

Policy without Partisanship: The Direct Appeals of First Ladies

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Presidents make public appeals on behalf of their policy priorities, but they are not the only members of presidential administrations who address the public. First ladies are highly visible presidential surrogates. We argue that first ladies make direct appeals to selectively advance presidents' policy initiatives, and do so without being overly partisan. To support these claims, we present evidence from the public remarks of the last three first ladies whose husbands have completed their terms: Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama. We use topic models to show that the remarks of first ladies are primarily concerned with policy, rather than ceremonial topics. We measure the partisanship of public remarks using a dictionary-based approach with Bayesian shrinkage and regularization to illustrate how the remarks of first ladies are not overly partisan. Our findings on the strategic communication of first ladies advance our understanding of the first ladyship and of the presidency.

Keywords: first ladies, presidents, public appeals, political communications, text-as-data methods

American presidents routinely make direct and public appeals to the American people. Presidential scholars have increasingly studied such uses of the “bully pulpit” since the publication of *Going Public* (Kernell 1986) and *The Rhetorical President* (Tulis 1987). Consequently, many studies have considered how and why presidents make direct appeals to the American public, as well as the efficacy of these appeals (Canes-Wrone 2006; Cohen 2010; Edwards 2003; Eshbaugh-Soha 2016; Franco, Grimmer, and Lim 2018; Ragsdale 1984). However, presidents are not the only members of the executive branch,

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nor are they the only political actors capable of making direct appeals on behalf of an administration. The literature often omits the appeals of others in the presidential orbit speaking on behalf of the president. One of these important voices is that of the first lady. In recent decades, first ladies have made more public remarks; their role has become more substantial, and they are the most unique and recognizable of presidential surrogates. Although scholars have done groundbreaking work on the politics of first ladies (Borrelli 2011; Wright 2016), the contributions of first ladies in conveying messages to the public for the president are largely neglected by the existing scholarship.

In trying to understand more broadly how presidents use the White House resources at their disposal to try to achieve their goals of communication to the public, scholars on the presidency should account for first ladies as a unique and versatile presidential surrogate. Yet, there is no scholarly consensus on how direct appeals of first ladies are different from the presidential appeals.

Given the voluminous literature on public appeals that largely omits appeals by presidential surrogates, and a booming literature on politics of first ladies that has offered fruitful historical evidence of a more active role, we argue that the remarks of first ladies should be considered as direct appeals on behalf of presidents. Specifically, appeals of first ladies are designed to further the policy initiatives of presidents in a less partisan way; they are political but not overly partisan. We contribute to the literature using multiple text-as-data methods to systematically examine the public remarks of the three most recent first ladies. We conduct a text analysis on all 1,264 public remarks made by these three first ladies (Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama) and compare them with 1,266 presidential weekly addresses in the same era.

Our empirical investigation supports our argument in two ways. First, using topic models (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2017), we show that the majority of remarks made by first ladies are policy related. However, they craft the speeches with a *personal, rather than formal*, communication style that uses vocabulary frequently considered more feminine or compassionate. Second, we claim that the language used by first ladies in their remarks is neither controversial nor overtly partisan. With a rich data set of congressional floor speeches made by legislators from two major parties (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2019), we create a partisan tone dictionary via the “fightin’ words” algorithm, a dictionary-based approach with Bayesian shrinkage and regularization (Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn 2008). We then use this dictionary to measure the partisanship of the remarks of first ladies and compare it to the partisan tones in presidential weekly addresses. We find evidence that first ladies appeal in a nonpartisan manner, in marked contrast to their spouses. In fact, the partisanship reflected in the remarks of first ladies is so consistent across administrations that first ladies almost appear to share the same partisanship, while presidential remarks reflect the partisanship of the administration.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the relevant literatures on public appeals, the roles of first ladies, and gender and political communications, and characterizes how these literatures construct our argument and how they motivate our empirical exercise. The second section theorizes our main argument and presents our empirically testable hypotheses. In the subsequent section, we summarize our data and describe the preprocessing steps. Next come our main empirical sections that present the

topic model and the results it yields, and thoroughly introduce the dictionary method and the partisanship of first ladies' and presidents' remarks it measures. The final sections discuss the implications and limitations of our findings and conclude.

Literature Review

Three broad literatures motivate the empirical investigation of direct appeals of first ladies in this article. The first is on public appeals, focused primarily on presidential appeals and their efficacy. Another investigates the roles of first ladies and the institutionalization of first ladies. The last presents a long-standing discussion regarding the workings of gender, stylistically and substantively, in political communications. In this section, we review each and identify how its insights inform our arguments and analyses that follow.

Direct Appeals from the Executive Branch

Scholars of the American presidency have long discussed how presidents, as chief executives, communicate publicly in an attempt to influence the opinions, decisions, and actions of the American people. "Going public" has become one of the primary governing strategies of modern presidents (Kernell 1986; Tulis 1987). The theories of "going public" claim that the presidents strategically go over Congress and directly communicate with the public in order to sway public opinion and achieve their policy goals (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Canes-Wrone 2006; Edwards 2003; 2009; Eshbaugh-Soha 2016).

The efficacy of presidential appeals, however, is a matter of ongoing debate. Some scholars offer evidence for the modest, though positive, effects of presidential appeals on shaping public opinion (Barrett 2004; Brace and Hinckley 1992; Cavari 2013). The majority of this evidence, however, suggests a null effect that presidents are unlikely to be able to drastically move public opinion toward their preferred policy preferences (Edwards 2003; 2009; Franco, Grimmer, and Lim 2018; Rottinghaus 2010; Simon and Ostrom 1989). Thus, presidents strategically go public primarily on issues with which the majority of the public already agrees, as a means to increase the salience of an issue (Canes-Wrone 2006; Cohen 1995; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2011).

However, presidents do not hold monopoly rights on direct appeals; they also rely on many surrogates in the executive branch, such as vice presidents, press secretaries, cabinet officials, and, of course, first ladies to help spread their messages and influence public opinion and legislative action. Yet, much of the literature on direct appeals has focused exclusively on the appeals made by presidents and largely omits the appeals made by presidential surrogates. It is widely observed that presidential surrogates regularly make public remarks on specific issues to advocate for policies consistent with presidential priorities. The first lady has become more visible in the executive branch in the modern era, from Betty Ford's vocal activism on breast cancer awareness to Melania Trump's "BE BEST" initiative. As literature of public approval ratings of first ladies has revealed, the wives of presidents are uniquely situated, given the higher favorability among voters

and the unelected and the nonpartisan nature of their position (Burrell 2001; Burrell, Elder, and Frederick 2011). Thus, first ladies are unique presidential surrogates who can convey certain messages and speak to certain audiences beyond the effective reach of the president. First ladies may be more effective communicators in a polarized era, because they are viewed as less partisan and their style may appeal to wider audiences (Wright 2016).

First Lady as an Institution

First ladies serve an important institutional role as one of the most recognizable public faces of an administration. The very first first lady, Martha Washington, set the stage for future first ladies by establishing three primary roles—public figure, hostess, and presidential confidante (Eksterowicz and Watson 2000)—none of which is policy related. Subsequently, the duties of a first lady consisted almost entirely of ceremonial duties and hosting obligations, such as the preservation, restoration, and decoration of the White House.

