

# Presidential Cues and the Nationalization of Congressional Rhetoric, 1973-2016

Benjamin S. Noble\*

December 10, 2022

## Abstract

Presidents occupy a unique role as both the head of the executive branch and a de-facto party leader. They nationalize politics and polarize lawmaking. Yet members of Congress do more than respond to presidential leadership—they leverage the president’s symbolic power to heighten political conflict. I argue that lawmakers, particularly those in the non-presidential party, invoke the president to nationalize legislative debate and polarize constituent opinion. Using the text of all House and Senate floor speeches between 1973-2016 and a within-member panel design, I find that legislators reference the president more frequently in the out-party, and increasingly so as their constituencies become more out-partisan. I support the behavioral implications with a vignette experiment: when a Republican Senator invokes President Biden in a policy speech, Republican respondents increase approval of that Senator and oppose political compromise. This research highlights the institutional consequences of nationalization and negative partisanship.

---

\*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, Washington University in St. Louis, Campus Box 1063, One Brookings Drive, St. Louis MO 63130. [benjamin noble.org](http://benjamin noble.org). [bsnoble@wustl.edu](mailto:bsnoble@wustl.edu).

On March 31, 2021, President Biden released details about what would ultimately become the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. In the weeks that followed, an Oklahoma-based polling firm fielded a survey about the proposal. The firm told half of the sample about a provision that would expand Amtrak service in the state, and they found that 71 percent were in favor (McFerron 2021; Rakich 2021). The firm told the other half of the sample about the same Amtrak plan “unveiled by President Biden.” Support fell 14 points. On their own, these results illustrate how nationalization and negative partisanship can powerfully shape public opinion. However, these presidency-focused frames are not just the creation of survey firms—they are emblematic of the way lawmakers discuss policy on the floor of Congress. For example, Representative French Hill (R-AK) attacked the infrastructure plan, saying “Democrats have turned to a partisan, top-down, rampant spending style of governing with *President Biden’s infrastructure vision* as the latest example” (Congressional Record, April 21, 2021, H2034; emphasis added). Representative Scott Franklin (R-FL) similarly argued that the bill was “a socialist wish list. Less than 8 percent of *President Biden’s infrastructure plan* goes to roads, bridges, waterways, ports, and airports” (Congressional Record, April 22, 2021, H2091; emphasis added). As the head of the executive branch and a de-facto party leader (Jacobson 2019; Levinson and Pildes 2006; Lee 2009), the president is an engine of nationalization (Hopkins 2018; Schattschneider 1960) and legislative conflict (Cohen 2019; Lee 2009). However, these anecdotes suggest that lawmakers leverage the president’s symbolic role to heighten political conflict.

Members of Congress seek attention for themselves, their parties, and their priorities. Capturing that attention, however, is challenging. Most Americans pay little attention to politics or political actors (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Zaller 1992), with one important exception: the president, who is universally known and constantly covered (e.g., Edwards 2003). As politics have nationalized and polarized (Hopkins 2018; Pierson and Schickler 2020; Schattschneider 1960), the president has become a heuristic through which voters understand the two parties and their representatives’ behavior (e.g., Gronke, Koch and

Wilson 2003; Jacobson 2019; Popkin 1991). When the president is successful, their party benefits at the expense of the other (Lebo and O'Geen 2011), which "persuades members to rally around the initiatives of their own party's president, and, as a mirror image, the other party to resist initiatives championed by an opposing party's president" (Lee 2009, 3). Scholars of this inter-branch dynamic typically focus on presidential leadership as the cause of this conflict: presidents advance their agendas, symmetrically polarizing legislative behavior (Beckmann 2010; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Cohen 2019; Lebo and O'Geen 2011; Lee 2009). Opposition lawmakers try to damage the president through investigations (Kriner and Schickler 2016) and veto brinkmanship (Groseclose and McCarty 2001), but these tactics rely on institutional power. At the same time, scholars of congressional communication focus on lawmakers' decisions to discuss national policy versus local issues (Grimmer 2013*b*; Rogowski and Stone 2020) or engage in divisive and polarizing rhetoric, broadly defined (Ash, Morelli and Van Weelden 2017; Ballard et al. 2021; Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy 2019; Lee 2016; Russell 2018, 2020; Wang and Tucker 2020, but see Fu and Howell 2020; Green 2015; Groeling 2010). Even as congressional communications become increasingly important (Lee 2016), we know less about why lawmakers talk about the president, and who is most likely to do so. Answering these questions helps us understand how nationalization and negative partisanship manifest within Congress as well as the consequences for inter-branch policy-making.

I argue that members of Congress explicitly reference the president to nationalize policy debate, polarizing constituent opinion to advance their electoral and policy goals. By nationalizing debate, lawmakers can attract attention to the issues they care about and expand the scope of conflict (Schattschneider 1960). The president is a potent, partisan symbol (Jacobson 2019) and source cue (Mondak 1993) who "focuses the eyes and draws out the attachments of people" (Skowronek 1998, 20). In particular, the presidency is "the principal instrument for the nationalization of politics" (Schattschneider 1960, 14) and references to presidents (and presidential candidates) "cue a set of meaningful associations

with the national parties, the social groups that support them, and the positions they take” (Hopkins 2018, 2). By associating the president with policy, lawmakers escalate conflict to the highest level and potentially draw in otherwise inattentive constituents who hold strong, polarized opinions about the president (Donovan et al. 2019; Jones 2020). However, in an era defined by negative partisanship, attention facilitates opposition. Americans are increasingly motivated and mobilized by out-group animus (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018), and references to party leaders asymmetrically polarize opinion among the other party’s partisans (Nicholson 2012). Taken together, theories of nationalization and negative partisanship imply that out-partisans, but not in-partisans, can benefit by invoking the president in policy debate. As such, I hypothesize that lawmakers increasingly invoke the president when in the out-party, and especially so as their constituency becomes more out-partisan. Behaviorally, out-party references to the president should lead voters to associate that issue with the president and oppose compromise. By cueing strong partisan considerations (Rogowski and Stone 2020), this nationalized position-taking should cause out-partisans to increase their support for the lawmaker.

I test these hypotheses in two parts. First, I turn to a corpus of over 1.5 million floor speeches given by 2,100 members of the House and Senate between 1973 and 2016 (Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy 2018). The floor is a venue for salient policy debates where lawmakers take positions to shape and reflect constituents’ views. After merging this data with a series of key variables, I measure the frequency with which lawmakers invoke the sitting president in each two-year Congress. Leveraging the panel structure of the data, I show that lawmakers reference the president more when in the out-party—and increasingly so when their constituency becomes more homogeneously out-partisan. Second, I present results from two waves of a survey experiment testing the behavioral implications of my argument. Respondents are randomly assigned to read a short, hypothetical floor speech given by a Republican or Democratic Senator about one of four policies.

Within each party-issue combination, speeches differ only in whether the Senator references President Biden's ownership of the bill. Consistent with my hypotheses, when the Republican Senator invokes President Biden, Republican respondents increase approval of that Senator and decrease support for political compromise. The same cannot be said for Democratic Senators and Democratic respondents (see also Nicholson 2012). Together, these findings show that out-partisans asymmetrically invoke the president on the floor of Congress and, in so doing, polarize constituent opinion.

This research contributes to debates about the separation of powers and blame game politics (Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Kriner and Reeves 2014; Kriner and Schickler 2016; Lee 2009; Levinson and Pildes 2006; Noble 2021) as well as congressional messaging (Ballard et al. 2021; Green 2015; Groeling 2010; Lee 2016; Russell 2018, 2020), highlighting the president's role as a nationalizing cue in congressional rhetoric. Even if parties are mirror images in voting on the president's agenda (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Lee 2009), patterns of rhetorical support and opposition are starkly asymmetric. These results are important for our understanding of how legislators respond to, and reflect, conditions of nationalization and negative partisanship. This article also has implications for the study of legislator self-presentation (Bernhard and Sulkin 2018; Fenno 1978; Grimmer 2013*b*; Kaslovsky 2022) and the nationalization of politics (Hopkins 2018). While these references advantage out-partisans, normatively, they exacerbate conflict and narrow the scope for compromise. Ultimately, I suggest that some of what we categorize as nationalization reflects a preoccupation with the *president*—not simply differences in the salience of national and local issues.

## **Why Out-Partisans Talk About the President**

The president (Light 1999) and members of Congress (Mayhew 1974) are motivated by electoral and policy goals. Electoral success depends, to some extent, on policy success

(e.g., Arnold 1990) and while Congress makes laws, the president is held accountable for policy and political outcomes (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson 2002; Kriner and Reeves 2015; Noble, Reeves and Webster 2022). Americans know little about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997) and interpret governmental action through the most salient political leaders (McGraw and Dolan 2007). As a consequence, the public holds exaggerated opinions of the president's power (Clifford et al. N.d.) and Americans use the president as a heuristic when thinking about politics and political outcomes (Popkin 1991). Affective and ideological perceptions of the president trickle down to his party (Jacobson 2019) and perceptions of lawmakers' support for, or opposition to, the president bear on congressional election outcomes (Gronke, Koch and Wilson 2003). Presidents who successfully pass policy electorally advantage their party (Lebo and O'Geen 2011), incentivizing lawmakers to polarize over the president's agenda (Lee 2009). The president must be careful taking public positions on bills, because "What the president gains by influencing co-partisans to vote on his side he loses as opposition members vote in dissent (Cohen 2019, 97). Given the zero-sum nature of political competition, in-partisans want to help the president succeed, which creates credit-claiming opportunities for the whole party. By contrast, out-partisans must be careful about lending support to the president. Passing those policies signals that "the president is a wise and prudent leader. That would only strengthen him and his party for the next election" (Sundquist 1988, 630).

More than withhold legislative support, out-partisans go on the attack: launching investigations of the president's administration (Kriner and Schickler 2016), drawing vetoes (Groseclose and McCarty 2001), and criticizing the president's actions (Christenson and Kriner 2017; Groeling 2010). These messaging tactics, which magnify differences between the parties, are becoming increasingly important in a polarized and competitive congressional environment (Lee 2016). However, the existing literature on polarized congressional communication paints a mixed picture. Theories about who goes on the attack and when include: Republican asymmetry, electoral incentives, ideological extremism, minor-

ity status, and presidential out-party status (Ash, Morelli and Van Weelden 2017; Ballard et al. 2021; Groeling 2010; Green 2015; Russell 2018, 2020; Wang and Tucker 2020).<sup>1</sup> However, the definition of polarizing rhetoric is often broad, with a focus on communication that creates in-group/out-group distinctions or references party labels and party leaders (but see Green 2015).

