Presidential Leadership of Partisan Websites

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Abstract

Presidential leadership of the news media is a topic central to American politics. Yet despite myriad changes to the news environment, including the rise of a diverse set of more partisan Internet news sources, scholarship has been slow to examine how these media respond to presidential speeches. This paper studies this important topic by exploring the response of a range of partisan media to a presidential speech. We use web scraper and text analysis software to build a dataset over 11 days surrounding Barack Obama's 2015 State of the Union address. We collect news coverage from a variety of both conservative and liberal websites unassociated with television or newspaper ownership. We show striking similarities in coverage across liberal and conservative websites, even though the substance of the reports varies in interesting ways. The implications of this paper are significant for the president's ability to lead news coverage in an age of varied and more partisan news outlets.

Presidential leadership of the news media is a central topic to the study of American politics. Traditionally, presidents have had mixed influence over news coverage, often responding to the agendas of broadcast news media on major foreign policy issues (Edwards and Wood 1999). Recent changes in the communications environment and the expansion of available news sources may alter how and whether presidents lead the news, although the extent of this impact is still unclear. On the one hand, the diversity of news sources supplies presidents with more options to communicate their policy agendas. A greater variety of outlets may benefit presidential leadership of the media as mainstream news sources continue to eschew hard in favor of soft news stories. On the other hand, an increasing diversity of news sources may undermine presidential leadership given the likelihood that these sources will not cover the president in similar ways. Moreover, even though presidents are now less reliant on these traditional news forums, the diversity of available media choices that target an increasingly fragmented and partisan news audience requires presidents to diversify their own media communications strategies, which may not produce effective leadership of the news.

These changes raise questions about the prospects for presidential leadership of the news media in the post-broadcast age.[1] Yet, despite these clear changes in the news media environment, including the rise of a diverse set of more partisan Internet news sources, scholarship has been slow to examine how these media respond to presidential speeches. Given that we know very little about whether fragmented audiences promote or undermine presidential leadership of the news, the primary purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of presidential leadership on a divergent set of partisan media in the post-broadcast age.

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[1] There are a variety of target dates for the beginning of the post-broadcast age of American politics. Some might associate it with the end of the "golden age of presidential television" (Baum and Kernell 1998), which some identify as being 1986 (Young and Perkins 2005). Cohen (2008, 15) states that the "new media age" began in the 1970s, perhaps with the advent of CNN. Prior (2007) includes the rise of the Internet, in addition to cable television, as significant in post-broadcast effects.

We study this important topic in the following ways. First, we examine the impact of a single, high-profile presidential address and trace its effect on a sample of partisan online media. Our sample of online media includes both liberal and conservative-leaning websites. Second, we focus our attention on income inequality, an issue that is not only important enough to generate news coverage, but also one that should vary by partisan leaning (see Bartels 2008). Following these guidelines, we selected President Obama's 2015 State of the Union Address, and test what impact the speech and his references to income inequality had on responses by a series of conservative- and liberal-leaning websites. The president's primary domestic policy focus in this address was income inequality, an additional reason why we chose to study this policy area.

To test the relationship between the president's speech and media coverage, we collected data from a sample of conservative- and liberal-leaning websites. We use web scraping and text analysis software to build this dataset and trace partisan source coverage of the president's speech—in terms of attention, tone, and topical focus—three days before and one week after the address. Even with the advent of the Way Back Machine, reaching further back into the dawn of the Internet reveals fewer and fewer snapshots that one can collect and code. Thus, there exists a tradeoff in examining presidential leadership of even newer media: avoid a longer time series to examine online news sources, or ignore the Internet to examine longer-term trends of news coverage of the presidency and important issues. Our approach for this paper chooses the former and adds a significant piece to the puzzle of presidential leadership of online chatter. Thus, this paper reveals important implications concerning the diversity of news media and how they may limit opportunities for presidential leadership of news agendas and their tone of coverage.

Specifically, this paper makes three primary contributions to the literature. First, it explores the impact that presidential communication has on a specific set of diverse news sources available in the post-broadcast age of American politics. Much of what we know about presidential

communication centers on traditional forms of news media (broadcast television and newspapers). This study seeks to bridge our knowledge of presidential-media relations into the post-broadcast age. Second, it speaks to the increasing diversity of partisan online news media, and the complications this presents to presidents who need news coverage to set the national policy agenda and govern effectively. If presidents are unable to affect the diversity of partisan online news sources with a high-profile speech like the State of the Union Address, then this clearly undermines the president's ability to lead the nation on important policy issues.