The hosting role of the first lady has continued to the present, but the Office of the First Lady has become institutionalized and more publicly political over time, through a gradual expansion of responsibility and opportunity to lead in communication with the public. In the modern era, as the West Wing has become more centralized and politicized (Dickinson and Lebo 2007; Lewis and Moe 2010), such an institutionalized trend has spread to the East Wing, the office home to the first lady. The Office of the First Lady has also been formalized, and the role of first lady has been expanded with increasing expectations of public appearances and speeches (Frederickson and Smith 2003). The Kennedy White House formalized the Office of the First Lady, with Jacqueline Kennedy having her own full-time communications staff (Watson and Eksterowicz 2003). Since the Kennedy administration, the Office of the First Lady has become a fully professionalized institution, playing a larger role in delivering the president's message and communicating with the public. Scholars also admit that the Office of the First Lady has become an extension of the machinery of the White House, and first ladies are used to strategically benefit their husband's administration (Beasley 2010; Burns 2008; Grimes 1990). In a more detailed investigation of the history of the first ladyship, Borrelli (2011) uses rich archival data and reveals that even when first ladies are not accepted as representatives of the electorate, they still find a way to reinstate themselves as interpreters and mediators in the executive branch. Jeffrey Cohen stresses the importance of first ladies in the full-bloom institutional presidency due to their institutionalized "political, popular, and/or policy making benefit to the president" (2000, 374).

Scholars have recognized the trend of institutionalization for the Office of the First Lady, and two points warrant some discussion. First, most of the studies focus on the behavior of the first ladies from a historical and/or typological approach. Typological studies have been rooted in a personal analysis of the characteristics of particular first ladies. While historical studies that focus on idiosyncratic tendencies of particular first ladies are interesting and help shed light on the workings of individual White

Houses, they offer less systematic analysis of the expanding political role of first ladies in contemporary presidential administrations. Second, studies on the institutional first ladies suggest their increasingly active role in policy; however, these studies forgo discussions on the extent of this political activity and the details of specific issue spaces common to first ladies. Scholars also acknowledge that the majority of classic empirical or historical political science research has not seriously considered the institutional role first ladies play or their influence on presidential behavior (Watson 2003). Therefore, in this article, we study first ladies, specifically their communications with the public, from an institutionalist approach. It is important for scholarship to deepen its understanding of the political role of first ladies, but also more specifically, that the rhetoric of first ladies serves the executive institution and carries a unique message on behalf of the presidents.

Gender and Political Communications

When considering when and how first ladies strategically make appeals, one must also consider the impact of gender stereotypes on public perception of the actions and remarks of first ladies. Originally consigned to ceremonial hostessing and wielding their influence in private, first ladies now have more public responsibilities, but still must show some adherence to ideas of traditional femininity in order to be perceived favorably (Grimes 1990; Wertheimer 2005). Rhetorical research has long documented the presence of gender stereotypes in public discourse and how gender influences personality assessments and favorability of political figures in general (Anderson and Sheeler 2005; DeRosa and Bystrom 1999; Kanner 1991). These gender analyses of rhetoric have also included discourse evaluations of the first ladies (Parry-Giles and Blair 2002; Wertheimer 2004). Feminine gender stereotypes and personality traits include compassion, affection, gentleness, sensitivity, supportiveness, and kindness (Diekman and Eagly 2000). First ladies risk being seen unfavorably if they are viewed as insufficiently compassionate, and thus unfeminine.¹

Gender norms influence the image that first ladies seek to portray and also the policy issues they are most likely to discuss in their remarks to the public. Women are assumed to be naturally more compassionate than men (Banaji, Hardin, and Rothman 1993; Eagly and Steffen 1984; Hoffman and Hurst 1990; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Assumptions about individuals of different genders having predispositions toward particular personality traits impact assumptions about proclivities for certain policy areas. Policy issues that are frequently associated with compassion, like education, health care, child care, and poverty, are seen as more likely to be of interest to women, and women are seen as more likely to be innately capable of handling the political intricacies associated

1. Consider criticism of Hillary Clinton as uncaring and too focused on her own career after her 1992 cookie-baking comments (<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/17/us/the-1992-campaign-hillary-clinton-defends-her-conduct-in-law-firm.html?module=inline>) or criticism of Melania Trump for not being more vocally against the separation of children from their families at the border (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/us/politics/melania-trump-jacket.html>) for examples of such criticism.

with those policy issue areas (Bauer 2015; Dolan 2010; 2014; Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Koch 2000). First ladies are likely to use the majority of their policy remarks to discuss issues associated with compassion in order to conform to ideas surrounding femininity and appropriate behavior for first ladies.

Previous work suggests that first ladies are expected to regularly communicate with the public, but that they must do so within certain parameters of acceptability. The role of first ladies in public communication requires neither total removal from policy nor full partnership in policy decisions but, rather, a selective engagement in policy. First ladies coordinate their remarks with presidents in order to influence public opinion and gain support for presidential priorities, but from a different perspective than communicated by the president. Previous work has indicated that first ladies are generally popular and are expected to make public remarks; however, there has been a lack of systematic empirical analysis of these remarks. In this article, we use a rich data set and text analysis techniques to examine and quantify the remarks of first ladies, in order to systematically understand the strategic appeals of first ladies.

The Strategic Appeals of First Ladies

What specific strategies do first ladies choose when they communicate with the public and to what extent does their rhetoric coordinate with that of the president? Unfortunately, there is no scholarly consensus on this question. At first glance, there are three conjectures that constitute a spectrum of the first lady–presidential policy dynamic in strategic communication. First, first ladies may stay away from policy and stick with the traditional hostessing role. Second, first ladies may be full partners of the president and speak on behalf of the president on a variety of issues. Third, first ladies may selectively deploy a handful of policy domains. However, the first conjecture is at odds with the institutionalization of the Office of the First Lady and the more influential role played by first ladies in conveying presidential messages to the masses. The second conjecture is not supported by the fact that the public does not respond favorably when first ladies appear to “overstep” their role or attempt to become too involved in policy particulars (Grimes 1990). For example, when Hillary Clinton was actively promoting health-care reform, she was widely blamed after its failure. At times the first lady may have been a political asset, and at other times a political liability, to her husband (Cohen 2000). Therefore, the third conjecture is more in line with the fact that first ladies selectively and carefully engage in the role of policy advocate, while explicitly adhering to gender norms. Scholars of first ladies have argued that every first lady, at least for the last one hundred years, has been expected to create her own voice, and this expectation has only grown as the role has become increasingly more public (Wertheimer 2005).

There are two important benefits of having the first lady speak on behalf of the president on certain types of issues. First, presidential administrations strategically use the remarks of first ladies to draw attention to or gain support for particular policy issues and to make credible bipartisan appeals (Wright 2016). Presidents, as the leaders of their party, are expected to be inherently partisan. First ladies can balance the partisan tone of

an administration in order to appeal to broader audiences. Second, presidents and first ladies can coordinate their remarks so that presidents may benefit from the popularity of their wives. Presidents can most effectively use direct appeals when they are popular and enjoy high approval ratings (Canes-Wrone 2001). Given how central a role favorability plays in the effectiveness of direct appeals, it is important to consider the direct appeals of the presidential surrogate most likely to enjoy high popularity scores and be insulated from sudden fluctuations of public support, which is often the first lady (Mueller 2008). Wright (2016) provided experimental evidence showing that messages from the first ladies can change the way Americans view the president and his policy agenda, in certain issue areas and among women voters.