However, there are reasons to suspect that patterns of partisan communication differ when considering explicit references to the president. In particular, Green (2015) identifies a pattern in a sample of one-minute speeches where out-partisans more frequently reference the president and presidential candidates—but it is not clear why. I argue that out-partisans do so broadly to take advantage of negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2016) and nationalize the policy-making process. Presidential involvement polarizes voting (Cohen 2019; Lee 2009), so lawmakers may want to ensure constituents are aware of the president’s position. By referencing the president, they can raise awareness of presidential involvement—a tactic, I argue, that helps the out-party, but not the in-party. Voters are more supportive of “bipartisan” policy (Westwood 2021) and may instinctively oppose the president’s agenda given the growing correlation between party and presidential performance evaluations (Donovan et al. 2019; Jones 2020). Further, behavioral research highlights the asymmetric power of out-party polarization relative to in-party persuasion (Goren, Federico and Kittilson 2009). People tend to view in-groups as holding a diverse set of views whereas out-groups are homogeneous. Thus, learning information about one’s own in-group (with which one may agree or disagree) is not so informative. By contrast, information about an out-group (for example, the president’s support for a policy or political candidate) may lead someone to use that information as a negative voting cue (see e.g., Arceneaux and Kolodny 2009). These polarizing effects are driven by references to leaders in particular, rather than parties in the abstract

---

<sup>1</sup>Although many of these theories are tested using Twitter data (but see Ash, Morelli and Van Weelden 2017; Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy 2019), Russell and Wen (2021) find that senators’ policy expressions on Twitter are correlated with legislative activity. Presumably, these relationships extend to theories of partisan communication on the floor as well.

(Nicholson 2012), which leads me to suspect that the literature conceptualizing polarizing rhetoric broadly cannot capture this asymmetric dynamic. Further, the literature on negative partisanship emphasizes the mobilizing power of out-party animus relative to in-party amity since the 1980s (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018, but see Costa 2020). Even if presidential co-partisans might alter their communication strategies to promote positivity (Ballard et al. 2021; Wang and Tucker 2020), they should be less likely to explicitly reference the president.

**Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis:** A lawmaker will invoke the president more often when in the presidential out-party.

Even if between-party differences play a key role in explaining partisans' rhetorical strategies vis-à-vis the president, intra-party differences likely exist as well. Individual lawmakers have incentives to appeal to their distinct constituencies to shape opinion (e.g., Lenz 2012), respond to existing opinion (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963), or satisfy demands for a certain type of representational style (Grimmer 2013*b*; Fenno 1978; Rogowski and Stone 2020). Lawmakers may be able to prime constituents to evaluate them in terms of their support for, or opposition to, the president. For example, Hopkins and Noel (2022) find that lawmakers who were more supportive of President Trump were seen as more conservative, despite more moderate voting records than other less supportive lawmakers. Legislators who represent homogeneously partisan constituencies should be more eager to take advantage of this strategy given the increasing correlation between partisanship, presidential approval (Donovan et al. 2019), and voting behavior in congressional elections (Jacobson 2015). By contrast, in more heterogeneous constituencies, lawmakers may avoid presidential references at risk of appearing "out of step" (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002; Carson et al. 2010; Grimmer 2013*b*).

**Constituency Partisanship Hypothesis:** As a constituency becomes more out-partisan, out-party lawmakers will increasingly reference the president.



## Finding Presidential References in Floor Speeches

To test my hypotheses, I use evidence from floor speeches given in the House and Senate between 1973 and 2016. Members speak on the floor to take positions on salient policy issues (Mayhew 1974), pursue legislative goals (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996), connect with constituents (Hill and Hurley 2002; Pitkin 1967), and gain visibility (Bernhard and Sulkin 2018; Proksch and Slapin 2012). These decisions are strategically motivated, requiring members to spend scarce resources and put themselves on the record (Hall 1998; Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Sellers 2009; Witko et al. 2021). These speeches offer a direct and individualized measure of what lawmakers prioritize (Witko et al. 2021). Although congressional leadership solicits participation in messaging themes, “parties are less interested in who delivers their messages than in what members are saying” (Rocca 2007, 500). Individuals own goals and preferences play a key role in whether they participate (Harris 2005), which should alleviate some concern about the degree to which members accede to party pressure when invoking the president.

Although few constituents actively watch C-SPAN to hear what their representatives are saying, the media cover floor speeches (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996). In general, the media prizes conflict and over-represents criticism of the president in its coverage (Groeling 2010). Ultimately, out-party criticism of the president is likely to garner coverage beyond the chamber. Further, lawmakers promote their floor speeches on their websites, in social media, and through press releases. For example, on January 24, 2017—just four days after President Trump took office—Senator Shaheen posted a press release on her website linking to a floor speech in which she “Calls out President Trump” (Shaheen 2017). The content of floor speeches is also highly correlated with what lawmakers discuss in other communication modes, like press releases (Grimmer 2013*b*). For these reasons, floor speeches provide an ideal venue to investigate the ways in which lawmakers invoke the president.

The data for my analysis come from the Congressional Record as digitized by Gentzkow,

Shapiro and Taddy (2018). My time series includes the text of floor speeches delivered orally by members of the House and Senate between January 3, 1973 (the start of the 93rd Congress) and September 9, 2016 (the end of the original data).<sup>2</sup> Per my theory, out-partisans reference the president as a salient cue, and as such, I focus on lawmakers' direct and explicit references to the president. To construct my dependent variable, I search each speech for direct references to the president by last name (e.g., "Bush" or "Obama")<sup>3</sup> or the use of the bigram "the president."<sup>4</sup> If a speech includes either of these search terms, it is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. This definition of presidential references is conservative given that lawmakers may reference the president multiple times in a single speech.

In the analysis that follows, I specify the dependent variable as the number of president-referencing speeches member  $i$  gives in Congress  $t$ . Aggregating to the Congress level allows me to better capture the quantity of interest—the overall focus on the president in a member's speaking profile, which may vary at lower levels of aggregation given the availability of floor time as well as the legislative and electoral calendars. I drop all non-substantive speeches—approximated here by removing those with fewer than 30 words.<sup>5</sup> In my empirical models, I use this count as my dependent variable controlling for the total number of speeches a lawmaker gives in each two-year Congress. However, in this section, I describe the data in terms of the percentage of speeches that reference the pres-

---

<sup>2</sup>Although members may amend their remarks after the fact in the "extension of remarks," I include only the text of speeches given in person on the floor to focus on lawmakers' theoretically observed actions.

<sup>3</sup>This choice of keywords will capture references to a president's signature policy, such as the Bush Tax Cuts or Obamacare. These policy nicknames are of theoretical relevance as they are used by lawmakers to shape public opinion about policy (see also Hopkins 2018).

<sup>4</sup>Before searching, I remove addresses to the Senate's presiding officer (i.e., "Mister/Mr. President" or "Madam(e) President") at the beginning of each speech as well as references to the President of the Senate or the President Pro Tempore. The bigram search will capture other forms of "the president" such as "the president's" as well as potential false positives (e.g., the President of General Motors). To account for this possibility, in the supplemental appendix, I re-run my analyses using only references to the sitting president's last name and substantively replicate my results.

<sup>5</sup>Upon manual inspection, I confirm that speeches with fewer than 30 words are generally procedural—members yielding time, thanking the previous speaker, asking for unanimous consent, etc. Of 100 manually coded speeches with fewer than 30 words, 92 were non-substantive. In the supplemental appendix, I plot the distribution of speeches by log word count and show that the distribution is bimodal. The 30-word cut point roughly separates these two modes.

