

Against and Alongside the Bully Pulpit: Interbranch Messaging in a Polarized Era

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Abstract

Using public appeals such as the State of the Union addresses, presidents directly speak to the public in order to shape the legislative focus in Congress. Yet scant attention has been given to how presidential public appeals are responded by partisan lawmakers. In this article, I use text-as-data methods to analyze a new collection of House members' press releases during the Obama and Trump administrations (2013-2020), to investigate how legislators intermittently buoy and block presidential efforts to rally public support for policy initiatives. I find that the public discourse is dominated by the extremists, while the moderates tend to keep silent or stay neutral. Furthermore, in response to presidential appeals, there is incredible homogeneity among co-partisans and incredible heterogeneity among opposing partisans. Lastly, Republicans are different from Democrats on the content of response and in the way they engage in president's terms. Collectively, these empirical findings help us understand the party polarization within Congress and cast new light on the coalition that the presidents face in the legislative arena.

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Introduction

“President Trump did an excellent job articulating some of the successes that we are experiencing. ... Our economy is soaring, the unemployment rate has hit a 50-year low. ... He has been bold in his efforts to protect our borders and ramp up national security.”

– Rep. Hal Rogers’ (R-KY05) press release (Feb 4th, 2020)

“I respect the Office of the President but I do not in any way respect Donald J. Trump, who, for more than three years, has demeaned the office, and who currently stands impeached.”

– Rep. Bobby Rush’s (D-IL01) press release (Feb 4th, 2020)

“During tonight’s address, we heard the President mention those issues. The time for talk is over. With over 250 bipartisan bills held up in the Senate, now is the time for bipartisan action.”

– Rep. Kendra Horn’s (D-OK05) press release (Feb 4th, 2020)

American presidents always use the “bully pulpit” and go over Congress to directly appeal the general public, in order to achieve his legislative goals. The State of the Union addresses stand out as one of the most influential scheduled presidential appeals. On the evening of February 4th, 2020, President Trump delivered a State of the Union address in front of all legislators assembled under one roof. In the aftermath of Trump’s address, legislators also respond with their own statements but in different ways, as exemplified in the quotes above. As one of the most conservative, Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY05) fervently applauded Trump’s address, but also emphasized economy, immigration, and national security, tracking the content of Trump’s original speech. On the other side of the aisle, Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL01) directly boycotted Trump’s address. Notice a moderate legislator, Rep. Kendra Horn (D-OK05), also spoke out but in a starkly distinct tone; she appealed for bipartisanship and did not reflect what Trump said. Meanwhile, another moderate House member, Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-NY22), the whip of the Blue Dog coalition, didn’t even respond. Motivated by these examples of congressional reaction to presidential address, this paper will offer a rich assessment of how Members of Congress strategically respond presidential appeals with their own statements.

The preponderance of literature on elite appeals focuses on the dyadic relationship between politicians and voters. Presidential scholars emphasize whether presidents successfully break through the voter indifference and alter public opinion (Kernell 1986; Tulis 1987; Edwards 2003, 2009; Canes-Wrone 2006; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peak 2011; Rottinghaus 2010; Cavari 2013; Franco, Grimmer, and Lim 2018), and congressional scholars document how legislators strategically communicate with their own constituencies (Fenno 1978; Yiannakis 1982; Lipinski 2004; Quinn et al. 2010; Grimmer 2013; Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014). However, the interbranch messaging receives little attention, and it is an important gap we should fill. We know a lot about presidential appeals, but we do not have a good understanding about how those appeals and the mass response is often filtered through partisan lawmakers. Given the high salience of the State of the Union, congressional responses to the presidential address probably represents one of the most important political conversations in a given year. Therefore, it is important to know how lawmakers are responding to the president's legislative agenda and how that shapes the broader constituent's views.

The literature of the modern Congress has investigated how polarized and how partisan members of Congress really are (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 2005; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Party conflict in Congress is far beyond the ideology, so legislators behave strictly along the party line (Lee 2009). Given the fact that presidential leadership increases cohesion within both major parties (Lee 2009, 75), we may be under the impression that the moderate are so cohesive in vital roll-call votes and we may assume that these legislators are all following the leaders. What we yet to know is that behind the closed door, are moderate legislators voicing some discontent? This article moves beyond the roll-call votes and sheds light on the political contestation of public appeals by assessing the both inter-party and intra-party variation of congressional communication in response to the president.

This paper argues that although the moderate have a decisive influence on roll-call

voting, the voicing of public response to the president is dominated by the extreme due to legislators’ partisan and electoral concerns. Drawing upon a rich collection of House members’ press releases in response to the State of the Union addresses during the Obama and Trump administrations (2013–2020), I measure the *volume* and *valence* of interbranch messaging and find that co-partisan legislators are almost uniformly alongside the president, while out-party legislators are against, except the moderate. These marginal representatives, whose own partisanship is at odds with the partisanship of her constituencies, are notably less likely to respond to presidential speeches; and when they do respond, they tend to stay neutral.

Additionally, this paper uses Text-as-Data methods to reveal the *content* of interbranch messaging. A semi-supervised Keyword Assisted Topic Model (Eshima, Imai, and Sasaki 2020) discriminates the agenda issues where different legislators respond differently. Safe-seat legislators respond with clear attitudes on partisan issues that the president emphasizes in the State of the Union address (e.g., “big government” and “immigration”), rather cross-pressured ones respond with neutral attitudes and focus on bipartisan topics (e.g., “drugs” and “infrastructure”). It indicates from a substantive perspective that political contestation of public appeals is dominated by the extreme, not the moderate.

Finally, using the outcome of the keyATM model, this paper further assesses the *structure* of interbranch messaging – the extent of which legislators follow the agenda set by the president in State of the Union addresses. I create a measure to calculate the prevalence distance across the topic domain between each legislator and the president. Evidence shows that co-partisan legislators generally mirrors the content in president’s original speech, whereas out-party representatives respond in their own terms. A comparison of two presidential administrations reveals that Republicans are more unified, in terms of following Trump’s agenda and ignoring Obama’s.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I review the existing literature of elite appeals

and congressional behavior. Second, I point out that legislator’s strategic response to presidential appeals is influenced by their partisan and electoral concerns. The third section describes the data and the fourth introduces methods of valence coding and topic measurement. The subsequent three sections present empirical evidence on how House members respond the State of Union addresses in valence, content and structure. The final section discusses implications of the findings in an era of political polarization.

Literature Review

Three broad literatures motivate the empirical assessment in this article. One focuses on the public appeals made by the presidents and legislators; another studies the effect of countervailing appeals from the behavioral and experimental perspective; the last one investigates the politics of congressional behavior. In this section, I review each and characterize how its insights inform the analyses that follow.

American presidents always use the “bully pulpit” to publicly appeal to the American people. The “bully pulpit” is referred as a terrific platform where American presidents can advocate their policy agenda directly to the public. The bulk of literature in American presidency, incentivized by Samuel Kernell’s *Going Public* (1986) and Jeffery Tulis’s *The Rhetorical Presidency* (1987), discusses the theories of going public and claims that the presidents strategically go over Congress and directly communicate with the public in order to sway the public opinion and achieve their policy goals. The core of this literature is on the efficacy of such appeals, which is a matter of ongoing debate. Some scholars argue that presidents are effective leaders of public opinion and “going public” has a short-term effect on shaping public policy preference (Cavari 2013). The majority of evidence, however, suggests that the capacity of presidents to successfully alter public opinion is either limited in scope (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peak 2011; Rottinghaus 2010), or just fall on deaf ears (Edwards

2003, 2009; Franco, Grimmer, and Lim 2018; Simon and Ostrom 1989). The public appeals has been studied since the Reagan's era, though, this literature omits members of Congress as important players during the process of information priming. Due to my knowledge, how legislators' complimentary and competing communications in response to presidential appeals are still unexamined in the public appeals literature.

Presidents hardly hold a monopoly voice in elite-public communication. From Fenno (1978) to Grimmer (2013), congressional scholars have documented the ways in which legislators invest time and resources to communicate with their constituencies (see also Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014; Lipinski 2004; Quinn et al. 2010; Yiannakis 1982). Much of the congressional communication literature seeks to explain the different kinds of communication strategies that individual members employ. Previous research rarely examines the inter-branch messaging between the president and lawmakers. In a vibrant healthy public discourse, however, the exchange of speeches between presidents and legislators matters in shaping public opinion. Members of Congress, with well-defined political objectives, are expected to offer corroborating or countervailing speeches with respect to presidential public appeals, and are playing an important role in shaping public opinion, at least in their own districts. But congressional rhetorical response to presidential direct appeals and their impact on efficacy of altering public opinion have been understudied in American Politics.