Therefore, we argue, first ladies strategically tailor their remarks to the public. Specifically, we pare this argument down to two main empirically testable hypotheses. First, first ladies project an unobjectionable image and primarily focus on their administration's policy goals regarding "compassion" issues and tailor their discussion to their own established personal interests or career. Second, first ladies seek to remain less partisan than their husbands in order to be able to appeal to outpartisans (members of the opposite party of the president) and broaden the appeal of the administration. In short, first ladies are political, but they are not partisan. The rest of this section discusses these two hypotheses in detail.

The remarks of first ladies reflect their personal interests and experiences, and are primarily concerned with compassion policy issues. We expect that first ladies, even when discussing policy, attempt to craft an image that is personal, caring, and unobjectionable to voters. We predict that first ladies attempt to mirror some female politicians in presenting a comfortably "feminine" and compassionate persona. Especially because first ladies do not have to prove that they are "tough enough" for politics (Brooks 2013), like women who are political candidates in their own right, first ladies are free to lean into gender stereotypes and focus wholeheartedly on issues that female politicians have long been seen as experts in, like education, family, and health care (Bauer 2015; Dolan 2010; 2014; Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Koch 2000), without spending much time discussing issue areas that have been traditionally thought of as "masculine," like the economy or foreign policy (Dolan 2014; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2002). We predict that the majority of first ladies' public statements will focus on substantive policy issues, but will be primarily focused on compassion policy areas.

While first ladies may focus more on a particular subset of policy issues (compassion issues), the remarks of first ladies are carefully in line with presidents' policy priorities. First ladies launch their own policy-related initiatives that highlight efforts the administration is making in a particular policy issue without talking explicitly about that policy. For instance, Michelle Obama launched a program called "Let's Move!" to promote exercise and healthy lifestyles for children. While not directly related to President Barack Obama's health-care reform, her initiative was generally focused on health policy, though in a more indirect and unobjectionable manner. A former aide to Michelle Obama confirmed this strategy during an interview, saying that "people need to see what the

administration is doing and she always uses subliminal messaging and the administration's talking points, so the goals are very interconnected. Let's Move! was connected with the president's agenda" (Wright 2016, 97).

The Bush administration also provides examples of first ladies working in tandem with the policy objectives of their husbands. Laura Bush supported her husband's education reform policy, "No Child Left Behind," through her initiative, "Ready to Read, and Ready to Learn." Discussing improving childhood literacy may be less politically charged than discussing specific testing standards, but it still promoted education and subtly focused the discussion on one of the administration's main goals. A former chief of staff for Laura Bush confirmed such strategic thinking in an interview, discussing how, "(as) a librarian-teacher, she is expected to know about this. This is a safe issue, non-controversial for a first lady to be talking about education" (Wright 2016, 96). Even before their husbands became presidents, Michelle Obama was wellknown as athletic and as an exercise aficionado and Laura Bush was known for being a librarian. We should expect first ladies to use their own interests and personal histories to discuss their husband's policy priorities in a personal, unobjectionable manner.

Hypothesis 1 First ladies spend the majority of their public remarks discussing substantive policy issues, primarily related to "compassion"-related policy, and do so in a personal, and uncontroversial, manner.

First ladies discuss an administration's policy objectives, but they do so without showing a high degree of partisanship. Due to the topics first ladies are likely to discuss in public, they are often able to appear significantly less partisan than their husband and other members of the president's administration. The nature of their remarks allows first ladies to more easily appeal to members of the opposite political party with less fear of being accused of "abandoning the party" than if presidents were to speak similarly. First ladies are likely to use words and phrases common for members of both political parties, and they may even use language associated with the opposition party in order to appeal to outpartisans (Wright 2016). Reaching the public on both sides of the aisle becomes a tremendous communication asset for first ladies. The strategy of appearing not overly partisan can also be confirmed from staffers and press aides to first ladies. During the 2004 presidential election campaign, one of Laura Bush's press aides said, "Mrs. Bush was definitely seen as more moderate than her husband. And really by virtue of staying silent on a lot of the issues that may have been more controversial. That may have allowed her to go into areas in the country that were more moderate ... that her voice may resonate a little easier than the president himself" (Wright 2016, 89–90). Although there is certainly historical evidence for our hypotheses, we will provide more systematic, quantifiable evidence through the use of machine learning tools and techniques in our empirical investigation that follows.

Hypothesis 2 First ladies are less partisan than presidents and are similar to one another in terms of the partisanship expressed in their remarks.

Data

First ladies have become more politically active in recent decades, and it is now expected that first ladies will frequently address the public. Our analysis focuses on the public remarks made by the three most recent first ladies whose husbands have completed their terms in office.² We have collected all the transcripts of Michelle Obama's public remarks from the American Presidency Project Website³ and have obtained all transcripts of Hillary Clinton's and Laura Bush's remarks as first ladies from the websites of each of their husband's administrations that were archived by the National Archives.⁴ Over the course of their husbands' terms in office, Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama made a total of 265, 441, and 558 remarks, respectively.

Because we argue that first ladies are perceived as either a satellite or an extension of the president, comparing the rhetoric of the first lady and the president is in order. Here, we choose to compare the remarks of first ladies to presidential weekly addresses because they are similar in scope and frequency. The remarks of first ladies and weekly presidential addresses are comparable in scope because both can be seen as targeted appeals (Cohen 2010), neither are primetime national speeches, and speakers are not subject to limitations on their topics as they would be in Q&A sessions. Furthermore, each remark or address is on one clear, concentrated topic. Presidential weekly addresses are audio- or video-formatted weekly speeches to the nation and are broadcast every Saturday. Each weekly address lasts 3 to 4 minutes and generally discusses a single topic. Presidents have total discretion concerning what they discuss in each weekly address, so each is likely to reflect the president's priorities at the time. President Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush, and President Obama made a total of 410, 416, and 400 weekly addresses, respectively (i.e., weekly presidential addresses and the remarks of first ladies were given with close to the same frequency, with the exception of the Clintons). We have obtained transcripts of each weekly address from the American Presidency Project Website.⁵ In sum, we analyze 1,264 remarks from first ladies and 1,226 weekly presidential addresses.⁶

2. We do not include Melania Trump in our analysis because she seldom makes public remarks and her husband's term is ongoing. However, we will touch on the case of Melania Trump in the discussion section.

3. See http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/first_lady.php.

4. See <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/firstlady/flpress.html> and https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/EOP/First_Lady/html/general-index.html.

5. See <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/satradio.php?year=2009%26Submit=DISPLAY>.

6. We follow the standard in the text analysis literature and perform the following preprocessing steps on the raw speeches: (1) delete all punctuation; (2) remove capitalization; (3) drop stop words, commonly occurring, but meaningfully insignificant words (the set of stop words is defined by a list obtained from <http://www.mit.edu/~ecprice/wordlist.10000>) and a list of obvious context-specific meaningless words, including "mr," "mrs," "ms," "obama," "barack," "michelle," "laura," "george," "bush," "clinton," "bill," "william," "hillary," "rodham," "audience," "laughter," "applause"; and (4) reduce words to their stems according to the Porter stemming algorithm. For details on the Porter stemming algorithm, please see <https://tartarus.org/martin/PorterStemmer/>.

