Mediated Homestyle: Congressional Strategy and Local Press Relations in the 111th House of Representatives

Michael K. Romano
mromano@georgiasouthern.edu

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MEDIATED HOMESTYLE: CONGRESSIONAL STRATEGY AND LOCAL PRESS RELATIONS IN THE 111TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

by

Michael K. Romano

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science
Western Michigan University
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Doctoral Committee:

John A. Clark, Ph.D., Chair
J. Kevin Corder, Ph.D.
Emily Hauptmann, Ph.D.
Brian F. Schaffner, Ph.D.
For over thirty years, research on Congressional behavior has provided evidence of a link between constituent opinions and the ways in which members publically conduct themselves. Homestyle (Fenno, 1978: pg. 32), the way members “cultivate their constituencies,” has emphasized that personal encounters between members and their constituents is an effective strategy for decreasing the level of uncertainty members have about their approval. Homestyle, however, overlooks the fact that members of Congress cannot directly interact with their constituents on a daily basis. The mass media, specifically local media outlets, help legislators by transmitting relevant information about political events and legislators’ actions to the communities that those representatives serve. Representatives involve themselves in strategic interactions with journalists in order to influence the media’s capacity to influence public opinion by deciding what does and does not become news. Members attempt to present themselves in a manner consistent with the interests of their constituents in order to promote a sense of trust with citizens. Representatives can influence media reports on their behavior through the release of press statements specifically designed to bolster their activities in the legislature. These statements create an “image” or brand around a particular member, which can be easily consumed by the electorate and influence their preconceived notions.
and beliefs about the representativeness of a legislator to their interests. This dissertation examines the way members influence the local media’s ability to report the news through the use of press statements. I argue that the frequency and themes of these releases have a significant effect on the news that is created by local newspaper outlets. Furthermore, these interactions have a significant and positive effect on constituent perceptions about their representative.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Members of Congress have to deal with multiple audiences during their day-to-day work in Washington. As one of the primary sources of information about politics, the media expects political actors to provide not only their expertise in discussing matters of policy, but also to create situations that journalists can weave into a narrative that people enjoy. Constituents, however, like to see their Representative ensuring their interests in Washington while acting in an upright, ethical manner; a manner that is not well-suited to media attention. Malecha and Reagan (2012), Zaller (1999), Sellers (2010), and others note that fluctuations in press attention to Congress have led to a fundamental shift in the ways in which representatives behave both internally and externally. Internally, legislative proceedings have shifted from closed, in-house deliberations between members, leaders, and parties to battles waged in the media for control of the policy message and public opinion. The shift has pushed representatives to provide clever, quick, and easy to understand statements about the policy rich environment inside the chamber to satisfy what they view to be a largely unpredictable audience (Sellers, 2010; see also Arnold, 2004). Strategic political communications,\(^1\) often referred to as “spin,”

\(^1\)Following Manheim (2008, p. 106), I define “strategic political communication” as “the use of sophisticated knowledge of such attributes of human behavior as attitude and preference structures, cultural tendencies, and media use patterns—and such relevant organizational behaviors as how news organizations make decisions regarding news content and how congressional committees schedule and structure hearings—to shape and target messages to maximize their desired impact while minimizing undesired collateral effects” (see also Sellers, 2010).
has been shown to be effective in controlling party messages in the national press and
shoring up support within the party (Sellers, 2010). Politicians attempt to strategically
shape communications through the media in order to control the agenda and manage the
public narrative by carefully choosing the statements they make in the press (Cook, 2005;
Kernell, 2007; Larson, 1992; Sellers, 2010).

Externally, rank-and-file members have increasingly become aware of the
“constant election,” and must continually update their advertising strategies in order to
control the narrative that constituents receive about their behavior in Washington (Evans
& Oleszek, 2001; Sinclair, 2006). Changing trends in information technology and the
increasing speed at which information can be transmitted has only exacerbated the issues
that representatives must deal with when trying to maintain their own narratives in the
public. News agencies are seen both as gatekeepers of information as well as narrative
creators. Through their ability to provide the frame of stories presented to the public, the
media is central to the development of public debate over matters of politics and public
“gatekeeper,” the press is able to control the flow of communications between political
actors and citizens by affecting the distribution of information to citizens (Soroka, 2012),
and has been connected with the effect of media coverage on topics such as economic
attitudes in the United States (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Soroka, 2006, 2012), foreign policy
(Soroka, 2003), and others. While new media technology has provided a more
streamlined conduit for representatives to utilize when communicating with their
constituents back home, the most recent reports on news media by the Pew Research
Center have found that local media outlets still maintain the public’s trust in reporting information about politics that affect their particular area (Pew Research Center, 2011). Starting in the latter half of the twentieth century, representatives took greater control over their efforts to maintain a positive public profile in the media by hiring staff whose sole duty was the handling of press affairs (Born, 1982; Cook, 1989; Dunn, 1968).

Despite the increasingly polarized media and political environment that members of Congress must deal with, local outlets still tend to provide a permeable, open system for representatives to use when trying to cultivate a personal vote from citizens. Because of the open nature of the media environment, especially with regard to local newspapers throughout the United States, representatives have had to develop what I refer to here as a “mediated homestyle” in order to deal with the press. Mediated homestyle—an extension of Fenno’s (1978) original concept—is based on the belief that representatives must treat both journalists and constituents as members of an audience for representation. In order to reach out to these two distinct audiences, representatives use several strategies in order to entice the press to report on their work and also placate constituents by acting in a manner they deem “representative” to their interests. Among the many strategies that members of Congress utilize in order to affect their relationship with media outlets is the press release, a brief communication or statement for press consumption that provides information about current issues or news.

The diverse audiences that rank-and-file members of Congress must attempt to persuade create a number of complications when crafting press releases and creating a mediated homestyle with a strong positive congressional narrative. Press releases sent out
by members have a particular purpose—whether that be to promote branding and credit claiming in the district (Mayhew, 1974) or to produce an air of expertise within the media and the legislature itself in order to bolster a member’s own strength on an issue and increase their opportunities for bargaining (Fenno, 1973). I examine how members of Congress craft their mediated homestyles with the local news media in an increasingly polarized environment and the effect that these crafted profile has on press coverage and constituent attitudes. I focus on local news coverage and newspaper coverage specifically, because local newspaper coverage has been shown to be the most effective at covering individual members of Congress and is apt to cover members more thoroughly (Arnold, 2004). Arnold’s (2004) extensive examination of the effects of local coverage on political accountability notes that local newspapers are an appropriate starting point for examinations such as the one proposed here since newspapers must fill a much larger news-hole than other media outlets, and more often than not, other local media outlets (such as television and radio) often follow the lead taken by local newspapers in choosing what stories to cover in a given day. This study expands upon work done by Arnold (2004), Vinson (2003), Schaffner (2006) and others by focusing on individual members’ “news savvy” through the examination of members’ press releases as a tactic to control their public profiles, independent of the political party and the national media. The essential questions are how successful are members at cultivating a positive perception in the media and among their constituents? Which strategies are more efficient at influencing the ways in which local media outlets cover their activities? And how does
such coverage affect the perception that constituents have of their representative and their activities in Washington?

In order to answer these questions, this dissertation will provide an in-depth examination into the creation of mediated homestyle by focusing on the ways in which members of Congress construct and distribute press releases to journalists in the local media, and how these releases are used in the news media environment in order to cultivate unique identities within the electorate. Specifically, each chapter will focus on the medium of local newspapers and how members of Congress utilized them during the 2009-2010 term. Each chapter will examine a particular strategic consideration that members must consider when producing releases—such as the structural components of the congressional-press relationship, the frequency of release, the effectiveness of the language in releases in influencing the language of news stories, and the success that exposure has on sustaining a positive congressional image with the voting public in each member’s district.

The central question here is how members of Congress release their media narratives to their constituents back home. Previous work done by Arnold (2004), Cook (1989, 2005), and Sellers (2010) have shown that it is not possible for the national press to cover every individual member of Congress and their activities. Even if it were possible, there is very little incentive for the national press to do so. It is well established in the literature on political communications that the national press requires some sense of individual authority when writing news stories, something that Congress tends to lack. Susan Miller (1978, p. 7) refers to this press issue as the “search for the ultimate
spokesman” for the institution. When such a spokesperson seems to arise, they often only speak for one side of the aisle and thus generally cause more conflict by waging media battles against the other party. Recent examinations of the media as a political institution note that with regard to Congress, the individual member tends to take a backseat to the “expert” and the “leader,” both of whom can provide the type of narrative that the media wants and needs (see Cook, 2005; Sparrow, 1999).

Unlike the national media, local media outlets are often more concerned when crafting stories with serving audience demand for coverage of issues that affect their daily lives. This provides members of Congress with the opportunity to manipulate coverage of their behavior by providing localized angles to national stories. The lack of attention that most members of Congress receive from the national press means that if members wish to pursue their goals and cultivate a particular image within the electorate, they must seek out attention from the local press in their districts. Local media outlets are often better suited to meet the needs of members of Congress with regard to distributing coverage to constituents back home (Arnold, 2004; Cook, 1989; Larson, 1992; Vinson, 2003). While local media outlets may be constrained with regard to their ability to fully cover the behaviors of members in Washington, this constraint may suit legislators’ goals by allowing them to craft their own identity with very little press conflict. Thus, as part of the strategy behind mediated homestyle, members plan the ways in which they are perceived via the media by utilizing several tools at their disposal. I assume that representatives, in order to maintain office, have a strong incentive to inform constituents about positive legislative activities. This produces an incentive toward information
asymmetry between representatives in Washington and local journalists, with members of Congress releasing statements designed to highlight their own achievements and cultivate “brand loyalty” through the press. Local newspapers attempt to combat this asymmetry by conducting their own investigations and creating their own frames around congressional media events; nevertheless, many outlets are still constrained by the inability to fully cover members and their actions due to financial cutbacks affecting newsroom dynamics, organizational constraints such as ownership and market size, and time constraints in getting news out to the public in a more competitive 24-hour news cycle. This does not mean that local news outlets are at the mercy of representatives in Congress or complacent “partners in propaganda” (Bagdikian, 1979; 2004), as the media’s independent agenda-setting power allows them to choose how and when to cover members of Congress, if they are covered at all.

**Mediated Homestyle and the Local Press**

The behavioral changes for representatives have been mediated in some ways and exacerbated in others by the media system of the United States. Scholars argue that the media has an independent “agenda-setting” function, which can be utilized to focus citizen attention on particular controversies and events and provide cues about the salience of topics and issues currently being discussed by political actors (McCombs, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Through their agenda-setting role, the mass media has the potential to frame much of what occurs in politics and the world (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Shoemaker, 1991). Agenda-setting in the media is largely a factor of an individual press outlet’s ability to act as a gatekeeper to the public, essentially deciding what the
“real world” looks like through the day-to-day decisions made by members of the press on what to cover (Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2006, 2012). Gatekeeping, a theory of communication and communication channels first developed by White (1950), emphasizes the agenda-setting role of the news media and has been utilized in explaining such concepts as media effects in campaigns (Bartels, 1993; Iyengar & Kinder, 1989), economic evaluations and foreign policy (Soroka, 2003; 2006) and media-bias (Pugilisi & Snyder, 2011).

Coverage alone does not guarantee an informed public, and the media must also take into account the level of interest that can be generated by a particular piece of news if they hope to grab citizen attention and hold it over the long term (Zaller, 1992). This often leads to stories focusing on the drama of politics rather than the substance, referred to in the literature as “tabloidization,” in which the need to please advertisers causes the news-process to focus on the spectacle of negative events in order to produce more entertaining news, rather than focusing on more important events that may be affecting the nation (Esser, 1999). This sentiment is also felt by representatives in Congress. Representative Anthony Beilenson (D-CA 24) in a 1997 interview in The Hill newspaper stated that, “the more outrageous members are the ones that get the most attention…people back home are frustrated and upset when they see some of this stuff on television…when we were working quietly, off in the distance, strangely, we were doing a better job” (in Dennis & Snyder, 1998, p. 60). Research on public opinion done by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) has found that individuals often complain about the constant “bickering” done by members of Congress. The contempt that citizens hold for
the institution of Congress and its members is well documented in the political science
literature and opinion surveys (Hibbing, 2002; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; 2002;
Kimball & Patterson, 1997), which find that individuals rank Congress the lowest among
government agencies and other political institutions. A recent study by Public Policy
Polling found that, when asked to compare Congress to a series of disliked things,
respondents ranked the institution lower than many of the available options, including
root canals (which ranked higher 56% of the time), traffic jams (56%), and brussels
sprouts (69%) (Public Policy Polling, 2013).

When asked how constituents feel about their particular member of Congress,
however, rankings are more positive. The expectation of constituents back at home is to
see their particular representative conducting themselves in an ethical fashion; not only to
produce good public policy but also to do so ethically (Schudson, 2008). Whereas
members of Congress often make the argument that the media loves a fight, constituent
evaluations tend to be based on the representative’s ability to affect national legislation
and properly represent the district’s interests in Washington (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina,
1987; Grant & Rudolph, 2004; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). The paradox of
congressional opinion expounded by Fenno (1978), points to a differentiation in the
public’s mind between their feelings about the institution of Congress more generally and
the individual rank-and-file members that make up the institution specifically. In order to

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2Grant and Rudolph (2004) specifically show that, accounting partisan approval and economic
conditions, citizen’s approval of Representatives generally is positively affected by the ability of members
to focus on disproportionately national issues and introduce bills that will significantly affect the national
legislation. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987), in a study of job-related expectations of representatives
found that, while no one job dominated the evaluations of members, citizens generally expect members of
Congress to work on bills concerning national issues, keep them informed about what is occurring in
Washington, and ensure that their district is “taken care of” with regard to receiving government money and
projects.
develop an understanding of legislative behavior, citizens must acquire information about the processes and actors involved in the political process in Washington. Edelman (1995, p. 1) notes that, “Political beliefs and actions spring from assumptions, biases, and news reports. In this critical sense politics is a drama taking place in an assumed and reported world…a world people do not directly observe or touch.” Since most citizens do not have direct access to members of Congress or to Capitol proceedings, they must rely on the mass media to provide them with information about proceedings and legislative actions.

Homestyle, how representatives “cultivate their constituencies” (Fenno, 1978, p. 32) through various tactics and behaviors, has been extended from its original conception as actions within the district to involving much of the behaviors representatives perform in order to develop a strong linkage with constituents. Originally developed as a way to move past the traditional arguments about “delegate” and “trustee” representation, homestyle according to Fenno (1978) conceives of the representative as satisfying several different constituencies during their time in office. From largest to smallest, the constituencies consist of the geographic constituency, reelection constituency, the primary constituency, and the personal constituency. The idea behind homestyle was that representatives “cultivated” each of these constituencies in different ways in order to decrease the level of uncertainty they have about how they are viewed within the district. Fenno’s analysis focuses little attention on media tactics used by congressional offices when cultivating their constituencies back home, primarily mentioning the media as part of the campaign rather than a part of the overall legislative process. Since 1978, the concept of homestyle has been expanded upon to further investigate its role in areas such
as campaigns and elections (Ansolabehere, Snyder, & Stewart, 2000; Carson et al., 2011), how representatives justify political decisions (McGraw, Timpone, & Bruck, 1993; Parker & Goodman, 2009; Romero, 2006), and expanding from examinations of the House to include senatorial homestyle as well (Binder, Maltzmann, & Sigelman, 1998; Fenno, 1982; Shapiro et al., 1990; Taggart & Durant, 1985). Most recently, Grimmer (2009) and Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood (2012) have begun to focus on how members may utilize the media in order to claim credit for their actions and formulate “expressed agendas” with regard to their attention to particular policies and pieces of legislation.

However, these recent studies have not gone so far as to include the media as a particular constituency that representatives must develop a relationship with. The purpose of this dissertation is to directly include the media—and specifically local media outlets—into the “kaleidoscope of constituencies” (Fenno, 1978, p. 1) and argue that representatives must develop a form of mediated homestyle in order to reach a larger constituent base within the district.

The world of politics in the Capitol is created through mediated experiences between members of Congress and their constituents at home. The narratives created by those involved in the media process, such as press secretaries, beat reporters, editors, and others, all contribute to the ethos of the constituent public, and are in some ways responsible for the results and consequences of each story. In democratic systems, the primary function of the press is to provide independent information about the workings of government that can be utilized by citizens in their subsequent evaluations of political actors. Downs (1957, p. 238) states that, “citizens acquire political information for two
main reasons: (a) to help them decide how to vote, and (b) to form opinions with which they can influence government policy formation during the period between elections.”

I focus on the latter reason here. Outside of the formal campaigning process, it is reasonable to assume that representatives attempt to control information coming out of the mass media through various tactics in order to maintain a sufficiently positive public profile within the district (Fogarty, 2009). While citizens may utilize a myriad of sources to keep themselves informed about their representative’s behavior in Washington, the costs of remaining fully informed often outweigh the benefits of obtaining complete information. Through the mass media, citizens are able to come together on issues and events, such as major political speeches and political campaigns, but the ways in which individuals interpret and internalize these events is largely dependent on the amount and length of coverage that they receive as well as the mediums that citizens utilize to gather information about politics. Studies on cognition and political evaluations have shown that individuals often subscribe to a behavior of “motivated reasoning”—the preference

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3Downs’ (1957) postulate is more mechanical in its evaluation of why individuals seek out political information, however the basic understanding of why citizens learn about politics does not necessarily take away from the drama that they absorb during this process. It is commonly accepted that news stories have become more sensational when reporting on political events. Whereas individuals may take away the basic information about these events, as per Downs’ (1957) postulate, they also take away part of the drama of politics due to the media frame of news stories. Schudson (2008) notes that the press’ ability to take complex events and provide a simple narrative that individuals can absorb and understand is one of the primary abilities of the press in a democratic society. Oftentimes the frames of news stories provide the drama and sensationalism that provide the incentive for individuals to tune in and can be utilized as the catalyst to motivate the public into action as well.

4On certain, long term issues such as the state of the economy, crime, and others, the public receives constant updates and a plethora of information about the fluctuations that occur. Many other issues, such as specific or controversial bills and matters of foreign affairs, often receive scant, scattered bursts of illumination in the mass media, during which time citizens must absorb the facts of the debate, internalize them and then evaluate their standings. The mass media becomes most important for these events, since they are often the first and at times only source of information regarding the issue for most of the public. These same divisions occur on the national and local level as well, with national outlets focusing more so on institutional arrangements and major political figures, while local outlets strive for “localized” stories that can satisfy their more narrow media markets.
for information that reinforces prior beliefs—when absorbing information (see Bartels, 2002; Fischle, 2000; Kim, Taber & Lodge, 2009). When evaluating members of Congress, it is assumed that citizens will base their attitudes on preconceived notions about the political environment rather than naively updating their evaluations based on recent information. Therefore it is imperative for members of Congress, in order to maintain a positive public profile, to understand the ways in which citizens develop these evaluations since it will influence the effectiveness of members’ press strategies. Since the press allow representatives to reach a wider, more general audience than might come to a meeting or other staged event, it follows that press strategies should be pertinent to any attempt at sustaining a positive profile in the public’s eye.

I theorize that the symbiotic relationship that has developed between members of Congress and local media outlets—specifically local newspapers—allows representatives to have greater control over the frame of news stories about them so long as those representatives remain “in-step” with the wants and needs of the electorate they serve. Fogarty (2009) notes that interactions between legislators and the media are largely dependent upon whether or not representatives are performing their duties in Washington by translating constituent preferences into legislative actions. Individual legislators may be able to affect the narratives about them through the creation of a mediated homestyle and strategic bargaining with news outlets. One such strategy utilized by legislators to affect local news outlets is the press release. The importance of the press release comes from the fact that it allows members to provide a local angle to national events and helps to reduce the level of uncertainty felt by members. Localization, the finding of a local
angle in a story or creation of one by relating a general event to a particular community (Vinson, 2003), has been shown to be particularly important to whether or not a member of Congress becomes news, since it is not guaranteed that their actions will be interesting to a wide, national audience. Vinson (2003) argues that by providing a local angle to a story, members of Congress increase their chances of being the subject of news stories in their district. This is particularly significant since in Vinson’s (2003) analysis, local media outlets were still largely print based operations dealing with finite space limitations. Local press outlets—particularly local newspapers—have recently seen some success in transferring their operations into digital outlets, which may mitigate issues relating to news production; though these new models of distribution have still not built a thriving revenue model (Pew Research Center, 2012). Therefore, I assume that the success of a member’s mediated homestyle using press releases as a strategy is dependent on a number of factors, specifically the initial relationship between representatives and the local media, the frequency of releases and the content of each release.

Localized news stories incentivize press outlets to run stories written by members’ staffs, and thus help to decrease the amount of uncertainty members face with regard to how they are perceived by constituents in the district as well. In Congress, “perception is everything” (Fenno, 1978, p. 1) and members are constantly faced with uncertainty about how their actions are viewed by the public. This uncertainty forces members of Congress into a constant state of narrative production—the creation and dispersion of a particular congressional image or identity that is in line with a legislator’s own goals and preferences—which is the heart of mediated homestyle. The basis of narrative production
comes from the notion that representatives must, in some fashion, have certain relational characteristics with the population they are trying to represent and must justify that these qualities exist in order to maintain office. The concept of the representative/constituent relationship has had a diverse history of examination in the political science literature. One of the well-documented concepts of this relationship deals with descriptive representation and the connections that members and their constituents share by being of similar demographic backgrounds. Descriptive representation has had a wide variety of interpretations and examinations in the literature (see Eulau & Karps, 1977; Pitkin, 1967 for more theoretical examinations; Canon, 1999 & Eulau et al., 1959 for empirical examinations). Unlike accounts of congressional identity and image that focus primarily on ascriptive characteristics, such as race or religious affiliation, the relational characteristics inherent in image production are vaguer. The focus here is not on descriptive representative per se, but on how members of Congress utilize the press in order to control the perceived “representativeness” of a member in the public eye. In an increasingly more polarized political environment, I argue that members of Congress increase their attempts to leverage the local media in order to appear more “local”; that is more like the constituents they serve than professional politicians. Being “local” in the public eye is dependent on the makeup of the district, with members from more homogeneous districts utilizing partisanship more readily to make their case than representatives from more diverse districts, who will focus more often on personal characteristics and their ability to provide for the district to make their case.
The ability of a member to successfully establish a positive public profile is dependent on a number of factors that will be analyzed in the chapters that follow, such as the basic structural and environmental factors like district homogeneity, district size and makeup which affect their ability to reach local constituents, the frequency of contact and the topics and language utilized by members in crafting messages for public consumption. The main take-away from the analysis will focus on how the use of narratives in the media legitimates individual members as “representatives” of the public and not just as “members of Congress.” Using the press release as a measure of a member’s mediated homestyle and thus their narrative, how powerful is the press release as a tactic to affect the news narrative in a positive direction?

**Outline of Chapters**

In order to come to some sort of understanding about how members of Congress create, cultivate, and maintain a positive narrative regarding their actions as representatives, we must first explore the relationship that currently exists between the mass media and government institutions. The complex structure and interrelation that the press has with members of the public leads most members of Congress into a slightly awkward predicament. Both the press and citizens expect representatives to produce relatively good public policy. The means by which good public policy is formed often come into conflict with what news agencies find valuable in weaving a story. This pushes members of Congress to constantly create and update the congressional narrative that corresponds with the image or identity that is in line with their legislative goals, the end result being the creation of a mediated homestyle that is favorable to the particular
political actor. This narrative is dispensed to news agencies, which can adopt, alter, or ignore the narrative to fit their own needs. Thus image production and the narrative are similar to the concept of strategic communications described by Sellers (2010) with regard to communications between Congress and the press on matters of public policy. Here, I focus on the individual level narrative production process that each member of Congress is responsible for during their day-to-day actions in Washington and at home.

