny; callers' doubts were often rooted in the timing of allegations or perceived lack of evidence. Many (35) callers' evaluations of accusers were unclear, meaning that they did not provide a sufficiently clear evaluation of the allegations or did not substantively address the allegations in their call. Callers who did not substantively address the allegations often focused on other scandals in comparison; some of these calls were subsequently disconnected by the host. The remaining 14 callers

TABLE 7.4 *C-SPAN Open Phones Participant Reaction Themes*

Theme	Description
Perceptions of hypocrisy	Callers alleged that members of the opposite party or media were behaving hypocritically or with bias
Political weaponization	Callers alleged or implied that the sex scandal was being used strategically against a political figure or party
Bigger picture	Callers claimed or implied that coverage of the sex scandal was obscuring discussion of more important issues
Personal and communal experiences	Callers related the allegations to situations they themselves had experienced or those experienced by their family members, friends, or local community
(Un)shifting societal norms	Callers articulated that the alleged sexual misconduct was previously or remains normalized in American culture and society

provided mixed evaluations. There were two types of mixed evaluations in which the caller believed the accuser's story as legitimate but either (1) believed the accused figure was innocent or (2) continued to view the accused figure positively. We found that those with firm opinions often demonstrated party allegiance, which is discussed in further detail later in this section.

When reacting to the sampled political sex scandals, C-SPAN open phones callers articulated perceptions of hypocrisy surrounding political sex scandals. Callers' perceptions of hypocrisy alleged that members of the opposite party or media were behaving hypocritically or with bias in how they addressed or discussed sex scandals. When reacting to sex scandals since 2016, multiple callers to the Democratic phone line made comparisons to allegations against President Trump. For example, a Democrat line caller responding to 2020 allegations against President Biden explicitly labeled Republicans as hypocrites for not demanding Trump address his allegations as they demanded of Biden. A moderate line caller responding to President Clinton's scandal voiced concerns that media coverage about the scandal was "misleading" against Clinton. On the flip side, a Democrat line caller claimed that the "elite liberal media" protected former New York governor Andrew Cuomo (D), and another caller believed news media overly focused on Rep. Matt Gaetz's (R-FL) scandal rather than Gov. Cuomo's because of their partisan affiliations. These perceptions of hypocrisy often served to lessen the impact of the accused's alleged wrongdoings or the impact of other political figures' alleged wrongdoings by comparison.

C-SPAN open phones callers labeled political sex scandals as political weapons. Political weaponization refers to the callers alleging or implying that the sex scandal is being used strategically against a political figure or party. For example, one caller believed that "somebody out there [is] stirring the pot" against Roy Moore's (R-AL) Senate campaign. Another common descriptor of different sex scandals that callers used was a "witch hunt" of the political figures. Although little attention has been devoted to how the label "witch hunt" has been applied to political and sex scandals, it ultimately serves to undermine any investigations into the scandal as being politically or socially motivated and baseless akin to historic witch trials. A common way that political weaponization was implied was callers' questioning of the allegations' timing or motivations. A common question by callers across multiple scandals was "Why now?" or "Why not sooner?" in the accused's career or campaign. A few callers further questioned accusers' motivations by suggesting they were paid to publicize the allegations, such as one caller saying that Monica Lewinsky was "trying to make a fast buck." By labeling

sex scandals as political weapons, callers often defended and supported political figures who denied their alleged wrongdoing, even if they believed there was at least some legitimacy to the allegations.

When discussing a sex scandal, C-SPAN open phones callers seemed to prioritize other issues or the "bigger picture." As a theme, the bigger picture refers to callers claiming that coverage of the sex scandal obscures discussion of more important issues. One Democrat line caller claimed that coverage of Rep. Weiner's (D-NY) scandal got in the way of "bigger issues of the day" such as employment rates and the debt ceiling. There are two potential implications for callers focusing on a bigger picture. First is that some members of the public may not perceive political sex scandals worthy of being considered scandals. For a situation to rise to the level of a crisis of scandal, some kind of violation must be perceived (Coombs, 2007; Coombs et al., 2021). Therefore, it is possible that sex scandals may be perceived as a violation less frequently and by fewer people, especially in relation to the perceived prevalence of sex scandals. Second is that attempts to shift the public discussion away from the sex scandal may provide support to the political figure. However, we cannot conclude which of these potential implications is most accurate or representative of public reactions to political sex scandals based on this study.

When reacting to sex scandals, C-SPAN open phones callers shared their personal and communal experiences in relation to the scandal. In this theme, callers related the allegations to situations they themselves had experienced or those experienced by their family members, friends, or local community. Some of these experiences were used to support the presumed legitimacy of the allegations. For example, an Independent line caller shared her experience with not sharing details of being sexually assaulted for approximately a decade to empathize with Dr. Christine Blasey Ford during Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing. However, some of these experiences were also used to challenge the allegation's legitimacy. When reacting to allegations of sexual harassment against 2012 Republican primary presidential candidate Herman Cain, one Republican line caller referenced previous sexual harassment allegations made against his father to support his claim that sexual harassment in the workplace "happens all the time for nothing."

These divergent responses demonstrate the varying views and experiences with sexual harassment within the American public and included implicit hints of gender differences in sexual scripts, norms, and understanding about what appropriate sexual behavior is. Women are more likely to report being victims

of sexual harassment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022), and a majority of sexual abuse offenders are men (United States Sentencing Commission, 2018). The genders and perspectives of the callers in these open phones segment examples echo this stark reality of American life. Political sex scandals and their fallout can either be used to further hegemonic gender norms or they can be used to instill equitable societal change. SCCT recommends denying or diminishing accusations. Indeed, politicians engaging in these behaviors may be able to minimize image threats, but by using these strategies they contribute to issues around sexual harassment. More work needs to be done to adapt SCCT or create a new crisis strategy theory that will work to change sex norms and behaviors so that sexual abuse is lessened.

Lastly, C-SPAN open phones callers situated sex scandals within broader societal norms surrounding sex. The (un)shifting societal norms referenced by callers articulated that the alleged behaviors of the sex scandal were or remain normalized in American culture and society, though such norms may need to change. Referencing social norms surrounding sex, sexual harassment, and sexual assault were consistent across time. When reacting to allegations against Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas, one caller shared her experience with sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace throughout her career. She explained that making allegations of sexual harassment in her day, given that she was 71 years old, would have resulted in being fired immediately without further justification and that "it's not terribly different today; it is somewhat different, but not terribly different." Some callers believed that the shifts in social norms have caused people to be overly sensitive. According to a Democrat line caller reacting to allegations against former senator Al Franken (D-MN): "I don't think he's done anything wrong. I'm 79 years old, and when I was young, what they're reporting now would be just making a pass at a girl." The variation in understanding what constitutes sexual harassment exhibits that what is deemed as appropriate behavior is changing, but may be slow to be adopted by all Americans. The slow adaption of new norms around what is appropriate might be especially salient for those who are older and experienced sexual harassment as a norm. Future research can explore whether there are differences between different age groups around what is and is not considered sexual harassment.

More recent C-SPAN open phones callers were more concerned about broader post-scandal impacts than their earlier counterparts. For example, one caller reacting to Justice Kavanaugh's hearing noted his concerns about the potential impacts of the courts and sex scandals becoming increasingly politicized as well as

court packing and ideological balance. Similarly, another caller was concerned about the impacts, consequences, and legitimacy of New York state politics when reacting to former Gov. Cuomo's resignation following his sex scandal. One reason callers may be more concerned about post-scandal impacts is a shift from articulating more episodic reactions to articulating more thematic reactions. Episodic reactions are those that focus on the scandal as a single event or episode, whereas thematic reactions are those that touch on broader themes and connections between events. The data available in this study cannot claim whether there is a growing trend to thematic reactions, but it is worth investigating in future research.

C-SPAN open phones callers often demonstrated party allegiance in their reactions to political sex scandals. When callers did or could disclose their partisan affiliation, they were more likely than not to express support for in-party political figures and condemn out-of-party political figures. Fifty-two callers either explicitly stated their political affiliation or called a line dedicated to either Democratic or Republican callers. Of those 52 callers, 57% expressed support for in-party political figures, which includes 80% of 30 Democratic callers and 87.7% of 7 Republican callers. This reaffirms previous research that has found that individuals often engage in partisan-motivated reasoning when evaluating allegations of sexual misconduct (Klar & McCoy, 2021). Also seen, Democratic callers were slightly more favorable of holding in-party figures accountable for their sex scandals. For example, one Democratic caller believed Rep. Weiner (D-NY) should resign and explicitly disagreed with previous callers who expressed support for him. Meanwhile, a few Republican callers alleged that C-SPAN devoted more attention to one party's scandals than the other. One caller responding to Justice Kavanaugh's hearing raised concerns about C-SPAN's approach to balanced coverage of scandals, wanting C-SPAN to "give the same attention" to a book about Kavanaugh as the scandal hearing. However, in his call he still expressed trust in C-SPAN. Another Republican caller implicitly accused C-SPAN of an anti-Republican bias, alleging that C-SPAN coverage focused exclusively on Rep. Gaetz (R-FL) rather than Gov. Cuomo (D-NY) although both experienced scandals around similar times; the host corrected that allegation by highlighting their earlier coverage of Cuomo's scandal. Although partisan callers are alike in upholding their party's figures, there were two noticeable differences along partisan lines.

Women callers appeared more likely to believe accusers, either fully or partially. We suspect women were more likely to express at least some belief in accusers due to women also being more likely to share relevant direct or indirect

experiences with sexual harassment and sexual assault. Ten callers referenced personal experiences while expressing full or partial belief in accusers; 9 of those callers were women. The majority of these women shared firsthand, direct experience of sexual assault or sexual harassment, whereas the only man shared an indirect experience of accusations placed against his father. Similarly, women were more likely to emphasize the taboo nature of the sex scandals. For example, one woman caller was "disgusted about the fact that [her] children have had access" to coverage about President Clinton's scandal. As previously mentioned, women are more likely to be the victim of sexual abuse (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022), and there is a societal norm that women should act as sexual gatekeepers (Garcia et al., 2012), so these open phones responses are not surprising. However, that women were more likely to stand with accusers demonstrates a gendered problem in American society that can be seen through its political scandals. More work needs to be done to educate the full public on the trends and facts surrounding sex abuse so that fewer Americans experience these traumatic events.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this mixed-method project, we sought to understand how political figures respond to sex scandals and how the public react to political sex scandals using data from the C-SPAN Video Library. First, we conducted a content analysis that identified SCCT response strategies across 11 political figures responding to a sex scandal. As mentioned in the method section, the selection criterion for data was limiting. Only videos where public figures were directly addressing a publicized sex scandal they were involved in were used. Although this limited our sample size, this inclusion criterion was vital to ensure that SCCT could be applied to this specific type of crisis communication and examined in a holistic way. There are more data points available of public figures resigning or indirectly reacting to the consequences of a sex scandal, but this type of data would not have worked well for the current study. In this study, we found that political figures use a range of strategies that somewhat frequently follow SCCT's recommendations. Although not statistically significantly different, Democratic figures apologized more frequently, while Republican figures denied more frequently. Second, we thematically analyzed public reactions to political sex scandals using C-SPAN's open phones segments in which members of the public can call in to

C-SPAN and provide commentary on a topic. In this study, we found that many callers did not provide a clear evaluation of the allegations' legitimacy, and those that did were relatively evenly split in whether they believed or doubted the allegations. We identified five themes across the callers' reactions: (1) perceptions of hypocrisy, (2) political weaponization, (3) bigger picture, (4) personal and communal experiences, and (5) (un)shifting societal norms.

Between these two study methods, there are three key implications for further discussion that may impact how researchers understand and study political sex scandals. First, the quality of political figures' responses may not matter significantly in our currently polarized context. We found that most followed SCCT recommendations by denying allegations when they were presented as rumors or apologizing when available evidence made denying allegations impossible. Regardless of following SCCT, multiple political figures' careers were negatively impacted due to ultimately resigning because of allegations or having unsuccessful electoral campaigns. Further, we found that C-SPAN open phones callers often demonstrated party allegiance when reacting to political sex scandals. This conclusion is further supported by previous research. Boyle et al. (2023) analyzed campaign materials, news coverage, and candidate interview and social media statements of Trump's and Biden's sexual misconduct scandals. They found that political figures can still be successful despite using a mismatched response from what SCCT recommends (Boyle et al., 2023). Importantly, though, they noted that the candidates' electoral success may not be wholly reflective of their scandal response success due to not examining to what extent their reputations recovered or the impact of affective polarization on voting outcomes. Additionally, Spaulding (2018) found that the effectiveness of responding to a sex scandal may rely more on factors other than adhering to SCCT recommendations. Further, Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) highlight that identity can influence how people make sense of a crisis or scandal, such as potential voters' partisan identities impacting their interpretation of political sex scandals. As affective polarization continues to be of critical concern, scholars should further consider its impacts on how politicians respond and the public reacts to political sex scandals.

Second, the public makes sense of and evaluates political sex scandals within the broader political context. Of the five themes identified in open phones segments, three are connected to political events and issues beyond the sex scandal: perceptions of hypocrisy, political weaponization, and bigger picture. Public reactions to political sex scandals through an open forum, like the C-SPAN open

phones segments, is a way for callers and the audience to engage in sensemaking about the sex scandal. Sensemaking is the process in which people collectively process a crisis including "what happened, why it happened, and who was responsible" (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 554). While sensemaking is often studied following major crises and disasters (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010), C-SPAN open phones segments present an opportunity to understand sensemaking as people react to political sex scandals. Even though crises and scandals are generally unexpected and produce ambiguity, they do not exist in a vacuum. People will make sense of crises as they seemingly relate to other crises and events.

Both the public figures' responses and public callers' reactions to political sex scandals highlight gender and sexual norm changes in society. Several callers lamented that behaviors once seen as acceptable flirting are now seen as sexual harassment. For example, a caller commenting on Franken's 2017 scandal and resignation stated, "When I was young, what they're reporting would be just making a pass at a girl." This response and others like it demonstrate that these behaviors have long been a part of the American landscape, but trends are changing and classifying inappropriate behaviors as sexual harassment. Movements like #MeToo have been lauded as helping to hold those who commit sexual harassment responsible (Brown, 2022). This finding demonstrates that there is growth and change occurring in terms of sexual harassment in America and politicians are not escaping this shift, but there are still people who disagree with the change and would like to see these behaviors not classified as sexual harassment. The politician's responses often echoed this kind of sentiment when using a blame or denial strategy. They would minimize their actions by calling them flirting or saying that their actions were misunderstood by the victim. Aggrieved entitlement could explain why callers are disagreeing as some people in society do not want to see a more equitable division between genders and instead want to ensure that the patriarchy continues (Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018). People may be afraid of change or do not want to feel as though they are losing power, and shifts around gender equity could make them uncomfortable.

Although some of the callers in our sample did not agree with these changes, others did not think the punishments received were harsh enough. Several callers mentioned that they did not think merely having to resign or make a public apology was punishment enough for some of the politicians' actions. Callers in this category demonstrate that there is still movement toward recognizing inappropriate sexual behaviors as sexual harassment. More and more Americans are

agreeing with movements like #MeToo and want those who enact sexual harassment to be held responsible (Brown, 2022). These two responses echo the polarization seen in American politics. People are not in agreement in the culture as to what counts as sexual harassment and how it should be handled. More work needs to be done to explore this divide to better understand what is driving it and how to close the gap.

Lastly, there were still gendered norms around sex that were present in the callers' reactions to the sex scandals. In society, women are often seen as the sexual gatekeepers and men the sexual conquerors (Garcia et al., 2012; Reling et al., 2018). This norm was echoed in our findings when some callers praised the sexual assertiveness of some male politicians embroiled in sex scandals while demonizing the female victims. The persuasiveness of hookup culture could be an explanatory mechanism for these reactions because it increases gender divides around sexual freedom (Garcia et al., 2012). Men and women should be allowed to appropriately express their sexuality and neither should be praised for committing sexual harassment or assault. Views like these keep more gender equity from occurring in society because it allows one gender to have sexual freedom while penalizing another for engaging in the same behavior. There needs to be more work done to create more equitable norms around sex for all genders, and political sex scandals highlight that this is not yet being achieved.

As with any research, our mixed-method project has notable limitations that can be revisited and improved upon through future research. Our sample sizes were relatively small, which posed the biggest limitation to our content analysis of political figures' responses by preventing us from identifying any potential statistically significant differences. Additionally, our small sample sizes inherently limit the generalizability of our findings, although we attempt to compensate for this limitation through thick, descriptive analysis. Future research would benefit from identifying more political figures' responses to sex scandals within and beyond the C-SPAN Video Library. The C-SPAN open phones segments provide a unique avenue of examining public reactions to political events such as sex scandals. However, these participants are not a perfect representation of the general public as they may be more politically informed and motivated to participate. Future research should continue to consider and incorporate the C-SPAN open phones callers but may be strengthened when paired with additional methods of gauging public reactions. In conclusion, political sex scandals offer a productive area of future research, especially in connection with the C-SPAN Video Library.

REFERENCES

Benoit, W. L. (2015). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration* (2nd ed.). State University of New York Press.

Boyle, K., Kramer, I., Wilson, C., & Hallows, D. W. (2023). Presidential crisis: An analysis of Biden & Trump's crisis communications strategies in response to allegations of sexual misconduct. *Public Relations Review*, *49*(4), Article 102365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102365

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Brown, A. (2022, September 29). *More than twice as many Americans support than oppose the #MeToo movement. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project.* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/09/29/more-than-twice-as-many-americans-support-than-oppose-the-metoo-movement/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, June 22). *Fast facts: Preventing sexual violence.* Retrieved January 2024 from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html#:~:text=One%20in%204%20women%20and,harassment%20in%20a%20public%20place

Clark, N. (2017). *The etiology and phenomenology of sexual shame: A grounded theory study* (Publication No. 1937467880) [Doctoral dissertation, Seattle Pacific University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10*(3), 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049

Coombs, W. T., Holladay, S. J., & White, K. L. (2021). Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and application in dealing with complex, challenging, and recurring crises. In Y. Jin, B. H. Reber, & G. J. Nowak (Eds.), *Advancing crisis communication effectiveness: Integrating public relations scholarship with practice* (pp. 165–180). Taylor & Francis.

Eriksson, K., & McConnell, A. (2011). Contingency planning for crisis management: Recipe for success or political fantasy? *Policy and Society*, *30*(2), 89–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2011.03.004

Freelon, D. (2013). ReCal OIR: Ordinal, interval, and ratio intercoder reliability as a web service. *International Journal of Internet Science*, *8*(1), 10–16.

García, C. (2011). Sex scandals: A cross-cultural analysis of image repair strategies in the cases of Bill Clinton and Silvio Berlusconi. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(3), 292–296. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.008

Garcia, J. R., Reiber, C., Massey, S. G., & Merriwether, A. M. (2012). Sexual hookup culture: A review. *Review of General Psychology*, *16*(2), 161–176. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027911

Grumbach, J. M. (2018). From backwaters to major policymakers: Policy polarization in the states, 1970–2014. *Perspectives on Politics*, *16*(2), 416–435. https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271700425X

Hayes, R. M., & Dragiewicz, M. (2018). Unsolicited dick pics: Erotica, exhibitionism or entitlement? *Women's Studies International Forum*, *71*, 114–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.07.001

Holman, M. R., & Kalmoe, N. P. (2024). Partisanship in the #MeToo era. *Perspective on Politics*, *22*(1), 44–61. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721001912

Klar, S., & McCoy, A. (2021). Partisan-motivated evaluations of sexual misconduct and the mitigating role of the #MeToo movement. *American Journal of Political Science*, *65*(4), 777–789. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12619

Layman, G. C., Carsey, T. M., & Horowitz, J. M. (2006). Party polarization in American politics: Characteristics, causes, and consequences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *9*(1), 83–110. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.070204.105138

Maitlis, S., & Sonenshein, S. (2010). Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick (1988). *Journal of Management Studies*, *47*(3), 551–580. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00908.x

Reling, T. T., Barton, M. S., Becker, S., & Valasik, M. A. (2018). Rape myths and hookup culture: An exploratory study of U.S. college students' perceptions. *Sex Roles*, *78*, 501–514. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0813-4

Rosentiel, T. (2011, June 14). *Most say political sex scandals due to greater scrutiny, not lower morality.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/2011/06/14/most-say-political-sex-scandals-due-to-greater-scrutiny-not-lower-morality/

Sisco, H. F. (2012). Nonprofit in crisis: An examination of the applicability of situational crisis communication theory. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *24*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2011.582207

Spaulding, C. (2018). Evangelical Christian crisis responses to same-sex sex scandals. *Journal of Media and Religion*, *17*(1), 28–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2018.1463717

Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2006). Mismanagement, mistrust and missed opportunities: A study of the 2004 tsunami and Swedish political communication. *Media, Culture & Society*, *28*(5), 789–800. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443706067028

United States Sentencing Commission. (2018). *Quick facts: Sexual abuse offenders.*

https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/Sexual_Abuse_FY18.pdf

von Sikorski, C., Heiss, R., & Matthes, J. (2019). How political scandals affect the electorate. tracing the eroding and spillover effects of scandals with a panel study. *Political Psychology*, *41*(3), 549–568. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12638

8

SPIRITUAL ADVISORS TO THE U.S. PRESIDENCY

Mapping the Rhetorical Terrain

Andrea J. Terry

During the 2016 presidential election, the world watched as Donald J. Trump won the vote of white Evangelical Christians across the nation and with it, the United States presidency. It is no secret that Trump's strategy relied on the Evangelical vote, as did Republican presidents before him. However, Trump diverged sharply from his Republican predecessors in the choice of Paula White as his spiritual advisor. The first woman to serve as a U.S. president's primary spiritual advisor, White was regularly seen with Trump at public events. White publicly prayed over Trump, praised his efforts to bring the nation back to its "Christian foundation" during recorded meetings in the Oval Office, and spoke on his behalf at several events including prayer events, meetings with faith leaders, the National Day of Prayer, and the White House Roundtable on African American History Month.

White's role as Trump's presidential spiritual advisor raises questions about the official role and function of these individuals: What exactly *is* a presidential spiritual advisor, and what do these individuals communicate to the public about the role of religion within the U.S. presidency? This study begins to answer such questions. By engaging in systematic research regarding who counts as a spiritual advisor and what functions those individuals serve within the presidency, I hope to better understand how these individuals function rhetorically as an extension of the U.S. presidency.

Because spiritual advisors have historically appeared at religious functions such as the White House Prayer Breakfast, inaugurations, presidential funerals, and following national tragedies (such as the Oklahoma City bombing), understanding the rhetorical function of presidential spiritual advisors would help to enhance our understanding of the presidency. Presidential spiritual advisors

have increasingly appeared as proxies of the president (such as Kirbyjon Caldwell's news appearances on behalf of George W. Bush and Paula White's interviews supporting Trump); therefore these individuals should be studied as an important extension of presidential rhetoric and as public rhetors who have not only spiritual influence but the ability to shape popular understanding of civil religion in the United States.

In this chapter, I begin to define what a presidential spiritual advisor is, present an initial typology of presidential spiritual advisor rhetorical functions, and discuss how those functions have shifted from the presidencies of Ronald Reagan through Donald Trump. The essay will proceed as follows: First, I provide an overview of faith in the presidency, including a working definition of and review of the literature related to presidential spiritual advisors. I then engage in a qualitative content analysis of public appearances by spiritual advisors from the C-SPAN Video Library for insight into the frequency with which those roles have been engaged from January 1981 to January 2021. I end by discussing the implications of the changing role of presidential spiritual advisors as an extension of presidential rhetoric and as individuals who have the power to shape public understanding of what it means to practice one's faith in the political sphere.

FAITH AND THE PRESIDENCY

To understand what a presidential spiritual advisor is, it is first necessary to understand how the expectation for a president's public expression of faith has changed over the course of U.S. history. While the practice of presidents engaging with spiritual leaders is as old as the U.S. presidency itself, a president's choice to be advised by a religious leader (or even to have a religious faith) was initially a private matter. For example, George Washington never revealed the details of his belief (or lack thereof) in his public speeches or private diaries, preferring to keep his personal life private (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.). Thomas Jefferson, while considered a Deist, primarily focused on ensuring a "wall of separation" between church and state. James Madison famously wrote, "The letters and communications addressed to me on religious subjects have been so numerous, and of characters so various, that it has been an established rule to decline all correspondence on them" (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.). Throughout the 1800s, most presidents in the United States shared similar sentiments, keeping their faith a matter that remained mostly private.[1] Even Abraham Lincoln, who

invoked the idea of God in his writings and speeches on emancipation, never formally joined a church (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.).

During the early 1900s, there was a slight shift toward presidents being more public about their religious perspectives. Theodore Roosevelt equated patriotism with religion, writing a book titled *Fear God and Take Your Own Part*. Warren Harding, a Methodist-turned-Baptist, publicly argued that "the fundamental trouble with the people of the United States is that they have gotten too far away from the Almighty God" (Roosevelt, 1916) and Calvin Coolidge won the presidency in a contentious 1928 election against a Roman Catholic candidate. While Franklin Delano Roosevelt remained mostly private regarding his faith, World War II and the beginning of the Cold War marked an important inflection point in American expectations of a president's performance of faith.

Beginning his presidency in 1945 at the start of the Cold War, Harry S. Truman represented a significant shift in presidential discourse, casting the Cold War in eschatological terms, infusing his speeches with religious imagery, and adding the phrase "under God" to the pledge of allegiance (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.). Following Eisenhower as the nation's first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy did not discuss religion beyond his famous speech at the Houston Ministerial Convention during his presidential campaign. Similarly, Lyndon B. Johnson and Gerald Ford were quiet about their respective faiths. Richard Nixon, however, counted Billy Graham as a spiritual advisor and frequently mentioned God in his speeches. Jimmy Carter, however, was public about his status as a "born-again Christian," capturing the votes of millions of Evangelicals during the 1976 election. Capitalizing on conservative Evangelicals as a voting bloc, Ronald Reagan captured that support of the Christian Right as a voting bloc in 1980. Having solidly established himself as the candidate of the Christian Right, Reagan maintained their support and sparked a flurry of scholarly interest in the role of religion in electoral politics: an area of study that continues today.

SPIRITUAL ADVISORS IN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Scholars of the presidency have debated the ability of presidential rhetoric to move public opinion, set agendas, and motivate citizen action: a field of study known as the "rhetorical presidency" (Tulis, 1987). While presidential religious communication has been studied extensively, less is known about the individuals who serve as spiritual advisors to U.S presidents. Within rhetorical studies,

scholars have studied the rhetoric of White House National Prayer Breakfast events during the Bill Clinton (Ofulue, 2002; Rosenholtz, 2018), George W. Bush (Goldzwig, 2002; Rosenholtz, 2018), and Barack Obama (Johnson, 2012; Rosenholtz, 2018) presidencies. This scholarship has focused primarily on the rhetoric of presidents at this event, although each White House Prayer Breakfast features a vast array of speakers, including the sitting president's official spiritual advisor. Events such as the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial Prayer Service and presidential inaugurations have also been examined with a focus on the president's rhetoric, but not that of the other speakers (Lejon, 2012; Schrader, 2011). Other scholars within political science and religious studies have examined the discourse of the White House Prayer Breakfast, but the role of presidential spiritual advisors within this event has not yet been studied (Peterson, 2017). Studies also focus on specific individuals, with Billy Graham receiving the most scholarly attention by far. Yet this research tends to focus on the rhetoric of Graham himself without attention to his function as an extension of the U.S. presidency (for example, Gibbs & Duffy, 2007; Glass & Batóg, 2020; Vaughn, 1972).

To date, the only scholarship to focus specifically on spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents is that of Daniel Flores, whose conference presentation "The Joseph Dilemma" begins to sketch a typology of spiritual advisor roles. Flores defines presidential spiritual advisors as "typically high-profile religious leaders whom they [presidents] feel they can trust with their innermost secrets or they find public association with them politically advantageous" (Flores, 2018, p. 3). These individuals hold no official role in the president's cabinet but are expected to show the same level of dedication and trust as a cabinet member. Flores's historical examination of presidents and their relationships with spiritual advisors yielded three initial roles these individuals occupy: lobbyist, chaplain, and focus group (Flores, 2018). Lobbyists "seek audiences with the Presidents to discuss issues that concern their communities or national policy closely related to their faith-based worldviews," while chaplains are "dedicated to the spiritual well-being of the President" (Flores, 2018, pp. 8–9). Chaplains pray with the president, listen to their concerns, and engage in other spiritual practice. Finally, focus groups consist of "handpicked religious leaders by someone close to the President such as a . . . chaplain. Once appointed, members of this group assemble only when their input is needed by the White House" (Flores, 2018, p. 9).