The Presidency and News Media

Presidential leadership of the news media is a principal topic in the study of American politics. Because much of this research centers on the relationship between the president and traditional forms of news media, we begin by summarizing several foundational studies in this literature. Just as this strain of research has offered a number of (and sometimes conflicting) conclusions concerning the president's relationship to traditional news coverage, there is also very little research that examines presidential leadership of newer media. Thus, the implications of these findings for presidential leadership of newer media are even less clear, whether we examine agenda-setting or tone of coverage.

Evidence concerning presidential leadership of the traditional news agenda proves mixed and variable. On the one hand, presidents respond to news coverage of salient foreign policy issues like the Arab-Israeli conflict or US-Soviet relations (Edwards and Wood 1999; Wood and Peake 1998) and several subcategories of economic issues (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2005). On the other hand, presidents tend to lead news coverage on both foreign and economic policy issues that were not previously salient (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2011; Peake 2001). Presidential influence over the news agenda also varies by presidents' strategy of leadership. National addresses affect short-term news coverage on many issues (Peake and Eshbaugh-Soha 2008) and increase coverage in

newspapers (Bradshaw, Coe, and Neumann 2014). Everyday presidential speeches also increase the number of news stories published by approximately two dozen American newspapers (Cohen 2010). Presidents even have success increasing *New York Times* coverage of a range of policies when they issue executive orders that concern those policies (Boydstun 2013). In addition, Miles (2014) reveals that presidents can alter traditional news coverage indirectly, by diverting media attention away from issues unrelated to the president's priorities.

Research regarding tone reveals that presidential news coverage is predominately negative (Cohen 2008; Eshbaugh-Soha 2010; Farnsworth and Lichter 2006; Groeling and Kernell 1998). Beyond these descriptive findings are few studies that actually seek to explain whether and to what extent presidential leadership strategies may successfully direct the tone of news coverage. This limited research produces findings that should be encouraging to the president, nevertheless. Presidential speeches increase the tone of newspaper coverage, especially when the president is a voice in the story (Cohen 2010). Visiting a local media market (or "going local") also leads to more positive news coverage for the president (Barrett and Peake 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2006), a finding that recent research has extended to Spanish-language television news coverage of the presidency (Eshbaugh-Soha 2014). Although Wood (2007) illustrates that presidential optimism affects public opinion on the economy through public *perception* of the tone of news coverage, he does not examine whether presidential tone shapes the *content* of economic news reports.

Scholarship has been slow to explore presidential leadership of agendas and tone of newer media. Of this limited body of work, Baum and Groeling (2008) offer an important examination of newer media, including partisan blogs, but their focus is not exclusive to presidential leadership. Thus, while limited in scope, they do find that presidents are still newsworthy across a range of newer media, including partisan blogs. Another study compares the news agenda across a range of online, cable, and traditional news sources and demonstrates that news coverage of the president's

speeches is fairly uniform across outlets (Eshbaugh-Soha 2016). For newer media, there is too little research to draw any definitive or distinct conclusions. But across all media and eras of news coverage, research is clear that presidential leadership of the news media proves mixed, in terms of both agenda-setting and the tone of coverage.

Theory

The purpose of this paper is to examine presidential leadership of a varied contingent of online media sources. The argument is that a single, high-profile presidential speech (in this case the State of the Union Address) affords presidents the best opportunity to catch the attention of a range of news sources, thereby setting their agendas. And there is much evidence that presidents are able to use this speech to affect traditional news media, like newspapers (Bradshaw, Coe, and Neumann 2014), and television (Foote 1990). Even if the speech may not translate into greater legislative success or garner sustainable increases in public support, it is still easily accessible to media and always a legitimate news story.[2]

There are two primary reasons why nearly all news media will respond to presidential speeches generally, and the State of the Union, more specifically. First, news media are interested in making profit, which in turn influences their decisions as to what to cover (Graber and Dunaway 2015; Hamilton 2004; Leighley 2004). The first motivation in profit is to generate large audiences, so that news organizations will cover topics that they think will be of interest to their viewers. Typically, and certainly on traditional news sources, the president is likely to be a profitable news topic, as most people are interested in presidential news compared with other political stories.

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[2] Even though presidents have given fewer national addresses since the Reagan Administration (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2011, 83) and networks are more resistant to giving airtime for discretionary speeches (Edwards 2003), the State of the Union address is still well-covered. The only instance that we found of a major distraction to the SUA was the verdict in the OJ Simpson civil deposition, in which President Clinton's 1997 SUA was placed on a split screen with the reading of this guilty verdict.