In Chapter 2 I begin with a theoretical examination the importance of audience and the creation of narratives within the concept of representation. Specifically, how does the medium through which we view a particular subject affect the way in which we interpret how “representative” it is? Chapter 2 will focus on how the roles of the audience and political narrative are conveyed through the media in order to better understand their importance in modern democratic societies, and how the media in the United States has evolved in parallel with changes in the structure and rules governing Congress since the beginning of the Republic. In the literature on representation, the concepts laid down by Pitkin (1967) loom large, although as recent studies have pointed out, Pitkin’s argument is far from perfect. In particular, Pitkin discusses only briefly how the concept of “representativeness” is cultivated by elected officials. Manin (1997), focusing primarily on role of elections in representative governments, observes that the individuality of potential representatives is an essential factor in explaining voting behavior in modern elections. Both representatives and citizens focus primarily on the “personal nature of the

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5Pitkin (1967) reserves her discussion of representation to only those individuals who are chosen by a population or subject to make decisions on their behalf, and thus excludes non-elected officials from her line of discussion. Rehfeld (2006, 2009) picks up on this and expands upon Pitkin’s work by examining how such officials can “represent” without being directly chosen by the subjects they are working for.
representative relationship” (Manin, 1997, p. 219). One reason for this is due to the changing channels of political communications, which allow candidates to communicate more directly with a mass audience without mediation from the party. Representative democracy through the media, for Manin (1997), is intent on pleasing an audience. Following this, we can start to understand representation as a dynamic process, as Saward (2010) argues, where representatives make claims of representation to the public and attempt to persuade them that these claims are legitimate.

To test and verify the assumption that members of Congress create particular media narratives and disseminate them to local media agencies in order to propagate and control the image they portray in their constituents, I generated a unique data set of press releases and news coverage for use in the empirical chapters. The dataset consists of a sample of approximately 108 members of the House of Representatives who served during the 111th Congress (2009-2010). This sample of members allows us to explore the different strategies and techniques utilized by members who have to serve and please diverse constituencies, while still remaining appealing to members of their party in the legislature and back home. I focus solely on members of the House here for two primary reasons. First, while members of the House and the Senate both share similar legislative duties, and are responsible for their actions within their state constituencies, members of the House are often seen as being “closer” to their local districts, since they are smaller and must go through frequent electoral periods. Because of the smaller, often more homogeneous districts, members of the House are better able to narrow their focus on a few key outlets in order to maximize their media strategies. The media strategies of
members of the House have received some recent attention in key studies done by Schaffner and Sellers (2003), Sellers (2010), Vinson (2003), and others. However, the majority of studies on Congress and the media tend to focus on the institution itself and the national media (Cook, 1989, 2005, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Sparrow, 1999, 2006;), leaving gaps in our knowledge of local media strategies used by the average member.

A second reason to focus on the House is that it allows us to have a relatively homogeneous sample to examine. The different structure of the Senate makes evaluation of both chambers as if they were the same in the eyes of the media impossible. Recent scholarship has concluded that, for many reasons, the Senate is considerably different from the House in structure, power within the chamber, and the ability of Senators to craft their own agendas (Monroe, Roberts & Rohde, 2008). Media examinations of Congress conclude that the Senate is more focused on national news outlets, as these agencies tend to be more interested in Senators opinions as “experts” in legislation (Arnold, 2004; Cook, 2005). While it may be possible to discuss the media strategies of both the House and the Senate in similar ways, the differences between the two chambers make it likely that the individual strategies will differ greatly when examining them together, since Senators must deal with a different audience dynamic when crafting messages for the public.

Data on press releases was gathered utilizing members’ own web-pages on House.gov. Releases were then matched with a corresponding news agency within their local district using the Newsbank research collection, which provides a comprehensive assortment of newspapers at a local, regional, and national level. The dataset was then
utilized in a variety of statistical models depending on the question being posed in each chapter in order to come to some conclusions about the strategies used by members of the House with regard to the local media.

Chapter 3 adds a critical component to the analysis by focusing attention on the development of congressional-press associations and the structural determinants of news coverage. I assume throughout that legislators are goal-oriented actors who attempt to strategically manipulate the agenda-setting environment of the local media to achieve their goals by maintaining an accountability link with their constituent public. This is done through the act of advertising and the development of “brand loyalty” within the district. There are risks in advertising, however, and members attempt to control for these risks by building relational networks within the local media in their district. In this chapter, I will examine the social connection between local press outlets and members of Congress and how structural and environmental factors associated with a member’s district affect the ability of a representative to accumulate positive coverage. I argue that the ability of a member to increase their positive coverage in the district is dependent first on structural factors within the district, including the variations in the ownership and structure of the media within the district, a member’s ideology, and their tenure in office. Members involve themselves in exchanges of information with the local press and develop associations based on mutual incentives that exist between the two actors.

In Chapter 4, the empirical analysis focuses on the frequency of production of press statements during a congressional term. Members of Congress, as part of their mediated homestyle strategy, produce a number of statements throughout the year in
order to publish their successes to the electorate. It is unclear whether increasing production of press statements has a proportional return with regard to news coverage. In Chapter 4, I start by analyzing the impact of increasing the number of press releases sent out by a member of Congress on news coverage within the representative’s district. Members who wish to see more coverage will most likely produce more releases for use by the press. While there is an initial gain in releasing statements on the amount of coverage a member receives during a given term, this gain is not linear. This finding is similar to previous research done by Schaffner, Schiller and Sellers (2003), which shows that in-state approval of U.S. Senators is affected by their press efforts only to a given threshold (in their analysis up to 40 press events).

Whereas the analysis in Chapter 4 provides us with an understanding of whether or not the frequency of press releases may affect local news coverage and the positive narrative that members attempt to bolster within their constituencies, Chapter 5 takes the examination one step further by examining the content of such releases and their ability to influence news in the district. In Chapter 5, I focus on congressional releases over the course of the term and examine correlation of themes and language in the release to news stories in the local press. In order to fully examine each release, I follow the coding scheme laid out by Blei (2012), Quinn et al. (2010) and others, and develop a probabilistic topic model utilizing a latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) to operationalize various themes based on the language used in congressional releases and in subsequent news coverage throughout the term. Topic modeling has most recently been utilized by Grimmer (2009)

Press events, according to Schaffner, Schiller and Sellers (2003) is measured as a record of the amount of interviews, press conferences and caucus meetings attended by a given Senator and recorded by the Senate Radio Television Gallery.
to analyze Senate press releases in order to measure Senators’ “expressed agendas,” or how members articulate their priorities to constituents. Taking this theory a step further in examining House releases, I examine how members expressed agendas correlate with news coverage in the district to see what factors lead to more intense echoing in the local press. I expect that press outlets will likely exhibit a significant amount of echoing of representative’s statements on more national issues such as the economy and domestic policy, and that the diversity of news sources available to news outlets will mitigate the level of echoing that occurs.\(^7\) The extent to which members of the press echo statements made by representatives depends on the complexity of the issue and the clarity of a member’s expressed agenda on the issue being discussed. Research shows that political elites are extremely effective at controlling political and media information environments (Coe et al., 2004; Domke, 2004; Riker 1986; Zaller 1992). By examining the way that the press “echoes” political actors’ language, we can assess the effect of political language on news content (Coe et al, 2004; Domke, 2004; Domke et al, 2006). The study in Chapter 5 will proceed in two stages. In the first stage, congressional press releases will be analyzed for common themes, broken down specifically by state and party. After breaking down these themes, the analysis will focus on how often such language is adopted by media outlets to describe news stories throughout the 2009-2010 term.

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\(^7\)“Echoing” (Coe et al., 2004; Domke, 2004; Domke et al, 2006) or “Ventriloquism” (Grimmer, 2009) is used to describe the act of news coverage mimicking statements made by public officials when discussing matters of politics. The term “echoing” is used here because, unlike the concept of “ventriloquism” proposed by Grimmer (2009), echoing allows for more interpretation by members of the press, rather than the expectation that releases are repeated verbatim in papers, “much like a ventriloquist’s dummy” (Grimmer, 2009, p. 5).
In Chapter 6, I take the previous findings and examine the ways in which congressional media strategies and news reporting affect the disposition of members’ home constituencies. Up until this point, the analysis has focused on the relationship between narrative production by members of Congress and the news coverage it may generate in the local district. Using data from the most recent Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), the examination in Chapter 6 will look at whether media strategies have a substantial effect on citizens’ perception of their member’s actions, goals and behaviors while in office. The CCES is one of the most extensive survey projects attempting to gather data on citizens’ views on their representatives and how they hold their representatives accountable, as well as providing voting statistics for participants in each of the 50 states (Ansolabehere, 2012). The CCES will be analyzed using a hierarchical or multi-level model approach that can account for varying levels of influence over the parameters in the model. In particular, the multi-level model approach is utilized in order to account for varying structural components, such as district and media based variables as well as representative-level variables utilized in previous chapters. By structuring the final model hierarchically, the analysis can show how these levels of influence ultimately affect the feelings of citizens about their members, and how effective the media and congressional media strategies are at manipulating the process.

In the final chapter, I will draw some more general conclusions about representation as a whole, and the implications the preceding study has for our understanding of the U.S. Congress as a whole, as well as outlining some future research possibilities.
On October 29, 2009, Michigan Representative Bart Stupak (D-1) released a statement to the press regarding the public release of the House’s version of the Affordable Healthcare Act of 2009 (AHA). While this was not the first time Rep. Stupak had released a statement regarding the AHA, by that time almost universally known as “Obamacare,” the public release of the bill did provide him with the opportunity to reiterate some of the finer points of the legislation. In the statement, Stupak notes that, “I am pleased to see the bill includes a negotiated rate for Medicare reimbursement and shifts how reimbursements are distributed…Both of these provisions will benefit rural healthcare providers in the First District and across the nation” (Stupak, 2009). Two days later, the Cheboygan Daily Tribune, a small rural paper that served Stupak’s district, ran a story about the AHA, focusing primarily on the representative’s opinion of the current bill. The article was largely a reiteration of Stupak’s original release, but mainly focused on the statement that Stupak believed that the bill would greatly benefit Medicare providers and recipients in the First District.

At first glance, the reasoning behind Stupak’s statement and his emphasis on the benefits of the expansion of Medicare through the AHA seems obvious. With 27% of the
voting age population in the First District\textsuperscript{8} being recipients of Medicare, Stupak was
attempting to appeal to his constituency concerning why he was warming to the bill. In
his statement to the press, Stupak emphasized his reservations concerning the bill, mostly
due to the fact that it did not prohibit the use of federal funding for abortion procedures, a
prohibition later added as an Amendment sponsored by Stupak himself. While the
majority of the original press statement focused on this fact, the article in the \textit{Cheboygan
Tribune} chose instead to focus specifically on the fact that Stupak believed the bill would
benefit constituents and the reasoning behind that belief, rather on Stupak’s reservations.
Legislators are known to make statements to their constituencies in order to gauge
reactions to policies (Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, & Zorn, 1997; Mayhew, 1974) and this
behavior tends to be seen as significant to the ability of representatives to retain office
from election to election. Essentially, such statements can be seen as attempts by
representatives to develop an \textit{image} of themselves in the electorate, and part of a process
I refer to here as \textit{mediated homestyle}, the way in which representatives develop a
connection with constituents through the use indirect methods of communication such as
the mass media. Mediated homestyle and image development are strategically developed
in order to provide representatives with the ability to mold and shape news coverage in a
way that will positively benefit them later on.

The significance of mediated homestyle is based on the belief that perception
drives the way in which we view the world around us. Perception, its connection to
political concepts such as difference, identity (Connolly, 1991) and by proxy the role it

\textsuperscript{8} Data gathered utilizing the U.S. census statistics of current Medicare enrollees by Congressional
plays in representation (Williams, 1998; Young, 2000), is a matter of opinion. The judgments we make about subjects—from everyday decisions on our food preferences or clothing choices to more complex decisions on politics and economics—are dependent on previous information called forth from private and collective memories. I decide to re-wear a particular shirt or pair of slacks because of the positive feedback I can recall receiving from friends or family the last time I wore it. I vote for the incumbent because the economy is good or getting better, and the images that I receive from the campaign are ones of continued prosperity and progress. Zaller (1992, p. 6) notes that, “every opinion is a marriage of information and predispositions: information to form a mental picture of a given issue, and predisposition to motivate some conclusion about it” (emphasis added). The same conclusions can be made for evaluations of representation as well. The notion that such judgments and perceptions have political and social value is consistent with research on information processing in political science and the idea that voters use schemas to structure and organize information so that new information can be organized more efficiently and accessed more readily when needed (Conover & Feldman, 1984; Duncan, 2005; Markus, 1977; Wilson, 2008).

Utilizing the idea of information processing and predispositions as a backdrop, the concept of representation can also be viewed as a marriage of information about the relationship between the representative and the constituent, which provides us with a

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9 That is, is the relationship democratic or non-democratic? Created through some form of divine justification or via the process of a free and fair election? Is the representative obligated to accept or is there choice in the matter? Rehfeld (2006) notes that these sorts of questions are vital in understanding the multifaceted nature of representation and its role in institutionalized systems, specifically those in which nondemocratic forms of representation are prevalent. For an in-depth examination of this concept, see Rehfeld (2005, 2006).
mental understanding of the predisposition to motivate participation and governance by both sets of actors. Representation becomes a dynamic process based on the motivated reasoning of constituents to accept the representative in question as theirs once in office, with the understanding that the representative-agent will fulfill the wishes of the electorate or face the consequences at the next election. Homestyle (Fenno, 1978), and its extensions both in the literature and here with regard to mediated homestyle, is utilized by representatives in order to maintain a perception of themselves in the district that will benefit them positively and provide them with more leverage to fulfill their own interests within the chamber. ¹⁰ The public actions of legislators can be seen as attempts to perform maintenance on the perception of their work in the chamber and for the electorate. They are actions taken in part to decrease the amount of uncertainty that representatives have about how constituents perceive them from day to day (Fenno, 1978). While these acts may fade from the public memory rather quickly, the effect persists by positively affecting the evaluations of representatives over the long term, leading up to the next election (Lodge, Steenbergen & Brau, 2001).¹¹

¹⁰ At a most basic level, representation can be thought of politically as the aggregation of interests of a political body. A representative’s duty is to translate this aggregation into decisions that are congruent with the will of the public they serve. Representatives’ self interests, according to scholars such as Fenno (1973) consist of gaining greater power within the chamber and enacting “good public policy.” According to Pitkin (1967), representatives have objective interests that they seek to achieve while in power. These interests can vary, and measuring the congruence between the interests of representatives and the interests of constituents is a way of measuring accountability with the public. For more on the concept of interest and representation, see Urbinati (2008), Williams (1998), and Young (2000).

¹¹ This idea follows from the concept of the on-line (OL) model of voting behavior developed by Lodge et al. (2001), in which messages sent by political actors are valuable in that they update the “running tally” assessment of a given public figure in the public’s eye. While recall of specific actions and behavior may be low in the general public, these behaviors may still have a significant impact on the level of trust afforded to a given public figure in the long term. The OL model, therefore, “posits a strong indirect effect of attention to campaign messages on judgment, mediated by the OL Tally” (Lodge et al., 2001, p. 243).
Representatives are faced with a dilemma when maintaining their image in the public. The problem for modern representatives is that they are unable to interact with constituents personally on a daily basis (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003). In order to control the perception of the public, therefore, they must cooperate with and attempt to incentivize media agencies within their district to accept and broadcast their messages to the public with little to no editorial framing on the part of journalists. News agencies, however, are autonomous agencies with their own interests and beliefs as to what constitute a “good story,” and have the ability to conduct their own investigations into the behaviors of representatives in the legislature, which may show a representative acting out of step with the political beliefs of the district they serve. The interaction between news agencies and representatives, therefore, creates a opportunities for mediated homestyle, in which representatives attempt to brand themselves using their own unique styles and rhetoric while appealing to the journalistic norms and standards of the news.

While representatives have their own style of influencing the perceptions of the public at a personal level, the mass media largely controls the regular transmission of messages from public figures to the mass public. In order to engage the electorate, therefore, members of Congress must cultivate a form of impersonal influence (Mutz, 1998), relying on indirect contact and associations in order to influence the public’s perception about their actions and behaviors while in Washington. In order to influence this perception, representatives have increasingly allocated resources to media operations within their offices (Born, 1982, Romero, 2006). The new “weapons of combat” (Zaller, 1999, 1-1) are the press releases, statements, press conferences and “spin” that
representatives put on their work in order to reassure the public that they are acting in the best interests of the district and the nation; their enemy being a variety of “others” ranging from the other major party, the President of the United States, the Supreme Court, and so forth. Members of Congress and their staffs are afforded several opportunities to strategically insert themselves into the process of perception building. Representatives can work with the media by developing personal relationships with journalists, editors, and news agencies (Cook, 1989, 2005; Gershon, 2012), managing media gatekeeping by varying the amount of statements coming from their offices (Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2012), and inserting their own narratives into the frames of stories to manage the agenda setting function of the media in the district (Entman, 2007; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the theoretical concepts underlying representation and its connection to the concept of perception and the media, as well as to examine the strategies that representatives use to affect the public’s perception of how they “act for” their constituents. In the next section, I examine the role of representation in democratic systems, focusing primarily on contemporary accounts of representation and the evolution of the general sense of what a representative is over time. Primarily I focus attention on the formal requisites laid out in previous literature that describe the perceived nature of a representative, which is often utilized as a baseline for the conceptual framework of what a representative should “look like.” Next, I lay out how representatives attempt to control how the public perceives them through strategic manipulation of the media system, and how they incentivize news agencies to follow
their own narrative regarding their actions in Washington. Finally, a historical
examination of the media in the United States and its relationship with the U.S. Congress
is used in order to frame how the two institutions developed, and how their evolution has
impacted the ability of representatives and the media to control the public narrative. In
the conclusion, I discuss how this theoretical framework will inform the chapters to
follow, and what reasonable conclusions we can draw from the theory discussed so far.

**Representation and Audience Perception**

Political representation, the idea that one entity or *agent* can “stand for” another
body, has been debated extensively by scholars, politicians and the public for over two
millennia. Manin (1997) notes that the early development of the concept of
representation can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, entering into the modern
literature through the works of contract theorists (Hobbes, 1651 [2010]; Locke, 1689
[2003]; Rousseau, 1762 [1993]), formalized by institutionalist scholars (Hamilton,
Madison, & Jay, 1789 [1991]; Mill, 1861 [1998]), and contested still well after (see Dahl,
2006; Dewey, 1954). In contemporary political science, the most notable account of
representation comes from Pitkin (1967), who lays out a general framework of the topic
and provides some illumination on the various types of relationships that exist between
representatives and represented. At the most abstract level, general accounts of
representation start with the question of how one actor can be authorized to perform some
action in place of another, whether that be legally, politically, or symbolically. The
relationship between the two parties can be complex and often convoluted as Pitkin
(1967, p. 10) notes, since representation can take various forms. Political representation,
specifically, starts as the formalistic process in which an agent is authorized to perform some action in the interests of another body. This form of representation is what Mansbridge (2003) refers to as “promissory,” since agents are held accountable by past agreements. Much of the theoretical work done on the concept of political representation has attempted to show how one individual (an agent) is held accountable to a population for the decisions they make, as well as the relationship that exists between the agent and her constituents. This allows the formal, minimal model of representation to evolve into more substantive political representation, as agents take action on behalf of the people they serve, in a manner ideologically and politically consistent with their constituencies.

Treatments of the concept of representation have varied since Pitkin’s (1967) examination, providing more nuanced assessments of topics such as descriptive representation (Canon, 1999; Grose, 2011; Grose, Mangum, & Martin, 2007), institutional justifications for different forms of representation (Manin, 1997; Rehfeld, 2006, 2009; Saward, 2010), and behavioral aspects and how representatives may work for and cultivate a link with the constituents they serve (Eulau et al., 1959; Eulau & Karps, 1977; Fenno, 1978; Grimmer, 2009; Grimmer, Messing, & Westwood, 2012). While such assessments vary in their focus, every examination of the topic of representation contains several key theoretical features that are necessary for representation to exist. Two particular factors relevant here concern the question of the audience for representation and the style that representing agents utilize. While Pitkin (1967) does express that an audience can be a component of representation, her account confines it mainly to forms of symbolic representation. Manin (1997) first designs the
concept of “audience democracy” as a way to distinguish between changes in
representative systems that have occurred throughout history. Audience is more
significant in modern representative systems due to the reliance of these systems on
electoral selection mechanisms to choose representative agents. Manin (1997) notes that
recent findings in the public opinion and voting literature have shown that the average
voter tends to rely more on personal characteristics of candidates when making voting
decisions, even after taking into account variables such as individual respondents’
socioeconomic backgrounds and political preferences. Because of this, representatives
need to rely more heavily on the creation of individual identities by exposing cleavages in
the electorate itself, treating voters more like an actor would an audience than a
representative would a constituency. In this way, “Representatives are thus no longer
spokesmen; the personalization of electoral choice has, to some extent, made them
trustees. But they are also actors seeking out and exposing cleavages” (Manin, 1997, p.
226).

According to Rehfeld (2006), examinations of representation should take into
account the audience of representation more thoroughly, rather than presuming some
implicit “electorate.” By doing so, we can better understand representation more
generally, which will allow researchers to make arguments about representation in cases
where agents are not chosen through election, such as lobbyists, diplomats and judges.
The audience for Rehfeld (2006, p. 5) consists of the “relevant group of people who must
recognize a claimant as a representative.” According to this account, audiences in
representative systems are part of the formal process through which agents are chosen
and legitimized by a population. Representatives do not necessarily have to be selected through democratic means, which allows for non-democratic representation to exist. Therefore, the audience of representation can change depending on the institutional context. In this general account, in order to be perceived as representative agents by a population, potential representatives must be recognized and validated through two sets of rules. The first set of rules is designed via the governing institutions in order to designate the way in which representatives are officially selected. Specifically, these rules “specify a Selection Agent who uses a Decision Rule to select a representative from a Qualified Set” (Rehfeld, 2006, p. 5, italics in original). In democratic systems, the selection agents are citizens, with the decision rule being decided by the institution itself (such as “majority rule” or “plurality” voting), and the qualified set are those citizens eligible to serve as representatives. Prior to any of this, Selection Agents act as the Audience by recognizing that a claimant (or “representative-elect”) has been chosen using rules that were appropriate and valid for the position under consideration, and that under these rules the claimant has officially become a representative of the people.

Qualification as a representative is based upon the audience’s judgment; although Rehfeld (2006) notes that audiences do shift and change depending on the context of a situation. For example, while constituents may recognize a particular member of Congress as “representative” of their interests, that member must also be recognized as legitimate by the chamber in order to effectively be called “representative.”

Whereas Rehfeld (2006) considers the audience as part of the formal process of selection of a representative agent, Saward (2010) argues that representation should be
seen as a dynamic, evolving process in which agents must construct or make claims to an audience about their ability to represent its interests. Thus, the audience is an institution itself, which must be recognized by agents continuously, and not just during the moment of selection. Representation is cyclical, according to Saward (2010, p. 36), an “ongoing process of making and receiving, accepting and rejecting claims—in, between, and outside of electoral cycles.” The maker of a claim, in this case, attempts to persuade an object—most often a constituency—that s/he is able to stand for them in some official capacity. These claims occur in a cyclical pattern, in which the audience of representation acts as a set of active participants in the claim making process, internalizing and accepting/rejecting claims as they are made. Thus, representation is tied to the continuous process through which individuals generate their perception of reality and the objects around them. According to Saward (2010), representation is less a formal institution, and more an event or series of events which occur when an agent claims they are acting for and in the interests of another set of individuals. This set must then evaluate the claim made by an agent, and decide whether to accept being represented.