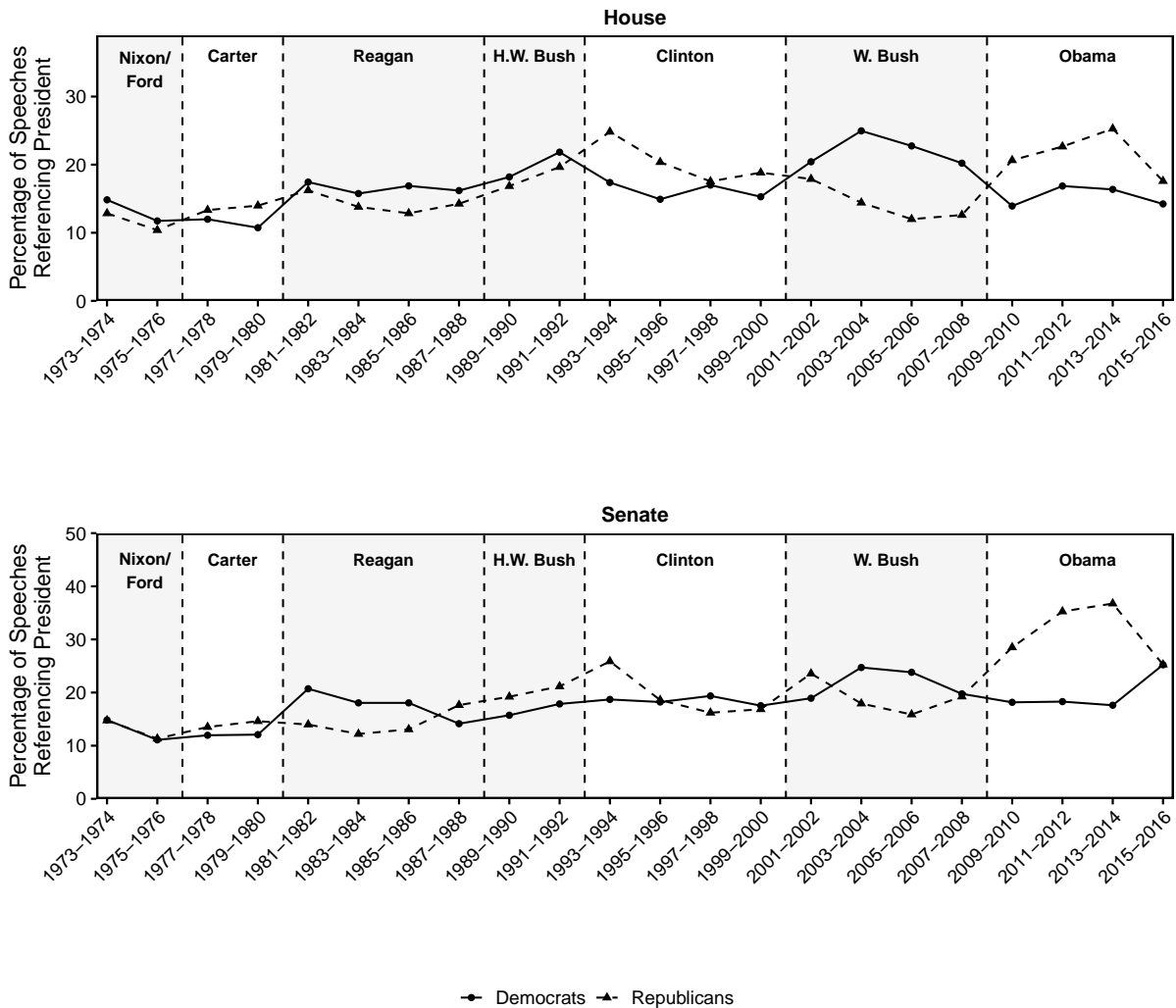


Figure 1: Out-partisans typically reference the president more often than in-partisans, consistent with the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis. For every two-year Congress, I calculate the percentage of all floor speeches that reference the president for each chamber-party. This pattern is more consistent in the House than in the Senate.

ident. This choice facilitates interpretation as the raw count of such speeches (without accounting for the underlying total) can be misleading.

In Figure 1, I visually summarize patterns of presidential references by party and chamber. Time, in terms of two-year Congresses, is on the  $x$ -axis. On the  $y$ -axis, I plot the total percentage of speeches that reference the president in each Congress, separated by party. I also include vertical dashed lines preceding each Congress in which a new

president takes office. Consistent with the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis, House out-partisans reference the president in a greater share of speeches than presidential co-partisans in every two-year Congress in the time-series. The pattern is less consistent in the Senate, but the differences are especially large during the Obama presidency.

Figure 1, while helpful for visualizing over-time variation, masks a large degree of variation at the individual level. In Table 1, I list the 20 members of the 113th (2013-2014) House and Senate with the largest and smallest percentage of speeches that reference President Obama, a Democrat. Again, consistent with the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis, 18 of the 20 top referencing members are Republicans. Many of these lawmakers, such as Jim Jordan, Mo Brooks, and Ted Cruz have national profiles and are conventionally considered strong partisans. Meanwhile, the majority of the least frequent referencers are Democrats—many of whom have more moderate reputations or are not well known.

## Measuring Party and Constituency Partisanship

Figure 1 and Table 1 provide suggestive support for the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis: that a lawmaker will invoke the president more often when in the out-party. To test this hypothesis more formally, I construct a binary indicator of whether a lawmaker is a presidential out-partisan in each two-year Congress. The variable *Out-Party* takes on a value of 1 when a member is a presidential out-partisan and 0 otherwise.<sup>6</sup>

To test the Constituency Partisanship Hypothesis, that out-partisans will increasingly reference the president when their constituency is more homogeneously out-partisan, I leverage the president's two-party vote share in the constituency in the previous presidential election. To facilitate interpretation in the interaction models to come, I construct *Past Pres. Vote Margin* by subtracting 50 from the president's previous vote share in the district (from Jacobson 2015) or state (from Amlani and Algara 2021). The president's

---

<sup>6</sup>I exclude all independents from the analysis. Party switchers are given a single party code within each Congress as assigned by Volden and Wiseman (2014).

Table 1: Members of the 113th (2013-2014) House and Senate with the highest and lowest percentage of speeches referencing Obama.

Name	House				Senate			
	Party	Number	Total	Percent	Party	Number	Total	Percent
		Pres. References	Speeches	Pres. References		Pres. References	Speeches	Pres. References
Joe Wilson	R	100	134	74.6	R	64	98	65.3
Tim Griffin	R	31	44	70.5	R	8	13	61.5
Tom Rice	R	20	29	69.0	R	130	217	59.9
Andy Harris	R	31	50	62.0	R	60	103	58.3
Mo Brooks	R	32	52	61.5	R	116	217	53.5
Jim Jordan	R	6	10	60.0	R	122	238	51.3
Roger Williams	R	31	52	59.6	D	1	2	50.0
Luis Guterrez	D	26	44	59.1	R	200	408	49.0
Jim Bridenstine	R	21	36	58.3	R	206	448	46.0
Louie Gohmert	R	135	232	58.2	R	18	40	45.0
:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Mark Amodei	R	0	16	0.0	D	4	51	7.8
Alma Adams	D	0	4	0.0	D	22	281	7.8
Bruce Braley	D	0	9	0.0	D	9	117	7.7
Vern Buchanan	R	0	6	0.0	R	8	119	6.7
David Brat	R	0	1	0.0	D	2	31	6.5
Paul Cook	R	0	6	0.0	D	8	131	6.1
Katherine Clark	D	0	13	0.0	D	4	76	5.3
Curtis Clawson	R	0	7	0.0	D	11	211	5.2
Suzan Delbene	D	0	26	0.0	R	1	34	2.9
Tammy Duckworth	D	0	36	0.0	D	0	11	0.0

previous vote margin carries forward into midterm Congresses.

In addition, I account for several institutional and individual-level covariates that could be correlated with a member's party and propensity to reference the president. These variables include whether a lawmaker is a *Majority Party Member* and/or holds a *Leadership Position* as defined by Volden and Wiseman (2014). I also control for a *Member's Past Vote Share, Seniority*—the number of congresses a lawmaker has served—(both from Volden and Wiseman 2014) and for Senators, whether they are *In-Cycle*, that is, up for reelection at the end of a Congress. I also control for the *Total Speeches* a lawmaker gives in a two-year Congress. I include member fixed effects in all models to account for other possible confounders such as a legislator's ideology, race, sex, or innate preferences to reference the president.

### **Identification Strategy: Member Fixed Effects**

The data is structured as a time-series, cross-sectional panel, which allows for the estimation of within-member change over time as a lawmaker moves from the presidential in-party to the out-party and as constituency-level partisanship changes, holding members fixed. To isolate within-member change and account for the count dependent variable, I estimate negative binomial fixed-effects models. I cluster standard errors at the member level to account for correlation within member-observations. As the House and Senate vary along a number of dimensions, including both the size of the body and speaking rules, I estimate two separate models for each chamber—one with no interactions to test the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis and one with an interaction between *Out-Party* and *Past Pres. Vote Margin* to test the Constituency Partisanship Hypothesis. This interaction term should be negative as lawmakers should reference the president less as *Past Pres. Vote Margin* increases (and vice-versa). The coefficients produced by the model should be interpreted as average within-member changes associated with each covariate on a member's decision to deliver speeches that reference the president within a two-year

Table 2: Lawmakers increasingly reference the president when in the out-party and when representing more out-partisan constituencies.

	House		Senate	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Out-Party	0.267*** (0.020)	0.315*** (0.024)	0.124*** (0.023)	0.167*** (0.037)
Past Pres. Vote Margin	-0.001 (0.001)	0.006** (0.002)	-0.003+ (0.001)	0.003 (0.004)
Out-Party × Past Pres. Vote Margin		-0.012*** (0.003)		-0.010+ (0.006)
Member's Past Vote Share	0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Majority Party Member	-0.049* (0.020)	-0.035+ (0.021)	-0.078** (0.025)	-0.076** (0.025)
Leadership Position	0.079+ (0.044)	0.076+ (0.044)	0.161* (0.063)	0.163** (0.063)
Seniority	0.008* (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	0.004 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)
In Cycle (Senate)			-0.049** (0.017)	-0.048** (0.017)
Total Speeches	0.005*** (0.000)	0.005*** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)
Num. FEs.	1,838	1,838	359	359
Num. Obs.	9,326	9,326	2,177	2,177
R2 Adj.	0.155	0.155	0.124	0.124
R2 Within Adj.	0.124	0.125	0.088	0.088

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

*Note:* Coefficients are from a negative binomial model with fixed effects for lawmakers. The dependent variable is the number of speeches in which a lawmaker references the president in a two-year Congress. Standard errors are clustered at the lawmaker level.

Congress.

## Out-Partisans Reference the President More than In-Partisans

In Table 2, I present results from four models testing the two primary hypotheses in the House and Senate. First, I turn to the unconditional models reported in columns 1 and 3

in which I find support for the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis. In the House (column 1), the coefficient on *Out-Party* is 0.267, or approximately a 30% increase in references to the president in a two-year Congress. In the Senate, the coefficient is more modest, 0.124, or a 13% increase. Both of these differences are positive, statistically significant, and consistent with the Out-Party Asymmetry Hypothesis.

In columns 2 and 4, I present evidence in favor of the Constituency Partisanship Hypothesis—the expectation that out-partisans will reference the president more often when representing more out-partisan constituencies (or less as the president’s past vote share in the constituency increases). When the president’s vote margin is 0 (that is, he received 50% of the vote in the previous election) in a House district or state, out-party lawmakers in both the House and Senate reference the president more often than in-partisans. However, the interaction term between out-party status and constituency partisanship is negative, indicating that out-partisans are responsive to increasing constituency support for the president. In the House, this difference is statistically significant, while in the Senate, it is not statistically significant at conventional levels. Interestingly, the un-interacted *Past Pres. Vote Margin* coefficient is positive and statistically significant in the House, indicating that in-partisans also increase presidential references when their constituencies become more co-partisan. However, this pattern does not hold in the Senate.