Flores's work, while an important start, focuses primarily on the interaction between president and spiritual advisor and does not attend to the very public roles these individuals play on behalf of the president. Systematic research on

the public communication of spiritual advisors to the U.S. presidency would provide important insights into the ways these individuals communicate on behalf of the president, influencing the public's understanding of the relationship between faith and the presidency. This project begins that process by examining the public function of spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents by asking the following research questions:

RQ1: What is a spiritual advisor in the context of the U.S. presidency?
RQ2: What are the rhetorical functions of spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents?
RQ3: How have these functions changed over time?

METHODS

To better understand what spiritual advisors are and how they function as a public extension of the presidency, this study focuses primarily on public speeches given by spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents starting with Ronald Reagan and ending with Donald Trump. There are two main reasons Reagan's presidency was chosen as the starting point: First, Reagan's presidency has been acknowledged as a significant turning point in U.S. presidential politics economically, ideologically, and in terms of communication practices (Skowronek, 2008; Terry, 2017). Relatedly, the C-SPAN Video Library has information readily available starting with the Reagan presidency. While previous presidents such as Jimmy Carter and Harry Truman were religiously engaged, the televised presidency took off with Ronald Reagan, making it easier for audiences to see and engage with spiritual advisors to the presidency starting at this point (Denton, 1988).

To determine who should be considered a spiritual advisor, I initially relied on Flores's typology, searching through biographies and academic works on religion and the presidency for individuals who were acknowledged as chaplains and members of what Flores calls the "focus group" (Flores, 2018; see also Balmer, 2009; Denton, 1988; Gibbs & Duffy, 2007; Hutcheson, 1988; WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.). Flores's "lobbyist" was not included because individuals who lobby the president on behalf of other groups seemed unlikely to speak on the president's behalf and with the president's authority. Through this process, I identified 23 individuals (see Appendix A to this chapter). Each spiritual advisor was then searched for by name in the C-SPAN Video Library. Of these 23 individuals, 19 were present in the video archive. The speech dataset was organized

chronologically with the date, speaker, presidency, title of speech, title of event, role, and stable link to the speech location in the C-SPAN Video Library (see Appendix B to this chapter). To maintain the focus on understanding how each spiritual advisor represented the presidency, spiritual advisor speeches that did not correspond with the years of their president's term were removed. After removing speeches from spiritual advisors that took place outside their president's term, we were left with 85 speeches from 19 spiritual advisors during the time period January 1981–January 2021.

After finalizing the dataset, the speeches were coded for occasion and spiritual advisor function using qualitative content analysis with an iterative framework. Content analysis as a method involves identifying and quantifying particular "words or content with the purpose of understanding contextual use" of those words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using an iterative framework requires the researcher to visit and revisit the data, and connect the data "with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings" (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). In this case, I was concerned with content of spiritual advisor speeches that provided insight into the occasions during which spiritual advisors speak and the rhetorical functions they served as extensions of the presidency. As I reflected on the different speeches and occasions, I continuously considered the relationships between the speeches, the event titles, other speakers present, and contribution of the spiritual advisor, allowing the major categories for occasion and spiritual advisor function to emerge from the data.

Along with an iterative content analysis approach, Aristotle's speech genres provided a beginning framework for determining occasions and spiritual advisor roles. These genres and their fusions have been widely used to describe the different functions of political rhetoric, and in particular, presidential rhetoric, making them an appropriate starting point for understanding spiritual advisor discourse (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008; Jamieson & Campbell, 1982; Schrader, 2011; Shogan, 2007). The epideictic genre is focused on ceremonial uses of public speaking as well as speeches of praise and blame. For example, a eulogy or toast would be considered epideictic. The deliberative genre is focused on questions of what should be done and is the most common genre in political discourse. Speeches that focus on determining what should be done in the face of a particular problem or situation would be considered deliberative. Forensic speeches are focused on establishing the truth of a matter, much like a jury in a courtroom. A speech that asks the audience to render a judgment (true or false, good or bad, moral or immoral) would be considered forensic. These speech genres often overlap in political discourse. For example, Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs

Campbell's analysis of President Johnson's eulogy delivered in honor of Robert F. Kennedy showed how the epideictic (eulogy) can blend with calls for deliberative action. For spiritual advisor speeches, it is expected that some generic fusions will be present depending on the speech occasion. These situational and content differences will be used to develop a series of rhetorical functions, which will be further explained below.

FINDINGS

The findings in this study show interesting trends in the genre, occasion, and function of spiritual advisors as well as the frequency of spiritual advisor appearances. In the following sections, I will review the major trends for each area.

Genre, Occasion, and Function

As expected, generic fusions were prevalent throughout the dataset, with both deliberative/forensic fusions and deliberative/epideictic fusions. The epideictic genre was also prevalent throughout. I identified nine occasions corresponding to the genres: policy/panel discussion, inauguration, prayer service/event, national convention/rally, memorial service, other celebration, awards dinner, news conference, other speaking engagement. Across these different occasions, five distinct rhetorical functions emerged: prayer leader/national pastor, speaker/policy commentator, eulogist, interviewee, and hype supplier. The relationships among genre, occasion, and function can be seen in Figure 8.1.

The first genre that emerged was the epideictic, or purely ceremonial genre. Occasions fitting within this genre included inaugural invocations and prayers, memorial services, prayer services, and some news conferences. For the epideictic occasions of inaugural invocations and prayers, memorial services, and prayer services, the spiritual advisor took on the rhetorical function of "prayer leader/national pastor." In this function, the spiritual advisor worked to mark important national occasions with prayer, provide comfort during times of national tragedy, and lead the nation in collective spiritual exercise. This rhetorical function emphasized the religious or spiritual credibility of the individual, giving them the authority of both the presidency and their faith tradition as they guided the nation toward the divine.

The deliberative/epideictic generic hybrid emerged through occasions such as national conventions, political rallies, some news conferences, and other speaking

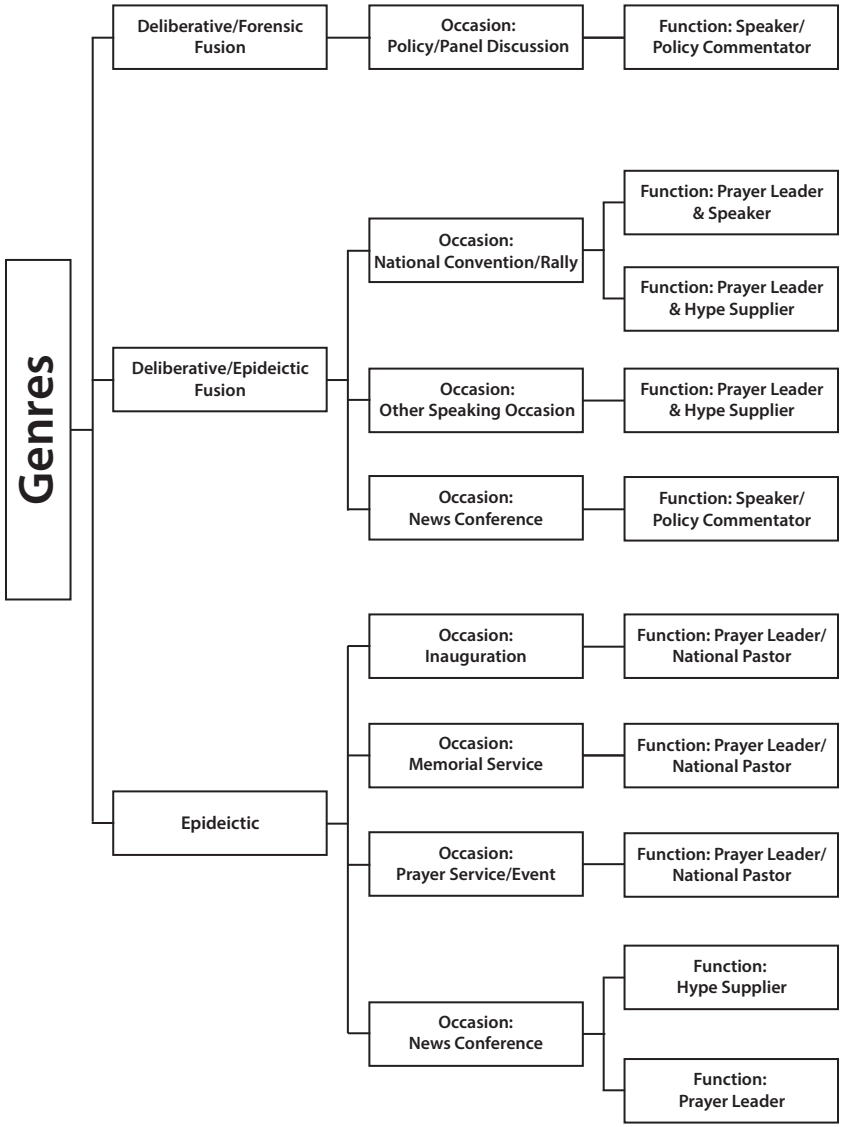


FIGURE 8.1 Relationships among genre, occasion, and rhetorical function of spiritual advisors.

engagements such as luncheons and personal interviews. At national conventions and rallies the spiritual advisor engaged the epideictic genre through prayer while encouraging audience members to take action in the upcoming election. During these occasions, the spiritual advisor's rhetorical function also fused, as prayer

leader/national pastor and hype supplier. The rhetorical function of "hype supplier" was unique to the Trump presidency, as Paula White consistently used her position as spiritual advisor to publicly praise Trump's actions and encourage audience members to support him (Terry, 2024b). During some news conferences, spiritual advisors blended the rhetorical functions of speaker and policy commentator. For example, Kirbyjon Caldwell's appearances on behalf of George W. Bush required him to explain and advocate Bush's policies while also speaking from his own perspective as a faith leader.

The final genre that emerged, the deliberative/forensic hybrid, occurred exclusively in the speaking occasion category of policy/panel discussion. These occasions primarily included spiritual advisors who fell into the "focus group" designation described by Flores (2018). These events invited deliberative speaking as spiritual advisors engaged with interest groups and experts on matters of policy. For example, during the "Challenges of Poverty" panel discussion, Jim Wallis (a member of Obama's spiritual advisor focus group) discussed solutions to poverty with experts and activists (Terry, 2024c). "Focus group" spiritual advisors were especially active in this kind of event, with Jim Wallis, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rashad Hussain, Melissa Rogers, and Joel Hunter engaged in discussions of immigration, racism in America, climate and energy legislation, online radicalization and violent extremism, and the religious expression in American public life. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush also had speakers engage in policy/panel discussions, although not to the same extent as Obama. Additionally, Clinton and Bush tended to send spiritual advisors from the "chaplain" designation to discuss policy. These speaking occasions primarily fit the deliberative genre with some overlap into the forensic genre because the discussions focused not only on what should be done but also on determining the underlying causes of these issues. For example, Rashad Hussain appeared on a panel titled "Combating ISIS Online," where he discussed not only how online extremism could be reduced (deliberative) but also how much of a threat online extremism posed to national security (forensic) (Terry, 2024a).

Frequency

The results show some interesting trends regarding the number of spiritual advisors and frequency of their public appearances from 1981 through 2020. As shown in Table 8.1, the number and type of spiritual advisors varied widely by president: of 6 presidents and 10 presidential terms represented in the data, 3 presidents

TABLE 8.1 *Number of Spiritual Advisors and Designation by President*

President	Number of spiritual advisors	Designation
Ronald Reagan	2	Chaplain
George H. W. Bush	3	Chaplain
Bill Clinton	4	Chaplain, focus group
George W. Bush	5	Chaplain, focus group
Barack Obama	11	Chaplain, focus group
Donald Trump	2	Chaplain

(Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama) and 6 total terms used focus groups. The remaining three presidents (Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Trump) relied primarily on the "chaplain" role.

Of the three genres identified, the epideictic genre was the most stable across presidencies, anchored by the expectation of spiritual advisor appearances at inaugurations, funerals, and prayer events (see Figure 8.2). The second most frequent genre, the deliberative/forensic hybrid, expanded significantly during the Obama presidency, aided by Obama's frequent use of focus group members at policy discussion panels (see Figure 8.3). The final genre (deliberative/epideictic fusion) included occasions such as political rallies, national conventions, news conferences, and other speaking engagements.

Of the 6 presidents and 10 presidential terms represented in the dataset, there was significant variation in the public use of spiritual advisors. As shown in Figure 8.4, Reagan and George H. W. Bush invited spiritual advisors to speak almost exclusively during occasions that fit within the epideictic genre and prayer leader/national pastor rhetorical function. During Clinton's presidency, the number of spiritual advisor appearances increased, as did the breadth of their roles, with a marked increase in the number of speaking engagements within the policy commentator rhetorical function. George W. Bush had the highest frequency of spiritual advisors speaking in the prayer leader/national pastor rhetorical function. Obama had the highest frequency of spiritual advisor appearances overall, with a marked increase in the political commentator rhetorical function, as mentioned above (see Figure 8.4). Finally, Trump oversaw the emergence of a new rhetorical function: that of the hype supplier. Given that Trump served only one term, the number of spiritual advisor appearances is significant, with 13 public appearances by his primary chaplain, Paula White, during one term (see Figure 8.3).

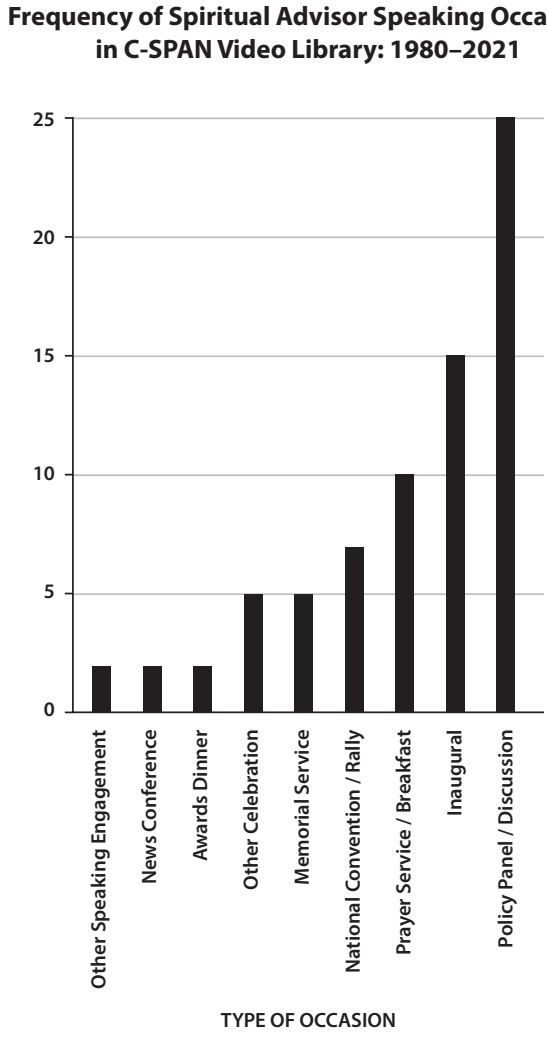


FIGURE 8.2 Occasions and frequency of spiritual advisor appearances at each speaking occasion.

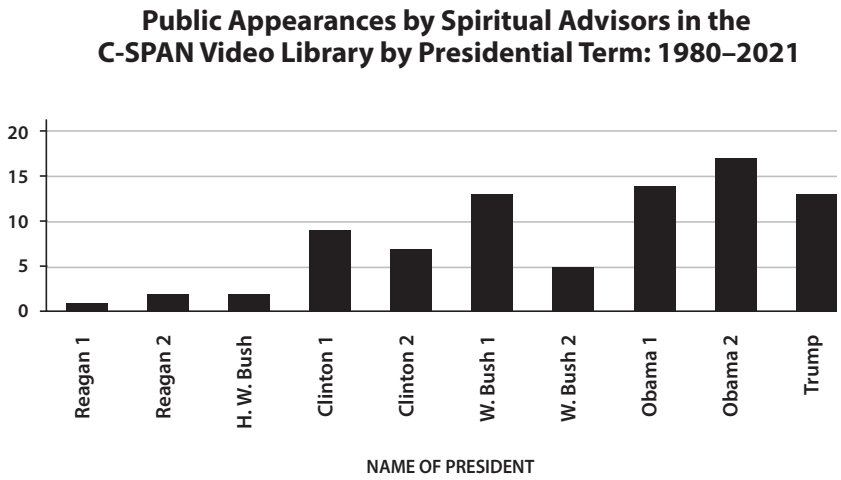


FIGURE 8.3 Number of public appearances by spiritual advisors during each presidential term.

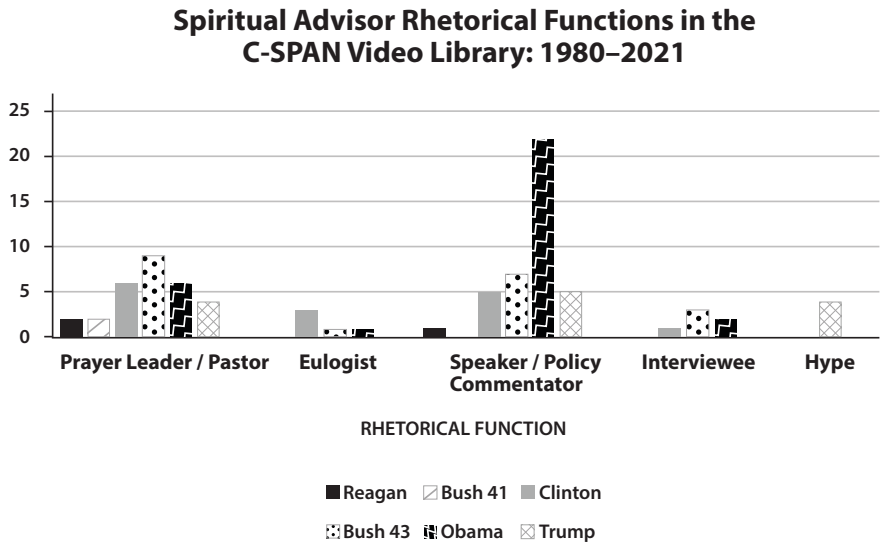


FIGURE 8.4 Frequency of spiritual advisor functions by presidency in the C-SPAN Video Library 1981–2020.

DISCUSSION

While it is unsurprising that spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents serve important ceremonial functions, there are several interesting findings from this research that merit further discussion. In particular, I consider the generic hybrids of spiritual advisor speaking occasions, the emergence of unique rhetorical functions, and marked increase of spiritual advisor speaking engagements over the last 40 years.

At the outset of this study, I did not expect to find anything unique regarding the genres of spiritual advisor speeches. However, the results of this study show that the genres spiritual advisors speak into are anything but simple. The fact that two of the three genres represent generic hybrids calls for consideration of the overlapping expectations spiritual advisors to U.S. presidents face as religious leaders operating in a political space. Given that spiritual advisors have a public role in which they represent not only the president but their own faiths, it makes sense that their speech occasions would mirror this complexity. While the current study stops at describing the complex generic hybrids spiritual advisors face, further study into how these individuals navigate situations that call for generic hybrids would provide insight into how spiritual advisors manage sometimes competing tensions of the political and spiritual. As Campbell and Jamieson (1982) point out, "fusions are not invariably successful" and "hybrids are called forth by complex situations and purposes" (p. 150). Further research into what makes a spiritual advisor's negotiation of generic hybrids successful could help us understand the circumstances under which combining the spiritual and political is successful, ethical, or even dangerous.

Additionally, the occasions during which spiritual advisors speak and the rhetorical functions they serve have changed dramatically over time. As mentioned previously, throughout the Reagan and George W. Bush presidencies, spiritual advisors served almost exclusively as prayer leaders. With Clinton, additional speaking engagements emerged and continued to expand from 1993 to 2020. This dramatic shift calls for considering *why* presidents call for spiritual advisors to speak, and to what end. In *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Jeffrey Tulis (1987) argues that presidents use the "bully pulpit" of the presidency to share their agenda through the mechanism of mass media in a stable, mutually beneficial relationship. Examining the changes in how presidents use media (including social media and new media), Jennifer Mercieca (2017) revised Tulis's thesis, arguing that the traditional relationship between the president and the press has become "independent, competitive, and unstable" (p. 206). Perhaps, then, we might consider the increase in spiritual advisor speaking occasions and rhetorical functions as

part of these changes: With these trustworthy individuals authorized to speak as an unofficial extension of the presidency, modern presidents have one more way they can circumvent the press and share their agenda with the public.

The instability of the relationship between the presidency and the press could also be a plausible explanation for the emergence of new rhetorical functions for spiritual advisors. Donald Trump's relationship with the press has been famously hostile, with Trump going so far as to label the press "fake news" and the "lamestream media." In this hostile environment, Trump seems to have designed events such as the July 17, 2019, "Trump Remarks on Religious Freedom" to eliminate any threat of immediate criticism. It is in this environment that the rhetorical function of "hype supplier" emerged, where Paula White provided a prayer that praised Trump in the same breath as thanking God. The simultaneous praise of president and God complicates White's credibility as a faith leader. Further research into White's discourse and its analogs in other times and spaces could provide insights into how spiritual advisors facilitate the rise of fascist leaders.

We might also consider the increased role of individuals serving as members of the spiritual advisor "focus group" during the Obama presidency. While Paula White was the first woman to serve in the primary chaplain role to a president, Obama's group of spiritual advisors is by far the most diverse, including representatives from multiple faith perspectives: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim. That these individuals were part of Obama's spiritual advisor team demonstrates his commitment to cultural pluralism: the physical manifestation of the "cosmopolitan civil religion" David A. Frank (2011) identified in Obama's 2009 inaugural address. With this in mind, further study into who is chosen as a spiritual advisor and why could clarify how presidents can facilitate perceptions of inclusion or exclusion by the kinds of representation present in advisory roles, whether official or unofficial. Studying the role of race, gender expression, denomination, sexuality, ability, and ethnicity of spiritual advisors could also help shed light on how we come to know—either explicitly or implicitly—whose expressions of faith carry weight in U.S. political–religious discourse.

CONCLUSION

To return to the initial research questions, What is a spiritual advisor in the context of the U.S. presidency? Based on my initial research, it seems that Flores's initial typology of roles holds true with regard to the chaplain and focus group roles. My research did not support Flores's argument regarding the lobbyist as

a spiritual advisor role. Individuals in the chaplain role were acknowledged religious leaders who performed public ceremonial functions (such as inaugural invocations) and private functions. As shown in Appendix A, some spiritual advisors who served in the chaplain role were not present in the C-SPAN Video Library. Further research into these individuals' interactions with the president is therefore necessary. The focus group role included religious leaders, activists, and experts in the intersection of religion and politics. For example, members of Obama's spiritual cabinet (serving the role of focus group) included Jim Wallis (activist and pastor), Rashad Hussain (expert on policy and relations with Muslim countries), and Rabbi David Saperstein (religious leader).

The expansion of the focus group role cold be explained by George W. Bush's initiation of the White House Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives in 2001 (United States Department of Justice Archive, n.d.). With the creation of this office, the opportunities for individuals to serve in the focus group role substantially increased. While Bush tended to keep religious leaders in this role, Obama expanded it to include activists and experts, as mentioned above.

The rhetorical functions of spiritual advisors are varied. In this study, I identified five distinct roles: prayer leader/national pastor, eulogist, speaker/policy commentator, interviewee, and hype supplier. Each of these rhetorical functions was connected to a series of particular occasions and genres. This initial typology of rhetorical functions warrants additional research to determine how these roles work differently within the occasions and genres identified in this study.

Finally, how have these rhetorical functions changed over time? As mentioned previously, the primary public-facing rhetorical function has been ceremonial in nature, with prayer leader and eulogist functions remaining stable from 1981 through 2021. However, the rhetorical function of eulogist requires further consideration, as it was often engaged after the spiritual advisor's presidency had been completed and had more to do with that individual's relationship with the deceased than their connection to the current president. While the ceremonial rhetorical functions have remained stable, new rhetorical functions have emerged over time. For example, the rhetorical function of policy commentator began with Clinton and increased substantially throughout the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies. Trump also used this role to an extent and also oversaw the emergence of the "hype" function. This particular rhetorical function seems to be closely related to Trump's particular communication strategies, which included ingratiating his audience and intimidating his detractors (Mercieca, 2020). Building up his own *ethos* through the hype function seems to complement Trump's efforts to flatter his supporters by extension.

While the present study is admittedly limited due to its focus on available public speeches by presidential spiritual advisors, it nonetheless represents an important first step toward systematically studying these influential individuals. Further study using archival documents from presidential libraries would help to contextualize and closely describe the relationship between presidents and their spiritual advisors, helping us to deepen our understanding of what it means to speak with the authority of faith leader and representative of the president. In addition, close textual analysis of these speeches would be helpful for understanding how spiritual advisors negotiate their complex rhetorical situations and with what level of success, and what vision of faith in the United States they project to the public.

While there have been multiple spiritual advisors for each U.S. president (as shown in this study), only one of them has ever received the official designation of White House chaplain: Billy Graham. Given the frequency and stability of occasions for spiritual advisors to speak to the public, it is perhaps surprising that this is the case. This lack of institutionalization of spiritual advisors is also an issue that warrants further research.

APPENDIX A: SPIRITUAL ADVISORS BY PRESIDENT

- Ronald Reagan (1981–1988)
  - Donn Moomaw
  - Billy Graham
- George H. W. Bush (1989–1992)
  - Billy Graham
  - Edmond Browning (no results)
  - John Maury Allin (no results)
- Bill Clinton (1993–2000)
  - Billy Graham
  - Philip Wogaman
  - Tony Campolo
  - Bill Hybels
- George W. Bush (2001–2008)
  - Kirbyjon Caldwell
  - Ted Haggard (no results)
  - Billy Graham
  - James Mayfield
  - Mark Craig
- Barack Obama (2009–2016)
  - Kirbyjon Caldwell
  - Jim Wallis
  - Rabbi David Saperstein
  - Cardinal Theodore McCarrick
  - Joshua DuBois (spiritual cabinet, "President's Pastor")
  - Joel Hunter (spiritual cabinet)
  - Denis McDonough (spiritual cabinet)
  - Rashad Hussain (spiritual cabinet)
  - Melissa Rogers (spiritual cabinet)
  - Sharon Watkins (spiritual cabinet)
  - Lt. Carey Cash (spiritual cabinet; no videos)
- Donald Trump (2017–2020)
  - Paula White-Cain
  - Samuel Rodriguez (no videos)

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Donn Moomaw	1/21/85; Reagan 1	Reagan Inauguration	Prayer/invocation	https://www.c-span.org/video/?77789-1/president-reagan-1985-inauguration
Billy Graham	8/4/1985; Reagan 1	Prayer Breakfast	Keynote speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?125591-1/prayer-breakfast
Billy Graham	7/19/1988; Reagan 2	Democratic National Convention	Invocation and remarks	https://www.c-span.org/video/?3501-1/remarks-national-anthem-invocation
Billy Graham	1/20/1989; Bush41	G. H. W. Bush Inauguration	Invocation	https://www.c-span.org/video/?5794-1/president-george-h-w-bush-inauguration
Billy Graham	7/19/1990; Bush41	Nixon Library Dedication	Invocation	https://www.c-span.org/video/?13226-1/richard-m-nixon-library-dedication
Billy Graham	1/20/1993; Clinton 1	Clinton Inaugural Ceremony	Opening prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?37261-1/president-clinton-1993-inaugural-ceremony
Billy Graham	1/20/1993; Clinton 1	Clinton Inaugural Ceremony	Closing prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?37261-1/president-clinton-1993-inaugural-ceremony
Billy Graham	6/17/1993; Clinton 1	Gov. John Connally Memorial Service	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?43230-1/memorial-service-john-connally
Billy Graham	6/26/1993; Clinton 1	Pat Nixon Funeral	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?45038-1/pat-nixon-funeral
Billy Graham	4/15/1994; Clinton 1	American Society of Newspaper Editors Luncheon	Keynote speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?56098-1/newspaper-coverage-religion

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Billy Graham	4/27/1994; Clinton 1	Nixon Funeral	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?56426-1/president-nixon-funeral
Billy Graham	2/2/1995; Clinton 1	National Prayer Breakfast	Closing prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?63086-1/national-prayer-breakfast
Billy Graham	4/23/1995; Clinton 1	Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial	Speaker at prayer service	https://www.c-span.org/video/?64705-1/oklahoma-city-memorial-service
Billy Graham	5/2/1996; Clinton 1	Congressional Gold Medal Endowment Dinner	Honoree/speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?71572-1/congressional-gold-medal
Billy Graham	1/20/1997; Clinton 2	Preinaugural Breakfast	Blessing of meal	https://www.c-span.org/video/?78157-1/pre-inaugural-luncheon-remarks
Billy Graham	1/20/1997; Clinton 2	Clinton Inaugural Ceremony	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?77158-1/president-clinton-1997-inaugural-ceremony
Billy Graham	11/6/1997; Clinton 2	G. H. W. Bush Presidential Library Dedication	Invocation	https://www.c-span.org/video/?95003-1/bush-presidential-library-dedication#
Billy Graham	2/5/1998; Clinton 2	National Prayer Breakfast	Closing speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?99829-1/national-prayer-breakfast
Billy Graham	8/15/1998; Clinton 2	Reagan Tribute	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?3813-1/president-reagan-tribute-speech
Billy Graham	9/14/2001; Bush43 1	National Prayer Service	Speaker/prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?166031-1/national-prayer-service#!

