A Delicate Balance:
Policy Position and Legislative Performance Branding during the 2013 Government Shutdown

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Abstract

A large research literature portrays party labels as marketing brands that serve as efficient sources of information about a party's candidates. Parties build strong brands by sending clear and consistent signals to voters. But how do party leaders promote strong brands that benefit all party members? The answer is not always obvious. In 2013, House Republican leaders initiated a partial government shutdown under pressure from conservatives, even as others in the caucus warned that it might cause Republicans to lose the House. We find that, after initiating the shutdown, party leaders engaged in a public messaging effort that downplayed the divisive issues leading to the shutdown (position branding) and emphasized the party's progress in resolving it (legislative performance branding). These findings provide insights into how party leaders seek to address internal branding conflicts, and may help to explain why the shutdown did not end up being the electoral disaster many predicted.

Introduction

An extensive party branding literature investigates how party identity influences voting behavior in elections, candidate strategy in campaigns, and legislative organization and behavior. Party labels serve as informational shortcuts for inferring positions, values and attributes to candidates (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960). Voters who identify strongly with a party are "less likely to defect and more likely to vote." And because voters "develop perceptions of partisan identities through their own observations of the party and its behavior," party elites have incentives to be attentive to their brands (Lupu 2013, 51).

Experimental research confirms that candidates can benefit when parties send clear and consistent signals to voters. However, empirical studies also find that real world candidates employ partisan symbols selectively, depending on the partisan composition of their districts and the institutional context (Neiheisel and Niebler 2013). This is because a strong party brand that appeals to some voters may repel others. Krehbiel goes so far as to describe party labels as "bad luck charms" (1998, 223).

While most research assumes that party brands derive from party or candidate policy positions, scholars have also long argued that voters' perceptions of parties are also based on other non-policy considerations (Stokes 1963). For example, Cox and McCubbins' (2005) cartel theory of legislative organization proposes that lawmakers support leadership agenda control because all party members benefit from a strong record of legislative accomplishments. In other words, voters are assumed to reward a party for its legislative performance.

However, cartel theory also predicts extreme policies that may harm the reelection prospects of party moderates. In this paper, we argue that party leaders sometimes employ rhetoric to address such intra-party tensions. Grimmer (2012) finds that moderate lawmakers distance themselves from the party's policy positions by emphasizing district service rather than policy in their press releases. Butler and Powell note that party leaders often engage in "spin" to take credit for good societal outcomes and avoid blame for bad ones (2014, 503). We argue that party leaders also engage in spin to divert public attention away from unpopular policy position.

The event of interest is the 2013 partial government shutdown, strongly supported by the Republican base but opposed by most Republican voters. We focus on how Republican

leaders communicated on Twitter about a shutdown they instigated. Rather than emphasizing their support for the policy issues driving the shutdown (postion branding), these leaders emphasized a more unifying frame emphasizing the party's dedication to resolving it (legislative performance branding).

We employ supervised machine learning methods to differentiate position and legislative performance mentions in more than 11,000 tweets sent by Republican lawmakers during the shutdown. We confirm expected patterns of communication. House Republicans from safe electoral districts and members of the Tea Party caucus were signifcantly more likely to emphasize the issues behind the shutdown in their tweets while blaming Democrats for the standoff. In contrast, party leaders and members from electorally competitive districts emphasized the party's efforts to minimize the shutdown's effects and bring it to a close. These findings provide new insights into how parties attempt to negotiate competing branding objectives, and may also help to explain why the 2013 shutdown did not end up being the electoral disaster many were predicting based on the previous government shutdown in 1995.

Position and Legislative Performance Components of Party Brands

It is well established that many voters use candidate's party affiliation as an informational shortcut, and that voters who strongly identify with a party are more likely to turnout and support that party's candidates (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Lupu 2003). The importance of party in elections has led to substantial scholarship investigating how voters form perceptions of parties; how candidates use party affiliation in campaigns, and how party elites attempts to influence public perceptions of the "party brand" (e.g. Snyder and Ting 2002; Grynaviski 2010; Groeling 2010; Neiheisel and Niebler 2013; Butler and Powell 2014).

Much if not most of the research on party branding focuses on perceptions of party policy positions, based on the left-right axis model first popularized by Anthony Downs in an *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). For example, Grynaviski (2010, 50) argues that "party government depends on voters believing that party leaders will follow through on their commitment to pursue their party's program," while Woon and Pope (2008) confirm that greater party unity (measured by voting patterns) is associated with greater electoral successes for a party's candidates. However, party unity is not a given because candidates do not always benefit from

a strong policy-based party brands. In competitive districts, "holding all other variables constant, voters consistently punish legislators for voting too often with their party" (Carson et al. 2010, 608). As a result, moderate candidates may have incentives to distance themselves from party policy positions in campaigns (Lindbeck and Weibull 1987; Krehbiel 1998; Snyder and Ting 2002; Lee 2007). Incumbents representing competitive constituencies are also less likely to bring up policy issues in their press releases (Grimmer 2013).

Another line of research argues that voters' perceptions of parties are based on more than just policy positions. In 1963 Donald Stokes published a critical review of *An Economic Theory of Democracy* in which he distinguished between "position-issues" ("those that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined") and "valence-issues" ("those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate") (1963, 733). Stokes argued that voters often judge parties based broader societal conditions such as the state of the economy. Subsequent studies have used valence to mean "any nonpolicy advantage a candidate or party might have" (Stone and Simas 2010), such as name recognition (Groseclose 2001), competence or trustworthiness (Stone and Simas 2010), and governing ability (Butler and Powell 2014).