Another literature in public opinion and political psychology suggests that the inter-branch rhetorical exchanges, especially the countervailing ones, matter a lot in the mass opinion formation. There are some experiential work investigating how mass opinion is formed and altered by the competing political messages sent by the president and congressmen (Lupia 1994; Chong and Druckman 2010). They emphasize that the countervailing and corroborating speeches are most influential under certain conditions. These conditions include that individuals' opinions are internally conflicted (Zaller 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 2002) or members of Congress oppose the policies of a co-partisan president (Kriner and

Howell 2013). It is implied that either the public in a swing district where voters are located closely to the medium of partisan spectrum, or the public in a “split-ticket” district where the representative and the president are from different parties, are more vulnerable to a meaningful opinion updating. Furthermore, there is a great level of influence when voters hear surprising messages from legislators in response to the president. For instance, a Republican member of Congress coming out and criticizing Trump would have a bigger effect than a Democrat opposing Trump. However, this behavioral literature, which heavily relies on experimental settings, presupposes that legislators are saying things. This is a strong presupposition that needs to be tested. Especially, given a plenty of experimental work that assumes that the opinion updating is critical and complex for swing voters (Zaller 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 2002), we should first and foremost investigate whether these moderate legislators actually respond to the president. Therefore, my approach is to fully utilize real-life data to provide a comprehensive picture of interbranch messaging over at least the most recent decades.

Lastly, congressional literature has long documented the polarization in Congress and how partisanship underlines the behavior of each legislator (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 2005; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). In terms of the legislative behavior with respect to the president’s agenda, Frances Lee (2009) argues that in the modern Congress, congressional members and their leaders particularly focus on the symbolic voting and do their best to tan down internal division or the possibility of the fact that there are moderate and hardliners. Therefore, congressional voting behavior just appears so partisan cohesive that their internal difference seems to be blurred. However, beyond the roll-call votes, we do not have a lot of good measure on the intra-party variation of legislators’ preferences and positions with regard to the president-advocating policy issues. This motivates me to study the interbranch messaging for the purposes of better understanding the extent of which legislators are not the same in communication and their underlining views might be actually different from their actions.

Legislator's Response to Presidential Appeals

The studies on legislative behavior basically assume that members of Congress are single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974). Follow-up research claims that representatives use their roll-call votes, *per se*, to take the position and advertise their legislative achievements in order to strengthen their reelection prospects (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). Scholars on congressional communication further emphasizes that legislators use their speeches and statements for the purposes of boosting their reelection chances (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009; Grimmer 2013; Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014). However, very few studies systematically analyze that congressional communication vis-a-vis the presidential appeals is actually a more direct and effective way to brandish their partisanship and demonstrate their representation for the interests of their home districts.

The interbranch messaging is of great importance to extend our understanding of both legislative behavior and the executive-legislative relationship. First, major presidential appeals are mostly broadcasted under the national spotlight, how legislators respond in their own statements (press releases or social media posts) is relatively easy for voters to see, especially compared to the roll-call votes. In addition, many presidential appeals are strictly policy related (e.g., the State of the Union addresses), what the president says is directly meant to influence legislator's behavior. Thus, how members of Congress use their own statement to join the public discourse on the policy discussion, though largely omitted in the literature, is itself worth of a fuller assessment. Lastly, as political elites become more polarized (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), the interbranch messaging is a new manifest to measure the polarization in Congress. The traditional literature on political polarization focuses on what members of Congress do (e.g., mostly the roll-call votes), but what members of Congress say can cast some new light on the our understanding of political polarization in recent decades.

I argue, in this paper, that members of Congress strategically use the interbranch messaging alongside or against the presidential appeals to serve their own partisan and electoral purposes. When we understand the interbranch messaging from the legislator's perspective, there are two main determinants for how representatives interact with the president. On the one hand, legislators' response to presidential speeches should be consistent with their partisan label. Since the president is widely seen as the partisan-in-chief (Galvin 2010; Wood 2009), whatever the president appeals to the public carries substantial meaning for the party's brand and policy stance. The political fates of co-partisans are always linked (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 2005) and members of Congress are well aware that how they respond a president's priorities affects his party's collective reputation (Lee 2009). Therefore, congressional members have strong incentives to support their co-partisan president in the public discourse. On the other hand, beyond the partisanship, what legislators say largely reflects their electoral concerns, thus their attitudes toward the presidential appeals and the policy issues emphasized in their response should be linked to the care to their home voters. Especially, the marginal representatives who are cross-pressured by the partisanship of their own and their constituencies, have different home styles compared to those safe-seat legislators (Fenno 1978; Grimmer 2023). Also, the marginal legislators, in their interbranch messaging strategy, would be more reluctant to express clear attitudes toward the president and more likely to dodge the clearly partisan issues that may potentially backfire in their home districts. If they have to make countervailing messages, they would select local or bipartisan issues to deliver a mark.

Among the president's efforts of going public, the State of the Union addresses arguably stand out as the most important presidential appeals. Unlike other presidential appeals that are ad hoc in timing, the State of the Union addresses are scheduled speeches that are delivered at the beginning of each calendar year in office. It is one of the few events when all three branches of the US government are assembled under one roof. The president not only directly speaks to members of both chambers of Congress and the Supreme

Court Justice, but also appeals to the mass public via prime-time television broadcasting. Most importantly, the president uses this “bully pulpit” to propose a legislative agenda and national priorities (Cohen 1995; Eshbaugh-Soha 2016). Therefore, the State of the Union addresses are arguably the most typical and influential presidential public appeals.

Consequently, congressional response to the State of the Union is one of the most influential interbranch interaction. There are three elements in congressional response that can reflect the partisan and electoral concerns of legislators. First is the *Volume and Valence* of legislators’ response. The *Volume* refers to whether the representatives speak out. Legislators are not obliged to offer a response to the State of the Union address. Those in safe seats would be more active in position their support or opposition toward the president, but the those moderate in a cross-pressured situation would be less likely to respond. The *Valence* means whether the response is supporting, opposing, or neutral. If the marginal legislators speak out, their support or opposition would attenuate. They are more inclined to stay neutral, without expressing a clear attitude to potentially irritate voters. Second is the *Content* of response. Congressional response to the State of the Union not only can express complements or condemns to the president, but also can offer legislators’ insights on the most important issues that their constituents most care about. Facing the same speech delivered by the president, Democratic and Republican legislators would echo different issues, safe-seat and marginal representatives would choose distinct topics to make a point. Third is the *Structure* of response. The State of the Union addresses allow the president to propose a legislative agenda and national priorities, so whether congressional response follows the president’s lead in issue priorities also matters. For example, when Trump spends more time to stress the policies of immigration, tax reform while briefly mentions the issues like infrastructure and drugs, liberal, moderate, and conservative legislators would put different weights on these issues in their response. Strong Republicans would mimic in Trump’s terms and stress the immigration and tax reform policies, while staunch Democrats might ignore these issues but switch attention to some liberal issues that Trump fails to mention.

Data

To study how legislators respond to presidential appeals, in this paper, I focus on the president's State of the Union addresses and House members' press releases in response to them. I have obtained transcripts of each State of the Union addresses from the American Presidency Project Website.¹ I focus on 8 consecutive years of the State of the Union addresses from 2013 to 2020 that cover the second term of the Obama administration and all four years of the Trump administration.²

Presidential appeals, however, are not the single voice in public discourse. Members of Congress regularly react to presidential addresses by their own speeches or statements. To measure legislators' response to the State of the Union addresses, in this paper, I employ a new collection of 1,425 press releases from House members that directly responded to the State of the Union addresses. I obtain the original press release data (2013–2020) from the congressional statements database on ProPublica. The statements on ProPublica are pulled directly from official House and Senate websites. The original database consists of all press releases from House members and Senators. I then identified the press releases from House members that are directly in response to the State of Union addresses by humanly reading the filtered press releases within 3 days after the address was given. After collecting the text data, I conducted a data cleaning process that removes titles, introductory paragraph, guest and legislator information. For the text-as-data analysis below, unit of analysis is a press release from a House member that is in response to the State of the Union address in a given year.

The reason for investigating only House members and their press releases is that they have shorter term of two years, compared to Senators, and they are facing a stronger electoral

¹<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidential-documents-archive-guidebook/annual-messages-congress-the-state-the-union>, accessed in Oct 2020.

²The 2020 State of the Union was delivered on February 4th, so it reflects Trump's policy priorities and legislative agenda before the COVID-19 swept the US and influenced the domestic policy agenda.

connection with the public. Press releases constitute a useful medium to measure legislators' strategies of interbranch messaging. First, they are frequently used by legislators to express their opinion on the presidential appeals to their constituencies, as scholars stress that press releases have a direct effect over the content of newspaper stories and constituent evaluations (Grimmer 2013). Further, in press releases, legislators not only offer their confirming or countervailing attitudes toward the president, but also reveal on what issues they agree or disagree with the president.

Measuring Interbranch Messaging on the State of the Union

House members express their attitudes toward the State of the Union addresses in their press releases. I manually code these press releases to identify their valence. Specifically, for each press release, I label its position into either *favor*, *neutral*, or *oppose* with respect to the president. A *favor* press release is one that shows an affirming, applauding, and positive attitude.³ An *oppose* press release is one that expresses a criticizing, denouncing, and negative attitude.⁴ A *neutral* press release is one that contains no clear praising or condemning rhetoric, or instead talks specific issue positions that are related to local

³As an example of a favoring press release, Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI05) commented on Trump's State of the Union address, "In his first year, President Donald Trump has restored a sense of confidence in the American people. By reducing red tape and signing historic tax reform, the Trump Administration has helped unleash the economy and improve the financial outlook of many Americans. Tonight, in his speech, the President outlined a bold and optimistic vision for an even safer and more prosperous America – expanding on economic successes, rebuilding our military, and enacting criminal justice reform. I am also encouraged by the President's call for renewed bipartisanship, as we must come together to continue restoring liberty, ensuring security, and increasing opportunity for all."