Continued

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Billy Graham	1/21/2005; Bush43 2	G. W. Bush Inaugural Prayer Service	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?185044-1/inaugural-prayer-service
Billy Graham	5/31/2007; Bush43 2	Billy Graham Library Dedication	Honoree	https://www.c-span.org/video/?198399-1/billy-graham-library-dedication
Kirbyjon Caldwell	1/20/1996; Clinton 2	Barbara Jordan Funeral	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?69467-1/barbara-jordan-funeral#!
Kirbyjon Caldwell	8/3/2000; Bush43 campaign	Republican National Convention Day 4	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?158606-1/2000-republican-national-convention-day-4#!
Kirbyjon Caldwell	12/14/2000; Bush43 1	President-Elect G. W. Bush Prayer Service	Invocation	https://www.c-span.org/video/?161293-1/president-elect-bush-prayer-service
Kirbyjon Caldwell	12/21/2000; Bush43 1	Faith-Based Initiatives Interview	Interviewee	https://www.c-span.org/video/?161437-4/faith-based-initiatives
Kirbyjon Caldwell	1/21/2001; Bush43 1	G. W. Bush Inaugural Prayer Service	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?162051-1/inaugural-prayer-service
Kirbyjon Caldwell	2/3/2001; Bush43 1	State of the Black Union, Part 1	Panelist	https://www.c-span.org/video/?162369-1/state-black-union-2001-part-1
Kirbyjon Caldwell	9/14/2001; Bush43 1	National Prayer Service	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?166031-1/national-prayer-service#!
Kirbyjon Caldwell	10/15/2001; Bush43 1	Benefits of Minority Homeownership	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?173241-4/benefits-minority-homeownership

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Kirbyjon Caldwell	1/20/2005; Bush43 2	G. W. Bush Inaugural Ceremony	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?185043-1/president-george-w-bush-2005-inaugural-ceremony
Kirbyjon Caldwell	1/21/2009; Obama 1	Obama Inaugural Prayer Service	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?283503-1/inaugural-prayer-service
Phillip Wogaman	8/27/1996; Clinton 2	Democratic Convention Evening Session	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?74606-1/democratic-convention-evening-session
Phillip Wogaman	12/15/1998; Clinton 2	Minister News Conference	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?116654-1/minister-news-conference
Phillip Wogaman	2/3/1999; Clinton 2	From the Eye of the Storm	Interviewee	https://www.c-span.org/video/?119933-1/from-eye-storm
Phillip Wogaman	1/21/2003; Bush43 1	Behind Every Choice Is a Story	Interviewee	https://www.c-span.org/video/?174757-1/behind-choice-story
Tony Campolo	1/20/1997; Clinton 2	Clinton Inaugural Interfaith Prayer Service	Speech	https://www.c-span.org/video/?78109-1/inaugural-interfaith-prayer-service
Tony Campolo	12/15/1998; Clinton 2	Teens and Society	Panelist	https://www.c-span.org/video/?116671-1/teens-society
Bill Hybels	8/10/2000; Clinton 2	Presidential Religious Reflections	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?158757-1/presidential-religious-reflections
James Mayfield	12/14/2000; Bush43 1	President-Elect G. W. Bush Prayer Service	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?161293-1/president-elect-bush-prayer-service

Continued

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Marc Craig	12/14/2000; Bush43 1	President-Elect G. W. Bush Prayer Service	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?161293-1/president-elect-bush-prayer-service
Marc Craig	8/3/2000; Bush43 1	Republican National Convention Day 4	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?158606-1/2000-republican-national-convention-day-4
Marc Craig	1/21/2005; Bush43 2	G. W. Bush Inaugural Prayer Service	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?185044-1/inaugural-prayer-service
Jim Wallis	1/21/2009; Obama 1	Obama Inaugural Prayer Service	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?283503-1/inaugural-prayer-service
Jim Wallis	4/03/2009; Obama 1	Challenges of Poverty	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?285073-1/challenges-poverty
Jim Wallis	1/29/2009; Obama 1	Market Capitalism	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?283730-4/market-capitalism
Jim Wallis	12/21/2011; Obama 1	Role of Religion in 2012 Elections	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?303325-6/role-religion-2012-elections
Jim Wallis	11/16/2012; Obama 1	Activists After White House Fiscal Cliff Meeting	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?309499-3/activists-white-house-fiscal-cliff-meeting
Jim Wallis	11/13/2017; Obama 2	Racism in America	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?437186-1/racism-america
Rabbi David Saperstein	10/14/2015; Obama 2	International Religious Freedom Report	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?328738-1/international-religious-freedom-report

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Rabbi David Saperstein	7/28/2016; Obama 2	ISIS Threat to Religious and Ethnic Minorities	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?413291-3/isis-threat-religious-ethnic-minorities-david-saperstein-remarks
Rabbi David Saperstein	2/08/2017; Obama 2	Lantos Human Rights Prize	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?423688-1/2016-lantos-human-rights-prize
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	8/29/2009; Obama 1	Sen. Edward Kennedy Burial at Arlington National Cemetery	Speaker/prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?288601-1/senator-edward-kennedy-burial-arlington-national-cemetery
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	9/07/2010; Obama 1	Interfaith News Conference	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?295331-1/interfaith-news-conference
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	3/31/2010; Obama 1	U.S.–Jordan Relations	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?292806-1/us-jordan-relations
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	3/29/2011; Obama 1	Civil rights of Muslim Americans	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?298715-1/civil-rights-muslim-americans
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	6/13/2013; Obama 2	Celebration for Rep. John Dingell	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?313325-1/celebration-representative-john-dingell
Cardinal Theodore McCarrick	6/16/2015; Obama 2	Funeral Services for Beau Biden	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?326426-1/funeral-service-beau-biden

Continued

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Joshua DuBois	9/26/2013; Obama 2	Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?315250-1/faith-based-neighborhood-partnerships
Joshua DuBois	11/19/2013; Obama 2	The President's Devotional	Interview	https://www.c-span.org/video/?316507-9/the-presidents-devotional
Joshua DuBois	11/22/2013; Obama 2	The President's Devotional	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?316417-1/the-presidents-devotional
Joshua DuBois	10/13/2016; Obama 2	President Obama's Legacy on Race and Justice	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?416624-1/president-obamas-legacy-race-justice
Joel Hunter	4/30/2009; Obama 1	Immigration Overhaul	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?285609-1/immigration-overhaul
Joel Hunter	5/12/2010; Obama 1	Senate Climate and Energy Legislation	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?293475-1/senate-climate-energy-legislation
Joel Hunter	4/14/2014; Obama 2	White House Easter Prayer Breakfast	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?318855-1/white-house-easter-prayer-breakfast
Rashad Hussain	12/18/2010; Obama 1	Muslim Public Affairs Council Annual Convention	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?297171-1/muslim-public-affairs-council-annual-convention
Rashad Hussain	5/28/2013; Obama 2	Online Radicalization and Violent Extremism	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?312974-1/online-radicalization-violent-extremism

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Rashad Hussain	5/06/2016; Obama 2	Combating ISIS Online	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?409161-1/combating-isis-online
Melissa Rogers	1/12/2010; Obama 1	Religious Expression in American Public Life	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?291245-1/religious-expression-american-public-life
Melissa Rogers	8/07/2013; Obama 2	Faith-Based Community Initiatives	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?314438-1/faith-based-community-initiatives
Melissa Rogers	9/26/2013; Obama 2	Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?315250-1/faith-based-neighborhood-partnerships
Melissa Rogers	9/18/2015; Obama 2	Conference Call on Upcoming Visit of Pope Francis	Speaker (audio only)	https://www.c-span.org/video/?112430-1/conference-call-upcoming-visit-pope-francis
Melissa Rogers	10/24/2018; Obama post-president	Faith and American Public Life	Speaker/author	https://www.c-span.org/video/?465675-1/faith-american-public-life
Melissa Rogers	2/19/2020; Obama post-president	Religion and Democracy	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?469033-1/religion-democracy
Sharon E. Watkins	1/21/2009; Obama 1	Obama Inaugural Prayer Service	Prayer/speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?283503-1/inaugural-prayer-service

Continued

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Paula White-Cain	11/2/2016; Trump campaign	Trump Campaign Rally	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?417872-1/presidential-candidate-donald-trump-rally-pensacola-florida
Paula White-Cain	1/20/2017; Trump	Trump Inaugural Ceremony	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?422124-1/president-trump-2017-inaugural-ceremony
Paula White-Cain	2/1/2017; Trump	Remarks on Supreme Court Nominee	Supporter	https://www.c-span.org/video/?423344-1/president-trump-remarks-supreme-court-nominee
Paula White-Cain	5/4/2017; Trump	Trump National Prayer Event	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?428059-1/president-trump-national-prayer-event
Paula White-Cain	9/1/2017; Trump	Trump Meeting With Faith Leaders Re: Hurricane Harvey	Speaker/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?433462-101/president-trump-meeting-faith-leaders
Paula White-Cain	8/01/2018; Trump	Trump Meeting With Urban Pastors	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?449293-1/president-trump-meeting-urban-pastors
Paula White-Cain	8/27/2018; Trump	Trump Remarks at Evangelical Leadership Dinner	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?450757-1/president-trump-remarks-evangelical-leadership-dinner
Paula White-Cain	5/05/2019; Trump	Trump Observes National Day of Prayer	Prayer	https://www.c-span.org/video/?460357-1/president-trump-observes-national-day-prayer
Paula White-Cain	7/17/2019; Trump	Trump Remarks on Religious Freedom	Speaker/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?462771-1/president-trump-remarks-religious-freedom

Name	Date/POTUS	Occasion/event	Role	Link
Paula White-Cain	1/3/2020; Trump	Trump Remarks at Evangelical Rally	Prayer and speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?467813-1/president-trump-remarks-evangelical-rally
Paula White-Cain	1/16/2020; Trump	Trump Remarks on Constitutional Prayer in Schools	Speaker/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?468229-1/president-trump-remarks-constitutional-prayer-schools
Paula White-Cain	2/27/2020; Trump	White House Roundtable on African American History Month	Speaker/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?469815-1/white-house-roundtable-african-american-history-month
Paula White-Cain	7/23/2020; Trump	Evangelicals for Trump, Alpharetta, GA	Speaker	https://www.c-span.org/video/?474065-1/evangelicals-trump-event-alpharetta-georgia
Paula White-Cain	1/6/2021; Trump	Rally on Electoral College Vote Certification	Prayer/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?507744-1/trumps-jan-6-rally-speech
Paula White-Cain	7/26/22; Trump post-president	America First Policy Institute	Prayer/hype woman	https://www.c-span.org/video/?521940-101/america-policy-institute

NOTE

1. There are two notable exceptions: Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley. Hayes was a devout Presbyterian whose speeches were imbued with religious rhetoric and who publicly attributed his presidential victory to God. Hayes was a staunch proponent of prayer and issued proclamations "recommending all Americans of all faiths to observe days of prayer" (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.). McKinley was a member of the United Methodist church and hosted the General Missionary Committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the White House to discuss whether the United States should intervene in the Philippines. During this meeting he revealed that during his prayers, God impressed upon him that "there was nothing left for us to do but take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace to do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died" (WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.).

REFERENCES

Balmer, R. (2009). *God in the White House, a History: How faith shaped the presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush.* Harper Collins Publishers.

Campbell, K. K., & Jamieson, K. H. (2008). *Presidents creating the presidency: Deeds done in words.* University of Chicago Press.

Denton, R. E., Jr. (1988). *The primetime presidency of Ronald Reagan: The era of the television presidency.* Praeger Publishers.

Flores, D. F. (2018). *The Joseph dilemma: Spiritual advisors and the burden of political access.* The Fourteenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. https://oxford-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-05-flores.pdf

Frank, D. A. (2011). Obama's rhetorical signature: Cosmopolitan civil religion in the presidential inaugural address, January 20, 2009. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, *14*(4), 605–630.

Gibbs, N., & Duffy, M. (2007). *The preacher and the presidents: Billy Graham in the White House.* Center Street.

Glass, W. R., & Batóg, W. (2020). Evangelical aspirations and Cold War realities: Billy Graham behind the Iron Curtain. *Journal of Church and State*, *62*(3), 486–505. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csaa006

Goldzwig, S. R. (2002). Official and unofficial civil religious discourse. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, *25*(1), 102–114.

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Hutcheson, R. G., Jr. (1988). *God in the White House: How religion has changed the modern presidency.* MacMillan.

Jamieson, K. H., & Campbell, K. K. (1982). Rhetorical hybrids: fusions of generic elements. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *68*(2), 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638209383600

Johnson, A. E. (2012). Avoiding phony religiosity: The rhetorical theology of Obama's 2012 National Prayer Breakfast address. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, *2*(2).

Lejon, K. O. (2012). The inauguration ceremony as public theology: The case of George H. W. Bush and Barack Obama. *Linkoping Studies in Identity and Pluralism*, *13*.

Mercieca, J. (2020). *Demagogue for president: The rhetorical genius of Donald Trump.* Blackstone.

Mercieca, J. R. (2017). Ignoring the president: Barack Obama and the postrhetorical presidency. In S. R. Martin (Ed.), *Columns to characters: The presidency and the press enter the digital age* (pp. 206–230). Texas A&M University Press.

Ofulue, N. (2002). President Clinton and the White House Prayer Breakfast. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, *25*(1), 49–63.

Peterson, J. R. (2017). The religious content of the presidents' remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast, 1953–2016. In *Congress & the Presidency*, *44*(2), 212–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2017.1294216

Roosevelt, T. R. (1916). *Fear God and take your own part.* George H. Doran Company.

Rosenholtz, C. E. (2018). *This great prayerful tradition: American presidents preaching public theology at the National Prayer Breakfast* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Missouri.

Schrader, V. L. (2011). Consoling through faith: A rhetorical analysis of religious references in Bill Clinton's Oklahoma City bombing memorial prayer service address. *Kentucky Journal of Communication*, *30*(1), 13–27.

Shogan, C. J. (2007). *The moral rhetoric of American presidents.* Texas A&M University Press.

Skowronek, S. (2008). *Presidential leadership in political time: Reprise and reappraisal.* University of Kansas Press.

Srivastava, P., & Hopwood, N. (2009). A practical iterative framework for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800107

Terry, A. J. (2017). *The rhetoric of political time: Tracing the neoliberal regime's ascent* [Dissertation]. Texas A&M University. https://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/161372

Terry, A. J. [DRTERRY]. (2024a, February 23). *Combating ISIS online* [Video clip]. Clip of *Hussain on ISIS* (May 6, 2016). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5107386/user-clip-hussain-isis

Terry, A. J. [DRTERRY]. (2024b, February 23). *Paula White Hurricane Harvey* [Video clip]. Clip of *President Trump meeting with faith leaders* (September 1, 2017). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5107387/user-clip-paula-white-hurricane-harvey

Terry, A. J. [DRTERRY]. (2024c, February 23). *Wallis on poverty* [Video clip]. Clip of *Challenges of poverty* (April 4, 2009). https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5107385/user-clip-wallis-poverty

Tulis, J. (1987). *The rhetorical presidency.* Princeton University Press.

United States Department of Justice Archive. (n.d.) *Fact sheet: Task force for faith-based and community initiatives.* Retrieved February 20, 2024, from https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/about.html#:~:text=On%20January%2029%2C%202001%2C%20President,Faith%2DBased%20and%20Community%20Initiatives

Vaughn, B. (1972). *Billy Graham: A rhetorical study in adaptation* [Dissertation]. University of Kansas. http://hdl.handle.net/1808/27448

WGBH Educational Foundation. (n.d.). God in the White House. *American Experience.* PBS. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/godinamerica-white-house/

9

SPEAKING OFF THE BENCH

Analyzing the Extrajudicial Appearances of Supreme Court Justices

Matthew T. Cota

C-SPAN's *America and the Courts* program often begins with the jubilant first movement of Johann Sebastian Bach's Harpsichord Concerto No. 2 in E major.[1] The piece is well regarded by Bach scholars, but they disagree on its original and proper key, correct octave, and intended concerto and solo instruments (Butler, 2016; Wolff, 2001, 2016). It is fitting that a piece of music entangled in compositional debate serves as the overture for the program that televises the extrajudicial activities of America's judges. Indeed, disagreements about Bach's piece reflect present day debates on the proper off-bench behavior of the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel A. Alito are currently under fire in the media and in Congress for taking lavish trips with conservative billionaires and Republican donors. Details about both justices' trips were first published by ProPublica in April of 2023 (Elliott et al., 2023; Kaplan et al., 2023) and demonstrate that both Thomas and Alito traveled with people who had legal and financial interests before the Court (Marimow & Brown, 2023; Tillman, 2023). Shortly after ProPublica's report was released, a bipartisan coalition of senators called for the Court to establish a code of ethics (VanSickle, 2023). Chief Justice John G. Roberts responded by reassuring the American public and Congress that the justices were working toward a solution to their ethical problems (Barnes, 2023). In November of 2023, the Court adopted its first ethics code. The code does not include any enforcement mechanisms for its rules, however, leaving the future of extrajudicial behavior up in the air (VanSickle & Liptak, 2023)

The evidence presented against Thomas and Alito raises the question of whether their trips influenced their decisions on the Court. Alito argued in an

unprecedented op-ed that it is impossible to establish a connection between the justices' off-bench behavior and their judicial decisions (Alito, 2023). While it would indeed be challenging to collect the type and amount of extrajudicial data needed to draw a causal relationship between the justices' off-bench activities and their decisions on the bench, some extrajudicial data are within reach. Transcripts and recordings of the justices' public remarks are accessible, making these remarks some of the only sources of mineable data of off-bench behavior.

Judicial politics research has yet to exact sufficient empirical scrutiny on the "understudied activity of off-the-bench speech" and the extent to which it encapsulates strategic judicial behavior (Krewson, 2019, p. 696). The tragedy of this literature gap is compounded by research demonstrating the frequency in which the justices speak publicly and the reflection of the justices' goals in their speeches (Black et al., 2016b; Farganis & Wedeking, 2011; Glennon & Strother, 2019; Krewson, 2019; Murphy, 1964). While scholars have identified initial goals and effects of the justices' speeches (Krewson, 2019; Strother & Glennon, 2021), they have yet to determine how this rhetoric differs from the justices' speech during their judicial duties. Uncovering this difference may allow scholars to determine the extent to which the justices' public rhetoric is strategically based. But the question remains: Do justices speak differently off the bench from how they speak on the bench?

To answer this question, I developed a theoretical argument for why justices might speak differently off the bench than they would speak on the bench. I expected that variation in institutional rules and norms will produce differences in linguistic content between judicial and extrajudicial speech. To test my theory, I conducted a comparative analysis of the justices' public remarks and their speech during the Court's oral arguments by examining five types of linguistic content. Within all categories of linguistic content, I found evidence indicating that many justices speak differently off the bench than on the bench, suggesting that variation in rules and norms influence the justices' speaking behavior.

The goal of this study is to provide empirical evidence demonstrating variation in the justices' speaking behavior based on the setting they are in. By directly comparing the justices' speech during oral argument to off-bench speech, my findings demonstrate variation between certain justices' judicial and extrajudicial behavior, variation that should be considered and studied in future lines of research. Highlighting this variation helps inform the normative debate about extrajudicial behavior and brings scholars one step closer to uncovering the extent to which justices behave strategically off the bench.

THE JUDICIAL BULLY PULPIT

In rejecting a request to give public remarks in the 1930s, Justice Benjamin N. Cardozo wrote that a justice "may not talk about events of the day. They may indicate his judgment as to problems that will come before him as a judge! He may not talk about the past . . . he may not talk about the future" (Hellman, 1940, p. 271). While those in the judicial profession see Cardozo as a model judge (e.g., Posner, 1993), his contentions do not reflect the norms of extrajudicial speech. Indeed, since the early days of the republic "the tradition among the Justices has been one of wide-ranging and frank out-of-court commentary" (Westin, 1962, pp. 635–636).

The norms and purpose of the justices' public remarks has changed significantly over time (Creamer & Jain, 2020; Davis, 2011; Glennon & Strother, 2019; Schmidt, 2013; Westin, 1962). What remains consistent, however, is that the justices have always had motivations for speaking publicly (Schmidt, 2013). Prior to the Civil War, the justices gave overtly political and partisan speeches. It is hardly surprising that these early justices spoke in partisan terms, however. After all, some of them were "in the room where it happened" as delegates at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 or participants in the ratifying conventions of their respective states (Miranda, 2015).

Early extrajudicial remarks featured the justices arguing in favor of candidates for elected office, giving stump speeches about their own political campaigns, reacting to the actions of Congress and the president, and expressing views on public policy (Westin, 1962, pp. 637–647). At this point, the justices' goals were purely political. After the Civil War, the justices began to abstain from directly discussing political or partisan issues, shifting their priorities to informing the public on legal matters, their roles as justices, and "the Court and its inner conflicts" (Creamer & Jain, 2020; Westin, 1962, p. 656). In the 1940s, the justices continued to focus their speeches on discussing legal issues and their work on the Court but began to provide the public with more biographical information about themselves (Schmidt, 2013; Westin, 1962). Contemporary justices primarily use their remarks to educate the public and benefit the Court. Schmidt (2013) finds that the dominant focus of the justices' public remarks has been to educate their listeners about civic government and to defend the Court as an institution. Glennon and Strother (2019, p. 252) demonstrate that the justices' off-bench speech overwhelmingly covers "legitimacy-reinforcing topics that deemphasize the partisan or political aspects of the Court's work." In other words, the justices are focused on speaking apolitically with the goal of bolstering the Court's legitimacy.

Davis (2011) concurs and adds that the justices hope to use their speeches to make personal connections with the public.

The literature recounted here suggests that the norms and goals of the justices' public speeches have shifted over time but are presently aimed at shoring up institutional legitimacy and appearing apolitical (Glennon & Strother, 2019). Similar to how presidents can strategically use their bully pulpit to draw up support for their judicial nominees (Johnson & Roberts, 2004), empirical evidence suggests the justices possess similar pulpit power and may use it strategically to support the Court. Krewson (2019) finds that members of the public who attend a justice's speech perceive them more favorably and have more positive views on the role of law in judicial decision-making. While the justices' speeches likely "do not reach the ears of many," they are still able to increase personal favorability and cultivate institutional support through press reports about their remarks (Krewson, 2019, p. 688). Strother and Glennon (2021) offer similar findings but uncover novel effects of the content of the justices' speech. When the justices use rhetoric that legitimatizes the Court, listeners perceive the Court as less political and have increased feelings of institutional legitimacy toward the Court. This finding suggests that the justices can strategically use public rhetoric at a pulpit to influence perceptions about the Court.

The present era of "celebrity justices," epitomized by a plethora of merchandise promoting Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg as the "Notorious RBG" and praise for conservative justices from the Federalist Society, has been driven, in part, by an influx of public appearances from contemporary justices (Hasen, 2016, pp. 1–2). From a data standpoint, the justices' public remarks present a unique opportunity for examining modern extrajudicial behavior. Between 1960 and 1999, the justices made a total of 769 extrajudicial appearances. Between 2000 and 2014, that number nearly doubled to a total of 1,353 extrajudicial appearances (Hasen, 2016, p. 5).[2] Further, Black et al. (2016b) demonstrate that most of the justices' extrajudicial trips are taken to give speeches. They find that these trips can be predicted by ideological, personal, and legal factors, suggesting that the justices' decision to give public remarks may be similarly motivated by their judicial goals (Black et al., 2016b, p. 375).[3]

An implication of these studies is that the justices' extrajudicial speeches may provide useful insights into under-tapped elements of strategic judicial behavior. Indeed, Murphy (1964, p. 126) argues that the justices may use public speeches to achieve their goals, such as maintaining institutional legitimacy (Epstein & Knight, 1998). That the content of the justices' speech can help them achieve

legitimacy-based goals (Strother & Glennon, 2021) invites a deep analysis to determine how the justices' speak off the bench. While speaking off the bench is likely motivated by strategic goals similar to those undertaken during the judicial process, giving public remarks is not a part of the justices' duties on the bench. Institutionalist theories would suggest that the justices will speak differently based on their setting and the rules and norms of that setting (Epstein & Knight, 1998; Murphy, 1964). To account for the influence of institutional setting, I will provide a theoretical argument that helps explain how the content of justices' off-bench remarks relates to their speech on the bench, and then present evidence indicating differences between these two settings.

ORAL ARGUMENT VS. PUBLIC REMARKS

In their official duties, the justices are limited to two main methods of public communication: oral argument and written opinions (Johnson, 2004; Maltzman et al., 2000). Because oral argument speech is vocal, it provides a better comparison with the justices' public remarks and will be the focus of my comparison. Institutionalist theory holds that variation in rules and norms is strongly linked to variation in behavior (North, 1990; Schelling, 1960, 1978; Shepsle, 2017). These theories have been successfully applied to the study of the Supreme Court (Epstein & Knight, 1998; Murphy, 1964) and help inform predictions related to judicial behavior during the judicial process (e.g., Black & Owens, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Maltzman et al., 2000). Following studies that demonstrate how variation in rules and norms can lead to variation in judicial behavior, I theorize that the justices' speaking behavior will differ between oral argument and their public remarks due to the differences in the rules, norms, and purpose of these two settings.

The rules and norms of oral argument constrain the justices' speaking behavior (Johnson, 2004). For example, in the 2019 term, the justices introduced a "two-minute rule" that instructs them to remain silent during the first two minutes of an advocate's argument (Jacobi et al., 2019). Traditional norms of oral argument allow for a free-for-all questioning environment, in which the justices are free to "ask questions at any time, but they try to not interrupt one another" (Johnson et al., 2009; Ringsmuth et al., 2023, p. 68). Evidence suggests, however, that some justices are more likely than others to ignore norms related to interruption (Jacobi & Schweers, 2017). The Court established new rules for oral argument

during the COVID-19 pandemic. The justices moved to telephonic arguments where the they were required to ask questions in order of seniority (Jacobi et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2021; Ringsmuth et al., 2023). Under these new rules, Chief Justice Roberts became, likely to his delight, the umpire of oral argument by moderating the justices' speaking time and ensuring each justice got a chance to ask questions (Jacobi et al., 2021). When the justices returned to in-person argument in 2021, they reinstated the free-form questioning format but retained the option for a second round of questions moderated by Roberts (Ringsmuth et al., 2023, p. 76). This research demonstrates that modifications to the rules and norms of oral argument led to changes in the justices' speaking behavior.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that oral argument helps the justices make decisions. Indeed, the justices rely, in part, on the information the advocates provide them at oral argument and the quality of the arguments they make to help them decide cases (Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006). In fact, the justices may broadcast their preferences toward one advocate over the other, or even tip their hand as to how they will vote in a case based on how they speak during oral argument (Black et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2009). As such, the purpose of oral argument is to provide the justices with information and arguments that aid and influence their decision-making.