No matter what audience an agent is speaking to, in order to perform their substantive duties for the electorate representatives must make decisions in a manner that is acceptable to the population. The common dichotomy present in the literature states that representatives follow a decision making model dependent on whether they feel they have a mandate from their constituents, viewing themselves either as delegates, “sent to pursue his constituents’ will and not his own” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 146), or as independent trustees of their constituents, making decisions based on their personal expertise and
experiences. Both conceptions of representation place contradictory demands on the behavior of representatives, since mandate representatives are required to be responsive to changes in the whims of the population they serve, whereas independent representatives must strive to prove they are serving in their constituencies’ “best interests.” Empirical examinations of representation have attempted to show whether or not representative agents respond to cues from their constituencies and if constituents maintain some form of legitimate control over representatives’ actions based upon these theoretical concepts. Miller and Stokes (1963), in an examination of constituency influences on members of Congress, find that members of Congress react differently depending on the issue area that is presented to them in the legislature or by the public. Eulau and Karps (1977) likewise find that representatives can be broken down into four different components based on the responsiveness of the representing agent to the constituency. The four components of representation consist of policy responsiveness, where representatives are responsible for agitating the political process concerning matters of policy, service responsiveness, where representatives secure particularized benefits for individuals and groups in their constituency, allocation responsiveness, consisting of pork-barrel spending and appropriations for their constituency, and symbolic responsiveness, which involve public gestures by a representative in order to gain the trust and support of the public they represent.

Following from the basic dichotomy of mandate and independent forms of representation common in the literature, we can start to divide various representational styles into groups depending on how agents view their audience. In Figure 1, I break
down a typology of representation based on audience function as well as representative function. Formal institutional audiences are believed to be necessary in order to legitimate representatives primarily through electoral or some other selection outcome similar to the formal theory laid out by Rehfeld (2006, 2009). In these cases, representatives primarily focus on audiences in order to justify their position in the political process. On the other hand, dynamic “claimants” to representation are believed to justify their ability to stand for an audience through more regular reaffirmations, seeing representation as more of a series of events in which agents cultivate an identity around their actions and how they benefit the audience they are standing for (Saward, 2010).

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<td>Formal Institutional</td>
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<td>Dynamic Claimants</td>
<td>Gyroscopic Representation</td>
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*Figure 1. Typology of Representative Styles.*

Beginning with styles of representation positing agents acting independently of their constituencies once chosen, when such agents are subjected to an audience that operates as part of the formal institution of selection and legitimation, representatives will most likely follow what can be called “traditional” norms of trustee representation. In such styles, representatives are believed to make decisions based primarily on their own expertise and experiences, and does not sacrifice his/her judgment in order to please the public and their passions (Burke, 1774 [1987]). In this most general sense, such styles of representation are considered to be one of two forms of promissory representation, in which an agent makes a promise to his/her constituency at the time of selection that s/he
will act in the best interests of the population being served. In trustee models, this promise is made with the understanding that constituent opinions will not be the basis for a representative’s decisions, but that s/he will instead decide based on the “good of the whole” of society.

When representatives treat their audience in a more dynamic sense and make claims to representation, as Saward (2010) argues, then agents begin to act in a manner similar to what Mansbridge (2003) calls “gyroscopic” representation. According to Mansbridge (2003, p. 520), in gyroscopic models of representation, “voters select representatives who can be expected to act in ways voters approve without external incentives” (italics in original). Voters, in these cases, tend to choose representatives that have “good” characteristics—such as congruent policy positions, features such as “honesty” and “principles,” and skills at governing (Fearon, 1999; Fenno, 1978; Miller & Stokes, 1963). The difference between this and traditional trustee models, however, is that voters induce representatives to react to their wants and needs after the initial period of selection by first selecting agents that act in congruence with their interests, and second by coercing representatives to remain in step with their desires through consistently requiring representatives to legitimize their work—most often through reelection. This is what Kingdon (1989, p. 45) refers to as “recruitment” representation, since agents are conscripted by the electorate based on their similarity of beliefs and principles, the understanding being that if representatives fall “out of step” with the electorate, they will be replaced by someone more congruent.
In mandate forms of representation, when representatives consider the audience as part of the formal institution through which agents are selected, one can expect a style similar to what Mansbridge (2003) calls “anticipatory representation.” Anticipatory representation is based on the concept of retrospective voting, in which the electorate evaluates political leaders based on past performances rather than future promises (Fiorina, 1981; Przeworski, Stokes, & Manin, 1999). In such cases, agents are believed to make decisions based on how their constituents will evaluate them at future time periods, causing representatives to act in a more reactive manner rather than based on the promises they have already made. In such cases, representatives must take into consideration how they will justify their decisions to constituents not only in the present, but also in the future as well. By anticipating their constituency’s desires, members focus on satisfying their audiences in order to maintain a link that will continue forward into the next period of selection.

Finally, forms of mandate representation that focus on making dynamic claims to the audience follow patterns similar to the traditional notion of delegate representation. In delegate or preference based styles of representation, agents are believed to focus specifically on fulfilling the wishes of their constituents, setting aside their personal judgment and the general welfare in order to pursue policies that are popular with the electorate. Formal theorists examining delegate representation (e.g., Cane-Wrone & Shotts, 2007; Fox, 2007) argue that such behavior causes politicians to shy away from pursuing policies that are in the public interest because they may be unpopular in the opinions of the public itself. Empirical examinations of delegate representation tend to
show that while political agents may not always adhere to strictly relying on their constituents’ opinions when making decisions, representatives do reflect purposively on the preferences of their constituents when evaluating salient issues and policies (McCrone & Kuklinski, 1979). When representatives consider themselves to be delegates, therefore, they place the majority of power in the hands of their constituent audience, seeing themselves as servants of the people, “sent to pursue [their] constituents’ will and not [their] own” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 146).

The typology in Figure 1 leaves us with two specific dimensions of representational style. The first, comprised of traditional styles of trustee and delegate representation, promote an environment in which agents act in a promissory role with their constituents. The second dimension consists of those styles—such as anticipatory and gyroscopic representation—that are more audience-centric, in which agents react to their constituents and other audiences in more regularly defined ways in order to promote a link between themselves and those they represent. These audience-centric styles provide representatives with more opportunities to utilize mediated homestyle as a strategy, since representatives focus more attention on pleasing constituents and informing them of their actions in government. One reason why members of Congress may have shifted the style of representation from more traditional approach toward audience-centric approaches might be because of the transition of the institution from an insiders’ game played between members and other political elites to an open battle waged primarily in the media (Zaller, 1999). While media presence has always been a factor for members of the U.S. Congress, the evolution of the two institutions beginning in the early
nineteenth century has forced members of Congress, as representatives of the people, to adopt more “press friendly” strategies in order to maintain office and control the political narrative about them in local news operations. The institutionalization of the free press in the United States created new constraints for members, which pushed many representatives to develop individual identities outside of political parties. This allowed legislators the ability to also change the perspective of representation to one that was more local and based specifically on the services brought to the district. It also served to expand the creation of individual personalities and homestyles (Fenno, 1978) through which representatives could engage constituents. By viewing the audience as an integral part of the representative process, agents promote a relational approach to representative style, one in which constituencies may come in and out of view, existing “potentially” rather than as static fixed groups and interests (Young, 2000). This promotion by representatives is not only done during personal interactions, however, and the media can be central to the development of a good relationship between representative-agents and constituents as well, leading to the development of mediated homestyles. In the next section, I will expand on the development of political representations in the press by focusing on the development of the press, and its relationship with Congress from the 18th century until today. By looking at the historical development of the press and Congress side-by-side, I show how developments and changes to the information architecture in the United States pushed representatives to take a more audience-centric approach to their work.
Political Representation and Mediated Perception

At the root of the expansion of congressional press operations are, based on historical documentation, the necessity for representatives to remain visible with the public. Visibility is a priority for representatives, according to Fenno (1978), because it helps to decrease the amount of uncertainty a legislator has about their standing in the district. The kaleidoscope of constituencies that the modern representative must deal with pushes members to adopt different representational styles depending on the audience they are interacting with. Representatives must, therefore, generate a particular narrative that can be easily accepted by a majority of their audience in order to reduce the level of uncertainty a representative has about remaining in office. This causes representatives to develop unique *homestyles*, according to Fenno (1978), so that they may alter the perception of district constituents and maintain an advantage during elections. While traditional views of homestyle focus their attention on members’ action within the district, specifically one-on-one interactions and personal work with constituencies, the simple fact is that no representative can be in the district on a daily basis. Members must rely, therefore, on some media attention in order to cultivate a personal vote with constituents (Grimmer, 2009; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003). Mediated homestyle can therefore be viewed as an extension of Fenno’s (1978) original concept that incorporates changes in the attitudes of representatives toward the media.  

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12 Fenno’s (1978) concept of homestyle originally relegated media efforts primarily to campaign efforts and spent very little time examining the way that the media can be used by representatives to cultivate a personal connection with constituents. In more recent evaluations of homestyle, Fenno (2000) notes that there are unique variations in the use of the media by representatives, and argues that this is part of the changing attitude of representatives since the 1990s, when representatives became more entrepreneurial with their relationships with the media.
The concept of homestyle has focused on the person-to-person interactions that representatives have with constituents, mediated homestyle focuses on the incorporation of media efforts to develop a sense of personal trust with constituents.

As previously noted, the media is a political institution (Cook, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Sparrow, 1999; Starr, 2004), which is responsible for shaping citizens’ sense of politics and the political. Research on the influence of the mass media has found that the media is also powerful at shaping individuals’ perception of reality (Soroka, 2012) and our perception on topics such as race and ethnicity (Branton & Dunaway, 2009; Callanan, 2012), climate change (Bell, 1994; Boykoff, 2007) and war (Barabas & Jerit; 2009; Domke et al., 2006; Lewis & Rose, 2002). The news media is especially important in shaping what topics become known to the public, essentially setting the stage for political discussions (Edelman, 1995; McCombs, 2002). Bennett (2012, p. 10) states that, “Few things are as much a part of our lives as news…it has become a sort of instant historical record of the pace, progress, problems, and hopes of society.” In this way, the media—and the narratives presented through the media—are a source of power with regard to how individuals view the world, and can shape the way we understand what is “representative” of society.

For their part, representatives attempt to cultivate positive attributes that can be translated into a political narrative voters identify with and accept in order to persuade voters that a representative can effectively “stand for” constituents. These narratives coalesce into a political identity which representatives utilize as a link they can share with constituents back home. These identifying links can take on a variety of mutations,
ranging from links based on characteristics such as race or gender, as well as party affiliation or regional affiliations.\textsuperscript{13} It is widely recognized that the two most important factors that determine an individual’s vote choice are a candidate’s policy preferences and their personal characteristics as viewed by the voter (Ansolabhere & Snyder, 2000; Degan, 2007; Groseclose, 2001; Stokes, 1963). Personal characteristics—such as honesty, integrity, morality, hard work, and trustworthiness—become part of a political narrative and identity utilized by representatives in order to show that they can effectively represent constituent interests. These traits, known as “valence” characteristics, are at the base of a representative’s identity, forming a \textit{valence identity} that audiences can easily accept. Because valence identities are constituted from broad archetypes that are easily identifiable and positive, audience members who accept these identities tend to deemphasize conflict and competition, as well as to devalue negative evaluations of their representative, who they view as part of an in-group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Transue, 2007).

The uncertainty of their audience’s perception, as well as their ability to utilize the media to their advantage, pushes members of Congress into a constant state of \textit{narrative production}—the creation and dispersion of a particular congressional image or identity that is in line with a legislator’s own goals and preferences. Narrative production is a form of strategic political communication in which members of Congress disseminate their valence identities to the public through the media, in order to cultivate a personal

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} In Fenno (2000) for example, Fenno notes that Rep. Mac Collins (R-GA) and his predecessor Jack Flynt (R-GA) both were well known “local boys” with connections to the local community in which they served. This allowed these two representatives to cultivate, for Fenno, a personal link with constituents, which was utilized in order to indicate that they were “just like them” since they shared similarities with constituents and had strong ties to the local communities they served.}
vote with constituents. This narrative production leads to the formation of mediated homestyles, since members rely on the local news agencies within the district as a conduit through which a representative can communicate. Representatives must also develop an identity that journalists and editors—a different audience subset—will find interesting in order to overcome the hurdles present in the news-making process. The basis of narrative production comes from the notion that representatives must, in some fashion, have certain relational characteristics with the population they are trying to represent and must justify that these qualities exist in order to maintain office. In an increasingly polarized political environment, members of Congress increase their attempts to leverage the local media in order to appear more “local”; that is, more like the constituents they serve than professional politicians.

**Patronage, Antagonism, and Exchange between Representatives and the Press**

Treatments of the mass media in political science tend to follow the idea that the mass media is primarily a cultural institution, one whose primary effect is constraining and manipulating the social world and perpetuating a particular viewpoint about identity. While this sort of view is useful in understanding the political and social world in the United States, it often prevents the media from being considered a political institution— affecting the rules and actors involved in the day-to-day governing of society and the opinions of those in power.

Following work done by Kaplan (2006), Cook (2005) and Sparrow (1999), I focus on the political origins and developments that led to the creation of the mass media as an institution in the United States. Borrowing from North (1990), institutions are those
functioning “rules of the game” that constrain interactions between two entities or actors. Institutions are attempts to produce norms and equilibrium points based on shared procedures and values, and act to reduce the amount of uncertainty inherent in political decision making. Since actors in the political realm must deal with a relative amount of uncertainty (Downs, 1957), institutions allow actors to devise subjective decision models based on the particular circumstance offered to them. According to Kaplan (2006), Schudson (1978), Sparrow (1999) and others, the media act as a political institution by decreasing the level of uncertainty in the political world. The press achieves this by creating stable patterns in behavior and the standardization of information across individuals. By doing so, the news, and the process by which it is created, is irrevocably tied to the concept of the “political.” It is endemic across the democratic public sphere, given authority and trust by the public because of the press’s service as a conduit of information and opinion (Kaplan, 2002, 2003; Munson & Warren, 1997; Ryfe, 2006).

The establishment of the free press in the United States and its guarantees of protection under the Bill of Rights left both members of the press and legislators in Congress rushing to define the boundaries of their new association. Early colonial and British parliamentary procedure up to the 18th century was one veiled in secrecy from the public. Members of parliament generally followed a practice of exclusion, barring the press from proceedings (Starr, 2004). Printers and publishers would be allowed access to floor speeches for publication after the fact, and on an infrequent basis; however, these were generally authorized by the political parties and subject to extensive rewrites before publication (Emery, 1972; Starr, 2004). Press freedom was protected by English
common law but was under the purview of Parliament, which at times severely limited the ability of publishers to produce the news. Sedition was considered a substantial crime on which truth had no bearing, and it carried with it an equally significant punishment if a publisher was found guilty. In the months leading up to and throughout the American Revolution, many editors and journalists took severe risks in publishing pro-rebellion pamphlets and periodicals and many colonial papers had to either go underground or move their businesses outside of major towns in order to avoid British persecution (Emery, 1972).

Buttressed by their role in building and maintaining support during the Revolutionary War and the debates that followed the writing of the Constitution, members of the press began promoting themselves as pillars of the democratic process and bastions of free speech (Emery, 1972; Schudson, 2008; Starr, 2004). The press was not alone in promoting itself in this way, as politicians were quick to point out the importance of press freedom to a functioning democratic system. According to Thomas Jefferson, “when man is free and every man able to read, all is safe … The people are the only censors of their governors… [and were] it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without a newspaper or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter” (quote taken from Sparrow, 1999, p. 5). Similarly, Massachusetts’s chief justice William Cushing, in a letter to John Adams, sums up political support in the early Republic in stating that, “Without this liberty of the press could we have supported our liberties against British administration? Or could our revolution have taken place? Pretty certainly it could not, at the time it did” (Starr, 2004,
p. 70; see also Levy, 2004, p. 199). The implication for Cushing and Jefferson was that the press could—and in fact did—have a major impact on the political world. For most, fostering their development was important if democracy was going to flourish in the new Republic, as the press was seen very early on to be a vital check on government “from the outside.” The media’s independence from government provided it with an opportune position to provide surveillance on government while offering representatives and political actors a conduit to speak with their constituents.

Despite the desire to expand the news business and newspaper readership throughout the United States, newspapers were still largely limited in their scope and circulation among the states and were usually created by a single editor/publisher who was responsible for both writing articles, editing and setting and printing the final publication (Starr, 2004). More prominent paper businesses hired a few reporters to write stories; although, this was largely an exception and not the rule. To curry favor with politicians, the press attempted to bargain with leaders in Congress for subsidies by acting as stenographers of legislative record. The National Intelligencer, one of the Republic’s earliest “national” papers, promoted the Federalist legislature by printing speeches and defending Federalist policies in print, producing an early form of symbiosis between the press and the political parties that dominated American politics at the time (Baldasty, 1992; Ritchie, 1991; Schudson, 1972). This early form of patronage was principally one built upon financial gain for the press, allowing editors to subsidize the costs of production by acting as official organs for the early political battles that occurred between supporters of the two parties.
It was not long before political actors began to see the potential of the press in controlling the national agenda and attempted to manipulate the early agenda-setting power of the press either directly through the creation of their own news outlets—such as Alexander Hamilton’s *New York Evening Post*—or indirectly through the payment of editors and early correspondents for political favors (Nord, 2001; Ritchie, 1991). Patronage of the press was not reserved to representatives favored outlets, as the recognition by members of Congress that the press could help control the political narrative of what was occurring in the Capitol led to acts of legislation designed to make it easier for newspapers to be distributed throughout the developing nation (Ritchie, 1991; Starr, 2004). The Postal Act of 1792, through subsidies for newspaper postage, established the newspaper industry as the favored instrument of congressional communications within the states. According to Nord (2001, p. 84), “Everyone took the subsidy of newspaper circulation to be the proper function of federal policy making” and established the news not only as a vital communication outlet between representatives and citizens, but also as a necessary commodity for members of Congress in order to effectively control their image within the electorate of the time (see Kielbowicz, 1989).

While members of Congress recognized the importance of the press early on, individual representatives struggled with how they could utilize journalists effectively now that their actions on the floor were open to scrutiny. Early models of government-press relations were focused on control, manipulation, and rewards by political actors in order to manage the press. The Senate, taking cues from the Executive branch, maintained a strict veil over their proceedings, while the House kept floor proceedings
public in order to maintain accountability with the public. This early relationship did not last for long, as legislators learned to curry favor with members of the press gallery by offering patronage to journalists who toed the party lines. The fury of Representatives like Aedanus Burke and others over what they believed to be a “thick veil of misrepresentation and error” (Blanchard, 1979, p. 9) caused by the press’s reporting of proceedings exemplifies much of the earliest debates over press presence in the chamber. Local papers were still being established and relied primarily on national papers for much of their information, creating a trickle-down form of benefaction between the parties, national papers such as the United States Gazette, National Intelligencer, and Aurora (the primary Anti-Federalist paper of the time). According to Ritchie (1991, p. 8), “Members of Congress decried newspaper libel on their good names and virtue at the same time they subsidized official party papers, fed information to favorite editors, rewarded journalists financially and goaded them into attacks on the opposition.” For the two main political parties that dominated congressional politics at the time, patronage boiled down to a system of clientelism in which the press would receive benefits in exchange for political support. The press maintained a measure of credibility with the public by continuing to have an adversarial relationship with representatives by holding representatives accountable to voters printing “objective” news such as speeches and matters of fact about pieces of legislation, though press editors were able to control what speeches were printed.

Clientelism did not necessarily mean that there was no competition in the press. Both the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties (which later formed into the Republican-
Democratic party under Jefferson) had their favored news organs and moved to gain influence in the newly forming local papers as well. Federalists, still in control of Congress and the executive branch during the closing decade of the 18th century, attempted to minimize as best they could the Republican “threat” to legislative actions and the nation in general. The scurrility of the press led some historians to refer to the closing of the 18th century in the United States as the “Dark Ages of Journalism” (Emery, 1972), in which the extreme partisanship of editors in the press and politicians—along with some leftover animosity from the Revolutionary War—brought about a good deal of violence, in both words and actions, against political rivals.14 The Alien and Sedition Act of 1798, enacted to punish any person that might “write, print, utter, or publish any false, scandalous, and malicious writing against the government of the United States, or either house of the Congress or the said President…or to excite against them the hatred of the good people of the United States or to resist or oppose, or defeat any such law” (see U.S. Statutes at Large, “The Sedition Act,” I, Sec. 2, p. 596), was seen as a last ditch attempt by Federalists to control the national narrative being “threatened” by Jefferson and his supporters. In total, between 14 and 25 indictments were served to publishers, editors, and journalists under the Act, resulting in 11 trials and 10 convictions of primarily Republican printers. The “reign of terror” as Jefferson referred to it, would only last two

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14 Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson to Benjamin Franklin and editor of the Anti-Federalist Philadelphia General Advertiser (commonly referred to as the Aurora), had his office broken into and was beaten by Federalist supporters (including John Fenno, editor of Gazette of the United States) after stating that, “If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by [George] Washington” in the Aurora. See Emery, (1972, p. 118) for a description of the event and the retaliations of some Federalist journalists in response.
years when the effort to extend the law two more years was defeated by a narrow margin in the Congress, allowing it to expire in March of 1801 (Emery, 1972).

While the parties worked closely to control the narrative in the press about the state of politics in the United States, individual rank-and-file members during the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century often worked with particular press outlets at a distance. Content to record the proceedings from the galleries, members of the press rarely sought out information from representatives in Congress, and rank-and-file members of Congress likewise rarely sought out press attention unless it was to attack an outlet when the representative believed it to be out of line. The concept of the first “Washington correspondent” is regularly attributed to the published letters of Federalist Representative James Elliot to the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal. Elliot, who published in the Freeman’s Journal under the name “Ariel,” utilized the outlet to promote Federalist legislation through the newspaper firsthand, providing a new avenue for representatives to publish their opinions for constituents to read (Marbut, 1971). Letter writers were able to speak firsthand to their experiences in Washington, and could provide support for or critiques of many of the proceedings that occurred on the floor of the House. And while the relationship between Elliot and the Freeman’s Journal would only last a short period of time,15 the concept of “corresponding” with editors back home and in the national dailies quickly caught on with other members of the House, who would frequently send speeches and edited notes on floor proceedings to their favored press outlets (Ritchie, 1991).

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15 Elliot began corresponding with the editor of the Journal in 1808, and would retire after the 1810 term. See Ritchie (1991) and Marbut (1971) for more information on Elliot’s relationship with the press.
By the 1820s, relationships between representatives and members of the press gallery began to shift, with members seeking out reporters and stenographers in order to ensure that what was being recorded matched the public profile that members were attempting to convey. The transition to creating individual level relationships between reporters and representatives can be seen as the first step toward the creation of a mediated homestyle by legislators interested in creating a positive perception with constituents back home. The development of weekly papers in rural areas and daily papers in more metropolitan areas led to the proliferation of local congressional reporting by professional journalists and editors. The number of regional newspapers expanded tremendously, with rural weeklies seeing the most growth overall (Ritchie, 1991; Starr, 2004; Thomas, 1810). By the 1830s, the United States had approximately 900 newspapers overall, and by 1840 the number had almost doubled to 1,631 (Nord, 2001, p. 94). This led commentators on American politics such as Alexis de Tocqueville (2003 [1831]) to place a strong emphasis on communication through newspaper as a form of community building. According to Tocqueville, the novelty of newspapers was their ability to provide individuals with shared experiences, thoughts, events and feelings about what was occurring in the United States. Thus, “A newspaper,” according to Tocqueville (2003, p. 603), “always represents an association of which its regular readers make up the membership.” This worked out well for political parties and early interest groups who were able to control the narrative in the news; although by some accounts

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16 These were not all daily papers. Many of the early periodicals started as weeklies, and expanded during the 19th century to bi-weeklies and tri-weeklies mostly, with some transforming into daily papers by the end of the 19th century. The number of daily papers in 1840, according to census data collected by Nord (2001) was 138, which doubled to approximately 254 in 1850.
during the middle of the 1830s excessive party control over the news had begun to wane. Smaller weeklies tended toward more neutral reporting, and partisanship found its place primarily by identifying with a party’s stances more generally, rather than being owned by the parties themselves (Starr, 2004). Correspondents were still commonly employed by many of the more prosperous papers, though they were often provided by the paper’s editors or by specially employed writers who would both report the news as well as provide opinions.

