

THE POLITICS OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

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Speeches are vital to modern presidential governance. We know that speeches inform others of presidents' policy preferences and allow them to meet public expectations; yet we do not know precisely what influences presidents' tendencies to deliver them. This article argues that presidents consider the potential benefit or cost of delivering speeches. Deteriorating conditions in the political environment should cause a change in presidential behavior; while improvements may encourage presidents to continue their current course of action. Using time series analysis, I find that this is indeed the case. Typically, low presidential approval ratings and a poor economy encourage presidents to deliver more and fewer policy-based speeches, respectively. Even though the "golden age" of presidential politics also matters to presidential speechmaking, individual presidents do not significantly explain speechmaking over time.

That speeches are central to the modern president's governing strategy is a mainstay of the American politics literature. Presidents use speeches to communicate their policy preferences to legislators and bureaucrats, address the public in times of international or domestic strife, and play head of state by welcoming foreign leaders and successful sports teams to the White House. Since the 1960s, presidential speeches have increased markedly, with some arguing that divided and gridlocked Congresses forced presidents to rely not on private bargaining with legislators, but on public support and the "permanent campaign" to achieve their legislative goals (Kernell 1997). Presidents have continued to rely on speeches as they govern even as parties have centralized and unified in Congress (Aldrich and Rhode 2000) and evidence mounts that speeches have limited effects on public opinion (Edwards 2003). At times, speeches have increased presidential success in Congress (Barrett 2004; Canes-Wrone 2001a; Eshbaugh-Soha 2006; Fett 1994), with a modest impact over the national, domestic policy agenda (Edwards and Wood 1999).

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The literature regarding what encourages presidents to deliver speeches is less clear. Although presidents appear to deliver national addresses in response to changes in their approval ratings or state of the economy (see Brace and Hinckley 1993; Ragsdale 1984), neither Hager and Sullivan (1994) nor Powell (1999) finds a demonstrable impact of either the president's approval ratings or the state of the economy on yearly speeches.¹ Other factors, such as divided government, prove mixed: it decreases the number of political activities (Hager and Sullivan 1994), but increases the number of speeches in Hart's (1987) analysis and has no statistically significant impact on yearly speeches delivered in or outside of Washington DC (Powell 1999). Nevertheless, reelection years tend to increase yearly speeches (Hager and Sullivan 1994; Powell 1999), just as characteristics of individual presidents add little to our explanation of the number of presidential speeches over time (Hager and Sullivan 1994).

Despite this impressive research, we still know little about what motivates presidents to deliver speeches and what factors influence the number of presidential speeches over time. Indeed, the existing literature is deficient in several ways. Along with providing mixed and inconsistent results, it does not unify around a cohesive theory to explain speechmaking. One purpose of this article is to argue that fluctuations in the president's monthly speechmaking activities are best explained by negative developments, such as declining economic conditions and approval ratings² or deteriorating political conditions in Congress. Second, it examines annual speeches which, given quickly changing dynamics of presidential politics, may not accurately reflect the short-term motivations of presidential speechmaking. This project disaggregates and quantitatively analyzes the number of speeches by *month*, increasing the reliability of causal inferences about presidential speechmaking. Third, previous scholarship does not explicitly consider recent observations that the speechmaking environment for presidents has changed with the advent of the 24-hour cable news cycle (Baum and Kernell 1999; Cohen 2008). This article makes these considerations.

Along with addressing the limitations of past research, this topic is also vital to our more complete assessment of the public presidency for several reasons. First, speechmaking is the focus of modern presidential governance and is how presidents primarily lead Congress, the media, and the public. Knowing how presidents adjust their public leadership efforts in response to the larger environment may help us *explain* better the limits of presidential influence in these arenas or the conditions under which presidents may demonstrate successful leadership. Second, exploring when and under what conditions presidents are likely to alter their speechmaking behavior is important to *prediction*, determining when we may see an increase or a corresponding decrease in the president's speechmaking activity. Third, knowing what motivates presidents to alter their public presence under which conditions is vital to *understanding* the public presidency more fully.

In short, I maintain that presidents consider the potential benefit (or cost) of delivering more (or fewer) speeches. Because negative information should

theoretically weigh more heavily in the speechmaking decisions of presidents, an unfavorable political environment should cause a change in presidential behavior, while improvements may encourage presidents to continue their current course of action. I employ time series methods—with the month as the unit of analysis—to examine the impact of relevant variables on policy-based presidential speeches, from January 1969 through December 2000, with a comprehensive dataset of monthly presidential speeches.

A THEORY OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHMAKING

Applying a Cost-Benefit Calculus to Speechmaking

In the tradition of Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995), I assume that presidents anticipate the future costs and benefits of their current actions, and may alter their behavior in the present to assist in their own goal achievement.³ This is true of presidential action in general, and should also be as applied to speechmaking. Like other policy makers and politicians, presidents have limited current information—whether positive or negative—that they hope to parlay into action that may help them secure their policy, reelection, or historical achievement goals (Light 1999). Securing one's policy goals should especially help presidents win reelection and, perhaps, achieve a sense of historical significance.

There is much research that calls into question the ability of presidents to achieve their policy goals through speechmaking (Edwards 2003). Nevertheless, presidents themselves believe that ineffective communication contributes to a failure of governance. Both Presidents Clinton and Reagan, for instance, lamented that their inability to lead the public was failure to communicate policy initiatives clearly (Edwards 2003, 35). As others have argued, moreover, it is through devoting commitment and concern to a policy that demonstrates presidential leadership (Rockman 1984; Shull 1989). Because modern presidents display commitment and concern to a policy or issue through their public speeches—even if they are not typically successful leading public opinion (Edwards 2003)—they lead by speaking about policy issues. Any variation in the level of attention through speeches, therefore, indicates that presidents are altering their leadership or governing strategies to affect their political fortunes and assist in their goal achievement, *ceteris paribus*.