When the justices speak off the bench, their speech is largely unconstrained. There are no special rules as to what the justices can or cannot say in their speeches. While Canon 4 of the 2023 Code of Conduct for Justices discourages some speaking behavior, the lack of enforcement and the looseness of the code's language may allow the justices to skirt Canon 4's guidelines. Because of these two prominent features of the code—the limited guidelines and lack of enforcement (VanSickle & Liptak, 2023) —it is likely that the justices' extrajudicial behavior will continue to be governed by norms. As described above, these norms have changed over time. As these norms have changed, so too has the content of the justices' public speeches. The justices have transitioned from being perfectly comfortable making partisan speeches to a general abstention from remarks that wander into the "political thicket" (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Westin, 1962).[4]

The purpose of the justices' public remarks is just beginning to be uncovered. Today's justices speak to educate the public and shore up support for the Court (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Krewson, 2019; Schmidt, 2013; Strother & Glennon, 2021). By using their speeches to bolster institutional legitimacy, the justices engage in "strategic institutional maintenance" by attempting to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the public by using legitimizing language in their public

speeches (Keck, 2007; Strother & Glennon, 2021, p. 438). Maintaining institutional legitimacy is an essential component for the Court to operate in modern American politics (Bartels & Johnston, 2013, 2020), incentivizing the justices to speak to legitimize.

In summary, the constraints and purposes of oral argument and the justices' public remarks are different. During oral argument, the justices must abide by rules and longer held norms (Jacobi et al., 2019; Ringsmuth et al., 2023). The Court's 2023 Code of Conduct, on the other hand, provides guidelines for extrajudicial speech that will likely be ignored due to a lack of enforcement procedures, suggesting that loose, self-imposed norms will continue to govern the content of the justices' public remarks (Creamer & Jain, 2020; Westin, 1962). While justices use oral argument to help them decide cases by gathering information and evaluating arguments (Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006), they tend to use public remarks to bolster legitimacy and cultivate public support (Davis, 2011; Glennon & Strother, 2019; Krewson 2019; Schmidt, 2013; Strother & Glennon, 2021). The variation between the rules, norms, and purpose of oral argument and justices' public speaking environments broadly suggests that their speech will be different in these two settings. Thus, I expect that the content of the justices' public remarks will differ from their oral argument speech. To tease out the specifics of this relationship, I offer an examination of five different types of linguistic content.

First, I examine gendered language. Roberts and Utych (2020) argue that political elites will strategically use gendered language to pursue their goals. This ties into how justices behave off the bench: they strategically give public remarks to try to increase the Court's legitimacy (Strother & Glennon, 2021). Institutional settings can be pressured by gender dynamics, however, and will often constrain gendered language within those settings (Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014). Both oral argument and the justices' public speaking environments exhibit pressures of gender dynamics that constrain speakers to comply with gendered norms of language (Gleason, 2020; Gleason & Smart, 2022; Glennon & Strother, 2019, p. 255). Consistent between these two settings is that pressures of gender dynamics come from multiple sources. During oral argument, these pressures come from the attorney arguing the case and the gender composition of the Court (Gleason & Smart, 2022). During the justices' public remarks, these pressures come from individuals that constrain the justices' speech, such as interviewers (Glennon & Strother, 2019). However, the speeches I examine in this study are podium-style speeches given by the justices alone without any moderators. As a result, the level of constraint will be lower in this speaking environment

relative to what it is during oral argument. Thus, I expect that the justices will use more gendered language during their public remarks than during oral argument.

Next, I look at emotional language. Multiple studies have identified variation in the justices' use of emotional language during oral argument (Black et al., 2011; Dietrich et al., 2019; Treul et al., 2009). This literature suggests that the justices will use emotional language when they are pursuing goals (Black et al., 2011, p. 573). During their speeches, the justices are actively pursuing their goal of bolstering institutional legitimacy and shoring up support for themselves and the rule of law (Krewson, 2019; Strother & Glennon, 2021). During oral argument, on the other hand, the justices are more concerned with gathering information used to help them make decisions (Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006). Accordingly, I expect the justices to use more emotional language during their public remarks than during oral argument.

Third, I examine drives. Language that includes drives allows scholars to understand the motivations underlying behavior (Pennebaker et al., 2015, p. 21). During their public speeches, the justices are pursuing broad goals, such as shoring up legitimacy (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Krewson, 2019; Strother & Glennon, 2021). During oral argument, the justices are gathering information used to help them make decisions (Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006). Because the justices use language in their public remarks to help achieve their goals (Strother & Glennon, 2021), I expect them to use language that includes drives more often during their public remarks than during oral argument.

Fourth, I examine cognitive language. This type of language offers insights into how someone thinks and processes information (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 17). During public remarks, the justices presumably have prepared remarks, allowing them to exert less cognitive effort. Comparably, because the justices are deciding cases that will influence national legal policy, oral argument is a higher-stakes setting, where the rapid-fire questions from the justices to the advocates can produce intense exchanges (i.e., Black et al., 2011) and the arguments presented can affect the decisions the justices make (i.e., Johnson et al., 2006). The difference in setting and stakes may therefore lead to a difference in the justices' cognitive effort and language. More specifically, because a speech is a lower-stake setting than oral argument, I expect that the justices will use less cognitive language during their public remarks than during oral argument.

Finally, I examine political language. The primary goal of contemporary justices is to shore up institutional legitimacy (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Krewson, 2019; Strother & Glennon, 2021). To achieve this goal, the justices want to

speak in a way that separates the Court from politics and legitimizes it as an institution. This behavior has an effect. When the justices use more legitimizing speech, the Court is perceived as less political (Strother & Glennon, 2021). Using overtly political language would work contrary to achieving legitimatizing goals. It is even less probable, however, that the justices would make overtly political comments during oral argument. As such, I expect that the justices will use more political language in their public remarks than in their oral argument speech (Liptak, 2020).

The justices speak publicly at vastly different rates (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Hasen, 2016). Based on theories of the public remarks as strategic behavior (Krewson, 2019; Murphy, 1964; Strother & Glennon, 2021), this variation suggest that the justices put different strategic premiums on public remarks as a means of achieving their legitimacy-based goals. A justice may modify their speech depending on whether they see public remarks as an efficient means to attaining their legitimacy-based goals (Glennon & Strother, 2019; Strother & Glennon, 2021). Therefore, I expect the content of the public remarks to vary between justices.

DATA AND MEASURES

To test my hypotheses, I analyzed the linguistic content of the justices' speech during their non-interview public remarks and the Court's oral argument. Specifically, I examined five types of linguistic content: gendered language, emotional language, cognitive language, political language, and expressed drives. I began by compiling the transcripts of all of the justices' public remarks available in C-SPAN's Video Library. The aggregate data included 169 public remarks made by 14 justices between 2002 and 2022 with a corpus of just over 316,000 words.[5] Next, I gathered all oral argument transcripts from the years in which a justice gave public remarks. These data came from Walker Boyle and Azeem Bande-Ali's oral argument transcript database.[6] I removed the advocates' speech from these transcripts, so I was left with exclusively the justices' oral argument speech. These data included nearly 800 cases and a corpus of just over 3.4 million words.

Gendered Language

Transcripts at the ready, I employed Roberts and Utych's (2020) dictionary of gendered words (hereafter DGW) to measure the gendered language content of

the justices' speech. Using the DGW diverges from recent studies that analyze gendered language in the justices' speech (e.g., Gleason, 2020; Gleason & Smart, 2022). To measure gendered language, these studies rely on gender stereotypes associated with affective language content (i.e., Newman et al., 2008). However, "linguists have shown that individual words can be classified as gendered and have substantial impacts on a conversation depending on the word choice of its participants" (Roberts & Utych, 2020, p. 41). Therefore, "rather than analyzing gender stereotypes and similar phenomenon," Roberts and Utych argue that "determining *which* words are more masculine or feminine . . . is a methodologically important approach to determining the consequences of masculine and feminine language in politics" (2020, pp. 40, 43, emphasis in original). To ensure that my analysis captures the unique gendered qualities of individual words, I apply Roberts and Utych's analytical process.

The DGW was created by asking survey respondents to rate words on a scale of 1 (very feminine) to 7 (very masculine). The DGW includes a total of 700 words, of which approximately 6% are classified as very feminine and 11% are classified as very masculine. Very feminine words are defined as being rated 3 or lower; some examples include "adorable," "glimmer," "exquisite," "soothe," and "sassy." Very masculine words are defined as being rated 5 or higher; examples include "jock," "ravage," "handsome," "thug," and "swagger" (Roberts & Utych, 2020, p. 45). I subsetted the DGW to include the most feminine and most masculine words. I also remove all words from the DGW that implied a legal context. Including these words may result in inflated estimates of gendered language because these words are more likely to appear in legal speech (Black et al., 2016a).[7] The subsetted dictionary includes a total of 120 words, 45 of which were very feminine words and 75 were very masculine words.

Using the subsetted dictionary, I counted the total number of very feminine and very masculine words within the justices' public remarks and oral argument speech per case. Next, I calculated the rate of feminine words and the rate of masculine words for each of the justices' public remarks and oral argument speech per case by dividing the total number of feminine or masculine found in each speech type by the total number of words from that speech type and multiplied that value by 1,000. I computed these rates for each opinion per 1,000 words so I could control for the variation in total speech within and between the justices' public remarks and oral argument speech (Roberts & Utych, 2020, p. 45). Greater values indicate higher rates of feminine and masculine language within a given speech type.

Emotional Language

To measure Emotional Language and the three other categories of linguistic content, I employed the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (hereafter LIWC) program (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). The LIWC is a text analysis software that uses a dictionary-based word search approach to examine the content of language within text (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Several studies have demonstrated the external and internal validity of the LIWC, and it has been successfully employed in Supreme Court scholarship (e.g., Black et al., 2016a). The program searches a text for specific words based on a variety of linguistic variables and counts the number of words that fall into a given variable. I use LIWC's Affect category to determine the percentage of emotional words used by each justice within each transcript in my data (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 18). Examples of words include "good," "new," "love," and "well."

Drives

I examined the extent to which the justices discuss their drives, needs, and motivations using the LIWC's Drives category. Scholars who study judicial behavior are primarily interested in explaining why the justices behave in certain ways by analyzing their preferences and goals (e.g., Baum, 2006). Examining my data using LIWC's Drives category allowed me determine the percentage of words during oral argument and public remarks that implicate the justices' drives and motives (Pennebaker et al., 2015, p. 21). Common example words implicating drives and motives include "our," "we," "us," and "work" (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 11). This analysis will demonstrate in which setting the justices discuss their drives more and potentially points scholars toward the spaces where the justices defined their drives, motives, and needs.

Cognitive Language

I expected the justices to exert a greater amount of cognitive effort during oral argument than they do during public remarks. To estimate cognitive engagement, I used LIWC's Cognition category, which provides the percentage of words used in a text that imply how someone thinks and processes or recalls information (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 17). Example words include "is," "are," "but," and "was" (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 11). Using the LIWC, I was able to derive the percentage of words that imply cognitive functions used by each justice during oral argument and public remarks.

Political Language

The justices repeatedly assert that their decisions are absent from politics and are based on the facts and the law. While judicial politics studies have shown that numerous factors often outweigh the law in the justices' decision-making (e.g., Black et al., 2020; Epstein & Knight, 1998; Hazelton et al., 2023; Segal & Spaeth, 2002), it is likely the justices would avoid being overtly political during their public oral arguments to preserve the idea that justices are apolitical actors. Even though the justices may tip their hands during oral argument as to how they will vote ideologically (Black et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2009), speaking in blatant political terms is unlikely. During public remarks, however, the justices are not performing their judicial duties, leaving more room for discussing politics or speaking in political terms. To test this possibility, I use LIWC's Politics category, which measures the percentage of words used by each justice within each transcript in my data that are common in political and legal discourses (Boyd et al., 2022, p. 19). Examples of words include "democratic," "congress," "president," and "govern" (Boyd et al., 2022, pp. 12, 19).

Finally, it may be the case that the justices speak differently depending on whom they are speaking to. For example, a justice may speak differently when they are giving remarks in front of other judges than how they speak when they are giving a college commencement address. To account for this possibility, I control for whether the justices are speaking to a legal audience (other judges, bar associations, law schools) or a nonlegal audience (members of the public, historical foundations, college students) by including a dummy variable that is coded as 1 when a justice is speaking to a legal audience and 0 when they are speaking to a nonlegal audience.

METHOD AND FINDINGS

Figure 9.1 displays a distribution of total percentage of linguistic content present in the justices' oral argument speech and public remarks. For example, approximately 20% of Justice John Paul Stevens's total oral argument speech contained cognitive language, while his total public remarks speech contained approximately 13.5% cognitive language. At face value, the distribution suggests that the linguistic content of the justices' oral argument speech is different from that of their public remarks speech. This distribution, however, does not control for the

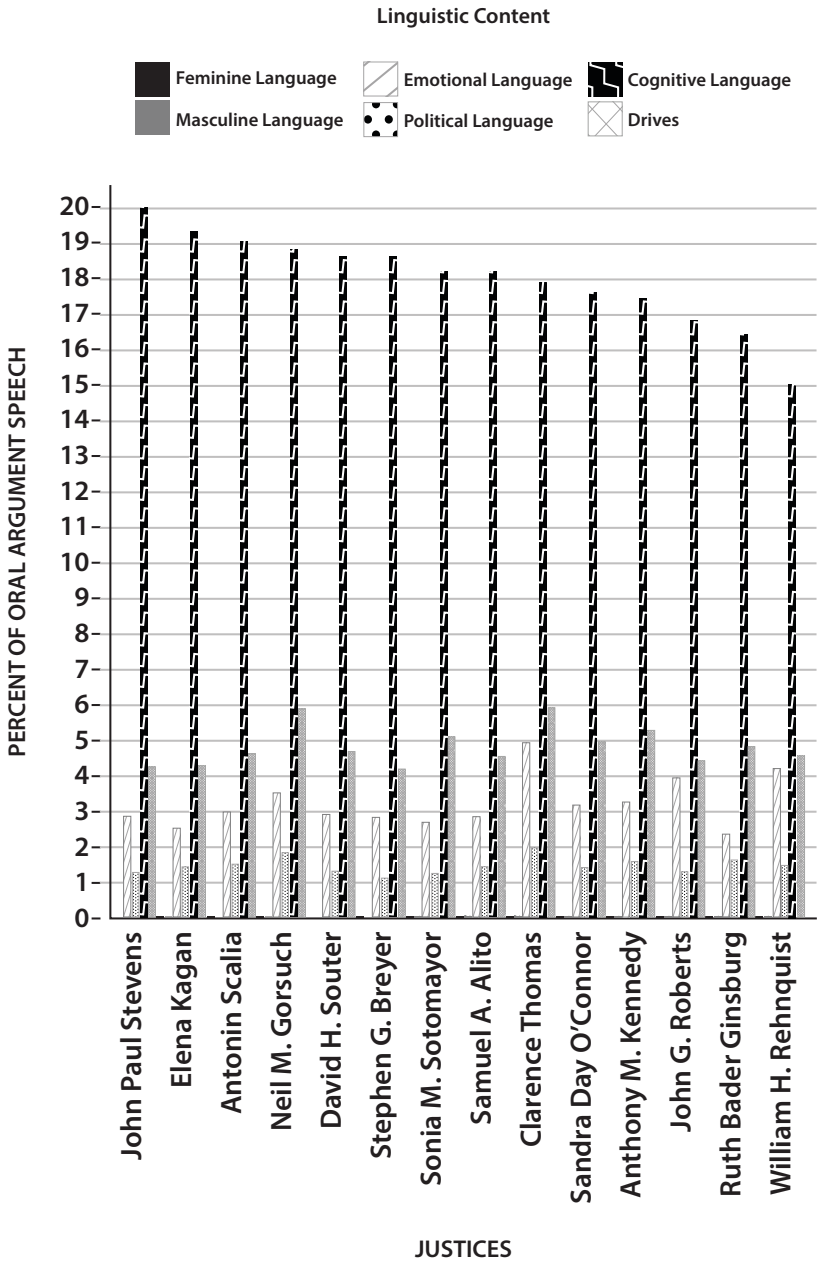


FIGURE 9.1a Total percentage for all types of linguistic content between oral argument speech by justice.
(*Figure continued*)

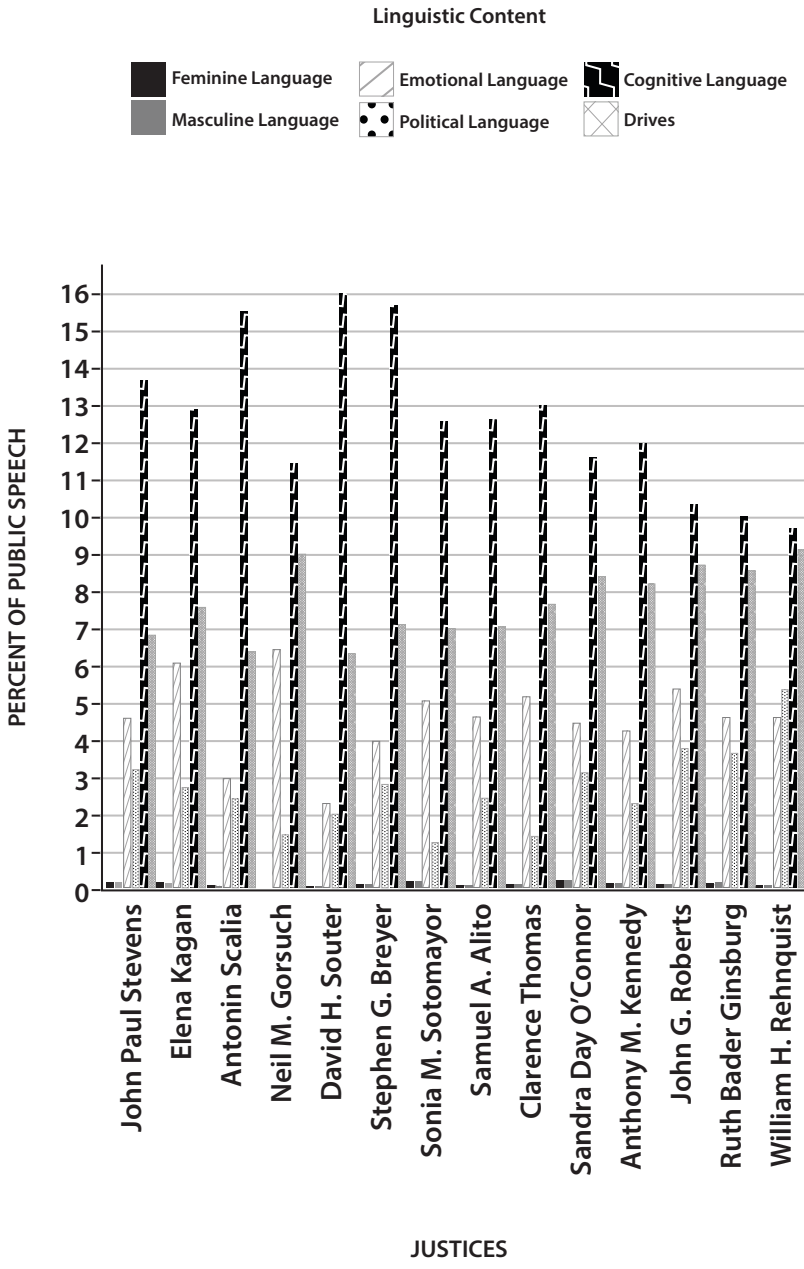


FIGURE 9.1b Total percentage for all types of linguistic content between public remarks by justice.

variation in speech length within oral argument and public remarks or the differences in corpus size within my data. Indeed, the ratio difference in corpus size between my public remarks and oral argument data is approximately 1 to 10. To determine whether significant differences exist between the linguistic content of the justices' oral argument speech and their public remarks, I ran a series of difference-in-means tests via linear regression to compare each justice's oral argument speech to their public remarks speech while controlling for word count and audience type. To calculate the difference in each type of linguistic content between the two speech settings, I subtracted the average amount of linguistic content present in each justice's oral argument speech from the average amount of linguistic content present in their public remarks. Tables 9.1 and 9.2 in the Appendix to this chapter provide the coefficient estimates for the effect on linguistic content when moving from oral argument speech to extrajudicial speech. Table 9.1 reports the change in rate of gendered language per 1,000 words, and Table 9.2 presents the percentage change in linguistic content.

Consistent with my hypotheses, the linguistic content is significantly different between oral argument speech and public remarks for certain justices. Figure 9.2 displays two coefficient plots of the estimated effect moving from oral argument speech to extrajudicial speech had on Feminine and Masculine Language at the 95% confidence interval. Figure 9.3 displays four coefficient plots of the estimated effect moving from oral argument speech to extrajudicial speech had on Emotional, Cognitive, and Political Language and Drives at the 95% confidence interval.

Starting with gendered language, the coefficient plots displayed in Figure 9.2 demonstrate that all justices except Neil M. Gorsuch use more gendered language overall in their public remarks than during oral argument. Results are statistically significant for a majority of justices in my data. Similar to Roberts and Utych's (2020) findings, the substantive effects of moving from oral argument to public remarks on the gendered language content of the justices' speech is somewhat small. For example, the data show that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who had the strongest effect for Feminine Language, used, on average, approximately two more feminine words during her public remarks than in her oral argument speech. Justice Gorsuch, who had the strongest effect for Masculine Language, used, on average, approximately six more masculine words during his public remarks than in his oral argument speech. Overall, these data demonstrate differences in the gendered language use between oral argument speech and public

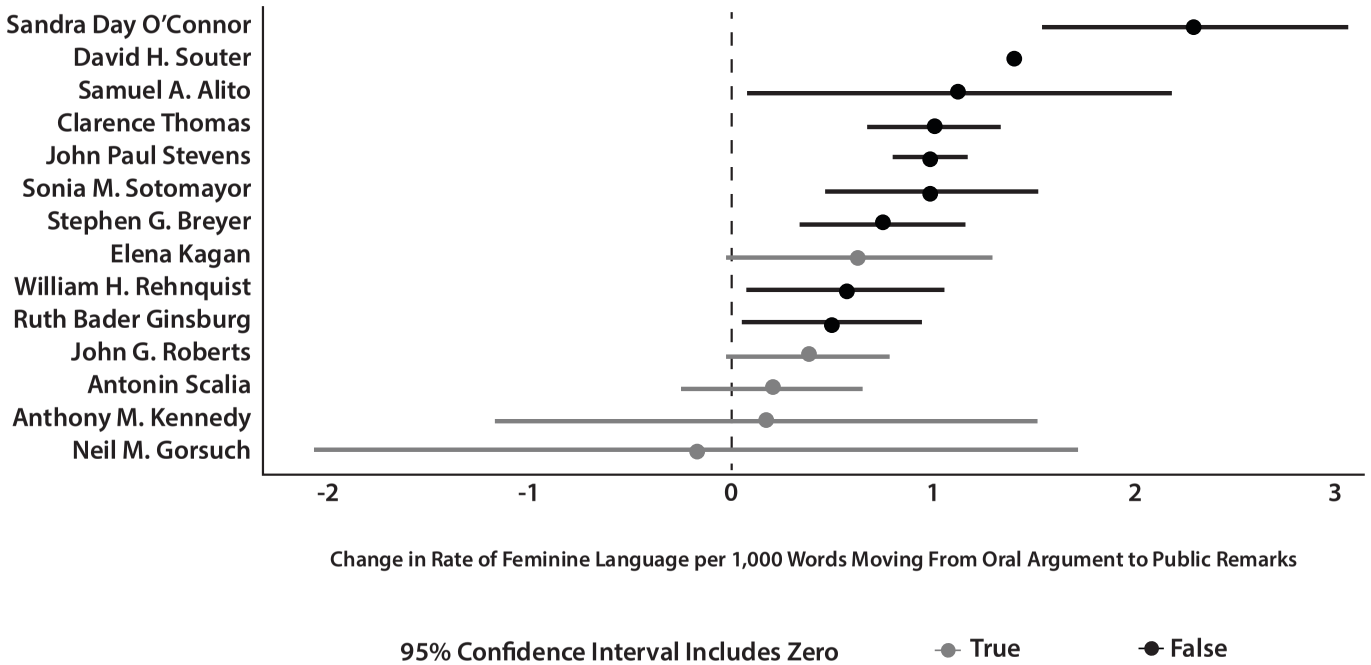


FIGURE 9.2a Effect on gendered language (feminine) moving from oral argument speech to public remarks.

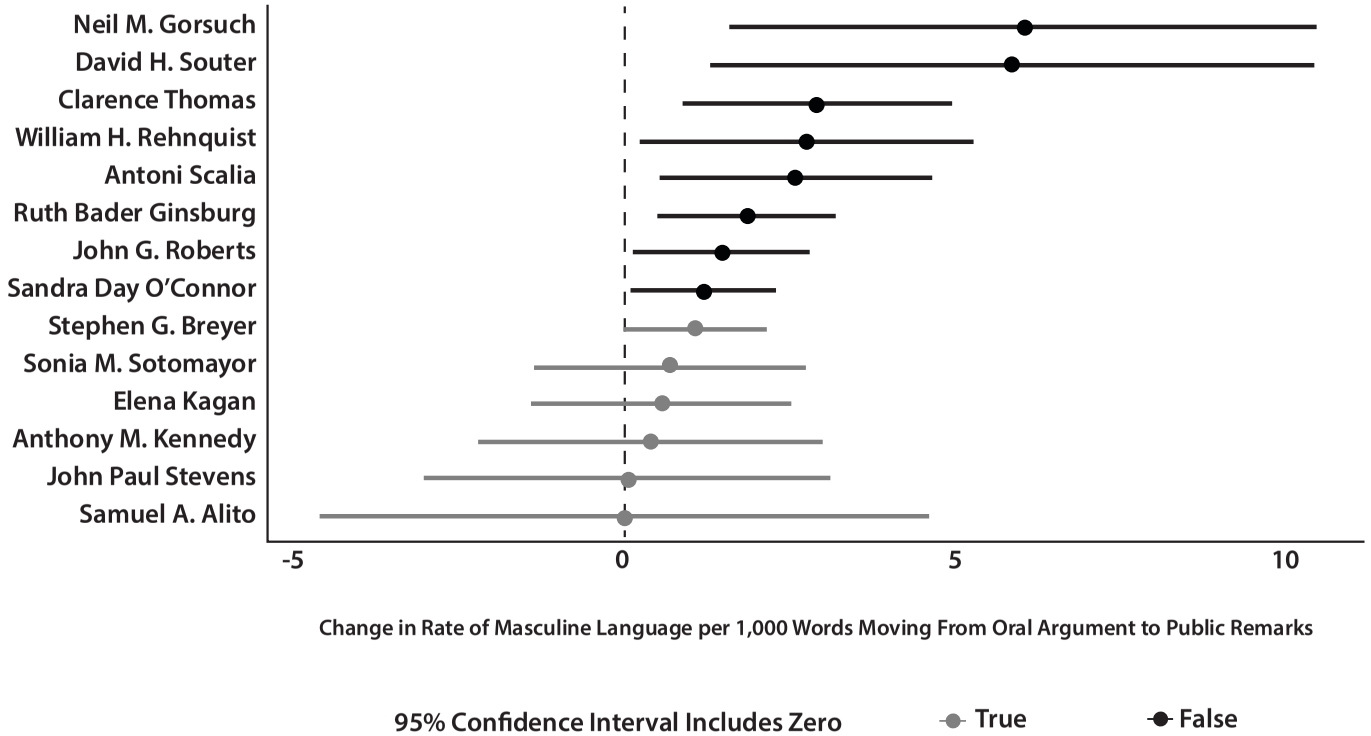


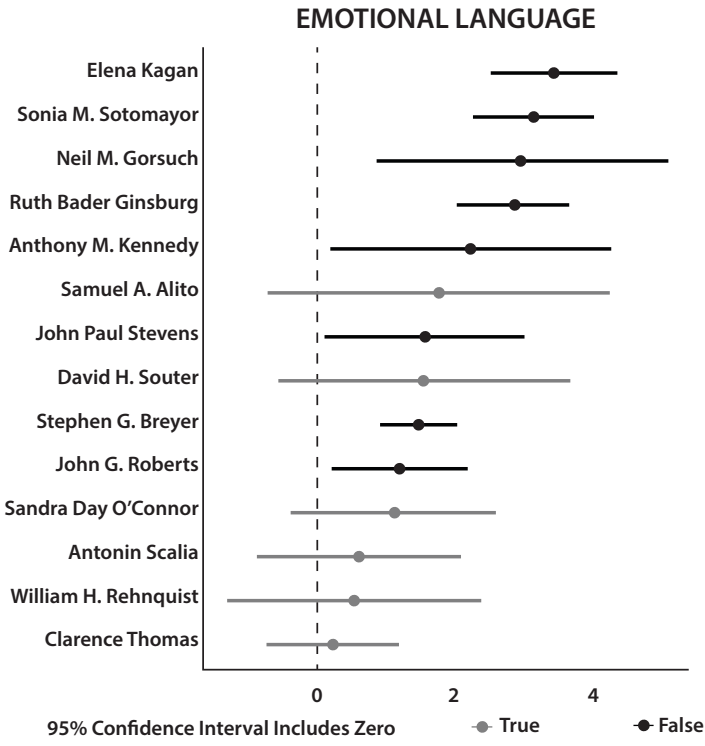
FIGURE 9.2b Effect on gendered language (masculine) moving from oral argument speech to public remarks.

remarks. Scholars ought to examine potential factors that lead to variation in gendered language in the Court communicative activities—that is, oral argument and opinion writing—to determine the extent to which theories of gendered language use within groups apply to the Court's group-based decision-making and communication (i.e., Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014).