The industrializing newspaper business of the 1830s, through the professionalization of correspondents and the introduction of “objective” reporting, provided the next step in the evolution of the congressional-press relationship in Washington. The early relationship between the press and representatives in Congress provided the initial framework necessary for establishing a communications outlet poised to control the narrative in the public eye. Representatives still had the upper hand, since the press had not yet acquired the ability to constrain the behavior of political actors and many press outlets still maintained some partisan attachment either implicitly or explicitly. During his visit in the early 1800s, Tocqueville noted that the press provided political elites with a tool to gather the voices of the multitude under a single narrative. Tocqueville saw newspapers as a tool for communicative action to the extent that it allowed political actors to remain accountable to and persuade the public about their actions. According to historical accounts by Ritchie (1991), Marbut (1971) and others, journalists had become more dual-natured. There was the “objective reporter of fact,” who provided accounts of congressional records and legislative proceedings from the
galleries, and the “editorial correspondent,” whose responsibility was bringing opinion to fact and to pay patronage to the partisan biases of the owners and backers of a press organization. Several papers, most notably James Gordon Bennett’s New York Herald as well as smaller papers such as the New Orleans Picayune and Philadelphia Public Ledger, were the first to move away from partisan affiliations in order to establish journalistic independence (Marbut, 1971). Partisan papers were still available and utilized to great extent by politicians attempting to bolster their own image in the public while lambasting their rivals.

The model of Bennett’s New York Herald emphasized a new era of congressional-press relations by turning the previously established, congress-dominated, patronage relationship on its head in favor of a new style of a press-controlled reward system. Members of Congress were beginning to lose control of their messages as the press became more self-reliant. Representatives interested in maintaining a positive profile with constituents found themselves at the mercy of the press in order to advertise and prove that they were representing constituents appropriately. According to Marbut (1971, p. 42), Herald correspondents “tended to praise officials who cooperated in giving exclusive information and to blast harshly those who remained aloof.” The tactic of utilizing press distributions to funnel opinions about issues and to control congressional narratives quickly became a notable tool in the journalist repertoire and led to several instances of professional and personal embarrassments for representatives and newspapers\textsuperscript{17} as well as congressional hearings over the identities of correspondents and

\textsuperscript{17} Perhaps one of the more notable instances involves one of the first female correspondents to be allowed into the Press Gallery, Jane Grey Swisshelm. Swisshelm utilized her first (and only) letter from
their sources (Marbut, 1971; Ritchie, 1991). At the same time, news was beginning to become more local as cheaper printing practices led to a boom in newspaper investment and circulations in the expanding nation (Nerone, 1987; Schudson, 1978). According to Schudson (1978, p. 22), “for the first time the American newspaper made it a regular practice to print political news, not just foreign but domestic, and not just national but local…not just the affairs of the elite in a small trading society, but the activities of an increasingly varied, urban, middle class society.”

In order to stay relevant, representatives had to find a way to advertise to this new form of journalist and news consumer (Mayhew, 1974). The professionalization of the news and of news correspondence marked the beginning of what historians and scholars of the media refer to as the “adversarial” approach to news-making (Marbut, 1971; Ritchie, 1991; Schudson, 1978; Starr, 2004). Members of Congress, with a few exceptions, were no longer in control of the press and the news that was written about them. Journalism by the end of the 19th century had begun to solidify around the ideas of independence from political parties, and many editors and publishers pulled away from party organs in favor of mass distribution and the values of “objective” reporting. With the parties in Congress finding it more and more difficult to secure the patronage of newspapers, individual representatives began seeking out correspondents for newspapers in the gallery to publish gossip and scandal surrounding Senator Daniel Webster. At the time other journalists shied away from such sensationalist news, and Swisshelm was warned by several other members of Congress not to publish the piece. The opinion, which was printed in Swisshelm’s Pittsburgh weekly but bearing her title as a correspondent for the New York Tribune, was copied into several other papers across the nation. After condemnation fell on Swisshelm for the piece and Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, for its publication, Swisshelm was ejected from the press galleries and fired from her duties at the paper. See Ritchie (1991) for more details.
that circulated in their districts, in the hope that they might use them as mouthpieces for their own advertising back home.

**A New Phase of the Press Institution**

Toward the end of the 19th century, representatives would discover an important tool for manipulating the media narratives about what was occurring in Washington: the press release. A self-prepared opinion crafted by a political actor for express use by the media in order to inform them of a representative’s opinions, stances or current work in Washington, the press release quickly caught on with other members after the idea was introduced. Attributed to Representative Benjamin Butler18 of Massachusetts, the press release has been described by correspondents as the ability of a political actor to “interview one’s self” rather than rely on a member of the press (Richardson, 1903).

Members of Congress, according to Richardson (1903), saw the creation of the press release as an equalizer between representatives and the press, giving members the ability to craft the news, rather than just be part of the newsgathering process.

Since the development and mass adoption of the press release beginning in the late 19th century, members of Congress and the press in the United States have largely entered into a new stage of refinement in their relationship. The ebb and flow of the congressional-press relationship has led to what Cook (1989) refers to as a largely “symbiotic” relationship in which both representatives and the press are dependent upon and intertwined with each other. The early proliferation of local press outlets during the

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18 According to Richardson (1903), a long time correspondent in Washington during the late 19th century and early 20th century, Representative Butler was, “never willing for a newspaper man to take down what he said” (p. 32). Rather than allow journalists to provide their own voice to his words, Butler would write out his opinion for correspondents to reprint and quote. 
end of the 19th century due to the success of “cheap press” styles of production was the impetus for strengthening ties between members and their home outlets. Local papers seemed more advantageous to individual members of Congress since these papers were more interested in rank-and-file members and how their actions would affect the districts they served. Press releases became more valuable to both members and the local press, since they served to advance both actors’ interests. For members, press releases allowed representatives to have some control over the narrative that the media produced about them. With the expansion of local media outlets, the ability of members to make their statements with a minimum of journalistic interference was beneficial since it provided an added control over the message about how members were acting in Washington. Meanwhile, local papers—especially independently owned and operated outlets—were able to benefit from congressional press releases since the release gave the media an “ear to the ground” regarding what was happening at the national level.

As the media expanded and advanced in the 20th century, the press release remained intact as a staple of congressional business. As party strength began to severely wane during the end of the 19th century, the press still maintained a strong relationship with citizens in the United States. The beginning of the 20th century saw new trust being placed in the press, largely due to newly established codes of ethics by professional groups that emphasized objectivity, truth, and unbiased, neutral reporting. However, media expansion also increased the competition that members of Congress had to deal with. Local newspapers have remained central to congressional press strategies despite the shift in significance towards television beginning in the 1950s and despite similar
views in newsworthiness between the two media. Studies of newspapers and television have frequently concluded that television news is often more selective than newspaper coverage due to the limited space allotment to discuss stories during the average newscast. Likewise, critiques of television news often note that stories tend to be more superficial for the same reasons: short time frames for stories and a multitude of news stories to choose from (Cook, 1989; 2005; Gans, 1979; Robinson, 1981).

The advent of the television age has changed the congressional-press relationship in one significant way: the creation of the professional news consultant or press secretary. Early studies of the professionalization of the House beginning in the 1960s revealed that generational shifts in House membership correlated with the growing number of press assistant roles in Congressional offices (Born, 1982; Cook, 1989; Robinson, 1981). The specific inclusion of a “press secretary” role on the Congressional Staff Registry, according to Born (1982, p. 350), was indicative of a stronger focus on advertising by representatives and, “at minimum, a sign of the greater centrality of such activities to [representative’s] operations.” The job description of the typical press secretary, according to Cook (1989), was to:

Report to the public, through the news media and various projects, the goals, positions, activities, and accomplishments of the representative; to inform constituents of services available through their representative; and to increase the representative’s national profile when possible.

The introduction of press secretaries to most congressional office staffs is an important in the development of the congressional-press relationship. Historically, prior to the proliferation of the role during the broadcast age beginning in the 1960s, members of Congress struggled to develop a rapport with journalists in order to control the
narrative about them in the news. Members could do this by providing information about
tantalizing stories to particular journalists and editors in return for favorable coverage, or
by becoming the editor of a newspaper that based in their district. Standards of
professionalism and the ethic of objectivity in the 20th century left representatives in a
state of uncertainty about their ability to control the narrative being circulated about them
in the local media. The institution of Congress began feeling the effects of a weakening
national relationship with a press system becoming obsessed with the presidency, and
professional ethics led to a much more negative style of investigative reporting by the
national media.

The professionalization of congressional staff and the introduction of the press
secretary role were utilized as an attempt to gain some ground and establish a new
equilibrium between rank-and-file members of Congress and local press outlets, so that
both institutions could function with one another now that the old patronage systems and
partisan press outlets of the 19th century were long defunct. Press secretaries—most of
who are previously involved in the news making industry (Cook, 1989)—come into their
role with connections and knowledge of how the news making process works. The
allocation of resources to the creation of professional “communication aides,” according
to Born (1982, p. 350), is a sign of “greater centrality” of advertising activities by
members of Congress within their own districts. Research has found that the way
members allocate their resources affects vote outcomes and has been hypothesized to
affect the well-known incumbency advantage of current members of Congress (Box-
By the end of the 20th century, representatives were left with a system in which they must please two separate types of audiences when developing a communications strategy. In order to deal with various audiences, representatives must generate a narrative that is acceptable to their constituents, while creating stories that are interesting and newsworthy to journalists. In the next section, I reexamine the concept of representation through the frame of media narratives developed by representative agents in order to form a connection with their audience. Since the media acts as a separate institution, following its own norms and practices, representatives must allocate resources to press operations in order to engage and manipulate press attention, in the hopes that representatives can control the media frame presented to the public.

Conclusions

The beginning of this chapter opened with the idea that the use of press releases could help representatives by controlling the narrative the media distributes to the public regarding legislators’ behaviors. By utilizing a localized angle, representatives can carve out a place in the local media environment and entrench themselves as experts that journalists can use when writing stories. In doing so, representatives hope to have better control over their public image, as portrayed in the news. Since representatives cannot communicate personally with constituents on a daily basis (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003), they seek out media attention in order to reach the potential constituent audiences available to them via the news media. Journalists are not beholden to legislative opinion,
however, and may also craft stories using their own norms and standards (Entman, 2007). The interactions that occur between representatives and journalists during the news-making process help to create a mediated homestyle, wherein representatives’ rhetoric and actions are used by journalists to create an identity that is appealing to an audience. Mediated homestyles are an extension of the original concept theorized by Fenno (1978), in which representatives utilize their own unique styles and characteristics in order to generate attention from the media and attempt to gain the public’s trust. Unlike the original concept of homestyle, it is a form of impersonal influence (Mutz, 1998), relying on indirect contact with constituents through the media rather than through personal contact. It is also a form of strategic political communication, in which representatives decide on a particular attribute to emphasize in order to gain the greatest possible outcome—most often increased public support and power that can be exploited in the next election.

Representation, the concept that one object may “stand for” others, is likewise important for legislators to keep in mind when constructing narratives about their work. At the heart of the valence identity of any legislator is some concept of representative style, which serves to drive the narrative about how a legislator serves their constituents in government. Utilizing these representative styles, and by emphasizing certain characteristics deemed valuable by constituents, representatives create unique methods for “cultivating their constituencies” (Fenno, 1978, p. 32). More than anything, a legislator’s homestyle is created in order to show how they are successfully and accurately representing their constituents’ interests in politics. While legislators have
recognized the importance of press attention in maintaining a positive perception of themselves with the public, the institutionalization of press operations beginning in the 1970s is indicative of a shift in the way members control the perception of constituents. Traditional representative behavior inherent in homestyle views constituents as individuals with interests that legislators can cater to and fulfill by acting as a representative agent. Mediated homestyles and the increased use of press operations by representatives view constituents instead as an audience, considering them as consumers of representation who require updates and information about how a particular agent is serving their needs. Using press operations in this way, legislators attempt to indirectly persuade constituents that there is a link that they both share.

The end goal for every congressional press operation, therefore, is to affect the viewpoint of the electorate and to keep a representative in power over time. Media operations can impact such outcomes by manipulating the level of attention, tone, and topics that the news focuses on each day. While legislators and journalists are far from being partners in propaganda (Bagdikian, 1979, 2004), local news agencies do need members of Congress to report on the current atmosphere in Washington in order to remain competitive and attract consumers. Representatives also need news agencies to remain positive about their actions in government in order to cultivate a personal vote with constituents and remain in office from election to election. This relationship is the foundation for what Cook (1989, 2005) calls the symbiotic relationship between legislators and newsmakers. In the forthcoming chapters, the relationship that exists between members of Congress and local news agencies will be examined empirically in
order to understand more fully the dynamics of this relationship and how it impacts the perception of constituents. Legislators understand that in order to become news, they must develop a relationship with journalists and provide them with incentives for covering members and their actions (Gershon, 2012). In the next chapter, I begin by focusing on this relationship and examining specifically how it affects the tone and number of stories a newspaper runs in a given year about a member of Congress, without taking into account overt attempts by representatives to gain press attention.
CHAPTER 3
THE RELATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF CONGRESSIONAL PRESS COVERAGE

Since the organization of the first Congress, representatives and citizens have acknowledged that the press is vital to the proper functioning of democratic society. The press can equally benefit representatives and the public by easily transmitting information about legislative activities to constituents back home. In the modern media, citizens rely on press outlets to keep them informed about what politicians are doing in Washington, and charge members of the media not only with reporting the facts, but also with the important task of monitoring political actors in order to keep them accountable with the public (Graber, 2010; Schudson, 2008). Changes in the media environment starting in the 1960s have shifted the central attention of research on the media and politics away from individual relationships with the press toward a focus on the President and political leaders, sensationalism in coverage and the press as a political institution in American society. As a result of journalists’ doctrines of newsworthiness in national news outlets, coverage of Congress is often scattershot. This leads individual members of Congress toward strategies of localization (Vinson, 2003) in order to gain media coverage within their district. Local coverage of legislative activities has received some attention from scholars in recent years (Larson, 1992; Schaffner, 2006; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003), yet many facets of the relationship between representatives and the local media are still unexplored.
Legislators are strategic actors with multiple goals while in office (Fenno, 1973). These goals are dependent on a legislator’s ability to maintain elective office for a prolonged period of time (Mayhew, 1974). Legislators also participate in activities that bolster their visibility within their respective districts, which are generally categorized as the acts of credit claiming, position taking, and advertising. According to Mayhew (1974, p. 49), the act of advertising by members of Congress is the “efforts to disseminate one’s name among constituents in such a fashion as to create a favorable image but in messages having little to no issue content.” While seen as the most simplistic of the three actions taken by members of Congress, the act of advertising is significant to a representative’s attempts to influence the opinions of the mass electorate since advertising is most often mediated. Legislators’ unique homestyles tend to focus on the act of credit claiming and position taking by members in their districts in attempts to highlight and strengthen their claims to representativeness, the hope being that the “brand loyalty” that is often the outcome of advertising will occur. Conversely, press coverage of members of Congress and members’ own attempts to manipulate such coverage are often done in an attempt to increase name recognition and visibility, with the content of messages being noteworthy but ancillary.

By focusing the media’s gaze on their actions, members of Congress put themselves at risk of investigation by the press if they move out of step with the electorate (Fogarty, 2009). The relationship that members of Congress cultivate with press outlets influences a representative’s ability to successfully manipulate coverage of their behavior in Washington and the opinions of the electorate they serve. Here, I
examine the connection between local press outlets and members of Congress and how the political and media environments within a member’s district affect the ability of a representative to accumulate positive coverage.

The chapter will proceed as follows. Section two begins with an examination of the congressional/press relationship in the United States and examines the pertinent literature that will act as the backdrop for the rest of the chapter. Specifically, I will examine the constraints placed on both representatives and the press due to their intertwined nature as described in Chapter 2. In section three, I develop a theory of relationships between members and their local media outlets, focusing on the creation of a valence score between members and the local press. Sections four and five present the data and discuss the decision rules in choosing the sample of legislators and news outlets, as well as producing some bivariate analyses of the independent variables in order to develop theoretical expectations for the full models. Sections six and seven present the empirical analysis of the frequency of news articles and the tone of coverage that occurs in the local press. Finally, section eight will conclude with a discussion of the significance of the Congress/press relationship pertaining to the building of positive narratives by members of Congress and how it affects claims to representation made by members to their home districts.

**The Changing Relationship between Congress and the Media**

There is a basic agreement within the field of political communications that the final news story reported by the media is the product of a strategic interaction between political actors and journalists (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Cook, 1989; 2005;
Empirical accounts of the relationship between the press and Congress generally argue that there is a widening gap between what members refer to as the “gentlemanly” local reporter and the “hostile” national correspondent. Changes in journalistic roles, vastly believed to be the result of the investigation into the Watergate scandal during the 1970s, have led to more “hard-hitting” and investigative tactics by the news media with regard to handling political actors. According to Robinson (1981), this change is one exhibited most prominently by national press journalists, since they have the ability to pick and choose their sources and subjects and may produce more “hard” news as a result. Journalists for local press outlets must maintain access to the sources they have in Washington—generally the few members of Congress that represent their media market—and therefore must be more congenial and “softer” with stories on members in order to maintain information flow.

Whether national or local, the question of who has the final decision making authority over the final news product is largely still one of debate, though it is generally agreed that no story exists without some kind of relationship between members and the press. The media is considered to be a strategic actor due to its ability to control what does and does not become news on a day-to-day basis. This is commonly referred to as the media’s “gatekeeping” ability and is defined by Shoemaker (1991, p. 1) as “the process by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day.” This provides the press with the potential to set the agenda of public deliberation by
providing information on particular events, actors, and issues while ignoring others. According to Soroka (2012), gatekeeping can be thought of as the deliberate manipulation of the distribution of information that makes up the “real world.” The press is in a unique position to control the flow of information in this case since politics is out of the reach of the average citizen in the United States. Similarly, legislators are not in a position to directly interact with constituents on a regular basis (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003), and the media can act as an intermediary between representatives and the public. Thus the media act as a filter through which information about members of Congress passes before reaching the electorate. And despite the growing trend toward online resources for news consumption in the United States, recent studies by the PEW Research Center continue to find that more traditional media play a key role in informing individuals about local politics, especially local newspapers and television (PEW Research Center, 2011).

Gatekeeping is a suitable starting point for examining the relationship between legislators and the local press, since it provides a reasonable assumption that there is no a priori decision being made about the threshold a particular story must pass before becoming news (Soroka, 2012). While the media’s gatekeeping ability can act as a constraint over representatives’ abilities to manipulate public perception, it is still debatable whether the media’s strength is absolute or at the margins. The political power of the media cannot be measured just by its ability to control the flow of information, but also by its ability to provide independent information about the behavior of political actors (Althaus, 2003; Arnold, 2004; Bennett, 1990). Press independence, the ability of
journalists to be the authors of their own opinions and stories, goes beyond just gatekeeping as it is generally examined by including the ability of the press to be a threat to political actors if they step out of line with their constituents’ wishes, either ethically or politically. Cook (2005) and Fogarty (2009) contend that media outlets can constrain the political messages that potential actors send to the public, assuming that representatives are highly risk-averse and thus will “play it safe on certain issues and minimize any potential damaging coverage” (Fogarty, 2009, p. 8). In order to be perceived as a possible risk to the goals of a member of Congress, the press must be able to report information that could potentially damage the perception of an individual legislator in the public’s eye. Trends toward event-driven journalism, cynicism, and a primary focus on conflict, trends which media critics often point to when examining the shortcomings of the press (Bennett, 1990; Gans 1979, 2003; Lawrence, 2000), also provide journalists with strategic opportunities for free expression and the ability to showcase independence from political actors (Schudson, 2008). Evidence tends to be sympathetic to the idea that the press can create opportunities for strategic free expression, but not without limitation. Bennett’s (1990) theory of indexing presumes that media professionals will catalog or “index” the range of voices expressed in the mainstream debate around government and policies. By deciding what is considered “mainstream,” the press may arbitrarily create “a world in which governments are able to define their own publics and democracy becomes whatever the government ends up doing” (Bennett, 1990, p. 125).

At the local level, the ability of the press to remain independent and function as a valid gatekeeper to the public is contingent on their ability to be autonomous when
carrying out investigations of Congress and representatives, something that the local press has had some difficulty performing (Graber, 2010; Larson, 1992; Vinson, 2003). As a political institution, the media in the United States can be viewed as an open system. Open systems, according to Sparrow (2006, p. 146), emphasize the fact that organizations “exist in an uncertain political and economic environment, one in which they have to stabilize their position in order to flourish” (see also Katz & Kahn, 1966; Sigal, 1973; Sparrow 1999). Uncertainty is the driving force behind the decisions made by media outlets, and the most basic forms of uncertainty that local press outlets face are economic and informational uncertainty. Economically, local newspapers are in constant competition with other media and agencies attempting to catch and maintain the public’s attention. Economic vulnerability leads outlets toward strategies that can maximize their returns while minimizing their investment of resources (Hamilton, 2004; Sparrow, 2006; Underwood, 1993).

Information uncertainty leads the press to rely on inside sources in order to remain up-to-date with what is occurring in Washington. Corporately owned newspapers and large metropolitan dailies can reduce their levels of information uncertainty by maintaining correspondents in Washington with the sole duty of reporting on newsworthy topics. For the majority of news outlets the need for up-to-date information dictates that the press must rely on the political actors they wish to investigate for information about their behavior. According to Sparrow (2006, p. 147), the “dependence of media personnel on high-ranking officials for new and important information about government operations and high politics may allow these politicians and executive-branch personnel
to enjoy a ‘policy monopoly’ with respect to a particular policy area.” Taken together, the economic and information uncertainty that news outlets must deal with has led to the perception that journalists and local news agencies treat representatives more gently when reporting on news events in order to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship (Cook, 2005). Content analysis done by Vinson (2003) has found that local media coverage of members of Congress tends to be more neutral or negative, and there is a wide variability in coverage as well. Similarly, Arnold (2004) found that 70 percent of news pieces on representatives in local newspapers were neutral. Members do receive some positive coverage; according to Arnold’s (2004) analysis, 20 percent of news articles were positive toward members. However, the results of these previous works go against the popular conception that local media outlets are “lapdogs” and willing partners in propaganda (Bagdikian, 1979, 2004; Larson, 1992).

Valence and Tone of Coverage in the Local Media

The primary reason that members of Congress cultivate a relationship with the press is to maintain interaction with constituents in their district. The development of unique homestyles (Fenno, 1978, 2000) mitigates the necessity for members to develop a strong relationship with the press, although it is still the case that “no legislator can directly interact with every constituent on a regular basis” (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003, p. 41–42) in the same way that local media outlets do. Fenno (2000) concedes that more recently, representatives have needed to extend their personal styles to media efforts outside of campaigning, due to the increasingly entrepreneurial nature some media-savvy legislators.
Research on legislative behavior has led to the accepted belief that there is also a difference between “work horses” (who produce a generous amount of legislative work while receiving little publicity) and “show horses” (who produce little legislative work but receive a large amount of publicity) in Congress (Clapp, 1963; Payne, 1980), and has been used to examine congressional strategies in elections (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2003), participation in the chamber (Hall, 1987) and the subject of the mass media (Niven, 2004; Niven & Zilber, 1998). This basic difference between legislators in terms of publicity seeking will lead to different media homestyles. We can imagine that certain relational characteristics of a network consisting of members of Congress and local press outlets will affect the prominence of a representative in print prior to the influence of outside structural factors. News outlets have a unique advantage as a communication device due to their long history of development within the United States (Starr, 2004) and their ability to develop bonds of associations with readers through a shared narrative about events, thoughts and experiences (Tocqueville, 2003). These bonds, over time, provide news outlets with a type of capital which can be used to persuade and influence individuals’ thoughts and actions by developing trust with the individual viewers, solidifying a social relationship between the news provider and the news consumer.