Although not always influential, speeches are a primary tool available to modern presidents to alter their current political situation and help them to govern. As such, presidents should anticipate when delivering more (or fewer) speeches is most likely to *benefit* them in goal achievement, whether by improving their public standing or achieving legislative policy goals. After all, presidents typically receive a bump in the polls after delivering a nationally televised address (Brace and Hinckley 1992; but see Edwards 2003) and increase their legislative success rate by speaking publicly (Canes-Wrone 2001a). Presidents will also consider the *cost* of speechmaking before they speak publicly.⁴ For example, presidents may hurt

their chances for bargaining with legislators if they “go public” (Kernell 1997), undermining their chances to achieve their legislative policy goals. Policy speeches may raise public expectations about the president’s ability and willingness to solve public problems, leading to a decline in public support if those expectations are not realized (Waterman, Jenkins-Smith, and Silva 1999). Speeches, themselves, may ultimately be ineffective securing additional public support (Edwards 2003), meaning that presidents will want to use them sparingly and strategically to maximize their impact.

The Importance of Negative Information

Much existing literature documents the primacy of negative information to actors across the political spectrum. One of the possible truisms of American politics is that a poor economy spells disaster for an incumbent president (Holbrook 1994). Even though negative campaign ads are not particularly effective in winning votes, they tend to increase political knowledge (Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007) and voter turnout (Kahn and Kinney 1999). Media are drawn to negative stories in general (Bennett 2009) or about the presidency, in particular (Cohen 2008; Groeling and Kernell 1998). Towle (2004) discusses, as well, how presidential administration’s interpretation of public opinion changes relative to declines in presidential approval ratings or, as I maintain, increases in negative information.

To explain monthly variation in speechmaking by presidents, therefore, it is important to consider the way in which presidents may respond to positive and negative information in the larger political environment. Although Lau (1982; 1985) does not examine presidents, his work concerning two central hypotheses about positive and negative information and costs and gains is informative. First, negative information stands out against a positive background and holds more weight in the mind of a decision maker. As such, presidents are most likely to vary their governing strategy in response to unfavorable, not favorable, changes in the political environment. When the political environment sours, therefore, presidents will alter their speechmaking behavior in an attempt to improve their prospects for achieving their goals. It is when strategies fail and circumstances worsen, for example, that administrations are likely to replace White House staff or move from an “insider” to an “outsider” strategy of governance, as Bill Clinton did when his economic plan was floundering in Congress (Kernell 1997, 7–8).

Second, individuals are more likely to avoid costs than they are to pursue gains. And there are clear costs to speaking in the face of unfavorable conditions. Presidents may draw attention to themselves and their failed policies by speaking publicly about them (Ragsdale 1984). Even presidents who may attempt to alter the policy agenda through speechmaking may find that an increasingly negative news media is unresponsive to their efforts (Cohen 2008) and, instead, use the president’s own words to focus on presidential failures.

Nevertheless, the effects of a cost-benefit assessment are not uniform. Those who can control the outcome of their actions are less likely to be cost-oriented than

those who cannot control outcomes (Lau 1985, 122), such as presidential action on the economy, over which presidential control is slight (see Morris 2001). In arenas over which presidents may exhibit some control—such as approval ratings (Ragsdale 1984), legislative success (Edwards 1989), or media coverage (Edwards and Wood 1999)—presidents may speak more to expand the scope of conflict (Schattschneider 1960) in an attempt to alter the incentive structure presented by an unfavorable political environment. By speaking more frequently, presidents may be able to improve their fortunes in Congress (Canes-Wrone 2001a; Kernell 1997) or increase their public standing. Thus, presidents may benefit from delivering more speeches in the face of unfavorable conditions over which they have some control, but reduce speechmaking when conditions over which they have little control worsen.

HYPOTHESES AND DATA

Presidential Approval Ratings

Theoretically, presidents are more likely to pay attention to negative than positive information and increase their level of activity in response to conditions over which they have some control. Along these lines, presidents should increase their speechmaking in response to negative information about approval given the degree to which presidents and their staff attempt to influence the president's popularity. Although some research suggests otherwise (Edwards 2003), presidents devote countless resources to cultivating public support (Kumar 2007) over which speeches have a modest impact, besides (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Ragsdale 1984). Hypothetically, *a decline in the president's approval ratings will lead to an increase in the number of president's speeches.*⁵ Presidential approval ratings are measured as the monthly average of the percentage of respondents who approve of the president's job performance according to the Gallup Poll.

The Congressional Environment

According to my theory, negative conditions in Congress should increase presidential speechmaking. That is, in the face of an unfavorable congressional environment—and given the modest impact that more speeches have on increasing the president's legislative success rate (Barrett 2004; Eshbaugh-Soha 2006)—presidents will deliver more speeches as a way to shake things up, to “expand the scope of conflict,” and alter the incentives before legislators. In the short-term, at least, *a decline in the president's legislative success will lead to more policy speeches the next month.*⁶ The president's monthly success rate consists of the percentage of victories on roll-call votes on which the president took a public position. It is as an additive measure of House and Senate roll-call votes⁷ lagged one month.⁸

I also control for the impact that the larger congressional environment may have on presidential speeches. Although divided government is negative

information, it is also a condition over which the president has little control especially since it changes little from month-to-month. Consistent with my theory, therefore, it is likely that this negative information provided by the broader congressional environment should decrease the number of monthly speeches that presidents deliver. The effects of divided government may have even become magnified as congressional parties have strengthened under “conditional party government” (Aldrich and Rhode 2000). Simply, with fewer cross-pressured legislators under more unified Congresses of recent years, presidents may find it beneficial to engage in private bargaining with key legislative leaders who can deliver votes for the president. I code the broader congressional environment as a dummy variable, with one denoting conditions of divided government.

