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The State of the Union: The State of Applause

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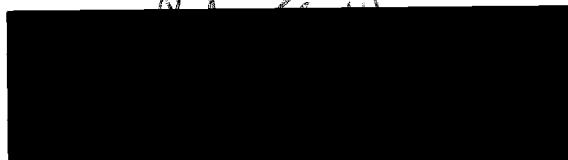
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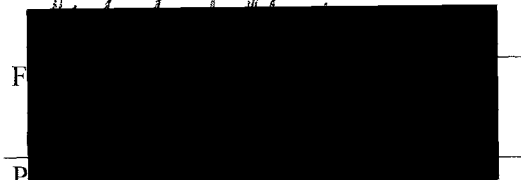
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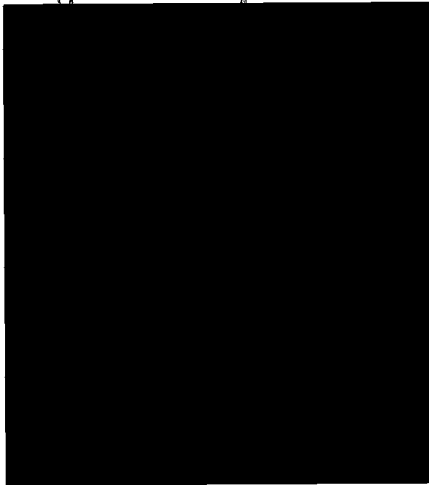
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Abstract

This research focuses on reactions by members of Congress during the State of the Union address. Quantitative methods are used to examine if changes in overall political conditions, especially the level of partisanship, changes the nature of the responses of political actors. The results find that Congress responds to the speech in two major ways. Responses can represent attempts at partisan unity or alternatively represent attempts to show stronger than normal support for certain issues. This research supports several competing theories of representation and highlights the need to establish proper context when studying political actions. Since multiple theories of representation can draw from the conclusions the research also emphasizes the need for models to be synthesized that draw from more than one theory.

Dedication

To everyone who has helped me further my education...

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the help of many people. I would like to thank my thesis committee as a whole for evaluating my research and steering me on a successful path. I would like to specifically thank Dr. Mueller for acting as my primary adviser, Dr. Burge for inspiring the idea that started this project, Dr. McNitt for assistance with methodology and for teaching me vital statistical skills, and Dr. Wandling for always providing an insightful perspective. I would also like to thank Eastern Illinois University for providing a platform from which I could further my education and expand my knowledge.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The State of the Union address is a tradition nearly as old as the United States itself. As such, the speech involves a lot of ceremony and protocol. With the development of television, the average citizen of the United States has had the opportunity to observe this tradition. Since 1980, shortly after Congress formed C-SPAN to televise Congressional proceedings, the speech has always been available for public record, independently of news media sources which also provide coverage but may contain bias. The development of television allowed for the average citizen to have a window into the inner workings of government in a way that had previously been impossible. Citizens could now see their elected officials directly as they discussed policy. Beyond pure policy, however, citizens also had a window to see how officials conducted themselves. Tone, confidence, and any number of other personal factors radiating from the President might be hard to quantify, but at a human level leave some form of impact upon viewers. In turn, though members of Congress are technically part of the audience, their live reactions are also televised. While the speech is about the President's message, members of Congress have an opportunity to express their opinions on what is being said, and have the chance for those feelings to be communicated back home to their constituents. Savvy officials could perhaps use this to their advantage.

Though the State of the Union is of course a very condensed version of policy debate compared to even the average Congressional floor session, the high profile nature of the speech introduces an inherent level of importance, leading to increased scrutiny from all parties. While during President Obama's term viewership has steadily declined

with each passing year, around 32 million Americans watched his 2015 address (Byers, 2015). Even at a historically low level, 32 million people constitute nearly 10 percent of the American population. Furthermore, discussion of the State of the Union does not remain confined to the singular activity of watching the speech live, but also spreads out through word of mouth conversations and media coverage. Polling data by Gallup shows that the public responds to the contents of the State of the Union and that citizen opinion on individual issues can change in strength, context, position, or a combination thereof after the speech (Newport, Jones, and Saad, 2012). The connection required to create an impact on a citizens' awareness of politics is clearly established even during years of high apathy.

Knowing that the State of the Union address affects public consciousness establishes a causal relationship between the two, which provides for a good starting point for researchers to ask more detailed questions. What do citizens pay attention to during the speech? How does the President decide what to include in the speech, and do the issues included in the speech in turn set the national agenda? Does the tone of the speech change depending on national mood? What role do the media play in the process? Many of these questions have at one time or another had scholars attempt to address them. For example, Jeffrey Cohen addressed the “chicken or the egg” aspect of agenda setting, trying to answer the question of if the President sets values that the people adopt or if the President picks issues to put in the speech that the people are already concerned about (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). However, many of the questions posed have not had solid answers established. On those questions debate still exists or scholars have not found a

way to adequately address the issue yet. Other scholars have noted that a true challenge of studying the State of the Union speeches is the sheer range of scholastic concepts that can potentially be researched, and the level of depth each question poses (Edwards III and Wood, 1999, p. 327). The State of the Union is also a rather unconventional topic in Political Science, so at times may not be getting the research attention the subject warrants.

For obvious reasons much existing research focuses on the President's relation to the State of the Union speeches, leaving Congress' connection less studied. With that in mind, there are obvious focal points to research regarding Congress' role during the speech. For example, as the President give the address there are natural pauses in cadence that traditionally allow observers in the room to respond with applause. Within that framework, members of Congress have the ability to show their support for talking points, refrain from doing so, or occasionally respond in a more energetic or provocative manner. An example of this last type of response would be the incident that occurred during President Obama's 2009 speech when Representative Joe Wilson shouted "You lie!" towards the podium (CNN, 2009). While at first it may appear as if Congress lacks the ability to put forth a range of responses to the State of the Union, small incidents like this example show that the situation is more complex. Members of Congress, for various reasons, can and do put a unique spin on how they react to the President.

The challenge then becomes interpreting what the responses during the speech mean, and linking responses to other general political science concepts. There are many general theories relating to Congressional behavior, media behavior, public behavior, and

a number of other issues that could all possibly come into when interpretive analysis is conducted. Research regarding Congressional response to the State of the Union requires all of these areas to be considered. Though foundational work must be done to analyze State of the Union addresses beyond the speeches' merit as speeches, these other theories can still provide a wealth of experience for that development.

These questions are undeniably important to the public at large, and have in fact been asked specifically by media sources in the past. For example, by the early 1990s the practice of airing the State of the Union on C-SPAN had occurred long enough that the network's news commentators had observed enough of the speeches to informally comment on the nature of Congressional responses. In particular, they noted the differences between members of Congress and the other guests in attendance. Also of interest to the commentators were the "rules" placed upon each group, regarding what could and could not be brought into the speech, and what standards each group had for being considered disruptive (C-SPAN, 1991). Though members of Congress have incredible latitude in their behavior, they are not completely free from various forms of pressure outside of political concerns that could curtail their actions. Though only a very basic analysis, this type of attention shows a clear popular interest in the subject.

The focus of this research will be on gauging Congress' reaction to the State of the Union and determining what factors primarily influence these reactions. Widely discussed topics like partisanship may be strongly acknowledged as important, but are also acknowledged as hard to measure. Research does at least exist to provide a consistent measure that can ease integration of research concepts, but in some ways these

decisions regarding how a concept is measured are more important than decisions regarding which concepts to include in analysis (Lee, 2008a, p. 200). Other research regarding speechcraft in general will be used to introduce factors that are commonly used to compare speeches to one another. While this project seeks to incorporate broad political science concepts, attention must still be given to this traditional angle (Riffkin, 2014). With careful attention given to methodology, an avenue to make State of the Union research relevant to larger theories is easily obtainable.