In *Setting the Agenda*, Cox and McCubbins (2005) propose another valence-based explanation for legislative organization that emphasizes the party's legislative performance. Members of the majority party support strong leadersip agenda control because "[t]he more favorable is the majority party's record of legislative accomplishments, the better its reputation or brand name will be... The better the majority party's brand name, the better will be the prospects for (re)election of its various candidates and the better will be the prospects for (re)attainment of majority status" (2005, 7). Butler and Powell (2014) investigate whether voters are more likely to support candidates from a party that is portrayed as getting things done (they are), and also find that party leaders (in state legislatures) are more likely to pressure rank and file members on when the party's governing reputation is at stake.

However cartel theory also contains the seeds of intraparty conflict. Party leaders follow two agenda setting rules: "Thou shall not aid bills that will split thy party," and "thou shalt

aid bills that most in thy party like" (Cox and McCubbins 2005, 24) These rules reflect the assumption that party leaders are elected by and accountable to the median member of the party caucus (Cox and McCubbins 1995). But leaders who hope to remain leaders of the majority party also need to consider the needs of the median member of the chamber (Krehbiel 1998). Congressional scholars have vigorously debated whether congressional policy decisions reflect the preferences of the chamber or party median. How party leaders respond when these legitimate competing considerations conflict has received much less attention.

Brand Messaging during the 2013 Government Shutdown

Coordinated messaging campaigns in Congress date back to at least the 1990s and are now institutionalized within both parties. Party leaders disseminate "talking points" through media channels hoping to "generate a positive response toward [the] party among voters" (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, 108; see also Evans and Oleszek 2001; Groeling 2010; Sellers 2010). Party messaging research generally emphasizes efforts to influence specific legislative policy decisions. For example Kaiser (2014) describes how Republican leaders repeatedly described the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act as a "bailout" bill on the advice of a prominent Republican strategist, Frank Luntz. They did so, not because the bill actually bailed out banks (it made future bailouts more difficult), but because the bailout depiction evoked the most negative reaction among focus group participants.

We are interested in party messaging as a branding activity (rather than as an attempt to influence specific policy decisions). On October 1, 2013 the federal government suspended all non-essential functions after the House failed to pass a continuing appropriations resolution passed over by the Senate (H.J. Res. 59). The House Republican leadership was primarily responsible for the shutdown. A bipartisan majority of minority Democrats and moderate Republicans were prepared to support a clean continuing resolution[1]. Knowing this, House leaders chose not to schedule a floor vote.

The shutdown furloughed about 800,000 non-essential federal government employees while another 1.3 million deemed essential reported to work not knowing when they would be paid. The most visible effects included gated National Parks, suspended Head Start programs (which

[1]One that did not include House language defunding the Affordable Care Act (among other things).

led to a highly publicized $10 million private donation), reduced veterans' services and the possibility of delayed tax refunds.[2] The estimated longer term consequences included a .25 percentage point reduction in annualized GDP growth rate and 120,000 fewer private-sector jobs.[3]

House Speaker John Boehner later called the shutdown a "predictable disaster,"[4] and explained why he made it happen: "When I looked up, I saw my colleagues going this way. You learn that a leader without followers is simply a man taking a walk. So I said, 'You want to fight this fight? I'll go fight the fight with you."[5] Not all of Boehner's followers favored the shutdown however. Conservative Republicans were elated. They saw a shutdown as their best opportunity to defund the Affordable Care Act, described Boehner's decision as "wonderful" (Rep. John Culberson (R-TX)) and predicted that "people will be very grateful" (Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN)). Although it might be "painful," it was still the right thing to do.[6] Other Republicans angrily warned that the shutdown could cost the House its majority (Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL));[7] predicted that it "ends badly for the American people and the Republican Party" (Rep. Reid Ribble (R-WI));[8] and described it as the "dumbest idea" ever (Senator Richard Burr (R-NC)).[9]

Most Americans sided with opponents of the shutdown. A poll commissioned by Republican lawmakers about a month earlier found that 56% of the respondents who planned to vote for Republicans in the next election opposed a shutdown.[10] A majority of "very" conservative respondents did support one (63%), but made up just 10% of those expecting to vote Republi-

[2]Schwartz, John. "$10 Million Gift to Help Head Start Through Shutdown." *The New York Times.* 8 Oct. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[3]Council of Economic Advisers, "Economic Activity During the Government Shutdown and Debt Limit Brinksmanship," *Executive Office of the President of the United States,* October 2013. Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/weekly_indicators_report_final_0.pdf

[4]Memoli, Michael. "Boehner on 'Tonight Show': Shutdown was a 'Predictable Disaster'" Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, 24 Jan. 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[5]O'Keefe, Ed. "Boehner Appearing on Leno: GOP Is to Blame for Shutdown." *The Washington Post*, 24 Jan. 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[6]O'Keefe, Ed, and Rosalind Helderman. "On Cusp of Shutdown, House Conservatives Excited, Say They Are Doing the Right Thing." *The Washington Post*, 28 Sept. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[7]Siddiqui, Sabrina. "Adam Kinzinger: Defunding Obamacare Will Cost Republicans House Majority (VIDEO)." *The Huffington Post*, 15 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[8]Weisman, Jonathan. "Clock Is Ticking for Recess, and for a Deficit Deal." *The New York Times.* 22 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[9]Zwillich, Todd. "Sen Richard Burr, R-NC Calls Conservative Effort Linking Government Shutdown Fight to Repealing Obamacare -the Dumbest Idea I've Ever Heard.-" *SoundCloud.* 25 July 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[10]http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/gop-poll-finds-strong-opposition-to-government-shutdown/article/2534580

can in 2014. A widely reported CBS poll from the day before the shutdown began found that 80% of respondents considered it an unacceptable way to negotiate.[11]

The unpopular shutdown ended on October 17 when a pending government default gave House Republican leaders a reason to schedule a vote on a bill (H.R. 2775) to raise the debt ceiling and fund the government at current levels through February 7, 2014. House Republicans got none of what they demanded, but a majority (62%) continued to express support for the shutdown by voting against this latest bill (which passed with the support of a bipartisan majority). Republicans did recognize that the shutdown was unpopular. Most of the bills and resolutions proposing to restore funding for popular programs (such as National Parks and veterans' services) were Republican sponsored.[12] Democrats also sponsored shutdown-related bills, but their bills mostly chided Republicans by proposing to make continuing appropriations for ALL departments and programs, or by closing the House gym for the duration.