Another important data set that we rely upon in our measure of party differences in political remarks is congressional floor speeches from the 109th Congress to the 114th Congress (1993–2016). We obtain the data from “Congressional Record for the 43rd–114th Congresses: Parsed Speeches and Phrase Counts,”⁷ and this data set contains processed text from the bound and daily editions of the United States Congressional Record. In our process of qualifying the party differences, we assume that the two major political parties in the United States speak different languages (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2019). Thus, we use the metadata on counts of two-word phrases (bigrams) by speaker and party for each congressional session to measure the partisan tones of each phrase by congressional session. Because the discourse of members of Congress would be hyperpartisan, using it as a standard of measurement, we can benefit from the wider variation of the party differences between the two parties. Details of the measuring techniques will be discussed in a later section.

Representing text as a matrix of phrase counts is widely common in text-as-data methods. Correspondingly, we create multiple document-term matrices (DTMs) in order to test the abovementioned hypotheses. The input for topic models is a DTM for the public remarks of all three first ladies we are covering in order to compare the types of topics all three first ladies addressed. In the DTM containing the remarks from the first ladies, rows correspond to individual remarks and columns include the most-used two thousand unigrams (one word) and the most used two hundred bigrams (two-word phrase). For measuring the partisanship of remarks, we use a dictionary method, the details of which will be presented later. The input for analyzing the partisanship associated with the remarks of the first ladies consists of six DTMs, one for each individual in the analysis. For the six DTMs analyzing partisanship of speeches, rows refer to individual remarks and columns correspond to all distinct two-word phrases or bigrams.

Topic Modeling for the Remarks of First Ladies

We use topic modeling (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2017) to analyze the topics most frequently discussed by first ladies in their remarks to the public. Specifically, we use an unsupervised latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA; Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003) to model which topics first ladies discuss with the public, and how often first ladies mention these topics. Because the remarks of first ladies are carefully drafted, we assume there is an a priori specification of possible words chosen that reflect general issues and topics that first ladies want to discuss with the public. We fit a model for 11 topics, $K = 11$. The number of topics is chosen with respect to the trade-off that balances the granularity and the generality of the topics.⁸ The remarks of first ladies given between 1993 and 2017 are

7. See Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M. Shapiro, and Matt Taddy. “Congressional Record for the 43rd–114th Congresses: Parsed Speeches and Phrase Counts.” Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Libraries [distributor], 2018-01-16. https://data.stanford.edu/congress_text.

8. More than 11 topics results in a needlessly detailed model with overly specific individual topics. Fewer than 11 topics results in a model with noncohesive topics that places remarks that are not substantially about the same subject matter in the same topic.

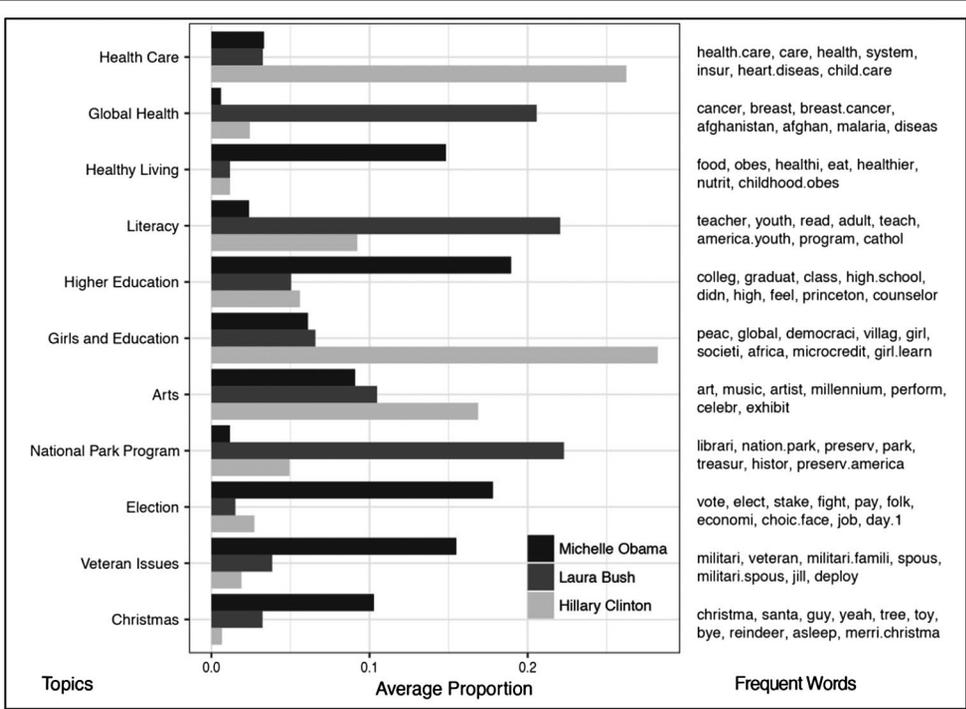


FIGURE 1. Topic Model for First Ladies’ Remarks (1993–2017).

organized into 11 different topics by our model, the results of which can be seen in Figure 1. We also present the proportion of remarks given about each of the 11 topics. We manually label the topics using the words most frequently used in remarks classified as belonging to each topic in addition to listing the most frequent words in remarks assigned to each topic.⁹

The topics most frequently discussed by the three first ladies demonstrate significant similarities. All three first ladies spent the majority of their public remarks discussing topics involving substantive policy issues. The model supports Hypothesis 1: the majority of topics in our model shown in Figure 1 are distinctly policy oriented, and many are related to policy generally considered to be related to compassion issues (health care, education, the arts). Although all three first ladies discussed similar political topics in general, the topic model also shows subtle differences between the first ladies that align with their husband’s specific policy agendas, as well as their own interests.

Topics related to health (the first three topics in Figure 1) are some of the main topics all three first ladies discussed in their public remarks. The topic of health occupies on average 20% of all first lady remarks. However, the specific nature of the remarks varied depending on their background and their husband’s initiatives. “Health care,”

9. We find the most frequent words using the labeling function from the *stm* package in R. We list the top words given by the labeling functions in the package (Highest Prob, FREX, LIFT, Score) while removing duplicates.

“global health,” and “healthy living” are the three health-related topics discussed by the first ladies. While each first lady remarks on each topic, each topic is clearly dominated by a particular first lady. Hillary Clinton discussed health care in nearly 25% of her public remarks. She was a leading advocate of the Health Security Act, one of her husband’s main policy programs. Even after the failure of the Health Security Act,¹⁰ Clinton continued to discuss health care, with a shift toward the importance of access to health care for all children—hence the presence of “child care” among the most common words in the health-care topic.

During the Bush administration, Laura Bush worked closely with the State Department to promote global health diplomacy, as a parallel project to President Bush’s Middle East Partnership Initiative after launching a war in Afghanistan. She frequently discussed the health-care needs of people in Afghanistan and the importance of fighting global diseases like malaria and cancer. Laura Bush discussed global health in more than 20% of her public remarks.

Like her predecessors, Michelle Obama discussed health in tandem with her husband’s efforts to pass and improve the Affordable Care Act. Instead of discussing specific aspects of policy, she focused on encouraging people to eat more nutritious food and live active lifestyles, as well as discussing the importance of exercise and the benefits of home gardening. She launched the “Let’s Move!” initiative to improve school lunches and encouraged children to exercise. In sum, all three first ladies were clearly involved in their administrations’ efforts to discuss health policy with the public and focused on the issues pertinent to their husband’s policy goals.