The second motivation for generating profit is by reducing the costs to producing news. Reducing the costs of production may be achieved in a variety of ways, including cutting staff or repackaging AP wire reports to not have to pay for independent reports. The president, in particular, is relatively easy to cover given that the White House expends considerable resources to reach the news media (Kumar 2007). Covering a nationally televised address is especially low cost since all media will have easy access to it. When presidents and their own words are easily accessible, presidents help to reduce the costs to producing this coverage, which increases the likelihood that the president will be in the news.

Norms of journalistic professionalism also influence the decisions of news organizations to cover the president. In a word, a topic is most likely be covered if it is newsworthy, and stories are considered to be newsworthy, when they have a strong impact on viewers or society, involve conflict or scandal, are familiar to viewers, are proximate, timely, and novel (Graber and Dunaway 2015, 113-114; see Groeling 2010). Since presidential news easily meets this standard of what is newsworthy, the president is likely to be covered frequently.

These standards drive traditional news coverage of the president, even though presidents may respond to news agendas (Edwards and Wood 1999) or receive predominately negative news coverage (Farnsworth and Lichter 2006). The larger question is what aspects of theories of traditional news coverage extend to newer media, particularly partisan-leaning and political websites. We think that the same standards that drive traditional news coverage should also affect coverage by online and partisan news outlets in the following ways. The expectations for whether the president can dictate the specific choices of coverage and the tone of that coverage are likely to vary by the self-identified partisan leaning of nontraditional news sources. At the very least, our theory is designed to help us develop expectations for how the impact of a single presidential speech varies across online media, according to measures of both agenda-setting and tone.

Just as audience demand drives the profitability of traditional news, so too does audience demand dictate political website traffic. Certainly, the profit mechanism differs between the two. Whereas traditional news outlets parlay viewers into charging more for commercial airtime, political websites also benefit from more readers, including through advertising, more visits, and greater exposure. So long as the focus of a website is on political news, it is likely to cover a high-profile political figure and event, like a presidential State of the Union address. Second, reducing costs is also rational for political websites. As Hindman (2009, 132) notes, "even in the digital world, some content is expensive to produce," so it should not be considered the case that being online is synonymous with a free product. Moreover, there is ample evidence that many online news sources and blogs rely heavily on other online news sources, anyway; Drudge Report is essentially a centralized listing of key internet links. And when the president is involved, it follows that it is relatively costless to use his words or agenda to produce at least the baseline of a blog posting or story. Although this also differs in function from traditional news, it is still relatively easier to respond to an existing topic or news story or event, rather than to come up with something unique, or something that may require additional research and information.

Although we are agnostic as to the journalistic professionalism of political websites, we think that whether or not a topic is newsworthy should also motivate their coverage. Indeed, any evidence of systematic slant (evinced on cable news channels such as Fox or MSNBC) would undercut the justification of newsworthiness based on professional norms, which espouse objectivity (as much as that is even possible). To this end, partisan websites are more likely to follow patterns of partisan cable news programs. And even if we were to argue that *Hannity* or *The Rachel Maddow Show* deviate from traditional news reporting practices, they are certainly likely to cover the president when the president is newsworthy. Thus, political websites are likely to cover the president, but do so in a way that reflects their readers' interest and partisan leaning. Thus, differences in coverage should vary by how much of

the president's words are covered and the tone of that coverage, not in terms of whether or not they cover the president. In fact, coverage of the president's address on either conservative or liberal websites should track coverage of a traditional news source like the *New York Times*.

This particular expectation is consistent with research on the democratization (or lack thereof) of the dissemination of information spurred by the Internet (see Hindman 2009). The idea is that the Internet and its myriad available sources of information, perspectives, and opinions would produce an equally diverse set of perspectives, coverage, and commentary. If the Internet has fueled greater democratization and openness, then we are likely to find a range and diversity of news coverage. But it is equally possible that the Internet concentrates information and does not live up to its promise of being vast and informationally-diverse (as Hindman (2009) finds). If we find a similarity in coverage across partisan websites, then our data lend support to this perspective. Overall, then, this paper also speaks to the diversity of information provided by different websites and what impact they have on the range of Internet news coverage and the democratization of the Internet.

As it is, the primary driver behind variation in presidential news coverage by partisan websites should be the very partisan leaning of those sources. Each appeals to a particular audience that is mostly of a partisan nature. Therefore, conservative websites should be less likely to cover the president's message, and more likely to cover him negatively. Conversely, liberal websites should be more likely to cover the president's message, and be more likely to cover him positively. Although we are unable to measure the ideological leaning beyond whether or not a website is classified as liberal or conservative, it is highly likely that websites will differ in the amount and tone of their presidential news coverage. Thus, we not only describe each of our 20 sources separately to search for different patterns of coverage, we also account for the possibility that the size of a website's audience is synonymous with its available resources. Although more resources may not affect variation in tone of coverage, it should affect the amount of coverage devoted to the president's address. This is consistent with studies of

news coverage that show newspapers with larger circulation numbers, e.g.., the *New York Times*, produce

larger newspapers that local or regional newspapers, e.g., the *Sacramento Bee*. Thus, higher-ranked

websites should offer more coverage than lower-ranked ones.