Here, two pieces of information are leveraged in order to understand the valence approval level of the media for representatives in Congress: the difference between positive, negative and neutral coverage, and the amount of “shared space” that a member has with other representatives. Valence, with regard to media coverage, is dependent on the tone of coverage and the frequency of said coverage in the local media. Let $P_D(n)$ be
the percent valence approval of legislator \( n \) in the sample. Media coverage, it is argued, can take either a positive, negative, or neutral tone, all of which factor into the ability of a member to be seen as representative of their district. These different types of stories make up the various degrees of emotional responses that affect the representativeness of a member of Congress. I argue that the degree of valence a member of the House acquires is measured simply as the difference in the sums of the number of positive articles (\( d^+(n) \)) and negative articles (\( d^-(n) \)) over the total number of stories (\( D \)) in the sample. Positive and negative stories are determined based on the tone of the writer/commentator when discussing an individual legislator. Neutral stories, while effective at providing voters in the electorate with information about the policies and issues that a member of Congress is dealing with, are not believed to have a strong impact on the perception of representativeness—and thus valence—of a member of Congress. These stories, however, do affect the overall viewpoint of the electorate since they allow individual constituents to come to their own conclusion about how to interpret a representative’s actions. Neutral stories are therefore included by weighting the overall valence score by the total number of stories run by a newspaper that mention a member of Congress (\( D \)). Thus, the valence approval score for a member of Congress is as follows:

\[
P^v_p = \frac{\left[ \sum d^+(n) \right] - \left[ \sum d^-(n) \right]}{D}
\]

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19 The Appendix provides some examples that illustrate how positive, negative, and neutral coverage was coded in the analysis that follows.
We can imagine that the level of approval a single representative receives in the media is weighted proportional to the other members of the legislature that share a news source. That is, representative $A$’s media approval is dependent, at least partly, on whether a news outlet also covers the actions of representative $B$, since both legislators can be seen as being in competition with one another for news coverage. This is what I refer to as a member’s “shared space,” and is based on the argument that constituents may be likely to evaluate members of Congress as a group of legislators the more that news coverage is split between several different members (Schaffner, Shiller, & Sellers, 2003). As an example, Representatives Dutch Ruppersberger (MD-2), Donna Edwards (MD-4), Elijah Cummings (MD-7) and Chris Van Hollen (MD-8) all represent districts served by the Baltimore Sun newspaper. These four representatives, therefore, compete at some level for coverage in the Sun on any given day. In cases such as this, newspapers may choose to group representatives together in stories or discuss them individually, thus decreasing the overall level of focus one member receives proportional to the other members that share news space. On the other hand, Representative Fred Upton (MI-6) does not have to worry about sharing coverage with other members since the Kalamazoo Gazette serves primarily his district. Therefore, I argue that the percent valence score for a given legislator is weighted by a member of Congress’s “shared space”, which is equal to the sum of all representatives ($n_k$) that share a common news source in the sample. For members who do not share a news source with another representative (such as in the Fred Upton example), the valence score reverts back to the standard equation noted above. In
the analysis below, valence will be measured as a percentage which ranges between positive and negative one hundred.

Data

Using the valence score developed here, we can begin to examine the impact of environmental and structural factors on the level of prominence a member of Congress receives in the local press. In order to understand the effect that the political, social and media environment has on members’ valence score in the local media, a dataset of House members was created, and local newspapers were matched with members based on shared audience populations.

In order to determine what kinds of information about representatives newspapers make available, one must ensure that they collect news articles about a reasonable number of representatives from a reasonable number of papers (Arnold, 2004). I start by randomly selecting a sample of members of the House who served between January 1, 2009 and November 3, 2010. Table 1 presents a list of representatives and newspapers included in the analysis, along with statistics on circulation and number of overall mentions of a representative in the newspaper. The sample consists of approximately 25% of the total House population (108 members), and is reasonably diverse both geographically and ideologically. The representatives in the sample range in time spent in the legislature, allowing for variation to occur based on the amount of time a representative has spent cultivating a relationship with the local press, while still allowing for new members who may receive more attention due to their freshman status in the legislature. Representatives range from first-term representatives like Rob Wittman (R-
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Newspaper Source</th>
<th>Total Articles</th>
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VA1) and Dina Titus (D-NV3) to nineteen-term legislator Pete Stark (D-CA13), with the median time spent in the legislature being five terms or ten years. Geographically, the dataset draws a reasonable proportion of members of the House from each of the four regional divides in the United States as defined by the decennial census. The dataset does oversample women in the chamber (22.2% sampled versus 17.9% in the chamber); but there are no theoretical reasons to believe this will adversely affect the analysis that follows. Ideologically, the dataset provides a reasonable snapshot of the divides present in the House of Representatives in the 111th Congress. The overall sample is 37.0% Republican, which is representative of the minority party in the House during the 111th Congress.20

Deciding which newspaper to examine alongside each member of Congress presents a greater challenge. According to a report by the Congressional Research Service, there were approximately 1,400 daily newspapers in the United States in 2010, and several thousand community papers that published either weekly or biweekly

20 While this is below the 44.3% Republican population of the House in 2009-2010, the data is still found to be relatively balanced when compared to the full population overall and no significant issues were found to occur by not having an exact match to the population percentage.
(Kirchoff, 2010). The problem is drawing a sample of newspapers that is a reasonable approximation of the universe of papers available to members and their constituents, as well as being representative of papers that citizens actually read regularly and can be influential in affecting citizen perceptions of their representative. The Newsbank digital archive provides one of the most comprehensive collections of newspapers and articles both globally and domestically. Newsbank boasts 2,240 newspapers that serve the United States, including both local papers, major metropolitan papers and nationally circulated papers, thus providing a more robust sample of papers to choose from when matching news sources to representatives.

In order to decide which newspaper to match with each individual member of Congress, the following rules were utilized. First, while there is evidence that indicates that some members of Congress are served by newspaper outlets from adjacent states (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003), I focus on news outlets that are housed within the state that a member serves. While news outlets may run stories that involve representatives from neighboring states, I assume that members and constituents are better served by in-state news services. The reason for this is that in-state newspapers have a greater incentive to report on events and actions that directly impact the state they supply. While some newspapers may find stories from adjacent states newsworthy, it is less likely that they will focus any major effort or time focusing on out-of-state representatives. This assumption does have some evidence within the data as well. Including adjacent states in the news searches for House members reveals that the majority of mentions still occur in newspapers that serve the same state as the member of Congress.
Following this, the second rule used when choosing an appropriate newspaper takes into account what periodicals the majority of citizens read. There is some debate over whether the median newspaper reader is viewing a relatively small local paper (Martin, 1996; Vermeer, 2002) or something generally larger. Arnold (2004, p. 19, fn. 16) presents evidence that the median newspaper reader is viewing a paper with a circulation of at least 100,000. Smaller newspapers (those with a circulation less than 100,000) will behave differently than larger newspapers with regard to how they treat members of Congress. Because of this, the sample includes a mixture of newspapers with large circulations and smaller circulations in order to fully understand the variance in newspaper treatments of representatives and their actions, and how political and media characteristics affect this relationship. The median circulation of newspapers included in the dataset is 83,317. The dataset has a reasonable distribution of low circulation newspapers (those with less than 100,000 in reported circulation) and high circulation papers, with low circulating papers making up 55.6% of the dataset, and ranging from such papers as the more rural, Arkansas-based *Stuttgart Daily Leader* (circulation 2,397) to the metropolitan *New York Daily News* (circulation 632,595).

The examination that follows will look at two different dependent variables in order to understand the local media environment that members of Congress must deal with on a day-to-day basis. The first variable of interest is simply the number of stories in which a member of the House was mentioned during the 111th term. The total number of stories acts as a proxy for overall exposure that a member of the House has, and is examined in order to provide a baseline understanding of what increases and decreases
coverage of a member in local newspapers, independent of the tone of said coverage. To examine the environmental factors that impact the frequency of local congressional news coverage, I rely on a negative binomial regression. The second variable of interest will be the valence score discussed in the previous section, which will provide some conclusions about how the overall tone of coverage is influenced by various factors of the social, political, and media environment. The valence approval score of a member of Congress in the local press is examined using OLS regression. Each of the two models examines the valence and frequency of coverage in 2009 and 2010 separately. I will discuss the results of the negative binomial regression first in order to understand the impact of the political and media environment on the total frequency of coverage before discussing the impact these factors have on the valence score of a member in the local press.

**Independent Variables and Bivariate Analysis**

Before moving to the full analysis of local news coverage, I will spend some time examining the impact of some of the independent variables via bivariate analysis, as well as discussing the expectations of the impact of other factors included in the full analysis. While not all variables in the full model will be focused on in this section, some time will be spent teasing out the individual impact of variables such as tenure in office (measured as total terms spent in the legislature), ideology and party identification, district coverage of the newspaper’s market, and electoral competitiveness during the 2010 campaign to see how these factors affect the frequency and tone of coverage (measured via the valence approval score) in local news agencies.
Beginning first with tenure in office, the length of a legislative career is expected to negatively affect the amount of news coverage a given legislator receives, with members of Congress seeing a steady decrease in coverage the longer they remain in office. Much like the presidential “honeymoon” period, when a new representative enters the House the press is willing to provide some coverage in order to establish a relationship, which in turn is reciprocated by the representative interested in maintaining their seat in the chamber. Over time, this coverage tends to decrease as members become more entrenched in Washington and members of the press go in search of stories that will entice readers’ interests. While this decrease may not necessarily affect the tone of congressional coverage overall, total time spent in the legislature should have a significant effect on the frequency of coverage seen during the 111th Congressional term.

As shown in the box plot presented in Figure 2, freshmen representatives exhibit the widest range of variability in total coverage of the course of the 111th Congress. The only other point in a member’s legislative career in the sample to exhibit a generally higher frequency of coverage during this period are legislators in their fourteenth term of office, specifically John Spratt (D-SC5) and Sander Levin (D-MI12), both of whom chaired powerful committees (Budget and Ways and Means respectively). During the 2009 term there is a considerably higher amount of variability in news coverage

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21 Leadership of a committee or within the House itself has been examined in previous research by Schaffner and Sellers (2003) and Gershon (2012), both finding a null effect of leadership positions on the frequency and tone of news coverage. Nevertheless, House leadership was included in both the bivariate analysis above and in the full model in order to test whether previous findings were the result of previous sampling frames. In all models, being a member of House leadership—whether as a member of party leadership or the ranking member or chair of a committee—had no significant effect on the frequency of news coverage or the valence score of coverage in the sample.
depending on the length of a given member’s legislative career, while in 2010 that variability is more muted, although some does still exist.

Figure 2. News Coverage by Term in Office.

Table 2 presents a bivariate negative binomial regression of terms in office on the frequency of coverage. As the findings show, the time spent in office does significantly and negatively affect the frequency of coverage a member of Congress receives, as
expected. This finding is significant at the 0.05 level in both the full congressional term as well as in the 2009 model; however the finding is only significant at the 0.10 level in 2010. During the election season, members of Congress are often battling on two fronts, attempting to make news based on their behaviors in Washington, while simultaneously fending off challengers in their home district. This can cause the impact of terms in office to level off as members face effective challengers and news reports examine the benefit of retaining the incumbent for another term in office. Freshmen members are often the most vulnerable to electoral defeat as well, which generates more coverage as members fight to keep focus on what they have achieved over the previous term.

Table 2

**Bivariate Analysis of Term in Office on the Frequency of Congressional Coverage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>-0.031*</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>-0.036*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.354***</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.668***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

There is some indication that party attachment and ideology may also have an impact on the frequency and tone of local congressional coverage in the model, although previous research is mixed with regard to their significance. Previous research done by Schaffner and Sellers (2004) has found that being a member of the out party had a positive impact on the ability to generate news in local press outlets as well as national news outlets (specifically *USA Today*). Increases in partisan polarization, not only in the electorate but in Congress as a body and in the media, call into question whether this
finding is a product of the timeframe of study or if it is a stable finding over time. More recently, Gershon (2012) finds no statistical impact of party attachment on the frequency of news stories; although she does note that party attachment does impact the tone of local coverage in her analysis of the 2006 campaign.

While previous research has focused specifically on party attachment as a factor leading to more or less news coverage, it may also be the case that in a more partisan media environment ideology may be a more significant factor in a news agency’s decision to cover a member of Congress. Figure 3 presents the distribution of news articles in a local paper for each member of the legislature by their ideological score utilizing the *DW-NOMINATE* measure developed by Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 2007). On the surface, the data presented in Figure 3 indicate that there does not seem to be any significant difference in the total number of stories referencing a given member when we divide the dataset by party identification and between conservatives and liberals. One

![Figure 3. Article Distribution by Ideology.](image-url)

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interesting result we can see is that the distribution of articles seems to be affected by the proximity a given member is to the median of their party.

In Figure 4, the bivariate impact of a member’s proximity to the median member of their party on the frequency of news coverage shows that in the dataset, conservative members of Congress received a greater amount of coverage, especially conservative members of the Democratic Party. The bivariate regression line for Democrats in the sample indicates that as representatives become more conservative with respect to their party median, the more likely it is that these members receive press coverage. Likewise, in Figure 5, there is also some indication that these increases in coverage may not be to the benefit of a representative’s image in the public, as more conservative members tend to receive more negative coverage according to the valence measure. Ideological extremity comes with a number of consequences, whether a representative is a member of

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**Figure 4.** Frequency of News Articles by Ideological Distance from the Median Party Vote.
the minority party or in the minority of their own party as well. During the time span included in this study, both chambers of Congress as well as the executive were controlled by Democrats, which may lead to more negative coverage from the press since members of the out party will have a more difficult time achieving their policy goals in the chamber. Research has shown that the legislature, and the federal government in general, act differently during times of unified government, as the majority party explores an agenda that is more partisan and “energetic” (Key, 1964, p. 688; see also Cutler, 1988; Fiorina, 1992; Mayhew, 2005). More ideologically extreme members of the majority party, likewise, may be put at odds with the agenda of their own party if legislation is seen as being outside of their preferred policy outcome. Both of these situations will lead to conflict within the chamber, which members of the press can weave into stories that are appealing to the public. Such members are not readily able to call attention to positive outcomes and successes in the chamber, and instead must speak “on the
defensive” about the current policy agenda being pushed by either the majority party leadership or the executive.

In order to fully examine the impact of party attachment and ideology on frequency and tone of congressional press coverage, therefore, both the ideological extremity from the party median and party identification is included in the models below. Based on the bivariate analysis here, I argue that while being a member of the minority party may not have a significant impact on the frequency of stories during the 111th Congress, ideologically conservative members of Congress should see a positive increase in the level of coverage as members deviate more from their party’s median voter. Such deviation should cause moments of conflict both within the chamber and within the party, providing members of the press with stories that are of interest to the public, thus allowing members to overcome the media’s gatekeeping ability. Being ideologically different from the party provides legislators with a strategic opportunity to make statements against what is occurring in the chamber in order to gain attention from news organizations and better their chances of being seen as representing the interests of their district over the interests of political parties. Members must be careful about how they express such sentiments, since backlash can occur if statements are too scandalous.\textsuperscript{22} Being a member of the minority party is argued here to have a negative impact on the valence score of a given legislator. Members of the minority party will have a more

\textsuperscript{22}Joe Wilson’s “you lie!” statement during President Obama’s a joint speech on health care before Congress in 2009, for example, certainly increased the amount of attention the Republican member garnered in both the local and national media. Much of the coverage tended to call into question the appropriateness of Wilson shouting during a presidential address, and caused a mixed reaction in the media. It is argued, however, that while statements such as this may have a negative impact on the tone of a member’s media coverage, it should have a positive impact on the number of stories, since it exemplifies the conflictual frame that news gathering organizations look for in stories.
difficult time achieving their policy goals in the chamber, thus forcing legislators to spend more time defending themselves in the media for not being able to properly represent the interests of the district in Washington. I hypothesize therefore that, due to the minority status of the Republican Party, newspapers in the district were prone to run more negative stories involving Republican members of Congress, especially during the first half of the 111th term.

Bill sponsorship is included as a proxy for the amount of “legislative work” that a member is initiating that the media can report on. Among the multitude of reasons a member of Congress might sponsor bills, one is to garner attention in order to promote themselves within the district. Unlike stating that a member supports a given bill or piece of legislation, sponsoring a bill sends a signal to the electorate back home that their representative is hard at work, and also sends a signal to the local press that the representative is doing something of note that may be worth coverage. News media outlets, due to their unique gatekeeping ability, can choose to report on these bills fully, focus on particular parts of the bill (such as how it may affect the district), or completely ignore members’ actions and report on other events. It is assumed here that, among the various reasons for sponsoring legislation in the chamber, members may attempt to use bill sponsorship in order to provide interesting, newsworthy stories that can be reported on back home in order to increase their popularity. Therefore I hypothesis that increases in bill sponsorships should significantly increase the positive valence of a member within the district based on the prominence of positive coverage in the local press.
Figure 6. Differences in Frequency and Valence by Types of Ownership.

Certain factors, specifically the geographic overlap of the newspaper and the district, corporate ownership of a news outlet, and whether the newspaper has a Washington bureau to cover Congress may mitigate the ability of a member to cultivate a relationship with his or her local press outlet. Ownership may factor into a news outlet’s decision to run stories about a member’s actions in Congress, as well as how to cover such events. Some scholars, most notably Schaffner and Sellers (2003) and more recently Gershon (2012) have suggested that differences in media ownership may have an impact on the ability of a member of Congress to garner news coverage in the district. In order to control for this possibility, a binary variable is included in the model measuring corporate ownership. Corporate ownership is measured according to whether or not the entity that owns and operates a press outlet is a publically traded company. In the sample, approximately one-third of the newspapers were owned by publically traded
companies (37.04%). As seen in Figure 6, corporately owned news agencies exhibit a greater degree of variance in the frequency of news coverage they provide about members of Congress, as well as providing more coverage than their private counterparts. This is most likely due to the fact that corporately owned media agencies are better able to overcome the economic uncertainty that exists in media markets and provides more resources for local news agencies to cover members of Congress and their actions in Washington. What is not clear, however, is whether the stories produced by corporate news agencies are any different in tone than their private counterparts. Figure 6 shows that there is very little difference in the valence scores of privately owned and corporately owned media agencies with regard to variation from the median and differences in the range of scores. Therefore, it is more likely that in the full analysis below, corporately owned media agencies should exhibit a significant and positive effect on the frequency of stories; although it is less clear that any significant effect will occur on the valence score for such organizations.

Another characteristic of a news outlet that may impact the frequency of Congressional coverage is the overlap that a market has in the district. According to Schaffner and Sellers (2003, p. 45), “if a district geographically covers only a small proportion of a newspaper’s market, the paper’s reporters may devote little attention to the district and its representatives.” Smaller newspapers that are geographically covered by a member’s district, therefore, should devote more attention to a member’s actions while in office and increase the overall valence of a member in a positive manner. Larger newspapers that have a smaller overlap with a member’s district, on the other hand, may
devote more attention to other news events and political actors when deciding what to cover, since “the district’s citizens make up only a small portion of the paper’s readership” (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003, p. 46). In the sample, district coverage ranges from very low (3.1%) to total market coverage (100%).

The analysis also includes a measure of ideological disparity between the district and the representative in order to test whether a shared ideology between the two causes more coverage in the press. Members who share similar ideological values as their district may receive better coverage since news outlets will likely produce more positive coverage overall. Ideological congruence is measured as the distance from the representative’s ideological score and the absolute median citizen’s score, calculated using the *Cook Partisan Index*. According to Golder and Stramski (2010) this absolute median congruence calculated is preferable in situations in which many ideologies need to be compared to a single individual (what they term a “many-to-one” relationship). Put simply if we consider a single policy dimension, we might conceptualize congruence in terms of the distance between the district’s “most preferred” policy position, measured simply as the median ideological score of the citizenry, and the resulting ideology score of the member (measured here using the Poole-Rosenthal scores). Golder and Stramski (2010) state that, “one might argue that congruence in a many-to-one relationship is just the extent to which the ideological position of the representative approximates the position of the median citizen” (p. 92). As such, the scores range from 0 to $+\infty$, with scores closer to 0 considered the most congruent and less congruent as disparities become more and more apparent between representative and their constituents.
Finally, two variables are included in the analysis of the 2010 term in order to take into account the impact of election coverage on the frequency of stories. First, the model includes a variable for the competitiveness of the 2010 election between the member and their challengers. Competitiveness is measured based on the vote share that a member of Congress received over their challengers in the general election, and is coded as an ordinal variable ranging from zero, indicating that a member of Congress ran unopposed, to three, indicating a highly competitive election. As Figures 7 and 8 show, the frequency of news stories is dramatically different for highly competitive elections.

Figure 7. Frequency of News Coverage by 2010 Electoral Competition.

Figure 8. Valence Tone of News Coverage by 2010 Electoral Competition.
than for any other. It is hypothesized that more competitive elections will generate a
greater frequency of coverage as members and challengers produce ads, statements and
attend debates in which they discuss both themselves and their challengers and their
records in government and politics. While these actions may occur in less competitive
elections as well, they should not be as effective at generating news stories, since
challengers in these cases may have a more difficult time being taken as a serious threat.
The tone of such articles should be driven down to some degree in low and moderately
competitive elections, since challengers will attempt to draw more negative attention on
the incumbent in the hope of being seen as a more credible threat. In the analysis that
follows, each of the different competition levels will be treated as a factor compared to
running unopposed, since unopposed incumbents during the campaign can focus
specifically on continuing their media strategy from the off-election year because they do
not have to worry about running a vigorous reelection campaign. Endorsements,
measured based on whether the editorial board of an examined newspaper endorses a
member of Congress in the election, is hypothesized to likewise increase coverage.
Editorial endorsements are often republished by newspapers after the editorial board has
made its decision, reiterating its choice to the electorate up until Election Day. This
drives up the frequency of positive coverage an incumbent receives overall, although it
may also increase the level of negative coverage as challengers and their supporters send
in opinion letters arguing against the editorial board’s decision.
Frequency of Congressional News Coverage

In this section, a full model of article frequency is examined to see what factors lead to changes in press coverage in local newspapers, utilizing a negative binomial regression model. The models are divided between 2009 and 2010 in order to observe any peculiarities that occur in the various legislative “seasons.” Also in this section, I will focus on examining whether the political and media environment in a representative congressional district lead to specific changes in the frequency of positive and negative coverage in local newspapers.

The results of the negative binomial analysis of total news coverage are presented in Table 3. The first set of expectations dealing with the characteristics of the representative and their work have some mixed results in the model. Terms in office has a significant effect on the total amount of coverage received by representatives in Congress in both the 2009 and 2010 model, but the impact of congressional tenure is only significant at the 0.10-level during the 2010 election year. Both models act as predicted, however, with the length of time a representative has spent in office up to the 111th Congress negatively affecting the probability that they will receive news coverage during both 2009 and 2010. According to the model in Table 3, in 2009 the effect of a one-term increase in a member’s time spent in the legislature decreases the likelihood of receiving coverage by –0.033, a decrease of approximately 4% in the incident rate of local news coverage. In 2010, the effect of a one term increase in time spent in the legislature amounts to a decrease in local news coverage of –0.026, or a 4% decrease in the incident rate of local congressional news coverage during the year. These findings provide
supporting evidence to the theory that as members become more entrenched in the their legislative careers, news agencies begin to look for alternative sources of information and stories, as members of Congress begin seeming more “safe” in the eyes of gatekeepers in news agencies, who are looking for more exciting and enticing news stories.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Effects on the Frequency of Congressional Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1: 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–0.033* (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Interestingly, the factors focusing on members of Congress’ more political characteristics, specifically being a member of the minority party and a member’s ideological extremity from their party’s median voter as well as bill sponsorship, are not found to have any significant effect on the ability of members to garner local press attention during the 111th Congress. The fact that minority party membership did not have a significant effect on the overall model is surprising, as minority members should
find it easier to generate compelling news over the course of the term due to their hostility with the majority party’s legislative agenda; although this is not the case in the model. The coefficient for minority-party membership and ideological extremity from the party are signed correctly in the 2009 model, but since they are not significant, we cannot speculate too far with regard to what this might mean. Likewise, there is no significant impact for bill sponsorship in either of the two models. Sponsorship is not necessarily an indicator of legislative success, and bill sponsorship may not lead to a compelling news story depending on the impact it will have the district. This result is contrary to previous work done by Gershon (2012), who finds a positive impact of sponsorship in her study of press outlets during the 2006 campaign. This may indicate that the strength of legislative work as a source of news stories may be influenced by the particularities of the political environment during each campaign year, and not necessarily be a consistent source for enticing news agencies to run articles about members of Congress.