Given the difficulty of interpreting negative binomial coefficients and interaction terms, I plot the marginal effects of out-party status for the range of constituency partisanship in Figure 2. In the right panel, I plot the president’s previous vote margin in House districts on the *x*-axis. On the *y*-axis, I plot the average change in the number of speeches referencing the president when a lawmaker changes from presidential co-partisan to presidential out-partisan. The slope is negative, indicating that as presidential vote margin increases, out-partisans and in-partisans become more similar in their referencing behavior. However, the predictions themselves are positive and statistically significant until the district’s past presidential vote margin is about +15. This plot indicates that lawmakers reference



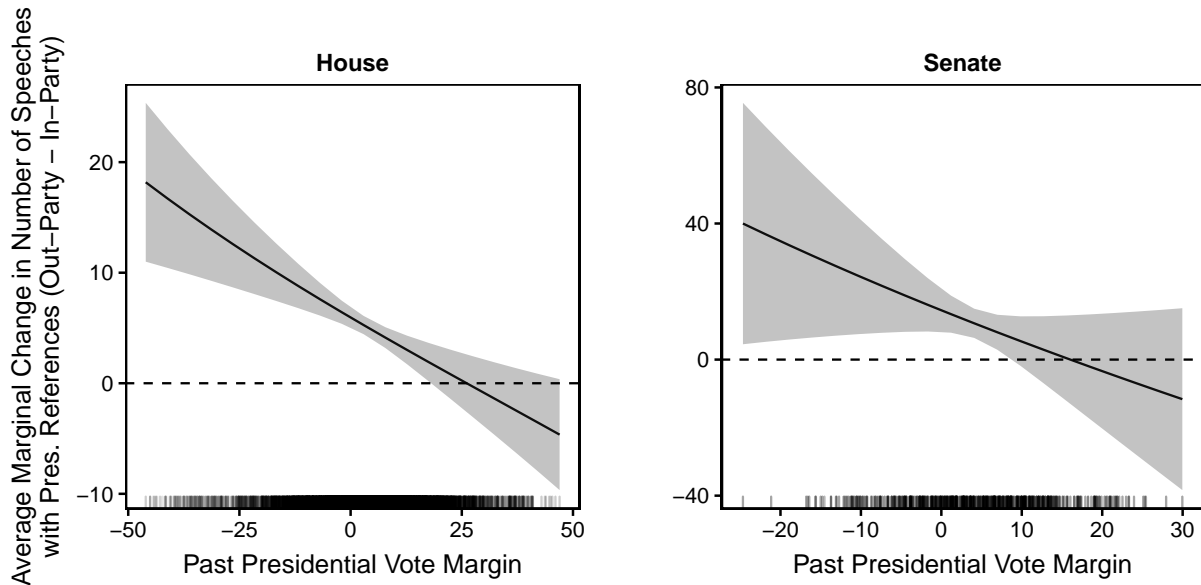


Figure 2: The marginal effect of becoming a presidential out-partisan on the number of president-referencing speeches given at varying levels of constituency support for the president (in terms of the president’s past vote margin). In both the House and the Senate, the effect of being an out-partisan is positive when constituency support for the president is negative or slightly positive. Differences between parties decrease when the president’s past vote margin increases. At higher values of presidential vote margin, the differences between the two groups are not statistically distinguishable from one another. The rug illustrates the observed levels of presidential vote margin.

the president more often when in the out-party, although decreasingly so as the president’s margin increases. In the right panel, I depict the same relationship for the Senate, which is similar.

These results support the two primary hypotheses. Lawmakers reference the president more often when in the out-party, however, the rate at which they do is related to constituency partisanship. Overall, the change in the number of speeches given by House members is substantively meaningful—an increase of roughly 30% of total speeches depending on the model specification. For the Senate, these changes are more modest but still large, representing a 13% increase depending on the model. In both chambers, these coefficients are as large or larger in absolute magnitude than the coefficients on being

in the majority party, which should serve as a good comparison given its importance in driving other out-party behavior with respect to the president, such as initiating oversight hearings (e.g., Kriner and Schickler 2016). Further, a focus on the average within-member change may mask a larger collective impact of such speeches. At the level of collective representation (Grimmer 2013a; Weissberg 1978), voters may see the floor as place consumed by presidential politics. If voters see Congress as a venue for partisan fights rather than bipartisan policies that can solve national challenges, gridlock and negative partisanship should only increase. Worryingly, as fewer cross-pressured members return to Congress with each election, those speaking on the floor represent increasingly homogeneous constituencies (Jacobson 2015) and have incentives to increase—not decrease—presidential references.

## **Presidential References Polarize Out-Party Constituents**

So far, I have provided evidence that lawmakers reference the president more often when in the out-party. It is not clear, though, how constituents react to lawmakers who reference the president frequently in their communications. Given existing evidence about the polarizing power of out-party references, especially out-party leader cues (Nicholson 2012), I expect presidential references to have an asymmetric effect on public opinion. When an out-party senator references the president, I expect that out-party constituents will increase their support for the senator and be more likely to oppose political compromise. As affective polarization is driven by out-party animus rather than in-party favoritism (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018), I do *not* expect comparable effects among presidential in-partisans when receiving a presidential cue from an in-party lawmaker.

## Experimental Design

To test these hypotheses, I conducted two waves of a survey experiment using a Lucid convenience sample in the summer of 2021.<sup>7</sup> In total, these surveys were administered to 2,271 individuals, however, only 1,296 passed the pre-treatment attention check and were included in the analysis. In the supplemental appendix, I present balance statistics for this sample and present models where I control for several observable covariates. The respondents first answered basic demographic questions as well as a series of unrelated questions about politics. When they reached the experiment, they were asked to read a short excerpt from a hypothetical Senate floor speech about one of four issues: infrastructure, veterans' benefits, prescription drug pricing, or immigration. These issues differed in terms of salience and level of partisan polarization, ensuring that the results are robust to the choice of policy. To increase the external validity of the experiment, each speech was modeled after a real Senate floor speech about each policy. In addition to randomizing the issue, respondents were randomized into one of four experimental conditions based on the Senator's party vis-à-vis the president (in-party, out-party) and whether they explicitly referenced the president in their speech. As President Biden, a Democrat, was in office in 2021, the in-party senator is a Democrat and the out-party Senator is a Republican. Out-partisans always oppose the policy in question while in-partisans always support the policy. This choice allows me to recover the effect of the presidential reference holding the within-party policy position fixed and keeping positions realistic. I present these four conditions visually in Table 3.

In the *In-Party Reference* condition, respondents read: "Suppose a Democratic senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about infrastructure." Other wave 1 issues included veterans' benefits and immigration. In wave 2 respondents were asked about infrastructure and drug pricing.<sup>8</sup> Then, respondents saw the hypothetical

---

<sup>7</sup>All studies involving human subjects were approved by the university's institutional review board.

<sup>8</sup>The wording varied marginally for prescription drug pricing. It read "Suppose a Democratic senator from a state like yours gives the following speech in Congress about prescription drug prices."

Table 3: Experimental conditions vary by the party of the Senator and whether the speech references the president.

Relationship to President	References President	
	Yes	No
In-Party Senator (D)	In-Party Reference: Supports bill	In-Party No Reference: Supports bill
Out-Party Senator (R)	Out-Party Reference: Opposes bill	Out-Party No Reference: Opposes bill

floor speech about that policy. For example, in the infrastructure condition, the Democratic senator says: “Today, I rise to voice my support for President Biden’s infrastructure bill.” He briefly justifies his support for the bill and then concludes by saying, “President Biden’s bill will make us competitive for business—in my state, across the nation, and around the world. For that reason, I support President Biden’s proposal.” The *In-Party No Reference* condition is almost identical except that references to the president are replaced with support for “this” bill. The *Out-Party Reference* and *Out-Party No Reference* conditions are qualitatively similar except the Republican senator is opposed to the bill in question. The full vignette wording across all four infrastructure conditions is presented in Table 4. The language used in the other three policy speeches is presented in the supplemental appendix.

Before assignment to treatment, I ask respondents the standard ANES two-part party identification question. First, respondents indicate whether they identify as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or Other. Those answering Republican or Democrat further specify if they identify as a strong or not very strong partisan whereas those answering Independent or Other are asked if they lean toward one party. I collapse all partisans (including leaners) into their respective parties and true independents into their own group. In the analysis, I compare in-partisans (Democrats) to out-partisans (Republicans) controlling for independents.

After reading their assigned speech, I asked respondents: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way this Senator is handling his job?” Respondents answered on a four-point

Table 4: Experimental vignette wording and differences across all four infrastructure conditions.

Treatment	Speech
In-Party Reference	Suppose a <i>Democratic</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about infrastructure: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my support for <b>President Biden’s</b></i> infrastructure bill. What we choose to invest now is not only for today, but for tomorrow. We need to enact a long-term program to make sure our roads, bridges, railroads and airports are modernized. <b>President Biden’s</b> bill will make us competitive for business—in my state, across the nation, and around the world. I <i>support <b>President Biden’s</b></i> proposal.”
In-Party No Reference	Suppose a <i>Democratic</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about infrastructure: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my support for <b>this</b></i> infrastructure bill. What we choose to invest now is not only for today, but for tomorrow. We need to enact a long-term program to make sure our roads, bridges, railroads and airports are modernized. <b>This</b> bill will make us competitive for business—in my state, across the nation, and around the world. I <i>support <b>this</b></i> proposal.”
Out-Party Reference	Suppose a <i>Republican</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about infrastructure: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my opposition to <b>President Biden’s</b></i> infrastructure bill. What we choose to invest now is not only for today, but for tomorrow. We need to enact a long-term program to make sure our roads, bridges, railroads and airports are modernized. <b>President Biden’s</b> bill will <i>not</i> make us competitive for business—in my state, across the nation, and around the world. I <i>oppose <b>President Biden’s</b></i> proposal.”
Out-Party No Reference	Suppose a <i>Republican</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about infrastructure: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my opposition to <b>this</b></i> infrastructure bill. What we choose to invest now is not only for today, but for tomorrow. We need to enact a long-term program to make sure our roads, bridges, railroads and airports are modernized. <b>This</b> bill will <i>not</i> make us competitive for business—in my state, across the nation, and around the world. I <i>oppose <b>this</b></i> proposal.”