In addition to policies related to health, education is another policy issue related to compassion that first ladies discussed frequently in their public remarks. Each first lady spent approximately 20% to 25% of her public remarks discussing education (indicated in Figure 1 by the topics “literacy,” “higher education,” and “girls and education”). Although each first lady spent much of her time discussing education, they focused on slightly different topics. Hillary Clinton often stressed the global importance of girls having equal access to education; she was even the U.S. representative to the United Nations–sponsored World Conference on Women in 1995. Her speech at the conference made special mention of education, and throughout her time in the White House she continued to discuss the importance of access to education such that girls and women could have equal opportunities. As a former teacher and librarian, Laura Bush launched a literacy campaign and often discussed the importance of reading. Her efforts supported “No Child Left Behind” without often discussing specific policies. As an accomplished attorney, Michelle Obama often discussed the importance of higher education and its equalizing effects.

The first ladies also discussed a number of topics that, while political, are often discussed in a more “feminine” or personal manner. All three first ladies spent approximately 10% of their remarks discussing the arts. Remarks about the arts typically involved investment in the arts, and the benefits that children and society obtain from access to the

10. A more thorough analysis of Hillary Clinton’s remarks on health care can be found in a later section entitled “The Exceptions: Hillary’s Health Care and Michelle’s Campaign Statements.”

arts. “National park programs” and “veterans’ issues” were also popular topics for all three first ladies. While, initially, national parks and veterans’ issues may not appear particularly “feminine,” the manner in which first ladies discussed these topics was decidedly feminine and in keeping with feminine gender norms. In remarks about the park system, first ladies discussed the importance of preserving national treasures and providing families with recreational activities to enjoy together. When first ladies discussed veterans’ issues, they focused on the sacrifices made by military families and military spouses, in addition to the contributions of members of the armed forces.

First ladies also spent time discussing elections (mostly serving as popular surrogates for their husbands) and the holidays. The presence of “Christmas” as a separate and unique topic suggests the importance of first ladies still fulfilling traditional hostessing duties. Still, the vast majority of remarks given by first ladies (more than 95%) were related to substantive policy issues.

The topic model for the first ladies shows considerable support for Hypothesis 1, that first ladies spend the majority of their remarks to the public discussing policy issues associated with “compassion”-related policies. Although first ladies are presidential surrogates who engage in policy discussions with the public, we maintain that first ladies are careful to avoid the appearance of being “too political” in their remarks to the public. In order to examine this claim, we examine the partisanship expressed by first ladies in their public remarks.

Partisanship of First Ladies’ Direct Appeals

In this section, we quantify the partisanship of the remarks of first ladies. We create a measure that allows us to evaluate the partisanship of every remark based on the phrases used in each remark. Our method of measuring the partisanship of individual remarks is a dictionary-based approach with Bayesian shrinkage and regularization. We follow the work of Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn (2008) and specify a “fightin’ words” model, using the floor speeches of members of Congress as our training set. Based on the frequency with which members of each political party use particular phrases, we take the following steps for each full remark made by the first ladies and presidents. First, we assign a partisan score to each phrase. Then we sum the partisanship of each phrase within each remark. Finally, we assign a partisan score to each full remark.

Creating a Measure of Partisanship

In order to measure the partisanship of first ladies’ remarks, we use a training set of congressional floor speeches. We begin with the total counts for each distinct two-word phrase (bigram) from congressional speeches in a given session (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2019). We calculate partisan weights by congressional session because the partisanship expressed by particular phrases changes over time (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy

2019). Thus, the words used by Republicans in 1994 are likely to vary significantly from the words used by Republicans in 2016 (e.g., “America great” is probably not particularly partisan in the 1990s, but as part of “Make America Great Again” it likely is scored as partisan in 2016). Because we will be measuring differences in bigram choice for members of different political parties, we also collect bigram counts by political party. For each congressional session in our sample (103–114), we have a vector of speakers’ party identification, $Y = (\text{Rep}, \text{Rep}, \text{Dem}, \text{Rep}, \dots, \text{Dem})$. We define X as an unnormalized $N \times J$ matrix of phrase counts,

$$x_{\text{Dem}} = \left(\sum_{i=1}^N I(Y_i = \text{Dem})X_{i1}, \sum_{i=1}^N I(Y_i = \text{Dem})X_{i2}, \dots, \sum_{i=1}^N I(Y_i = \text{Dem})X_{iJ} \right),$$

where N corresponds to the total number of bigrams, so N_{Dem} refers to the total number of Democratic bigrams.

We model the choice of bigram as a function of party. The strategy is to model bigram choice in the full collection of documents and then to assess how usage of a particular bigram differs by a speaker’s political party. We specify the prior probability that a specific phrase is used by a Democratic member of Congress, π_{Dem} . We note that the number of times Democrats use each bigram, x_{Dem} , given the prior probability of each phrase being used by a Democratic member of Congress, has a multinomial distribution. Formally,

$$\pi_{\text{Dem}} \sim \text{Dirichlet}(a),$$

$$x_{\text{Dem}} | \pi_{\text{Dem}} \sim \text{Multinomial} (N_{\text{Dem}}, \pi_{\text{Dem}}),$$

where a is a vector describing the variation in phrase frequency for each bigram. The full Bayesian estimate using the Dirichlet prior yields the function,

$$p(\pi | a, X, Y) \propto p(\pi | a) p(x_{\text{Dem}} | \pi, a, Y),$$

$$\propto \frac{\Gamma \sum_{j=1}^J \alpha_j}{\prod_j \Gamma \alpha_j} \prod_{j=1}^J \pi_j^{\alpha_j - 1} \pi_j^{x_{\text{Dem},j}},$$

and $p(\pi | a, X, Y)$ is a Dirichlet distribution,

$$\pi_{\text{Dem},j}^* = \frac{x_{\text{Dem},j} + \alpha_j}{N_{\text{Dem}} + \sum_{j=1}^J \alpha_j}.$$

We use the log odds ratio of phrase j weighted by its variance to measure how the rate at which phrase j is used varies by political party. The log odds ratio and its variance¹¹ are

$$\text{Log Odds Ratio}_j = \log \left(\frac{\pi_{\text{Dem},j}}{1 - \pi_{\text{Dem},j}} \right) - \log \left(\frac{\pi_{\text{Rep},j}}{1 - \pi_{\text{Rep},j}} \right),$$

$$\text{Var Log Odds Ratio}_j \approx \frac{1}{x_{\text{Dem},j} + \alpha_j} + \frac{1}{x_{\text{Rep},j} + \alpha_j},$$

where α_j is regularized penalty, which here we set $\alpha_j = 1$. Now we can evaluate not only the point estimates of the phrase *partisan weight* but also the certainty of those estimates. Specifically, we use the standardized log odds ratio to measure the partisanship of a phrase.

$$\text{Std. Log Odds Ratio}_j = \frac{\text{Log Odds Ratio}_j}{\sqrt{\text{Var}(\text{Log Odds Ratio}_j)}}.$$

Based on how often Democratic members of Congress and Republican members of Congress use a particular phrase, the “fightin’ words” algorithm assigns a particular level of partisanship to each two-word phrase (i.e., phrases more often used by Democratic members of Congress have a positive score, and phrases used more often by Republican members of Congress have a negative score). Figure 2 displays the partisan weights assigned to each bigram used by members of the 114th Congress, along with how commonly each bigram was used. Bigrams that appear above the horizontal line $y = 0$ were more likely to be used by Democrats in the 114th Congress, and bigrams that appear below the line $y = 0$ were more likely to be used by Republican members of Congress. For example, “gun violence” is measured as more Democratic in partisanship than “homeland security,” but homeland security is used more often by members of Congress in general.