Following this overview of the merits of this research, an in depth literature review will be conducted on the scholarly works in the mentioned and relevant fields. In particular, theories of representation, media studies, and partisanship will play a large role in shaping this research going forward. Once the literature is reviewed, a proper methodology can be constructed that considers existing developments in political science that can be incorporated into this research while also drawing from that body of work for guidance when filling in the remaining methodological gaps. Afterwards direct findings will be presented, first in the form of statistical analysis with ample visual aid and later interpreted using observations from the speeches. Finally, the research can then be summarized in a section devoted to explaining how the findings link to other areas of political science. The conclusions will not exist in a vacuum, and implications for other research will need to be highlighted.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Public Opinion

Though the focus of this research is on Congress, some framing is needed first from a Presidential perspective so that reactions to the State of the Union can be taken in proper context. Much of the work done regarding Presidential addresses focuses on how Presidential speeches affect public opinion and approval ratings. The State of the Union provides a degree of consistency that other speeches lack, making comparisons between speeches easier. The iconic nature of the State of the Union likely also influences those interested in public opinion to study it over other potential options. Many studies have analyzed the relationship, if any, between how important a given issue is to the general public and how much time a President devotes to that issue in a speech (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). The original work on the subject argued that the President was setting a nationwide agenda through the choices made in crafting the speech (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). Later research has argued that the effect is mutual, however. While the President can influence the public through speeches such as the State of the Union, what the President decides to include in the address can also be affected by what the public is already concerned about (Hill, 1998, p. 1328). Though some of this research suggests that Members of Congress have little, if any, direct control over the issue agenda the State of the Union address takes, the nature of the connection between audience members and speech givers, or in Congress's case, active audience members, still needs to be considered (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). Individual members of Congress's actions reflect their constituents' concerns, but their constituents concerns can also be affected by public displays of support or

disapproval.

There is also evidence, however, that Members of Congress do have some flexibility when presenting themselves to the public. Almost by definition, this flexibility can have different outcomes for how the public sees their elected officials. Officials have room to temper the language used on a particular issue so that they can maintain a given position while reaching a compromise with opposing positions, or they can take a more hardline stance on an issue to potentially gain support at the expense of productivity and opposing politicians (Druckman and Mitchell, 1995, p. 10). Politicians can have competing interests and the temptation to sacrifice other concerns for electability can be strong. The relationship may seem obvious, but by taking it into consideration the overall picture of both how a member of Congress projects an image and what a member of Congress has as real, tangible goals can become harder to ascertain.

Representation

To continue a direct consideration of Congress the concept of representation must be discussed early on. A constant debate exists in scholarly circles that study Congress as to the relative strengths of ideology versus representative constituent needs when a member of Congress mentally calculates a course of action. At the very least, however, it is acknowledged that nearly all political actors subject to elections tailor certain actions to win favor with their specific constituencies (Erickson and Wright, 2013, p. 91). Therefore, it can reasonably be expected that members of Congress feel a certain pressure from the public to act a certain way. Foundational research has even suggested that nearly all Congressional behavior can be explained as actions calculated to win reelection

(Mayhew, 1974, p. 11). General public opinion is one factor, but at another level members of Congress would be expected to specifically respond to the opinion in their home district or state, which may run counter to overall public opinion, or perhaps even their own deep seated beliefs (Erickson and Wright, 2013, p. 91). The natural counter-argument to a constituent-based view of representation is the previously hinted at ideology or partisanship view. While these concepts will be discussed later, it is also important to note that ideology and partisanship can also be channeled through a constituent-based view as well. If a certain region has a strong majority of voters who are ideologically rooted in one direction or who are hyper-partisan, that effect might manifest in a representative simply because the representative wishes to appeal to those values in voters (Ezrow, Tavits, and Homola, 2014, p. 1559). Other countries where more than two parties receive significant vote share on a regular basis have provided evidence for study of this phenomenon, but researchers have also related voter polarization to changes in control within parties in the American system as well (Ezrow, Tavits, and Homola, 2014, p. 1559). Other studies have shown that the American public as a whole is indeed trending towards more partisan, not just elected officials. An abundance of choice in information sources has a possible effect of allowing individuals to select more freely information which already fits into their existing worldview, thus reinforcing opinions and making cooperation more difficult (Reedy, Wells, and Gastil, 2014, p. 1399). To some degree, the nuances are important for understanding representation, but for the purposes of studying the State of the Union responses Congress gives it is also important to note that whichever theory holds correct, members

of Congress do well to reinforce their positions when possible (Fenno, 2003, p. 55).

A traditional survey of representative theory builds from the work of Richard Fenno. His major contribution to the field is the development of a system of “home styles” that describe how representatives behave in their home distractions. It is difficult to adequately summarize everything that home styles can cover, but the basic end result that can be applied to other areas of research is that representatives tailor themselves and their actions to present a positive image to their constituency (Fenno, 2003, p. 31). While on its face this is an obvious statement, the less obvious part of the equation but by far one of the most vital steps is determining exactly what demographics make up a constituency (Fenno, 2003, p. 8). The entire process for analyzing a member of Congress's behavior using only this one method understandably becomes very complex very quickly. However, as demographic analysis is not just a technique studying Congress, but also a real, concrete strategy that members of Congress want to take advantage of to gain reelection, the complexity forces them into taking “shortcuts” to cover as many possible voters as possible, much as academics would like to find easy proxy factors to study the behavior. Broad sweeping gestures that take little effort but cast a wide net to catch the attention of potential voters are opportunities that are hard to resist for elected officials (Fenno, 2003, p. 31). Therefore, while Fenno's focus was on how representatives behave at home when reaching out to the people of their state or district, the State of the Union address can still easily fit into this model. The media provides a conduit through which such effortless but broad action can be viewed from afar. Furthermore, which such a large audience, as previously mentioned, and the fact

that one part of a representative's home style is how they portray events in the capital, responses during the State of the Union might actually be a more effective tool in cultivating re-election than most available to the average representative (Parker and Goodman 2011, 494). This is of course a simplistic view that presents some complications, such as the fact that it can be difficult to distinguish individual members of Congress, but other political science concepts can be incorporated to fill in those gaps, such as the benefit of party unity and party identification.

Partisanship

The strength of partisanship is the natural counter-argument used against representation-based models of Congress. While there are a technically infinite number of stances a person can hold, almost all issues come down to a binary vote, necessitating compromise and the formation of partisan coalitions (Cooper and Brady, 1981, p. 422). The strength of partisanship has varied over time, but research has shown that partisan bonds can have some notable effects on political behavior. Partisan concerns can trump the individual concerns of representatives, but at the same time partisan association can also generate backlash independent of individual action. This has largely been used as an explanation for why Congress' overall approval rating is so low, yet there is such a high rate of incumbents getting reelected (Durr, Gilmore, and Wolbrecht. 1997, p. 175). Representatives targeted efforts can get themselves reelected, but do not necessarily generate an overall favorable view of their activities. Since both partisan unity and the divergent actions required of representation have utility for elected officials, there is a constant balancing act between these concerns.

Though partisanship can only be demonstrated to be partially responsible for the actions of Congress, the grouping of representatives and other political actors simplifies analysis, so proper application of the concept can help form a broad context that extends beyond individual members of Congress. In particular, studies of partisanship establish a few key trends that can be used to predict behavior on a large scale. Currently partisan unity has been on the rise for several decades, and trend seems to correspond to an increase in how controversial issues are, both with single issues becoming more controversial and with more inherently controversial issues being placed upon the agenda (Lee, 2008a, p. 200). In relation to the State of the Union address, this means that the nature of the speech as well as the way Congress responds to individual talking points is likely to change over time.

Partisanship can manifest in ways other than pure party unity and voting cohesion as well. Due to the structure of Congress, and the American government as a whole, it is possible for one party to be in control of the Presidency and another party in control of Congress, or for different houses of Congress to be controlled by different parties. The potential for these arrangements to cause friction along partisan lines is fairly obvious. At the same time, study of divided government in this manner at the federal level can prove difficult because of a lack of institutions that can compare. However, most state governments are organized structurally in very similar ways to the federal government, which allows for divided government issues to occur at that level as well. Some studies on partisanship and divided government have focused here. This research has been helpful in confirming a trend where the issues covered by a legislature shift to more

controversial subjects as partisanship and divided government increase (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 182). In other words, partisanship itself is not the only factor of legislative productivity, but partisanship causes an agenda shift which further lowers productivity (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 182). This analysis has also made it possible to filter issue areas into controversial and non-controversial subject areas (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 194). Therefore, when studying partisanship with speeches in particular this research would suggest that an issue by issue view is vital to understanding the full range of possible response.

Another method that had been traditionally used to analyze the degree of cooperation in Congress is by analyzing institutional roll call voting. This method highlights what issues are controversial in a legislative body and considers agenda setting when examining legislative productivity (Bobic, 2015, p. 26). Some issues simply never make it to the floor if a bill in question is not predicted to succeed, or if the issue is predicted to only waste time because it is too controversial. Though when looking at the State of the Union it does not make much sense to directly incorporate this theory, examining roll call voting for what issues are raised in Congress is a similar methodology to considering what issues are raised during the State of the Union. The situations can form a rough analogy, which validates the other research that suggests issue content matters during the State of the Union.