Note: Differences between referential and non-referential conditions are in bold. Differences between in-party and out-party conditions are italicized.

scale ranging from strongly approve (4) to strongly disapprove (1). To facilitate interpretation, I recode this variable to range from 0 to 1. I also asked respondents which was worse: a senator “not willing to stand up for their principles” (1) or one who was “not

willing to compromise" (0).<sup>9</sup>

To measure whether respondents reacted as hypothesized, I use ordinary least squares to regress both dependent variables on an interaction between 1) whether the senator references the president in the speech, 2) an indicator for whether the senator is a presidential in-partisan (here, a Democrat), and 3) whether the respondent is a Democrat. I pool all four policy areas and include an indicator for each (i.e., infrastructure, veteran's benefits, drug pricing, and immigration) in the model. I also account for the survey wave to adjust for differences due to timing and question wording. I drop respondents who fail the pre-treatment attention check or do not answer any question included in the model. Ultimately, I have 1,286 respondents across four policy conditions.

## Experimental Results

The main quantities of interest are the change in approval and change in principles versus compromise for respondents when the senator references the president compared to when he does not—holding senator party and respondent party fixed. To estimate these quantities, I calculate the marginal effect of the presidential reference, which I present visually in Figure 3. In the left-panel, I plot the marginal effect of the presidential reference on senator approval. I plot the effect among Republicans in triangles and dashed error bars and Democrats in circles and solid error bars. The horizontal dashed line indicates no marginal effect of presidential reference. When the referencing lawmaker is an out-partisan (here, a Republican), out-partisan respondents (here, Republicans) increase their approval of that senator by 0.09 points on average. This difference is statistically significant. There is not strong evidence that presidential in-partisans (here, Democrats)

---

<sup>9</sup>Question wording differed marginally between the two studies. In wave 1, the question was: "What causes more problems—senators who are not willing to stand up for their principles or senators who are not willing to compromise?" Answers included: "Not willing to stand up for their principles" and "Not willing to compromise." In wave 2, the question read: "Which, in your opinion, is worse?" and answers included: "A senator who is not willing to stand up for their principles" and "A senator who is not willing to compromise."

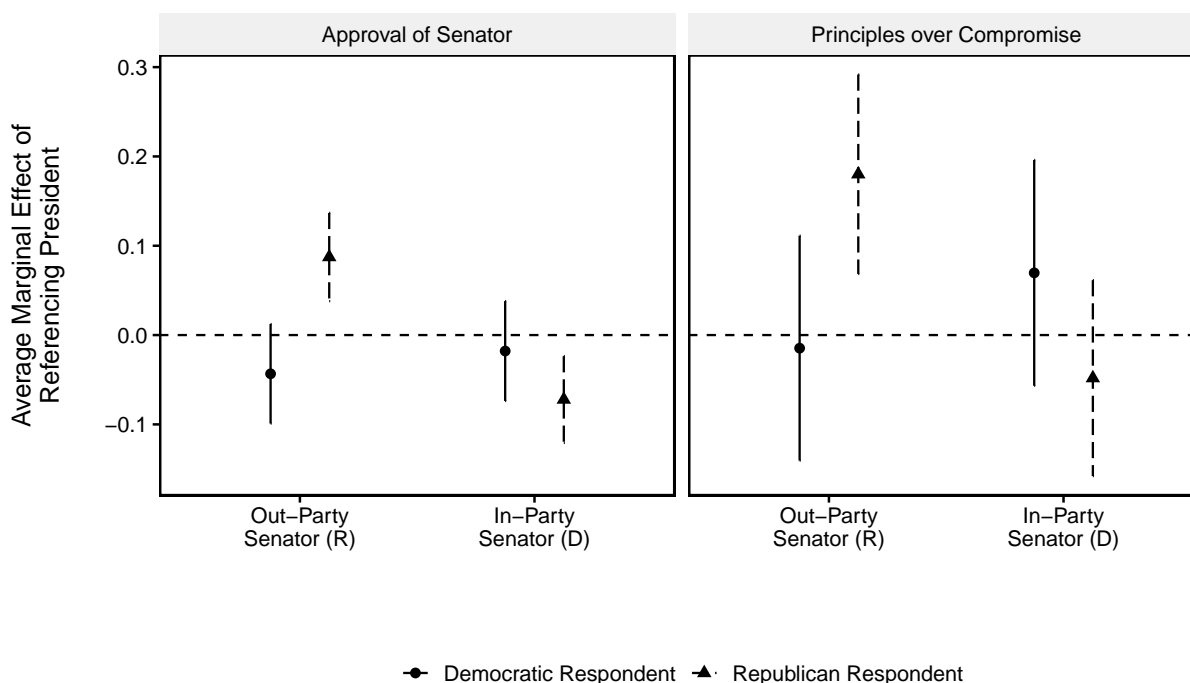


Figure 3: Marginal effect of presidential references by senator party and respondent party. When a presidential out-partisan (Republican) references the president in his speech, other out-partisans (Republicans) increase approval of that senator and prefer principles to compromise. There is no evidence of comparable effects among in-partisans (Democrats) when an in-party (Democratic) senator references the president.

decrease their support for that out-party lawmaker. When the presidential in-party senator (here, a Democrat) references the president, out-partisans (Republicans) decrease their approval of that Senator, but there is no increase among in-partisans (Democrats).<sup>10</sup>

A similar pattern can be seen in the right-panel of Figure 3. When an out-party senator references the president, out-party respondents are more likely to agree that standing up for political principles is more important than compromise—an increase of 0.18 points. There is no evidence of effect for any other combination.

In addition to these two questions, I also asked respondents about their perceptions

<sup>10</sup>These results are qualitatively similar when including controls. However, I note that evidence could suggest a shift toward principles over compromise for Democrats when a Democratic senator invokes President Biden. These results are in the supplemental appendix.

of the senator's ideology, their prioritization of the issue, and, in the first wave only, how satisfied respondents were with the way democracy was working. The results are generally consistent with those presented here, however, none reach conventional levels of statistical significance. These results are presented in the supplemental appendix.

These experimental results support the underlying behavioral theory motivating the observational analyses of this paper. When out-partisans invoke the president, they dampen the appeal of compromise among their co-partisan constituents and increase their approval in the process. Consistent with Nicholson (2012), in-party cues did not generate similar effects among presidential co-partisans. Ultimately, these results help make sense of the asymmetric patterns we see in who invokes the president.

## **Conclusion**

The president occupies a unique place in government as the head of the executive branch and as a de-facto leader of one of the two congressional parties. In these roles, the president is a salient and polarizing symbol, which, I show, lawmakers strategically leverage in their communications strategies. Analyzing House and Senate floor speeches given between 1973 and 2016, I find that lawmakers reference the president more often in floor speeches when in the out-party. Further, I show that this pattern is increasing in constituency out-partisanship with respect to the president. I provide evidence of the behavioral implications through a survey experiment in which respondents read hypothetical floor speeches that vary in terms of whether lawmakers reference the president. I find that when an out-party (Republican) senator references the president in a policy speech, out-party respondents (Republicans) increase support for that senator and are more likely to prize principles over compromise.

This research contributes to our understanding of nationalization (Hopkins 2018), blame game politics and the separation of powers. Whereas past research has focused



primarily on institutional mechanisms of roll call voting (Lee 2009), committee investigations (Kriner and Schickler 2016), and veto bargaining (Groseclose and McCarty 2001) as a means for the out-party to damage the executive, I identify an alternative mechanism in communication strategies. These findings are important given the increasing relevance of congressional communication strategies in an era of competitive majorities (Lee 2016). These findings also contribute to the literature on partisan congressional rhetoric (Ash, Morelli and Van Weelden 2017; Ballard et al. 2021; Gentzkow, Shapiro and Taddy 2019; Groeling 2010; Green 2015; Russell 2018, 2020) and polarization, but I focus specifically on the president as a source of party conflict and partisan signaling. Although this literature has documented a pattern of polarization and negativity in out-party messaging, my research suggests that some of this sentiment may be related specifically to invocations of the president rather than the congressional parties or leaders. Finally, these findings have implications for theories of representational style in Congress (Bernhard and Sulkin 2018; Kaslovsky 2022; Grimmer 2013*b*; Fenno 1978; Rogowski and Stone 2020)—how lawmakers use language to shape constituent opinion about the quality of their work.

In this paper, I focus primarily on the logic of out-party references to the president. However, in-partisans reference the president in a significant proportion of their speeches. To some extent, lawmakers cannot avoid the subject. The president is a powerful actor and legislators rely on the president and the executive branch more broadly for implementation of policy. As such, even in-partisans must make occasional references to the president in the course of legislative debate. Alternatively, even if in-party presidential references do not increase co-partisan approval ratings, presidential references may provide other benefits to in-partisans not examined here. For example, Fu and Howell (2020) find that Republican legislators who invoked President Trump in their Tweets often saw subsequent increases in donations. Future research should investigate these, and other, possibilities. Additionally, this paper assumes that the sentiment of presidential references is positive for in-partisans and negative for out-partisans. However, it might be

the case that the tone of presidential references varies with other systematic factors like presidential approval and electoral vulnerability. Another promising direction for future research would be to map speeches to bills and investigate whether bills that draw presidential references saw more polarized voting patterns, above and beyond the polarizing power of presidential position-taking identified in Lee (2009).

Nationalization, polarization, and negative partisanship create conditions in which the president serves as a powerful, but polarizing, symbol. In response, lawmakers increase their attention to the president when in the out-party. While this strategy may advantage out-partisans and make issues easier for voters to understand, it also raises the stakes of lawmaking and narrows the scope for compromise. As members of Congress frame policy-making around the president, lawmaking becomes a high-stakes showdown over affective and identity-based issues. Logrolling or compromise become increasingly difficult as constituents on both sides want to ensure the presidential team either wins or loses. Although we have previously understood nationalization as a process by which voters prioritize national politics at the expense of state and local issues, these results suggest that some of the pathologies of nationalization stem from a preoccupation with the president at the mass and elite level.