Moving to Emotional Language, results in Figure 9.3 demonstrate statistically significant differences in emotional content for 9 out of the 14 justices in my data. The coefficient estimates presented in Table 9.2 offer a tangible substantive effect for each justice by providing the percent change in emotional language when moving from oral argument to public remarks. Justices Elena Kagan's and Sonia M. Sotomayor's speech demonstrate the two strongest effects: Within these data, the emotional content of Kagan's and Sotomayor's speech increased by 3.43% and 3.13%, respectively, when moving from their oral argument speech to their extrajudicial speech. Because emotional language "provide[s] valuable insight[s] into people's intentions, motives, and desires" (Black et al., 2011, p. 573), the significant increases in the emotional content of certain justices' public remarks may allow future scholars to derive theses justices' preferences and motives from their extrajudicial speech.

Multiple studies have observed that Justice Antonin Scalia stands out from his colleagues when it comes to emotional speech (Black et al., 2011; Wexler, 2005, 2007). My results concur with these findings by demonstrating that Scalia did not speak differently during oral argument compared to the way he spoke to the public when it came to emotional language. Since he joined the Court, Scalia was identified as a unique character on the bench (Murphy, 2015). My results reveal another unique feature about him: When Scalia spoke to a public audience, his use of emotional language was no different than it was when he was speaking during oral argument.

Results from the Drives category demonstrate that all justices discuss their drives, needs, and motivations more during their public remarks than during oral argument. Results are statistically significant for all but three justices. These results harmonize with studies that note the importance of goals and preferences in judicial decision-making (e.g., Baum, 2006; Black & Owens, 2016). That justices express their motives and drives to a greater extent during their off-bench remarks suggest that an all-encompassing analysis of the content of the justices' extrajudicial appearances may reveal that both their judicial and extrajudicial decision-making are motivated by diverse or similar preferences and goals. For



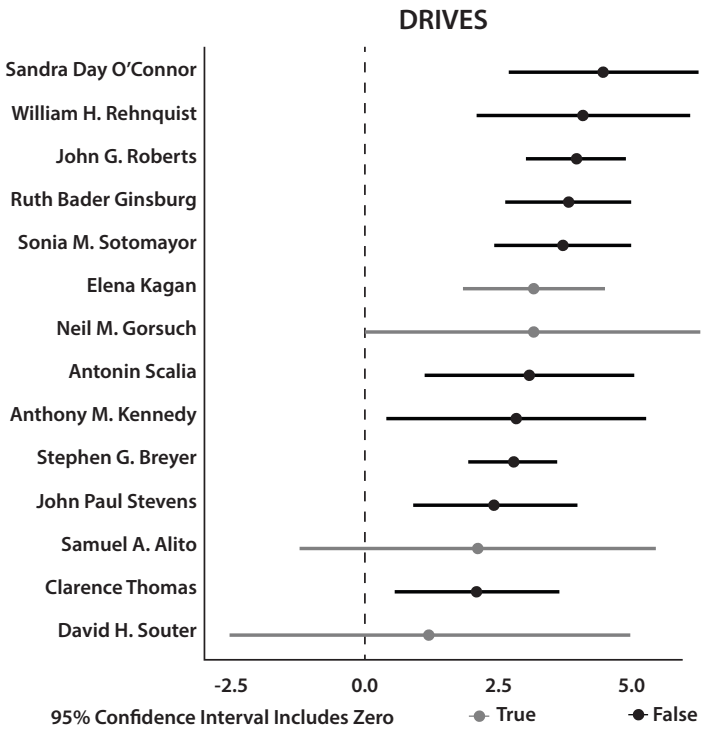
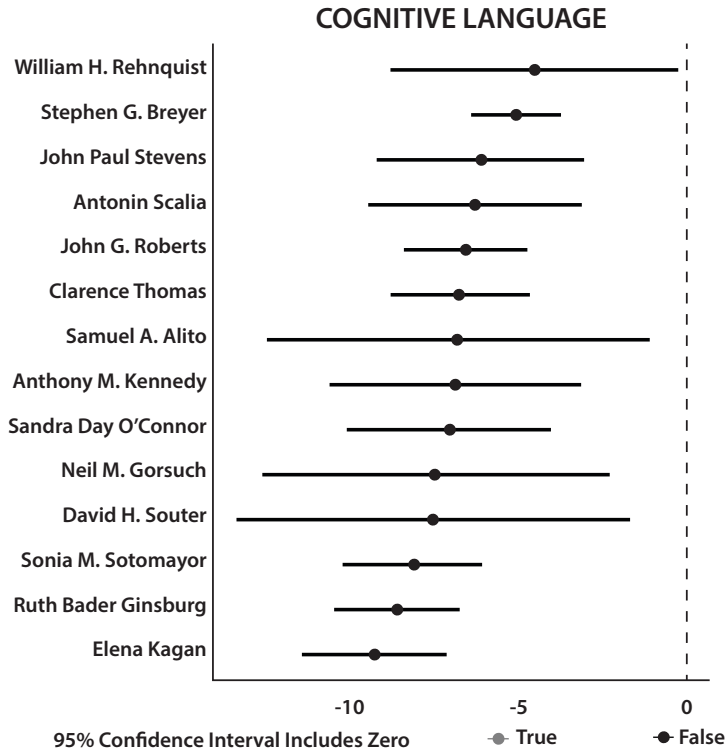


FIGURE 9.3a
Effect of moving from oral argument speech to public remarks on emotional language and drives. (*Figure continued*)



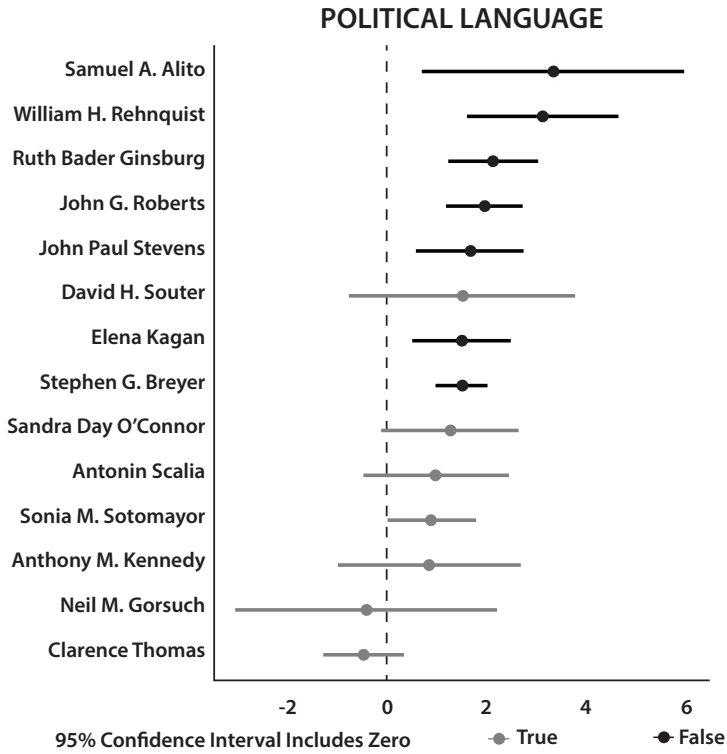


FIGURE 9.3b
Effect of moving from oral argument speech to public remarks on cognitive and political language.

example, in one of his final public speeches as sitting justice, Stephen G. Breyer stated the following: "[When deciding cases,] I keep in mind the fact that we are a nation of nearly 330 million people of every race, every religion, many different national origins, holding virtually every possible point of view." It can be inferred from this statement that a motivation for Breyer's decision-making rests on his recognition of the nation's diversity. Even though justices seem to hint at their decisions in their speeches, it may be difficult to model judicial decision-making based on the justices' public statements. Nevertheless, these data suggest, at the least, that the justices' public remarks are worth exploring as a source for deciphering their motives, goals, and preferences.

Estimates for Cognitive Language in Figure 9.3 demonstrate that all justices use less cognitive language during their public remarks. Results are statistically significant for all justices. These data suggest the justices are more cognitively engaged and may be exerting more cognitive energy during oral argument as they work through cases, hurl questions at advocates, and, in Justice Breyer's case, pose amusing and complex hypotheticals about tomato children and marshmallow guns (see Liptak, 2022). All justices use at least 4.5% less cognitive language during their public remarks, suggesting that they are more cognitively engaged during their judicial duties than during their extrajudicial activities. Collins (2011) demonstrates that cognitive dissonance, which is a "state of psychological discomfort that arises when an individual behaves in a manner that is inconsistent with that individual's beliefs or prior actions," can affect a justice's decision to author a separate opinion (p. 362). It may be the case that the justices' decision-making is influenced by other cognitive processes or psychological states. Indeed, these data suggest that most justices are more cognitively engaged during oral argument than during their extrajudicial remarks. To better understand the effects of cognition on judicial decision-making, scholars should explore the justices' judicial behavior as a function of their cognitive processes.

Results from the Political Language category offer insights into the justices' willingness to discuss politics off the bench. Indeed, Figure 9.3 demonstrates that all justices except Thomas and Gorsuch use more political language during their extrajudicial remarks than during oral argument. Results are statistically significant for half of the justices in my data. Justice Alito demonstrates the strongest effect: Within these data, the political content of his speech increased by approximately 3.34% when moving from his oral argument speech to his extrajudicial

speech. That Alito leads his colleagues in the political content of his public remarks speech is somewhat unsurprising. Alito has given overtly political speeches in the past (Liptak, 2010, 2020) and has gone far to defend his extrajudicial behavior (Alito, 2023). What will be interesting is whether Alito will continue to use overtly political language in his off-bench remarks, or whether the Court's adoption of its Code of Conduct will curb the political language within his, and his colleagues', speeches.

Finally, Figure 9.4 demonstrates a frequency distribution of public remarks per justice by audience type. These data demonstrate variation in how often each justice speaks publicly and whom they speak to when they give public remarks. Within my data, Chief Justice Roberts spoke the most frequently and Justice Gorsuch spoke the least frequently.[8] Figure 9.4 also demonstrates that nearly all justices spoke to legal audiences at a greater frequency than they speak to nonlegal audiences. Whether the justices spoke to a nonlegal or legal audience had a minimal effect on their speech content, however. Figures 9.5 and 9.6 demonstrate the effect of the audience type dummy variable on justice speech when moving from nonlegal to legal audiences. Coefficient estimates of this effect are displayed in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 in the Appendix to this chapter.[9]

That the majority of justices within my data present consistent statistically insignificant results indicates that audience type does not have a large effect on how the justices speak during their public remarks. Five justices present statistically significant results, however, which suggests that certain justices modify their speech when speaking to members of the legal profession. Figure 9.5 demonstrates that Justice Ginsburg used more feminine language while speaking to legal audiences, while Justice Thomas used less feminine language. The most interesting finding from Figure 9.5 is that Justice David H. Souter used less gendered language overall when speaking to legal audiences, suggesting that he took a gender-neutral approach when speaking to members of the legal community. Figure 9.6 displays that when talking to legal audiences, Justice Souter used less emotional language, Justice Kagan used more cognitive language, and Justice Sotomayor used less language that indicate her drives. The most substantively interesting finding from Figure 9.6 is that all justices used more cognitive language when speaking to legal audiences, suggesting that they were exerting greater cognitive effort when speaking to fellow judges, lawyers, and law students. Results are statistically significant for Justice Kagan alone, however.

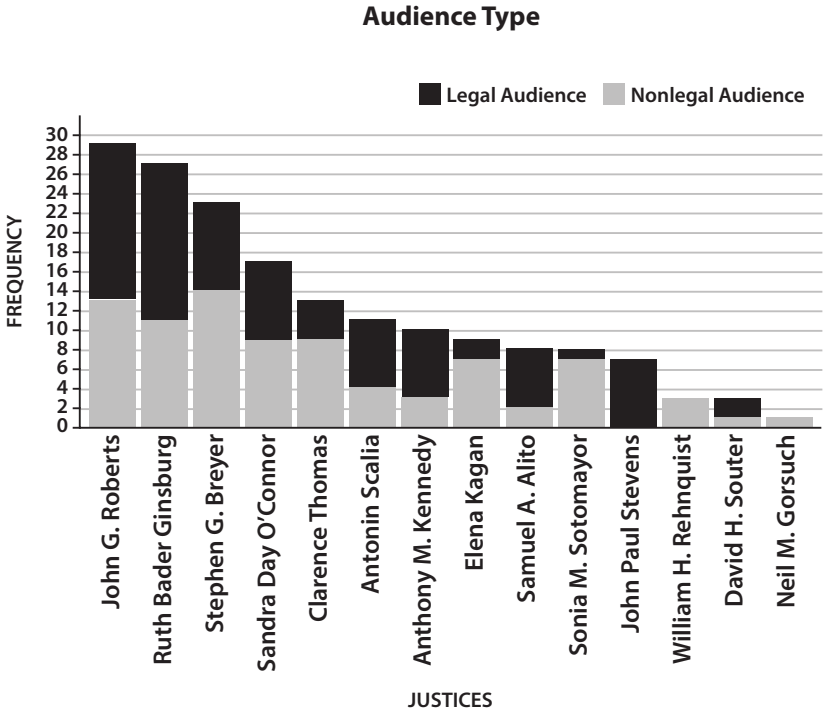


FIGURE 9.4 Frequency of the justices' public remarks by audience type.

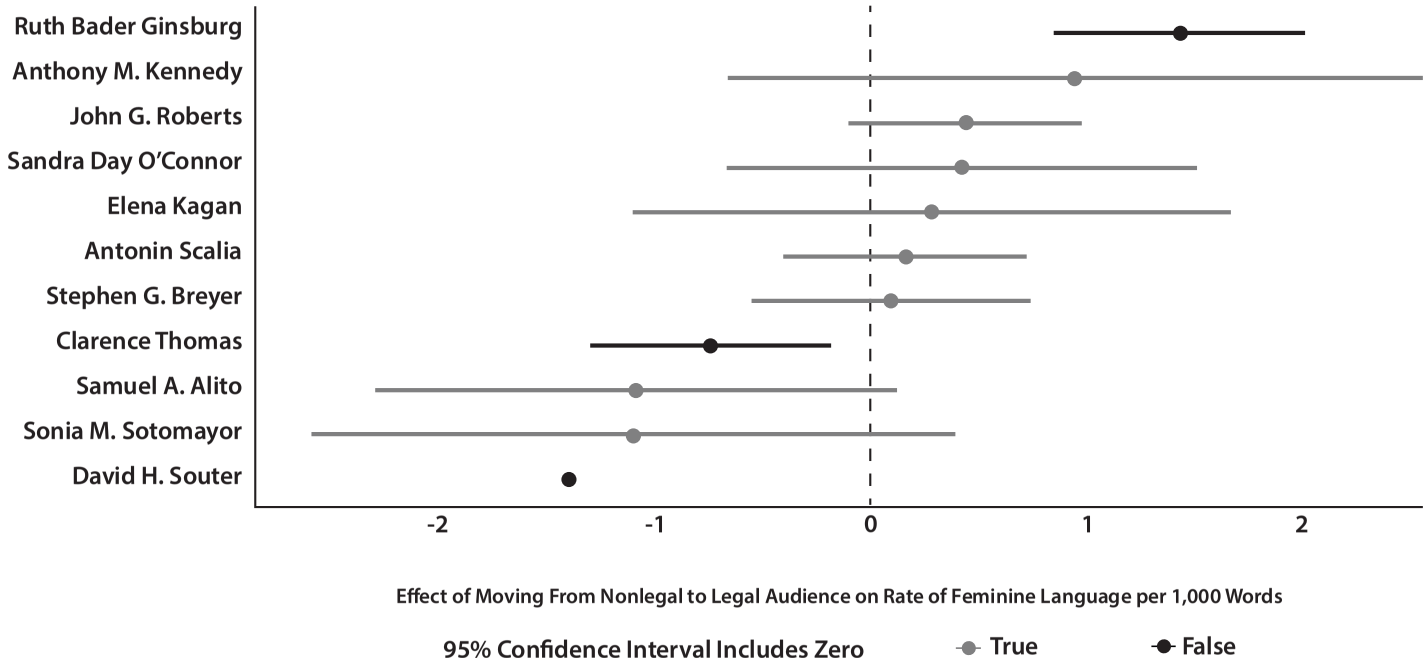


FIGURE 9.5a Effect of moving from nonlegal to legal audiences on gendered (feminine) language.

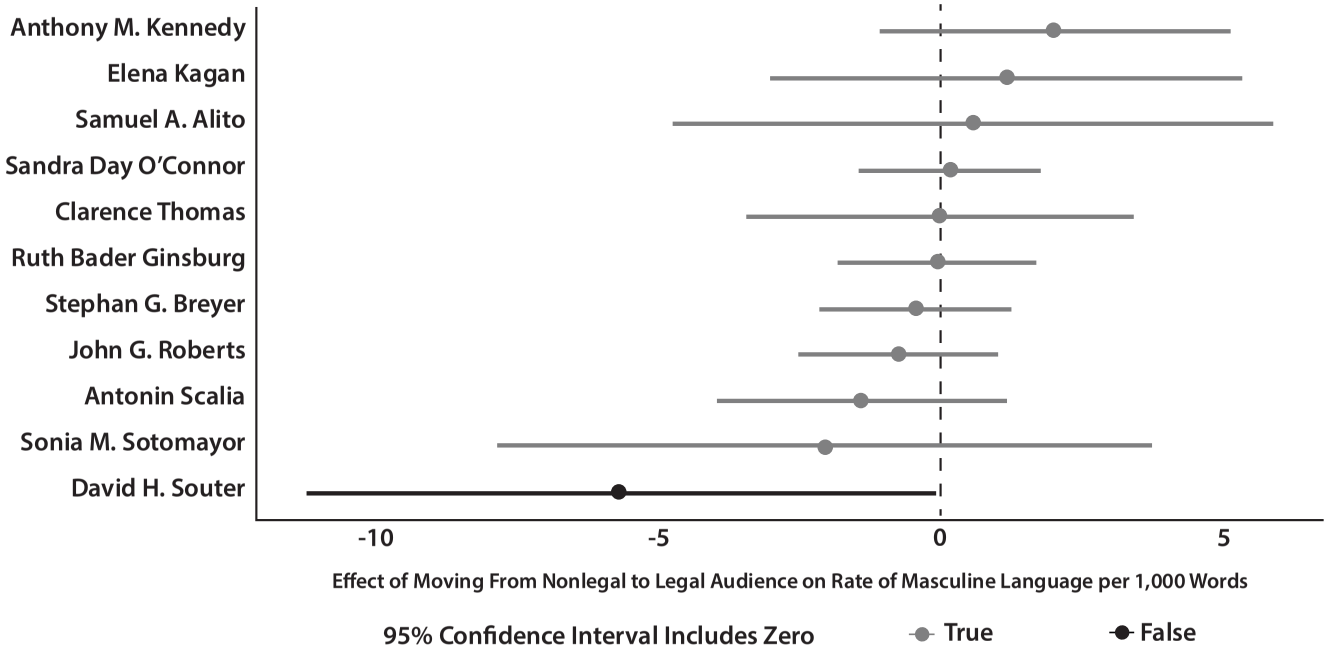
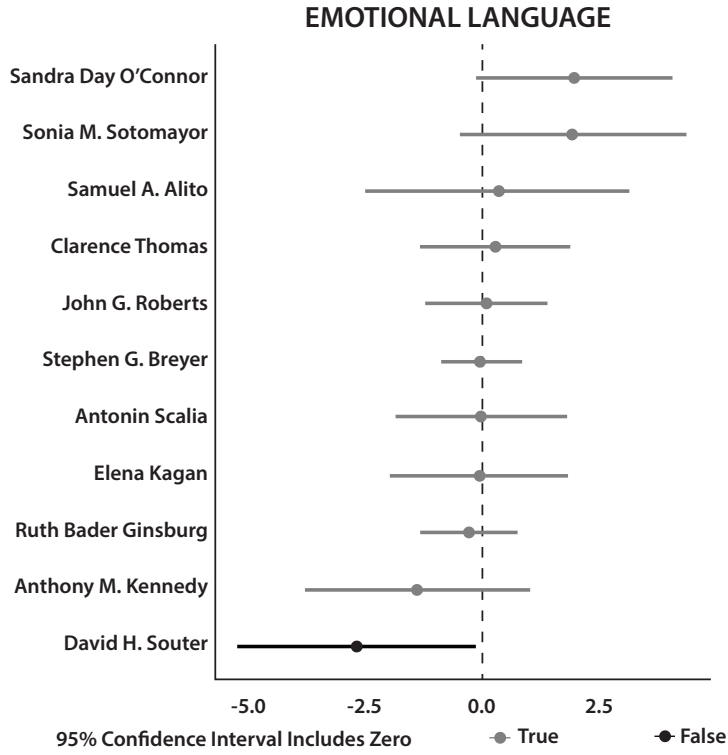


FIGURE 9.5b Effect of moving from nonlegal to legal audiences on gendered (masculine) language.



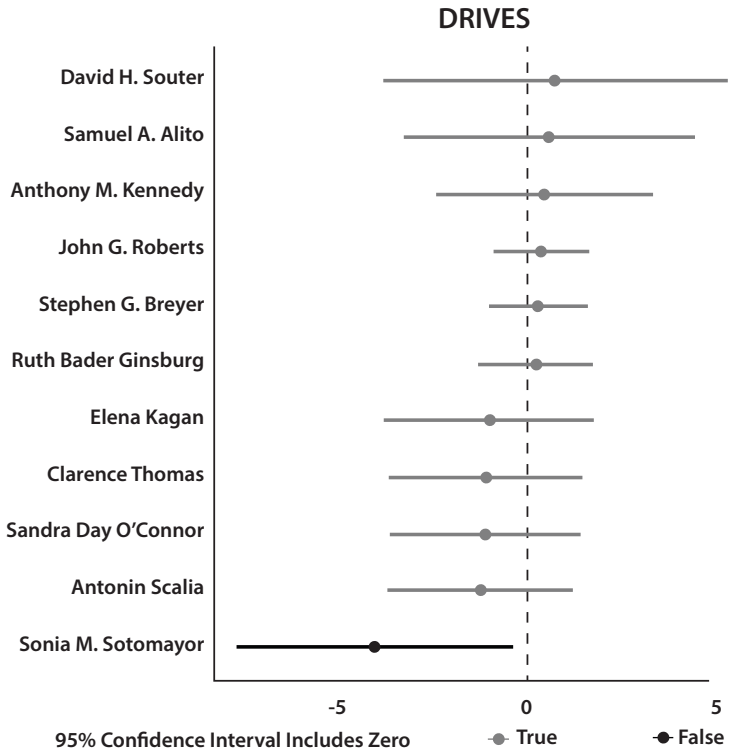
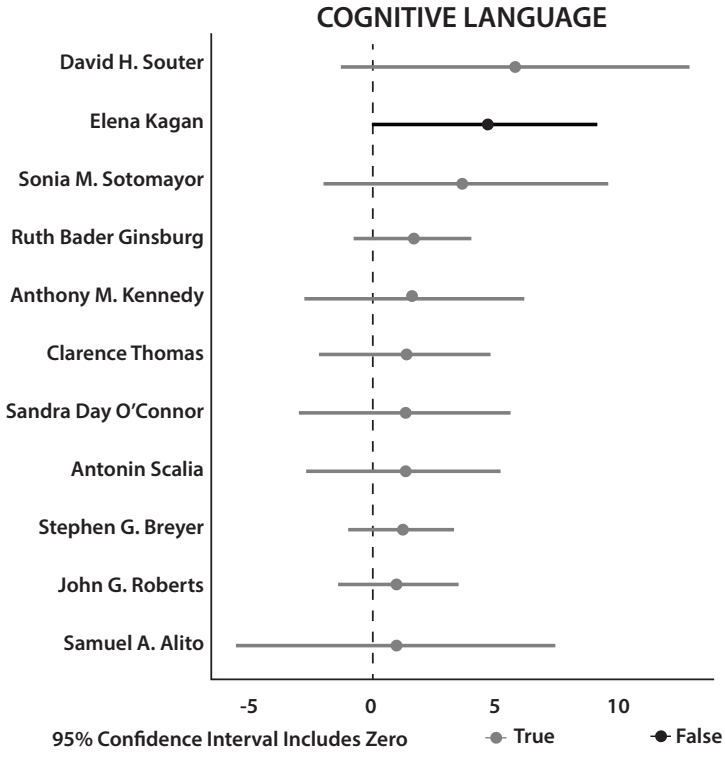


FIGURE 9.6a
Effect of moving from nonlegal to legal audiences on emotional language and drives.



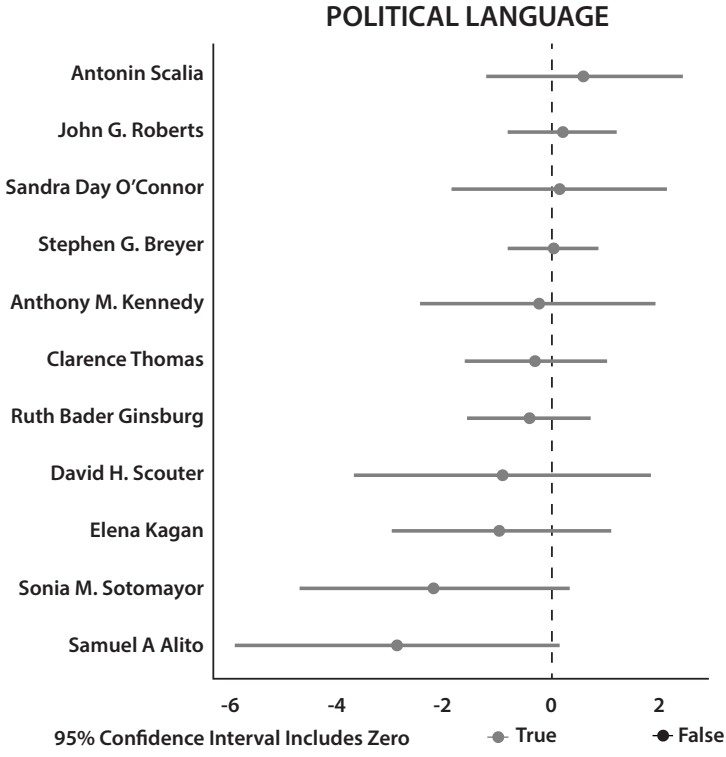


FIGURE 9.6b
Effect of moving from nonlegal to legal audiences on cognitive and political language.

