

17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process

Recitation: Congresspeople and Congress Lawmaking

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Home Style in Contemporary America

- Home style → communication style
- Two ways of developing a home style: credit claiming and position taking (also honorary)
- Measuring Senators' home styles: press releases from 2005-2007


- Senator Warren (D-Mass.)'s Press Release:

📍 CORONAVIRUS: For information about coronavirus (COVID-19) and financial assistance, click here.

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Press Releases

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OCTOBER 02, 2020

Senator Warren Statement on President Trump's Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis

Washington, DC - United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) released the following statement on President Donald Trump's and First Lady Melania Trump's positive COVID-19 diagnosis: "The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted pain on millions of families across the country. My thoughts are with the President, First Lady, White House staff, and anyone else who may have come into contact with the President, and I wish them all a quick and safe recovery."My thoughts are also with millions of other ... [CONTINUE READING](#)

- Used a Bayesian statistical model to find out some potential topics
- Compute the proportion of press releases senators allocate to each of the topics.
- Whether individual senator prioritized credit claiming over position taking.

Press Release Topics

TABLE 1 Topics in Press Releases

Description	Stems	%
Honorary	honor, prayer, remember, fund, tribute	5.0
Transp. Grants	airport, transport, announce, urban, hud	4.8
<i>Iraq</i>	iraq, iraqi, troop, war, sectarian	4.7
DHS Policy	homeland, port, terrorist, dh, fema	4.1
History/Heritage	heritage, park, historic, culture, visitor	3.8
Judicial Nom.	judge, court, supreme, nominate, nominee	3.8
Fire Dept. Grant	firefight, homeland, afgp, award, equipment	3.7
WRDA	water, river, corps, wrda, habitat	3.7
Education Fund.	student, education, school, teacher, college	3.6
<i>Budget</i>	tax, deficit, budget, cut, wage	3.5
<i>Consum. Safety</i>	consumer, fda, internet, food, broadcast	3.2
<i>Health Care Access</i>	care, patient, health, medical, hospital	3.0
Science Research	university, research, science, center, laboratory	2.9
Justice Grants	crime, justice, enforce, methamphetamine, meth	2.8
<i>Environment</i>	epa, environment, pollute, fish, clean	2.8
Biofuel	fuel, energy, ethanol, renew, oil	2.8
<i>Immigration</i>	immigration, border, illegal, reform, alien	2.6
Farm	farmer, farm, agriculture, crop, rancher	2.6
Defense Const.	defense, military, navy, army, aircraft	2.5
<i>Energy/Gas</i>	oil, price, energy, gasoline, consumer	2.4

Grimmer, Justin. "Appropriators not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 (2013): 624–42. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association (United States). All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Press Release Topics Cont.

<i>Justice Dept.</i>	intelligence, detainee, cia, surveillance, gonzales	2.4
National Guard	military, soldier, guard, iraq, troop	2.2
Worker's Rights	worker, airline, employee, flight, faa	2.0
<i>Mortgage Crisis</i>	mortgage, lender, bank, loan, lend	1.9
Veteran's Affairs	veteran, affair, traumatize, wound, care	1.9
BRAC	brac, realign, closure, air, defense	1.9
Beef Imports	trade, beef, export, japan, cattle	1.8
<i>Gov. Transp.</i>	transparency, earmark, taxpayer, lobbyist, lobby	1.7
<i>Foreign Affairs</i>	darfur, peace, passport, intern, humanitarian	1.7
Education	student, school, academy, young, attendee	1.6
<i>Tax Policy</i>	tax, deduct, relief, taxpayer, income	1.5
Transp. Approp.	transport, congest, rail, road, transit	1.5
Medicare/Liheap	prescript, liheap, medicare, beneficiary, senior	1.4
Disasters	fema, disaster, declare, storm, damage	1.2
Child Safety	crime, criminal, theft, internet, identify	1.1
SCHIP	schip, insured, coverage, uninsured, chip	1.1
Prev. Medicine	disease, diagnose, cancer, breast, cure	0.9
<i>Stem Cells</i>	stem, cell, cure, research, disease	0.9
Katrina Recovery	louisiana, hurricane, gulf, coast, coastal	0.9
Infect. Disease	flu, pandemic, vaccine, outbreak, stockpile	0.5
FDA	fda, drug, prescript, pharmaceutical, medicine	0.5
<i>Social Sec.</i>	social, retire, private, terrorist, retire	0.5
<i>Justice Oversight</i>	gonzales, alberto, interim, resign, dismiss	0.4
<i>Worker Safety</i>	miner, accident, safety, tragedy, coal	0.4

Note: The topics identified by the model. Appropriations topics are in bold, while position-taking topics are italicized.

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Research Questions

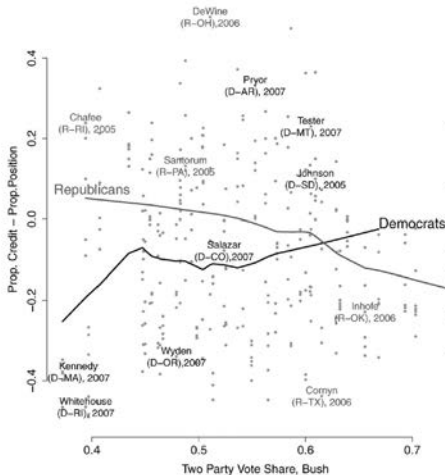
- What explains Senators' homestyles?
- Under what conditions Senators would spend more time and energy one of two communication strategies?
- What are the consequences?