The expectation that characteristics of the media environment affect the frequency of newspaper coverage also received some support in the model. Being owned by a corporate entity significantly and positively affected the ability of a member of Congress to increase the frequency of coverage in both the 2009 (0.274) and 2010 (0.224) model. Newspapers owned by publically traded, corporate entities rely on a larger network of wire services and correspondents to provide more general stories about events occurring in Washington, thus providing them with a larger network that may have greater contacts with a member of Congress compared to privately owned entities. Corporately owned newspapers can therefore minimize the level of information uncertainty that exists in the
media system by utilizing their resources to funnel stories from Washington back into the local press. While some privately owned media companies may be able to utilize similar resources, they must also deal with the economic uncertainty that has negatively impacted the newspaper industry due in large part to the digitalization of news. Overall, the odds of a member of the House appearing in a news article was 32% higher in a corporately owned newspaper in 2009, and 25% higher in 2010.

Two final expectations that significantly impact the frequency of news coverage in the model are the proportion of the district a media market covers and the ideological disparity between the representative and their constituents. In both the 2009 and 2010 models, district coverage of a newspaper’s market positively and significantly affected the frequency of coverage a member received in the local press. In 2009, an increase in a district’s coverage of a local media market increased the incident rate of frequent news coverage by approximately 92%. In 2010, the incident rate of news coverage increased by approximately 98% as district coverage of the media market increased as well. This result is in line with previous research done by Schaffner and Sellers (2003) and Gershon (2012) who both find that the overlap of the congressional district and the media market is a significant variable during the campaign season. Newspapers whose coverage is primarily within a member’s district will be more likely to cover individual members at a higher frequency, since both the news outlet and the member share a common audience interested in the actions of the representative in Washington. Ideological disparity between a representative and their constituents was also a significant factor during the 2010 season, most likely caused by an increase in news articles and editorials involving
campaign matters. Increases in the ideological disparity of a representative and their district caused the incident rate of news coverage increase by approximately 51% in 2010, with a coefficient of 0.413.

Before moving to examine the differences between frequency and valence tone of articles, Table 4 presents the impact of the independent variables on the frequency of positive and negative newspaper coverage specifically. What is interesting is that when the overall frequency of stories is broken apart into positive and negative coverage, certain factors that were not significant to overall coverage become very significant to a particular type of coverage. Also, while other factors that were significant in the overall model, such as terms in office or district coverage of the media market (particularly for negative coverage), were insignificant when coverage is broken into the two categories. For example, it is important to note that district coverage of a newspaper’s market is more effective in increasing the amount of positive coverage than it is at increasing the amount of negative coverage in the sample. While negative coverage was not significantly affected by district coverage of the market in either of the two models of congressional coverage, the findings in Table 4 show that increasing the amount of the district that covers the media market increased in the frequency of positive coverage by a coefficient of 0.749 during 2009 and 0.498 in 2010.

One important initial finding from the results in Table 4 is that, unlike the model of total coverage presented in Table 3, being a member of the minority party does have a significant impact on particular forms of coverage that a member might receive. Specifically, according to the results presented here, being a member of the minority
Table 4

Structural Effects on the Frequency of Positive and Negative Congressional Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Coverage</th>
<th></th>
<th>Negative Coverage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>−0.001 (0.01)</td>
<td>−0.004 (0.01)</td>
<td>−0.009 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.017 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>−0.093 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.027 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.682** (0.21)</td>
<td>0.044 (0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
<td>−0.050 (0.39)</td>
<td>−0.436 (0.39)</td>
<td>0.968 (0.69)</td>
<td>0.667 (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>−0.006 (0.005)</td>
<td>−0.006 (0.005)</td>
<td>−0.005 (0.01)</td>
<td>−0.006 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>0.223* (0.11)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.375* (0.19)</td>
<td>0.356+ (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coverage</td>
<td>0.749*** (0.21)</td>
<td>0.498* (0.20)</td>
<td>0.378 (0.35)</td>
<td>0.258 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>−0.233 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.292+ (0.16)</td>
<td>0.176 (0.29)</td>
<td>0.779** (0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>−0.068 (0.13)</td>
<td>−0.091 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.445* (0.23)</td>
<td>−0.431+ (0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
<td>0.213** (0.07)</td>
<td>0.379*** (0.11)</td>
<td>0.253* (0.13)</td>
<td>0.138 (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.088***</td>
<td>1.493***</td>
<td>1.616***</td>
<td>1.260**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>691.64</td>
<td>649.94</td>
<td>690.29</td>
<td>690.64</td>
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<td>107</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

party in the 2009 model increased the frequency of negative coverage a member received.

In 2009, the impact of being a member of the minority party served to increase the
frequency of negative coverage by a coefficient of 0.682, increasing the incident rate of negative articles by 98% compared to being a member of the majority. While the total coverage was not affected in any significant way, therefore, the evidence in the breakdown of coverage provides some evidence that being a member of the minority party does not provide representatives with as many opportunities to gain positive coverage, and therefore produce a positive public profile in their districts, since members of the minority must be on the defensive against the legislative agenda currently being focused on by members of the majority. This is only apparent during the off-election year, since this is presumably when members of Congress will take more risks with the legislative agenda and there is time to make up for any mistakes before the next election.

Factors of the media environment had a more pronounced impact when examining the different types of coverage than when examining total coverage as well. Beginning first with differences in ownership, the models in Table 4 show that, contrary to the full model, corporate ownership is mostly significant during 2009 when it comes to producing more positive and negative coverage, however negative coverage does become marginally significant in 2010 as well. According to the models in Table 4, corporate control over a news agency during 2009 increased the incident rate of positive congressional coverage by 25%, with a coefficient of 0.223. This finding could provide some evidence to the arguments critics of corporate news control offer, since corporately controlled agencies may be attempting to bargain with members of Congress by providing positive coverage more readily if members are willing to bargain with owners over legislation and leads to stories. This is not the most likely conclusion, since the
evidence is mitigated by the fact that the coefficient in the 2010 model for corporately owned news agencies impact on positive coverage is insignificant. It can be reasonably assumed based on the arguments given by critics that, during election seasons, corporately owned newspapers should increase positive coverage of members that have served their interests in order to keep them in office for the foreseeable future. However, the model presented in Table 4 does not provide any clear indication that this is occurring. Likewise, corporately controlled media agencies had a more significant impact on the production of negative coverage throughout the 111th Congress, with such agencies increasing the frequency of negative coverage by a coefficient of 0.375 and 0.356 during 2009 and 2010 respectively. This amounts to an increase in the incident rate of negative coverage of roughly 45% in 2009 and 43% in 2010.

Another interesting influence of the media environment on the amount of negative coverage a member receives, according to Table 4, was that newspapers with a bureau in Washington had a decreased level of negative coverage than their counterparts. This provides some evidence that the proximity that journalists have to members of Congress may allow representatives to bargain with journalists for better, more positive coverage, than members who do not have a source they can use. Overall, in the models of negative coverage in Table 4, newspapers with a Washington office decreased the frequency of negative coverage during 2009 by a coefficient of −0.445 and by a coefficient of −0.431 in 2010. This amounts to a reduction the incident rate of negative coverage by approximately 35% for newspapers with a Washington office.
Two final factors of interest in examining what affects different types of coverage according to Table 4 is that, unlike the previous model of total coverage, both electoral competitiveness and editorial endorsement had a significant effect on the frequency of positive coverage during the campaign season, and electoral competition also had an effect on the amount of negative coverage as well. Starting first with electoral competitiveness, changes in the competition a member of Congress faced during the 2010 election increased the frequency of positive coverage a member received by a coefficient of 0.213, increasing the incident rate of positive coverage by approximately 24%.

Increases in electoral competition had a similar impact on the frequency of negative coverage, increasing the frequency by a coefficient of 0.253, or increasing the incident rate of negative coverage by approximately 29% as elections become more competitive. This finding provides some credence to the theory presented earlier that, as electoral competition becomes fiercer and members must compete more rigorously for their seat in Congress, more stories will be produced highlighting the campaign. While this does not impact total coverage, once articles are broken down into positive and negative categories, it becomes clear that more competition will increase the tension of the race, most likely by focusing on the conflicting arguments of members and their challengers.

Finally, following electoral competition, editorial endorsements during the 2010 election were also found to have a significant impact on the ability of members to produce more positive coverage. Members who received some kind of editorial board endorsement during the 2010 campaign received an increase in the frequency of positive coverage by a coefficient of 0.379, with an increase in the incident rate of positive
coverage approximately 46% higher than those members without an editorial endorsement. Editorial endorsements should, theoretically, affect the level of positive coverage more so than they should negative coverage, and as Table 4 shows, negative coverage is affected in the appropriate, negative direction. Positive coverage is also more likely to be affected by editorial endorsement because many newspapers run the endorsement article several times during the final days of an election, therefore bolstering the positive image associated with a given representative by frequently citing their accomplishments.

**Valence Media Approval in Congressional News Coverage**

Before moving to the full analysis of valence and tone of local congressional coverage, I will briefly discuss some of the differences between the two models. It is reasonable to assume that the factors that affect the frequency of stories will be different, to some degree, than the factors that impact the way a story is framed and the tone that coverage conveys about a member of Congress, thus certain variables in the models below will be adjusted to control for differences in theoretical assumptions. Some variables, such as bill sponsorship, ideology and party identification, editorial endorsement during campaign season and others have previously been discussed. In the models of valence below, two variables are adjusted to account for specific theoretical assumptions discussed in previous sections. First, rather than controlling for district coverage of a media market when examining the tone of coverage, the models control simply for daily circulation of a newspaper as reported to the Audit Bureau of Circulation. The reason for this change is that, unlike a model of frequency, tone of
congressional coverage should be impacted more by simply how many people are reading a newspaper. Papers with larger circulation, generally major metropolitan newspapers, are often argued to take a more cynical tone toward what is happening in Congress. Whether or not this is the case should not be dependent on how much of a congressional district covers the media market, but rather how many individuals utilize a news outlet as a source of information.\textsuperscript{23}

Secondly, in the 2010 model of valence below, electoral competition is treated as a factor compared to being unopposed during the general election, rather than as an ordinal variation from unopposed to high electoral competition.\textsuperscript{24} The reason for this is that tone of coverage is assumed to be affected by whether a member of Congress is facing a specific level of electoral competition as opposed to all others. In the models below, therefore, it is assumed that the valence of coverage during an election year is dependent on being in a particular level of competition as opposed to all other levels. Electoral competition in general should decrease the valence score a member receives based on the amount of positive and negative coverage in the local press, although there should also be differences in the impact each level should cause. Specifically, being in a low level competition and a high level competition should have the greatest impact on the amount of negative coverage a member receives, and therefore should decrease the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{23} As a test of the model, both district coverage of a media market and daily circulation was included in the second model to see if it would significantly impact the final results. In the analysis, including district coverage did not significantly change the results of the model that are presented below, and an examination of the correlation of the independent variables showed that there was a significant level of collinearity between the two variables. Because of this, I do not believe there to be any major issue with substituting one variable for the other in the model below.

\textsuperscript{24} As with coverage and circulation, changing the coding of electoral competition does not significantly affect the results of the model presented below, however it does allow for better interpretation of the results compared to treating competition as a continuous variable.
\end{footnotesize}
valence score of a member more so than moderate challenges. Low level competitors and high level competitors should, therefore, go negative against a member of Congress early and often, though for different reasons.

The results of the OLS regression of the valence score for individual members’ of Congress is presented in Table 5. Beginning first with the 2009 model, the analysis shows that out of the tested variables measuring the media and political environments of congressional districts, representatives’ party affiliation and the daily circulation of a newspaper both have a significant impact on the valence tone of coverage in local newspapers. As expected, tenure in office, corporate ownership of a newspaper and ideological extremity from the median of the party do not have an impact on the valence of newspaper coverage that is discernible from zero. Overall the model performs well, with a significant F-statistic of 2.813, and an R-squared of 0.187.

Looking first at expectations surrounding the characteristics of a representative, only being a member of the minority party had any significant impact on the valence score of newspaper coverage in 2009. The effect of being a member of the minority party, holding other variables constant, decreased the positive tone of coverage by 9.503 percent compared to members of the majority. This provides evidence indicative of the difficulty minority members had with maintaining positive media coverage, and falls in line with the theoretical assumptions discussed earlier. During a time of unified government, members of the minority are left at an especially strong disadvantage as they
Table 5

**Structural Effects on the Tone of Congressional News Coverage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: 2009</th>
<th>Model 2: 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients (SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>0.170 (0.28)</td>
<td>−0.034 (0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>−9.503*** (2.43)</td>
<td>−4.197+ (2.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
<td>−6.604 (8.10)</td>
<td>−12.114+ (7.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>−0.070 (0.10)</td>
<td>−0.038 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>1.001 (2.27)</td>
<td>−2.637 (1.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Circulation</td>
<td>−2.688* (1.08)</td>
<td>−1.697+ (0.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>−0.360 (3.42)</td>
<td>−1.827 (3.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>1.307 (2.52)</td>
<td>3.187 (2.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
<td>−0.034</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Electoral Competition</td>
<td>−16.081** (5.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med Electoral Competition</td>
<td>−10.341* (4.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Electoral Competition</td>
<td>−13.006** (4.66)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.127+ (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>38.324**</td>
<td>35.969**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistic</td>
<td>2.813**</td>
<td>2.183**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

attempt to compete with both the majority party’s legislative agenda, as well as the agenda being put forward by the executive. In 2009, for example, members of the minority party (at the time, Republican members) more often had to respond to questions regarding the proposed Healthcare law being shaped in Congress, as well as solutions to budget problems and the economy—problems which Republicans in the House had differing opinions on than the majority and little power to shape the legislation itself.

Also in 2009, the model presented in Table 5 shows that the daily circulation of a newspaper had a significant effect on the valence score for representatives. Recall that it is assumed that as a newspaper’s daily circulation increases, there should be a decrease in
the proportion of positive coverage a member receives. This is based on the belief that larger newspapers, because of their ability to overcome particular types of economic and information uncertainty (Hamilton, 2004; Sparrow, 2006; Underwood, 1993), are better able to provide coverage that scrutinizes members of Congress more carefully. This leads to more neutral coverage in general, but also provides the possibility of more negative coverage as journalists begin focusing on behaviors and actions by members of Congress that might emphasize conflicts between representatives and the public.

According to the results in Table 5, the effect of an increase in the daily circulation of a particular newspaper decreased the valence score of a member of Congress by −2.688%. It is worth noting now that this result was duplicated in 2010 as well, but the significance level was reduced to the 0.10 level. In 2010, the effect of an increase in daily circulation resulted in a decrease of −1.697% in the valence score of a member of Congress.

While several of the initial expectations regarding the impact of the political and media environment of the congressional district were found to affect the valence score of coverage in 2009, the results in Table 5 show that tone was more likely to fluctuate during election years than in off-election years. It should be the case that individual valence score in newspapers should be more strongly affected by the environment of the district during the off-season, when members attempt to cultivate a reputation in the district outside of the election. What is interesting is that, during 2010, both party affiliation as well as ideological extremism from the party affected news coverage, though only at the 0.10 level. Editorial endorsement, likewise, met minimal standards of significance in the 2010 model. The main factor that impacted the tone of news
coverage, as will be discussed below, was electoral competitiveness. The model itself performs well overall, with an R-squared of 0.233.

Starting again with qualities of the representative, the 2010 model presented in Table 5 indicates that, in line with the theoretical expectation stated earlier, minority party membership and ideological extremity from the party both negatively affected the tone of congressional coverage in local news outlets. As in 2009, being a member of the minority party in Congress decreased the valence score of congressional news coverage by $-4.197\%$, holding other variables constant. While not as high in magnitude as in 2009, this finding indicates that members of the minority are at a particular disadvantage, since they are unable to readily point to successes in the legislature outside of the possibility of blocking legislation. Defensive tactics such as this may not always work in the favor of the representative if the district they serve support such bills and laws.

Also interesting is that, unlike the models for the frequency of congressional coverage in the previous section, the ideological extremity of a representative compared to the median of their party does have a significant impact on the tone of congressional coverage. This is contrary to the original assumptions based on the bivariate analysis. It was originally assumed that ideological distance within the party would lead to more frequent coverage, since it would provide journalists with stories that were more conflictual in nature, as more extreme members found media attention for going against their party. However, as the results in Table 5 show, ideological distance from the party is more significant to the tone of coverage during an election year. According to the 2010 model of congressional coverage, an increase in the ideological distance that a
member of Congress has from the median voter of their party will cause a decrease in the valence score for that representative in the local press of $-12.114\%$. Substantively, what this means is that based on the evidence in the model, more ideologically extreme representatives will be the subject of closer scrutiny in the local press. This may not increase coverage, as originally assumed, but will instead change the tone of that coverage from positive and neutral to more negative coverage. This is most likely due to the fact that as members become more extreme in their views than the norm of the party, the more likely that the public and the press will question a member’s actions.

Moving to factors unique to election years, the results of the OLS analysis find that editorial endorsements do have a significant impact on the tone of coverage in local press outlets. This result provides evidence in support of the expectations developed from both the bivariate analysis and based on the results examining the differences in the frequency of positive and negative coverage in Table 4. According to the model in Table 5, editorial endorsements by a newspaper have the effect of increasing the valence score for an individual member by $3.127\%$.

Finally, the most noteworthy finding in Table 5 is the various impacts of differing levels of competitiveness on the tone of congressional coverage. As previously mentioned, electoral competition should drive down the positive tone of coverage as challengers confront incumbents over their policy decisions and behaviors in Washington. These types of events are of interest to news agencies, as they provide journalists with easy opportunities to describe stories that the public has an interest in. As previously expected, the varying levels of competition have different effects, with low
level competition and high level competition having the strongest effect. This attention allows members of the press better scrutinize the behavior of representatives under the guise of investigating claims made by challengers. According to the results in Table 5, low level competition during an election as the effect of decreasing the valence score of an incumbent member by −16.081 percentage points. Low level electoral competition, while not necessarily threatening to a representative’s seat in the legislature, has the ability to draw more attention to negative aspects of a representative’s behavior in Washington. Similarly, moderate competition in an election, compared to other levels of competition, has the effect of decreasing the valence score of coverage by −10.341%. When challengers provide moderate competition to incumbent representatives, news agencies should be more willing to focus on negative stories. This allows a challenger to be taken more seriously as a contender, as challengers endeavor to show that constituents agree with their positions, with the hope that even if the challenger does not succeed in winning the election, the incumbent representatives will take those interests more seriously during the next term. Finally, the effect of being in a high level electoral competition as opposed to other levels decreases the valence score for incumbent members of Congress by 13.006%. High level contenders, unlike low level competitors and some moderate competitions, will attempt to draw attention to negative behaviors and aspects of an incumbent representative’s image in the media in hopes that this will give them the extra edge they will need to win election.
Conclusion

Despite changes in the business of news production (Pew Research Center, 2013), constituents often still rely on local news media to keep them updated about the actions of their elected officials. During election years, incumbent representatives receive a majority of news coverage, which has been shown to impact the success of challengers (Clarke & Evans, 1983; Gershon, 2012; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003). News about representatives does not stop at the end of the election year, however, and this chapter has shown there is much variation in the way that the local press treats their representatives. This finding is important, as variations in treatment and the valence score of news coverage of a representative in the local press can have a key impact on election results as well as on the ability of the electorate to keep their members accountable for their actions.

In this chapter I have attempted to explain the differences in local congressional news coverage, and how the political and media environment of the district affects the prominence of individual members in the pages of the local press. The findings here provide more evidence that variations in the district, as well as behavioral and political characteristics of representatives, have a significant impact on the ability of representatives to not only create news, but the treatments of representatives and the tone of coverage in local newspapers. Instead of treating positive, negative, and neutral stories as having mutually exclusive effects on the perceptions of constituents, the use of valence examines news stories together and weights them proportional to the total frequency of coverage a member receives. Measuring valence is presented as an alternative strategy to
examining questions of tone of coverage. The results in Table 5 provide a good first test of the accuracy of the scoring system to measure the tone of coverage, as it largely supports previous evidence about the impact of the political and media environment provided by Schaffner and Sellers (2003) and Gershon (2012).

In particular, there are two major findings in the analysis that help us better understand variations in local congressional press coverage. First, it is worth noting that there is variation in the impact of the political and media environment in off-election and election years. Much of the research on the ability of members to generate local press coverage, with some exceptions, have either examined the off-election year (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003) or have focused on coverage during the campaign season (Gershon, 2012; Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Kahn & Kenney, 1999). One of the most notable results in the analysis is the differences that occur between these two years.

Finally, the analysis in this chapter provides more evidence that the district coverage of a media market is an important factor to take into account when analyzing the relationship between members of Congress and the local press. Previous findings by Schaffner and Sellers (2003) have shown that district coverage significantly impacts the amount of attention that members receive, though research on the impact on tone is less clear. District coverage, according to the model here, is primarily significant during the off-election year, where it behaves as one would expect with regard to affecting the tone of congressional coverage in the local press. Thus my analysis confirms the previous findings of Schaffner and Sellers (2003) as well as provides further evidence of the

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25 Vinson (2003) and Arnold (2004) are notable as they examine full terms in Congress and the differences in coverage and congressional strategies to affect coverage.
importance of examining district coverage of a media market on the congressional press relationship.

While the environmental factors examined here provide evidence for the theory that variations in congressional coverage can be explained by differences in congressional districts, future research into the topic still needs to draw out variations that may occur due to more transient factors as well. Factors such as the perceived hostility of a district to their member, the quality and quantity of challengers during an election season, and the amount of pork members bring back to the district may further our understanding of the variation that exists in congressional coverage. Likewise, congressional strategies in manipulating the press, which were not examined here, may significantly impact the both the frequency and tone of coverage as well. Developing a more accurate understanding of the effect of the environment that the media and members of Congress exist within, both politically and structurally with regard to their organizations, will help us better understand how constituents develop opinions about their elected officials, political knowledge, as well as voter turnout and vote choice. Future research should attempt to link the media environment to these areas in order to explain these concepts more fully.
The relevance of the news media in contemporary politics has been the focus of debate since the widespread use of digital technology by individuals has begun saturating the market with choices and opportunities for new information outlets. Rather than relying on a few media sources for information about politics and current events, citizens now have ample sources they can turn to for news about what interests them personally. Cutbacks and down-sizing of traditional news reporting sources, along with advances in digital media technology, have also given political actors greater control over their ability to directly communicate with the public via social media outlets. These changes notwithstanding, citizens still rely on the news media to act as a filter for information concerning politics and daily events. And while local newspapers were the first and most affected by new digital technologies, recent evaluations by the PEW Research Center (2013) have found that newspaper circulation has balanced out since 2009, as news agencies have begun to experiment with new strategies to win back an audience.