The Economy

The state of the economy is vital to the president’s political success. Simply, when the economy is doing well, the president typically is also doing well. Because of this, monthly fluctuations in the economy could affect the president’s monthly speech-making activities. Although Wood (2007, 127 and 151) demonstrates that presidents respond to the state of the economy by increasing their level of optimism in their rhetoric as a function of the public’s economic evaluations (Consumer Sentiment) and business investment, he does not indicate whether presidents increase their number of speeches in response to the state of the economy. Nevertheless, we do know that presidents are typically responsive to media attention to the economy when it is in decline, but have great difficulty affecting media attention to a robust economy (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2005). Because of this, a poor economy presents costs to presidential speechmaking, as presidents risk increasing attention to the economy, something over which they have very limited control. Consistent with other research (Ragsdale 1984) and my own theoretical argument, I hypothesize that *a poor economy will decrease the president’s monthly speeches*. To account for two dominant measures of economic prosperity simultaneously, I combine monthly unemployment and inflation rates into one misery index. These data are available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Scandals

According to my theory, negative information should weigh more heavily than positive information in the president’s decision-making calculus concerning speechmaking and presidents will want to speak more frequently when faced with a situation over which they have some influence, such as media coverage of a political scandal. Thus, when faced with a political scandal—a negative situation—presidents should be most likely to alter their speechmaking behavior to influence media coverage of the scandal, and therefore *a presidential scandal should increase the number of speeches president’s deliver*.⁹ To assess this, I model the three major

scandals over this time period: Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Lewinsky. These are step-function dummy variables, coded as one during the months of these scandals.¹⁰

Domestic and International Events

Other factors that may affect the number of presidential speeches, but which are beyond the president's immediate control, are non-discretionary domestic and international events.¹¹ Because negative information should weigh more heavily than positive information on the president's speechmaking, I model negative, non-discretionary events, which should increase speeches. Presidents want to address a negative event immediately—especially if it is an international crisis—to demonstrate leadership and resolve. To test the alternative rival hypothesis, that positive events will have little impact on presidential speechmaking, I also control for positive, non-discretionary events. These events data were originally published by Brace and Hinckley (1993) and updated by Gronke and Brehm (2002).

Controls

The president's tenure may affect the number of speeches in two ways. First, each presidency follows regular cycles: a honeymoon period, initial successes (perhaps), midterm elections, and the campaign for reelection. The president's tenure, although affected by events specific to each administration, has predictable regularity that should be controlled for. Because of presidents' "cycle of decreasing influence," (Light 1999), where presidents lose power and influence in inverse proportion to their time in office, presidential speechmaking should correspondingly decline as fewer pay heed to the president's words. As such, *each additional month in a president's tenure will generate fewer speeches than the previous month* (Hinckley 1990). Tenure is a count variable for the month of the president's time in office.

Second, lame duck, second-term presidents are likely to have a shorter honeymoon period, have less sway with Congress after midterm elections, and be ignored more by the news media as they look to the next presidential election. As presidential speeches are an indication of presidential leadership, presidents should decrease their speeches during their second terms in office as their influence wanes. Therefore, *presidents in their lame-duck years will deliver fewer speeches when compared with all other times across presidencies*. Lame duck, two-term presidents are coded as a step-function dummy variable: one during each month after the midterm election in the president's second term.

Another regularity of presidential governance that should increase speechmaking is reelection. Among other goals, presidents desire reelection and engage in a permanent campaign to mobilize support for it. This effort to mobilize supporters and convince undecided voters to support their reelection and to advocate additional legislation and claim credit for past successes or call for future legislation should be higher during reelection than other years. As such, *presidents will deliver more speeches during reelection than other years*. A standard dummy variable,

coded one for months of a presidential reelection campaign, measures the impact of reelection years on speechmaking.

The individual who is president brings specific preferences and characteristics to the office. As Barber (1992) recognizes, presidential style is a uniquely individual attribute. Among Barber's (1992) components of style are rhetoric or how presidents choose to speak publicly and whether they are, indeed, good speakers. In light of this, a possible alternative hypothesis to mine is that variation in presidential speechmaking over time is a function of individual presidential style and is not explained by the other factors I have identified. I thus control for individual presidents, coded as dummy variables, in the quantitative analysis.

There exists a clear time or dynamic component to activities of presidential politics in general (see Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Wood 2000) and presidential speechmaking, in particular. Just as speeches have become more numerous since the 1960s, Baum and Kernell (1999) note a significant shift in the audience for presidential speeches after the golden age of presidential television. At the very least, the evidence will show that the number of presidential speeches has continued to increase in the post-golden age era. What is more intriguing is whether this time shift also affects the impact of political conditions on presidential speechmaking. As already mentioned, it is possible that recent changes in Congress may increase the impact of divided government on presidential speechmaking. Presidential approval, too, could be less influential now since it matters less in the president's relationship with Congress (Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003). To account for the discernible intervention of the golden age of presidential television and its impact on speechmaking, I measure time effects as a step-function variable, coded ones before 1986 and zeros including and afterward. This is consistent with Young and Perkins (2005) who identify 1986 as the end of the golden age of presidential television.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study consists of a type of speech over which presidents should have substantial discretion and which is therefore likely to be responsive to strategic decision making. These *policy speeches*, found in the yearly volumes of the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, are substantive statements on public policy (whether foreign or domestic) that follow several basic coding decisions. They track closely Ragsdale's (1998) description of minor speeches, but have been coded independently by the author and by month. First, the speech had to express a substantive policy view or legislative or administrative accomplishment. Typically, a speech includes specific information on a president's legislative proposal, such as specific bills or federal agencies that may be affected by the policies. Second, I code only speeches with 10 paragraphs or more and that also meet these other requirements. I do this to offer a clear and replicable coding rule and to differentiate policy speeches from symbolic or ceremonial speeches, such as bill signings. These speeches may contain policy information but clearly are more symbolic than