Data

We examine the impact of President Obama's 2015 State of the Union Address on its prior

and subsequent coverage across a balance of liberal- and conservative-leaning online news sources.

We searched for coverage between January 17 and January 28, 2015. That the speech was on

January 20, 2015 means that we collected data for three days before and eight days after the speech,

for a total of 11 days of news coverage. We built a list of websites from rankings provided by

Alexa.com,[3] and selected from these sources a range of liberal and conservative sources. We limited

our sources to ones with online archives that are searchable by date. The searchable archives allows

us to have some confidence that we are not undercounting stories which should be in our data set.

Given that our focus is on non-mainstream Internet sources, we did not select websites such as

foxnews.com or cnn.com. Nevertheless, we collected stories from the *New York Times* (through

Lexis-Nexis Academic) so as to have a mainstream news baseline with which to compare our non-

mainstream news results.

Having selected a set of sources and time frame, we used web scraping software to identify

and collect the universe of stories that cover the president's comments on income inequality. We did

this by narrowing our search to only stories which contain mentions of the president, or State of the

Union address, as well as income inequality. Each story was coded by date and by news source, and

text was segmented into ideational context blocks. Context blocks represent individual ideational

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[3] Alexa is a subsidiary company of Amazon.com which provides commercial web traffic data as well as website ranking information. The complete list of website with rankings from which we compiled our list is available from the authors.

sections of a news story, such as a paragraph, that relates to a specific issue. They represent a useful way to analyze text-based news stories, which often cover a variety of topics, spend differing lengths of time on each topic, and take contrasting sentiments depending on the topic being covered. The context blocks that we have selected cover a single issue and are thus most appropriate for addressing news coverage of that issue.

We then used Leximancer 3.1 software to search this database of text for sentences related to income inequality, according to a key word list that included the following key words: income inequality, income distribution, low income, minimum wage, unemployment, rich and poor, or middle class.[4] Once we identified context blocks that contain these words or word combinations, they were coded for number of sentences and tone. We aggregated these sentence counts to the day, which is our unit of analysis. The data were then aggregated to the day and by ideological leanings of the news sources. The sentence count is a measure of how much attention each news source gave to the coverage of the president's speech specifically with regards to income inequality, and the tonal value is a measure of the news source's orientation towards the president's speech on this issue.

We coded tone using the pre-built Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (LSD) of words with positive or negative sentiment. Our variable for tone was then calculated by taking the number of all of the positive words and subtracting the number of all of the negative words, and then dividing by the total number of positive and negative words. This produces a -1 to 1 tone scale with -1 representing statements that were completely negative towards the topic, and 1 representing statements that were completely positive.

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[4] Leximancer 3.1 software searched context blocks for individual words, word combinations, and word bigraphs and trigraphs. This ensures that the search hits potentially different wordings of the same concept. For instance, when searching for "income inequality", the software also identifies the trigraph "inequality of income".

The key independent variable is the text of President Obama's 2015 State of the Union Address. Available in several places including at the American Presidency Project online, we downloaded this speech into a text file and calculated the length of the speech and the overall tone of the speech. We then identified the sections of the speech that address income inequality issues and coded the amount of the president's attention (measured in sentences), and the tone of the president's remarks for the entire speech and income inequality issues, only.

There are a variety of ways to approach studying the impact of presidential speeches on news coverage. Our approach takes a single high-profile presidential speech, which allows us to assess what impact—and what kind of impact—that speech had on subsequent attention across a range of diverse news media. Given the sheer number of available partisan websites sources, we select twenty sites and focus our attention on only one aspect of the president's speech: Income inequality. Clearly, President Obama saw income inequality as worth prioritizing in his penultimate State of the Union Address, even though the prospects for legislative change were minimal and a lack of public consensus that government policies should be used to help remedy economic inequality.[5] In all, the president's State of the Union Address comprised 351 sentences at an overall tone of 0.28. His attention to income inequality amounted to 56 sentences or about 16 percent of the entire speech. His discussion of income inequality was also positive at 0.20.