Using the partisan weights assigned to each bigram, we assign a partisanship score to each remark given by a first lady or president. For each remark, we calculate how often each bigram appeared along with the total number of bigrams. The partisanship¹² of each bigram is denoted $\theta = (\theta_1, \theta_2, \dots, \theta_j)$, where $\theta_j \in \mathbb{R}$. The count of each bigram is denoted $X_i = (X_{i1}, X_{i2}, \dots, X_{ij})$. The partisanship of each remark i given by a first lady or president is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Partisanship}_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^J \theta_j X_{i,j}}{\sum_{j=1}^J X_{i,j}}.$$

11. See Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn (2008) for a detailed derivation.

12. We remind the reader that partisanship of each bigram is calculated by congressional session.

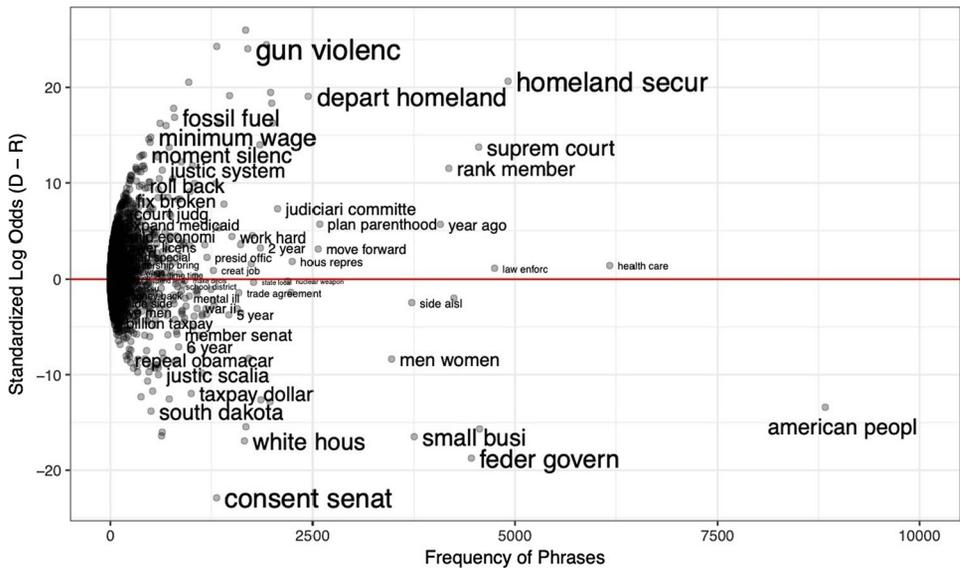


FIGURE 2. Partisan Phrases, 114th Congress.

Note: Higher value on the y-axis refers to a higher Democratic tone. The size of the phrases indicates strength of partisan tone, which is the absolute value of standardized log odds. This visualization excludes the phrases that did not appear in presidential weekly addresses or in first ladies' remarks.

Partisanship of remark is thus a continuous variable. A remark having $\text{Partisanship}_i > 0$ denotes a Democratic partisanship (i.e., the majority of phrases used in the remark are more often spoken by Democrats). Conversely, a remark having $\text{Partisanship}_i < 0$ denotes a Republican partisanship (i.e., the majority of phrases used in the remark are more often spoken by Republicans).

Comparing the Partisanship of First Ladies and Presidents

Using our measure for partisanship, we calculate the partisanship of every public remark given by a first lady and every weekly address given by a president. The yearly average partisanship of first ladies and presidents from 1993 to 2017 is shown in Figure 3. We report average yearly partisanship using a 95% confidence level. The first claim in Hypothesis 2 states that first ladies will be less partisan than their husband, and the results shown in Figure 3 generally support this assertion. First ladies are more likely than their husband to use phrases favored by members of both political parties, rather than phrases favored by their own political party.

During both of the Democratic administrations in our analysis, the remarks of first ladies were consistently less partisan than the weekly addresses of presidents. The difference in partisanship of the first couple is less pronounced during the Clinton years, but

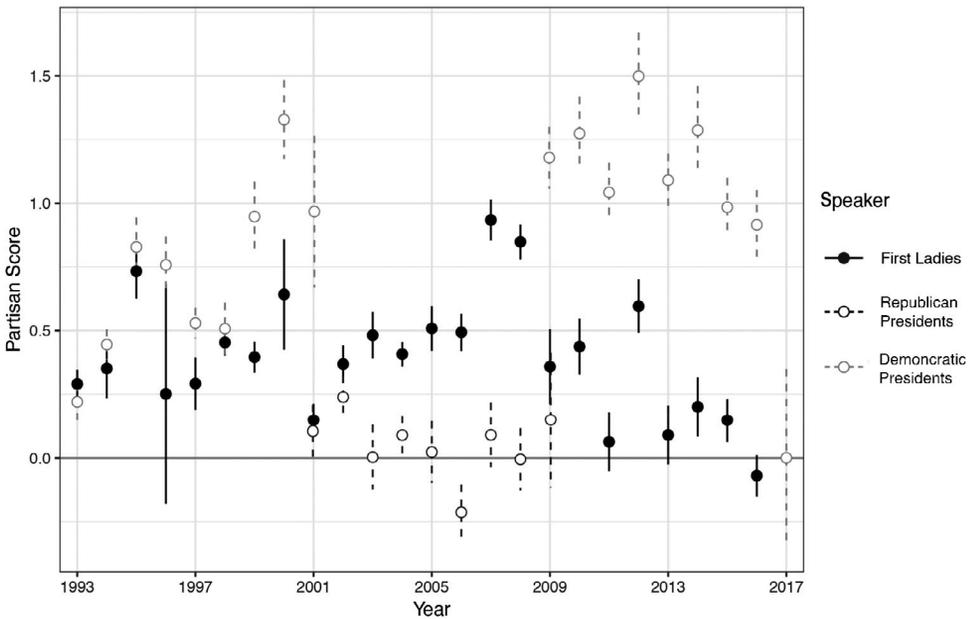


FIGURE 3. Average Partisanship of First Ladies and Presidents by Year (1993–2017).

the average partisanship expressed by Hillary Clinton was still less than Bill Clinton for every year but 1993. Both Clintons primarily used phrases that were more likely to be used by Democrats, but Hillary was more likely to use phrases that were less exclusively used by Democrats (i.e., the partisan score of her remarks was closer to 0). The anomaly of 1993 is largely explained by Hillary Clinton's remarks on health care while she spearheaded efforts to reform the health care system, and is discussed in greater detail in the section titled "The Exceptions: Hillary's Health Care and Michelle's Campaign Statements." During the Obama administration, Michelle was considerably less likely than Barack to use highly partisan phrases. In fact, Michelle Obama was the least partisan of all first ladies in our sample. Michelle Obama's partisanship was always significantly closer to 0 than was Barack Obama's for every year of his presidency, meaning she used phrases equally common among Republican and Democratic members of Congress while her husband was in office.