⁴As an example of opposing press release, Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL01) offered his harsh criticism toward Trump's SOTU address in 2018, by saying "This has been the most chaotic, divisive, and incompetent first year of any administration and I will not sit and watch as Trump pretends that he's off to a successful start. He's not. Trump does not respect the office, our long standing institutions, traditions, and many of our citizens, who he has repeatedly insulted. We are watching the presidency erode before our eyes and I, for one, refuse to participate in pomp and circumstance that does nothing but normalize his egregious and hateful behavior. This is a presidency that has been built on racism, stupidity, and lies, which has already wasted enough of America's time and I will not waste any more of mine." Another great example comes from Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR03) who just had one word in response to Trump's joint address to Congress in 2017: "Resist."

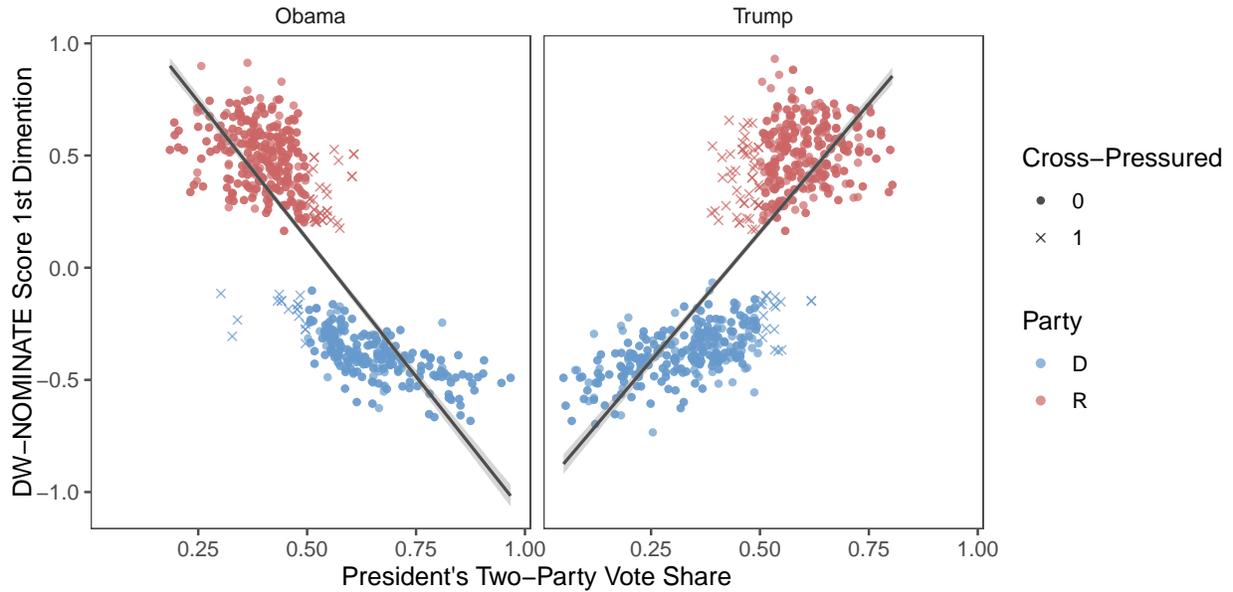
constituencies, or mentions both sides of the aisle without taking a side.⁵ If a legislator does not have a press release in respond to the presidential speeches listed above, I code it as a *silent* response.

After hand coding the attitudes expressed in all press releases that are in response to presidential addresses, I then follow conventions in the congressional literature (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2003; Jacobson 2004) and gather political information of each legislator, including partisanship, ideology, individual information, and their constituents' characteristics. Specifically, I gather information on president's two-party vote share in the district that each legislator represented, as an indicator of districts' partisan makeup.⁶ I also use the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE scores (Lewis et. al. 2020). Since the ideological score is highly correlated with the presidential two-party vote share, which is demonstrated in Figure 1, I will mainly use two-party vote share in the primary analysis. It is worth clarifying another two concepts that are related to the measures. First is the moderate: it refers to a legislator who is relatively in the middle of the ideological spectrum. Second is the cross-pressured: it indicates a representative whose partisanship is at odds with the partisanship of majority voters in his or her home district (e.g., a Democrat representing a district where majority of the voters voted for Trump in 2016). Also, those cross-pressured are highlighted with cross signs in Figure 1. Moreover, these cross-pressured are noticeably moderate on ideology, therefore, the rest of paper would use these terms (i.e., the moderate, the cross-pressured, and the marginal) interchangeably. As individual political information, I collected each legislator's age, gender, and race, also whether he or she is a freshman in the

⁵A good example of a neutral press release, see Rep. Ed Royce's (R-CA39) comment, "Tonight's joint session of Congress marks an important moment for our country. All of us must come together to meet the challenges facing America head on. After eight years of failed foreign policies, we face more threats than ever before. At the same time, I hear every day from Southern Californians who are still trying to get ahead. Many are parents who are struggling with skyrocketing health care costs. Others are workers hurt by a tax code that hampers job creation. There is much to do in the weeks and months ahead. I will continue to listen to your priorities and concerns, and work relentlessly to get results."

⁶Since the congressional districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were redistricted in 2018, I adjusted the presidential two-party vote share of Pennsylvanian legislators according to the new congressional map. Detailed partisan balance change, please see <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/19/upshot/pennsylvania-new-house-districts-gerrymandering.html>.

Figure 1: Relationship of Electoral Connection and Ideology



House and the seniority that is measure by the congressional sessions he or she has served.

Furthermore, I attempt to measure how different members of Congress respond to State of the Union addresses substantively. In particular, after the president set the agenda in the State of the Union, what agenda issues do legislators follow the president's lead? To what extent do legislators follow the president's lead? And how partisanship and electoral connection map in here? I use a two-step research design to gauge legislators' substantive response to the presidential appeals. The first step is to label the topics in 8 State of the Union addresses. I use an unsupervised topic model – Structural Topic Model with year dummy as covariates – to coarsely analyze texts of all 8 years of the SOTU addresses, then I validate by humanly reading in order to accurately hand code the topics for each paragraph. Consequently, I come up with in total of 22 topics and keywords associated to each topic (see Appendix Table A3 for the full list of topics and keywords). These topics include 17 issue topics, such as *Foreign Policy*, *Economy*, *Immigration*, *Healthcare*, *Education*, etc., and 5 non-issue topics, which are *Honorary*, *MAGA (Make America Great Again)*, *Bipartisanship*,

Liberal Values, and *Legacy and Future*. The keywords for each topic are chosen based upon the frequency and exclusivity, so each keyword represents a topic in a meaningful way. For example, the keywords associated for the topic of *Foreign Policy* are “nation,” “force,” “security,” “military,” “terrorist,” “isis,” “iran,” “nuclear,” “troop,” “defense,” “terrorism,” and “weapons.” And the keywords for the topic of *Honorary* include “thank,” “hero,” “salute,” “honor,” and “guest.” Obviously, the number of keywords varies across different topics. On average, there are 7 keywords per topics. The minimum number of keywords is 4 (*Drug*) and the maximum is 16 (*Economy*).

The second step is to use these topics and keywords, which are drawn from presidential addresses, to semi-supervise a topic model on the legislators press release responses. Here, I apply an innovative topic model – Keyword Assisted Topic Models (keyATM) (Eshima, Imai, and Sasaki 2020). The keyATM method bears multiple advantages for the purpose of investigating legislators’ response toward the State of the Union addresses. First, the keyATM allows me to use the pre-labelled topics to fit the model, thereby avoiding post-hoc interpretation and subjective adjustment of topics. Although unsupervised topic models, such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003) and Structural Topic Models (STM) (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2017), also perform well in distinguishing different topics in text, there are unavoidably high researcher degrees of freedom in labelling the topics and choosing the topic number (K). Since the topics are humanly coded and validated in the first step mentioned above, topic interpretation become straightforward in the keyATM. Second, the provision of a number of keywords can substantially improve the topic classification performance and the interpretability of the resulting topics. Third, similar to the STM, keyATM is able to incorporate covariates that can influence the prior.

I fit the keyATM to the corpus of all press releases in response to the SOTU addresses throughout 8 years. To prepare the text, I follow the standard in Text-as-Data literature and conduct the following pre-processing steps on the raw press releases: (i) delete all punctua-

tion; (ii) remove capitalization; (iii) drop stop words, commonly occurring, but meaningfully insignificant words, eg. “statement,” “respond,” “tonight,” etc.; and (iv) reduce words to their stems according to the Porter stemming algorithm. To prepare the keywords, I also remove capitalization, reduce each keywords to their stems, and store them in a list object. The inputs of the model is a document-term matrix (DTM), where each row refers to one press release posted by a legislator in a given year and columns include the most frequent 3000 unigrams and 500 bigrams. I use a total of $K = 22$ topics and do not include any additional topics without keywords because these pre-labelled topics – drawn from both the Democratic and Republican administrations – should encompass all possible issues on both sides of the aisle.⁷ Moreover, I only include the year dummies as covariates, and specifically exclude partisanship and ideology of legislators as covariates in order to prevent politician’s political information from influencing the prior.

