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Windsor, L., Dowell, N., Windsor, A., & Kaltner, J. (2018). Leader Language and Political Survival Strategies. *International Interactions*, *44*(2), 321-336.

Authoritarian leaders’ language provides clues to their survival strategies for remaining in office. This line of inquiry fits within an emerging literature that refocuses attention from state-level features to the dynamic role that individual heads of state and government play in international relations, especially in authoritarian regimes. The burgeoning text-as-data field can be used to deepen our understanding of the nuances of leader survival and political choices; for example, language can serve as a leading indicator of leader approval, which itself is a good predictor of leader survival. In this paper, we apply computational linguistics tools to an authoritarian leader corpus consisting of 102 speeches from nine leaders of countries across the Middle East and North Africa between 2009 and 2012. We find systematic differences in the language of these leaders, which help advance a more broadly applicable theory of authoritarian leader language and tenure.

Windsor, Leah C., Nia Dowell, and Art Graesser. "The Language of Autocrats: Leaders' Language in Natural Disaster Crises." *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy* 5.4 (2014): 446-467.

Recent research has shown that natural disasters present political problems for societies, as these events make both citizens and leaders vulnerable. Autocratic leaders use language strategically following natural disasters to maximize their time in office. We introduce a new data set derived from using computational linguistic programs (LIWC and Coh‐Metrix) to explore language patterns in the discourse of three prominent political leaders to uncover their strategies for navigating the political and social problems created by natural disasters. Our analysis covers the speeches of Chairman Mao Tse‐Tung, Commander Fidel Castro, and President Hosni Mubarak. We show that leaders' language reveals their preferences and strategies for accommodating the social, political, and economic shocks created by natural disasters through blaming and credit‐claiming language. Our results provide insight into how autocratic leaders' language reflects these three strategies.

Druckman, James N., and Justin W. Holmes. "Does presidential rhetoric matter? Priming and presidential approval." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34.4 (2004): 755-778.

The public’s approval of the president plays a critical role in determining the president’s power and policy-making success. Scholars and pundits have thus devoted a large amount of attention to explaining the dynamics of presidential approval. Surprisingly, this work has overlooked one of the more important potential forces behind approval—that is, what the president himself says. In this article, we examine the direct impact of presidential rhetoric on approval. We do so by combining a content analysis of the 2002 State of the Union address with both a laboratory experiment and a nationally representative survey. We show that the president can have a substantial effect on his own approval by priming the criteria on which citizens base their approval evaluations. Our results add a new dimension to the study of presidential approval, raise intriguing questions about accountability, and extend work on priming and public opinion by introducing the idea of image priming.

January 26, 1998

April 27, 2009

July 28, 2014

CRS (*Includes statistics about how often policy proposals in the SOTU are converted into responses)*

“Between 1965 and 2013, presidents made 33 policy proposals, on average, in each State of the Union address, according to a study that was published by the Congressional Research Service in 2015. During that period, Congress passed 41.6 percent of the requests made in State of the Union speeches in the year they were given.”

https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40132.pdf

The State of the Union address is a communication between the President and Congress in which the chief executive reports on the current conditions of the United States and provides policy proposals for the upcoming legislative year. Formerly known as the “Annual Message,” the State of the Union address originates in the Constitution. As part of the system of checks and balances, Article II, Section 3, clause 1 mandates that the President “shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” In recent decades, the President has expanded his State of the Union audience, addressing the speech to both the nation and Members of Congress. Over time, the State of the Union address has evolved considerably. The format and delivery of the speech have changed, and its length has fluctuated widely. Technology has also influenced the delivery of the address, with the advent of radio, television, and the Internet playing significant roles in the transformation. Although each President uses the State of the Union address to outline his Administration’s policy agenda, most incorporate common rhetorical arguments and ceremonial traditions. Bipartisanship, attention to both the past and the future, and optimism are recurring themes in State of the Union addresses. The legislative success rate of policy proposals mentioned in State of the Union addresses varies widely. Addresses given after a President’s election or reelection and during periods of unified party government tend to produce higher rates of legislative success. Presidents can also use the State of the Union address to increase media attention for a particular issue. Immediately following the State of the Union address, the political party not occupying the White House provides an opposition response. The response, usually much shorter than the State of the Union, outlines the opposition party’s policy agenda and serves as an official rejoinder to the proposals outlined by the President.