During the State of the Union address there is also another possible partisanship-related concern. As previously stated, one of the purposes of partisan activity is to create a rallying effect on a larger group of individuals (Cooper and Brady, 1981, p. 422). This

process is greatly assisted when signals are sent from a high profile party member, such as the President. Indeed, studies have shown that popular figures such as the President often have others attempt to associate themselves to a message to try and gain a small fragment of the figure's popularity (Lee, 2008b, p. 914). Conversely, someone can also distance themselves from a certain figure and message too, in an attempt to gain popularity by contrasting unpopularity. Members of Congress have this popularity aspect of public opinion to consider in addition to whether or not the President is a member of the same party as them (Lee, 2008b, p. 914). Members of Congress are known to comment on the President's popularity, or lack thereof, and explicitly making popularity a talking point when campaigning or otherwise trying to send a message to their constituents (Lee, 2008b, p. 914). It is therefore not too great a leap to make to infer that the responses during the State of the Union are also part of this overall equation.

Direct State of the Union Research and Media Studies

Other research has touched upon the State of the Union directly with content analysis, though not in a way that directly relates to political concepts. The State of the Union has been a hotbed for research on how language and political terminology evolve, which from there can go on to influence other political factors through the language-based filter (Rule, Cointet, and Bearman, 2015, p. 10837). Researchers have found that the State of the Union can serve as a focal point for the emergence of different political environments through the use of consistent new terminology. In broad terms, different “eras” of political thought can be established through studying the frequencies of certain words within State of the Union addresses (Rule, Cointet, and Bearman, 2015, p. 10838).

The implications of these findings mean that, regardless of other work relating to media studies and popular opinion, a given State of the Union speech is at the very least a product of the time during which it was given. The character and content of State of the Union addresses changes over time, but so does political climate. While finding a causal relationship is perhaps best left to research on public relation vectors, the importance of establishing context both for overall political conditions and for the State of the Union cannot be ignored.

Change is an important theme is a good deal of research relating to the State of the Union, especially media studies. The State of the Union has a long history of over 200 years. This study focuses specifically on the years during which television archives are readily available, and therefore inherently misses some of the major changes that occurred in prior years. For example, for the majority of State of the Union speeches television did not even exist, or, looking back even further, for a certain time period most of the nation did not even have a reliable method to consume the speech and responses to it in a timely manner. Even within the television time span, however, there has been noticeable change in how media sources have been able to cover the State of the Union and how media sources have chosen to cover the State of the Union. The distinction between ability to cover and choice to cover is an important one, but the two concepts intersect when it comes to government regulation. In the past, news agencies had stricter regulations placed upon them with the goal of ensuring news coverage was “fair” (Morris, 2007, p. 707). Over time these regulations have become less strict. This has allowed news organizations to cater to a range of viewpoints rather than remain uniform

(Morris, 2007, p. 707). Coupled with the increase in news outlets overall, the modern news media environment is drastically different than the environment during the early years of televised State of the Union Addresses. This means that theoretical principles that used to be well researched need to be updated. This change is indeed receiving a lot of scholarly attention and many of the needed updates are being carefully considered by scholars (Holmes and Bloxham, 2009, p. 245). Media studies can be complex and with this wave of research it can be hard to discern which variables are important to political climate, but above all this trend further reinforces the importance of context when studying anything through a media lens.

Some media studies have been conducted directly in the context of the State of the Union in this new environment with increased media options. Typically after the State of the Union a key party figure from the opposite party of the President will give a counter-speech. This serves as a rebuttal of key points the President made or as an attempt to control the direction of political discourse. While this practice is not necessarily new, a gap in research has been noted by some scholars in regards to how well this partisan message travels and what mechanisms the message can use to spread. The rise of modern news networks has been identified as one factor that is increasingly giving a larger audience to this type of message (Conroy-Krutz and Moehler, 2015, p. 575). However, research also suggests that these audiences are already predisposed towards a certain message and are seeking it out, rather than the message actually changing the opinions of viewers (Conroy-Krutz and Moehler, 2015, p. 575). In other words, the State of the Union rebuttals do more to energize an existing partisan base than they actually do to

pursued individuals according to this research. From a theoretical perspective this difference is not insignificant. In a way this research would suggest this sort of media environment is another symptom of partisanship rather than an aggravating factor. Therefore, when examining what factors could potentially contribute to content differences in the State of the Union or to differences in response to the State of the Union it would be more important to analyze the environment that leads to media conditions rather than media factors themselves.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This project attempts to link Congressional responses during the State of the Union to overall partisanship as well as proxy conditions relating to partisanship using content analysis and statistical methods. Two data sets and statistical methods will be used. A complete overview of the data sets and the variables used can be found in Appendix A. Both methods are considered so that the inherent limitations of one technique can be addressed by the other. The techniques complement each other for a more complete analysis. The data points will be obtained via direct visual observation of State of the Union archival footage. As each response occurs a new data point will be created, numbered and categorized by year, and a yes or no recorded for both the values of whether or not the response was partisan or disruptive. What these variables represent will be further explained later on. Furthermore, a note for each data point will also be made that states which issue policy area the talking point Congress was responding to belonged to. When issues overlap, the selected policy area will be the one that received the most emphasis from that talking point.

The goal of the analysis is to form a predictive model of Congress's response during a year's State of the Union Address. Successful correlation will provide evidence that members of Congress change how they react during the speech based off changes in overall political climate. Therefore the first step in conducting this study is to create a system for categorizing these responses and then watching a range of speeches to record the content. A “response” for the purposes of this paper is any deliberate sign of reaction to the speech. In other words, applause for a talking point or laughter at a joke would

qualify as a response, but someone coughing would not be a response.

The most basic distinction that can be drawn is whether or not a response is partisan. As previously mentioned, partisanship is a complex concept that can be measured in different ways, but ideally for coding purposes the distinction should be made as simple as possible. Therefore, when coding, when one party's response is different than the other party's response an instance will be denoted as partisan. This difference could be one party clapping and the other party refraining, or it could be both parties clapping but only one giving a standing ovation. Though a binary condition, determining whether a response is partisan or not will still require careful visual observation to determine the exact nature of the response. Key party figures including the Vice President, Speaker of the House, and senior Congressional leaders can to a degree be used to help judge overall party response. Attention to detail is critical, as sometimes only some members of Congress respond, but not along party lines. The visual record chosen as a standard for comparison purposes, C-SPAN's archive, regularly highlights other relevant figures in relation to the President's speaking points because the cameras are controlled by members of Congress' staff (C-SPAN, 2004). The task is by no means trivial, but responses can be reliably coded as partisan or non-partisan using these techniques.

Beyond that variable, it must be acknowledged that not all responses are equal. At the same time it is difficult to create a measure of the "weight" of each response. Several options exist, including recording the length of the response or the loudness of the response. For empirical analysis, though, a variable that can be more easily

standardized and controlled for other outside factors is preferable. Therefore, responses will also be coded for whether or not the instance is “disruptive” or not. During the speech there are natural instances of pause, either due to cadence or as a deliberate move by the President, which serve as informal cues for when response is acceptable (C-SPAN, 1991). If a response occurs at one of these times and does not disrupt the overall flow of the speech it is considered to not be disruptive. If, however, the instance of response interrupts the President, prevents the President from continuing to the speech, or otherwise occurs outside of the normal and accepted times it will be considered disruptive. From a theoretical point of view, disruptive responses indicate that the Members of Congress engaged in that response want to send a very clear message, putting their priorities ahead of norms encouraging normal responses (Erickson and Wright, 2013, p. 91).

In addition, the policy area mentioned in the speech that prompted a response will also be recorded. Sometimes issues intersect, in which case the issue involved for a response will be recorded as whichever aspect the President was emphasizing most. These data will allow for comparisons to be made to examine whether certain policy areas prompt more partisanship than others. As research has been done relating specific issues to partisanship and finding different trends with different issues, in broad terms these policy areas will be considered for independent issue-based analysis (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 182). When each response is recorded, however, the notation will seek to be as specific as possible, though, so that analysis can be more detailed if the need arises and to allow an avenue for future research if a specific sub-issue appears

anomalous. Recording which issues are being addressed can also assist in establishing long term trends in the content of the State of the Union, which has been noted to change over time (Rule, Cointet, and Bearman, 2015, p. 10838).