Although the bulk of our analysis focuses on trends and fluctuations in the amount and tone of blog coverage of income inequality and the president's address, we also seek to explain these two dependent variables. To do so, we model several independent variables. Given that these are daily news coverage measures, our focus in building these models was to select a series of independent variables that were also available by the day. First, because the president's focus is on income

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[5] In November 2011, 52 percent of Americans viewed the gap between rich and poor as an "acceptable part of the economic system" (http://www.gallup.com/poll/151568/americans-prioritize-growing-economy-reducing-wealth-gap.aspx).

inequality, we control for the state of the economy in our models. Specifically, we control for the daily Dow Jones Industrial Average. We log this measure for easier interpretation. Second, a good proxy for the president's political context is his job approval ratings. We use Gallup's daily approval tracking poll and model the daily change in this measure. Third, we model the blog's ranking, as coded by Alexa.com. Fourth, we model the president's State of the Union address as a dummy variable, coded 1 for the day after the address. We code the speech for the day after given that coding an evening speech on the day it is delivered will reveal its effect on coverage before the speech, not after, which is our primary interest.

Findings

Table 1 lists each news source that we use, by ideological leaning and Alexa.com traffic ranking.[6] It also includes average indicators of tone and amount. We also collected data over the same time period and using the same criteria for *The New York Times*. This supplies a baseline of comparison with a traditional news source. The data reveal slight differences in coverage across liberal and conservative blogs, with significant differences across individual sources. Overall, conservative websites are slightly more negative in their coverage of income inequality than liberal sources, and covered 10 more stories. Nevertheless, liberal websites offered about 1.5 more sentences per story than conservative ones. This compares similarly to the *New York Times*, which offered about 18 sentences per story. Typical of most traditional news sources, the tone of *New York Times*, which is still slightly more negative than positive, was centered in between the tone of conservative and liberal websites, at -0.002.

[Table 1 About Here]

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[6] Alexa's traffic estimates are based on data from global traffic panels, which is a sample of millions of Internet users using one of over 25,000 different browser extensions.

Among the individual sources, both conservative and liberal websites display significant variation in amount and tone of coverage. Conservative source coverage ranges from 9.875 to 30.66 sentences, and 5 to 30 stories. The tone is also quite variable with 5 positive- and 5-negative leaning websites. The most positive conservative website is The Blaze, at 0.011, while the most negative is NewsMax's -0.031 rating. On the liberal side, coverage ranges from 12.8 to 28.4 sentences, and between 4 and 26 stories. As one might expect, the highest ranked liberal websites—Huffington Post, Slate, and Politico—offer the most stories in our sample. Liberal sources also display a mix of positive and negative sentiment, with Salon producing the most negative coverage in our sample.

Clearly, neither set of partisan website is cueing solely on Barack Obama. If this were the case, then conservatives would be decidedly negative and vice-versa for liberal sources. Instead, this variation suggests the partisan websites are addressing the President's substantive policies and, as would be expected, even a Democratic president may not propose policies that would satisfy the most liberal, online audiences.

There is also significant variation in the amount and tone of coverage over time. Combining all liberal and conservative sources into separate measures of tone and amount, Figures 1 and 2 show the ups and downs of coverage leading up to and after the State of the Union Address on January 20, 2015. It is interesting that the tone of coverage the day after is more positive for liberal websites, but does not persist as positive coverage through the remaining days of the sample. This shows at least an immediate and beneficial impact of the president's address, and in the expected direction. Moreover, this finding is consistent with research that shows president's leadership is most likely to occur in the very short-term, but not over several days after the address (see Rottinghaus 2010 for a similar conclusion concerning leadership of public opinion). Even though the president is not guaranteed more positive coverage from the expected set of partisan websites (liberal, in this case), liberal coverage is more positive—at about 0.32—than even the president's

own tone of positive 0.02. It is also worth noting that the high point in the amount of coverage is not the day after the State of the Union Address, which would be a reflection on the president's speech, but the day of, or the lead-up to the address. Clearly, the White House goes to great lengths to promote the speech and their efforts in doing so are effective. Perhaps one potential, yet unobserved result of this pre-speech coverage is to generate a larger viewing audience than one would expect without such leadership of the news. Moreover, these patterns of coverage are relatively consistent with coverage in the *Times*, even though it is consistently more neutral in tone.

[Figures 1 and 2 About Here]

As a text analytics tool, Leximancer can be used to analyze the content of collections of textual documents and to display the extracted information visually. The information is displayed by means of a conceptual map that provides a view of the material representing the main concepts contained within the text as well as information about how they are related. This map can be understood as the conceptual structure of a body of text, showing which concepts appear the most often and how those words are related. As an example, it is clear from the conservative map in Figure 3 that conservative sources link Obama with the middle class, and talk about things like community college. Alternatively liberal sources tend to associate minimum wage with the American economy, and the middle class is talked about with regards to their tax burden.