substantive (Ragsdale 1998). Although policy speeches may be delivered to specific interest groups, campaigns speeches—whether to support individual candidates, the president’s political party, or own reelection campaign—are not included. Furthermore, policy speeches do not include any of the following: brief, informal exchanges with reporters, brief remarks of fewer than 10 paragraphs, national addresses, press conferences (joint or otherwise) or speeches delivered outside the United States.¹²

Given the tendency for presidents to travel and make numerous speeches throughout the United States (see, among others, Cohen and Powell 2005; Kernell 1997; Powell 1999), it is possible that presidential speechmaking behavior will also vary by location. For this reason, I analyze not only the total number of policy speeches per month, but also the total number of policy speeches per month delivered outside of Washington, DC. Figure 1 graphs the number of monthly, policy speeches. Although there is a general increase in the number of these speeches over time, as expected, there also exists substantial variation in the monthly number of these speeches. Appendix A lists example speeches.

The determination of the time frame for the analysis is rather straightforward. Aside from the necessity to limit the time frame given obvious time and resource constraints involved with coding presidential speeches, I was certain to begin the analysis in 1969. Richard Nixon created the Office of Communications in 1969, after all, which, among other things, institutionalized speechmaking into the White House (see Maltese 1994). Given the impact that institutional changes have had on other features of the presidency (see Dickinson 1996; Rudalevige 2002), it is probable that the institutionalization of the White House communications operation had a significant impact on the president’s ability to deliver more speeches. Ideally, the analysis should include as many data points as possible and the 32 years of data, across six presidencies, and 384 monthly observations should produce a highly generalizable set of results that future researchers may wish to extend through the Bush and Obama administrations.¹³

METHODS

Applying Box-Jenkins methods,¹⁴ I first identify, then estimate, a basic noise model for all policy speeches and those delivered outside of Washington, DC (McCleary and Hay 1980). Noise models for the dependent variables consist of some variation of autoregressive (AR), seasonal autoregressive (SAR), or moving average (MA) components that best purge each series of autocorrelation. The presence of any of these coefficients suggests an inertial process, which indicates regular patterns of presidential speechmaking outside of any response to the external environment. I then build each model, including all hypothesized variables and other relevant controls, with an eye toward ensuring that the models stay free of autocorrelation. Each dependent variable is stationary according to the Augmented Dickey Fuller