This project will use the time frame of 1980 to 2014. This range is chosen because C-SPAN has a reliable archive of footage of every speech starting with 1980, and because some data collection restraints prevent a full analysis of 2015. C-SPAN's archive also provides several advantages over other sources, beyond the clear benefit of using standardized sources. C-SPAN's footage is careful to include multiple camera angles during the speech, not just a singular view of the President as found in some recordings. The camera operators routinely switch to views of the entire chamber during periods of applause, which is vital for observation of Congress' reactions. As previously mentioned, C-SPAN's footage also often offers a view of key figures observing the speech at moments when they have a particular relevance to a speaking point the President has just addressed, zooming in on an area of the audience where there could be noteworthy reaction, and thus making analysis easier. Unlike news media broadcasts, C-SPAN's archives do not have distracting overlays containing outside information that could either obscure reactions from view or possibly even introduce bias during observation. For these reasons, C-SPAN's archives have been selected as the ideal source.

There are four hypothesis being tested. The first is designed to validate research on how the media has changed over time, exploring whether or not there has been a fundamental change in the overall level of response.

H₁: Responses per time will increase over time.

To expand with an example, if two speeches were exactly the same length, the one given in a later year will have more responses. The second hypothesis serves as a control for human attention span, which could possibly play a role in reducing the level of overall response.

H₂: Longer speeches will have fewer responses per unit of time.

The third and fourth hypotheses are the main focus of this study, however, focusing on the partisan variable and the actual nature of responses.

H₃: Years with more partisanship will see overall more partisan and more disruptive responses.

H₄: Years of divided government provoke less disruptive and partisan responses.

The final hypothesis seeks to validate the idea that a President is acutely aware of political conditions and will take more care in choosing content during years of divided government (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). Both OLS regression and logistic regression will be used to investigate these hypotheses.

Chapter 4. Analysis

Responses per Time

The first two hypotheses can be answered using a simple linear regression model with the responses per time as the dependent variable. The chronological year marker variable and speech length used as the independent variables along with control variables does not yield very conclusive results. These models are summarized in Table 1. The control variable measuring the house reelection rate returns significance, though the magnitude of impact is so small that the effect likely is not even noticeable for practical purposes. The War on Terror era marker has marginal significance for decreasing responses per time, while the overall yearly trend has marginal significance for increasing responses per time, but once again the observed effects are small enough that the overall change is negligible. Adding in control variables for individual Presidents shows a drastic change, however. Using President Obama as a base shows most Presidents gave speeches with a statistically different responses per time rate. The effects are subtle, but large enough to warrant consideration. Presidents Reagan and Clinton produced slightly higher responses per time than Obama while George H.W. Bush produced slightly less. Overall the predictive value of the model has increased, but aside from reelection rates the other variables of interest from the first model have been pushed well outside marginal significance. Rerunning the second model using a different President as the baseline yields no notable new information, only serving to produce a different baseline for the intercept. With the changes between the two models considered, it can be said that the individual speaking style a President adopts has a great influence of how

Congress is willing or able to respond during the State of the Union.

While the regression models show what factors contribute to the rate of responses per time, it does not necessarily answer all questions about how the rate has changed from year to year. Observation of how the variable of responses per time trends across years more directly addresses the base hypotheses. Overall, responses per time has increased over the longest scale, but has plateaued and remained consistent at different points on the timeline. Responses per time at the start period of this study were close to around 0.01 response per second, or one response per 100 seconds in more easily understood terms. After a few years this metric begins to increase. The transition is not particularly smooth, with steps made in each direction, before a new consistent level is established around 0.022 responses per second, or one response every 45 seconds or so. This change is seen visually in Figure 1.

With all evidence weighed, it is obvious that something has happened to cause Congress to respond more often during State of the Union addresses. There are now more responses per unit of time during a speech than there were during speeches past. The fact that the speeches with more response per time are later than those with less is very likely not merely because of when the speeches take place. The obvious causes have not provided sufficient explanation, however. While accounting for Presidential style is important as the analysis emphasized, within the overall change in responses per time the arrangement of individual Presidents is largely coincidental. For so many Presidents to have seen a rise in the responses per time variable likely something else is at work, something that could have even prompted stylistic changes. It is possible that

conditions have caused responses per time to increase but that there is some sort of “optimal level” at which more responses per time is unworkable if the speech is to be concluded in a timely fashion, or a similar counter concern to the factors leading the upswing. It may have taken Congress some time to fully process all the influences acting upon them in this manner, accounting for the unsteady rise and fall of the variable before it leveled out. This might also account for why the regression analysis found significance with the House reelection rate, even if it was very slight. Cumulative House experience could have allowed Congress to be more sensitive how often they responded during speeches. There are also many general political science theory concerns that might explain the mixed results the tests of these two hypotheses, which will be discussed once the entire analysis has been concluded.

Disruptive Responses/Divided Government Part I

Whether or not increased partisanship causes an increase of disruptive or partisan responses by comparison to responses that are neither can be extensively tested with the data sets produced in this study's methodology. Analyses can be run testing both individual responses and each speech as a whole. Information regarding individual response testing is available in Table 2. Model 1 is a basic analysis designed to avoid giving too much focus on any one variable. Several variables show predictive value for disruptive responses, though overall the analysis shows that the chosen variables do not account for very much of the variance seen. Speech length is significant, but has an effective coefficient of zero. The analysis shows a slightly tendency for later years to have more disruptive responses by simple virtue of being later, though the result pushes

the bounds of statistical significance. Contrary to expectations, the variable for the reelection rate in the House shows a very slight inclination for more disruptive responses when more people have been reelected. The War on Terror era shows significance and speeches during these years see drastically reduced rates of disruptive response. With all other factors held equal, a response during the War on Terror is roughly only half as likely to be disruptive as baseline responses. Conversely, the Cold War era has drastically more disruptive responses, as compared to baseline years in neither of these two eras. A response during the Cold War is five times as likely to be disruptive as baseline. Presidential election years also cause a decrease in disruptive responses at a similar level to the War on Terror variable. Of note, however, is that the partisanship value as measured by either DW-NOMINATE or divided government do not show significance.

The second model on Table 2 includes control variables for individual Presidents' terms. The results change dramatically. Speech length no longer registers as significant. Presidential election years lose significance as well. The influence of the reelection rate in the House is amplified by an order of magnitude. Presidential approval ratings are now significant and show a very slight decrease in how likely a response is to be disruptive as approval goes up. Addressing the point of this second analysis, Presidents George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush show a significant impact on how disruptive Congress is when Obama is used as a baseline. Switching baseline Presidencies only cause negligible changes. This effect can most likely be attributed to speaking style. Direct observation can support this conclusion. For example, George H.W. Bush did not pause to create many natural opportunities for Congress to respond in, so naturally the

rate of disruption would be higher during his speeches regardless of other variables, as the data indicates (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). While an argument can be made that a President's speaking style is politically inconsequential because such innate qualities are likely not politically motivated, the speeches do show highly visible impact from different speaking styles as seen in this example and therefore speaking styles warrant inclusion in the overall analysis. As a final note, however, though it is not always the case in the analyses presented in this paper, the trends within Presidencies for disruptive responses cause collinearity issues with the Cold War and War on Terror variables. This does suggest that both arguments about Presidential style hold merit, at least in regards to the disruptive variable, as the effects so closely align. The final model using Presidential control variables removes the Cold War and War on terror variables because of these collinearity concerns.

These questions can also be investigated using the other data set that uses each year's speech as a data point, rather than individual responses. This approach is more focused on trends as a whole, but is susceptible to problems caused by having a small number of data points. Mirroring the first analysis using the individual response data set, a standard regression does not find significance for any variable used. However, adding control variables for individual Presidents brings some factors to significance. This information is summarized in Table 3. With President Obama as a baseline, George W. Bush's term as President shows statistical difference in terms of disruption. Those eight years saw a significantly lower rate of disruption. The reelection rate for House members and Presidential approval also show significance in a similar manner to the individual

response analysis. The higher the House reelection rate the more responses are disruptive, with the opposite occurring for Presidential approval. Both factors have only a small impact, but the Presidential approval impact is particularly small.

While one previous discussion point was how the speaking style of some Presidents alone may be a strong enough factor to cause a difference in rates of disruptive responses, the fact that the model produced in this analysis has a comparatively large R Square value with relatively few significant variables may suggest that several other outside factors not measured by this data set are included within the variable that denotes George W. Bush's terms. Political conditions during those terms may simply have broken the overall trends other variables measure for a brief amount of time that is significant, or other variables were at play at those times and measured variables serve as intermediate variables. There are some obvious potential causes, though one could argue that the War on Terror variable was designed as a “catch-all” in that regard. However, it is also important to note that while the War on Terror has a certain stylistic tone in politics, the popularity of the War on Terror and how the concept has been handled has changed over the time span. Therefore, while as coded the War on Terror control variable has merit, the pressures involved in producing these results might have been better measured by differentiating between the early War on Terror and a later time period. As a final note of importance for the divided government hypothesis, once again that variable did not show significance.