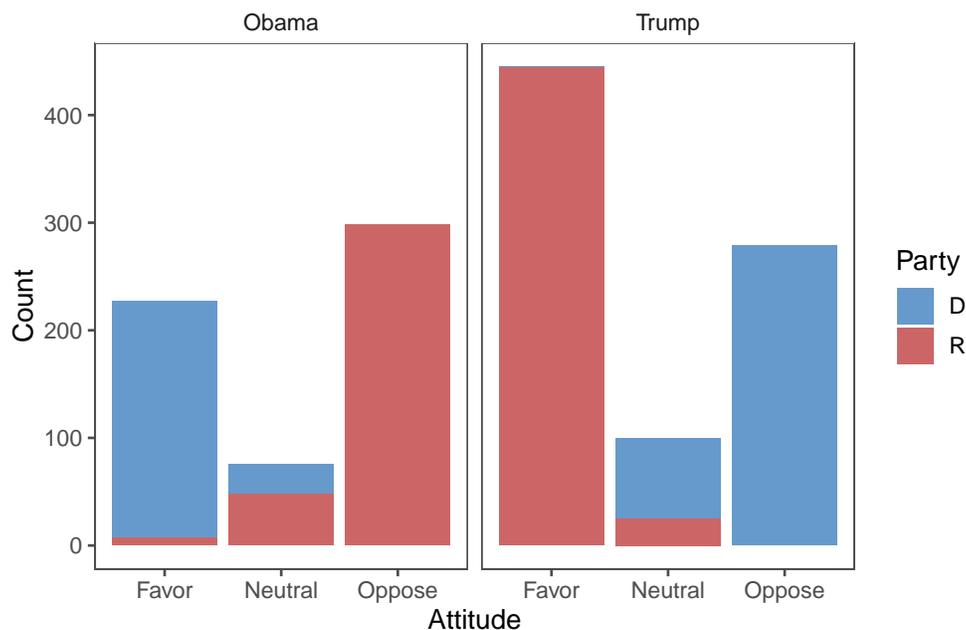
Volume and Valence of Congressional Response

I argue above that the members of Congress use their responses to serve their own partisan and electoral purposes. In this section, I show that legislators’ responses to presidential State of the Union addresses follow the partisan line. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the marginal representatives generally avoid from expressing their opinions; and if they say something, they would be less likely to take a stance, rather to say something neutral.

Using the hand-coded attitudes in House members’ press releases and summarizing apart by the two presidents, Figure 2 shows that whether a House member is against or alongside the president in the aftermath of the State of the Union address is largely decided by his or her partisanship. For both Obama and Trump, over 95% of the confirming messages were sent by their co-partisans and not a single co-partisan legislators stood against their

⁷I also attempted to add 2 no-keyword topics, but I found that these two topics do not capture more informative or meaningful issue topics and the prevalence of these two additional topics is close to zero.

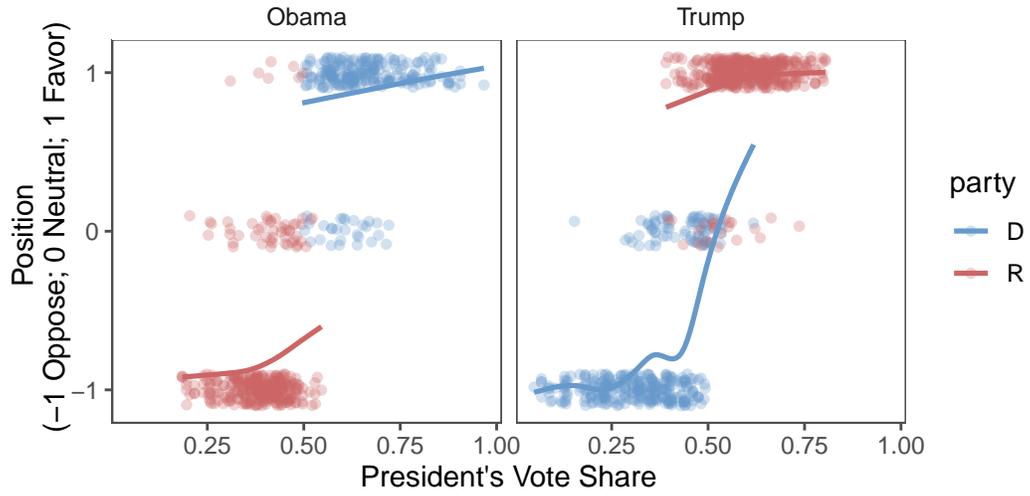
Figure 2: Descriptive Figures of MC’s Attitudes towards the SOTU Addresses (2013-2020)



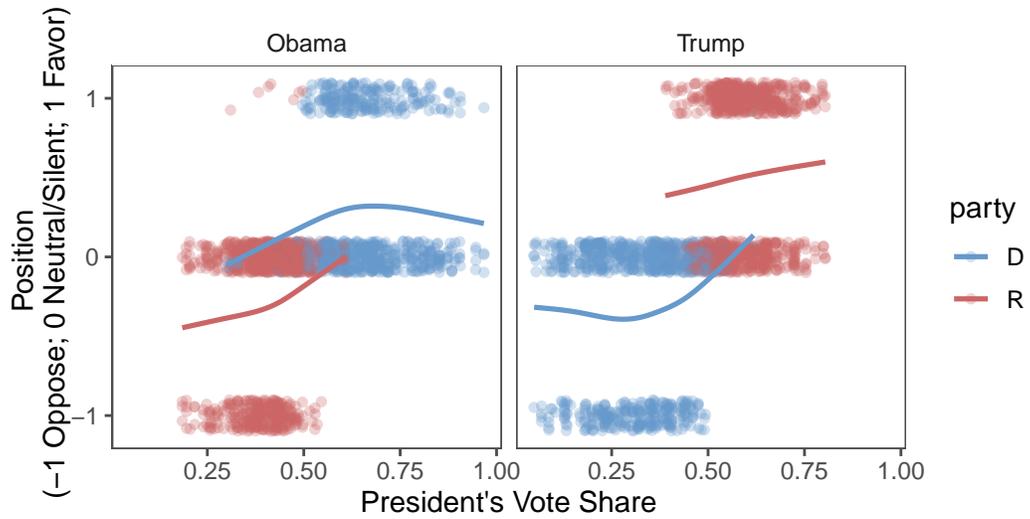
“partisan-in-chief.” Compared with the clearly confirming or condemning messages, the neutral messages are a lot fewer. However, most of those neutral messages were sent by the out-party representatives. Comparing the two presidents, one interesting difference stands out that Republicans seem to be more unified along their party line. Although the opposite volumes were similarly loud, Trump clearly enjoyed a strong unity of his own co-partisans. Republicans’ complements on Trump almost double in count Democrats’ support for Obama.

Even though consisting a quieter volume, the neutral messages reveals the importance of electoral connection. To measure a representative’s marginality, I follow the tradition in the legislative studies (See Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2020; Carson et al. 2010; Grimmer 2013) and use the share of the two-party vote for the sitting president in each congressional district. Figure 3(a) shows that given the representatives speak out, the president’s vote share in their districts largely influences their attitudes toward the presidential appeals. Each dot represents a press release given a legislator, and the fit lines are drawn

Figure 3: House Members' Attitudes and Electoral Connection



(a) Silent Legislators Excluded



(b) Silent Legislators Included

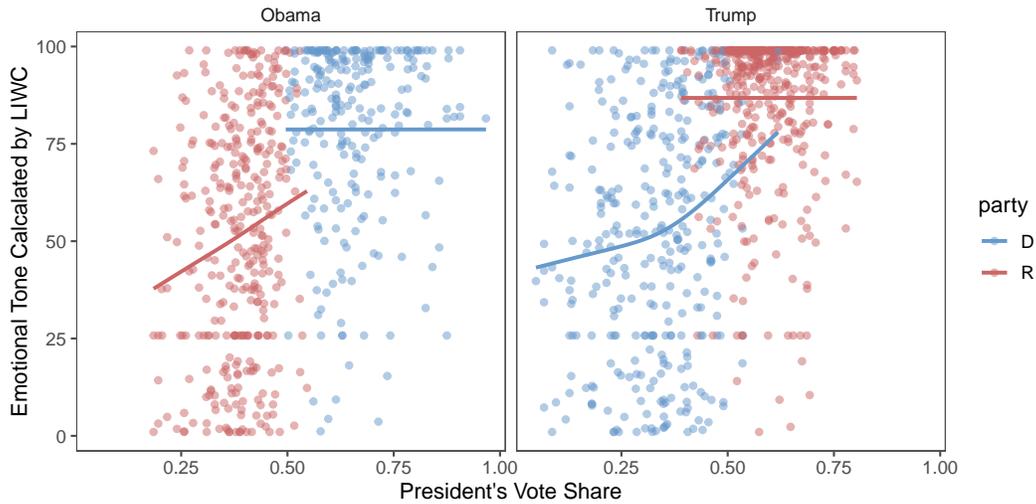
by non-parametric GAM regressions. Evidence shows that the president’s co-partisans are almost uniformly rallying around the partisan-in-chief. Among the opposite party representatives, those sitting on safe seats (with a small proportion of constituencies in their districts voted for the president) mostly sent countervailing messages; while those marginal or cross-pressured representatives are more likely to stay neutral. Figure 3(b) shows the scenario that includes all House members and treats all silent legislators as “0.” I find clear evidence that the marginal and cross-pressured House members are more likely to keep quiet or stay neutral. In sum, in response to the presidential appeals, the cross-pressured legislators are more likely not only to mute their volume but also attenuate their valence.