[Figure 3 About Here]

As a final look at the data, we present two separate inferential models that attempt to explain the tone and amount of partisan website coverage of income inequality. We include a variety of independent variables that may condition the tone or amount of coverage. These include Gallup's presidential approval ratings (daily tracking poll, available at pollingreport.com), the daily value of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, lagged one day and logged, a dummy variable to indicate the day

of the State of the Union address, whether or not the website was conservative or not, and the website's overall Alexa ranking.

[Table 2 About Here]

Neither model explains the dependent variables particularly well. Both models, in fact, reveal little significant variation by the ideological leaning of the website. Even though conservative sources cover the president more negatively and in fewer sentences than liberal sources, neither of these relationships is statistically significant. Even so, the president's State of the Union address has a positive effect on the tone of all coverage. This variable leads by one day so that it matches with coverage on January 21, 2015, the day after the State of the Union Address. This is not the extent of the president's leadership, of course. As the figures also illustrate, partisan websites gear up for the State of the Union address and rely upon it—and what they expect the president to discuss—to expand their news coverage. There are more stories building up to and including the day before and after the State of the Union address, denoting that presidents affect news coverage simply by delivered a national speech that is announced days in advance. Comparable to the amount of resources a website may have to devote to covering a presidential address, the Alexa ranking is positively related to the number of sentences a website produces. This is also consistent with past research that shows more resources available to traditional news sources leads to a greater amount of coverage. It also suggests that even though there exists a wide range of political websites, presidents are likely to have a larger return on their investment for websites with larger audiences. If the president wishes to develop a strategy for targeting partisan websites, specifically, then the president is wise to target the highest ranked ones to maximize his coverage.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine presidential influence over partisan websites. To do this, we examined one high profile presidential address and twenty political websites in real time. We

collected data on income inequality, a central priority of the president's 2015 State of the Union address. We examined coverage across a range of both liberal and conservative websites with the intent of moving the presidency-media literature more firmly into the post-broadcast age within which the president governs. Although this paper is far from the final word on the president's effectiveness in leading a diversity of political websites in an age of partisan media, it provides some insight into the difficulties of and opportunities for presidential leadership of the array of partisan media found on the Internet.

In all, we find a mix of predictable variation yet unexpected stability in the amount and tone of coverage of income inequality by partisan websites. In terms of amount of coverage, both liberal and conservative sources track the president's speech similarly to each other and in comparison with the *New York Times*. Moreover, the amount of coverage peaks the day before the address, suggesting that it is not the delivery of the speech but the promotion of it—by the White House and news organizations, themselves—that generates the largest amount of coverage. That a higher ranking web ranking is positively related to more coverage is consistent with the finding among traditional news that more resources equals more coverage. In all, there is little significant variation in the amount of coverage by the partisan leaning of a website that focuses predominately on political news.

The results are less robust concerning the tone of coverage. Although one might expect that liberal websites would be much more favorably disposed to the president's speech, the results do not demonstrate this consistently. Although liberal sources offer more positive coverage of the president than conservative ones, there is significant variation in tone by day and source in our sample; even liberal websites covered the president more negatively than positively on some days. Yet, when we look at the tone of coverage directly associated with the president's speech, we see that liberal websites were even more positive than the president's tone and that conservative

websites cover the president negatively. This is consistent with what we would expect and also reinforces the president's leadership of political websites, at least in the short-term and for partisan sources that are ideologically aligned with the president's point of view.

Obviously, more research is needed on this important topic. Although our analysis stops eight days after the president's speech (and a sample of subsequent days reveals no additional news coverage of the president's speech), its impact could endure longer in other years. For example, 2015 is the year before a presidential election in which the incumbent is not running. Quickly after the president's address, news media turned to likely Republican presidential candidates. In other years, perhaps during a president's first or second year—or even during his own reelection campaign—we may see additional and lengthier discussion of the president's agenda articulated in a major presidential speech like the State of the Union. The former is especially likely given that his proposals are more likely to be considered by Congress during a president's first or second years, rather than during his last two years in office. To this end, party control of Congress may also predict how long the president's speech affects the news, as party control affects the probability of presidential success in Congress.