How did House Republican leaders communicate about a shutdown that divided their caucus? We hypothesize that - after demonstrating allegiance to the party base by instigating the shutdown - party leaders then turned their attention to mitigating its damage to the brand for moderates who held the keys to the majority. More specifically we expect to find that leaders enagaged in a messaging strategy of downplaying the issue positions that led to the unpopular standoff while emphasizing the party's commitment to resolving it. We also expect to find that members communicated differently about the shutdown. Republicans who would be expected to support the shutdown, based on their ideology and district characteristics, should be more likely to highlight the issues driving it. Moderate Republicans from competitive districts should be more likely to emphasize their party's efforts to end it.

Party Messaging through Social Media

Politics-related Twitter research has rapidly advanced from basic descriptive analyses of usage patterns, to serious investigations of whether tweets can be used to infer preferences and predict behavior (Cummings et al. 2010; O'Connor et al. 2010; Tumasjan et al. 2010; Metaxas et al. 2011; Gayo-Avello 2012; Barbera 2014; Barbera and Rivero 2014). Investigations of congres-

[11] Dutton, Sarah, Jennifer De Pinto, Anthony Salvanto, and Fred Backus. "Government Shutdown Threat Unacceptable, Poll Says." *CBS News*. 29 Sept. 2013. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

[12] 58 of 91 bills excluding 23 bills introduced by one lawmaker (Rep. Alan Grayson D-FL) on the same day.

sional Twitter communications are more limited. Golbeck et al. (2010) and Hemphill (2013) find that members use Twitter to share information, advertise and credit claim. Barbera (2014) uses members' Twitter followers to estimate their ideology in lieu of roll call votes.

Twitter has valuable attributes for studies of party messaging. It is fast becoming a standard form of legislative communications. In October 2013 (the month of the shutdown), all but ten members of Congress had Twitter accounts and the average Republican member had 8,521 followers or subscribers (a total of 2,471,090). Former presidential candidate Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) had the most followers (around 1,800,000). Next in line were House Speaker Boehner (570,000), Marco Rubio, Ron Paul and Michelle Bachmann. In contrast to press releases, members use Twitter to communicate directly with their followers (or anyone who subscribes to a hashtag), while the 140 character limit encourages succinct themes. Research also indicates that reporters and bloggers increasingly turn to Twitter to source news stories.[13] And as press officers increasingly rely on programs such as Hootsuite and Buffer to distribute content across multiple social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc), it is plausible to assume that Twitter posts are representative of members' broader communications activities.

A Supervised Learning Approach to Studying Twitter Content

We first created a list of the Twitter accounts of all Republican members of Congress (243 Representatives and 43 Senators). Nine Representatives and one senator did not have a Twitter account or did not tweet during the event. On October 20$^{\text{th}}$ 2013, we collected their previous 3,200 tweets.[14] From this collection, we created a subset of 11,656 tweets sent between September 23$^{\text{rd}}$ and October 20$^{\text{th}}$ (the shutdown started on October 1$^{\text{st}}$ and ended on October 17$^{\text{th}}$).

The next step was to label the tweets for mentions of policy positions and legislative performance related to the shutdown. Instead of manually labeling all 11,646 tweets, we first label a random sample and then use supervised machine learning methods to automatically label the remainder. Two researchers labeled 1,000 randomly selected tweets for four dichotomous variables (a single tweet could be assigned to more than one category). The first was whether or not the tweet was about the *shutdown*. The second and third were whether or not it mentioned

[13] Oriella PR Network, "The Influence Game: How News is Sourced and Managed Today." *Global Digital Journalism Study*, 2012.

[14] Twitter limits how much data can be collected.

policy positions or *legislative performance*. The fourth was whether or not the tweet *blamed* Democrats for the impasse. This latter category was not part of our original research design but was revealed during the labeling process. Grimmer and King (2011) were similarly surprised to discover that "partisan taunting" was an important theme in members' press releases.

Table 1 provides examples of each. The agreement between the annotators (after adding the partisan blame theme) was 96% for the *shutdown* variable, 96% for the *position* variable, 90% for the *performance* variable, and 92% for the *blame* variable.