Robustness Check

The results of volume and valence of congressional response are robust to a variety of alternative measure and statistical models. First, I validate the hand-coded attitudes in congressional press releases by Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010). LIWC is a dictionary-based method to measure the emotional tone in texts. LIWC has an embedded semantic dictionary that identifies both positive emotion and negative emotion dimensions. The *tone* variable aligns the two dimensions into a single summary variable (Cohn, Mehl, and Pennebaker 2004). A high number is associated with a more positive, upbeat style; a low number reveals greater anxiety, sadness, or hostility.

Figure 4 demonstrates the relationship between the emotional tones in House members’ press releases and their electoral connection. The non-parametric fit lines firmly suggest a similar trend as shown in the previous section. In terms of the the tones embedded in congressional responses, the president’s co-partisan legislators are uniformly expressing positive tones. The tones of out-party legislators appear not only an obviously lower average level, but also are highly related to how much support the president has in their home districts. With more president’s two-party vote share in a district, the out-party representatives are

Figure 4: House Members' Emotional Tone and Electoral Connection



more likely to use positive tones.

Given the challenges in identifying the causal effect of a district's partisan composition on representative's response to the presidential speeches, I use a regression framework to show a robust relationship between the electoral consideration and volume and valence of congressional response to the presidential appeals. Using an OLS regression model, I demonstrate that cross-pressured legislators are more probable to mute their responses or attenuate their valence in response to the State of the Union addresses.

I first consider the correlation between electoral concerns and the tones expressed in the press releases. Since previous sections stress that the marginal legislators keep quite and neutral, I measure the electoral concern by creating a dummy variable, *Cross-Pressured*, which equals to one if the partisanship of a legislator is at odd with partisan preference for president of the majority of their constituencies. I regress the emotional tones expressed in press releases on the interaction of being cross-pressured and being out-party to the president, and I present the coefficients of being cross-pressured by breaking apart by the co-partisan

and out-party status. In the OLS regression, I also control the party, gender, race, and seniority of each legislator, while fixing years. Shown in Column (1) of Table 1, a co-partisan representative, even cross-pressured, would use a relatively similar tone as their co-partisan legislators; however, the cross-pressured legislators from the opposite party are significantly more positive in tone.

Then, I test the relationship between being cross-pressured and the volume and valence of response. I separately regress the interaction of being cross-pressured and being out-party on sending a neutral statement, keeping silent, and being silent or neutral, while holding the covariate constant. Demonstrated in Column (2)–(3) of Table 1, regardless of the partisanship, the cross-pressured House members are significantly more significantly more inclined to keep silent; and if they decide to speak out, they are significantly more likely to be neutral. This effect is even more influential for the out-party cross-pressured legislators. If we combine the silence and neutrality together, Column (4) shows that the co-partisan cross-pressured legislators are 18% more probable of keep silent or neutral, and the out-party cross-pressured are 26% more likely to attenuate their response, holding all other covariates constant. Of course, we do not see many cross-pressured legislators, on average 30 per congressional session, but it is suffice to say that these in marginal seats, who are more influential in roll-call votes, are obviously less likely to join this public contestation of public appeals. In the Appendix Table A2, I have also estimated the same models with the continuous measure of president’s two-party vote share, which yield similar results.

Table 1: Cross-Pressured Legislators and their Response to the SOTU Addresses (2013-2020)

	Dependent Variable			
	Tone (1)	Neutral (2)	Silent (3)	Silent/Neutral (4)
Co-partisan Cross-Pressured	-1.813 (4.066)	0.140*** (0.050)	0.147*** (0.043)	0.179*** (0.042)
Out-Party Cross-Pressured	11.652** (5.470)	0.469*** (0.067)	0.178*** (0.047)	0.258*** (0.046)
Out-Party	-31.043*** (1.428)	0.081*** (0.017)	0.038** (0.017)	0.074*** (0.016)
Party (Republican)	2.391 (1.633)	-0.105*** (0.020)	-0.074*** (0.018)	-0.113*** (0.018)
Gender (Male)	-1.043 (1.817)	-0.017 (0.022)	0.051** (0.021)	0.032 (0.021)
Race (Non-White)	-1.914 (1.980)	-0.104*** (0.024)	0.081*** (0.021)	0.031 (0.021)
Seniority (Sessions Served)	0.028 (0.184)	-0.009*** (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.007*** (0.002)
Constant	69.838*** (4.776)	0.226*** (0.058)	0.890*** (0.032)	0.937*** (0.031)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,420	1,420	3,480	3,480
R ²	0.293	0.104	0.094	0.093

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Issue-by-Issue Content of Interbranch Messaging

The previous sections show that what attitude House members hold toward the State of the Union addresses depend upon their partisanship and whom they represent. Moving beyond the supporting or opposing positions, this section explores how legislators respond to the State of the Union addresses substantively. I argue that the president uses the State of the Union addresses to set the agenda for legislators in the coming year, but legislators across the chamber would strategically pick issues to highlight in their press releases while expressing their complementary or countervailing messages. In specific, the partisan and electoral concerns also influence what issues representatives emphasize in their own statements.

Throughout the 8 years of interbranch messaging on the State of the Union, according to my hand coding, the presidents raised in total of 22 general topics and House members react to these agenda issues quite differently across the chamber. In order to systematically analyze how representatives respond to different issues, I use the Keyword Assisted Topic Model to investigate how prevalent each House member discuss across the topics in a given year. Table 2 provides all the 22 topics, which are labelled out of raw texts the State of the Union address, and the keyword stems associated with each topic. The keyword stems followed by tick marks are the assigned keyword stem to that topic. As can be seen, the most frequent stems in each topic arguably represent each topic pretty well. Furthermore, Table 2 also shows the average prevalence of each topic mentioned in House members' press releases.

Figure 5 demonstrates the prevalence of the issues that House members mentioned in their press releases throughout 8 years. The blue and red bars indicate the partisan averages of topic prevalence by Democratic and Republican legislators respectively, and the black solid lines portrait the proportion of each topic that the president mentioned in the State of the Union Addresses. There are several general patterns in the messages between the president

and legislators that are worth of a mention. First, in a larger picture, when the president set the agenda, House members as a whole generally responde on those issues stressed by the president. For example, when President Obama talked about *Economy, Wages, Education* and *Clean Energy* in his term, representatives discussed these issues disproportionately more than they did in Trump’s years. And when President Trump switched the national attention on *Make America Great Again, Immigration, Drug, and Infrastructure* in his addresses, there is an increase in the prevalence of these topics in House members’ press releases. Second, the most obvious distinction between legislators and presidents on the State of the Union comes in the nature of these two types of statements. Most obviously, in the State of the Union addresses, the president often honored national heroes, as Trump spent more than 20% of time in each of his four addresses praising and saluting his invited guests. On the contrary, legislators seemed to be reluctant to respond with the same honorary terms in their own statements. Rather, representatives widely used bipartisan rhetoric in the press releases. Both Democratic and Republican legislators would use, on average, 30% of the bipartisan rhetoric in their press releases. They emphasize their willingness to “work with the president,” and “look forward to opportunities to solve national problems.” For instance, Rep. Tom Rooney (FL-17) ended his press release in response to the 2018 State of the Union address by say, “I look forward to acting on the bipartisan initiatives we heard tonight and fixing the real problems our constituents face in their everyday lives.”