We also found similarities in tone and amount even among partisan websites with different ideological leaning, but wonder if this is really that surprising. Presidents, even when they lean either left or right, are unlikely to take positions as far left or as far right as many of these partisan sources. George W. Bush was criticized by conservatives for not being fiscally-conservative. Liberals routinely criticized Obamacare because it wasn't liberal enough, that it wasn't a single-payer program. For certain, the president can take positions that will appeal to these more partisan news outlets. Yet, for a national speech, where presidents will routinely take positions that are of interest to that large audience and support policies that both liberals and conservatives may support, perhaps it is expected that presidents would be criticized from both the left and the right. Additional

research on addresses that target specific, ideological groups may reveal more differences in the tone across conservative and liberal websites. Moreover, similarities across all sources and their coverage of the State of the Union Address could be reflecting the nature of this particular event. A regular news event that is high profile and clearly newsworthy is likely to penetrate all manner of online news sources, that coverage is likely to be similar even though partisan audiences may demand—and partisan news blogs may accommodate—a wider range of coverage in the absence of a clear potential news event like the State of the Union Address.

These and other questions provide for an exciting research agenda in the area of the presidency and media in the age of partisan news. Scholars will need to think creatively about how to explore these questions given the amount of data needed to conduct a comprehensive analysis and the difficulty in gathering enough past Internet data to run a lengthy time series analysis. Given the difficulty in collecting data for time already passed, future scholarship might identify the first year of the next president and track web coverage across the same sites that we have examined. This research design would allow for an examination of national addresses (like the State of the Union) and other speeches and events. The design could also explore whether partisan websites respond to the president's speeches, or whether they generate other kinds of presidential news coverage.

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Figure 1. Number of Sentences per Day by Liberal and Conservative Blogs
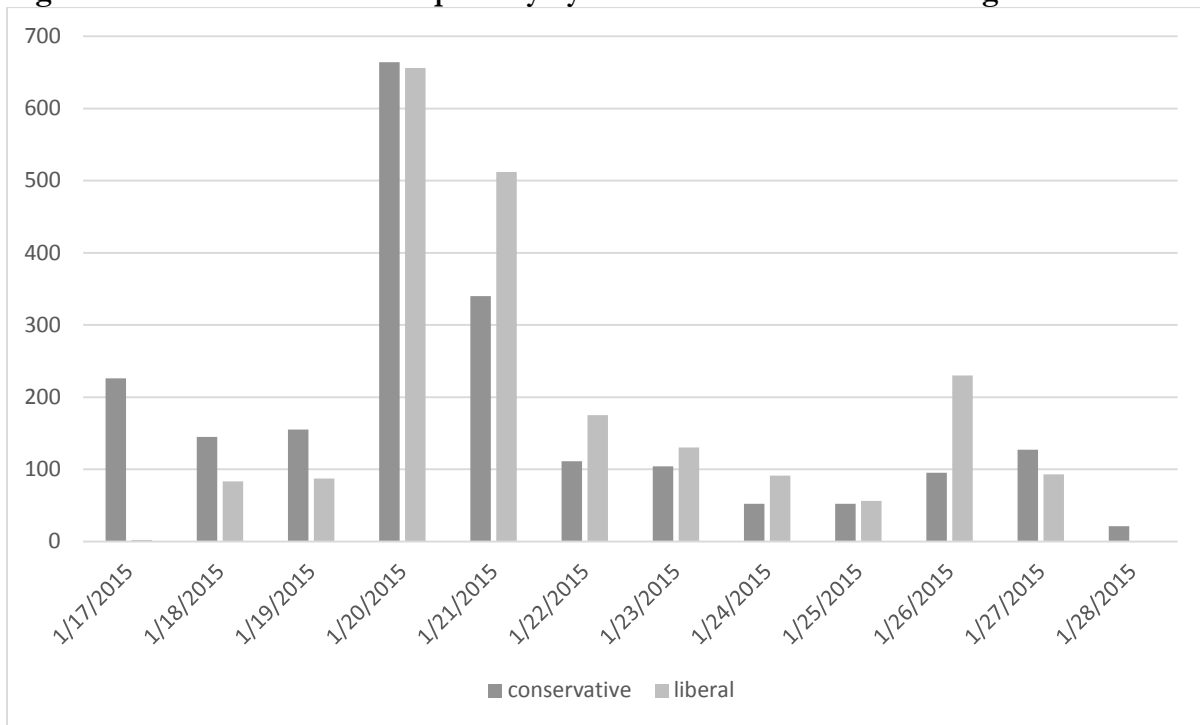
Note: Liberal and conservative sentences are positively correlated, at r = 0.87.