Baturo, Alexander, Niheer Dasandi, and Slava J. Mikhaylov. "Understanding state preferences with text as data: introducing the UN General Debate Corpus." *Research & Politics* 4.2 (2017): 2053168017712821.

Every year at the United Nations (UN), member states deliver statements during the General Debate (GD) discussing major issues in world politics. These speeches provide invaluable information on governments’ perspectives and preferences on a wide range of issues, but have largely been overlooked in the study of international politics. This paper introduces a new dataset consisting of over 7300 country statements from 1970–2014. We demonstrate how the UN GD corpus (UNGDC) can be used as a resource from which country positions on different policy dimensions can be derived using text analytic methods. The article provides applications of these estimates, demonstrating the contribution the UNGDC can make to the study of international politics.

Ambrosio, Thomas, and Geoffrey Vandrovec. "Mapping the geopolitics of the Russian federation: The federal assembly addresses of Putin and Medvedev." *Geopolitics* 18.2 (2013): 435-466.

This paper builds upon previous research on American state-of-the-union addresses and Russian geopolitics by examining how the Kremlin has represented Russia's geographic and geopolitical position in the post-Soviet era. It analyses presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly from 2000 to 2011, a period encompassing Vladimir Putin's first two terms as president and the single term of Dmitry Medvedev. In addition to exploring general trends evident in these speeches, this paper also provides in-depth analyses of three major themes: Russia's civilisational identity, the state of the international system and Russia's role within it, and global economics. We find that the legacies of the Cold War-era perceptions of threat, as well as dissatisfaction with the Cold War's resolution, remain salient in these speeches. However, there is some movement toward a broadening of Russia's cognitive map.

Rule, A., Cointet, J. P., & Bearman, P. S. (2015). Lexical shifts, substantive changes, and continuity in State of the Union discourse, 1790–2014. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 112(35), 10837-10844.

This study reveals that the entry into World War I in 1917 indexed the decisive transition to the modern period in American political consciousness, ushering in new objects of political discourse, a more rapid pace of change of those objects, and a fundamental reframing of the main tasks of governance. We develop a strategy for identifying meaningful categories in textual corpora that span long historic durées, where terms, concepts, and language use changes. Our approach is able to account for the fluidity of discursive categories over time, and to analyze their continuity by identifying the discursive stream as the object of interest.

Jennings, Will, Shaun Bevan, and Peter John. "The agenda of British government: The speech from the throne, 1911-2008." Political Studies 59.1 (2011): 74-98.

This article considers how UK governments use the Speech from the Throne (also known as the Gracious Speech and the King's or the Queen's Speech) to define and articulate their executive and legislative agenda. The analysis uses the policy content coding system of the Policy Agendas Project to measure total executive and legislative attention to particular issues. This generates the longest known data series of the political agenda in the UK, from the date of the first Parliament Act in 1911 right up to the end of 2008, nearly a century of government agenda setting. Using these data, the article identifies long-run institutional and policy stability in this agenda-setting instrument, and variation in its length and executive–legislative content due to the focusing events of world wars and party control of government. It assesses the degree to which the policy content of the speech is persistent (autoregressive) over time and identifies long-term trends in the total number of topics mentioned in each speech (scope), and the dispersion of government attention across topics (entropy). It also identifies important variation over time that indicates change in the agenda-setting function of the speech and evolution of the agenda in response to policy challenges faced by modern British governments in the period since 1911. Overall, the analysis demonstrates the robustness of the speech as a measure of the policy agenda and executive priorities in the UK.

Bevan, Shaun, Peter John, and Will Jennings. "Keeping party programmes on track: the transmission of the policy agendas of executive speeches to legislative outputs in the United Kingdom." European Political Science Review 3.3 (2011): 395-417.