Electoral Marginality and Senators' Communication Styles

- Using two-party vote share (%GOP) to measure the state partisanship
- Party was not doing well in the last Presidential election → More credit claiming.

Electoral Marginality and Senators' Communication Styles

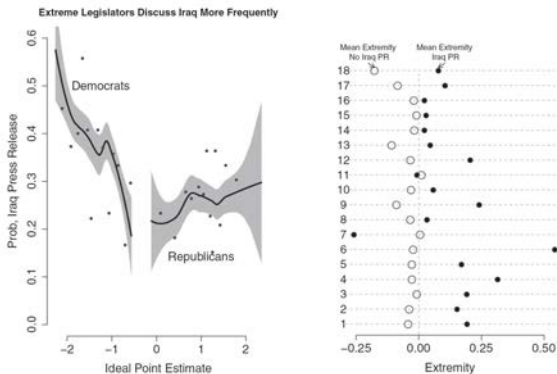
FIGURE 3 Marginal Legislators Systematically Emphasize Appropriations and Avoid Policy



Grimmer, Justin. "Appropriators not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 (2013): 624-42. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association (United States). All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Consequences of Position Taking

FIGURE 5 Senators Who Take Positions Are More Extreme Than Senators Who Do Not



Note: This figure shows that the senators who take positions on the Iraq war are more extreme than the senators who avoid offering a position. The left-hand plot shows that ideological extremity is a strong predictor of whether senators comment on the war. For both Democrats (the left-hand lower regression line) and Republicans (the right-hand lower regression line), senators who are ideologically extreme are more likely to articulate a stance on the war. The right-hand plot shows that each week the Iraq war is salient, position-taking senators are more extreme than their silent colleagues.

- What about homestyles of House members?

Communication Style of House Members

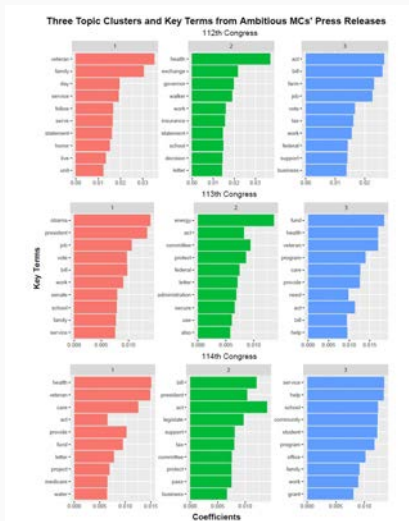
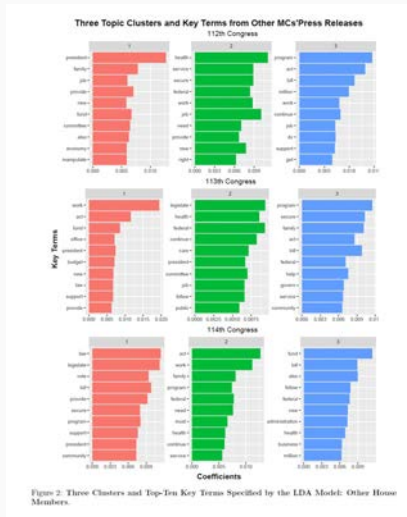


Figure 1: Three Clusters and Top-Ten Key Terms Specified by the LDA Model: Ambitious House Members. Y axis labels the key terms and X axis presents the prevalence of the key terms associated with each topic. These topics may not be directly mapped on to Justin Grimmer's credit-claiming versus position-take, and honor category.

Communication Style of House Members

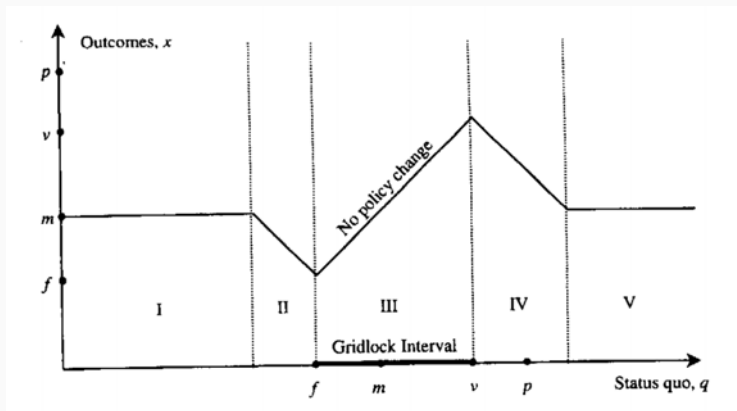


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Pivotal Politics

- Why are gridlocks so common?
- Supermajoritarian rule: Senatorial filibuster pivot and Presidential veto pivot
- Not inherently partisan, but why do we still talk about partisan polarization in Congress today?

- Polarization changes the distribution of legislators' policy preferences (ideal points). Legislators ideal points become more spreadout.
- Polarization also widens the gridlock interval.



Krehbiel, Keith. "A Theory." Chapter 2 in *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*. University of Chicago Press, 1998. © University of Chicago Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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