## References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven W. Webster. 2018. "Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans." *Political Psychology* 39:119–135.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven Webster. 2016. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century." *Electoral Studies* 41:12–22.
- Amlani, Sharif and Carlos Algara. 2021. "Partisanship nationalization in American elections: Evidence from presidential, senatorial, gubernatorial elections in the U.S. counties, 1872–2020." *Electoral Studies* 73:102387.
- Arceneaux, Kevin and Robin Kolodny. 2009. "Educating the Least Informed: Group Endorsements in a Grassroots Campaign." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4):755–770.
- Arnold, R. Douglas. 1990. *The Logic of Congressional Action*. Yale University Press.
- Ash, Elliott, Massimo Morelli and Richard Van Weelden. 2017. "Elections and Divisiveness: Theory and Evidence." *The Journal of Politics* 79(4):1268–1285.
- Ballard, Andrew O., Ryan DeTamble, Spencer Dorsey, Michael Heseltine and Marcus Johnson. 2021. "Dynamics of Polarizing Rhetoric in Congressional Tweets." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* n/a(n/a).
- Beckmann, Matthew N. 2010. *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in US Lawmaking, 1953–2004*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bernhard, William and Tracy Sulkin. 2018. *Legislative Style*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bond, Jon R. and Richard Fleisher. 1990. *The President in the Legislative Arena*. University of Chicago Press.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice and Scott de Marchi. 2002. "Presidential Approval and Legislative Success." *The Journal of Politics* 64(2):491–509.
- Carson, Jamie L., Gregory Koger, Matthew J. Lebo and Everett Young. 2010. "The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(3):598–616.
- Christenson, Dino P. and Douglas L. Kriner. 2017. "Mobilizing the Public Against the President: Congress and the Political Costs of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(4):769–785.
- Clifford, Scott, D J Flynn, Kasey Rhee and Brendan Nyhan. N.d. "Decider in Chief? Why and how the public exaggerates the power of the presidency." . Forthcoming.
- Cohen, Jeffrey E. 2019. *The President on Capitol Hill: A Theory of Institutional Influence*. Columbia University Press.

- Costa, Mia. 2020. "Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want from Political Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* .  
**URL:** <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajps.12571>
- Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1997. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. Yale University Press.
- Donovan, Kathleen, Paul M. Kellstedt, Ellen M. Key and Matthew J. Lebo. 2019. "Motivated Reasoning, Public Opinion, and Presidential Approval." *Political Behavior* .
- Edwards, George C. III. 2003. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. Yale University Press.
- Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. Mackuen and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fenno, Richard F. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Little, Brown.
- Fu, Shu and William G. Howell. 2020. "The Behavioral Consequences of Public Appeals: Evidence on Campaign Fundraising from the 2018 Congressional Elections." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50(2):325–347.
- Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M. Shapiro and Matt Taddy. 2018. "Congressional Record for the 43rd-114th Congresses: Parsed Speeches and Phrase Counts.".
- Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M. Shapiro and Matt Taddy. 2019. "Measuring Group Differences in High-Dimensional Choices: Method and Application to Congressional Speech." *Econometrica* 87(4):1307–1340.
- Goren, Paul, Christopher M. Federico and Miki Caul Kittilson. 2009. "Source Cues, Partisan Identities, and Political Value Expression." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4):805–820.
- Green, Matthew N. 2015. *Underdog Politics: The Minority Party in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Yale University Press.
- Grimmer, Justin. 2013a. "Appropriators not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3):624–642.
- Grimmer, Justin. 2013b. *Representational Style in Congress: What Legislators Say and Why It Matters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Groeling, Tim. 2010. *When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gronke, Paul, Jeffrey Koch and J. Matthew Wilson. 2003. "Follow the Leader? Presidential Approval, Presidential Support, and Representatives' Electoral Fortunes." *The Journal of Politics* 65(3):785–808.

- Groseclose, Tim and Nolan McCarty. 2001. "The Politics of Blame: Bargaining before an Audience." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1):100–119.
- Hall, Richard L. 1998. *Participation in Congress*. Yale University Press.
- Harris, Douglas B. 2005. "Orchestrating Party Talk: A Party-Based View of One-Minute Speeches in the House of Representatives." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30(1):127–141.
- Hill, Kim Quaile and Patricia A. Hurley. 2002. "Symbolic Speeches in the U.S. Senate and Their Representational Implications." *The Journal of Politics* 64(1):219–231.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. 2018. *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. and Hans Noel. 2022. "Trump and the Shifting Meaning of "Conservative": Using Activists' Pairwise Comparisons to Measure Politicians' Perceived Ideologies." *American Political Science Review* p. 1–8.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Masha Krupenkin. 2018. "The Strengthening of Partisan Affect: Strengthening of Partisan Affect." *Political Psychology* 39:201–218.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77(3):861–873.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2019. *Presidents and Parties in the Public Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Jones, Philip Edward. 2020. "Partisanship, Political Awareness, and Retrospective Evaluations, 1956–2016." *Political Behavior* 42(4):1295–1317.
- Kaslovsky, Jaclyn. 2022. "Senators at Home: Local Attentiveness and Policy Representation in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 116(2):645–661.
- Kriner, Douglas L. and Andrew Reeves. 2014. "Responsive Partisanship: Public Support for the Clinton and Obama Health Care Plans." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 39(4):717–749.
- Kriner, Douglas L. and Andrew Reeves. 2015. *The Particularistic President: Executive Branch Politics and Political Inequality*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kriner, Douglas L. and Eric Schickler. 2016. *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press.
- Lebo, Matthew J. and Andrew J. O'Geen. 2011. "The President's Role in the Partisan Congressional Arena." *The Journal of Politics* 73(3):718–734.
- Lee, Frances E. 2009. *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U. S. Senate*. University of Chicago Press.

- Lee, Frances E. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lenz, Gabriel S. 2012. *Follow the Leader?: How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levinson, Daryl J. and Richard H. Pildes. 2006. "Separation of Parties, Not Powers." *Harvard Law Review* 119(8):2311–2386.
- Light, Paul. 1999. *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Clinton*. The John Hopkins University Press.
- Maltzman, Forrest and Lee Sigelman. 1996. "The Politics of Talk: Unconstrained Floor Time in the U.S. House of Representatives." *The Journal of Politics* 58(3):819–830.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press.
- McFerron, Pat. 2021. "Biden Numbers almost Identical to Obama in 2009 — Cole Hargrave Snodgrass Associates."   
**URL:** <https://chs-inc.com/soonersurveyvol33no3-2/>
- McGraw, Kathleen M. and Thomas M. Dolan. 2007. "Personifying the State: Consequences for Attitude Formation." *Political Psychology* 28(3):299–327.
- Miller, Warren E. and Donald E. Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *The American Political Science Review* 57(1):45–56.
- Mondak, Jeffery J. 1993. "Public Opinion and Heuristic Processing of Source Cues." *Political Behavior* 15(2):167–192.
- Nicholson, Stephen P. 2012. "Polarizing Cues." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(1):52–66.
- Noble, Benjamin S. 2021. "Energy versus safety: unilateral action, voter welfare, and executive accountability." *Political Science Research and Methods* p. 1–15.
- Noble, Benjamin S, Andrew Reeves and Steven W Webster. 2022. "Crime and Presidential Accountability: A Case of Racially Conditioned Issue Ownership." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 86(1):29–50.
- Pierson, Paul and Eric Schickler. 2020. "Madison's Constitution Under Stress: A Developmental Analysis of Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23(1):37–58.
- Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press.
- Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. University of Chicago Press.
- Proksch, Sven-Oliver and Jonathan B. Slapin. 2012. "Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(3):520–537.

- Rakich, Nathaniel. 2021. "The New York Mayoral Election Is No Longer Andrew Yang's To Lose." URL: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-new-york-mayoral-election-is-no-longer-andrew-yangs-to-lose/>
- Rocca, Michael S. 2007. "Nonlegislative Debate in the U.S. House of Representatives." *American Politics Research* 35(4):489–505.
- Rogowski, Jon C. and Andrew R. Stone. 2020. "Words Speak Louder than Actions: Public Responsiveness to Elite Communication." *Political Behavior* 42(2):327–354.
- Russell, Annelise. 2018. "U.S. Senators on Twitter: Asymmetric Party Rhetoric in 140 Characters." *American Politics Research* 46(4):695–723.
- Russell, Annelise. 2020. "Minority Opposition and Asymmetric Parties? Senators' Partisan Rhetoric on Twitter." *Political Research Quarterly* p. 1–13.
- Russell, Annelise and Jiebing Wen. 2021. "From rhetoric to record: linking tweets to legislative agendas in congress." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 27(4):608–620.
- Schattschneider, E. E. 1960. *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Sellers, Patrick. 2009. *Cycles of Spin: Strategic Communication in the U.S. Congress*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shaheen, Jeanne. 2017. "On Senate Floor, Shaheen Calls out President Trump and Republican Leadership in Congress for their "dangerous obsession with rolling back women's reproductive rights" — U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire." URL: <https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/news/press/on-senate-floor-shaheen-calls-out-president-trump-and-republican-leadership-in-congress-for-their-dangerous-obsession-with-rolling-back-womens-reproductive-rights>
- Skowronek, Stephen. 1998. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Sundquist, James L. 1988. "Needed: A Political Theory for the New Era of Coalition Government in the United States." *Political Science Quarterly* 103(4):613.
- Volden, Craig and Alan E. Wiseman. 2014. *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress: The Lawmakers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, Richard T. and Patrick D. Tucker. 2020. "How Partisanship Influences What Congress Says Online and How They Say It." *American Politics Research* pp. 1–15.
- Weissberg, Robert. 1978. "Collective vs. Dyadic Representation in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 72(2):535–547.
- Westwood, Sean J. 2021. "The Partisanship of Bipartisanship: How Representatives Use Bipartisan Assertions to Cultivate Support." *Political Behavior* .

Witko, Christopher, Jana Morgan, Nathan J. Kelly and Peter K. Enns. 2021. *Hijacking the Agenda: Economic Power and Political Influence*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press.