Table 2: Top Words by Topic in MC’s Press Releases

Topics	Stems	%
FOREIGN_POLICY	secur[✓], nation[✓], world, militari[✓], threat, contri, nation.secur	7.3
HONORARY*	honor[✓], democrat, make, word, speak, guest[✓], action	0.5
ECONOMY	job[✓], economi, middl.class[✓], class, creat, middl, econom	9.8
MAGA*	great[✓], vision[✓], strong, economi, deliv, administr, growth	6.2
IMMIGRATION	immigr[✓], border[✓], famili[✓], protect[✓], polici, wall[✓]	5.9
HEALTHCARE	care[✓], health[✓], health.care, cost[✓], afford, act, promis	5.9
EDUCATION	educ[✓], colleg[✓], famili, afford, student[✓], middl, make	2.5
WAGES	wage[✓], minimum.wage, minimum[✓], rais, feder, rais.minimum, equal[✓]	1.1
CLEAN_ENERGY	energi[✓], climat[✓], renew[✓], clean[✓], product, oil[✓], mention	1.0
BIPARTISANSHIP*	work[✓], contri, nation, opportun, issu, forward, bipartisan[✓]	36.3
CITIZENSHIP	gun[✓], elect[✓], violenc[✓], protect, democraci[✓], vote[✓], democrat	1.9
WORKFORCE	workforc[✓], job[✓], labor, creat, train, st, centuri	0.5
TAX	tax[✓], reform[✓], cut[✓], increas, tax.reform[✓], code, relief[✓]	3.4
LAW_ORDER	justic[✓], crime[✓], crimin[✓], taxa, immigr, court, violent[✓]	0.4
LIBERAL_VALUES*	liberti[✓], radic, polit, digniti[✓], war, liber[✓]	0.4
DRUG	drug[✓], prescript[✓], prescript.drug, lower, democrat, opioid[✓], epidem[✓]	2.6
LEGACY_FUTURE*	futur[✓], ahead[✓], gener[✓], made, month, progress[✓], vision	2.4
TECHNOLOGY	innov[✓], cancer, children, research, immigt, act, scienc[✓]	0.5
INFRASTRUCTURE	infrastructur[✓], invest, road[✓], bridg[✓], rebuild[✓], crumbl, transport[✓]	1.4
VETERAN	veteran[✓], militai[✓], men.women, men, women, forward, forward.work	1.2
GOVERNMENT	govern[✓], polici, hous, fail, washington[✓], spend, regul[✓]	8.2
SOCIAL_SECURITY	save[✓], retir[✓], social, social.secur[✓], medicar, fund, benefit	0.5

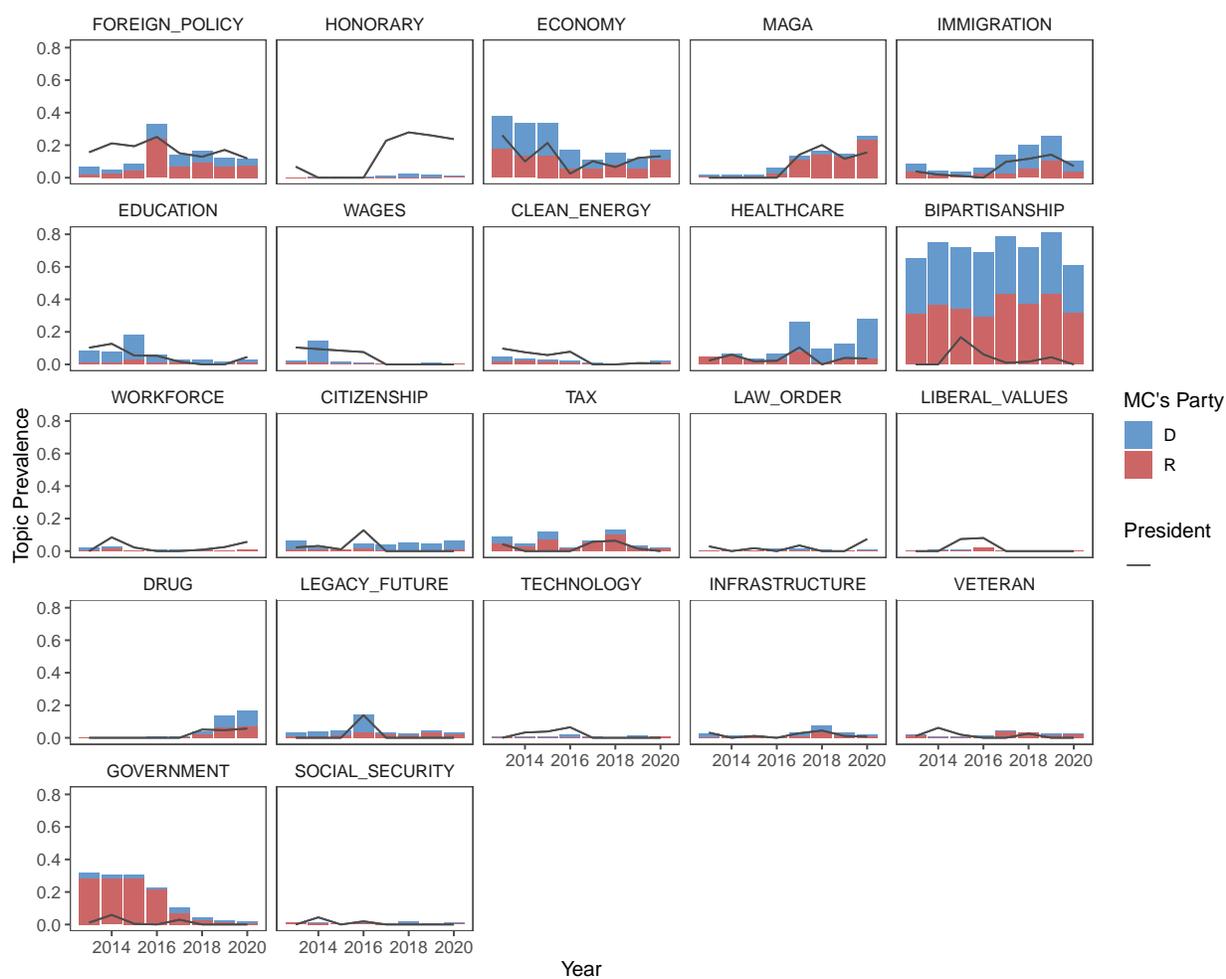
Notes:

* Indicates that the topic is a non-issue topic.

[✓] Indicates that it is the assigned keyword stem to that topic.

The order of topics are arranged by the proportion of that topic mentioned in the SOTU addresses.

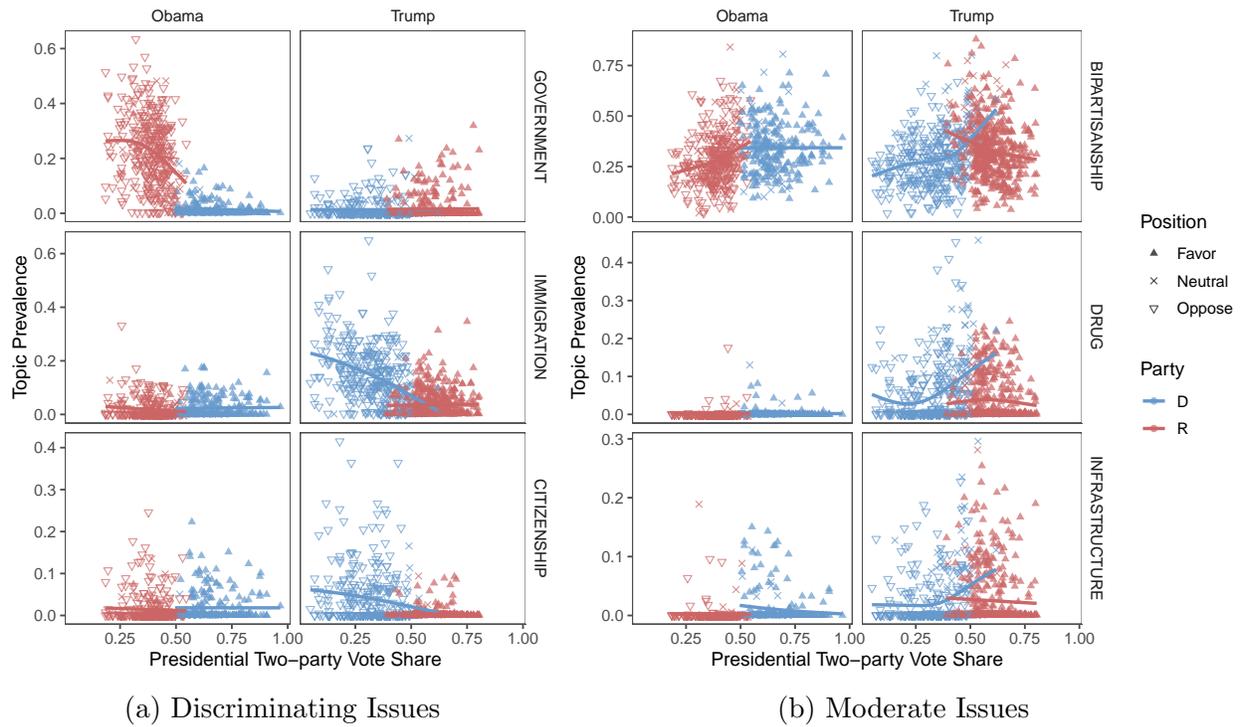
Figure 5: House Members' Response by Topics



Noticably, when representatives of the House have their own partisanship and the partisan make-up of their constituencies in mind, they respond different issues differently. In specific, legislators would pick issues they consider as important to their voters and express their opinion on those issues in their press releases. Thus, safe-seat legislators and marginal legislators would reasonably echo different types of policy issues. Figure 6 demonstrates how electoral concerns impact the issues that representatives pick to mention in their press releases. Panel (a) in Figure 6 highlights the discriminating issues that safe-seat legislators are more likely to mention. During the Obama administration, Republican criticism focuses on the issue of *(Big) Government*. Whatever Obama advocate in his addresses, Republican legislators would condemn Obama’s initiatives as “failed Washington policies” and blame the big government spending too much. For example, Rep. David Schweikert (AZ-06) responded Obama’s address in 2013 by say, “Unfortunately, it is a policy that will lead to more spending and more debt that American taxpayers cannot afford. Instead of pushing for more government, the president should focus on how we can reduce the size and cost of a federal government that continues to stifle the economic growth we need to ensure our nation’s prosperity.” Moreover, the smooth fit lines show that safe-seat Republicans would be more likely to criticize Obama on the issue of *(Big) Government*. Similarly, during the Trump administration, safe-seat Democrats were more inclined to condemn Trump’s *Immigration* policy. Even more, safe-seat Democrats were also more likely to mention the issue of *Citizenship* that is related to democratic election and gun violence in their criticism against Trump.