CONCLUSION

The results presented in this chapter demonstrate that certain justices speak differently depending on whether they are speaking during oral argument or speaking to a public audience. That most justices don't vary their language when their audiences are composed of members of the legal profession indicates that the justices speak consistently during their public remarks regardless of whom they are speaking to. My findings have several implications for the study of judicial behavior. First, they suggest that extrajudicial speeches may provide information that can aid our understanding of judicial motives, goals, and preferences (e.g., Baum, 2006; Black & Owens, 2016; Black et al., 2011). Indeed, results related to the justices' emotional language use and discussion of their drives suggest that they express their preferences during public remarks, potentially allowing scholars to examine how these remarks shape judicial decision-making. Second, results related to cognition indicate that the justices apply various levels of cognitive effort to distinct aspects of their lives. Indeed, the significant difference in justices' cognitive language use suggests that cognitive processes and different psychological states factor into judicial behavior (e.g., Collins, 2011). Third, results related to gendered language call for increased attention from judicial politics scholars to analyze the presence and consequences of gendered language in the judicial process. That gendered language use may be a function of pressures brought on by the gender composition of groups (i.e., Karpowitz et al., 2012; Mendelberg et al., 2014) suggests that the environment in which the justices make their decisions and communicate may be pressured by gender dynamics. These pressures should be examined. Should scholars wish to uncover bias in the justices' decision-making, perhaps they can expand the analysis of political language provided here to determine the extent to which the justices express overtly political views, as they once did in the early days of the American republic (Westin, 1962), and whether these views shape their judicial behavior.

The data used in this study do not include all of the justices' extrajudicial remarks. A study by Hasen (2016) demonstrates that the justices appear off the bench at much greater frequencies than demonstrated here. An important distinction, however, is that Hasen's analysis looks at "reported appearances and not actual appearances," whereas my analysis examines actual appearances and the content of their speech during these appearances. Regardless, Hasen's findings are helpful in directing future research in this area. Indeed, the most important next step in this line of research is to collect more data on extrajudicial speech,

which Hasen's study suggests is plentiful. The C-SPAN Video Library has more speeches of justices that could not be included in this study due to the lack of available transcripts, but these speeches are available for transcription by ear and hand. Further, scholarship on extrajudicial speech would benefit from a broadening of data sources to establish a database that includes as many of the justices' public remarks as possible.

Using the content of these speeches, researchers could expand Krewson's (2019) study to determine the extent to which speech content affects personal favorability for the justices based on a variety of treatments, such as exposure to personal facts (i.e., Wolak, 2023), explanations of judicial philosophies, or the overall message of the speech. These inquiries would allow scholars to make causal claims about how exposure to the justices' public remarks shapes individual attitudes of the Court and its personnel. A similar line of research could be to examine the justices' interviews using both observational text-based quantitative methods and qualitative methods for analyzing interviews. Interviewing a justice is a rare opportunity. As such, the most available option for studying interview data related to the Court is to examine the interviews of the few who have gotten to sit down with one of The Supremes.[10]

Finally, future researchers should continue to examine the justices' goals for speaking publicly. With public approval of the Court at a record low (Jones, 2023), the justices motivations' to speak and the content of their speech may be connected to their judicial decisions and their knowledge of how the public perceives them (Baum, 2006; Black et al., 2016c). That the justices can engage in "strategic institutional maintenance" by attempting to shift the public's perceptions of the Court through their public remarks bodes well for the justices' goal of maintaining institutional legitimacy (Strother & Glennon, 2021, p. 438). To contribute to the normative debate surrounding the reflection or influence of the justices' extrajudicial behavior on their judicial preferences, scholars must continue to devote empirical attention to the justices' behavior outside the Marble Palace.

APPENDIX

TABLE 9.1 *Difference-in-Means Tests Via Linear Regression Estimating the Effect on Rates of Gendered Language per 1,000 Words Moving From Oral Argument to Public Remarks*

Justice	Effect	Gendered language type
Anthony M. Kennedy	0.17	Feminine Language
	0.41	Masculine Language
Antonin Scalia	0.21	Feminine Language
	2.61**	Masculine Language
Clarence Thomas	1.01**	Feminine Language
	2.94**	Masculine Language
David H. Souter	1.39	Feminine Language
	5.90**	Masculine Language
Elena Kagan	0.63	Feminine Language
	0.58	Masculine Language
John G. Roberts	0.38	Feminine Language
	1.50*	Masculine Language
John Paul Stevens	0.99**	Feminine Language
	0.07	Masculine Language
Neil M. Gorsuch	−0.17	Feminine Language
	6.06**	Masculine Language
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	0.49*	Feminine Language
	1.89**	Masculine Language
Samuel A. Alito	1.10*	Feminine Language
	0.02	Masculine Language
Sandra Day O'Connor	2.30**	Feminine Language
	1.21*	Masculine Language
Sonia M. Sotomayor	0.98**	Feminine Language
	0.70	Masculine Language
Stephen G. Breyer	0.75**	Feminine Language
	1.08*	Masculine Language
William H. Rehnquist	0.57*	Feminine Language
	2.78*	Masculine Language

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 9.2 *Difference-in-Means Tests via Linear Regression Estimating the Effect on the Percent of Linguistic Content Within Speech Moving From Oral Argument to Public Remarks*

Justice	Effect	Linguistic content type
Anthony M. Kennedy	2.23*	Emotional Language
	2.83*	Drives
	−6.91**	Cognitive Language
	0.87	Political Language
Antonin Scalia	0.61	Emotional Language
	3.08**	Drives
	−6.33**	Cognitive Language
	0.99	Political Language
Clarence Thomas	0.23	Emotional Language
	2.11**	Drives
	−6.82**	Cognitive Language
	−0.46	Political Language
David H. Souter	1.55	Emotional Language
	1.21	Drives
	−7.58**	Cognitive Language
	1.52	Political Language
Elena Kagan	3.43**	Emotional Language
	3.18**	Drives
	−9.35**	Cognitive Language
	1.51**	Political Language
John G. Roberts	1.20*	Emotional Language
	3.95**	Drives
	−6.62**	Cognitive Language
	1.97**	Political Language
John Paul Stevens	1.56*	Emotional Language
	2.45**	Drives
	−6.16**	Cognitive Language
	1.68**	Political Language
Neil M. Gorsuch	2.97**	Emotional Language
	3.16	Drives
	−7.51**	Cognitive Language
	−0.40	Political Language
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	2.84**	Emotional Language
	3.82**	Drives
	−8.68**	Cognitive Language
	2.14**	Political Language

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Continued

TABLE 9.2 *Continued*

Justice	Effect	Linguistic content type
Samuel A. Alito	1.76	Emotional Language
	2.13	Drives
	−6.85*	Cognitive Language
	3.34**	Political Language
Sandra Day O'Connor	1.11	Emotional Language
	4.46**	Drives
	−7.10**	Cognitive Language
	1.28	Political Language
Sonia M. Sotomayor	3.13**	Emotional Language
	3.71**	Drives
	−8.19**	Cognitive Language
	0.88*	Political Language
Stephen G. Breyer	1.47**	Emotional Language
	2.78**	Drives
	−5.11*	Cognitive Language
	1.51**	Political Language
William H. Rehnquist	0.54	Emotional Language
	4.08**	Drives
	−4.52*	Cognitive Language
	3.13**	Political Language

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 9.3 *Estimates for the Effect of Moving From a Nonlegal to Legal Audience on Rates of Gendered Language per 1,000 Words*

Justice	Effect	Gendered language type
Anthony M. Kennedy	0.94	Feminine Language
	2.01	Masculine Language
Antonin Scalia	0.16	Feminine Language
	−1.41	Masculine Language
Clarence Thomas	−0.74**	Feminine Language
	−0.02	Masculine Language
David H. Souter	−1.39**	Feminine Language
	−5.66*	Masculine Language
Elena Kagan	0.28	Feminine Language
	1.16	Masculine Language

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Continued

TABLE 9.3 *Continued*

Justice	Effect	Gendered language type
John G. Roberts	0.44	Feminine Language
	−0.75	Masculine Language
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	1.43**	Feminine Language
	−0.05	Masculine Language
Samuel A. Alito	−1.09	Feminine Language
	0.57	Masculine Language
Sandra Day O'Connor	0.42	Feminine Language
	0.17	Masculine Language
Sonia M. Sotomayor	−1.10	Feminine Language
	−2.04	Masculine Language
Stephen G. Breyer	0.09	Feminine Language
	−0.44	Masculine Language

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 9.4 *Estimates for the Effect of Moving From a Nonlegal to Legal Audience on Percent of Linguistic Content*

Justice	Effect	Linguistic content type
Anthony M. Kennedy	−1.39	Emotional Language
	0.45	Drives
	1.62	Cognitive Language
	−0.26	Political Language
Antonin Scalia	−0.01	Emotional Language
	−1.23	Drives
	1.25	Cognitive Language
	0.59	Political Language
Clarence Thomas	0.28	Emotional Language
	−1.10	Drives
	1.32	Cognitive Language
	−0.32	Political Language
David H. Souter	−2.70*	Emotional Language
	0.73	Drives
	5.80	Cognitive Language
	−0.92	Political Language

*$p < 0.05$.

Continued

TABLE 9.4 *Continued*

Justice	Effect	Linguistic content type
Elena Kagan	−0.06	Emotional Language
	−1.00	Drives
	4.63*	Cognitive Language
	−1.00	Political Language
John G. Roberts	0.09	Emotional Language
	0.38	Drives
	0.99	Cognitive Language
	0.17	Political Language
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	−0.28	Emotional Language
	0.22	Drives
	1.65	Cognitive Language
	−0.44	Political Language
Samuel A. Alito	0.35	Emotional Language
	0.60	Drives
	0.88	Cognitive Language
	−2.89	Political Language
Sandra Day O'Connor	1.99	Emotional Language
	−1.12	Drives
	1.28	Cognitive Language
	0.14	Political Language
Sonia M. Sotomayor	1.96	Emotional Language
	−4.03*	Drives
	3.71	Cognitive Language
	−2.20	Political Language
Stephen G. Breyer	−0.01	Emotional Language
	0.29	Drives
	1.16	Cognitive Language
	0.03	Political Language

*$p < 0.05$.

NOTES

1. The piece's full title is Concerto for Harpsichord, Strings, and Continuo No. 2 in E Major, BWV 1053: I. (Allegro). Bach scholars refer to this piece as BWV 1053 for short (Butler, 2016; Wolff, 2016).
2. Hasen's (2016) data include reports of appearances in general where the justices did not necessarily give public remarks. My focus is solely on instances when the justices gave a public speech. Importantly, the trends from Hasen's data signal a

dramatic increase in the speaking behavior of the justices between the 20th and 21st centuries.

3. Black et al. (2016b) do not consider whether the justices strategically take trips. It may be the case that they strategically choose locations to give their speeches. At the very least, I would speculate that the justices do not decide where to travel randomly, such as by throwing a dart at a map while blindfolded.
4. Justice Felix Frankfurter coined the term "political thicket" in his opinion in Colegrove v. Green (1946), 328 U.S. 549 at 556.
5. Justices Brett M. Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett, and Ketanji Brown Jackson did not have speeches on C-SPAN when I was collecting data for this study so they were excluded from this analysis.
6. Boyle and Bande-Ali use oyez.org's API to extract transcript and case data from the Court's oral argument. The link to their GitHub page is https://github.com/walkerdb/supreme_court_transcripts.
7. Removed words: "assault," "authority," "blackmail," "chief," "commander," "crime," "felony," "government," "jail," "lethal," "liberty," "prison," "prisoner," "punish," "supremacy," "terror," "terrorist," "violent."
8. Only one of Gorsuch's speeches was available on C-SPAN, but he is known to rarely give public comments (Biskupic, 2023).
9. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, John Paul Stevens, and Neil Gorsuch are excluded from these analyses because within my data they respectively only spoke to either nonlegal or legal audiences and not both.
10. Cahn, D. (Writer), and J. Yu (Director). (2004, March 24). The Supremes (Season 5, Episode 17) [TV series episode]. In A. Sorkin (Executive Producer), *The West Wing*. John Wells Productions; NBC.

REFERENCES

Alito, S. A. (2023, June 20). Justice Samuel Alito: ProPublica misleads its readers. *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/propublica-misleads-its-readers-alito-gifts-disclosure-alaska-singer-23b51eda

Barnes, R. (2023, May 23). Roberts says supreme court will address ethics issues. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/05/23/supreme-court-ethics-roberts/

Bartels, B. L., & Johnston, C. D. (2013). On the ideological foundations of Supreme Court legitimacy in the American public. *American Journal of Political Science*, *57*(1), 184–199. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00616.x

Bartels, B. L., & Johnston, C. D. (2020). *Curbing the court: Why the public constrains judicial independence.* Cambridge University Press.

Baum, L. (2006). *Judges and their audiences: A perspective on judicial behavior.* Prince ton University Press.

Biskupic, J. (2023). *Nine black robes: Inside the Supreme Court's drive to the right and its historic consequences.* William Morrow.

Black, R. C., Hall, M. E., Owens, R. J., & Ringsmuth, E. M. (2016a). The role of emotional language in briefs before the US Supreme Court. *Journal of Law and Courts*, *4*(2), 377–407. https://doi.org/10.1086/685660

Black, R. C., & Owens, R. J. (2009). Agenda setting in the Supreme Court: The collision of policy and jurisprudence. *The Journal of Politics*, *71*(3), 1062–1075. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381609090884

Black, R. C., & Owens, R. J. (2016). Courting the president: How circuit court judges alter their behavior for promotion to the supreme court. *American Journal of Political Science*, *60*(1), 30–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12132

Black, R. C., Owens, R. J., & Armaly, M. T. (2016b). A well-traveled lot: A research note on judicial travel by U.S. supreme court justices. *Justice System Journal*, *37*(4), 367–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/0098261X.2016.1151387

Black, R. C., Owens, R. J., Wedeking, J., & Wohlfarth, P. C. (2016c). *U.S. Supreme Court opinions and their audiences.* Cambridge University Press.

Black, R. C., Owens, R. J., Wedeking, J., & Wohlfarth, P. C. (2020). *The conscientious justice: How Supreme Court justices' personalities influence the law, the high court, and the conversation.* Cambridge University Press.

Black, R. C., Treul, S. A., Johnson, T. R., & Goldman, J. (2011). Emotions, oral arguments, and Supreme Court decision making. *Journal of Politics*, *73*(2), 572–581. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002238161100003X

Boyd, R. L., Ashokkumar, A., Seraj, S., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2022). *The development and psychometric properties of LIWC-22.* University of Texas at Austin. https://www.liwc.app/static/documents/LIWC-22%20Manual%20-%20Development%20and%20Psychometrics.pdf

Butler, G. (2016). The choir loft as chamber. In M. Dirst (Ed.), *Bach perspectives, Volume 10: Bach and the organ* (pp. 76–86). University of Illinois Press.

Collins, P. M. (2011). Cognitive dissonance on the U.S. Supreme Court. *Political Research Quarterly*, *64*(2), 362–376. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909352776

Creamer, C. D., & Jain, N. (2020). Separate judicial speech. *Virginia Journal of International Law*, *61*(1), 1–56.

Davis, R. (2011). *Justices and journalists: The U.S. Supreme Court and the media.* Cambridge University Press.

Dietrich, B. J., Enos, R. D., & Sen, M. (2019). Emotional arousal predicts voting on the U.S. Supreme Court. *Political Analysis*, *27*(2), 237–243. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2018.47

Elliott, J., Kaplan, J., & Mierjeski, A. (2023, June 20). *Justice Samuel Alito took luxury fishing vacation with GOP billionaire who later had cases before the court.* ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/samuel-alito-luxury-fishing-trip-paul-singer-scotus-supreme-court

Epstein, L., & Knight, J. (1998). *The choices justices make*. Sage.

Farganis, D., & Wedeking, J. (2011). "No hints, no forecasts, no previews": An empirical analysis of Supreme Court nominee candor from Harlan to Kagan. *Law & Society Review*, *45*(3), 525–559. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2011.00443.x

Gleason, S. A. (2020). Beyond mere presence: Gender norms in oral arguments at the U.S. supreme court. *Political Research Quarterly*, *73*(3), 596–608. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919847001

Gleason, S. A., & Smart, E. (2022). You think; therefore I am: Gender schemas and context in oral arguments at the supreme court, 1979–2016. *Political Research Quarterly*, *76*(1), 143–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211069176

Glennon, C., & Strother, L. (2019). The maintenance of institutional legitimacy in Supreme Court justices' public rhetoric. *Journal of Law and Courts*, *7*(2), 241–261. https://doi.org/10.1086/703065

Hasen, R. L. (2016). *Celebrity justice: Supreme court edition.* UC Irvine School of Law Research Paper No. 2015-61. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2611729

Hazelton, M. L., Hinkle, R. K., & Nelson, M. J. (2023). *The elevator effect: Contact and collegiality in the American judiciary.* Oxford University Press.

Hellman, G. S. (1940). *Benjamin N. Cardozo: American judge.* Whittlesey House.

Jacobi, T., Johnson, T. R., Ringsmuth, E., & Sag, M. (2019, November 1). Look who's talking less: Supreme Court justices. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/11/01/look-whos-talking-less-supreme-court-justices/

Jacobi, T., Johnson, T. R., Ringsmuth, E. M., & Sag, M. (2021). Oral argument in the time of Covid: The chief justice plays Calvinball. *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, *30*(2), 399–460. https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/faculty-articles/39/

Jacobi, T., & Schweers, D. (2017). Justice, interrupted: The effect of gender, ideology, and seniority at supreme court oral arguments. *Virginia Law Review*, *103*(7), 1379–1486. https://virginialawreview.org/articles/justice-interrupted-effect-gender-ideology-and-seniority-supreme-court-oral/

Johnson, T. R. (2004). *Oral arguments and decision making on the United States Supreme Court.* State University of New York Press.

Johnson, T. R., Black, R. C., & Ringsmuth, E. M. (2009). Hear me roar: What provokes supreme court justices to dissent from the bench. *Minnesota Law Review*, *93*(5), 1560–1581. https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1552&context=mlr

Johnson, T. R., & Roberts, J. M. (2004). Presidential capital and the supreme court confirmation process. *Journal of Politics*, *66*(3), 663–683. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2004.00271.x

Johnson, T. R., Sorenson, M. W., Cleary, M., & Szarkowicz, K. (2021). Covid-19 and Supreme Court oral argument: The curious case of Justice Clarence Thomas. *Journal of Appellate Practice and Process*, *21*(1), 113–162. https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/appellate/article/id/2211/

Johnson, T. R., Wahlbeck, P. J., & Spriggs, J. F. (2006). The influence of oral argument on the U.S. Supreme Court. *American Political Science Review*, *100*(1), 99–113.

Jones, J. M. (2023, August 2). *Supreme Court approval holds at record low.* Gallup. https://news.gallup.com/poll/509234/supreme-court-approval-holds-record-low.aspx#:~:text=Americans'%20approval%20of%20the%20job,a%2042%25%20reading%20in%202005

Kaplan, J., Elliott, J., & Mierjeski, A. (2023, April 6). *Clarence Thomas and the billionaire.* ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/clarence-thomas-scotus-undisclosed-luxury-travel-gifts-crow

Karpowitz, C. F., Mendelberg, T., & Shaker, L. (2012). Gender inequality in deliberative participation. *American Political Science Review*, *106*(3), 533–547. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000329

Keck, T. M. (2007). Party, policy, or duty: Why does the Supreme Court invalidate federal statutes? *American Political Science Review*, *101*(2), 321–338. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055407070190

Krewson, C. N. (2019). Save this honorable court: Shaping public perceptions of the supreme court off the bench. *Political Research Quarterly*, *72*(3), 686–699. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918801563

Liptak, A. (2010, April 9). The end of an era, for court and nation. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/10/us/politics/10judge.html

Liptak, A. (2020, November 13). In unusually political speech, Alito says liberals pose threat to liberties. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/us/samuel-alito-religious-liberty-free-speech.html

Liptak, A. (2022, January 31). With Breyer's exit, a farewell to marshmallow guns and tomato children. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/31/us/politics/stephen-breyer-supreme-court.html

Maltzman, F., Spriggs, J. F., & Wahlbeck, P. J. (2000). *Crafting law on the Supreme Court: The collegial game.* Cambridge University Press.

Marimow, A. E., & Brown, E. (2023, August 31). Justice Thomas details jet travel, property deal with billionaire. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/08/31/clarence-thomas-alito-financial-disclosures/

Mendelberg, T., Karpowitz, C. F., & Goedert, N. (2014). Does descriptive representation facilitate women's distinctive voice? How gender composition and decision rules affect deliberation. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(2), 291–306. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12077

Miranda, L. M. (2015). The room where it happens [Song]. On *Hamilton.* Atlantic.

Murphy, B. A. (2015). *Scalia: A court of one.* Simon & Schuster.

Murphy, W. F. (1964). *Elements of judicial strategy.* University of Chicago Press.

Newman, M. L., Groom, C. J., Handelman, L. D., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Gender differences in language use: An analysis of 14,000 text samples. *Discourse Processes*, *45*, 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/01638530802073712

North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance.* Cambridge University Press.

Pennebaker, J. W., Booth, R. J., Boyd, R. L., & Francis, M. E. (2015). *Linguistic inquiry and word count: LIWC 2015 operators manual.* Pennebaker Conglomerates.

Pennebaker, J. W., & King, L. A. (1999). Linguistic styles: Language use as an individual difference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*, 1296–1312. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1296

Posner, R. A. (1993). *Cardozo: A study in reputation.* University of Chicago Press.

Ringsmuth, E. M., Sag, M., Johnson, T. R., & Jacobi, T. (2023). SCOTUS in the time of Covid: The evolution of justice dynamics during oral arguments. *Law & Policy*, *45*(1), 1–106. https://doi.org/10.1111/lapo.12204

Roberts, D. C., & Utych, S. M. (2020). Linking gender, language, and partisanship: Developing a database of masculine and feminine words. *Political Research Quarterly*, *73*(1), 40–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919874883

Schelling, T. C. (1960). *The strategy of conflict.* Harvard University Press.

Schelling, T. C. (1978). *Micromotives and macrobehavior.* W. W. Norton.

Schmidt, C. W. (2013). Beyond the opinion: Supreme Court justices and extrajudicial speech. *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, *88*(2), 487–528. https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/cklawreview/vol88/iss2/12/

Segal, J. A., & Spaeth, H. J. (2002). *The Supreme Court and the attitudinal model revisited.* Cambridge University Press.

Shepsle, K. A. (2017). *Rule breaking and political imagination.* University of Chicago Press.

Strother, L., & Glennon, C. (2021). An experimental investigation of the effect of supreme court justices' public rhetoric on perceptions of judicial legitimacy. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *46*(2), 435–454. https://doi.org/ 10.1017/lsi.2020.38

Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: LIWC and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *29*, 24–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X09351676

Tillman, Z. (2023, April 24). *Thomas's billionaire friend had business before Supreme Court*. Bloomberg Law. https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/thomass-billionaire-friend-had-business-before-supreme-court

Treul, S., Black, R. C., & Johnson, T. R. (2009). *Jekyll and Hyde questions from the bench: Does the emotional nature of supreme court justices' questions affect their votes on the merits?* Available at SSRN: https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1407518

VanSickle, A. (2023, April 26). In bipartisan bill, senators urge Supreme Court to adopt ethics code. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/26/us/politics/senate-bill-supreme-court-ethics.html

VanSickle, A., & Liptak, A. (2023, November 13). Supreme Court adopts ethics code after reports of undisclosed gifts and travel. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/13/us/politics/supreme-court-ethics-code.html#:~:text=The%20Supreme%20Court%20announced%20on,Here%20are%20the%20ethics%20rules.&text=Experts%20in%20legal%20ethics%20gave%20the%20document%20measured%20approval

Westin, A. F. (1962). Out-of-court commentary by united states supreme court justices, 1790-1962: Of free speech and judicial lockjaw. *Columbia Law Review*, *62*(4), 633–669.

Wexler, J. D. (2005). Laugh track. *Green Bag*, *9*(1). https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty_scholarship/1702/

Wexler, J. D. (2007, November 12). Laugh track II—Still laughin'! *Yale Law Journal*, *117*. https://www.yalelawjournal.org/forum/laugh-track-ii-still-laughin

Wolak, J. (2023). How political content in *Us Weekly* can reduce polarized affect toward elected officials. *Political Science & Politics*, *56*(4), 525–530. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000331

Wolff, C. (2001). *Johann Sebastian Bach: The learned musician*. W. W. Norton.

Wolff, C. (2016). Did J. S. Bach write organ concertos? In M. Dirst (Ed.), *Bach perspectives, Volume 10: Bach and the organ* (pp. 60–75). University of Illinois Press.

10

EMOTIONS IN TELEVISED DEBATES

Proposing a Multimodal Deep Learning Approach for Emotion Detection

Joyce (Yanru) Jiang

Presidential debates constitute one of the most important electoral campaign activities in the United States, attracting widespread attention and imparting extensive information about the candidates (Bucy et al., 2020). Due to their often-televised format, debates allow voters to evaluate not only candidates' positions on issues and rhetorical strategies, but also their nonverbal cues and emotional expressions (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Political debates thus provide strong evidence for assessing candidates' communication styles and how these choices affect voters' perceptions and decision-making (Boussalis et al., 2021).

Numerous studies on emotional displays during televised debates have examined the content of candidates' speeches by subjecting debate transcripts to lexical analysis (e.g., through application of sentiment dictionaries) or to discourse analysis (e.g., for the presence of emotive rhetoric) (Turkenburg, 2022; Yanti, 2021). These studies adopt the concept of "basic emotions" and the view, under cognitive appraisal theory, that individuals exhibit a set of discrete emotional states, such as fear, anger, and enjoyment, and that each of these emotions is associated with a distinct appraisal component based on antecedent events and consequent actions (Barrett, 1998; Ekman, 1992).

As a combination of preconscious affect (i.e., physiological reaction) and cognitive reasoning (Russell, 2003), discrete emotions play a crucial role in emotive rhetoric during political debates. Candidates attach emotions to political issues during presidential debates in order to enhance the audience's reflective capacity

in relation to their policy rhetoric and mobilize voters for their electoral success (Bucy & Newhagen, 1999; DeSteno et al., 2004; Turkenburg, 2022). Under this view, emotive rhetoric is regarded as a heuristic tool that politicians use to engage and persuade their audience (Turkenburg, 2022).

Beyond textual analysis, recent studies have begun to explore candidates' strategies in relation to emotional display during presidential debates using *multimodal* signals such as gestures, facial expressions, pitch, tone, and speech content (Boussalis et al., 2021; Bucy et al., 2020; Dietrich et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2019). *Multimodality* refers to the use of multiple sensory modalities, such as visual, auditory, and textual, to communicate or process information, with the belief that the combination of multiple signal channels interplays and enhances understanding and communication (Korhonen, 2010). This multimodal approach to emotion recognition aligns with the consensus in the psychology and cognitive science literature that visual and auditory cues are essential components of affect analysis (Mileva et al., 2018; Young et al., 2020). Through the use of multimodal emotional displays, candidates can deploy their chosen strategies in relation to emotion by regulating their body language and intonation to shape their perceived dominance, competence, and trustworthiness, as well as associating certain types of affects with emotionally charged issues (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2006; Boussalis et al., 2021; Bucy, 2011; Joo et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2017).

Prior studies on political debates have utilized manual content-coding analysis to identify nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone. However, this approach is both costly and time-consuming and is also prone to researcher bias (Bucy et al., 2020; Eubanks et al., 2018; Joo et al., 2019). With recent advances in computer vision (a machine-learning approach to the analysis of visual inputs) and affective computing (a computer-mediated approach to affect analysis and emotion detection), computational social scientists have begun to apply automated coding to the study of multimodal communication in televised debates (Boussalis et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2019). However, research of this type has tended to both focus too narrowly on selective candidates and interpret multimodal signals separately and sporadically rather than in an integrated fashion (Boussalis et al., 2021; Bucy et al., 2020; Stewart & Senior, 2018).