# Supplementary Appendix

Presidential Cues and the Nationalization of Congressional Rhetoric,  
1973-2016

## Contents

<b>A</b>	<b>Observational Study</b>	<b>1</b>
A.1	Substantive Speeches . . . . .	1
A.2	Restrictive Definition of Presidential Reference . . . . .	2
<b>B</b>	<b>Experimental Study</b>	<b>4</b>
B.1	Experiment Treatment Wording . . . . .	4
B.2	Experiment Post-Treatment Question Wording . . . . .	5
B.3	Experiment Balance . . . . .	5
B.4	Experiment Results . . . . .	7

# A Observational Study

## A.1 Substantive Speeches

In the main text, I define a substantive speech as one that exceeds 30 words under the assumption that those which fail to meet this criteria are either procedural or the result of transcription errors. To provide suggestive support for this hypothesis, in Figure A1, I plot the distribution of the log word count of all speeches in yellow as well as the distribution of speeches that reference the president in green. Speeches to the left of the vertical dashed line are less than 30 words while speeches to the right are more than thirty words. In both chambers, the distribution of all speeches is bimodal. The 30-word cutoff removes the first mode of short speeches, very few of which reference the president.

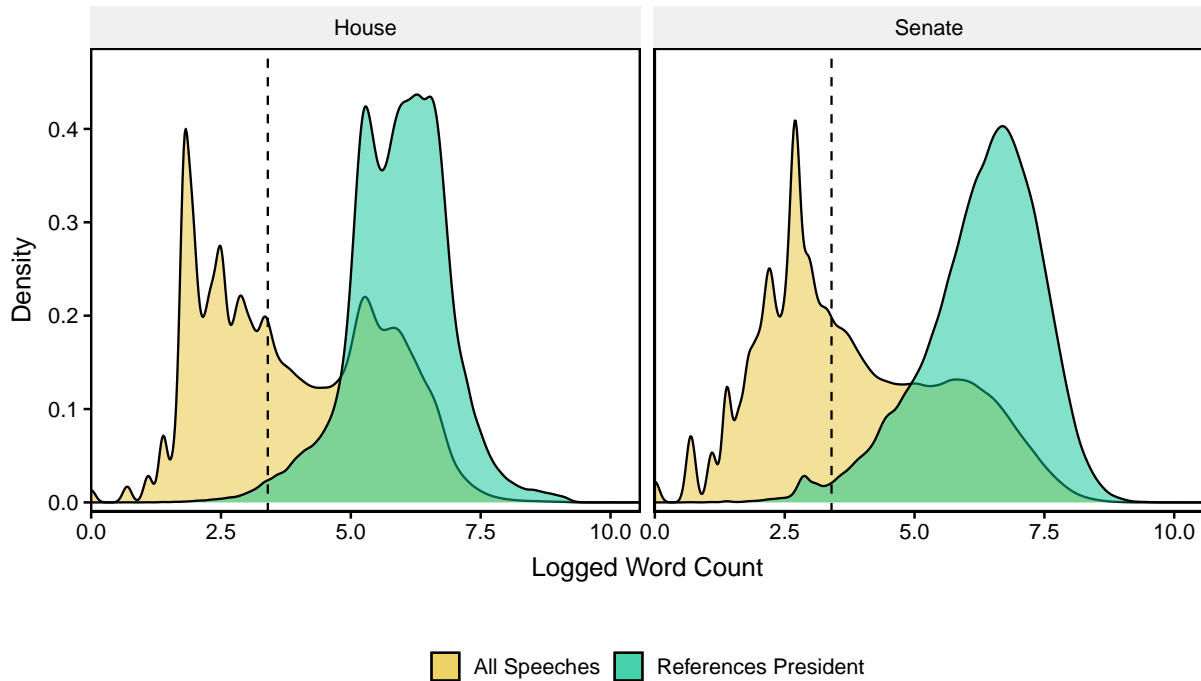


Figure A1: The distribution of floor speeches by log word count in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The distribution is bimodal in both chambers with one mode below 30 words (dashed line) and the other mode near 400 words. Speeches that invoke the president (green) are overwhelmingly clustered toward the second mode.

To support the assumption that speeches with 30 words or fewer are not substan-

tive, I randomly sample 100 such speeches (50 from the Senate and 50 from the House) and hand-code them as either substantive or non-substantive. Non-substantive speeches are either those which are entirely procedural (i.e., yielding time, asking for unanimous consent, quorum calls, etc) or those which are affirmations or non-substantive questions about the schedule. Of the random sample, 92 speeches are non-substantive and 8 are substantive. Overall, I conclude that the removal of speeches with 30 words or less ultimately eliminates non-substantive speeches without a large risk of removing short, substantive speeches.

## **A.2 Restrictive Definition of Presidential Reference**

In Table 2 of the main text, I present four models in which the dependent variable is specified as the number of speeches in which a member either directly references the sitting president by name (e.g., Bush, Obama) or uses any variation of the bigram “the president” (e.g. the president’s, the presidential, etc). Although rare, this procedure will sometimes capture a speech in which a member is not referring to the President of the United States (e.g., the president of a company). More common, however, is that this procedure will capture speeches in which a member invokes the president, but in a strictly procedural context, such as, “This bill permits the president to waive restrictions...”. To ensure these sorts of speeches are not driving the results, in Table A1, I present the same models as in Table 2 of the main text, but here I specify the dependent variable as the number of speeches in which a member mentions the sitting president by name only.

The results in Table A1 are consistent with the results in Table 2 of the main text. Ultimately, the effects of being an out-party lawmaker are larger, and in the Senate, the the interactive effect of out-party and constituency partisanship is now statistically significant. Ultimately, these results are stronger than those in the main text—the implication is that some of the procedural references are non-strategic, and the model in the main text represents a more conservative estimate.

Table A1: The effect of out-party status and constituency partisanship on the number of speeches lawmakers give which name the president.

	House		Senate	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Out-Party	0.387*** (0.032)	0.478*** (0.038)	0.195*** (0.033)	0.278*** (0.050)
Past Pres. Vote Margin	-0.003** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.003)	-0.009*** (0.002)	0.002 (0.006)
Out-Party $\times$ Past Pres. Vote Margin		-0.024*** (0.005)		-0.021* (0.009)
Member's Past Vote Share	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Majority Party Member	-0.012 (0.031)	0.016 (0.031)	-0.112*** (0.027)	-0.108*** (0.027)
Leadership Position	0.143+ (0.074)	0.136+ (0.074)	0.292*** (0.074)	0.295*** (0.073)
Seniority	0.006 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.019** (0.007)	0.017* (0.007)
In Cycle (Senate)			-0.069** (0.023)	-0.066** (0.023)
Total Speeches	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Num. FEs.	1,755	1,755	359	359
Num. Obs.	9,182	9,182	2,177	2,177
R2 Adj.	0.133	0.133	0.118	0.119
R2 Within Adj.	0.102	0.103	0.078	0.079

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

*Note:* Coefficients are from a negative binomial model with fixed effects for lawmakers. The dependent variable in all models is the number of speeches in which a lawmaker names the president in a two-year Congress. Standard errors are clustered at the lawmaker level.

## B Experimental Study

### B.1 Experiment Treatment Wording

Table B1: Experimental vignette wording for additional issue conditions.

Treatment	Speech
In-Party Reference, Veterans	Suppose a <i>Democratic</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about veterans benefits: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my support for <b>President Biden’s</b></i> bill regarding veterans benefits. Just as we invest in and train our men and women during their military service, we must make the same investments when they return to our communities, hang up their uniforms, and embark on the next phase of their lives. It is our duty to ensure that when veterans return home, they have the education and training and access to jobs they need to fulfill their potential. <b>President Biden’s</b> bill <i>ensures</i> that those who put their lives on the line for us will have a lifetime of their own upon returning home. For that reason, I <i>support <b>President Biden’s</b></i> proposal.”
In-Party Reference, Immigration	Suppose a <i>Democratic</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following floor speech about immigration: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my support for <b>President Biden’s</b></i> immigration proposal. People from all walks of life—business leaders, religious leaders, our agricultural community, and our civic leaders, regardless of political party—agree our immigration system is broken. Now we have run out of excuses to sit on our hands. <b>President Biden’s</b> bill <i>is carefully</i> crafted and balanced. <i>It creates</i> certainty for businesses and current U.S. citizens already here today. For that reason, I <i>support <b>President Biden’s</b></i> immigration proposal.”
In-Party Reference, Drug Pricing	Suppose a <i>Democratic</i> senator from a state like yours gives the following speech in Congress about prescription drug prices: “Today, I rise to voice <i>my support for <b>President Biden’s</b></i> legislation regarding the cost of prescription drugs. I continue to hear from people across my state and the nation about the burdensome cost of prescription drugs. There are heartbreaking stories about huge price tags that are stretching families budgets to a breaking point. Our country must do better. <b>President Biden’s</b> proposal <i>would lead</i> to lower drug prices. For that reason, I <i>support <b>President Biden’s</b></i> bill.

Note: Differences between referential and non-referential conditions are in bold. Differences between in-party and out-party conditions are italicized.

## B.2 Experiment Post-Treatment Question Wording

- **Senator Approval:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way this Senator is handling his job? (Strongly approve – Strongly disapprove, 4pt)
- **Principles vs Compromise (W1):** What causes more problems—senators who are not willing to stand up for their principles or senators who are not willing to compromise? (Not willing to stand up for their principles, Not willing to compromise)
- **Principles vs Compromise (W2):** Which, in your opinion, is worse? (A senator who is not willing to stand up for their principles, A senator who is not willing to compromise)
- **Senator Ideology:** Thinking about the speech you just read, would you say the senator who gave it is liberal, moderate, or conservative (Very liberal — Very conservative, 7pt)
- **Issue Priority (W1):** How much of a priority, if any, do you personally think [improving the country’s roads and bridges, addressing veterans benefits, addressing the issue of immigration] should be this year? (Top priority – Not a priority at all, 4pt)
- **Issue Priority (W2):** How important is this issue to you? (Very important – Not at all important, 4pt)
- **Democracy (W1):** How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working in our country? (Very satisfied – Not at all satisfied, 4pt)

## B.3 Experiment Balance

I present experimental balance among respondents in Table B2. I regress each of the four senator party/presidential reference conditions on all covariates using a multinomial regression. With the exception of Biden approval, observables seem well-balanced.

Table B2: Balance among treatment conditions from multinomial regression.