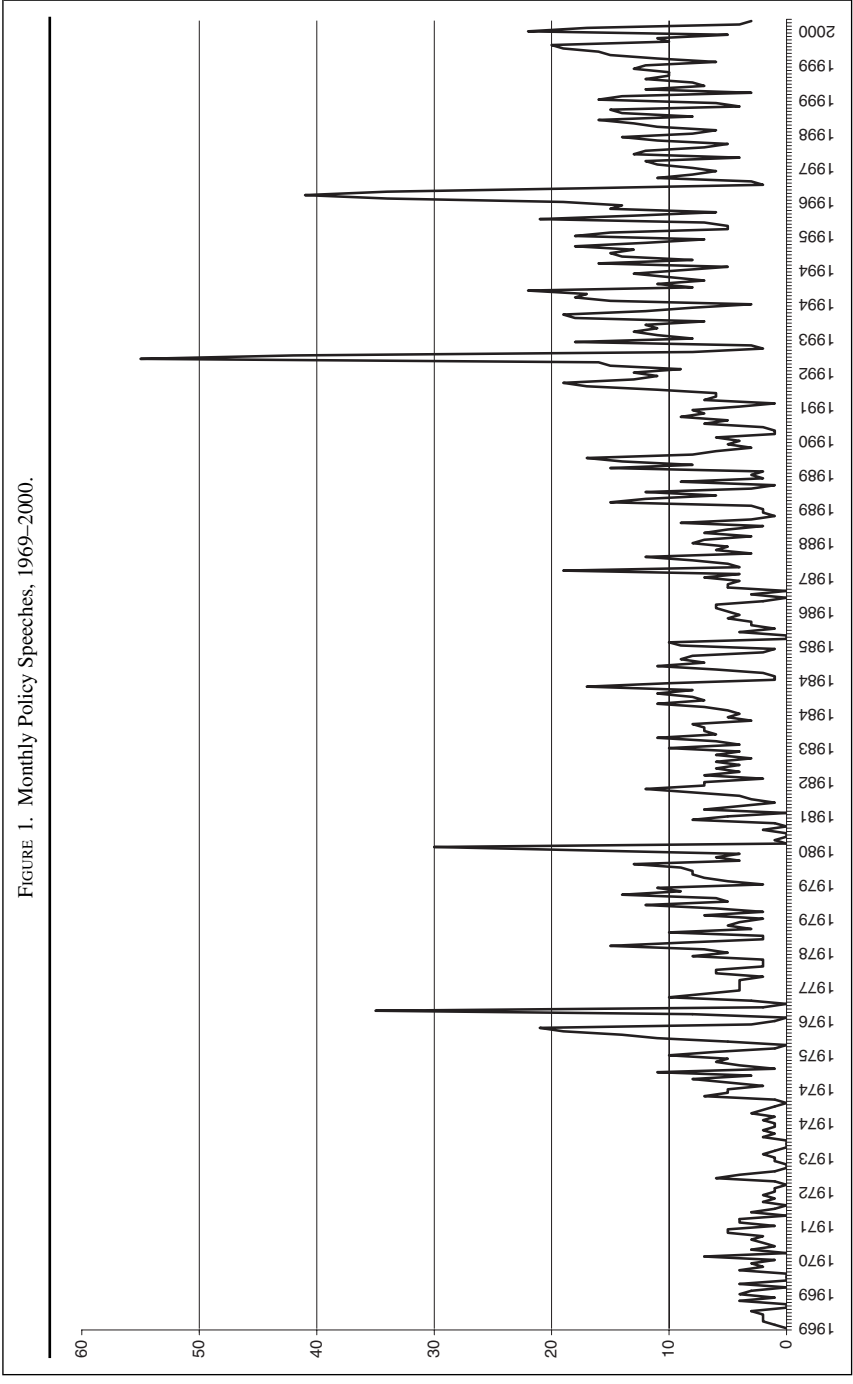


FIGURE 1. Monthly Policy Speeches, 1969–2000.

Tests presented in Appendix B.¹⁵ All models analyze the dependent variable at levels, therefore, not first differences.¹⁶

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents results for two sets of speeches: all policy speeches and those delivered outside of Washington, DC. The analysis reveals patterns indicative of cost-benefit behavior by the president, with unfavorable circumstances encouraging more presidential speeches when it might benefit him (and over which the president has some control), and fewer speeches when it should not. Declines in approval ratings and legislative success increase, whereas a poor economy decreases the number of policy speeches that the president delivers. In the former case—where a 10% decrease (about one standard deviation) in the president’s approval ratings leads to one additional policy speech per month—the president is responding to an unfavorable political environment with the intent, perhaps, of speaking more to alter the impact that low approval ratings may have on his ability to lead public opinion and Congress. Here, negative information weighs heavily on the minds of presidents and given the modest influence they have over their approval ratings, presidents choose to speak more when their approval is lower, consistent with my theory.

TABLE 1. The Determinants of Monthly Policy Speeches, 1:1969–12:2000

	All Speeches	US Speeches
Reelection Years	3.45* (1.04)	3.65* (0.95)
Presidential Approval	-0.11* (0.05)	-0.11* (0.05)
Misery Index	-0.43* (0.21)	-0.37* (0.17)
Legislative Success, $t-1$	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Negative-nondiscretionary Events	0.03 (0.86)	-0.86 (0.76)
Positive-nondiscretionary Events	0.96 (1.18)	-0.19 (1.03)
Divided Government	-0.63 (1.53)	0.70 (1.30)
Watergate Scandal	-3.89 (3.06)	-2.38 (2.71)
Iran-Contra Scandal	-2.04 (2.83)	-0.38 (2.58)
Lewinsky Scandal	3.55 (2.59)	1.52 (2.41)
Lame-Duck Presidents	0.82 (2.03)	-0.33 (1.77)
Tenure	-1.67 (1.75)	-1.98 (1.51)
Constant	19.37* (4.52)	13.96* (3.82)
AR11	0.42* (0.05)	0.45* (0.05)
SAR1121	0.24* (0.05)	0.09* (0.05)
MA151	0.14* (0.05)	0.14* (0.05)
Adjusted R ²	.41	.38
SE of Estimate	5.37	4.60
Q(critical $\chi^2 \approx 55.78$)	41.72	29.57
N	384	384

Note: standard errors in parentheses.

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

The economic finding is also consistent with my theory. Here, an increase in the misery index leads to fewer monthly policy speeches. This is negative information over which presidents have little potential for short-term influence, leading them to speak less during times of economic hardship.

Although the broader congressional environment—divided government—has little impact on the president's speechmaking in contrast to my expectations and the findings of analyses of annual speeches, presidents do respond to another kind of negative information signaled by the congressional environment. A decline in the president's success rate leads to a slight increase in the number of policy speeches. Like presidential approval ratings, presidents have a least marginal control over their legislative success rate (Edwards 1989) and so increase their speechmaking in response to this negative information.

Finally, reelection years increase the number of these speeches. Here, presidents hope to take advantage of their reelection platform—and the media attention that comes with it—to claim credit for recent legislative successes or argue for additional policy changes as a means to justify their reelection. It would not be surprising to find presidents deliver more campaign-style speeches during reelection years (see Hager and Sullivan 1994). That presidents deliver policy speeches in reelection years speaks clearly to the prominence of the permanent campaign in modern presidential governance.

Several other variables have no impact, despite expectations otherwise. First, I had hypothesized that scandals would encourage additional speeches as a way to communicate the White House's perspective to the media and public. Yet, no scandal has a statistically significant impact on policy speeches. Perhaps the strategy for a White House plagued by scandal is avoidance, meaning that presidents will carry on and talk about their goals and accomplishments as president and let their White House representatives attempt to spin coverage in the president's favor. Second, negative events have no statistically significant impact on monthly speeches. Although my theory suggests otherwise, this may be due to the very short-term nature of many events, that even negative ones have a limited impact on presidential behavior, much as we witness with so-called rally events on presidential approval ratings (Edwards 1990). Two controls also matter little: time in office and lame-duck status.