Table 1: Example tweets for the four categories

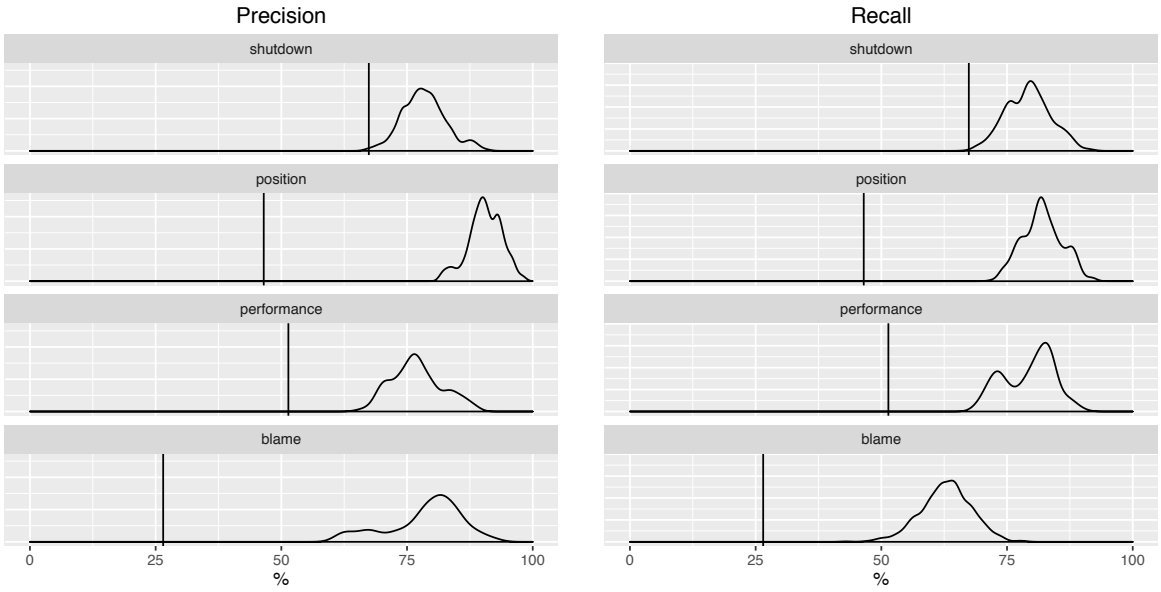
Name	Message
	Not about Shutdown
Doug Lamborn (C0-5)	With Colorado Springs constituent Jennie Dangers and her newly-adopted daughter Elizabeth.
Cathy McMorris (WA-5)	Always great to be home getting good local food in Spokane. @SweetFrostings, Dominis and its not even lunch yet!
	Policy Positions
Walter Jones (NC-3)	As the layers of the #Obamacare onion are peeled back, we're getting a better sense of just how much it stinks.
Marsha Blackburn (TN-7)	Federal public debt accounts for 73% of national debt. We've got to get this under control or our grandchildren will face bigger crises.
	Legislative Performance
Gregg Harper (MS-3)	The House has passed three bills to keep government open. Now the #SenateMustAct
Steve Southerland (FL-2)	Burning the midnight oil: expecting votes to go past midnight tonight as House works to avert #shutdown and ensure troops are paid. #sayfie
	Partisan Blame
Tim Huelskamp (KS-1)	Instead of being "Master of insults" @senatorReid should come to the table and reopen the government #EndReidShutdown
Keith Rohfus (PA-12)	Glad to answer calls from #PA12 constituents today. #Shutdown was preventable, but @SenatorReid needs to work w/ us.

We then used the labeled sample of 1,000 tweets to train a supervised machine learning algorithm (Support Vector Machine or SVM) (Joachims 2002), test its performance, and then automatically label the remaining 10,646 tweets. Since the disagreement between annotators

was very low, we use the labels of only one of the annotators for training. Preprocessing entailed stemming, removing numbers and removing infrequent terms that appear in fewer than 0.001% of the tweets. To evaluate algorithm performance for whether a tweet was about the shutdown, we split the labeled sample into a *training* set containing 75% of the cases that is used used to predict the remaining 250 cases. We then repeat this train/test process for all 750 possible combinations of train/test sets. For the other variables (position, performance, blame) the train set is smaller (506/169) because only 674 of the 1000 labeled tweets are shutdown related.

Figure 1 reports *precision* and *recall* for each of the variables. The former provides information about how many of the predicted cases are actually true cases (according to the "gold standard" human annotators). The latter provides information about how many of the true cases are not correctly predicted. Lower precision indicates that a variable's prevalence is being overestimated. Lower recall indicates that it is being underestimated. The vertical lines in Figure 1 indicate what would be expected from a random draw. For example, because 674 out of 1000 of the labeled cases are about the shutdown, precision and recall should be better than 67.4%. The density distributions indicate precision and recall for each of the 750 (506) trials. In nearly every trial, the average performace of the algorithm is substantially better than the baseline (Appendix A provides specific numerical information about the figures).

Figure 1: Predicting 4 dichotomous variables (N-fold Cross-Validation)



The final step was to use the trained algorithm to label the remaining 10,656 messages. To do this, we assigned the most common label of 750 (506) predictions for each tweet (If 375 (253) or more predictions were '1' then we assigned '1' to the tweet). Most (67.8%) of the 11,656 Republican tweets in the month surrounding the shutdown were shutdown-related. Of these, policy positions are mentioned in 46%, legislative performance is mentioned in 80%, and blame is mentioned in 23% (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of messages for each category.

All messages			
11,656			
No shutdown	Shutdown		
3,845 (33%)	7,811 (67%)		
	Position	Performance	Blame
	3,631	6,331	1,852

Findings

Figure 2 provides an initial glance at two central explanatory variables of interest: party leadership and ideology. We expect leaders to emphasize the party's effective efforts to resolve the shutdown more than the lawmakers who pushed those same leaders to start it. On average, the main Republican leaders mentioned policy positions only 28% of the time and legislative performance 60% of the time.[15] In contrast, notable Tea Party members mentioned positions 50% of the time and legislative performance just 35% of the time. House majority leader Eric Cantor's tweets included legislative performance mentions more than twice as often as policy positions (28% vs. 66%). Senator Ted Cruz's tweets mentioned policy positions almost three times as often as legislative performance (61% vs 24%).