<b>Senator Party: Reference:</b>	Democratic Yes	Republican No	Republican Yes
Female	-0.032 (0.186)	0.064 (0.185)	-0.214 (0.190)
Education (4)	-0.822 (0.757)	-0.925 (0.754)	0.761 (0.780)
College Grad	0.421 (0.380)	0.454 (0.380)	-0.270 (0.392)
Age (4)	0.233 (0.348)	-0.008 (0.349)	0.116 (0.357)
Income (24)	0.134 (0.353)	0.525 (0.348)	-0.101 (0.361)
White	0.260 (0.258)	-0.069 (0.246)	0.161 (0.258)
Black	-0.179 (0.392)	-0.113 (0.363)	-0.447 (0.407)
Democratic Respondent	0.243 (0.217)	0.139 (0.213)	0.132 (0.220)
Republican Respondent	-0.061 (0.175)	0.106 (0.171)	-0.210 (0.179)
Independent	0.033 (0.213)	0.044 (0.213)	-0.065 (0.217)
Biden Approval (2)	-0.440+ (0.258)	-0.201 (0.253)	-0.311 (0.263)
Constant	0.215 (0.328)	0.290 (0.323)	-0.143 (0.339)

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

*Note:* Coefficients are from a multinomial regression. The dependent variable is a categorical variable representing each of the four senator party/presidential reference conditions. The omitted condition is Democratic/No Reference.

## B.4 Experiment Results

Table B3: Effects of presidential references, senator party, and respondent party in experiment.

	Approval of Senator	Principles over Compromise
References President	0.087*** (0.025)	0.180** (0.057)
In-Party Senator (D)	0.038 (0.025)	0.072 (0.056)
Democratic Respondent	-0.051+ (0.027)	-0.053 (0.061)
References President × In-Party Senator (D)	-0.160*** (0.035)	-0.228** (0.080)
References President × Democratic Respondent	-0.131*** (0.038)	-0.195* (0.086)
In-Party Senator (D) × Democratic Respondent	0.167*** (0.038)	-0.095 (0.086)
References President × In-Party Senator (D) × Democratic Respondent	0.185*** (0.054)	0.313* (0.121)
Independent	-0.036+ (0.021)	-0.118* (0.047)
Veterans' Affairs	0.064* (0.025)	-0.025 (0.056)
Immigration	0.000 (0.025)	-0.014 (0.056)
Drug Pricing	0.069*** (0.018)	0.023 (0.040)
Wave 2	0.010 (0.021)	0.087+ (0.048)
Constant	0.696*** (0.024)	0.427*** (0.054)
Num.Obs.	1,089	1,089
R2 Adj.	0.132	0.025

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

*Note:* Coefficients are from an ordinary least squares model. The dependent variables are approval of the Senator and whether principles are more important than compromise.



Figure B1 re-presents Figure 3 from the main text with controls. Results are substantively similar. However, these results suggest that in-party references to the president could prompt in-partisans to prefer principles to compromise.

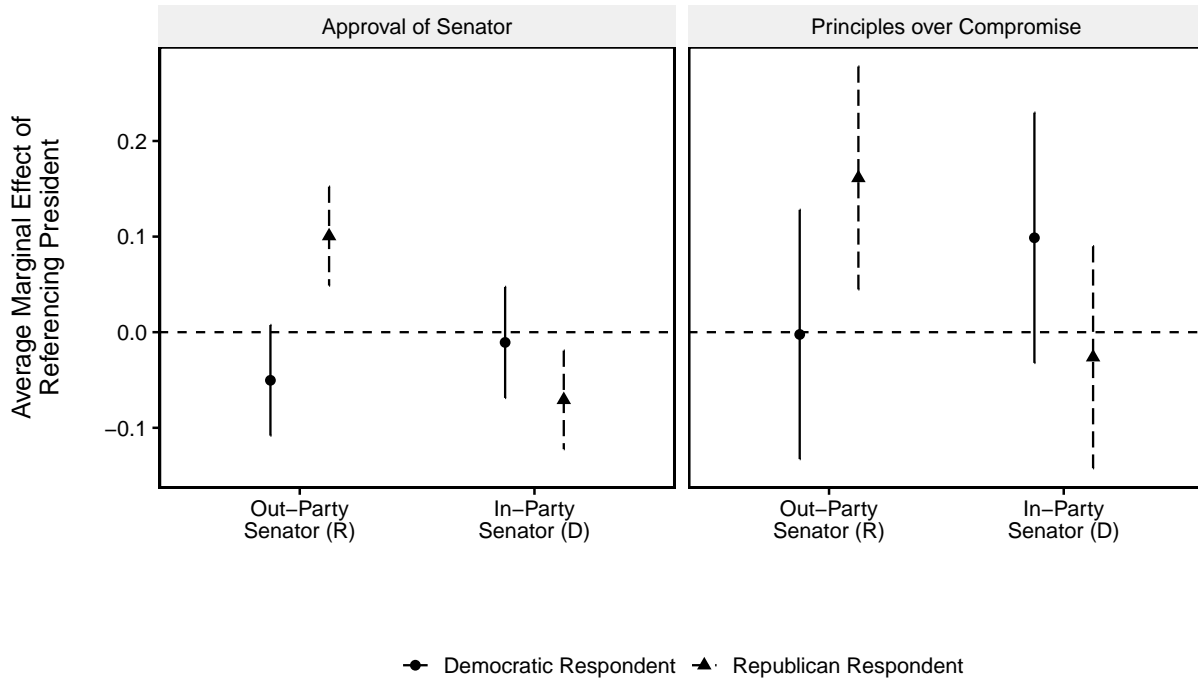


Figure B1: Marginal effect of presidential references by senator party and respondent party with controls. When a presidential out-partisan (Republican) references the president in his speech, other out-partisans (Republicans) increase approval of that senator and prefer principles to compromise.

Table B4 presents all experimental results with controls for all demographic variables. Columns 1 and 2 present results for the senator approval and principles versus compromise questions as in Figure B1. Column 3 presents results for the perceived ideological distance between the Senator and the respondent. This is calculated as the absolute difference between the respondent’s own ideology and the senator’s perceived ideology. Column 4 presents results for the question “How much of a priority, if any, do you personally think [improving the country’s roads and bridges/addressing the issue of immigration/addressing veterans’ benefits] should be this year?” This question was asked in wave 1 only. In column 5, results are for the question “How important is this issue to you?” This question was asked in wave 2 only. In column 6, results are for the ques-

tion “How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working in our country?” This question was asked in wave 1 only.

Table B4: Effects of presidential references, senator party, and respondent party in experiment with controls

	Approval of Senator	Principles over Compromise	Ideological Distance from Senator	Issue Top Priority	Issue Personal Importance	Satisfied with Democracy
References President	0.101*** (0.026)	0.161** (0.059)	-0.093 (0.178)	-0.086 (0.141)	0.147 (0.122)	-0.148 (0.146)
In-Party Senator (D)	0.040 (0.026)	0.021 (0.059)	0.565** (0.177)	-0.057 (0.146)	-0.089 (0.118)	-0.044 (0.151)
Democratic Respondent	-0.095** (0.032)	-0.052 (0.071)	0.673** (0.214)	0.118 (0.181)	-0.051 (0.143)	-0.114 (0.187)
References President × In-Party Senator (D)	-0.171*** (0.037)	-0.188* (0.084)	0.285 (0.252)	-0.104 (0.203)	-0.325+ (0.171)	0.180 (0.210)
References President × Democratic Respondent	-0.151*** (0.040)	-0.164+ (0.089)	0.400 (0.267)	0.025 (0.226)	-0.107 (0.177)	0.042 (0.234)
In-Party Senator (D) × Democratic Respondent	0.168*** (0.040)	-0.045 (0.089)	-1.448*** (0.267)	0.162 (0.223)	0.325+ (0.178)	0.161 (0.230)
References President × In-Party Senator (D) × Democratic Respondent	0.211*** (0.056)	0.289* (0.127)	-0.665+ (0.380)	-0.054 (0.313)	0.178 (0.255)	0.014 (0.323)
Independent	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.115* (0.052)	-0.652*** (0.155)	-0.204 (0.124)	0.031 (0.105)	-0.053 (0.128)
Veterans' Affairs	0.071** (0.018)	-0.016 (0.058)	-0.499** (0.174)	0.207* (0.094)	0.039 (0.097)	-0.039 (0.097)
Immigration	-0.001 (0.026)	-0.010 (0.058)	0.018 (0.174)	0.017 (0.094)	0.017 (0.094)	-0.005 (0.097)
Drug Pricing	0.074*** (0.016)	0.024 (0.042)	-0.407** (0.125)	0.047 (0.080)	0.286*** (0.063)	0.117 (0.083)
Female	0.016 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.032)	0.051 (0.096)	0.022 (0.064)	0.022 (0.064)	-0.117 (0.083)
Education (4)	0.093 (0.058)	0.214 (0.131)	-0.116 (0.394)	0.028 (0.328)	0.294 (0.263)	1.267*** (0.340)
College Grad	-0.032 (0.029)	-0.047 (0.066)	0.150 (0.197)	-0.054 (0.160)	-0.160 (0.135)	-0.613*** (0.166)
Age (4)	-0.039 (0.027)	-0.225*** (0.060)	0.770*** (0.181)	0.250 (0.155)	0.584*** (0.119)	-0.470** (0.160)
Income (24)	0.051+ (0.027)	0.002 (0.060)	-0.194 (0.181)	0.366* (0.150)	0.204+ (0.121)	0.200 (0.155)
White	0.023 (0.019)	0.016 (0.044)	-0.042 (0.131)	0.044 (0.111)	0.004 (0.086)	-0.313** (0.115)
Black	-0.004 (0.030)	0.085 (0.068)	-0.132 (0.203)	0.152 (0.169)	0.208 (0.135)	-0.265 (0.175)
Biden Approval (2)	0.055** (0.020)	-0.096* (0.045)	-0.230+ (0.133)	-0.062 (0.109)	0.220* (0.091)	0.684*** (0.113)
Wave 2	0.015 (0.022)	0.109* (0.050)	-0.214 (0.150)	-0.214 (0.150)	0.109* (0.050)	0.109* (0.050)
Constant	0.616*** (0.041)	0.484*** (0.092)	1.305*** (0.275)	2.888*** (0.227)	2.455*** (0.162)	2.126*** (0.235)
Num.Obs.	990	990	990	429	561	429
R2 Adj.	0.151	0.043	0.136	0.038	0.118	0.226

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001