To account for two alternative hypotheses, that presidential speechmaking behavior is conditioned by time period, individual presidents, or both, Table 2 presents results for both types of speeches, excluding lame duck and scandal variables which were statistically insignificant in the models presented in Table 1. Controlling for the impact of time on presidential speechmaking reveals some similarities and differences with the previous model. These similarities, which consist primarily of the impact of reelection years, legislative success, and presidential approval ratings on presidential speeches, illustrate that time has not had a substantial conditioning impact on these predictors of presidents' speechmaking behavior. In other words, most variables that affect presidential speechmaking without controlling for time

TABLE 2. The Determinants of Speeches, Controlling for Time and Presidents

	All Speeches	US Speeches	
Reelection Years	3.77* (0.98)	4.09* (0.91)	4.08* (0.88)
Presidential Approval	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.11* (0.04)
Misery Index	-0.09 (0.22)	0.005 (0.18)	-0.13 (0.21)
Legislative Success, $t-1$	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Negative-nondiscretionary Events	-0.06 (0.86)	-0.97 (0.75)	-1.00 (0.75)
Positive-nondiscretionary Events	0.77 (1.18)	-0.32 (1.02)	-0.51 (1.02)
Divided Government	-0.72 (1.40)	0.30 (1.24)	0.99 (1.60)
Golden Age	-5.59* (1.49)	-3.37* (1.29)	1.20 (1.96)
Tenure	-1.96 (1.29)		
Nixon			-4.12* (2.14)
Carter			-1.05 (2.30)
Reagan			-2.03 (1.91)
Bush			3.19 (2.71)
Clinton			2.89 (2.80)
Constant	16.87* (4.12)	9.15* (3.43)	9.78* (4.87)
AR111	0.38* (0.05)	0.44* (0.05)	0.40* (0.50)
SAR1121	0.22* (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)
MA151	0.11* (0.06)	0.12* (0.05)	0.11* (0.05)
Adjusted R ²	.42	.39	.40
SE of Estimate	5.29	4.57	4.56
Q (critical $\chi^2 \approx 55.78$)	39.54	30.44	35.02
N	384	384	384

Note: standard errors in parentheses. Ford is the reference category; varying the reference category has no impact on the other results presented here. Individual presidents dropped from total speeches model for inducing autocorrelation. Tenure is substituted as a control in this model.

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

have a similar impact when controlling for the impact of the golden age of presidential television. Nevertheless, presidents delivered about three to five fewer speeches per month during the golden age than after.

Time only clearly and consistently conditions the impact of one variable. The state of the economy—measured by the misery index—is not statistically significant in any of the models after controlling for time.¹⁷ This suggests that recent presidents recognize their limited control over the state of and news about the economy and instead of reacting to it, ignore it in their decision making concerning their monthly speeches. Since the advent of cable news television, presidents are more likely to talk about good news when they speak, knowing that the news media—and the numerous outlets available to report it—is less likely to do so (Cohen 2008). After all, presidents have much difficulty affecting media attention to the economy anyway when it is not doing well (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2005). It is interesting that congressional effects do not vary by time, even though Congress has recently become more centralized and parties more unified with fewer persuadable legislators.

Modeling individual presidents matters little to explaining presidential speechmaking, as only President Nixon gave significantly fewer speeches than did

President Ford. That presidential dummies also eliminate time effects suggests that the two are incompatible and, with the total speeches model—that they could not be included because each specification produced autocorrelation—also raises questions about the accuracy of this alternative hypothesis, that the characteristics and styles of individual presidents primarily explain presidential speechmaking. Their correlation with time is also important. Existence of a clear upward trend in speeches over time is necessarily a reflection of increased speechmaking by presidents. Only future research can determine whether specific differences of individual presidents are responsible for this trend or whether speeches would have increased regardless of the individuals occupying the office. The results here, however, lend more support to the idea that individual characteristics are not important to the amount of speechmaking by presidents, much as individual presidents' oratory skills are not significantly related to presidents' ability to lead public opinion (Edwards 2003).

CONCLUSION

This article set out to analyze systematically presidential speechmaking over time, built upon the expectation that presidents consider the potential costs or benefits of delivering speeches on a monthly basis, with negative information weighing most heavily in the president's decision calculus. The results provide support for this theoretical claim. The president's approval rating, state of the economy, and legislative success all shape the propensity of presidents to deliver speeches in the manner described. As they attempt to achieve their goals—whether policy, reelection, or historical achievement—through speechmaking, presidents deliver more speeches in response to unfavorable political conditions if they have some potential for improving their fortunes by speaking more frequently. By examining a consistent set of presidential speeches with the month as the unit of analysis, moreover, these findings should increase the reliability and our theoretical understanding of presidential speechmaking.

Even so, the impact of some of the statistically significant variables is substantively weak. This, in itself, provides insight into the monthly speechmaking of presidents in two ways. First, the substantively modest coefficients suggest that presidents are only likely to substantially change their speechmaking in the face of *strongly* negative information. In other words, only when political conditions are particularly bad will we see a corresponding response by the president. Then again, there may be a compounding effect, where negative information accumulated over many months may contribute to a larger long-term change in presidential speechmaking. Second, presidents are not highly volatile in their behavior, but rather inertial regularities of presidential activities tend to drive the communications behavior in an institutionalized White House.