Partisan Responses/Divided Government Part II

For testing partisan responses the analyses can simply swap the dependent

disruptive variables for dependent partisan variables. Table 4 shows these results, with Model 2 once again differing from Model 1 due to the inclusion of additional control variables that consider individual Presidents. Though the Pseudo R Square is low, explaining around 5% of the dependent variable, a basic analysis of the individual partisan responses produces many significant variables. Presidential election years, divided government, overall partisanship, Presidential approval, and the Cold War era all have significance with a notable impact. Speech length is also significant but once again has a coefficient of zero. Presidential election years show a moderate increase in partisan responses. Divided government shows a decrease in partisan responses at a level that roughly cancels out the effect of Presidential election years. Higher Presidential approval decreases partisan responses just enough to be noticeable, while the Cold War increases partisan responses by around a factor of five. By far the variable with the most impact is partisanship as measured by DW-NOMINATE. Partisanship's coefficient is 26,340.176, but it is important to keep in mind that due to the nature of the derived variable, the difference in partisanship as measured between Congressional terms is typically around 0.03, so while the impact is still massive the effective change in value between years is only around 800. Of course a year also starts at a rather high value, so each year's additional gain is also tempered in that way. As predicted by the fourth hypothesis, divided government has the expected effect of decreasing partisan responses.

The finding relating to partisanship may seem like an obvious finding, but the key is that political differences are translating directly into observable differences in behavior. The relationships between politicians are complex, and even though disagreements are

inevitable it does not necessarily mean members of opposite parties are naturally adversarial in other regards. These statistics show that in this case, however, political differences do translate to open response, and that the State of the Union is seen as an appropriate outlet for partisan sentiment. Through a combination of variables, though, it also appears as if over time partisan expression during the State of the Union has decreased. The year variable has marginal significance indicating a general downward trend despite the trend of increasing partisanship.

Adding in control variables for individual Presidents has the same methodological problem here as with the previous analysis involving individual responses and disruption. Using President Carter as a baseline only Presidential approval retains significance. The Cold War control variable and Presidential election year variable are now rated as marginally significant. Once again changing baseline Presidents affects very little overall statistically.

These results may imply that each President does not necessarily cause anomalies in the overall predictive trends, but that within each President's speeches there are different individual trends. Phrased differently, under each President there are still certain "rules" that can be used to predict whether a response will be partisan or not, but the rules are also significantly different depending on the President in office. Speeches under different Presidents do not necessarily break overall trends, but each President has a micro-trend within their own set of speeches. If this is correct, Presidential approval is a contributing factor within those micro-trends. While this idea raises the complexity of an accurate model by a substantial degree, observational evidence can be found more easily

that would suggest Presidents do change stylistically over their terms. As one example, George H.W. Bush slowed his style and allowed Congress more chances to respond as he progressed as President. Though relating to disruption, it is not too hard to imagine Presidents making other changes that affect partisanship. As a second example, Bill Clinton in later years took to referring to the budget as “my balanced budget,” which is a slightly politically loaded term, and could have perhaps had some partisan influence.

This question can also be investigated using the combined yearly data as well. This analysis has two models on Table 5, showing linear regression without Presidential control variables at first and then with those controls added for the second model. This additional analysis shows that only Presidential approval, Presidential election years, and the Cold War era have significance, in roughly the same magnitude and direction as the analysis on individual responses. Responses per time shows a possible large impact, where more responses per time lowers partisan responses, but hangs at the very edge of marginal significance. Overall partisanship and divided government have only slightly more favorable significance values and have direction and magnitude in line with the individual response analysis. These variables have a potential large impact so they are important to consider even if the evidence is not completely statistically significant. The R-square value is reasonable, however, showing the model has an explanatory value for the dependent variable around 36%. Unlike previous analysis, adding control variables for individual Presidents both lowers the R-Square value and reduces the significance of all variables. Presidential approval and responses per time remain the most significant variables and do not fully clear the margins.

One possible explanation for these results is that the year by year data set does not have enough points of information to firmly establish a trend. A given year can deviate significantly from an overall trend for a variety of reasons not measured in this study or for reasons that are completely unique to a given point in time. Such events are difficult to control for. The easiest solution is to expand the data set, but unfortunately that can only occur as more State of the Union speeches are produced, compromising on the standard of the source material used, or shifting the focus from televised speeches and all the connections those speeches imply.

Combining Partisanship and Disruption

Both partisan and disruptive responses indicate something important about the goals and behavior of Members of Congress. Making special note of responses which are both partisan and disruptive at the same time can therefore be used to analyze instances during which Congress' reaction was particularly strong. Model 1 on Table 6 shows a basic test of this idea and Model 2 shows the inclusion of the individual President control variables. Basic analysis of the individual responses finds significance for both the Cold War era and the War on Terror era, as well as divided government and Presidential approval. The non-era variables both show a reduction in responses that are both partisan and disruptive. For Presidential approval this is in line with the previous findings, showing only a slight decrease. For the divided government variable this is perhaps the best confirmation of the hypothesis that divided government leads to a stylistic change that makes the content of speeches less controversial during those years. A lack of divided government make a disruptive partisan response more than twice as likely to

occur than in years of divided government. Even if divided government does not change the standard scheme of how Congress responds to a speech, this can perhaps be evidence that divided government can lower the strength of reactions.

Adding controls for individual Presidents reduces leaves Presidential approval as the only significant variable. Logically it is not a stretch to imagine that this factor would be stronger than the other three variables found significant without these controls, as Presidential approval likely is an input into other variables even if they are not directly the same. When reactions that are defined complexly by having both a disruptive and partisan quality are considered, the inclusion of Presidential styles may be enough to disrupt the trend without establishing their own trends. Conditions may be required in a narrower range than for the responses that are only disruptive or only partisan, and many factors related to style can disrupt those conditions. With the difficulties involved in establishing a trend in the large data set, work involving the yearly data points does not produce any usable results.

Issue-based Analyses

As noted by previous research, one effect of increased partisanship is a change in issue frequency (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 182). From basic observation it is clear that in recent years the State of the Union has shown a noticeably different issue organization than in earlier years. The types of issues addressed have changed. To a degree, that change may be simply caused by different issues gaining or losing salience, an explanation which would work well in relation to the end of the Cold War and start of the War on Terror. However, in addition to the fact that some issues cannot be explained

this way, such as tax issues or economic issues, the fundamental structure of the speeches have changed as well. In early speeches, an issue would be interspersed throughout the speech, brought up multiple times with very few chances to respond on that single issues presented consecutively, but in later speeches issues tended to be discussed all at once before moving on to the next. This could potentially affect how Members of Congress respond. The question is perhaps better suited to a review by a psychological professional, but it is not hard to imagine that perhaps the audience grows tired of responding to a given issues after a while if the President spends a significant uninterrupted amount of time on it without diverting to other topics. This of course would then alter the statistics collected by this study.

The data collected in this project can be used to test the validity of some of these concerns, lending extra support to the other findings. The percentage each issue makes up a speech can be seen to change on every issue. In fact, there many instances where issues will not be mentioned at all in a speech. Due to the size of the data set it is impractical to exhaustively detail every nuance in issue change over time, but a few examples serve to highlight how issue salience can effect Congressional response. This approach is also necessary because no clear trend emerges in issue salience over time, both because of the reoccurring problem of few data points and also because the issue-attention cycle is not necessarily very long (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 184). Five issue areas in particular can be used to demonstrate issue disparity. Foreign Affairs stands out because in 1980 nearly half of Congress's responses were in relation to that policy area. Foreign affairs rarely gets that much attention. Due to rhetorical styles,

some years even appear to have no references to foreign affairs. This is not to say the subject was not discussed, only that the President gave a speech which reflected foreign affairs as relating primarily to another issue area. A good example would be how more often than not issues relating to terrorism were phrased in a way that related more to maintaining a strong military than in terms relating to other countries. Economic growth is another issue that was prone to this effect. Many programs can be described as “job creators” or as helping the economy, rather than described in terms of what the program does directly. Where the President puts focus can drastically alter how much of a speech is dedicated to economic issues. For example, President Obama discussed the Affordable Care Act at great length, but often discussed the Act in economic terms, not health care terms. Conversely, President George W. Bush nearly always put the focus of Medicare Part D on the health benefit gained by having access to prescription drugs, not on the economic savings aspect of the plan. Energy, crime, and health care are also issues areas that stand out because they do show a clear salience change over time. For health care there are some overlapping issues with Presidential focus as well that play into the changing numbers. These five issues are summarized in Table 7.