This chapter argues that this limitation is a consequence of social scientists' unfamiliarity with the application of multimodal computational tools to emotion detection. As an alternative, it introduces an end-to-end deep learning approach utilizing the C-SPAN Video Library for the detection of emotions expressed in televised debates using multimodal signals, including body movement, facial

movement, acoustic features, and speech content. This study demonstrates the scalability and generalizability of the model by performing emotion detection tasks on nine presidential debates[1] between 2012 and 2020 for nine presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the United States.

FROM VALENCE TO DISCRETE EMOTIONS

To simplify and avoid the fuzziness of emotion categorization, various scholars have proposed an arousal–valence circumplex model that has been widely used for physiological and dictionary-based measurements of emotions in political communication (Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Posner et al., 2005; Renshon et al., 2014; Russell, 1980; Soroka et al., 2019). The circumplex model maps a set of core emotions on two scales—emotional arousal (i.e., intensity) from low to high and valence from negative to positive (or unpleasantness to pleasantness—in order to describe them. Unlike a model of discrete emotions that might attribute overlapping functions and behavioral responses to these emotions, with different categories sharing similar patterns of brain activity, the valence approach to categorization corresponds to a more direct association with certain visual and auditory cues in the expression of each emotion. The arousal–valence categorization has been found to be pancultural and situation-independent (Russell, 1983; Russell & Bullock, 1985).

On the other hand, Ekman (1992) has argued for an emphasis on basic emotions—that is, a number of discrete emotional states, such as anger, fear, enjoyment, sadness, and disgust, that can be differentiated by facial expressions, associated appraisals, antecedent events, behavioral responses, physiology, and other characteristics. These core emotions are believed to have developed from individuals' habitual and adaptive responses to certain situations and have a rapid onset within a short reaction time, and arise as a result of automatic appraisal (Ekman, 1992; Lodge & Taber, 2005). Consistent evidence for the distinctiveness of these basic emotions has been established on the basis of cross-cultural observation of facial expressions (Ekman, 1992). Numerous scholars observe that, beyond the positive–negative valance-based emotion categorization, discrete emotions can serve as frames for political issues, from less emotionally charged topics such as economics to more emotionally charged issues such as gun violence, abortion, terrorism, and law and order (Lecheler et al., 2013; Nabi, 2003; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Small & Lerner, 2008).

Generally, it has been recognized that negative emotions such as anger, contempt, disgust, fear, and sadness are associated with more distinct facial signals than positive emotions, which has led to an imbalance in the literature, with more interest in studies of negative emotions. Negative emotional messaging is also more commonly presented in political news and campaigns and tends to dominate studies of political communication. Previous studies suggest that an audience is more likely to remember political incidents that are associated with negative emotions (Bartscherer, 2021). Similarly, negative campaigning has also been found to have a stronger impact in terms of mobilizing political participation.

Negative emotions that have been commonly investigated in previous studies include anger, fear, contempt, and disgust (Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Valentino et al., 2011). *Anger* is one of the most thoroughly characterized emotions in political communication. As an agitating emotion triggered by injustice, anger is associated with higher perceived intimacy with the target as well as preservation of the possibility of long-term reconciliation. *Contempt* is associated with the attribution of unworthiness or inferiority to the target, which is realized through actions such as looking down on and disparaging the target (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Both contempt and *disgust* arise from an impulse to revulsion and can therefore be positioned as defensive emotions, as opposed to the tendency toward approach that underlies anger. While contempt tends to arise from rejection of a target due to perceived incompetence, *social disgust* arises from perceived immorality. Finally, *anxiety/fear* may be able to decouple individuals from their partisan habits because these emotions arise when they are less certain about the relevant circumstances and do not feel in control (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Tiedens & Linton, 2001).

EMOTIONAL DISPLAYS IN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

It is reasonable to believe that political candidates and politicians would also consider emotions (especially different kinds of negative emotions) as frames and rhetorical strategies for reinforcing the heuristic connection between physiological representation and their political stances. The examination of emotional displays in presidential debates becomes even more intriguing as the combination of nonverbal cues and political rhetoric further influences the formation of long-term perceptions of candidates' personalities or "political images" (Bartscherer, 2021; Bucy, 2011; Grabe & Bucy, 2009).

Researchers have conducted cross-national and longitudinal studies on multimodal displays in political debates through content analysis of visual framing and nonverbal cues, which used detailed coding schemes; however, these studies tend to be limited in their scalability and generalizability due to the time required for manual annotation (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Joo et al., 2019). Bucy et al. (2020) used a combination of manual and computational content analysis to annotate expressions of anger/threat, defiance gestures, inappropriate displays, anger/threating tones, injections, and candidates' discourse. Drawing evidence from President Trump, they found that populist communication styles—operationalized as transgressive performances through the use of visual, tonal, and rhetorical markers of outrage—led to higher audience engagement on Twitter.

Alternatively, researchers have presented some interesting but nonsystematic findings in recent years that are derived from the direct operationalization of low-level nonverbal cues as measures of high-level constructs in political debates. Dietrich et al. (2019) argued that small changes in voice pitch are difficult to control due to the subtle nature of this variable, and thus pitch can be used as an index of emotional intensity. Benchmarking with the baseline fundamental frequency (F0) of each member of Congress (MC), they observed that female MCs exhibit greater emotional intensity than their male colleagues when discussing issues related to women's rights, and when compared with their speech on other issues. Additionally, vocal pitch intensity is also associated with MCs' commitments to specific issues and has the potential to affect lawmakers' behaviors. Boussalis et al.'s (2021) study conducted multimodal operationalization of emotional expressions by utilizing Microsoft Azure Face Recognition to detect happiness vs. anger vs. other emotions at a second-by-second frame-level, calculating average F0 at 100 frames per second and inferring statement-level sentiment based on the German translation of the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary. Using facial recognition tools, pitch variation analysis, and sentiment dictionaries, they observed that the effectiveness of an emotional display corresponds to social expectations around gender roles, with voters tending to punish female candidates for displaying anger and reward them for displaying happiness.

Overall, these nonverbal cues are understood as less controllable by candidates and therefore serve as a "leaky channel" for signals that reflect the honest internal affective states of candidates (Dietrich et al., 2019; Zuckerman et al., 1981). Additionally, visual and verbal signals are recognized as having a more immediate impact and eliciting a heightened response from audiences because they are biologically emergent cues rather than emotive rhetoric that are socially constructed (Bucy et al., 2020). Both findings support the understanding in psychology and

cognitive science that the human's brain is more responsive to multimodal signals (Collignona et al., 2008; Gao et al., 2019; Talsma et al., 2006).

Despite the valuable contributions to political communication, these observations are largely sporadic, with limited evidence from manual content analysis and a narrow range of emotions. Particularly, most studies only consider the impact of happiness vs. anger or emotional intensity on voters' perceptions and behaviors. Lastly, the direct operationalization of these low-level multimodal signals and their ability to capture expressed emotions remain controversial (Calvo & D'Mello, 2010; Zeng et al., 2009).

A MULTIMODAL DEEP LEARNING APPROACH FOR EMOTION RECOGNITION

Rather than questioning the utility of these direct operationalizations (such as F0 for emotional intensity or facial recognition at image level) for emotion recognition, the current study suggests that social science scholars can draw from traditional practices in psychology and affective computing research to develop multimodal emotion detection models.

Since the 1970s, researchers in psychology have established valid coding systems for manual emotion detection, such as the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) and Facial Expression Coding System (FACES; Kring & Sloan, 2007). Most of these coding systems are heavily influenced by the idea that discrete emotional states are associated with a distinctive set of muscle movements known as action units, or AUs (e.g., AU1 referring to inner brow raiser; AU5 referring to upper lid raiser). These facial AUs are commonly viewed as a relatively objective way to describe emotions based on facial signals (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Stewart & Hall, 2017, p. 103; Zeng et al., 2009). Although applying FACES to emotion detection on average takes 10 minutes for identifying emotional expression(s) from one facial image, the development of computer vision APIs such as OpenFace and OpenPose enable the automatic extraction of AUs by training on the lower-level signals—facial landmark to capture facial movement (Baltrušaitis et al., 2016; Cao et al., 2017). This advancement not only saves tremendous time from manual annotation and offers a generalizable and scalable solution for emotion detection, but it also closely approximates the systematic affect coding system introduced by psychologists.

Most studies argue that prosodic features such as pitch and energy contribute most significantly to audio-based emotion recognition (Zeng et al., 2009), which is consistent with the operationalization approaches in Dietrich et al. (2019) and

Boussalis et al. (2021). However, meta-analysis further suggests that most of these prior affect recognition studies are examined in the context of staged performances rather than naturalistic settings, and the more realistic a scenario gets, "the less reliable prosody is as an indicator of the speaker's emotional state" (Zeng et al., 2009, p. 48). Alternatively, acoustic information derived from spectral features, such as mel-spectrogram and mel-frequency cepstral coefficients (MFCC), are sufficient for detecting changes in affective expressions (Calvo & D'Mello, 2010). While the mel-spectrogram functions more as a pixel level of information for sound and tends to be more essential for musical analysis, MFCC is a highly compressible representation of the raw mel-spectrogram that preserves a descent amount of signal for human voices.

Though the current progress on affective computing is fascinating and exhibits satisfactory levels of performance, most of these emotion detection models are tested on curated, staged performances or movie clips, rather than real-life situations (Calvo & D'Mello, 2010; Zeng et al., 2009). When it comes to naturalistic data such as televised debates, therapy sessions, and interviews, the detection gets fuzzier as the performance decreases and the co-occurrence of multiple emotions increases. The recognition task is more challenging for presidential debates because candidates have strong incentive to be subtle with their expressions and do not want to be viewed as overly emotional.

Psychologically speaking, the presence of multimodal signals enhances perceptual clarity in emotion perception and increases activation within corresponding brain regions compared to unimodal perception, avoiding overreliance on semantic information (Collignona et al., 2008; Gao et al., 2017; Paulmann & Pell, 2011; Talsma et al., 2006). Extensive research from cognitive and behavioral science has investigated the coprocessing of auditory and visual signals in emotion perception (see Calvert et al., 2000; D'Mello & Kory, 2015; Ethofer et al., 2006; Gao et al., 2017; Kreifelts et al., 2007; Stein et al., 1996), highlighting the integration of multisensory signals from the same contextual source in the human brain. Congruence in expressed auditory and visual signals is prevalent in emotional messages, aiming to convey a coherent affective state through body language and tones (Collignona et al., 2008; Gao et al., 2017). Accordingly, enhanced perceptual processing in emotion categorization with congruent multimodal signals has been widely observed across various studies (de Gelder et al., 1999; Ethofer et al., 2006; Gao et al., 2017; Kreifelts et al., 2007; Paulmann & Pell, 2011).

The neuroimaging meta-analysis (Gao et al., 2019) also suggests that brain activation from audiovisual affective signals is associated with the core affective processing network, a supermodal region in the brain, including the right

posterior superior temporal gyrus/sulcus (pSTG/STS), left anterior superior temporal gyrus (aSTG/STS), right amygdala, and thalamus. Yet no neuroimaging support has been found for sensory-specific brain regions, such as the primary visual and auditory cortex. These findings inform a shared phenomenon—the *superadditivity* of multisensory signals—suggesting that the integration of two or more modalities is greater than the sum of the independent processing of each unimodal component. Given the fuzzy nature of current emotion detection tasks, there is a strong incentive to utilize the integration of visual, tonal, and semantic signals in a single deep learning network to better approximate human emotion recognition and further enhance model performance.

This argument motivated the current research to construct a deep learning architecture that processes relatively low-level visual and acoustic signals sequentially at frame level using facial landmark, body movement, and MFCC, in addition to high-level semantic embeddings at sentence level, which represents the abstract social construction of political speech. With an abundance of information being fed into the model, this design can overcome the challenges encountered by naturalistic emotion detection tasks in televised debates and offer more generalizable and replicable solutions for future work. Motivated by the existing literature, this study examines the performance of the proposed deep learning model on both valance (e.g., positive and negative) and discrete emotions, with an emphasis on negative discrete emotions, in order to engage more broadly with other research in the domain of political emotion.

For this study, I specifically chose presidential debates between 2012 and 2020 from the C-SPAN Video Library because these debates were offered in either a *switch-camera* or *split-screen* format,[2] which is more standardized for computer vision models than previous debate videos. By using such standardized videos, this study introduces an end-to-end pipeline that is consistent and useful for future video processing, study replication, and even hypothesis testing.

METHODS

Datasets

As part of a larger project, the deep learning model in this study has been applied to a U.S. televised debate dataset featuring nine presidential and vice-presidential candidates between 2012 and 2020. A C-SPAN split-screen or switch-camera

version of these debate videos was collected with a standardized manual annotation and computer vision processing (see Figure 10.1) with the following steps.

Transcripts of the debates were collected from The Commission on Presidential Debates.[3] Then, the forced alignment technique from Aeneas, a Python library for synchronizing audio and text, matched the video time stamp with each sentence from the debate transcript and the split debate video based on the sentence segment using FFmpeg, an open-source video processing and handling API. Using sentence-level units for this segmentation process assumes that each sentence conveys more coherent sentiments compared to arbitrary 5-second or 10-second intervals.

Once videos were trimmed and saved at the sentence-unit level, 1,057 clips were randomly sampled, with the threshold that each clip is at least three seconds, to ensure that adequate signals were contained in the sampled clips. The amount of data sampled was determined by the requirements for building a computer vision classifier for binary emotion detection. In the previous study (Joo et al., 2019), approximately 500 samples were used to detect nonverbal cues for President Trump and Hillary Clinton, respectively, achieving a satisfactory level of performance. Considering that the emotion detection task is inherently fuzzier and more challenging than gesture detection and given this study's goal of developing classifiers that can generalize across multiple candidates, I increased the number of samples to around 1,000. This adjustment aimed to balance training

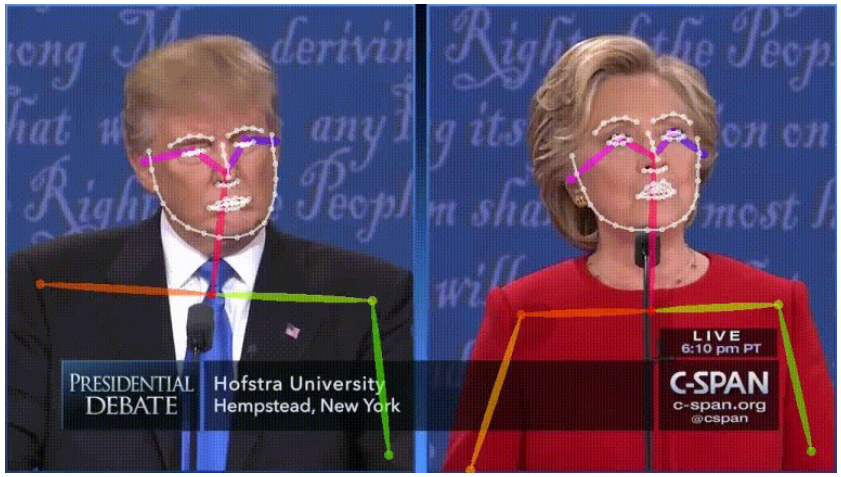


FIGURE 10.1 An example of C-SPAN split-screen format with facial landmark and body movement detection.

performance, the effort required for manual content coding, and computational resource usage. Finally, with the help of two research assistants I performed the ground truth annotation based on a coding scheme for emotion identification.

Coding Scheme

To achieve a comprehensive representation of politically meaningful emotions, this study employed the following categories for classification of emotional displays: *negative*, *positive*, *anger*, *anxiety/fear*, *contempt /disgust*, *sadness*, *enthusiasm*. All categories were coded on a binary scale to enable the co-occurrence of multiple emotions at once. Negative and positive valance were coded separately in order to allow for the possibility of coding neutral sentiments (i.e. neither positive nor negative). Our research group has conducted an iterative process for the development of this coding scheme involving the repeated annotation of video samples and further adjustments to the coding scheme employed in doing so.[4]

With the introduction of C-SPAN, annotators and machine analyses can make use of the split-screen or switch-camera versions of debate videos in order standardize the identification of emotions. Additionally, the research group observed that although certain agitated emotions, such as anger and enthusiasm, might be detectable based on speech content, more subtle emotions, like contempt/disgust or sadness, are heavily reliant on nonverbal cues. This observation confirms the aforementioned claim that the presence of multimodal signals enhances perceptual clarity, enabling richer emotion perception and categorization.

DEEP LEARNING CLASSIFIER

Building a deep learning model for multimodal data (e.g., video datasets) usually involves three main steps: (1) extracting multimodal signals, (2) feeding the extracted signals to the multilayered model, and (3) training and optimizing the model. The primary architecture in my classifier is a recurrent neural network (RNN).

Recurrent Neural Network

The RNN model was selected in this work for processing multimodal affect analysis because of its capacity to process temporal information with the assumption that the auditory and visual signals in each timestep are dependent on the

signals in the previous timesteps. Specifically, the RNN layer represents an iterative function that takes an input sequence and an internal state from the previous timestep ($t - 1$) to predict the current timestep (t).

While RNNs have the ability to capture contextual relationships between elements by preserving their internal state throughout the entire sequence processing, the standard RNN model encounters the vanishing-gradient problem during training (Dupond, 2019; Sherstinsky, 2020). To address this issue, the long short-term memory (LSTM) structure introduces an additional state variable, the cell state, which both retains specific information throughout sequence processing and controls when to update it. As a result, LSTM effectively mitigates the vanishing-gradient problem encountered by RNNs (Sherstinsky, 2020). The LSTM is particularly useful when dealing with input data that exhibit long dependencies, a characteristic of the multimodal input data of this study—input sequences spanning hundreds of frames/timesteps (Jiang, 2024).

Feature Extraction

The classifier model was trained on semantic information as well as low-level auditory and visual signals for emotion recognition. These multimodal signals were defined and extracted as the following (see Figure 10.2):

Auditory. Librosa, an open-source API for audio analysis, extracted the MFCCs at 30-frames-per-second granularity.

Visual. OpenPose, a multi-person computer-vision system that can jointly detect full body movement, extracted facial landmarks, and body keypoints (KEYPOINTs) at 30 frames per second (Baltrušaitis et al., 2016).

Semantic. Each sentence segment was preprocessed by Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) and trained on a BERT layer for the higher-level sentence embeddings. BERT is a state-of-the-art natural language processing and transformer-based learning model pretrained on a large text corpus, including Wikipedia pages and books (Kamath et al., 2022). The DistilBERT version is a smaller, faster, cheaper, and lighter transformer model of BERT and is selected here to enhance the processing speed (Sanh et al., 2020). When BERT is applied to a sentence, it generates word and sentence embeddings based on context. The sentence embedding (i.e., vector) can be extracted at the initial [CLS] (which stands for "classification") token from the output of the last layer of transformers (Chen et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024; Koroteev, 2021).

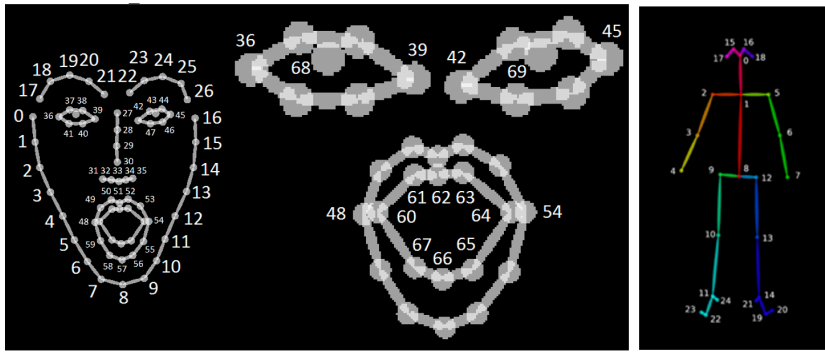


FIGURE 10.2 Illustrations of KEYPOINT. Figures adapted from OpenPose.

Model Architecture

The current model architecture consists of two levels (refer to Figure 10.3 for an illustration of the model architecture). In the lower level, each modality was processed separately. To elaborate, each sequential modality (visual and auditory) was individually passed through its dedicated RNN-LSTM layer. Subsequently, at each timestep *t*, the final vectors, representing the hidden states, were extracted. These vectors are believed to contain all temporal signals from timestep 0 to *t*, covering the entire temporal range from the beginning to the end. The semantic modality was directly input into the BERT layer, and the sentence vectors were extracted at the [CLS] token, as discussed previously.

At the higher level, the model integrates all multimodal information from various channels, including visual, auditory, and semantic inputs, into a higher-level multimodal representation. More specifically, the extracted KEYPOINT, MFCC, and BERT vectors are concatenated to form a larger vector after being individually processed by their respective layers.

Model Training

During the training process, 20% of shuffled annotated samples were reserved for the test data, while the remaining data was further divided into 80% for training and 20% for validation. Following the common practice, an Adam optimizer was selected and the number of epochs was set to 20 for all classifiers to avoid potential overfitting.[5]

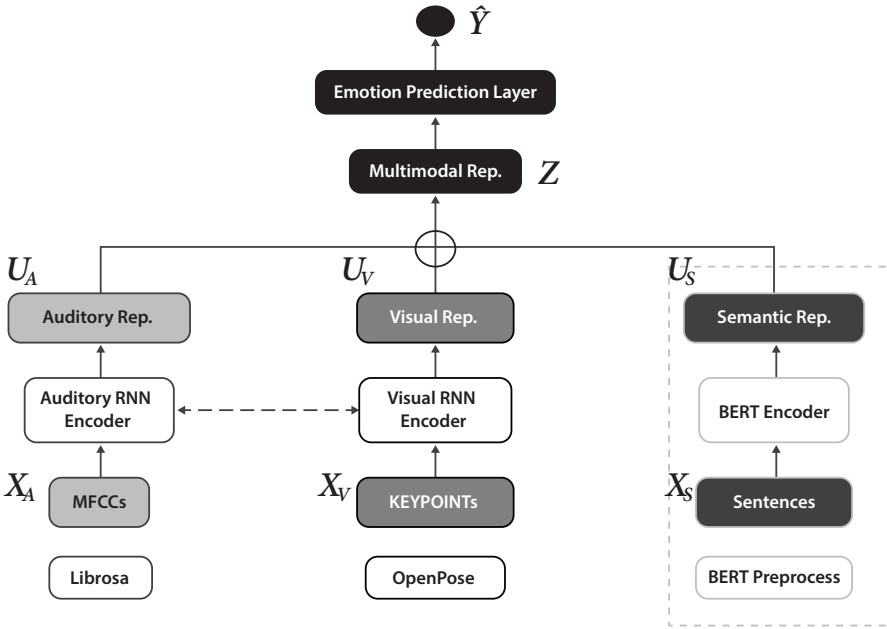


FIGURE 10.3 The model architecture integrates multimodal information. The color intensity represents the level of abstraction of both auditory and visual information.

One significant challenge when creating custom datasets in social science research is the inherent imbalance in content-based data, often featuring a surplus of negative cases compared to positive ones (Jiang, 2024). In computer vision, a common approach to address this issue is data augmentation, where researchers can manipulate the minority label by applying techniques such as image rotation, reflection, cropping, and color adjustment (Shorten & Khoshgoftaar, 2019). These transformation methods can alleviate the problem of imbalance and improve the generalizability of the neural network by effectively expanding the training data space. However, while transformation techniques in image processing are well-established, video data transformation remains relatively unexplored. In contrast to transforming video samples, our study addressed the imbalance by simply up-sampling the minority class (the class with fewer data points), following the optimization procedure documented in Jiang (2024). To ensure a fair comparison and a realistic examination of the models' performance, the evaluation on test data was conducted on the portion that had not undergone augmentation.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for all sampled clips are listed in Table 10.1. As shown, the sampled clips were evenly distributed across parties and general election years. President Trump (22.14%) and President Biden (16.46%) appeared most frequently in the clips due to their multiple appearances in the vice-presidential and presidential debates, followed by Mitt Romney, President Obama, and Hillary Clinton. The frequency distribution illustrates a relatively fair representation of the 2012–2020 debate videos in terms of years, candidates, parties, and genders.

Figure 10.4 illustrates the count and cumulative distribution of all sampled clip lengths. As mentioned previously, the trimmed videos were sampled with a minimum length of at least 3 seconds to ensure they captured complete sentences. The clip lengths follow a long-tail distribution.

Additionally, the frequency of emotions has been calculated for each emotion across all three general elections (see Table 10.2). Since emotions were coded in binary terms (e.g., 1 if present and 0 if not), they do not necessarily sum to 1 within a year. This binary coding allows a clip to express more than one emotion exhibited by the candidate (e.g., anger and anxiety or positivity and enthusiasm). Given that the current study sampled only around 1,000 clips for model training purposes and introduced a 3-second criterion, the distribution derived here should not be used for statistical inference regarding the overall expressed emotions in the 2012–2020 presidential debates. However, some emotion distribution patterns that align with previous studies have been observed.

When breaking down emotions by year, the early presidential debates in the U.S. were found to have more positive emotions and fewer negative messages compared to recent years, confirming findings in Bucy et al. (2020) that presidential debates and political messaging have become more negative over the years. Additionally, more agitating emotions such as anger and enthusiasm were observed to be more frequent than other emotions, which aligns with previous studies showing that politicians seek to use these intensified emotions to encourage political participation and party attachment (Marcus et al., 2019).

Table 10.3 illustrates the performance of the seven emotion classifiers trained on the augmented data. In terms of machine learning practices, models are first trained on the training data, and then the fitted model is applied to the validation data to assess validation performance. This stage is mainly used for model selection and hyperparameter tuning. The selected model is then applied to the unseen test data, which reflects the final model's performance. In this process,

TABLE 10.1 *Descriptive Information for All Annotated Clips*

Category	No.	%
Year		
2012	368	34.82
2016	365	34.53
2020	324	30.65
Candidates		
Biden	174	16.46
Clinton	115	10.88
Harris	49	4.64
Kaine	67	6.34
Obama	117	11.07
Pence	113	10.69
Romney	129	12.20
Ryan	59	5.58
Trump	234	22.14
Parties		
Democratic	522	49.39
Republican	535	50.61
Genders		
Male	893	84.48
Female	164	15.52

it is generally expected that the test performance will be lower than the validation performance to indicate that the model is not overfitting the training data.

In terms of performance measure for a classification task, the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) measure is viewed as a more reliable and robust measure for performance assessment (Joo et al., 2019), especially when the positive and negative cases are highly imbalanced. The AUC ranges from 0 to 1, with 0.5 indicating an at-chance performance of the model.

All emotion classifiers in Table 10.3 illustrate test accuracy slightly below validation accuracy, indicating that these models were not overfitting the training data. Additionally, all classifiers achieved satisfactory performance in terms of both AUC scores and accuracy. As expected, the most imbalanced emotion classes, contempt/disgust and sadness, received lower AUC scores than other

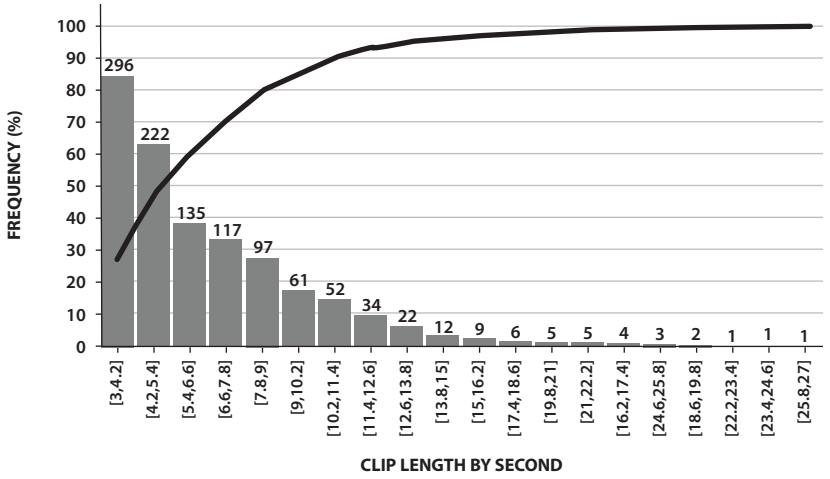


FIGURE 10.4 Histogram (bars) and cumulative distribution (black line) for clip lengths. The unit of the histogram is the clip count.