Figure 2: Position vs. performance branding in Tweets (selected lawmakers)

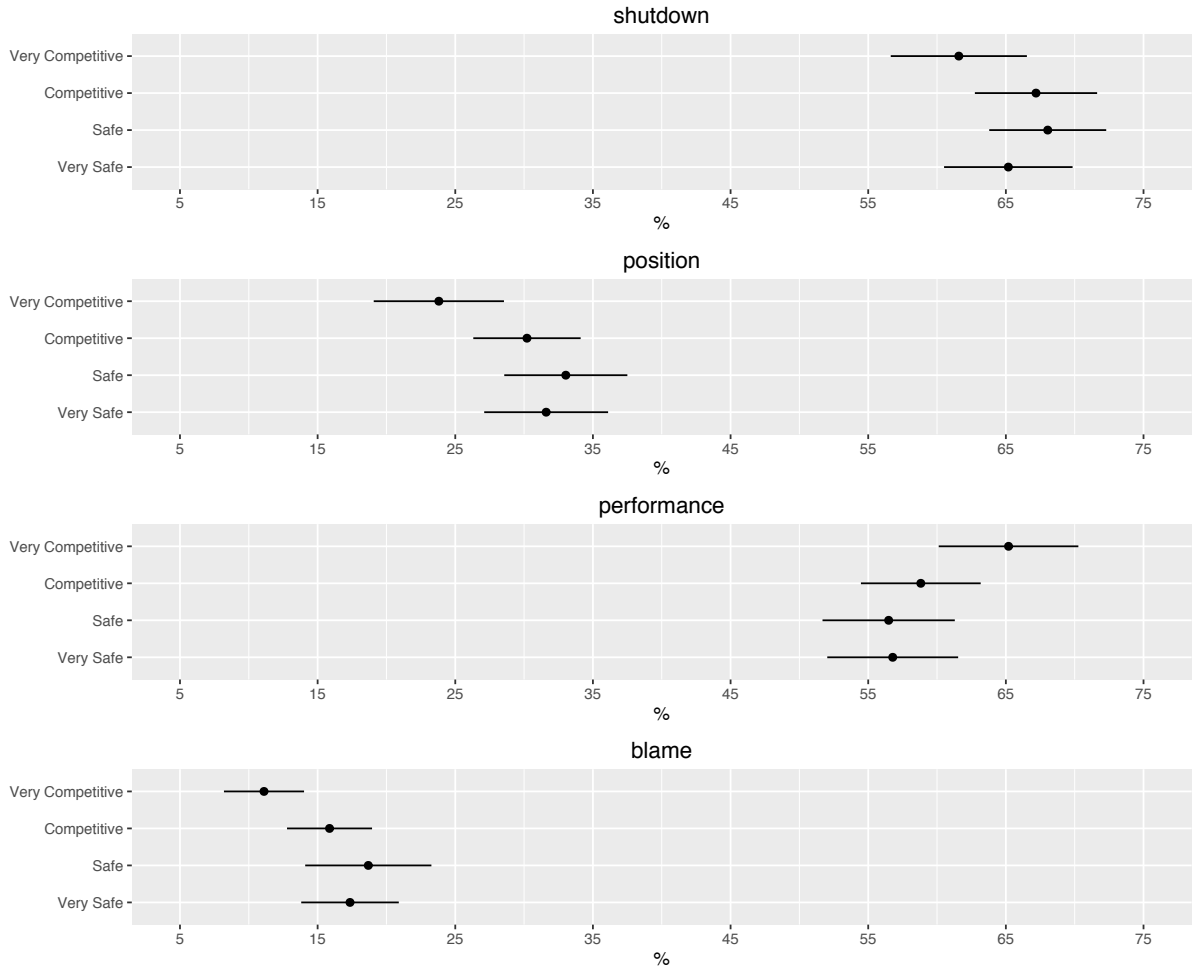
We expect that Republican members representing districts or states where Barack Obama did better in the 2012 general election will be less likely to mention the issues behind the shutdown. Moreover, existing research finds that moderate voters value legislative productivity and dislike representatives who are viewed as too partisan (Butler and Powell 2014; Carson et al. 2010). Figure 3 begins to examine the impact of House district competitiveness using President Obama's share of the two-party vote in the 2012 Presidential election (Canes-Wrone et al. 2002; Carson et al. 2010; Grimmer 2013). We expect that members from more competitive districts

[15]The percentages do not equal 100% because a single tweet could include both. House majority whip Kevin McCarthy did not send any Twitter messages during the shutdown.

and states are more likely to face electorates opposed to the shutdown. For this reason, they will be less likely to talk about the shutdown. When they do, members from competitive districts and states will downplay the issues driving the shutdown while emphasizing the party's efforts to resolve it. We also hypothesize that members representing safe (highly Republican) districts and states will be more likely to blame the shutdown on Democratic intransigence because such an argument will appeal to more of their constituents.

Figure 3 offers preliminary support for these expectations, particularly for Representatives and Senators from the most competitive quantile of constituencies (those where Obama received more than 45% of the vote). The differences in means between members in the most competitive quantile and other members are statistically significant for all four messaging dimensions (Appendix B).

Figure 3: The Impact of district competitiveness on Twitter messaging emphasis



Multivariate Analysis of Shutdown Communications

Do these initial results persist after controlling for other factors? We test three multivariate models for each chamber (see Appendix D and Figures 4 and 6). The first House and Senate models (Figure 4) are Beta regressions (Ferrari and Cribari-Neto 2004) predicting relative attention to policy positions and legislative performance. A value of 0 for the dependent variable indicates that a member only mentioned legislative performance, whereas a value of 1 indicates that they only mentioned positions in their tweets.[16] The other models are OLS regressions predicting the percentage of lawmakers' tweets that are about the shutdown and the percentage of tweets related to the shutdown that blame Democrats (Figure 6).