In the United Kingdom, the transmission between policy promises and statutes is assumed to be both rapid and efficient because of the tradition of party discipline, relative stability of government, absence of coalitions, and the limited powers of legislative revision in the second chamber. Even in the United Kingdom, the transmission is not perfect since legislative priorities and outputs are susceptible to changes in public opinion or media coverage, unanticipated events in the external world, backbench rebellions, changes in the political parties, and the practical constraints of administering policies or programmes. This paper investigates the strength of the connection between executive priorities and legislative outputs measured by the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament from 1911 to 2008. These are categorized according to the policy content coding system of the UK Policy Agendas Project ([www.policyagendas.org.uk](http://www.policyagendas.org.uk/)). Time series cross-sectional analyses show that there is transmission of the policy agenda from the speech to acts. However, the relationship differs by party, strengthening over time for Conservative governments and declining over time for Labour and other governments.

Mortensen, Peter Bjerre, et al. "Comparing government agendas: Executive speeches in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Denmark." Comparative Political Studies 44.8 (2011): 973-1000.

At the beginning of each parliamentary session, almost all European governments give a speech in which they present the government’s policy priorities and legislative agenda for the year ahead. Despite the body of literature on governments in European parliamentary democracies, systematic research on these executive policy agendas is surprisingly limited. In this article the authors study the executive policy agendas—measured through the policy content of annual government speeches—over the past 50 years in three Western European countries: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Contrary to the expectations derived from the well-established “politics matters” approach, the analyses show that elections and change in partisan color have little effect on the executive issue agendas, except to a limited extent for the United Kingdom. In contrast, the authors demonstrate empirically how the policy agenda of governments responds to changes in public problems, and this affects how political parties define these problems as political issues. In other words, policy responsibility that follows from having government power seems much more important for governments’ issue agendas than the partisan and institutional characteristics of governments.

Anderson Jr, Richard D. "Speech and democracy in Russia: Responses to political texts in three Russian cities." British Journal of Political Science 27.1 (1997): 23-45.

Theories ascribing democracy to inclusive contestation imply that the speech of authoritarian rulers will differ from the speech of electoral politicians. Authoritarian rulers will use an official language that insulates them from populations under their control. This official language insults subject populations by implying that the vernacular in which they formulate their thoughts is inadequate for the discussion of political ideas. Electoral politicians, praising the competence of citizens to decide political questions, take care to frame their ideas in ordinary language, as otherwise the politicians would contradict their message that bearers of ordinary language are politically competent. If rulers implicitly insult and politicians flatter, citizens should respond with disaffiliation to rulers' language and affiliation to the language of politicians, at least of those politicians whom the citizens favour. This hypothesis is tested using an experimental paradigm in three Russian cities at the end of 1993. The prediction that Russians will affiliate to the texts of some electoral politicians contrasts with the claim that Russians evaluate political ideas mainly by contemplating change in their standard of living, since Russia represents an unusual case in which authoritarian speech is associated with greater affluence, while electoral speech is associated with increasing impoverishment for most people.

Brender, Adi, and Allan Drazen. Do leaders affect government spending priorities?. No. w15368. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2009.

Since a key function of competitive elections is to allow voters to express their policy preferences, one might take it for granted that when leadership changes, policy change follows. Using a dataset we created on the composition of central government expenditures in a panel of 71 democracies over 1972-2003, we test whether changes in leadership induce significant changes in one measure of policy - spending composition - as well as looking at the effect of other political and economic variables. We find that the replacement of a leader tends to have no significant effect on expenditure composition in the short-run. This remains true after controlling for a host of political and economic variables. However, over the medium-term leadership changes are associated with larger changes in expenditure composition, mostly in developed countries. We also find that in established democracies, election years are associated with larger changes in expenditure composition while new democracies, which were found by Brender and Drazen (2005) to raise their overall level of expenditures in election years, tend not to have such changes.

Jones, Benjamin F., and Benjamin A. Olken. "Do leaders matter? National leadership and growth since World War II." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 120.3 (2005): 835-864.

Economic growth within countries varies sharply across decades. This paper examines one explanation for these sustained shifts in growth—changes in the national leader. We use deaths of leaders while in office as a source of exogenous variation in leadership, and ask whether these plausibly exogenous leadership transitions are associated with shifts in country growth rates. We find robust evidence that leaders matter for growth. The results suggest that the effects of individual leaders are strongest in autocratic settings where there are fewer constraints on a leader's power. Leaders also appear to affect policy outcomes, particularly monetary policy. The results suggest that individual leaders can play crucial roles in shaping the growth of nations.