This article raises additional questions for future research. First, what is the precise role of political scandals in presidential speechmaking? The results in this article are not definitive but intuition tells us that presidents surely change strategies

when faced with a political calamity. Second, it makes sense that negative international events would increase the likelihood of a national address on the crisis. But why do presidents not also increase policy speeches in response to such crises? Third, the political context that affects recent presidents did not necessarily influence earlier presidents' decisions to deliver speeches in the same way, especially concerning the economy. Placing this into the context of Lau's theory of negative information, it remains unclear why presidents used to react more forcefully to a poor economy, but now seem to ignore economic effects on their decisions to deliver monthly speeches. Future research should delve more deeply into this question and ascertain why time has muted the tendency for presidents to give fewer speeches in the face of poor economic conditions. Indeed, it is only by exploring these and other considerations of the complexities of the American political and institutional environments that we may continue to refine and further understand the generalities of political phenomena.

NOTES

1. Only when Hager and Sullivan (1994, 1097) include an interaction between whether or not the president is "an outsider" and three distinct measures of the political context—divided government, percentage of independents in the electorate, and their technology measure—do the state of the economy and presidential approval ratings inversely affect the president's yearly political activities.
2. Although this hypothesis is consistent with Ragsdale's (1984) findings about national speeches, I remind the reader that research on non-national speeches—the focus of this article—does not demonstrate this.
3. A wide and varied range of research shows that presidents consider the costs and benefits of their many activities, from agenda setting to issuing executive orders. In dealing with Congress directly, presidents are likely to benefit more by "hitting the ground running" (Piffner 1988), and not overburdening Congress, but focusing its attention on a handful of key legislative priorities. Scholars concur that the best opportunity for presidential success in Congress is a strategically packaged agenda (Bond and Fleisher 1990), just as presidents anticipate the likely success or failure of their yearly policy agenda before they submit them to Congress. Senate ideology is also a driving factor in the president's decision to nominate an individual to the Supreme Court: particularly when the president is "constrained," the median senator's ideology influences who a president will nominate to the Supreme Court (Moraski and Shipan 1999). Despite evidence to the contrary (Krause and Cohen 1997), Deering and Maltzman (1999) demonstrate that presidents issue executive orders in the face of a Congress hostile to them, but only if Congress is unlikely to overturn them.
4. Although Neustadt (1990) originally held that presidents weigh the costs and benefits of their decisions, few articles explicitly argue that the president's speechmaking may be a reaction to the costs and benefits associated with the larger contextual environment. To her credit, Canes-Wrone (2001b) applies strategy to speechmaking in that presidents may only "go public" when the public's issue position is closer to their position than Congress' or the status quo.
5. This claim is not without previous support. Nixon biographers, Evans and Novak (1971), maintain that in the face of declining public support following the US invasion of Laos in 1971, President Nixon increased his speechmaking in response. His staff advised him to "give the American people the largest concentrated dose of the president on television and in interviews with journalists (Evans and Novak 1971, 388, as quoted in Kernell 1997, 105).
6. It is worth noting that the primary theoretical justification for presidents to eschew private bargaining in favor of public speechmaking to affect legislation was the weakened party environment in the 1970s and 1980s. There were more cross-pressured or perusable legislators at this time and party leaders had less influence over their rank and file. Thus, presidents expanded their arsenal of influence by "going public" (Kernell 1997). An alternative to this argument is that increased party unity and centralized congresses presented by theorists of conditional party government (Aldrich and Rhode 2000) should encourage presidents to shun speeches in the

face of legislative failure and, instead, engage in more private bargaining. Although a possibility, there is little evidence to suggest that presidents are going public less and bargaining more than they used to. One only has to consider that President George W. Bush, president during unified and united Republican Party rule, engaged in arguably the most extensive public relations campaign in the history of the office to build public and congressional support for his policies (Edwards 2007, 252). This is an alternative, nevertheless, that can be interpreted from the analysis. At the very least, time may condition this impact, limiting the relationship in the post-golden age of the presidency.

7. Data use to calculate these percentages are provided by Bond and Fleisher (1990): <http://www.fordham.edu/politicalsci/profs/fleisher/richfleisher.html>.
8. Some have suggested that because presidential speeches should increase a president's success rate in Congress, this measure might be endogenous. Lagging the variable one-month is a way to mitigate this problem.
9. The month allows for a systematic examination of at least the major scandals in recent presidencies. A year is insufficiently refined to assess the impact of scandal. By way of an example, a yearly analysis of the impact of Watergate on presidential speeches would dummy all of 1974, including five months of President Ford's tenure.
10. Determining the exact beginning and end of these scandals can be complicated. Watergate has a clear end, President Nixon's resignation in August 1974. I coded the beginning of Watergate as beginning in May, the day after Nixon asked for the resignations of H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Iran-Contra begins in November 1986, with Ed Meese's announcement and ends with the Oliver North trial in August 1987. Lewinsky begins in February 1998 and ends in January 1999 with the president's acquittal.
11. Discretionary events, such as presidential uses of force, are those initiated by the president.
12. Intercoder agreement is quite high ($\alpha = 0.99$) on 5 percent of the sample.
13. The available events time series data is also not available past 2000, limiting the time frame, as well.
14. Another way to model first-order autoregressive count data over time is with a Poisson distribution that accounts for this order of autocorrelation (Brandt and Williams 2001). Because their technique does not purge any of my models of autocorrelation, I choose to run these models with ARMA controls for autocorrelation.
15. Even though some ADF results are not statistically significant, recall Ender's (1995, 257) solution to the ADF's lack of statistical power: test first the presence of a unit root with a constant and trend. If the null is rejected, then one need not examine other specifications, but instead conclude that there is no unit root.
16. Some may be concerned that running the models with a non-stationary independent variable (misery index) in levels causes spurious results. I do not difference the variable, even though the ADFs fail to reject the null of a unit root in the misery index, for theoretical reasons and because modeling the misery index in levels does not produce a spurious regression. As Granger and Newbold (1974) illustrate, spurious regression is most likely when two non-stationary variables trend together. This is not the case with the misery index and monthly speeches because the monthly speeches series is stationary. Next, a bivariate model of misery index and monthly speeches does not produce a high r-square or a strongly significant relationship, as one would expect in a spurious regression (Granger and Newbold 1974). Once the error is purged of autocorrelation, as it is in each model, there is minimal concern that the relationship between the misery index and monthly speeches is spurious. Theoretically, levels make sense because a change in the misery index from 15.5 to 15 is the same as 5.5 to 5, even though presidents are more likely to change their behavior when the economy is poor (misery index of 15) than when it is relatively good (an index of 5). A differenced misery index is statistically insignificant, nevertheless, and has no impact on the other variables in the model.
17. The correlation between monthly approval and misery indexes is modest, at $r = -0.44$. So, there is the possibility that the statistically insignificant misery index is a product of its relationship with approval. Yet, dropping approval from the model still produces a statistically insignificant misery index; dropping the misery index still produces a statistically significant and negative approval coefficient.