The next step is then to establish that not all issues prompt the same types of responses from Members of Congress, which this data set is also well positioned to answer. Crime received a disruptive response around 37% of the time that the issue received a response. By comparison, foreign affairs responses were only disruptive around 19% of the time. Energy responses were disruptive around 22% of the time, health care responses around 25%, and direct economic issue responses around 33%.

This information is provided in Table 8. Of these issues, health care was the most partisan, receiving partisan responses 30% of the time. Foreign affairs was the least partisan, with around 12% of responses being partisan. Direct economic issues were partisan around 20% of the time, energy responses around 22%, and crime responses around 23%. This information is provided in Table 9. The exact numbers are not what is important. The fact that the numbers show notable differences is. All factors being even, what the President chooses to speak about could significantly affect the numbers of partisan or disruptive responses.

As established by previous research and theoretical links, however, it is also important to note that the content included in a speech is also dependent on other political conditions that have also been used in this project to predict levels of disruptive and partisan responses (Cohen 1995, 87). Content therefore can be considered more of a symptom that can help understand the complete picture of how political actors respond to these speeches rather than an independent cause. Content is still worth considering directly because of the statistical effect that can be observed, but the content is not created in a political vacuum.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Without proper context the findings presented in the previous chapter can be hard to interpret. The four hypotheses presented earlier serve to focus the analyses in a productive manner, however. The first hypothesis, that responses per time will increase over time, can tentatively be said to be true if absolute terms are not used. The three most recent Presidents have given longer speeches and speeches with more responses per unit of time than the earlier Presidents studied. In later years, however, a sort of plateau has been reached in these figures and in absolute numeric terms some later years show a decline. The most obvious possible cause is the changing nature of the media environment in which these speeches are presented (Holmes and Bloxham, 2009, p. 245). Unfortunately, the design of this study focused on connecting many broader concepts to the reactions to the State of the Union, so a study more focused on directly measuring media related issues would be needed to draw a more definitive connection. This project's scope could only focus on so many concepts and remain coherent, however, and thus relied on theoretical links between proposed effects of shifting media conditions and the variables used here. The variables chosen were used because of their closeness to actual political processes. If these variables do not explain the observed changes, perhaps an approach that more directly measures the change in media conditions would have found a link. Research dedicated to media studies has at least one proposed method for doing so, measuring the spread major 24-hour news networks with comparisons to Congressional behavior (Clinton and Enamorado, 2014, p. 928). The statistics presented here do provide evidence that some form of change has taken place, though, even if the

specific cause has not been measured.

Furthermore, the fact that the relevant values peaked during Bill Clinton's years in office and then move back and forth over a relatively stable level show that perhaps once responses per time reach a certain threshold only diminishing returns are produced by additional Congressional responses. More responses logically slow down a speech, and while the opportunities presented are valuable, after a certain point those concerns have to be balanced with the need to bring the speech to a conclusion in a timely manner. Speech length seems to have found a stable equilibrium at around one hour, and Congress can maintain a response rate of one response every 45 to 50 seconds. There is no rule that enforces these limits, only the economic considerations of human behavior.

These factors also come into play regarding Presidential style. In particular, some of the nuances of speechcraft may play a larger role than theoretically accounted for in the model. Speechcraft includes a lot of subtle nuance that can be hard to quantify. This difficulty is further compounded by differences in Presidential personality (Renshon, 1994, p. 375). There has been a good deal of discussion in the academic community about the merits of different theories in this regard (Mazlish, 1994, p. 745). At the very least, however, content analysis of this range of speeches makes it abundantly obvious to observers that there is some quantity that makes addresses by different Presidents qualitatively different from others.

The findings relating to disruptive and partisan responses by Congress provide the most important insights of this research. There are many models and theories that describe how representatives behave in the American system of government. Most make

it abundantly clear that representatives are compelled to act in a way that helps secure reelection and effectively communicates a message tailored to that end to their constituents (Druckman and Mitchell, 1995, p. 10). It is no surprise that partisanship has value in this equation as well, because though partisanship is mostly about unity on a broad slate of issues it can also help with reelection in an overall partisan climate. (Reedy, Wells, and Gastil, 2014, p. 1399). The findings presented here, however, show that reactions by Congress during the State of the Union are seen as valuable enough to work into the equation as well. If Congress did not take the institution seriously then each year would see a very similar and generic response. The analyses on partisanship and disruption show that Members of Congress act differently depending on the differing political conditions of a given year. Both overall trends such as the increasingly polarized political atmosphere and more temporally local events such as Presidential election years have some connection to the process, showing that not only is Congress' behavior changed by overall political conditions but that the process is also highly sensitive to change.

The noted effect of individual Presidents on the process also reinforces this finding. Though Presidents are constrained by the same political factors that are being measured and compared to Congressional response, there is a fundamental difference between speaking styles that can hard to measure but nonetheless has an effect on how Congress responds. Presidents can be more or less accommodating to Congress by pausing for longer or shorter amounts of time at critical moments in the speech. Furthermore, as has been extensively considered by previous studies, the President

critically has control of the agenda and tone of the speech, which sometimes can deviate from the average political salience nationwide (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). At a very basic level, at least, the President is also aware of Congress' motivations and can at times make decisions based off this knowledge or use those motivations for their own benefit. An example of this would be Bill Clinton's insistence in his later years to referring to the budget as "my balanced budget", which inherently colored Congress' options for response by the terminology chosen. The President has the ability to take any one issue and discuss it in multiple ways (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). This freedom can change how favorable an issue both for the viewing public and for Members of Congress who must quickly mentally calculate their own response.

This is a skill that a shrewd President can make great use of, but it does not entirely overpower the overall political climate. It is also a skill that observers have noted that Presidents put effort into developing, so at the very least those in the office believe style can be valuable (Barlow, 2009, p. 20). There are also noted tools, such as the teleprompter, that can effect how a President gives a speech, while also magnifying the inherent choices a President makes about their own style (Barlow, 2009, p. 21). While these considerations heighten the complexity of any model, if these concerns are actively something political actors themselves seek to understand then there is definitely also academic merit in their study.

Addressing the frequent issue that occurred with collinearity of the Cold War variable and some Presidents, it is possible that this effect happens because there are three different Presidents in the studied time frame of the Cold War that do form an overall

pattern while the two studied Presidents in the War on Terror era happen to be anomalously different. This possibility also warrants the repeated discussion that different control variables for the early and later War on Terror to account for some possible differences in overall political conditions as the popularity of the War on Terror faded (Heatherington and Suhay, 2011, p. 546). Another possibility is that Obama is statistically different for other, unrelated reasons that were not measured, but because there are only two Presidents recorded during the War on Terror the variable is still rendered problematic.

The variable deserves further analysis, and perhaps a satisfactory answer can only be gained with the passage of more time and more Presidents so that Obama can be studied in full context. Another alternative approach may be to measure the “magnitude” of the era variables rather than the mere presence of the Cold War or War on Terror. For example, War on Terror casualty figures could be one metric of the War on Terror progressing as a political factor. However, a combination of two or more variables can also be said to potentially represent changing magnitudes in era variables. For example, the popularity of the War on Terror likely had some form of impact on the Presidential approval variable, or perhaps even the Congressional reelection variables. When taken together the overall effect may be the same as any other technique that measures era magnitude. However, even though this might theoretically cover that gap in methodology, actually creating the magnitude variables that directly measure the effect is of course preferable to combining the others in such a manner without solid confirmation that they do indeed interact in that manner.

To directly address the questions posed by the hypothesis that increased partisanship would increase disruptive and partisan responses it is important to draw a distinction as to why both of these metrics are important, yet different. Partisan responses show that partisan unity has an effect on behavior during the State of the Union. The affirmation provided by this research in that regard most importantly indicates that partisanship is a crucial factor that affects Congressional behavior during these events. The conclusion may seem obvious that an increase in partisanship will lead to an increase in partisan responses, but the finding has more to do with determining how far partisan influence has spread. Partisan concerns are just one of many things that affect how members of Congress act (Durr, Gilmore, and Wolbrecht, 1997, p. 175). Theoretically partisanship could touch nearly everything a Member of Congress did, yet at the same time there are some activities where partisanship likely does not have a great influence. As a frivolous example that serves as provide the most extreme end of partisan considerations, it is highly unlikely that the Congress will ever split their private gym into separate sections for Democrats and Republicans, no matter how intense partisanship gets. More seriously, there are a range of considerations besides partisanship that can counteract partisan behavior, the the responses during the State of the Union could have potentially been overshadowed by those concerns (Fenno, 2003, p. 55). Most notably, Members of Congress must be concerned with constituents in their home district or state which may not be fully aligned with partisan concerns (Fenno, 2003, p. 55). Without focusing on specific individuals within Congress it is hard to directly measure these counter concerns. The strong overall impact of partisanship, however, shows that party

influence does hold a large degree of sway over Congress despite possible counters.