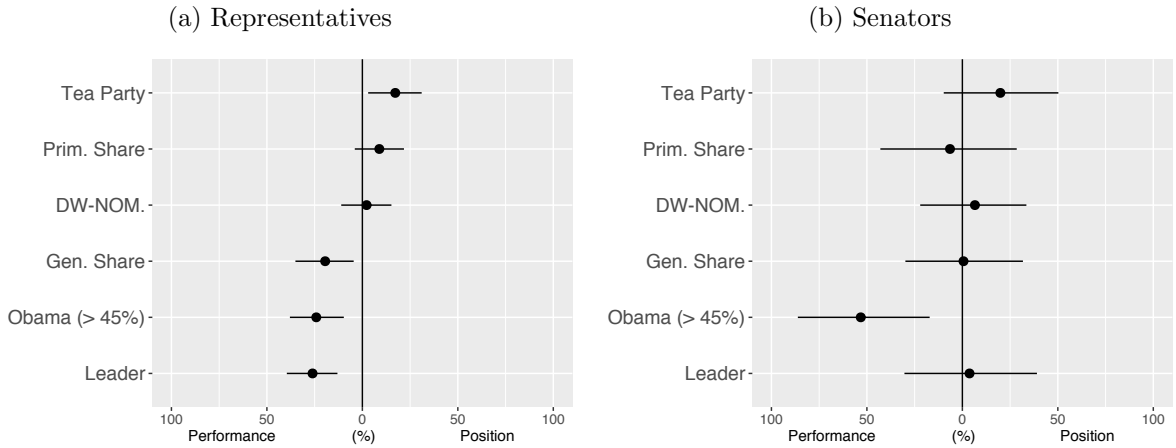
We expect House Republican leaders to emphasize legislative performance over positions as they seek to shape public perceptions of the party's role in instigating and then resolving the shutdown. In contrast, Republican leaders in the Democratically-controlled Senate had little control over developments once the shutdown began. Our list of party *Leaders* includes (in the House) the Speaker, Majority Leader, Majority Whip and committee and subcommittee chairs. In the Senate it includes the Minority leader, Minority Whip, and committee ranking members. The coefficient for party leaders will be positive if leaders support the party base by emphasizing policy positions, and negative if they supported moderates by emphasizing performance over policy. We expect the same to be true for ideologically moderate Republicans from competitive constituencies, and the opposite to be true for ideologically conservative Republicans from safe constituencies. We measure ideological extremism using a dichotomous *Tea Party* variable[17] and first dimension DW-NOMINATE scores (where higher scores indicate greater conservatism). For constituency competitiveness, we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether a district is in the most competitive quantile (at least 45% share for Obama).[18] We also ask whether members who won by larger margins in their most recent *General election* or *Primary election* are more likely to mention policy positions.

[16] Specifically $-(y * (n-1) + 0.5)/n$ where n is the sample size. We transform the extreme values of 0 and 1 using the method recommended by Smithson and Verkuilen (2006) and Cribari-Neto and Zeileis (2010).

[17] We rely on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea_Party_Caucus). Appendix C includes the full list.

[18] The results for this variable do not change when it is modeled as a continuous variable.

Figure 4: Predicting position/performance emphasis in tweets*



**Standardized coefficients (the effect of a variable moving from its mean to 1 standard deviation above)*

The results in Figures 4 are supportive for the Republican-controlled House. Party leaders emphasized the party's efforts to resolve the shutdown over the issues driving it, as did Representatives from the most competitive districts, and Republicans who won by smaller margins in 2012. In contrast, Tea Party members were significantly more likely to tweet about the issues driving the shutdown. Only state competitiveness is significant in the Senate. Senators from competitive states were more likely to emphasize the party's efforts to resolve the shutdown in their tweets.

Figure 5 transforms the beta coefficients reported in Figure 4 to estimate the size of the effects for three variables: party leaders, district competitiveness, and Tea Party membership. House leaders were about 55% more likely to focus on performance branding than non-leaders. Republican representatives from highly competitive districts were about 56% more likely to focus on performance branding than those from safer districts. Members of the Tea Party caucus were about 42% more likely to focus on position branding in their shutdown- related tweets.

Figure 5: Predicted position/performance emphasis for significant covariates in the House

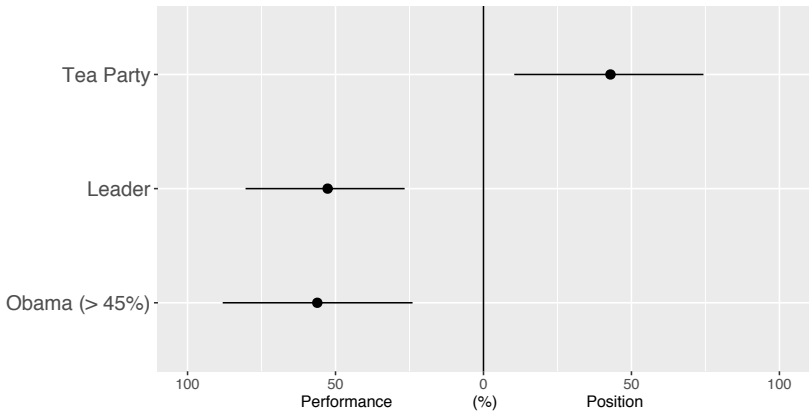
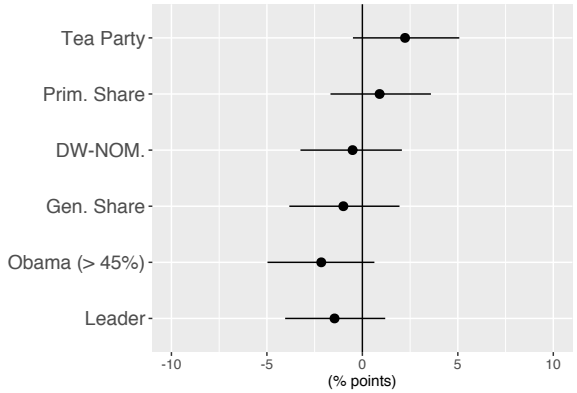