The changing shape and boundaries of the media environment have led to an increased relevance of media strategies in contemporary politics generally, and in Congress especially. It is no secret to scholars of Congress that representatives garner support in the electorate by strategically taking positions and claiming credit for policy successes. Recent work by Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood (2012) has provided
evidence that constituents’ credit allocation is significantly affected by the number of credit claiming messages sent by a member of Congress, rather than the amount of funding claimed in messages sent back to the district, and previous work by Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn (1997) has shown that timing of position taking messages is a strategic action taken by members depending on the political climate of the district. In order to reach a broad audience, members of Congress must negotiate the process of gaining access to the mass media. To successfully gain and manage access to media outlets, members of Congress must take into account their ability to engage a specific audience and tell them what they want to hear while appealing to the sensibilities of the medium they choose to utilize.

While the old public relations adage argues that there is “no such thing as bad press,” members of Congress work tirelessly to ensure that the press they do receive is favorable to them. Since the 1960s there has been a sizable increase in the number of representatives employing media strategists, as well as a large increase in the number of staffers hired per office (Born, 1982; Dunn, 1968; Malecha & Reagan, 2012; Romero, 2006). One particularly useful tactic utilized by members of Congress has been the issuing of press releases to inform the media of positions, events, and to make general statements about occurrences in Washington. Of the differing media strategies employable by representatives, the press release is one of the more versatile in helping members achieve their particular goals, such as self-promotion and credit claiming, which are invaluable to attaining reelection (Mayhew, 1974). While press releases may seem invaluable to representative, due to the uncertainty that exists in being an elected
public figure (Fenno, 1978), statistical results are mixed pertaining to how effective releases are at garnering news coverage. Most studies focus primarily on election years and the ability of releases to increase electoral success (Gershon, 2012), although some have focused on broader cross-sections of time (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003). The number of releases put out by a given congressional office in a given term can vary dramatically depending on the representative, but is there a limit to their effectiveness? That is, if we consider the issuing of a press release as an investment requiring time and the input of human capital (in the form of someone actually writing the release), then is there a return on the investment equal to the amount of releases sent out to the media?

In this chapter, the sample dataset and analysis developed in Chapter 3 will be expanded upon to include the frequency of press release use by members of Congress, in order to understand more clearly the impact that congressional press operations have on the tone and number of news stories commenting on a representative and their actions in Washington. The chapter will break down as follows. In the next section, the previous literature surrounding the impact of congressional press operations on local news agencies and the ability of journalists to produce the news will be examined, focusing specifically on how representatives develop a strategy for working with the local press in order to successfully maintain a positive image in the district. In section three, an empirical analysis of press release frequency will provide some idea as to the variations in which representatives utilize press releases when developing a press strategy. In section four, the frequency of press releases will be included in the analysis previously
done in Chapter 3 in order to test how effective press statements are at changing the frequency and tone of news articles, and whether their inclusion also affects the magnitude of previously significant coefficients. Finally in section five, I will discuss whether or not frequency is a significant indicator of success when dealing with the press, as well as discuss how the findings in this chapter will help advance the analysis going forward.

**Congressional Tactics and Local News Coverage**

Members of Congress are provided with a myriad of ways in which they can communicate with their constituents back home. Much of the research done on representative/constituent communications focuses primarily on direct forms of communication—specifically the use of such tactics as franked mailing (Davis, 2000), one-on-one communicative assemblies (Fenno, 1978, 2000), and more recently the explosive use of e-mail (Johnson, 2004; Owen, Davis & Strickler, 1999). Scholars have also focused some attention on indirect forms of communication via the mass media, although much of this research has either been focused on the reduction in coverage of the Congress overall (Cook, 1989; Lichter & Amundson, 1994; Underwood, 1993) or has been primarily focused on coverage of the institution, its leaders and committees (Cook, 2005; Hess, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Sellers, 2010). Focus on rank-and-file members has been, for many years, largely underrepresented in the literature with some exceptions (see Gershon, 2012; Larson, 1992; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003). Of the studies that focus on individual members and their ability to generate news coverage, results have been mixed. However, qualitative interviews with House staffers
and press secretaries generally point out that members take their local news agencies seriously and employ varied strategies to avoid negative news coverage and increase positive coverage (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012).

News outlets have attempted to overcome the problems associated with Congressional press strategies through the influence of a network of editors and trained journalists. As noted in Chapter 3, news agencies often have the unique advantage of being the final arbiter of what does and does not become news on a day-to-day basis. Gatekeeping allows members of the press to shift the power in news-making from sources, such as members of Congress, lobbyists and others, to news agencies more generally, allowing media outlets to develop institutionalized rules and procedures that affect the production and distribution of news content to the public (Gans, 1979, 2003; Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker et al., 2001; Soroka, 2012). Scholars examining newsworthiness in the mass media have developed several theories regarding why certain stories become news and others do not. One resounding conclusion has been that negative characteristics have the best likelihood of affecting whether the public becomes informed (Entman, 2012; Fogarty, 2009; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Shoemaker, Chang, & Bredlinger, 1987; Soroka, 2006, 2012; Tidmarch & Pitney, 1984). An extensive literature has developed around the argument that negative information, in certain situations, is viewed as being more important than equally positive information, and therefore the public is more readily open to the influence of and may be more likely to select news that is more negative, thus creating a, “systematic difference in the degree of negativity in the real world and in media content” (Soroka, 2012, p. 516).
Local coverage of Congress is believed to be largely determined by factors of issue saliency and items that will draw readers’ attention, such as the controversial, unusual, or compelling (Downie & Kaiser, 2002) as well as stories that have a local connection (Vinson, 2003). This lead to what Vinson (2003) calls the “Goldilocks dilemma” of congressional news coverage, arguing that members of Congress are either “too big or too small” (p. 51) for the majority of media outlets. The Goldilocks dilemma occurs, according to Vinson’s (2003) argument, because members of Congress are too big for some local media outlets to find the local angle to the inner workings of Congress, and can be too small because when a national story does catch the attention of news agencies, individual members of Congress often become a small cog in a much larger machine. As discussed in Chapter 3, members of Congress and news agencies must also take into account certain structural and environmental factors of the districts they serve when attempting to gain local media attention. Schaffner and Sellers (2003) argue that local newspapers that are owned by major national chains will be less likely to cover individual members of Congress due to differing priorities. Publically traded corporate news agencies have been found to increase the amount of coverage of individual members in previous analyses by Gershon (2012), and this conclusion has been corroborated by the analysis in Chapter 3 as well. Papers located in a state’s capitol have also been argued to have an incentive to cover state politics over federal due to their central location, forcing members of the federal legislature to compete with members of the state government, although empirical analysis has not provided any conclusive evidence to support this argument (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003).
Members of Congress, for their part, have fashioned a variety of strategies in order to overcome issues stemming from Vinson’s Goldilocks dilemma and the general finding of negativity as being the norm of news making. Perhaps the greatest change in member’s media strategies has been the creation of the professional press secretary in most congressional offices since the 1970s. Several scholars (e.g., Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012; Miller, 1978; Sellers, 2010) have observed that press secretaries are the driving force behind congressional media strategies that members rely on. The professionalization of the press secretary role in congressional staffs is an indicator that the role has become widely acknowledged as significant to members of Congress, who have charged secretaries with creation of media enterprises that can produce news that is stable and structured (Cook, 1989). The role of the press secretary is to not only improve the frequency and content of a legislator’s media coverage, but to also do so while minimizing the amount of negative coverage that occurs in media outlets (Cook, 1989, 2005; Gershon, 2012). These staffers act in a “boundary role” according to Blumler and Gurevitch (1981), since the position is generally occupied by individuals with previous experience in journalism, giving them intimate knowledge of the values and practices of the press. Findings from previous research have found that, in general, press secretaries focus much of their publicity strategies on local news coverage, and specifically see the use of press releases as being quintessential to a successful media strategy.

Focus on the local media allows an individual representative to develop a media strategy that will be indispensable to their attempts to seek reelection later down the road, as well as allowing members the ability to shape the flow of information that funnels out
of the media into the electorate. While national news may be enticing and indeed newsworthy for many local papers, finding the “local angle” that will help connect the events in Washington to the audience at home can sometimes be a difficult balancing act to achieve. The need for localization is significant for members of the press (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003), since national issues and events often have a local impact that cannot be fully grasped by the national media. One way to overcome this dilemma is to request information from the local area’s representative in hopes that they might be able to provide such an angle, especially if the member is able to make the connection between what is happening in the Capitol and how it will affect constituents back at home. The struggle to find a communion between the national and the local is one that both the press and the representative put great effort into achieving, and both attempt to find the best angle for stories in order to please their audience (Cook, 1989, 2005; Vinson, 2003). The need for localization in news coverage does provide members of Congress with a strategic advantage over the press since it provides legislators with the opportunity to craft statements that do not just explain the current climate in Washington, but do so while also giving members the opportunity to make representative claims about their own behavior and how they will serve their district’s interests.

Press releases have also long been utilized by scholars in examining the relationship between members of Congress and the press (Blanchard, 1979; Cook, 1989, 2005; Gershon, 2012; Miller, 1964; Robinson, 1981) and have consistently been shown to be one of the leading tools utilized by press secretaries to communicate with the press (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). Press releases are useful because they take advantage of
the shared knowledge that press secretaries and journalists have, while leveraging the organizational constraints felt by most news agencies due to limited staff, time constraints, and lack of other information resources. According to Cook (1989), while press releases may not always lead to a news story, they are still highly valued by press secretaries since they are able to stimulate reporters to focus attention on their member of Congress, and involve the least amount of time and allocation of resources in order to create and distribute.

The advantage of press releases is primarily due to the fact that most news stories are not the product of journalists’ independent research, but based on a strategic interaction between news-makers and political actors (Fogarty, 2009). In a recent study using interviews with journalists and their counterparts in congressional press offices, Gershon (2012) finds overwhelming support for the strength of press releases in affecting the kinds of news reporters produce about members of Congress. In interviews, press secretaries’ attitudes toward the importance of releases was positively and significantly correlated with the frequency and tone of members’ coverage, and showed a similar result in multivariate analysis of news coverage during campaigns. In order to stimulate news agencies into producing stories about them, therefore, members of Congress enact a variety of publicity strategies that involve the media. Interviews with press secretaries performed by Gershon (2012) prior to the 2006 campaign indicate that while tactics may vary among most members of a congressional press staff, the most beneficial media strategies incorporate a mixture of traditional homestyle behaviors such as public appearances and more mediated strategies, such as one-on-one interviews with reporters,
press releases and advertising. Much of the success that members of Congress have, according to the staffers being interviewed, can be attributed to the development of a personal relationship with reporters coupled with a bit of luck. Of the varying tactics utilized by legislators and their staff, the press release is argued to be deeply beneficial to helping shape the flow of information to the public.\textsuperscript{26} Press releases range in their uses by congressional offices; from short statements about public meetings or positions on bills before the legislature, to longer statements about upcoming legislation or current events occurring in Washington or within the district. Generally, press releases are written by in-house press secretaries for immediate consumption by the news media, and represent attempts by members and their staff to manipulate and control the tone and flow of coverage about members’ actions and behavior in Washington.

**Who is Using Press Releases?**

Since the 1950s, members of Congress have increasingly become more entrepreneurial in their behavior, operating independent of political parties in order to achieve electoral success (Ehrenhalt, 1983; Kedrowski, 1996). Entrepreneurial behavior and the perception of independence from the party has been argued to be partly due to the excess of negative media attention that parties receive in the media (Durr, Gilmour & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2002; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), causing members to detach themselves in order to avoid drawing negative attention to their actions. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (1995, 2002) argue that the nature of political news

\textsuperscript{26}Gershon (2012) finds that in her interviews with press secretaries, press releases ranked third in importance to gaining news coverage behind interviews with reporters and public appearances. The mean level of importance attributed to specific strategies for garnering media coverage in her survey responses was 3.74 for interviews, 3.5 for personal appearances, and 3.37 for press releases, and all three were found to be correlated with positive increases in the tone of members’ coverage in her sample.
presented by the media is responsible in part for the negative emotional response that the public has toward Congress. The reason for this is due to the media’s reliance on conflict when producing stories. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, p. 147) explain, “Citizens…dislike being exposed to processes endemic to democratic government. People do not wish to see uncertainty, conflicting opinions, long debate, competing interests, confusion, bargaining, and compromised, imperfect solutions.” Individual legislators may “run against Congress,” therefore, in order to avoid being seen as part of the problem in Washington. This claim is countered somewhat by scholars who argue that, while the negative emotional reaction of the public toward Congress as an institution is prevalent, political parties are still powerful institutions that rank-and-file members utilize to gain attention. Parties in Congress, it is argued, can provide individual members better access to media outlets through the adoption of a shared media message, which can increase the attention that representatives gain from the media (Ansolabehere, Behr & Iyengar, 1993; Lipinski, 2001, 2004; Lipinski et al., 2003; Sellers, 2000, 2010).

Central to the rise in entrepreneurial behavior has been the increased access to the media by individual members (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993), which has allowed representatives to make statements and promote themselves through the use of carefully timed events and press releases that highlight a legislator’s recent activities in Washington. The value of a media strategy that relies on press releases comes from the fact that they can stimulate news stories more generally, as well as provide opportunities for legislators and their staffs to leverage the organizational constraints of news agencies to produce better coverage. Cook (1989, 2005) points out that the use of well-timed press
releases to the media may be more significant in stimulating news-makers to pay attention to particular events and behaviors in Washington in general, and not necessarily in manipulating the press to write positively about a particular member. In the eyes of press secretaries, therefore, success in the media is measured more based on whether a story has been produced at all through the release of a press statement. Interviews with secretaries done by Cook (1989), Robinson (1981) and Gershon (2012) mirror this sentiment. Legislators face an increasing amount of competition in their efforts to gain news coverage. While new media technologies such as the Internet and social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have allowed representatives to take a more direct approach to their media strategies, many traditional news outlets have found that they are increasingly more successful in moving their businesses online as well. As a result of this, direct messages from legislators to constituents still make up only a small proportion of the information that the public receives and consumes (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Shogan, 2010; Sunstein, 2001). And while recent examinations of the state of the media environment in the United States performed by the PEW Research Center (2013) note that local newspaper outlets are still struggling with how to increase revenues utilizing new digital technologies, newspapers are seeing a modicum of success in attracting readers who consume news on mobile devices.

Of course while the production of more news can be beneficial to a representative, the end goal of any congressional press enterprise is the production and dissemination of coverage that paints the representative in a positive light with the hope that this will boost the in-state support a legislator receives. Previous studies of representatives have found
that individual members of Congress (both in the Senate and in the House) are better served by focusing their attention on local news agencies than on national news networks (Arnold, 2004; Binder, Maltzman, & Sigelman, 1998; Gershon, 2012; Larson, 1992; Schaffner, Schiller & Sellers, 2003; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003).

Legislators construct messages that are designed to generate the perception that they are providing a benefit to the districts they serve, cultivating a “personal vote” in the next election. Press releases are a flexible tool for representatives to use, since they can easily be shaped to provide any number of messages that correspond with a legislator’s goals in the chamber, and are easily incorporated into broader media strategies. The frequency of press releases has been shown to affect the amount of credit that constituents allocate to positive changes in the district (Grimmer, Messing, & Westwood, 2012), the ability of a representative to effectively make position statements on policy in Washington (Grimmer, 2013), as well as their ability to advertise themselves positively through the local media during campaigns (Clark & Evans, 1983; Gershon, 2012; Kahn & Kenney, 1999, 2002; Lipinski, 2001). These kinds of efforts lead to what Fogarty (2009, p. 13) calls the “ultimatum bargaining model” of legislator/news media interaction, wherein representatives and journalists work with one another in order to manufacture a news-product that consumers will be interested in. In this kind of bargaining model, legislators and journalists barter strategically with one another, attempting to create an equilibrium wherein journalists are provided with information that is useful in writing stories without becoming mouthpieces to representatives, and legislators are provided an outlet that can be used to dispense information that will bolster the support for a representative within
their district. The end goal for both in the model is the development of a positive relationship between a representative and the news agency that serves their district, which has been found to be positively and significantly correlated with more frequent and more positive coverage in the local press (Gershon, 2012).

Press releases for 108 members of the House of Representatives in the sample were counted during the time frame of the 111th Congress. Figure 9 presents the data in a box-plot showing the distribution of press releases each month during the congressional term. As Figure 9 shows, the average distribution of press releases during the 111th Congress is moderately low from month-to-month. There are several outliers in each month, providing some indication that there is some variance in the press release media strategies utilized by members. On average, members of the House sent out approximately seven press releases per month, with the maximum number of releases in a

![Figure 9. Press Releases Issued by Month in the 111th Congress.](image)

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27 Unfortunately, some members of the House only maintained the most current press releases on their House maintained websites. Archived sites were utilized for former members of Congress, however not all information was contained in the sites. These members were treated as missing in the analysis below.
month totaling 41 by Representative Vic Snyder (R-AR2). Press releases were at their lowest during the final two months of the campaign season during 2010, as well as during the August recess in 2009, indicating that the use of releases as a strategy is variable for times when representatives will be within the district and more useful for when legislators must be in Washington.

Prior to examining the effectiveness of press releases as a strategy to gain media attention, it is relevant to know what kinds of representatives utilize press releases more frequently in their media strategies. The conventional wisdom argues that there is a difference between “work horses” and “show horses” in Congress (Payne, 1980), with the latter more often being the focus of news agencies (Cook, 1989; Kedrowski, 1996; Robinson, 1981; Schaffner, Shiller, & Sellers, 2003). The development of media enterprises in Congress has led more representatives to value media attention and has blurred the lines somewhat between the two types. It is the case, however, that there are certain qualities that make up a media-centric personality in Congress. The general assumption in the literature is that media savvy legislators tend to be younger, more liberal, and more ambitious (Ehrenhalt, 1991; Kedrowski, 1996). In order to test the impact of youth in the legislature, both the physical age of a representative at the beginning of the 111th Congress as well as terms in office are used. Changes in the demographics of Congress may have blunted the significance of age in developing a press media strategy, however. Demographic surveys of representatives in Congress during the sampling years indicate that the 111th Congress had the highest average age of any Congress in recent U.S. history (Amer & Manning, 2008). The average age of
representatives in the sample was 57.7 years in the 111th Congress, which is the average age of the full population of the House during the 111th term. The dataset also includes the House’s youngest member, Aaron Schock (R-IL), 27, as well as the chambers oldest member, Ralph Hall (R-TX), 85. The age effect on the frequency of press releases as a media strategy is still assumed to be negative in the models presented below, however due to the relative age of the Congress being sampled, the effect may be muted to some degree. Along with age, terms in office may elicit a similar effect on the use of press releases as a strategy, as it is representative of the “age” of a member career-wise. Members who have spent more time in the chamber should have more entrenched media strategies, as well as formulated media strategies that may not necessarily rely on a high frequency of press releases. For this reason, it is assumed that similar to physical age, representatives with longer tenures in the legislature should have a lower frequency of press releases compared to newer members.

Behaviorally, three variables are utilized to measure the ideology of representatives as well their ambition in the legislature. First, the ideological distance of a representative from the median of their party, measured using the DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997, 2007), is utilized in order to test the impact of ideology on the frequency of press releases as a media strategy. It is believed that, if a member of Congress is aligning themselves with the ideology of the party (represented by the median ideological score), then they should release fewer press statements in order to increase the level of cohesion between themselves and the party. Following this, the more liberal or conservative a representative is compared to the median of their party, the
more likely it will be that they will break from the party’s message and release their own
statements on matters of policy. One factor that may diminish this is whether a
representative holds a position of power in the chamber, either as a member of party
leadership or as the chair or ranking member of a committee. Leadership, both in the
party or in committees, is seen as an indicator of ambition within the chamber, and is
considered to be analogous with more media savvy representatives. Members with
leadership positions in the House are assumed to release more press statements compared
to standard rank-and-file members in the chamber due to their position. Finally, based on
previous work done by Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood (2012) and Grimmer (2013), it
is assumed here that the number of bills sponsored in the chamber will have a positive
impact on the number of press statements released by a representative. Sponsorship of
bills in the chamber is an indication of legislative work being done by a member,
presumably work that will have a benefit to constituents back in the district. Thus,
members and their press secretaries should emphasize these sorts of behaviors through
the use of more frequent press releases depending on the amount of bills a member
sponsors during the course of a year or term in Congress.

Demographically, two final considerations are taken into account in order to
examine the impact of race or ethnicity, and gender on the use of press releases as a
media strategy. Previous work by Canon (1999) has indicated that media strategies of
minority members (specifically black legislators) may be more extensive than their white
counterparts in order to provide better substantive and descriptive representation to their
constituents, especially when working with African-American newspapers within their
district. Media strategies play a role in such forms of representation because they can provide representatives with opportunities to show that their decisions and behavior in Washington are in line with what their constituents want or expect. More recent work by Grose (2011) indicates that district level factors might mitigate these previous findings, making it questionable whether minority members still find frequent use of press statements to be of value to their attempts to claim they are representative of their district. Canon (1999) notes that, within his sample, black newspapers often printed press releases verbatim, and were seen as a useful tool for black representatives attempting to highlight the differences between themselves and other challengers or incumbents. This leads Canon (1999, p. 220) to conclude that “the message aimed at the black constituents is most efficiently distributed through press releases.” African-American representatives, accordingly, believed that most major newspapers often ignored their press release efforts; although this should not necessarily decrease the frequency the releases are utilized, since such statements are not written specifically for one news-outlet.

Similarly, female representatives may attempt to boost the frequency of their press statements in order to seem more representative of their district. Previous work focusing on gender and the media has shown that female representatives are often held to traditional gender stereotypes by the media during campaigns (Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2000; Devitt, 1999; Kahn, 1992, 1994, 1996), despite having similar issue priorities to males in the chamber (Dolan, 2005). As a strategy, running “as a woman” in these cases has been found to have mixed results in regards to electoral success (Herrnson, Lay & Stokes, 2003; Larson, 2001). According to Pearson (2013), the
increasingly polarized political environment in Congress has pushed female representatives to change the way they shape their strategies within their parties and in the chamber in order to gain power and influence. Research has shown that female representatives are more active in legislative processes than their male counterparts, and are more likely to speak on the House floor as well (Pearson, 2013). Women candidates and officeholders tend to receive less coverage than their male counterparts, however, which may lead female representatives to publish more press releases in order to drum up coverage during campaigns. During the off-election year it is unclear whether such issues will play out as an issue, though I assume here that female representatives will increase their media efforts by publishing more frequent press releases during the off-election year in order to bolster the amount of coverage they receive in the local press during such time.

Media strategies may also be affected by logistic issues and the makeup of a congressional district. Here, three factors are included to examine considerations representatives may take into account when formulating press strategies and deciding how frequently they submit press releases for media consumption. First, the ideological distance between a member and their constituents in the district is assumed to positively affect the number of press releases a member publishes. Similar to being ideologically distant from the median of the political party, representatives who are ideologically distant from their districts should employ press releases more frequently in order to better make claims to being representative to their district’s wants and needs. Press releases can be used to make claims to representation by publishing the reasoning behind a
representative’s voting decisions, as well as providing information about current discussions going on in the legislature and in the district as well. This allows a representative to reconcile perceived ideological fissures between them and the district. This strategy may be complicated depending on the median income level for constituents in the district. The median income for constituents acts as an indicator for the district’s level of affluence, which can factor into a legislator’s decision to utilize press releases as a strategy. I hypothesize that increases in the median income of the district will decrease the number of press releases a member of Congress publishes. The reason for this is primarily one of the electoral consequences of representation. Similar to the effects of timing when taking a position on policy (Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, & Zorn, 1997), legislators may take into account the affluence level of the district when deciding how to interact with the media, since more affluent districts will most likely have higher turnout rates during elections. It is believed that representatives who come from districts with higher median income levels will employ press releases less frequently, since they will need to act more carefully with their media strategies in order to maintain a hold on the majority of the population. Finally, the distance a member of Congress must travel in order to get from Washington back to their home districts may also affect the frequency of press releases published by the legislator’s office. Distance is measured using the number of miles between the Capitol building in Washington, and a member’s home district office. I hypothesize those members who are further away from their districts will employ press releases more frequently in order to make up for the fact that they
cannot be physically in their districts more often than representatives in districts closer to Washington.