The remarks of Laura and George Bush show a somewhat different story. Laura Bush was more likely to use phrases common for Democratic members of Congress and George Bush generally used phrases equally common among Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Laura Bush was not less partisan than President Bush; however, her remarks were likely designed to make the administration appear more bipartisan. It should also be noted that although Laura Bush was more likely to use language more closely associated with Democrats than her husband, her average yearly partisanship was similar to the first ladies who preceded and followed her. This suggests that first ladies

TABLE 1
Partisan Score of First Ladies' Remarks on Political Topics^a

	Year of Presidential Term								Average ^b
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
<i>Health</i>									
Hillary Clinton	0.29	0.52	0.77	0.74	0.32	0.60	0.68	1.05	0.62
Laura Bush	-	-0.04	0.36	0.34	0.51	0.62	0.95	1.05	0.54
Michelle Obama	0.57	0.51	0.17	0.08	0.47	0.30	0.27	-0.11	0.28
<i>Education</i>									
Hillary Clinton	-	0.37	0.88	0.63	0.49	0.51	0.48	0.55	0.56
Laura Bush	0.25	0.41	0.47	0.43	0.45	0.56	0.86	0.74	0.52
Michelle Obama	0.51	0.64	0.16	0.46	0.29	0.33	0.45	0.33	0.45
<i>Arts</i>									
Hillary Clinton	-	-0.25	-0.04	-2.24	-0.50	0.02	0.19	0.60	-0.32
Laura Bush	0.16	0.89	0.34	0.41	0.21	0.07	1.57	0.92	0.57
Michelle Obama	0.01	0.60	0.20	-0.25	0.03	0.13	0.22	-0.02	0.12
<i>National parks programs</i>									
Hillary Clinton	-	-	-	-	-	-0.14	-0.03	0.31	0.05
Laura Bush	-0.02	-0.05	0.31	0.75	0.44	0.17	0.74	0.79	0.39
Michelle Obama	0.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.67
<i>Veterans' issues</i>									
Hillary Clinton	-	-	0.92	-	-	-	-	-	0.92
Laura Bush	-0.18	-0.09	0.57	0.40	-0.08	-	0.76	-	0.23
Michelle Obama	0.81	0.86	0.32	0.29	0.43	0.43	-0.17	-0.34	0.33

^aPartisanship of remarks in topics "Christmas" and "election" are not reported because of the obvious nonpolitical and partisan nature, respectively, of the topics; however, the partisanship of individual remarks on those topics can be found in Figure A3 of the supporting information.

^bAverages are calculated only among years in which the first lady gave a speech on the topic.

are likely to give remarks that express a similar level of partisanship, regardless of the political party of their administration. We, therefore, see support for the second claim of Hypothesis 2.

The Partisanship of First Ladies by Topic

We analyze the partisanship of the remarks of first ladies sorted by topic, with the topics determined from the topic models.¹³ In Hypothesis 2, we argue that first ladies come across as less partisan, and thus the partisanship of their remarks is likely primarily influenced by the topic they are covering (i.e., we expect Republican and Democratic first ladies to discuss education with the same level of partisanship). The results shown in Table 1 support this assertion.

Health care and education are the two general topics discussed most frequently by the first ladies. For both topics, first ladies average only a little above 0 in expressed partisanship. When discussing health, there are some slight variations among first ladies, but overall, they express similar partisanship. First ladies are even more alike in partisanship when discussing education, showing almost identical partisanship across administrations. The arts, national parks programs, and veterans' issues are much more diffuse topics than health care or education, with some first ladies giving very few remarks on a topic.¹⁴ Given the idiosyncratic and particular nature of these topics, we refrain from making any general statements about the partisanship of first ladies when discussing these topics.

On average, first ladies do not express a high degree of partisanship when addressing the public. The topics first ladies are most likely to discuss, health care and education, tend to be popular issues among Democrats (meaning that Democratic members of Congress are more likely to discuss the issues than Republicans). Thus, given our measure of partisanship, first ladies are more likely to be scored more Democratic than Republican. Topics generally not discussed by first ladies include the military, taxes, and foreign policy.

This suggests that as surrogates, first ladies are used to discuss a very specific set of issues in a fairly nonpartisan manner. Administrations leave discussions of the military, taxes, and foreign policy to the president and other elected administration members, like the vice president. First ladies discuss issues the public associates with women and femininity, and they do so in a nonpartisan and nonthreatening manner. The partisanship expressed in the remarks of first ladies does not vary significantly by administration or political party. Partisanship expressed in remarks covering particular topics remains fairly steady across all administrations in our analysis.

13. We collapse the topics related to health and education, respectively, into the general categories of "health" and "education." The partisanship scores of individual remarks are reported in Figures A1–A3 in the supporting information.

14. See Figure A3 in the supporting information.

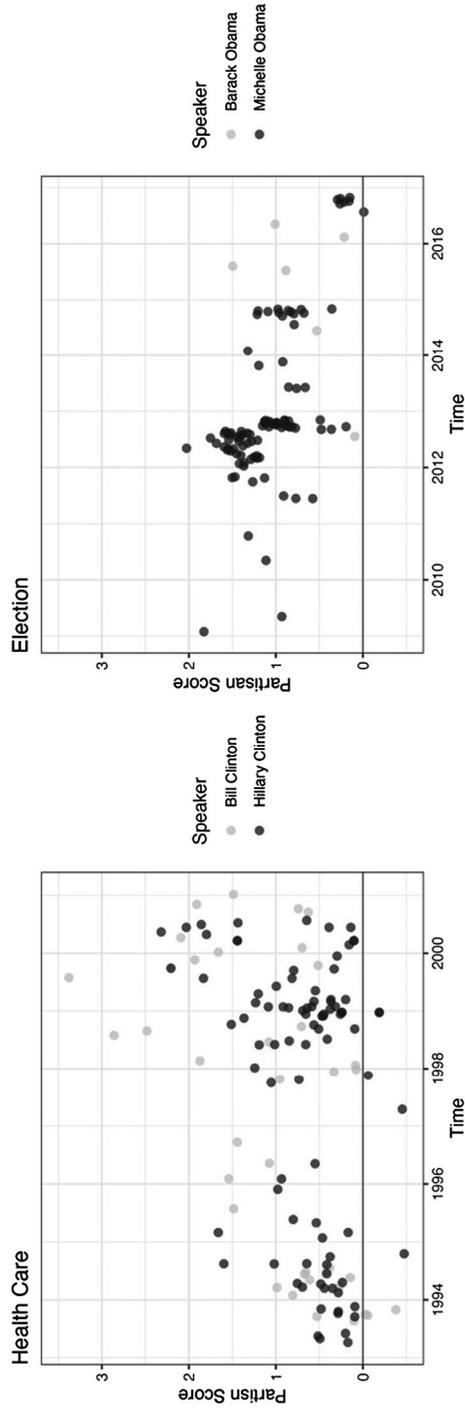


FIGURE 4. Partisan Score on Health Care- and Election-Related Remarks.

The Exceptions: Hillary's Health Care and Michelle's Campaign Statements

While, for the most part, first ladies maintain a less partisan message, this is not always the case. First ladies do, in particular circumstances, address the public with a more partisan tone. Of the remarks of the three first ladies in our analysis, Hillary Clinton's remarks show the smallest difference in partisanship from her husband. Additionally, Michelle Obama's campaign and election-related remarks were also remarkably Democratic in tone. Both of these special cases are recognized as highly politically relevant and expressed greater partisan tones, as can be seen in Figure 4. We do not think they necessarily contradict our theory, but, rather, these two cases actually further our argument that first ladies—as the most unique presidential surrogate—selectively and carefully engage in policy advocacy. First ladies are generally less partisan than presidents, but they can still, in special cases of policy frontline and campaign speeches, appeal in a more partisan tone.