On the contrary, as shown in Panel (b) in Figure 6, cross-pressured representatives instead emphasized a different type of issues. These moderate issues include *Bipartisanship*, *Drug*, and *Infrastructure*. The fit lines clearly demonstrate that marginal legislators who represent the battleground districts were more likely to use bipartisan rhetoric in their press releases and to echo the moderate issues like *Drug* and *Infrastructure*. These issues do not convey an extreme ideological taste that would not potentially irritate their moderate voters.

Figure 6: Electoral Concerns Influencing MC's Discussion across Topics



Notes: Blue color and Red color indicate the partisanship of legislators. The shape of each data point reflects the position a press release is taking on the corresponding State of the Union address: solid upward triangles are complementary attitudes, hollow downward triangles are condemning attitudes, and cross signs are neutral. Smooth fit lines are drawn by a generalized additive model (GAM).

Agenda Follow and Polarization in the House

Political scientists have widely acknowledged that political elites have become steadily more polarized over the past few decades across a wide range of issues (see Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). On the presidential-congressional relations, a bulk of studies find that the most consistent determinant of presidential success in Congress is party – support from the president’s co-partisans is higher than that from the members of opposition (Edwards 1989). However, the preponderance of evidence comes from the analysis on the roll call votes (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003; Cohen, Bond and Fleisher 2013). This section assesses the structure of interbranch messaging on the State of the Union. Diving into how member of Congress respond to presidential appeals across the issue domains, it demonstrates the extent of which legislators follow the agenda set by the president and whether they trace the content in president’s original terms or switch attention to other issues. It further casts new light on the topic of polarization in the House, and suggests that party cohesion and polarization continued to escalate.

To provide a comprehensive measure of how closely legislators follow the agenda set by the president in the State of the Union addresses, I rely on the topic prevalence result from the keyATM output and introduce a measure for the similarity of topic prevalence across the issue domains between the president and representatives. In specific, the president and each House members have a prevalence vector across the 22 topics in a given year. I then quantify the extent of which legislators follow the presidential agenda by a measure of distance between the prevalence vector of the president and the ones of representatives. There are multiple ways to calculate the distance of vectors (see, e.g., NEED A CITE), here I employ the Mahalanobis distance that is weighted by topic proportion in the president’s State of the Union addresses. An individual legislator’s distance of topic prevalence to the president’s is the square root of mean sum square of prevalence differences that is scaled by

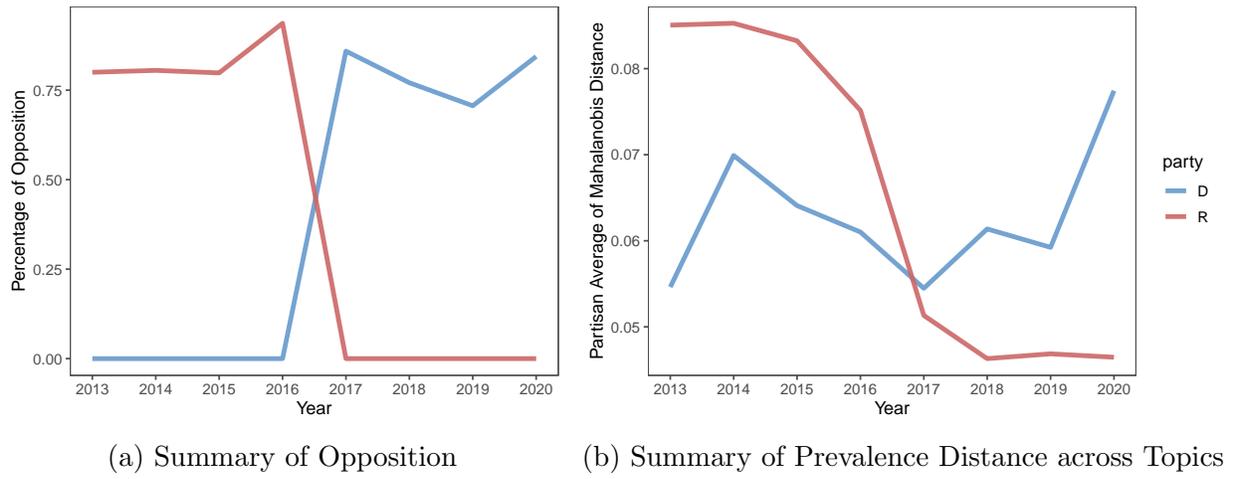
the importance of the topic. Formally,

$$\text{MC's Mahalanobis Distance} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{22} \sum_{t=1}^{22} \frac{(\text{MC}_t - \text{President}_t)^2}{e^{\text{President}_t}}},$$

where t refers to the topic, MC_t and President_t separately denote the prevalence of topic t mentioned by a member of Congress and the president. Since all topics do not carry the same weights, presidents always emphasize some issues by talking more (e.g. *Foreign Policy*, *Economy*) and briefly mention some other topics (e.g. *Social Security* and *Veteran Issues*), I engage a reweighting by dividing by $e^{\text{President}_t}$. The president's prevalence in some topic in a given year equals to 0, so I take the exponential to prevent the denominator from being 0. That being said, the Mahalanobis distance is just the Euclidean distance with some scaling that reveals president's priority among topics. Small the score is, more closely a legislator follows the agenda.

Figure 7 shows that attitudinal opposition by party over the 8 years in Panel (a), and the partisan average of distance across topic domains, excluding all non-issue topics in Panel (b). The level of opposition summarized by party is the standard to compare with. I find an interesting pattern that Republican legislators are more unified: they vehemently opposed Obama and fervently support Trump in their press releases, meanwhile they deviate from Obama's agenda but closely follow Trump's agenda. However, even though Democrats comment Obama and denounce Trump in their positions, they maintain a cautious distance to Obama and discuss within the range of Trump's agenda until they markedly deviated in 2020. This pattern yields some further interpretations. Whatever policies President Obama advocated (eg. *Clean Energy*, *Technology*, *Workforce* and *Wages*), Republican legislators mostly ignored those issues and criticized Obama's initiatives as the failure of *Big Government*. For example, Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO08) disagreed with Obama's address in 2014 without mentioning any specific issues, rather by saying, "The President believes more government and more executive action are the solutions to every problem facing our country.

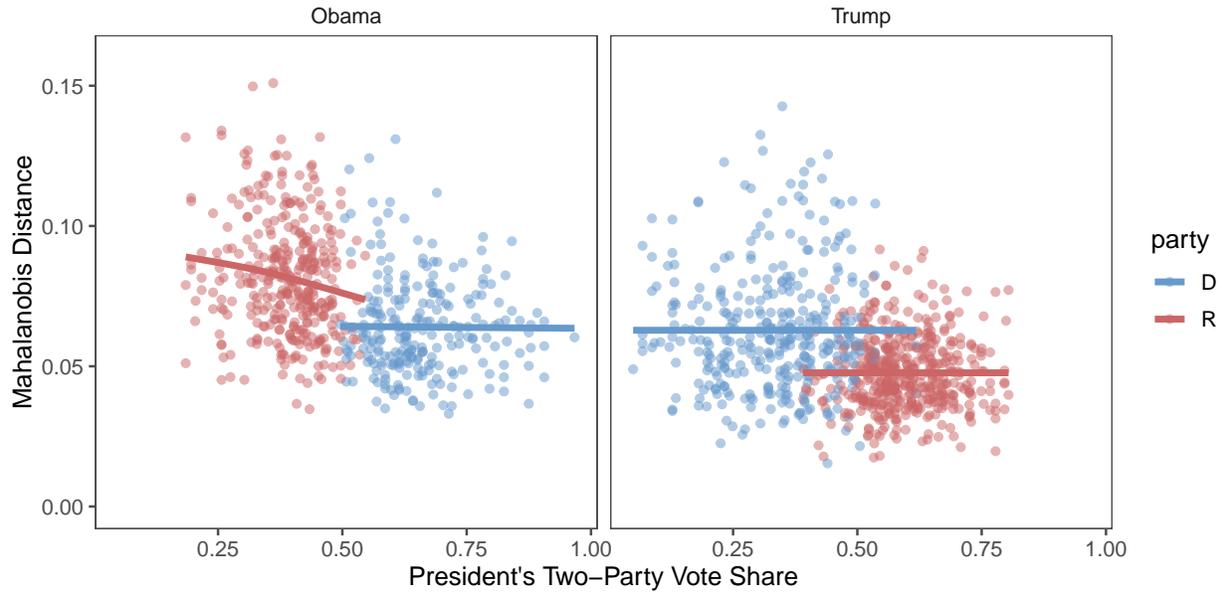
Figure 7: Opposition by Party and Distance of Prevalence across Topic Domains



Notes: 1. The lines demonstrate the partisan average, where blue indicates Democratic party and red refers to Republican party. 2. In Panel (b) Non-issue topics (*Honorary, MAGA, Bipartisanship, Liberal Values, and Legacy and Future*) are excluded.