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APPENDIX A

Examples of Policy Speeches

Selection of remarks on the Economic Program in Santa Monica, California, February 21, 1993. The president spoke at 1:25 p.m. at Santa Monica College.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wanted to come out to California, which was so good to me and to Al Gore, a State that did so much to give us a chance to serve and to try to turn our country around, to talk about the economic plan that I have presented to the Congress, the challenge that it presents to the country, and the help that all of us need from you to have any hope of its passage.

What I have challenged the Congress, Republicans as well as Democrats, to do, is to join me in this crusade for change. And I said I will set an example. We have to cut spending, raise taxes, and then increase investment, the things that will make people better able to live and grow this economy. We've got to do both: cut spending, raise taxes. And then we have to increase our investment in the things that will grow the economy.

I need your support for this program. The Members of Congress can only be expected to do what they think the people back home will stick by them in doing. We've got to cut spending. We've got to increase some taxes. We've got to invest some in America. We need an economic program that really recognizes that we live in a world where the capacity of our people and their ability to work together,

their ability to learn new things, their ability to have access to investment capital, and their ability to live together so that they draw strength from one another is the critical element in our future. We cannot continue to go on with the kind of paralysis and division and just ignoring our problems that has ripped us for too long.

Selection of remarks at a White House Meeting with the Deficit Reduction Coalition April 16, 1985; the president spoke at 4 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building.

Passage of this bill would be a decisive break with our spendthrift past, an achievement of comparable importance to the historic tax cuts of 1981. Instead of a budget for the special interests, we've proposed a budget for the public interest. It'll be introduced as an amendment to Senate Concurrent Resolution 32, but I just like to call it the taxpayers' protection plan.

We couldn't have gotten this far without your help. And as I've said before, if we can't make Congress see the light, we'll make them feel the heat.

Well, I'd like to take a minute and ask your support on another issue today, an issue that I believe touches on the very heart and soul of what it means to be an American. In a few days, Congress will vote on whether or not to support our proposal to help put Nicaragua on a path toward peace and democracy. Recently I proposed a plan for peace and democracy in Nicaragua, an immediate cease-fire to be followed by church-mediated negotiations leading to free and honest elections and Congress supporting this peace initiative with humanitarian aid.

Examples of Non-Policy Speeches

Selection of Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the Disabled American Veterans National Service and Legislative Headquarters March 3, 1976.

I am extremely proud to be here with you today and to particularly participate in the dedication ceremonies of the National Service Headquarters of the DAV. It is a most impressive building in an excellent site, and I commend and congratulate the DAV for seeing this brick and mortar come to life with the activities that are going on here today and the activities that will be continuing for a good many years to come.

Selection of Remarks at the Opening Ceremonies of the 2000 President's Cup in Lake Manassas, VA, October 18, 2000. The president spoke at 4:58 p.m. at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Club.

Now, as the honorary chairman, my first order of business is to declare this tournament officially open. Secondly, I have been informed—much against my better instincts—to declare this a no-mulligans zone. [Laughter] Now, I would like to invite the two captains up here to join me for a presentation and before the Cup.

Selection of Remarks at a Bush-Quayle Fund-raising Luncheon in Tampa, Florida, March 4, 1992. The president spoke at 1:30 p.m. at the Omni Westshore Hotel.

We've got a lot to do in these next few months because really we've got a lot to do in the next few years. And I am convinced that together, and I am so grateful for your support, that we can finish what we've started and move this country forward. And to do that, I need your support. Help me win the Presidency for 4 more years. And I ask for your support for the simplest of reasons: I think we believe in the same things, in the same values, the same important things. We know that taxes are too high because our Government is too big and it spends too much.

APPENDIX B

Augmented Dickey-Fuller Tests			
	No Constant or Trend	Constant Only	Constant with Trend
All Policy Speeches	-1.90 (6)	-10.35 (0)	-11.65 (1)
U.S. Policy Speeches	-4.27 (4)	-10.32 (0)	-10.90 (0)
Misery Index	-0.59 (2)	-1.48 (2)	-2.37 (2)
Presidential Approval	-0.83 (0)	-4.64 (0)	-4.89 (0)

Note: The null hypothesis for the Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root test is that the series are integrated. Critical Values (at $p = .05$) for the ADF test are: No Constant or Trend, -1.94; Constant Only, -2.87; Constant with Trend, -3.43. Analysis conducted in Eviews 6. Lag of Minimum Swartz Information Criterion (SIC) in parentheses.

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