TABLE 10.2 *Percentage of Annotated Emotions by Year*

Annotated emotions	2012 (%)	2016 (%)	2020 (%)	Mean (%)
Positive	42.12	32.60	38.89	37.84
Negative	26.63	42.19	33.64	34.15
Anger	14.40	29.04	26.85	23.27
Anxiety/fear	13.59	25.75	20.68	19.96
Contempt/disgust	3.26	10.68	9.88	7.85
Sadness	7.88	9.32	16.36	10.97
Enthusiasm	14.13	14.25	18.52	15.52

TABLE 10.3 *Performance of All Emotion Classifiers*

	Augmented	Validation		Test	
Emotion classifier	data	Loss	Accuracy	AUC	Accuracy
Positive	1,080	0.0297	87.9630	0.7692	76.0369
Negative	1,140	0.0400	85.0877	0.6906	73.2719
Anger	1,324	0.0157	94.7170	0.7924	76.9585
Anxiety/fear	1,412	0.0108	95.7597	0.7453	75.5760
Contempt/disgust	1,606	0.0016	98.7578	0.6393	90.3226
Sadness	1,538	0.0040	97.7273	0.5949	88.9401
Enthusiasm	1,470	0.0021	99.3197	0.6723	84.7926

emotions[6]. These two emotions are also less agitating, which might cause the model to have a hard time detecting their presence even when multimodal signals are provided. On the other hand, anger, being the more intensified emotion, achieved a higher AUC score, given that facial expressions tend to be more overtly expressed for this emotion.

DISCUSSION

This methodology essay contributes to the growing literature on political expression of emotion by illustrating an advanced deep learning approach to the detection of emotions that can integrate a variety of visual and auditory cues, as well as speech content, to enable more granular categorization. The deep learning model I propose is established on cognitive and affective foundations through the use of an approach to audiovisual signal integration that closely approximates how the human cognitive system processes multimodal information.

As the results show, all emotions achieved satisfactory AUC scores ranging from 59% to 79%, with the more balanced emotions ranging from 67% to 79%. This is noteworthy given that emotion detection in a naturalistic setting is a highly challenging task (D'Mello & Kory, 2015; Zeng et al., 2009). Additionally, this performance was achieved with around 1,000 short clips across multiple videos, formats, and candidates, indicating the scalability and generalization of the current approach.

However, the current pipeline faces some limitations. To ensure video quality for generating training clips, only post-2008 non–town hall presidential debates have been considered. Additionally, the clips were sampled based on a requirement of more than 3 seconds, indicating that the sampling could underestimate the emotions expressed in very short sentences. Regarding the less overtly expressed and more imbalanced emotions (such as contempt/disgust and sadness), while their detection may be less consistent compared to other emotions, it is reasonable to anticipate that increasing the sample size could improve the classifier's ability to capture these emotional signals. With more annotations and additional standard high-resolution debate videos provided by the C-SPAN Video Library, future studies could anticipate further improvements in the model performance.

Traditional research on emotions in political communication argues that emotions can be used as frames to moderate individuals' prior knowledge (Nabi, 2003). In the era of televised debates, this realm has expanded to include the examination

of how emotional displays, along with multimodal cues, influence viewers' political perceptions of candidates (Bucy, 2011). With the proposed generalizable method, future studies can explore the emotional displays of political candidates across different elections, genders, parties, and political issues, enhancing the research agenda in political expression of emotion and political debates.

Political communication scholars tend to view the display of emotions in presidential debates and in campaigns more generally as highly strategized, manipulative techniques, or even attempts to cause voters to deviate from the rational choice model by engaging them in heuristic thinking (Turkenburg, 2022). However, since their initial introduction, televised electoral debates might not have been explicitly designed as a venue for deliberative evaluation of candidates' policy platforms and competencies (Turkenburg, 2022). With the inclusion of multimodal signals, these debates may engage a wider audience by making politics more accessible and relatable through the use of universal emotional displays (Bucy & Newhagen, 1999).

NOTES

1. Two presidential and one vice-presidential debate video were collected in each general election year (i.e., 2012, 2016, and 2020). The second presidential debate, which tends to be held in a town hall format and thus does not always guarantee a standard split-screen or switch camera video format, was excluded in the current study to avoid data quality issues for feature extraction.
2. While the switch-camera format in C-SPAN broadcasts showcases individual candidates by switching between different cameras to provide various angles and close-ups during debates and speeches, the split-screen format displays multiple candidates simultaneously on screen, allowing viewers to see their reactions and interactions during events like political debates.
3. See https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/.
4. While our initial intention was to categorize contempt and disgust separately, we have observed that they pose challenges in being distinguished by visual and auditory signals during our iterative coding scheme finalization. This difficulty arises from the fact that both contempt and disgust are defensive emotions, which are less agitating compared to anger, and both stem from an impulse toward revulsion (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011). Additionally, since both contempt and disgust are relatively infrequent compared to other emotional states, combining them can effectively enhance the performance of our deep learning classifier.

5. The Adam optimizer has been empirically observed to perform better than SGD optimizers for most deep learning models. The number of epochs indicates how many times an entire dataset has been passed forward and backward through the neural network, which can be seen as developing an intuition for the underlying task.
6. For these emotions, AUC is a more reliable measure of performance than accuracy since highly imbalanced data can more easily yield a high accuracy score just by predicting all labels as 0.

REFERENCES

Barrett, L. F. (1998). Discrete emotions or dimensions? The role of valence focus and arousal focus. *Cognition & Emotion*, *12*(4), 579–599. https://doi.org/10.1080/026999398379574

Baltrušaitis, T., Robinson, P., & Morency, L. P. (2016). OpenFace: An open source facial behavior analysis toolkit. In *IEEE Winter Conference on Applications of Computer Vision (WACV)* (pp. 1–10). https://doi.org/10.1109/WACV.2016.7477553

Bartscherer, S. F. (2021). Instrumentalization of emotion during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Die Emotionalisierung Des Politischen*, 321–372. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839452783-022

Benjamin, D., & Shapiro, J. (2006). *Thin-slice forecasts of gubernatorial elections.* Working Paper 12660. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w12660

Boussalis, C., Coan, T., Holman, M., & Müller, S. (2021). Gender, candidate emotional expression, and voter reactions during televised debates. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(4), 1242–1257. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000666

Bucy, E. P. (2011). Nonverbal communication, emotion, and political evaluation. In K. Döveling and E. A. Konijn (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of emotions and mass media.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203885390.ch12

Bucy, E. P., Foley, J. M., Lukito, J., Doroshenko, L., Shah, D. V., Pevehouse, J. C., & Wells, C. (2020). Performing populism: Trump's transgressive debate style and the dynamics of Twitter response. *New Media & Society*, *22*(4), 634–658. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819893984

Bucy, E. P., & Newhagen, J. E. (1999). The emotional appropriateness heuristic: Processing televised presidential reactions to the news. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(4), 59–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02817.x

Calvert, G. A., Campbell, R., & Brammer, M. J. (2000). Evidence from functional mag-

netic resonance imaging of crossmodal binding in the human heteromodal cortex. *Current Biology*, *10*(11), 649–657. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0960-9822(00)00513-3

Calvo, R. A., & D'Mello, S. (2010). Affect detection: An interdisciplinary review of models, methods, and their applications. *IEEE Transactions on Affective Computing*, *1*(1), 18–37. https://doi.org/10.1109/t-affc.2010.1

Cao, Z., Simon, T., Wei, S.-E., & Sheikh, Y. (2017). Realtime multi-person 2D pose estimation using part affinity fields. In *2017 IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (CVPR)* (pp. 1302–1320). https://doi.org/10.1109/cvpr.2017.143

Chen, Z., Flemotomos, N., Singla, K., Creed, T. A., Atkins, D. C., & Narayanan, S. (2022). An automated quality evaluation framework of psychotherapy conversations with local quality estimates. *Computer Speech & Language*, *75*, 101380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csl.2022.101380

Collignon, O., Girard, S., Gosselin, F., Roy, S., Saint-Amour, D., Lassonde, M., & Lepore, F. (2008). Audio-visual integration of emotion expression. *Brain Research*, *1242*, 126–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brainres.2008.04.023

de Gelder, B., Böcker, K. B. E., Tuomainen, J., Hensen, M., & Vroomen, J. (1999). The combined perception of emotion from voice and face: Early interaction revealed by human electric brain responses. *Neuroscience Letters*, *260*(2), 133–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0304-3940(98)00963-x

DeSteno, D., Petty, R. E., Rucker, D. D., Wegener, D. T., & Braverman, J. (2004). Discrete emotions and persuasion: The role of emotion-induced expectancies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*(1), 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.86.1.43

Dietrich, B. J., Hayes, M., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2019). Pitch perfect: Vocal pitch and the emotional intensity of congressional speech. *American Political Science Review*, *113*, 941–962. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000467

D'Mello, S. K., & Kory, J. (2015). A review and meta-analysis of multimodal affect detection systems. *ACM Computing Surveys*, *47*(3), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1145/2682899

Dupond, S. (2019). A thorough review on the current advance of neural network structures. *Annual Reviews in Control*, *14*, 200–230.

Ekman, P. (1992). An argument for basic emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, *6*(3–4), 169–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699939208411068

Ethofer, T., Pourtois, G., & Wildgruber, D. (2006). Investigating audiovisual integration of emotional signals in the human brain. *Understanding Emotions*, 345–361. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0079-6123(06)56019-4

Eubanks, A. D., Stewart, P. A., & Dye, R. G. (2018). Nobody saw this coming? Support for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump through audience reactions during the

2016 presidential debates. In R. X. Browning (Ed.), *The year in C-SPAN Archives research, Volume 4* (pp. 199–217). Purdue University Press. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/ccse/vol4/iss1/1/

Fischer, A. H., & Roseman, I. J. (2007). Beat them or ban them: The characteristics and social functions of anger and contempt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *93*(1), 103–115. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.1.103

Gao, C., Weber, C. E., & Shinkareva, S. V. (2019). The brain basis of audiovisual affective processing: Evidence from a coordinate-based activation likelihood estimation meta-analysis. *Cortex*, *120*, 66–77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2019.05.016

Gao, C., Wedell, D. H., Kim, J., Weber, C. E., & Shinkareva, S. V. (2017). Modelling audiovisual integration of affect from videos and music. *Cognition and Emotion*, *32*(3), 516–529. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2017.1320979

Gottman, J. M., & Krokoff, L. J. (1989). Marital interaction and satisfaction: A longitudinal view. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *57*(1), 47–52. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.57.1.47

Grabe, M. E., & Bucy, E. P. (2009). *Image bite politics: News and the visual framing of elections*. Oxford University Press.

Hutcherson, C. A., & Gross, J. J. (2011). The moral emotions: A social–functionalist account of anger, disgust, and contempt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*(4), 719–737. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022408

Jiang, Y. (2024). Automated nonverbal cue detection in political-debate videos: An optimized RNN-LSTM approach. In C. Stephanidis, M. Antona, S. Ntoa, & G. Salvendy, G. (Eds.), *HCI International 2023—Late breaking posters.* HCII 2023. Communications in Computer and Information Science, Vol. 1957. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49212-9_5

Jiang, Y., Dale, R., & Lu, H. (2024). Transformability, generalizability, but limited diffusibility: Comparing global vs. task-specific language representations in deep neural networks. *Cognitive Systems Research*, *83*, 101184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogsys.2023.101184

Joo, J., Bucy, E. P., & Seidel, C. (2019). Computational communication science| automated coding of televised leader displays: Detecting nonverbal political behavior with computer vision and deep learning. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 23.

Joo, J., Steen, F. F., & Turner, M. (2017). Red Hen Lab: Dataset and tools for multimodal human communication research. *Künstliche Intelligenz*, *31*(4), 357–361. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13218-017-0505-9

Kamath, U., Graham, K. L., & Emara, W. (2022). Bidirectional encoder representa-

tions from transformers (BERT). In *Transformers for machine learning: A deep dive* (pp. 43–70). Chapman and Hall/CRC. https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003170082-3

Korhonen, V. (2010). Dialogic literacy: A sociocultural literacy learning approach. In A. Lloyd & S. Talja (Eds.), *Practising information literacy* (pp. 211–226). Chandos. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-1-876938-79-6.50010-8

Koroteev, M. V. (2021). *BERT: A review of applications in natural language processing and understanding.* ArXiv:2103.11943 [cs.CL]. Cornell University. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2103.11943

Kreifelts, B., Ethofer, T., Grodd, W., Erb, M., & Wildgruber, D. (2007). Audiovisual integration of emotional signals in voice and face: An event-related FMRI study. *NeuroImage*, *37*(4), 1445–1456. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2007.06.020

Kring, A. M., & Sloan, D. M. (2007). The Facial Expression Coding System (FACES): development, validation, and utility. *Psychological Assessment*, *19*(2), 210–224. https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.19.2.210

Lecheler, S., Schuck, A. R. T., & de Vreese, C. H. (2013). Dealing with feelings: Positive and negative discrete emotions as mediators of news framing effects. *Communications—The European Journal of Communication Research*, *38*(2), 189–209. https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2013-0011

Lerner, J. S., & Keltner, D. (2000). Beyond valence: Toward a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice. *Cognition & Emotion*, *14*(4), 473–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/026999300402763

Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2005). The automaticity of affect for political leaders, groups, and issues: An experimental test of the hot cognition hypothesis. *Political Psychology*, *26*(3), 455–482. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2005.00426.x

Marcus, G. E., Valentino, N. A., Vasilopoulos, P., & Foucault, M. (2019). Applying the theory of affective intelligence to support for authoritarian policies and parties. *Political Psychology*, *40*(S1), 109–139. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12571

Mileva, M., Tompkinson, J., Watt, D., & Burton, A. M. (2018). Audiovisual integration in social evaluation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, *44*(1), 128–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/xhp0000439

Mutz, D. I., & Reeves, B. Y. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, *99*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055405051452

Nabi, R. L. (2003). Exploring the framing effects of emotion: Do discrete emotions differentially influence information accessibility, information seeking, and policy preference? *Communication Research*, *30*(2), 224–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650202250881

Paulmann, S., & Pell, M. D. (2011). Is there an advantage for recognizing multi-modal

emotional stimuli? *Motivation and Emotion*, *35*(2), 192–201. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-011-9206-0

Posner, J., Russell, J. A., & Peterson, B. S. (2005). The circumplex model of affect: An integrative approach to affective neuroscience, cognitive development, and psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, *17*(3), 715–734. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579405050340

Renshon, J., Lee, J. J., & Tingley, D. (2014). Physiological arousal and political beliefs. *Political Psychology*, *36*(5), 569–585. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12173

Russell, J. A. (1980). A circumplex model of affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*(6), 1161–1178. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0077714

Russell, J. A. (1983). Pancultural aspects of the human conceptual organization of emotions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*(6), 1281–1288. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.6.1281

Russell, J. A. (2003). Core affect and the psychological construction of emotion. *Psychological Review*, *110*(1), 145–172. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.110.1.145

Russell, J. A., & Bullock, M. (1985). Multidimensional scaling of emotional facial expressions: Similarity from preschoolers to adults. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *48*(5), 1290–1298. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.48.5.1290

Sanh, V., Debut, L., Chaumond, J., & Wolf, T. (2020, March 1). *DistilBERT, a distilled version of BERT: Smaller, faster, cheaper and lighter*. arXiv:1910.01108 [cs.CL]. Cornell University. Retrieved June 10, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1910.01108

Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*(3), 513–523. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.3.513

Sherstinsky, A. (2020). Fundamentals of recurrent neural network (RNN) and long short-term memory (LSTM) network. *Physica D Nonlinear Phenomena*, *404*, 132306. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physd.2019.132306

Shorten, C., Khoshgoftaar, T. M. (2019). A survey on image data augmentation for deep learning. *Journal of Big Data*, *6*, Article 60. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40537-019-0197-0

Small, D. A., & Lerner, J. S. (2008). Emotional policy: Personal sadness and anger shape judgments about a welfare case. *Political Psychology*, *29*(2), 149–168. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00621.x

Soroka, S., Fournier, P., & Nir, L. (2019). Cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(38), 18888–18892. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908369116

Stein, B. E., London, N., Wilkinson, L. K., & Price, D. D. (1996). Enhancement of perceived visual intensity by auditory stimuli: A psychophysical analysis. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, *8*(6), 497–506. https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.1996.8.6.497

Stewart, P. A., & Hall, S. C. (2017). Microanalysis of the emotional appropriateness of facial displays during presidential debates: C-SPAN coverage of the first and third 2012 debates. In R. X. Browning (Ed.), *Advances in research using the C-SPAN archives*. Purdue University Press. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/ccse/vol3/iss1/1/

Stewart, P. A., & Senior, C. (2018). *Politics, lies and video tapes: Nonverbal cues and signals in the age of "fake news."* https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/v8krq

Talsma, D., Doty, T. J., & Woldorff, M. G. (2006). Selective attention and audiovisual integration: Is attending to both modalities a prerequisite for early integration? *Cerebral Cortex*, *17*(3), 679–690. https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhk016

Tiedens, L. Z., & Linton, S. (2001). Judgment under emotional certainty and uncertainty: The effects of specific emotions on information processing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*(6), 973–988. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.6.973

Turkenburg, E. (2022). Televised election debates in a deliberative system: The role of framing and emotions. *Democratic Theory*, *9*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2022.090102

Valentino, N. A., Brader, T., Groenendyk, E. W., Gregorowicz, K., & Hutchings, V. L. (2011). Election night's alright for fighting: The role of emotions in political participation. *The Journal of Politics*, *73*(1), 156–170. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000939

Yanti, Y. (2021). Basic emotions in the 2008 US presidential debates: What and how. *Journal of Cultura and Lingua*, *2*(3), 149–161. https://doi.org/10.37301/culingua.v2i3.97

Young, A. W., Frühholz, S., & Schweinberger, S. R. (2020). Face and voice perception: Understanding commonalities and differences. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *24*(5), 398–410. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.02.001

Zeng, Z., Pantic, M., Roisman, G. I., & Huang, T. S. (2009). A survey of affect recognition methods: Audio, visual, and spontaneous expressions. *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence*, *31*(1), 39–58. https://doi.org/10.1109/tpami.2008.52

Zuckerman, M., DePaulo, B. M., & Rosenthal, R. (1981). Verbal and nonverbal communication of deception. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *14*, 1–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0065-2601(08)60369-x

CONCLUSION

Ten chapters. Ten different methods. Many ideas. Lots of creativity. These chapters represent the ideas of authors who looked at the C-SPAN Video Library and saw something no one else saw. They applied search terms, a variety of methods, and different theories to answer a range of research questions. The result is a collection of chapters that we add to the nine previous volumes constituting another Year in C-SPAN Archives Research.

Whether it is framing studies of abortion or middle-class conceptions, or sex scandals, or spiritual advisors, the studies are here. There are also studies of emotion in televised debates and Supreme Court justices speaking off the bench. Digital communication in Congress, TikTok, and humor round out the topics. If it sounds like an eclectic collection, it is.

The C-SPAN Video Library has no limits. These scholars have no limits. The topics, methods, and conclusions of this volume attest to what can be learned from the analysis of the video, text, and indexes of the Video Library. Future volumes will unearth new ideas as scholars put their imaginations and methods together to advance social science.

The Center for C-SPAN Scholarship & Engagement (CCSE) is sponsoring summer institutes to teach graduate students new methods of analysis of video, audio, and text to seed future volumes with new ideas and papers. We hope that the next generation of scholars will push beyond what we have gleaned and learned to publish ever more interesting studies using the C-SPAN Video Library. Watch for them and participate.

CONTRIBUTORS

KATELYN E. BROOKS is currently a PhD candidate in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. She will begin as an assistant professor at Lindsey Wilson College in 2024. She researches political influence and discourse on social media. Her dissertation explores how and why government agencies present themselves to TikTok audiences by interviewing government communicators. She also studies crisis communication such as how Twitter users discussed the Capitol insurrection and political figures' sex scandals.

J. ELLIOTT CASAL is an assistant professor of applied linguistics in the Department of English and affiliate faculty of the Institute for Intelligent Systems at the University of Memphis. His research interests include corpus linguistics and corpus-based writing pedagogies, second language and genre-specific writing, and English for specific/academic purposes. He is the co-author of *Making the Most of Graduate School: A Practical Guidebook for Students in Applied Linguistics, Education, and TESOL*, and his recent work appears in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *Language Learning and Technology*, and *System*.

MATTHEW T. COTA is a third-year PhD student in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. He studies American politics, the U.S. Supreme Court, and judicial politics. His research focuses on American political institutions, judicial decision-making, and studying federal judges as people. He is a native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and received his BA in political science from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

DIANA DEYOE is a PhD student in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. Her research focuses on social media, relationships, and politics.

She seeks to understand how relationships are formed and shaped by social media and the relationship between social media and politics. Her thesis titled *Tolerated, Muted, Removed: A Study of Preexisting Relationships Across Political Lines on Social Media Using SIDE, the Investment Model, and the Model of Accommodation* was recognized as the 2022 Purdue College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Master's Thesis. Her work has also received a top award at the National Communication Association Conference. Her teaching experience includes interviewing, science communication, and public speaking.

SHAUN GALLAGHER (PhD, Hon DPhil) is the Lillian and Morrie Moss Professor of Excellence in Philosophy at the University of Memphis and professorial fellow at the School of Liberal Arts, University of Wollongong (Australia). His recent publications include *The Self and Its Disorders* (Oxford, 2024); *Embodied and Enactive Approaches to Cognition* (Cambridge, 2023); *Action and Interaction* (Oxford, 2020); *Performance/Art: The Venetian Lectures* (Milan, 2021); *The Phenomenological Mind* (3rd ed., Routledge, 2021); *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind* (Oxford, 2017); and as editor *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford, 2011); and as co-editor *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*. He is editor in chief of the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*.

JAMES RUSSELL HANER is a senior software developer in the Institute for Intelligent Systems at the University of Memphis.

JENNIFER HOEWE (PhD, Penn State) is an associate professor in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. She also holds a courtesy appointment in Purdue's Department of Political Science. She studies media psychology and political communication, and her research has produced more than 50 scholarly publications. Dr. Hoewe is the former head of the Communication Theory and Methodology Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), and she is a member of the CCSE Advisory Committee.

DIANE JACKSON is a doctoral candidate in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. Her research interests involve political partisanship, political issues, and media psychology. She specifically studies how we think about and communicate about political and politicized issues by investigating how activists organize through different mediated channels and the effects

that partisan news media can have on the way that we process and share politicized (mis)information. Her dissertation is about how our ability to detect political misinformation impacts our agreement with and intention to share the misinformation.

JOYCE (YANRU) JIANG is a PhD student in computational communication and an MS student in statistics at UCLA. Her main research interests lie in the realm of deep learning, political communication, and multimodal communication. Her main research focuses on the interpretability and correspondence of deep learning networks between humans and models. She is also a finalist for the 2023–2024 Meta PhD Fellowship. Several of her papers have been published in *Cognitive Systems Research*, *Communications in Computer and Information Science*, *Culture and Computing*, and the proceedings for the International Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM) and Language Resources and Evaluation Conference (LREC).

CHRISTIAN KRONSTED is an assistant professor of practice in the honors program at Merrimack College and is the co-editor of the Dance Philosophers Network and co-artistic director for the artist collective Stylin' Out Network.

AMANDA E. LILLY is an assistant professor at Utah State University. She completed her PhD in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University and currently researches interpersonal and sexual communication in computer-mediated contexts. Some of her other research focuses on how online daters use and perceive initiation messages that contain sexual content, or sexualized pickup lines, and how the use of initiation messages that contain sexual content violates online daters' expectations.

DAKOTA PARK-OZEE is an assistant professor of political communication in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Denver. Her research focuses on discursive hierarchies in U.S. political life, particularly tied to class and gender. You can find her work in *Communication & Democracy*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, among other publications. She teaches public speaking, political communication, and quantitative methods and is developing a community-engaged course in campaigns. She also conducts university service on workload equity and serves the National Communication Association as the second vice-chair of the Women's Caucus.

ANNELISE RUSSELL, PhD, is an associate professor of public policy at the University of Kentucky. She is also a faculty associate of the U.S. Policy Agendas Project and a member of the Comparative Agendas Project. Dr. Russell's research interests include questions about how policymakers communicate their agendas and the role of the media, particularly social media, in the political process. Much of her research is on congressional decision-making and communication, including an active research agenda in the intersection of social media and political institutions. Dr. Russell publishes research across political science, public policy, and communication, including in *American Politics Research* and *Policy Studies Journal*. Much of her interest in political communication stems from her work as journalist working for the *National Journal*, *Congressional Quarterly*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

NICHOLAS W. SIMON investigates the neurobiological and genetic basis of cost–benefit decision-making, with the central goal of determining how individual differences in risk-taking and impulsivity engender addition-like behavior. His lab pursues this goal using cutting-edge techniques to measure/manipulate brain activity in a rat model during behavioral tasks designed to emulate human decision-making scenarios. Dr. Simon also uses his expertise in research methodology and computational analyses to study physiological and emotional factors that govern sensitivity to language and emotion in collaboration with the Language Across Cultures (LAC) Research Team.

ANDREA J. TERRY (PhD, Texas A&M University) is an assistant professor of rhetoric in the Communication Studies Department at California State University, Sacramento. Her research investigates the intersections of political and religious rhetoric in its various mediated forms. Dr. Terry's work has been published in *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, *Communication Inquiry*, *The Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, and a number of edited volumes.

DEBORAH TOLLEFSEN is a professor of philosophy and vice provost and dean of the Graduate School at the University of Memphis. Her teaching and research interests include embodied and extended cognition, group cognition, collective responsibility, and joint action.

CHRISTINA P. WALKER is a political science PhD candidate studying comparative politics and political research methodology at Purdue University. Her research uses

a combination of causal and computational methods to investigate changes in elite messaging and public opinion in Africa and the U.S. Her most recent work is featured in *PS: Political Science & Politics* and *Digital War*.

AUGUST WHITE is a senior software developer with five years of experience in back-end development and proficiency in C#, Python, JavaScript, and SQL. Her expertise lies in creating efficient workflows for storing and manipulating large datasets. Previously she worked in the banking industry visualizing usage statistics for one of the largest banks in the mid-south. August holds a BS in computer science from the University of Memphis.

ALISTAIR WINDSOR is the director of the Institute for Intelligent Systems and an associate professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at the University of Memphis. He is also the associate director of the West Tennessee STEM Hub. Dr. Windsor's research in STEM education has been supported by funds from the Tennessee Department of Education and by the National Science Foundation. Dr. Windsor received his PhD in Mathematics from Penn State University in 2002 and held postdoctoral appointments at the Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Texas at Austin. His current research uses computational linguistics to advance STEM education.

LEAH WINDSOR is an associate professor of applied linguistics in the Institute for Intelligent Systems and Department of English at the University of Memphis. She also has faculty affiliate status with CAESER (Center for Applied Earth Science and Engineering Research) and in the Department of Political Science. She directs the Languages Across Cultures Lab and is PI on a National Science Foundation grant (#2117009) studying multimodal signals in world leaders' speeches. Her research broadly examines how what we say reveals who we are. Dr. Windsor received her bachelor of science degree in linguistics degree from Georgetown University in 1998, her master's degree in political science at the University of Memphis in 2005, and her PhD in political science from the University of Mississippi in 2012. From 2014 to 2019, Dr. Windsor served as PI for a Department of Defense Minerva Initiative grant that examined political communication in authoritarian regimes and opaque political groups. Her book on bias in family formation in academia, *The PhD Parenthood Trap: Caught Between Work and Family in Academia* (with Dr. Kerry Crawford) is available from Georgetown University Press. She was a 2020–2023 Non-Resident Fellow for the Krulak Center in the

Marine Corps University and serves on several elected committees in the International Studies Association. She is a fourth-generation farmer.

DIANA ZULLI is an associate professor in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. Her research focuses on the interaction of communication theory, digital technology, and political rhetoric. She is interested in how communication theories function in, and are affected by, the rapidly changing digital communication environment, how news media shapes political discourse, and how digital technology affects social and political processes. Her work has been published in a number of communication journals, including *Communication Theory*, *New Media & Society*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Social Media + Society*, and *Information, Communication & Society*. Her teaching areas are American political communication, public relations, and crisis communication.

INDEX

D

N

O

P

R

S