Hillary Clinton's remarks on health care are largely responsible for higher partisan averages, as she was the most partisan in her remarks when discussing health care.¹⁵ The left panel of Figure 4 displays the partisanship of all of the individual remarks given about health care by both Bill and Hillary Clinton during their time in the White House.¹⁶ It is evident that throughout their two terms, there was little difference in partisanship between the president and first lady when they discussed health care, especially during the fight to reform health care, during which Hillary Clinton headed the Task Force on National Health Care Reform. These results suggest that perhaps a large part of the partisan differences among first couples is because of the topics they discuss. When Hillary and Bill are both discussing health care, their partisanship is not remarkably different from one another. However, because the majority of the other topics Hillary Clinton discussed in her remarks were not as partisan, her overall yearly partisan scores are smaller (less partisan) than her husband's. Hillary Clinton, and the Clinton administration in general, received considerable backlash for her being too partisan and political with regard to health care (Wright 2016). It stands to reason that after both the legislative and public relations failures concerning Hillary Clinton and health care, the first ladies who followed her were more careful in making sure to not appear too partisan when making direct appeals on behalf of their administration.

Michelle Obama played an active role in Barack's election and made numerous remarks on the campaign trail. Previous studies on sex differences and gender analysis of rhetoric have mentioned the role of first ladies in elections and campaigns (DeRosa and Bystrom 1999; Kanner 1991; McGinley 2009; Stokes 2005). According to the topic models, we find that among all of Michelle's remarks, approximately 18% were election and campaign related. As shown in the right panel of Figure 4, these remarks were made primarily during the 2012 presidential election season, whereas we also observe several

15. For detailed average expressed partisanship by topic, see Table 1.

16. We identify remarks as health care–related remarks using topic modeling. Each remark displayed in Figure 4 was sorted into the topic best described as being about health and/or health care.

statements in the 2014 midterm election and the 2016 presidential election. Her favorability and popularity among voters inevitably sent her into the field for the 2012 reelection effort. In her remarks, she bolsters President Obama—addressing concerns about his leadership by discussing his achievement on Democratic issues. Because campaign speeches are targeted to the partisan audience and Michelle conveyed Democratic values, these 2012 campaign remarks, compared with Michelle’s other remarks, present higher Democratic partisan tones. This also explains why Michelle Obama’s yearly partisan score peaked in 2012.

Discussion

Previous literature on presidential public appeals largely omits the voices of first ladies, while the literature on the first ladyship awaits a systematic empirical analysis of first ladies’ appeals. In this article, we attempt to connect the studies on public appeals, first ladyship, and gender politics, and use the fullest text data available in public to investigate how first ladies represent the president and strategically communicate with the public. The empirical findings presented here reveal a political, yet tempered, role of first ladies in public communication. With respect to policy, first ladies advocate projects in line with their husband’s top policy initiatives, and they do so in a compassionate and humanizing fashion. With respect to partisanship, first ladies appeal in a less partisan manner than do others within their husband’s administration, and they share similar partisan tones across administrations.

Our empirical exercise is based upon all remarks from Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama, but the findings shed some light on how Melania Trump has recently behaved. Although Melania Trump seems to be the most press-shy first lady, compared to her predecessors, she speaks to education and children and demonstrates her compassion. Her “BE BEST” initiative aims to help children manage the many issues they face today, including encouraging positive social, emotional, and physical habits. More recently, with the global pandemic of COVID-19 and in the stay-at-home environment, Melania became more active on Twitter and Instagram (Yuan 2020). She appeals on-screen, wearing a surgical mask and emphasizing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and tweets praise for grocery store workers and power plant employees. In contrast to her husband, she breaks the partisan line and connects with *all* American people through videos and social media, and stresses the importance of critical scientific information and the suggested health guidelines. Furthermore, in a time of social distancing, she has reached out by phone to spouses of administration-friendly world leaders, and most of her conversations, provided by her office, include both condolences and discussions of policy. In sum, consistent with her predecessors, Melania Trump is communicating policy but in a nonpartisan manner.

Despite the careful and rigorous empirical exercises we conducted in this work, it is also important to note certain limitations of our research design. First, in comparing remarks of first ladies and appeals of presidents, we certainly wanted text that was as similar

as possible to compare partisanship. Given the declining audience of presidential weekly addresses and the consistent and particular radio/video format in which these addresses were broadcast, our estimate of partisan tones between the first ladies and the presidents is confined to these specific types of addresses. Perhaps the presidential partisan tones in prime-time appeals or political rallies are starkly different, and these are also important presidential appeals that we were not able to include in our analysis. Perhaps the different locations in which first ladies deliver their remarks and the same microphone/camera to which presidents present their weekly addresses biased our estimates. However, we chose presidential weekly addresses mainly due to their regularity and clear-bounded sample size. Thus, we can say with measured confidence that, on average or in general, first ladies communicate with the public in a less partisan manner than the presidents. Of course, further research can explore more robust apples-to-apples comparisons, such as whether presidents and first ladies talk about the same topics in the same venues in different ways.

Second, the training set for our partisan dictionary may also be a factor. We believe the congressional floor speeches are the best training set we could possibly get, but they also come with several shortcomings. Given that legislators' floor speeches are mostly policy-oriented, the partisan tone dictionary may possibly miss those languages that are applicable outside of the congressional context but still carry partisan meaning. Also, it is possible that legislators' discourse would be hyperpartisan by nature, so this hyperpartisan standard would be less effective in revealing the first ladies' more subtle partisan signals.

Last, the text-as-data methods we use in this article are descriptive in nature; we are thus less certain on the cause of low partisan intensity in first ladies' remarks. From a strategic perspective, one might expect that the variation is related to presidential approval. It is possible that first ladies would tone down their partisanship when their husband faces lower approval ratings. It is also possible that first ladies would reach more outpartisans when their husband's electoral base is more partisan or more populist in nature. A full answer to this question is beyond the scope of this article, but future research can perhaps offer a more detailed comparison between how first ladies make public appeals in their husband's first term and second term, or between campaign season and non-campaign season.

Conclusion

First ladies are presidential surrogates who advance real policies to the public through direct appeals. They are not partisan fighters, but they are political actors. The remarks of first ladies and presidents suggest a division of labor among first couples. First ladies spend the majority of their public remarks discussing policy issues related to compassion that the public has long associated with female expertise. While they still discuss topics like health care and education, presidents also discuss a wider range of policies including fiscal policy and foreign affairs. Our analysis finds considerable support for both Hypotheses 1 and 2. First ladies serve a political role as a prominent member

of an administration. First ladies discuss the administration's policy priorities concerning a specific set of issues and do so in an unobjectionable and nonpartisan manner. The majority of the remarks that first ladies deliver concern policy priorities related to issues concerning compassion. First ladies help focus attention on a president's policy priorities by discussing issues related to the policy of interest without delving into the specifics of the policy itself. First ladies tend to use phrases common to members of both political parties in order to appeal to voters belonging to both parties. In sum, beyond the spouse of the president, first ladies are political actors who discuss substantive policy areas without showing partisanship. They are also keepers of the presidential legacies, seeking to present the administration as favorably as possible.

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