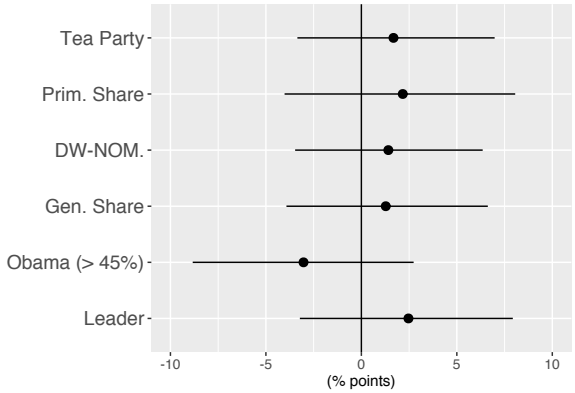
Figure 6 tests whether the same explanatory variables predict the percentage of a lawmakers' tweets that are about the shutdown and the percentage (of shutdown related-tweets) that blame Democrats (OLS regressions). There are no significant differences in attention to the shutdown. With respect to partisan blaming, Tea Party members (in the House and Senate) were about 8% more likely to blame the Democrats for the shutdown, while Republican Representatives from competitive districts were about 8% less likely to blame them (Figure 7). The only anomaly in the findings is that ideologically conservative senators were less likely to blame Democrats, other things equal.

Figure 6: Predicting shutdown tweets and partisan blaming*

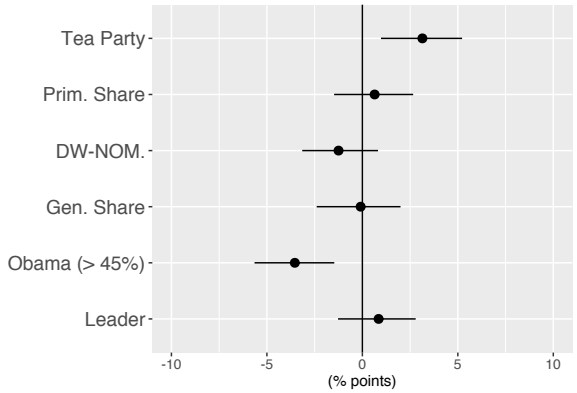
(a) % tweets about the shutdown (Representatives)



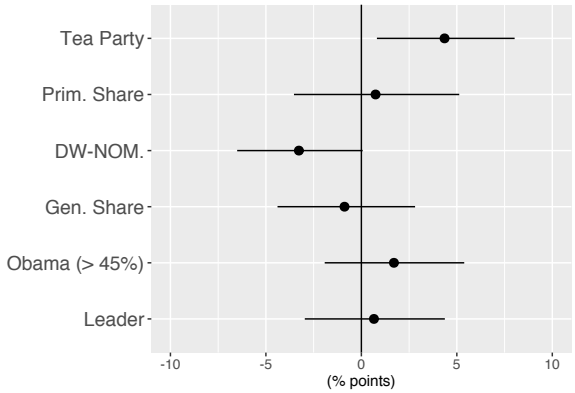
(b) % tweets about the shutdown (Senators)



(c) % tweets blaming Democrats (Representatives)

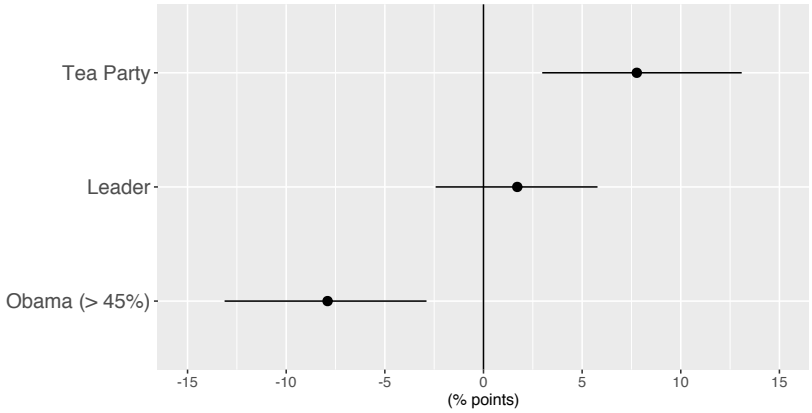


(d) % tweets blaming Democrats (Senators)



**Standardized coefficients (the effect of a variable moving from its mean to 1 standard deviation above)*

Figure 7: Predicted partisan blaming emphasis for significant covariates in the House



Discussion

An extensive party branding literature investigates how party identity influences voter behavior in elections, candidate strategy, and legislative organization. Party brands have position and valence components. Position branding occurs when voters infer policy preferences from a party's actions and statements. Valence branding occurs when voters evaluate a party's performance based on other factors such as the state of the economy or a party's governing ability. Cox and McCubbins (2005) propose a valence-based explanation for legislative organization: Voters care about a party's ability to get things done. An accomplishment-based brand benefits all party members. However, cartel theory also predicts a policy position brand that may harm the electoral prospects of centrist party candidates.

We propose one answer to the question of how party leaders balance the conflicting demands of the party base that elects them, and by centrist lawmakers who hold the keys to the legislative majority. We investigate party branding dynamics during the 2013 government shutdown. Conservative Republicans pressured House leaders to deny the House an opportunity to prevent it. This action sent a positive position-branding signal to the party base, but it had the opposite effect for many other legislators and their constituents.