By contrast, disruptive responses are more related to how important an issue is to Congress. While partisan tensions can fuel some Members of Congress to react in a more disruptive manner, there are many other reasons why a response might be disruptive. For example, there are some issues that politically everyone mostly agrees on and it would not help a politician's popularity to go against. This effect is both seen in the results and predicted by previous research (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 182). Support for the military is a good example of an issue of this nature. Members of Congress appear eager to always show support for the military, and thus might engage the issue with reactions that are stronger than the typical issue raised during the speech. As another example, whenever the President invites special guests to the State of the Union those individuals have frequently done something that everyone feels should be celebrated. Issues like these cross party lines, and thus in a way it is not surprising that partisanship was not a big influence on disruptive responses. The fact that Presidential election years, when the public is more politically engaged, show more attempts by Congress to assert that issues are important to them too makes logical sense as a way to garner at least a little bit of support through issues that are popular at the time (Donovan, Tolbert, and Smith, 2009, p. 98). This also ties in with the other factor that was commonly significant, that more disruption occurs as a President's popularity goes down. The President likely does not want to linger on issues causing low Presidential approval, but Congress may want to differentiate themselves from the President's stance, thus requiring a bit of disruption to ensure the message gets heard. The differences in findings between partisan responses

and disruptive responses serves to highlight the nuance of Congress' responses.

The focus on divided government yielded results that are consistent with the knowledge gained from the partisan and disruptive response analyses. Members of Congress wish to express their opinion regardless of party control of different branches of government. With that in mind it makes a degree of sense that divided government would not strongly impact how disruptive responses were overall. Relating to how issue content changes, however, divided government shows a level of control by the President that steers the overall speech towards less controversial issues, and thus less partisan responses occur (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 183). This effect says more about the nature of divided government than it necessarily relates directly how the opinions of Congress. The fact that content changes how Congress reacts, though, is an important and relevant concern. While it may seem that some factors have an overwhelming strength compared to others, in a way this discovery can be seen as a reminder that certain rules only exist for certain premises, and that the premise of a speech can be changed at a fundamental level, thus changing the rules.

The findings presented in this paper greatly clarify the nature of Congressional behavior during the State of the Union. The differing factors that influence partisan and disruptive responses highlight that the responses Congress give during the speeches are not necessarily intuitively the same. There are competing theories that would each make different claims as to what factors would overpower others. Though partisanship-based theories are often at odds with constituent-based theories, there is general agreement that all activity is done for the purpose of getting reelected (Parker and Goodman, 2011, p.

494). The fact that Congress responds for different reasons therefore likely indicates that the range of factors that are considered to impact reelection is large and spans both major theories, not that elected officials are acting counter to this widely accepted notion. The results serve as a strong warning not to make too many assumptions regarding the nature of political behavior and that complex systems cannot be always be distilled to a more basic level.

Some of the findings may seem obvious, but the confirmation and balancing of factors is still an important step for political science. Though at first measuring partisanship in Congress against the partisan nature of responses may seem like a clear cut case of collinearity, but as previously discussed the analysis is more important for the knowledge of where to draw the line of partisan effects, and how much other factors temper the effect of partisanship (Durr, Gilmore, and Wolbrecht, 1997, p. 175). The other findings relating to disruptive responses and divided government should, in a way, act as a foil for any argument saying the connection needs no study because of obvious linkages. The fact that disruptive responses are not closely linked to partisanship means that other representational models find an area of relevance using an approach that was specifically measuring common counter-arguments against those models. The fact that both models can find some support reinforces the idea that compromise and balance between the major behavioral theories likely holds more explanatory power than completely focusing on partisanship or on home district concerns. The analyses chosen by this study did not directly investigate which alternative might be the most viable, but the secondary analysis on the difference in disruption and partisanship between issues

might present some clues for future research. In addition, as disruptive responses have been postulated to be attempts by Congress to make sure support of an issue is visible, including research on issue salience is likely prudent (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 184).

Furthermore, it could have easily been postulated that divided government would have seen a more partisan and disruptive Congress as rivalries intensified. Instead the opposite was true. While the evidence this project has presented relating to issue-shifts is not as conclusive as the other aspects of the analysis, it does provide a viable explanation that agrees with several major theories. Political conditions have been shown to change the content of legislative activity (Bowling and Ferguson, 2001, p. 184). Speeches specifically have been studied as well, finding that speech content can be highly variable (Cohen, 1995, p. 87). Overall, the results stand on their own by providing critical nuance on Congressional behavior and partisanship, while also productively supporting other ongoing research. The importance of questions previously asked but not conclusively answered is highlighted as the multiple theories are drawn together.

Appendix A: Tables and Figures

Table 1

OLS Regression

Dependent Variable Responses Per Time

Model 1 Sig = 0.000, Model R-Square = 0.601

Model 2 Sig = 0.001, Model R-Square = 0.614

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Year	0.001	0.096	0.001	0.432
House Reelection	0.000	0.042*	0.001	0.057
Senate Reelection	0.000	0.847	0.000	0.058
War on Terror	-0.008	0.059	-0.008	0.138
Cold War	-0.006	0.222	(a)	(a)
Speech Length	0.000	0.185	0.000	0.239
Divided Government	0.001	0.648	-0.015	0.710
Partisanship	-0.029	0.486	0.027	0.957
Presidential Approval	0.000	0.903	0.000	0.775
Presidential Election	0.001	0.493	0.000	0.810
Midterm Election	0.000	0.897	0.000	0.971
Carter			-0.032	0.059
Reagan			-0.033	0.042*
George H.W. Bush			0.030	0.045*
Clinton			-0.017	0.049*
George W. Bush			-0.007	0.205

(a) – No output due to colinearity issues.