Figure 2. The Amount of Tone per Day by Liberal and Conservative Blogs
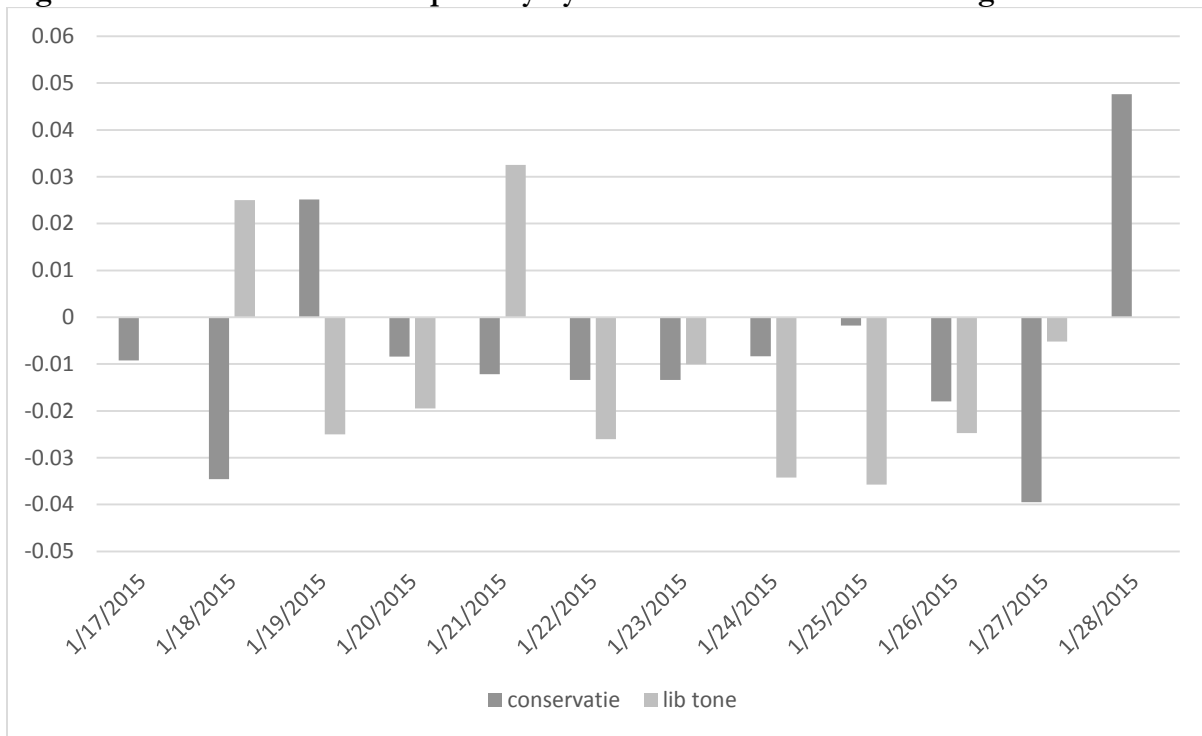
Note: Liberal and conservative tone are negatively correlated, at r = - 0.20.

Figure 3. Leximancer Context Maps of the President's State of the Union Address

Table 1. Alexa Rank, Average Tone, and Amount of Coverage by News Source

	Alexa Rank	Tone	Sentences	Stories
Conservative Sources				
IJ Review	46	0.005	9.875	8
The Blaze	71	0.011	20.111	9
Drudge Report	187	-0.009	22.5	6
TPNN	207	0.010	12.833	6
NewsMax	226	-0.031	17.276	30
Daily Caller	332	-0.010	12.071	14
Breitbart	561	-0.012	23.095	21
National Review Online	665	0.003	25	5
The Daily Signal	838	0.001	30.666	9
Weekly Standard	1117	-0.007	22	4
		-0.0105	19.06	112
Liberal Sources				
Huffington Post	193	-0.005	16.615	26
Slate	569	0.030	19.666	12
Politico	470	0.001	25	13
Salon	455	-0.052	21.555	9
National Journal	738	0.009	13.625	8
Mother Jones	692	-0.044	27	4
The Nation	924	0.025	28.444	9
Democratic Underground	995	-0.022	19.333	10
Daily Kos	1066	-0.006	12.8	5
The New Republic	1137	-0.005	31	7
		-0.0035	20.74	102
The New York Times		-0.002	17.82	22

Sources: Rankings provided by Alexa.com. Average tone and amount of coverage collected by the authors.

Table 2. Determinants of the Tone and Amount of Partisan Blog Coverage of Income Inequality

	Tone	Amount
Dow Jones Avg (logged)	-0.33	66.66
	(0.80)	(167.49)
Presidential Approval (change)	0.0003	0.34
	(0.003)	(0.70)
Alexa Ranking	0.00	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.004)
State of the Union Address	0.03*	-3.66
	(0.02)	(2.33)
Constant	3.17	-636.06
	(7.87)	(1636.99)
R-squared	.03	.05
F-test	1.14	1.86
N	213	213

* $p < .05$

Note: Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses. Amount of coverage is the number of sentences per day and by source.