We find that Republican party leaders' public rhetoric emphasized a different branding dimension than their actions. They engaged in a messaging campaign to redirect public attention away from the issues that inspired the shutdown (position branding) and toward the party's efforts to resolve it (legislative performance branding). We also find expected differences in messaging emphasis among the rank and file. Tea Party conservatives were more likely to emphasize the policy issues driving the shutdown, whereas members representing competitive districts were more likely to emphasize the party's efforts to end it.

Twitter is an increasingly common and valued form of political communication in Congress. It enables members' offices to interact directly with constituents, is becoming an important news source for journalists, and is probably representative of members' broader communications efforts. Twitter's length limit is also particularly conducive to studying political messaging because it encourages succinct themes. We find that members mostly tweeted about the shutdown during the shutdown (67% of their tweets). We were also able to predict the substance of

their tweets using standard covariates capturing preferences, constituency characteristics and electoral outcomes. Party messaging campaigns are a relatively new phenomenon in Congress. It is possible that messaging helps to explain why the 2013 shutdown did not end up being the electoral disaster many predicted. Regardless, this study appears to demonstrate the value of devoting additional research attention to messaging as a branding strategy.

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Appendix A: N-fold Cross-Validation of SVM Algorithm for four classes

Variable	Precision		Recall	
	mean	95% CI	mean	95% CI
shutdown	78.40	{78.1-78.6}	79.20	{79-79.5}
position	90.50	{90.3-90.8}	82.00	{81.7-82.3}
performance	76.90	{76.5-77.3}	79.30	{78.9-79.6}
blame	78.70	{78.1-79.3}	62.90	{62.5-63.3}

Appendix B: Comparing mean values and 95% confidence intervals for the most competitive quantile of districts with other districts

Variable	Very Competitive	Others
Shutdown	66.8%	61.6%
(95% CI)	[64.3 - 69.3]	[56.6 - 66.5]
Position	31.6%	23.8%
(95% CI)	[29.2 - 34.1]	[19.1 - 28.5]
Performance	57.4%	65.2%
(95% CI)	[54.7 - 60]	[60.1 - 70.3]
Blame	17.3%	11.1%
(95% CI)	[15.1 - 19.4]	[8.2 - 14]

Appendix C: Members of the Tea Party Caucus

HOUSE		SENATE
Bachmann (MN-6)	Palazzo (MS-4)	Blunt (MO)
Barton (TX-6)	Pearce (NM-2)	Cornyn (TX)
Bilirakis (FL-12)	Poe (TX-2)	Cruz (TX)
Black (TN-6)	Price (GA-6)	Enzi (WY)
Broun (GA-10)	Roe (TN-1)	Johnson (WI)
Carter (TX-31)	Ross (FL-15)	Lee (UT)
Cassidy (LA-6)	Royce (CA-39)	McCain (AZ)
Coble (NC-6)	Scalise (LA-1)	McConnell (KY)
Coffman (CO-6)	Schweikert (AZ-6)	Moran (KS)
Crenshaw (FL-4)	Sessions (TX-32)	Paul (KY)
Culberson (TX-7)	Smith (NE-3)	Risch (ID)
Duncan (SC-3)	Smith (TX-21)	Rubio (FL)
Farenthold (TX-27)	Stutzman (IN-3)	Scott (SC)
Fincher (TN-8)	Walberg (MI-7)	Sessions (AL)
Fleming (LA-4)	Westmoreland (GA-3)	Toomey (PA)
Franks (AZ-8)	Wilson (SC-2)	
Gingrey (GA-11)		
Gohmert (TX-1)		
Hartzler (MO-4)		
Huelskamp (KS-1)		
Jenkins (KS-2)		
King (IA-4)		
Lamborn (CO-5)		
Lummis (WY-0)		
Marchant (TX-24)		
McClintock (CA-4)		
McKinley (WV-1)		
Miller (CA-31)		
Mulvaney (SC-5)		
Neugebauer (TX-19)		

Appendix D: Beta and OLS regressions predicting Twitter messaging emphasis

	Dependent variable:					
	Perf. (%) - Pos. (%)		Shutdown (%)		Blame (%)	
	beta		*OLS*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	House	Senate	House	Senate	House	Senate
Obama (> 45.2%)	−0.566***	−1.182***	−0.049	−0.068	−0.081***	0.036
	(0.172)	(0.379)	(0.034)	(0.063)	(0.026)	(0.043)
Tea Party	0.427**	0.411	0.055	0.036	0.078***	0.090**
	(0.173)	(0.308)	(0.035)	(0.053)	(0.026)	(0.036)
General Share	−0.019***	0.001	−0.001	0.001	−0.0001	−0.001
	(0.007)	(0.016)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Primary Share	0.004	−0.003	0.0004	0.001	0.0003	0.0004
	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.0005)	(0.001)
DW-NOM.	0.068	0.215	−0.017	0.040	−0.041	−0.105*
	(0.235)	(0.438)	(0.047)	(0.076)	(0.035)	(0.052)
Leader	−0.524***	0.065	−0.030	0.049	0.018	0.012
	(0.137)	(0.331)	(0.027)	(0.057)	(0.021)	(0.039)
Constant	0.308	1.046	−0.250**	−0.495***	0.252***	0.131
	(0.505)	(1.158)	(0.114)	(0.173)	(0.087)	(0.117)
Observations	221	43	221	43	221	43
R^2	0.060	0.145	0.030	0.137	0.101	0.258
Adjusted R^2			0.003	−0.007	0.076	0.135
Log Likelihood	71.894	11.421				

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01