Figure 1

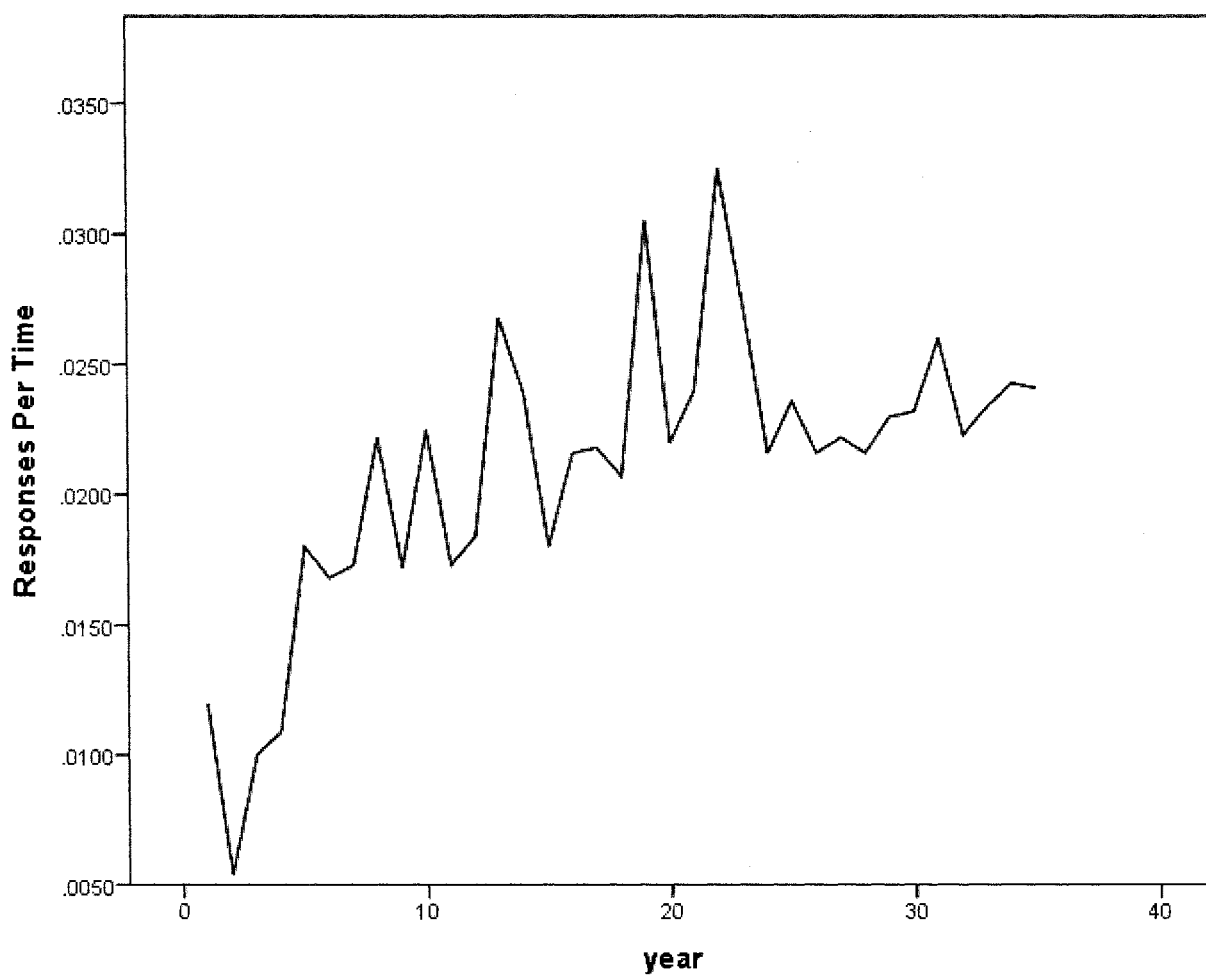


Table 2

Logistic Regression

Dependent Variable Disruptive Responses

Model 1 Sig = 0.001, Pseudo R-Square = 0.079

Model 2 Sig = 0.000, Pseudo R-Square = 0.098

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Speech Length	1.000	0.000*	1.000	0.853
Year	1.103	0.051	0.903	0.189
House Reelection	1.031	0.022*	1.131	0.000*
Senate Reelection	0.999	0.871	1.002	0.837
War on Terror	0.508	0.032*		
Cold War	5.306	0.000*		
Presidential Election	0.611	0.000*	0.811	0.164
Midterm Election	0.861	0.247	0.912	0.508
Divided Government	0.777	0.173	0.949	0.801
Partisanship	0.042	0.360	6.866	0.689
Presidential Approval	0.993	0.144	0.980	0.000*
Carter			1.000	0.853
Reagan			0.903	0.189
George H.W. Bush			1.131	0.000*
Clinton			0.811	0.164
George W. Bush			0.980	0.000*

Table 3

OLS Regression

Dependent Variable Disruptive Response Percent

Model Sig = 0.033, Model R-Square = 0.410

	B	Sig.
Speech Length	-0.001	0.879
Year	-3.606	0.281
House Reelection	2.609	0.000*
Senate Reelection	-0.113	0.724
Presidential Approval	-0.478	0.060*
Presidential Election	-1.768	0.792
Midterm Election	0.257	0.967
Divided Government	2.740	0.789
Partisanship	61.869	0.768
Cold War	(a)	(a)
War on Terror	14.864	0.399
Carter	-70.376	0.237
Reagan	-51.493	0.359
George H.W. Bush	-21.589	0.678
Clinton	-26.051	0.370
George W Bush	-42.894	0.000*

(a) – No output due to colinearity issues.

Table 4

Logistic Regression

Dependent Variable Partisan Responses

Model 1 Sig = 0.000, Pseudo R-Square = 0.047

Model 2 Sig = 0.000, Pseudo R-Square = 0.051

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Speech Length	1.000	0.043*	1.000	0.589
Year	0.901	0.084	0.919	0.349
Presidential Election	1.375	0.024*	1.316	0.091
Midterm Election	1.299	0.092	1.209	0.262
House Reelection	1.007	0.650	1.031	0.313
Senate Reelection	0.999	0.907	1.003	0.817
Divided Government	0.600	0.016*	0.673	0.206
Partisanship	26,340.716	0.013*	7,197.599	0.118
Presidential Approval	0.970	0.000*	0.967	0.000*
Cold War	5.385	0.000*	7.070	0.065
War on Terror	0.627	0.231	0.965	0.946
Carter			(a)	(a)
Reagan			0.485	0.242
George H.W. Bush			0.497	0.301
Clinton			1.503	0.608
George W Bush			0.479	0.186

(a) – No output due to colinearity issues.

Table 5

OLS Regression

Dependent Variable Partisan Response Percent

Model 1 Sig = 0.026, Model R-Square = 0.359

Model 2 Sig = 0.096, Model R-Square = 0.300

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Divided Government	-8.471	0.058	-5.411	0.429
Partisanship	158.663	0.072	100.376	0.447
Cold War	26.695	0.011*	(a)	(a)
War on Terror	-7.088	0.376	0.683	0.950
Responses Per Time	-50.895	0.095	-60.943	0.090
Presidential Approval	-0.255	0.047*	-0.287	0.070
Presidential Election	7.164	0.036*	5.940	0.168
Midterm Elections	3.139	0.366	1.616	0.681
House Reelection	0.133	0.714	0.592	0.428
Senate Reelection	-0.183	0.205	-0.121	0.546
Speech Length	0.005	0.101	0.004	0.101
Year	-1.527	0.228	-0.085	0.680
Carter			27.298	0.338
Reagan			19.518	0.575
George H.W. Bush			16.648	0.608
Clinton			2.115	0.906
George H.W. Bush			-6.313	0.624

(a) – No output due to colinearity issues.

Table 6

Logistic Regression

Dependent Variable Responses that are both Partisan and Disruptive

Model 1 Sig = 0.000, Pseudo R-Square = 0.030

Model 2 Sig = 0.000, Pseudo R-Square = 0.039

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Speech Length	0.980	0.153	0.994	0.230
Year	0.986	0.859	1.031	0.799
Divided Government	0.449	0.025*	0.728	0.557
Partisanship	1,781.910	0.206	1.029	0.997
Presidential Approval	0.975	0.004*	0.968	0.001*
Presidential Election	1.149	0.468	1.012	0.956
Midterm Election	1.182	0.425	0.959	0.859
House Reelection	0.985	0.475	1.055	0.188
Senate Reelection	1.006	0.578	1.016	0.298
Cold War	8.478	0.003*	0.978	0.992
War on Terror	0.188	0.007*	0.452	0.335
Carter			3.020	0.285
Reagan			1.293	0.585
George H.W. Bush			(a)	(a)
Clinton			0.738	0.789
George W Bush			0.339	0.137

(a) – No output due to colinearity issues.

Table 7

Percent of responses per year addressing each issue. Years chosen to represent each President. An issue must be the primary focus of the President's talking point to be coded.

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2001	2009
Foreign Affairs	47.8%	5.6%	16.2%	6.7%	0.0%	1.4%
Economic Growth	0.0%	19.4%	2.7%	5.7%	9.4%	25.0%
Energy	8.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	2.8%
Crime	0.0%	5.6%	5.4%	2.9%	2.1%	1.4%
Health Care	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%	7.3%	6.9%

Table 8

Percentage of responses to each issue that were disruptive.

Foreign Affairs	18.7%
Economic Growth	33.2%
Energy	22.2%
Crime	37.3%
Health Care	24.6%

Table 9

Percentage of responses to each issue that were partisan.

Foreign Affairs	11.9%
Economic Growth	19.8%
Energy	22.2%
Crime	22.9%
Health Care	30.0%

Appendix B: Coding Chart

Data Set 1 Unit of Measurement – Single Congressional response

Data Set 2 Unit of Measurement – One State of the Union address

Variable	Data Set 1	Data Set 2
Partisan Response	0 – no, 1 - Yes	% of speech marked 1 in previous data set, 0-100
Disruptive Response	0 – no, 1 - Yes	% of speech marked 1 in previous data set, 0-100
Disruptive and Partisan Response	0 – no, 1 - Yes	% of speech marked 1 in previous data set, 0-100
Issue	Descriptive	Descriptive
Speech Length	Number of seconds from start to end of speech, range 1781 to 5343	Number of seconds from start to end of speech, range 1781 to 5343
Carter	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Reagan	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
George H.W. Bush	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Clinton	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
George W. Bush	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Obama	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Cold War	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
War on Terror	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Year	First year studied is 1 and increases by 1 each year	First year studied is 1 and increases by 1 each year
Presidential Election Year	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Midterm Election Year	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Divided Government	0 – no, 1 - Yes	0 – no, 1 - Yes
Partisanship	Difference between party mean DW-NOMINATE scores, range from 0.514 to 1.091	Difference between party mean DW-NOMINATE scores, range from 0.514 to 1.091
House Reelection Rate	Percent of House members reelected, 0-100	Percent of House members reelected, 0-100
Senate Reelection Rate	Percent of Senate members reelected, 0-100	Percent of Senate members reelected, 0-100
Presidential Approval	0-100	0-100
Responses	N/A	Number of responses during the speech for that year,
Responses per time	N/A	Responses divided by Speech Length, range 0.0054 to 0.0325

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