When I talk to folks back home in Missouri, they tell me big government is the problem, not the solution.” When Democrats made countervailing statement against Trump, they also highlighted some Democratic issues that Trump omitted (eg. *Citizenship* and *Clean Energy*). For instance, Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA49) said in 2019, “The most glaring omission from his address was any serious proposal to combat climate change, which is already having a significant impact on our country, including more intense wildfires and rising sea levels.” Nevertheless, Democratic appeals on multiple liberal issues during the Trump administration pales to the Republican unified criticism on big government during the Obama years.

Figure 8: Electoral Connection’s Influence in Agenda Following



Notes: 1. Each dot represents how similarly a legislator talks across the issue agenda in the press release compared to the president’s State of the Union address, with the color of blue and red indicating Democratic and Republican parties. 2. Smooth fit lines are drawn by a generalized additive model (GAM).

More interestingly, representatives’ substantive response to the State of the Union addresses in two different administrations reveal an escalated polarization trend in the House. To show this, Figure 8 exhibits how electoral connection influences the extent to which legislators follow the agenda set by the president. Each point measures how similarly each legislator talks across the issue agenda in their countervailing statements on the State of the Union addresses, with the color of blue and red indicating Democratic and Republican parties. The GAM smooth fit lines sketch out the relations between the district partisan makeup and the level of agenda following by the two party legislators. The left-hand plot in Figure 8 shows that during the Obama’s second term, in addition to a clear partisan difference in agenda following, House members who represent higher proportion of Democratic voters more closely followed Obama’s agenda. Moreover, the influence of electoral connection in agenda following is observed within both parties. On the contrary, the right-hand plot in

Figure 8 demonstrates that during the Trump's four years, we find that legislators within the same party do not seem to consider their voters' partisanship, rather their closeness to president's agenda is primarily decided by their own partisan label. This suggests that in Trump's years, House members are more polarized in their willingness to follow the agenda.

Discussion

Drawing evidence from House members' press releases in response to the State of the Union Addresses, I conclude with two main empirical findings. First, the moderates are different from the extremists. In the aftermath of presidential appeals, the moderate legislators keep low volume or stay neutral, and avoid talking about partisan issues. Second, Republicans are different from Democrats. On the content of response, issues like Big Government and Immigration are discriminating Republicans and Democrats; whereas bipartisanship issues like Drug and Infrastructure are not. In the structure of response, Democrats' responsiveness is marked by continuity across presidential administrations; Republicans' responsiveness is dramatically different as a function of who occupies the White House.

These findings suggest several important implications for our understanding of public debates about president's policy agenda and party polarization within Congress. What's at stake in the public discourse over national policies is that in the current hyper-polarized political environment, congressional members thus always hold together in their parties and battle with one another. Congressional scholars have argued that fellow partisans' shared risk has wide-ranging effects on congressional party politics. So it persuades congressional members to rally around the initiatives of their own party's president, and the out-party legislators, as a mirror image, to resist policies advocated by an opposing party's president (Lee 2009). Furthermore, due to this party conflict in Congress, the moderate appear quite

cohesive and do their best to tan down internal division. The evidence on offer in this paper speaks to this interparty division but also the intraparty variation. With respect to responding the president's effort of agenda setting in the State of the Union address, members of Congress do demonstrate a stark partisan differences. But more interestingly, the evidence also reveals a great deal of intraparty variation in responding presidential appeals. The moderate just keep silent and don't engage in this political contestation of public appeals; even some speak out, they tend to be neutral.

What's also at stake here is the fight of public contestation over national issues. When the president sets the agenda in his national broadcasted addresses, the influence of presidential leadership, regardless of effective or not (Edwards 2009), should project on the same topic domain. Rather, the evidence I find in this paper suggest that the out-party legislators do not follow the lead, instead they would use their statements to shift public attention to their own issues of interest that a president does not even mention.

There are still plenty of room to enrich the discussion of interbranch messaging for the future research. Although Fu and Howell (2020) offer empirical evidence of the impact on fundraising, the downstream effects of interbranch interaction over public appeals need to be further investigated. Another line of thoughts is on correlation between what legislators say and how they vote. We observe multiple cases where the moderate would vote for a president-proposed bill in the end, but speak verbally against it. It is worth of an assessment on how legislators would use their speeches to compensate for the political fallout for tough votes.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive Results of MC's Positions towards SOTU Addresses

Year	Favor	Neutral	Oppose	N
2020	101 (55.8%)	15 (8.3%)	65 (35.9%)	181
2019	112 (49.3%)	38 (16.7%)	77 (33.9%)	227
2018	125 (53.9%)	33 (14.2%)	74 (31.9%)	232
2017	106 (58.6%)	14 (7.7%)	61 (33.7%)	181
2016	77 (39.1%)	16 (8.1%)	104 (52.8%)	197
2015	66 (36.1%)	26 (14.2%)	91 (49.7%)	183
2014	65 (35.1%)	29 (15.7%)	91 (49.2%)	185
2013	17 (50%)	5 (14.7%)	12 (35.3%)	34

Table A2: Electoral Connection and Response to the SOTU Addresses (2013-2020)

	Dependent Variable			
	Tone	Neutral	Silent	Silent/Neutral
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
President's Vote Share	5.419 (11.061)	-0.506*** (0.134)	-0.236* (0.121)	-0.380*** (0.118)
Out-Party	-50.742*** (8.138)	-0.691*** (0.099)	-0.174* (0.090)	-0.394*** (0.087)
President's Vote Share × Out-Party	59.944*** (15.507)	1.790*** (0.188)	0.410** (0.172)	1.018*** (0.167)
Party (Republican)	1.675 (1.618)	-0.124*** (0.020)	-0.075*** (0.019)	-0.125*** (0.018)
Gender (Male)	-1.344 (1.795)	-0.026 (0.022)	0.051** (0.021)	0.030 (0.021)
Race (Non-White)	1.015 (2.057)	-0.026 (0.025)	0.096*** (0.023)	0.071*** (0.022)
Seniority (Sessions Served)	0.134 (0.182)	-0.007*** (0.002)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.007*** (0.002)
Constant	65.128*** (8.591)	0.533*** (0.104)	1.046*** (0.083)	1.177*** (0.081)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,420	1,420	3,480	3,480
R ²	0.311	0.138	0.089	0.091

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3: Keywords of 22 Topics in SOTU Addresses (2013-2020)

Topics	Keywords
FOREIGN_POLICY	nation, force, security, military, terrorist, isis, iran, nuclear, troop, defense, terrorism, weapons
HONORARY*	thank, hero, salute, honor, guest
ECONOMY	job, business, worker, wage, trade, middl.class, manufactur, dollar, employment, income, nafta, recession, pipeline, trans.pacific, keystone, dakota
MAGA*	america, great, incredible, vision, success, optimism, victory
IMMIGRATION	protect, citizen, immigration, border, family, criminal, border.security, wall, migration, chain, visa, lottery
HEALTHCARE	health, cost, care, insurance, replace, coverage, obamacare, repeal, insurer
EDUCATION	child, education, college, student, kids, learn, university
WAGES	women, equal, minimum, wage, payment
CLEAN_ENERGY	energy, oil, climate, clean, waste, renewable
BIPARTISANSHIP*	work, bipartisan, ground, common, common.ground, sides, aisle
CITIZENSHIP	vote, community, elect, gun, democracy, violence, citizenship
WORKFORCE	job, worker, employment, equal, payment, workforce
TAX	tax, cut, reform, tax.reform, relief, deduction
LAW_ORDER	justice, criminal, violent, crime, judge, supreme, gorsuch
LIBERAL_VALUES*	justice, values, religious, dignity, liberty, liberal
DRUG	drug, prescript, epidemic, opioid
LEGACY_FUTURE*	future, progress, generation, ahead, legacy
TECHNOLOGY	science, space, innovation, creative
INFRASTRUCTURE	rebuild, infrastructure, road, bridge, rail, pipeline, rural, transportation, repair
VETERAN	military, hero, veteran, brave, va
GOVERNMENT	government, washington, regulation, drain, swamp, corruption
SOCIAL_SECURITY	saving, retirement, social.security, pension

Notes: * Indicates that the topic is a non-issue topic.

Figure A2: Topics and Priorities in the SOTU addresses (2013-2020)