Particularities of the media landscape that individual legislators must deal with may also affect the frequency of press release use in the sample as well. Specifically, the daily circulation of a newspaper, as well as whether the news agency has a bureau in Washington, may affect the number of press releases published by the office of a given member of Congress during a given term or year. Daily circulation of a newspaper should decrease the level of press releases sent out by a member’s press staff, since legislators should be more focused on cultivating a more personal relationship with these sorts of agencies. Circulation, in this case, can be used as a proxy for the power of a newspaper to reach an active audience interested in the news and events published by a newspaper on a given day. While press releases are still vital to the development of a press relationship, larger newspapers may value press releases differently compared to smaller papers (Arnold, 2004; Gershon, 2012). Thus, representatives may decrease the number of press releases they submit for media consumption and increase their effort allocation to other areas of their media strategy in order to build a stronger relationship with larger media agencies. Likewise, newspapers with smaller circulations may rely more readily on press releases as an avenue of news, thus increasing the frequency of press releases sent out by a member in order to help placate the needs of smaller news outlets. On the other hand, if a news agency has a bureau in Washington dedicated political news gathering, members of Congress should increase the frequency of press releases, since such strategies are generally seen as being part of the development of a
relationship between members and the press historically (Baldasty, 1992; Hess, 1986; Nord, 2001; Ritchie, 1991; Schudson, 1978). Reporters in Washington offices often must write stories for several news outlets, and seek out information first hand from political actors to help provide a local angle to stories of national significance. This provides representatives with an opportunity to influence press coverage, or at least get reporters to focus attention on their work in the Capitol.

Finally, as with the structural effects of generating news coverage discussed in Chapter 3, the use of press releases as a media strategy may be affected by factors specific to election years as well. For this reason, the competitiveness of an election and whether a newspaper’s editorial board has endorsed a member of Congress should have an effect on the frequency of press releases sent out by a member’s office during an election year. Increases in the electoral competitiveness of an election should cause incumbent members to increase the frequency of press releases sent out to local newspapers. Since incumbent members must split their time between working in Congress and running reelection campaigns, press releases can be useful tools to keep their actions in the media, bolstering the perception that representatives are working hard for constituents through enacting policies and bringing beneficial support back to the district. This effect, I hypothesize, will be mitigated by whether or not a newspaper has chosen to endorse a member of Congress for reelection. Endorsements should decrease the level of press releases sent out by a member during an election year, since this is an indication of a strong, more stable relationship between a legislator and the press (see Cook, 1989). Representatives endorsed by a newspaper’s editorial board should feel
more at ease with their standing with a newspaper, and may decrease the level of press releases sent out in order to allocate more time to other media tactics that will improve upon the existing relationship.

**Press Release Frequency and News Attention**

The analysis of the frequency of press releases by members in the 111th Congress proceeds in two steps. First, the coefficients were estimated for the full two-year term in order to examine the baseline assumptions of the overall model and to provide a comparison between the individual analyses. Next, the term is separated into individual years in order to examine the differences between off-election and election years in the House. Each model is estimated using a negative binomial regression in order to account for overdispersion in the variance.

The first column in Table 6 presents the results of the model for frequency of press releases the full term of the 111th Congress. Table 7 presents the predicted number of press releases produced by a member of the House for each of the significant variables in the models. The results in the baseline model are mixed with regard to the hypotheses laid out earlier. Looking first at characteristics of representatives and their behaviors in Washington, the expectation that bill sponsorship should increase the frequency of press releases produces a positive and significant result in line with previous expectations. As shown in Figure 10, as representatives sponsor more legislation over the course of a congressional term, the number of press releases written and distributed increases at a steady, positive rate.\(^{28}\) Using the minimum number of bills sponsored by a representative

\(^{28}\) Figure 10 presents the results only for the model of the full 111th term of Congress in order to conserve space.
Table 6

*Environmental Effects on the Frequency of Congressional Press Releases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: 111th Term</th>
<th>Model 2: 2009</th>
<th>Model 3: 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients (SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
<td>Coefficients (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.007 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.006 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term in Office</td>
<td>-0.017 (0.02)</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.02)</td>
<td>-0.032+ (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>0.004*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.004*** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.003** (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Distance from Party</td>
<td>0.295 (0.38)</td>
<td>0.389 (0.38)</td>
<td>-0.245 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-0.407* (0.17)</td>
<td>-0.515** (0.18)</td>
<td>-0.193 (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.254* (0.12)</td>
<td>0.270* (0.12)</td>
<td>0.174 (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Position</td>
<td>0.245 (0.15)</td>
<td>0.161 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.532** (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep/District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>0.193 (0.15)</td>
<td>0.163 (0.15)</td>
<td>0.207 (0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Median Income (logged)</td>
<td>-0.481 (0.43)</td>
<td>-0.390 (0.44)</td>
<td>-0.623 (0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Distance from Washington</td>
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<td>-0.111 (0.09)</td>
<td>-0.087 (0.10)</td>
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<td><strong>Newspaper Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Circulation (logged)</td>
<td>-0.159*** (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.153** (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.152** (0.06)</td>
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<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>0.254* (0.11)</td>
<td>0.300** (0.11)</td>
<td>0.205 (0.13)</td>
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<td><strong>Campaign Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.162* (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.194+ (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>8.814***</td>
<td>7.871***</td>
<td>8.052***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIC</strong></td>
<td>1176.3</td>
<td>1051.3</td>
<td>978.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

during the 111th Congress as a baseline (30), the results in the full model predict that a representative should produce at minimum 81 press releases over the course of a term.

Representatives should have a desire to highlight the work they are currently doing in the legislature, as these bills often have some impact on the district, which members can highlight in press statements in order to provide an incentive for news reporters and interested citizens to pay attention. In the case where members sponsor 175 bills over the
Table 7

Predicted Frequency of Press Releases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floor Characteristics</th>
<th>Model 1: 111th Term</th>
<th>Model 2: 2009</th>
<th>Model 3: 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Predicted Press</td>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td>Predicted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Releases</td>
<td>Press</td>
<td>Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference from</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>Difference</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term in Office</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>59.44</td>
<td>-12</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>54.03</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38.08</td>
<td>-44</td>
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<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>41.41</td>
<td>44.22</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>98.95</td>
<td>+21</td>
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<td></td>
<td>138</td>
<td>120.77</td>
<td>+48</td>
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<td>175</td>
<td>138.09</td>
<td>+69</td>
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<td></td>
<td>514</td>
<td>471.50</td>
<td>+477</td>
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<td>Minority</td>
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<tr>
<td>White*</td>
<td>120.68</td>
<td>65.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>80.31</td>
<td>-33</td>
<td>38.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male*</td>
<td>120.68</td>
<td>65.11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>155.65</td>
<td>+29</td>
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<td>Non-Leader*</td>
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<td>Leader</td>
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<td>99.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Circulation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(logged)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35020*</td>
<td>147.95</td>
<td>79.20</td>
<td>70.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125700</td>
<td>120.68</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td>65.11</td>
</tr>
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<td>201600</td>
<td>111.93</td>
<td>-24</td>
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<td>632600</td>
<td>93.28</td>
<td>-37</td>
<td>50.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No*</td>
<td>120.68</td>
<td>+27</td>
<td>65.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>155.53</td>
<td></td>
<td>87.86</td>
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<td>Campaign Characteristics</td>
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<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Unopposed*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.20</td>
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<td>Low Competition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>49.62</td>
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<td>Moderate Competition</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>+38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Competition</td>
<td>68.57</td>
<td>+62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No*</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48.05</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Predicted Probabilities are calculated using the values shown in Table 6. To obtain predicted values, other variables were set to their mean in the case of continuous variables, and their modal value for dichotomous variables. For continuous variables, the included values consist of the lowest and highest integer in the range, the median integer, and one standard deviation from the median. An asterisk denotes a baseline category used to calculate the percentage difference for other categories.
course of a congressional term, the predicted number of press releases written by a representative is 477% higher than the previous example.

Contrary to expectation, minority members of the House produced significantly fewer press releases according to the model than white representatives. Using the baseline number of press releases produced by the average member of the House in the 111th Congress (approximately 120), the findings in the full model show that the predicted number of press releases by a minority member of Congress is 33% lower than average. Unlike minority representatives, female representatives during the 111th congressional term were found to be more likely to have a higher number of press releases than their male counterparts in office. This variable generated a significant and positive coefficient in the regression analysis shown in Table 6, and produces a moderate, positive impact on the frequency of press releases. Overall, being female led to a 29% increase in the frequency of press releases compared to male members of Congress. The expected number of press releases by a female member of Congress, therefore, was
approximately 155 over the course of a Congressional term. In the 2009 model, the expected number of press releases produced by a female member of Congress was approximately 85, a 31% increase over male representatives in the legislature.

One interesting development is that, contrary to the hypotheses posed previously, all district level variables included in the model produced no significant effects on the number of press releases issued during the 111th Congress. This finding is consistent across the three models included in Table 6. While it is difficult to draw any conclusions from these null results, it can be speculated that perhaps members still focus their attention on variables relating to news agencies than district level variations when producing press statements. While the content of the news itself may be catered more to what constituents want or need to know (a hypothesis that will be examined in Chapter 5) the production of a number of press releases may have more to do with controlling the flow of information to news outlets specifically, and less about being able to reach out to the district in particular.

Characteristics of newspapers that cover congressional representatives were found to be significant to the number of press releases sent out by legislators. One of the more interesting findings in the sample is that as the daily circulation of newspapers increases, the amount of press releases generated by a member of Congress decreases. This finding was significant in all three of the models presented in Table 6, and all had a consistent negative effect. Figure 11 presents the predicted number of press releases generated by a
Figure 11. Predicted Number of Press Releases by Daily Circulation of Newspaper.

Following the results in Figure 11, newspapers with a low circulation seem to be the target of most press releases by members of Congress. Representatives were predicted to produce approximately 148 press releases during the full term when they were matched with newspapers with a circulation of 35,020 or the first deviation from the mean circulation. Using the first deviation as the baseline, newspapers with the average reported daily circulation of 125,700 decreased the predicted number of press releases produced by a representative by 19% during the full term (approximately 120 releases), and by 18% for each individual year (approximately 65 and 58 in 2009 and 2010 respectively). This follows from previous research done by Cook (1989, 2005), Robinson (1981), and Kaplan (2006), who argue that newspapers with an economic

---

29 In order to conserve space, only the results for the full model are presented in Figure 11. The predicted probabilities (as seen in Table 7) show a minimum amount of variance. Daily circulation in the figures is logged in order to provide better interpretation of the results.
disadvantage due to low circulation may rely more heavily on press releases from members of Congress in order to produce interesting news to their readers. Newspapers with higher circulations should be able to overcome more easily the economic uncertainty within the media system in order to generate news. Representatives may not find it is in their advantage to generate a large number of press releases in cases such as these, since reporters will not necessarily require them in order to produce articles about political events in Washington.

Newspapers with a Washington bureau were also found to have a significant effect in line with previous expectations. Newspapers with reporters working in Washington have better access to representatives and are better able to cover events that are going on in Washington. These reporters often work for regional newspapers or chain-owned papers, which requires them to write stories for several papers across a state or geographic area. Representatives recognize this constraint placed on Washington reporters, and should produce more press releases in order to help provide a “local angle” to national politics. According to the results in Table 7, when representatives were matched with newspapers that had a bureau in Washington, the predicted number of press releases produced by a member of the House increased by 27% (155.53) compared to other representatives. Similar results occur in the 2009 model, with representatives that have the advantage of a newspaper with a Washington bureau increasing the number of press releases their office produces by 35% from the baseline for that year, from approximately 65 releases to 86. These results are not significant in the 2010 model, however, which may be an indication that Washington bureaus are not as advantageous.
during election years, since representatives may attempt to seem more “personal” by spending more time in the district during these times.

**Impact of Election Years on Representatives’ Media Strategy**

Unlike the 2009 model, which follows the results of the full model almost entirely, the model for the 2010 election year presented in column three of Tables 6 and 7 reveal that the number of press releases distributed by a member of Congress is affected by different factors in election years than in off-election year. Aside from variables unique to election years, such as electoral competition and editorial endorsements in newspapers which will be discussed here, the results in Table 6 show that both terms in office and having a leadership position in the House had a significant impact on the frequency of press releases during 2010. These results, taken together with the unique impact of the electoral environment, provide evidence that members extend the feelings of uncertainty that drive them to craft unique homestyles to the mass media, especially during election years (Fenno, 1978). According to the results in Table 6, the number of press releases produced by a member of the House is negatively affected by the length of time a representative has served in Congress. In Figure 12, the predicted number of press releases is modeled with terms spent in the legislature in order to provide a fuller picture of the impact that tenure has on press strategy. As Figure 12 shows, freshman members of the House produce press releases more frequently than other members during election years. The results in Table 7 indicate that freshman members are expected to produce approximately 67 press releases during election years. Representatives who are in their fifth term in Congress, which was the median number of terms spent in the legislature in
the sample, were expected to decrease the frequency of press releases by 12% compared to freshman members (approximately 59 releases). In the case of the most senior members of the House, the expected number of press releases was approximately 38 over the course of an election year, a decrease of 44% from their freshman counterparts in the legislature.

Second, unlike the models for the full 111th Congress and 2009, having a leadership position in the House in 2010 had the effect of increasing the frequency of press releases crafted by a representative according to Table 6. According to Table 7, representatives with a leadership position in the House in 2010 were predicted to produce 70% more press releases, approximately 99 releases, than rank-and-file members on average. Leaders in the chamber become focal points when conflicts occur within the chamber or when prominent or controversial bills come up for debate. While these events may occur throughout a standard congressional term, election years can be the most trying on a representative in a leadership position, as they are often placed under more scrutiny by the media for their actions over the previous term. This can lead to
higher degrees of electoral uncertainty for members with leadership positions, either within the party or within committees that those members serve on.

Specific characteristics unique to the campaigning environment in 2010 were statistically significant and fell in line with previous expectations noted earlier as well. The level of competition an incumbent representative faced during the 2010 campaign positively impacted the number of press releases a member distributed. As the results in Table 7 show, representatives who were unopposed in 2010 produced a lower number of press statements on average, sending out approximately 42 during that time. Members facing a moderate level of competition increased their press release efforts by 38% from those unopposed in their reelection, distributing 58.33 press releases on average. Representatives facing high levels of electoral competition were the most active in the number of press releases they sent out in 2010, distributing 62% more releases to news agencies than members who were unopposed.

Finally, editorial endorsements were found to have a negative effect on the frequency of press releases, as previously expected. Endorsement by the editorial board of a newspaper sends a signal to members of Congress that the agency supports a representative, either due to their actions or because of the level of experience and prestige they bring to the district thanks to their time spent in the legislature. While there is no clear evidence that editorial decisions significantly impact the production of hard news stories in the media, the results here at least provide some evidence that editorial endorsements may decrease the level of uncertainty a member feels about where they stand in the eyes of the media, and therefore may decrease the level of press releases they
distribute in order to allocate resources to other tactics. Overall, the results for the 2010 model in Table 7 indicate that members who receive editorial endorsements reduce the number of press releases they distribute by 18%, a decrease from the baseline average of 58.33 to 48.05.

In this section, the analysis has shown that there is variation in the use of press releases as a media strategy to deal with press agencies. The allocation of resources by representatives in the House to media operations is an indication of how much weight they place on the news as a medium through which they can manipulate the public’s perception of their work in Washington. While many involved in press operations in the House have noted that receiving media attention is more about luck than anything else (Gershon, 2012), many still hold the use of press statements in high regard in order to motivate journalists to write stories about a representative’s actions in Washington. The hope for press operations, therefore, is that a well written and timed press release can increase the frequency of coverage a member receives in the local press, and hopefully decrease the likelihood that coverage will be negative in nature. These efforts allow representatives to better portray themselves as working for the people, rather than acting in their own self-interests, and can be beneficial when representatives go up for reelection by providing constituents with information that can be used when updating their opinion about their representative. In the next section, the data on press release frequency will be utilized along with the data from Chapter 3 to examine whether or not variations in the usage of press releases as a media strategy have any impact on the frequency or valence tone of news articles overall.
The Impact of Press Release Strategies on the Frequency and Tone of News Coverage

Utilizing the data and procedure established in Chapter 3, the data collected on press releases were added to models 4.3 and 4.4 in order to test the effectiveness of press statements on the frequency and tone of local congressional coverage. The results below will focus specifically on the impact of including the frequency of press releases as a proxy for congressional press strategy on the models overall, as well as reporting on the significance of press strategy to the dependent variables in question.

The analysis of frequency of coverage is presented in Table 8. Many of the independent variables included in the analysis remain unchanged when including press releases as a factor in the regressions presented in Table 8. There are some notable differences between the model presented here and the analysis in Chapter 3. First, it is notable to mention that in 2009 the effect of time spent in office on the frequency of coverage they received remained consistent with the addition of press releases as a proxy for media strategy, with a coefficient of −0.033. This provides some evidence that the effect of tenure on the frequency of press coverage is a constant in the local news media, with or without congressional attempts at manipulating coverage through the release of press statements. The effect of term length drops out of significance in the 2010 model of the frequency of news coverage; indicating that this effect is primarily notable only during off-election years. The inclusion of press releases as a proxy of congressional media strategy does not dramatically decrease the coefficient of terms in office in the 2010 model, but it does increase the standard error enough to make terms in office non-significant by standard measures. There is a similar effect with the impact of corporate
ownership on the frequency of congressional coverage, which also drops from
significance with the inclusion of congressional press efforts. The effect of corporate
ownership on the frequency of congressional news coverage in 2009 remains significant,
with a minor increase in the coefficient (from 0.274 to 0.281, an increase of 0.08). 30

Table 8

Structural Effects on the Frequency of Congressional Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: 2009 Coefficients (SE)</th>
<th>Model 2: 2010 Coefficient (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases Issued</td>
<td>0.073 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.003* (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>−0.033* (0.02)</td>
<td>−0.022 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>0.051 (0.15)</td>
<td>−0.081 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
<td>0.338 (0.50)</td>
<td>−0.119 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>0.003 (0.01)</td>
<td>−0.001 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>0.281* (0.14)</td>
<td>0.213 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coverage</td>
<td>0.622* (0.26)</td>
<td>0.511* (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>−0.109 (0.21)</td>
<td>0.374+ (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>0.001 (0.16)</td>
<td>−0.072 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.121 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.141 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.718***</td>
<td>3.339***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1111.6</td>
<td>1047.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Looking at the impact of press releases on the frequency of news coverage, the
analysis in Table 8 indicates that, while congressional media tactics are non-significant
during the first half of the legislative term, they do have a significant impact on news
coverage during election years. Figure 13 shows the increase in the predicted amount of

30 It should be noted that the minor increases in the coefficients between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4
do not dramatically increase the likelihood ratios previously reported in Chapter 3. As such, they are
excluded from the analysis here.
Figure 13. Predicted Number of News Articles by Number of Press Releases in 2010.

news coverage a member of Congress is likely to receive based on the number of press releases they distribute during the 2010 congressional session. As Figure 13 shows, a member of the House who allocates the minimum level of effort to gaining press attention by distributing ten press releases during 2010 is expected to receive approximately 66 news articles in the local press. The average representative, distributing 74 press statements throughout the course of an election year, is expected to have approximately 80 news articles in the local press as a result. This results in an increase of 17.51% from the minimum level of press attention. A representative allocating the maximum level of resources to distributing press releases in the sample, with 270 releases sent out in 2010, is expected to receive approximately 141 news stories in the local press. This results in an increase in press attention of 76.69% from the average representative in 2010, and an increase from the minimum of 112.52% as well.

Moving finally to the analysis of tone, Table 9 shows that while the inclusion of press releases as a proxy for congressional press strategy does affect some of the
coefficients in the model; it does not have any significant impact on the valence tone of articles appearing in the local press in either of the two years examined. Overall, the model for valence tone of news articles is affected very little by the inclusion of press releases as a proxy for congressional press efforts to manipulate coverage on them in the local press.

Table 9

Structural Effects on the Tone of Congressional News Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: 2009</th>
<th>Coefficients (SE)</th>
<th>Model 2: 2010</th>
<th>Coefficient (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases Issued</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>-9.387***</td>
<td>(2.52)</td>
<td>-3.772</td>
<td>(2.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
<td>-8.918</td>
<td>(8.47)</td>
<td>-12.323+</td>
<td>(7.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>-0.117</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>(2.35)</td>
<td>-2.959</td>
<td>(1.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Circulation</td>
<td>-2.689*</td>
<td>(1.20)</td>
<td>-1.884+</td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>(3.53)</td>
<td>-1.698</td>
<td>(3.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>1.085</td>
<td>(2.67)</td>
<td>4.092</td>
<td>(2.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Electoral Competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-17.508**</td>
<td>(5.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med Electoral Competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-10.588*</td>
<td>(4.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Electoral Competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-13.443**</td>
<td>(4.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.859+</td>
<td>(3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement*Press Releases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>37.80**</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.343**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistic</td>
<td>2.497**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.976*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
This brings up an interesting question, why would press releases affect the frequency of stories in 2010, but not impact the valence score of news articles? In order to explore this question, Table 10 presents the results of an analysis of the frequency of the three types of news coverage that make up the valence score. While press release frequency does not have an impact on the amount of positive and negative coverage of representatives, it does have a significant impact on the number of neutral stories that are written by journalists. The direction and coefficient for press release frequency are in the appropriate direction as well, indicating that as representatives send out more press

**Table 10**

*Structural Effects on the Frequency of Positive, Negative, and Neutral Congressional Coverage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Coverage</th>
<th></th>
<th>Negative Coverage</th>
<th></th>
<th>Neutral Coverage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Releases Issued</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>0.004**</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>−0.003</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>−0.034*</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td>−0.130</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Ideology Extremity</td>
<td>−0.414</td>
<td>(0.39)</td>
<td>0.679</td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
<td>−0.194</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills Sponsored</td>
<td>−0.006</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>−0.000</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>−0.005</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>0.340+</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coverage</td>
<td>0.463*</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
<td>0.558</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Ideology Congruence</td>
<td>0.261</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>0.765*</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Washington Bureau</td>
<td>−0.082</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>−0.410+</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td>−0.021+</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competitiveness</td>
<td>0.218**</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>0.264*</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Endorsement</td>
<td>0.383***</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>−0.150</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.234***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.980+</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.114***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>641.82</td>
<td></td>
<td>682.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>998.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*
releases, more news articles are written concerning their behavior and actions. Utilizing the coefficient from Table 10, the expected number of neutral news articles concerning a member of Congress who allocates the bare minimum of press efforts with ten releases throughout the year is expected to receive 45.52 news stories as a result. The average representative, releasing approximately 74 press statements, increases the expected number of news articles by 39.08%, with 63.31 expected news articles according to the results. Similar to the overall frequency of news articles presented in Table 8, representatives who place a high value on their press operations, sending out the maximum amount of releases during 2010, are expected to have 120.42 neutral stories written during the sample year.

**Conclusions—Does Press Release Frequency Matter?**

No matter what is occurring in politics, it seems that the sentiment expressed by many involved in congressional press operations that getting the attention of the news media requires more luck than anything else is decisively accurate (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). Increased partisan polarization in both the electorate and in Washington, major battles over public policy even during a term of unified government should provide representatives with ample opportunities to garner media attention in the local press. Representatives are enticing to journalists since they can provide a level of expertise while still appealing to the local angle that news agencies need to entice readers to pay attention. This should lead to an increase in the level of press operations in many congressional offices, and this increase should theoretically lead to an increase in press attention on the legislature. It is clear that representatives find their relationship with the
local press to be important to their ability to retain office, as interviews previously done by Gershon (2012) have found that those involved in congressional press operations hold their work with local reporters with high regard.

In this chapter, I have focused specifically on what attributes impact the frequency at which a legislator utilizes press releases as a strategy when dealing with the press, as well as whether or not the frequency of press releases has an impact on the tone and number of stories in the local press. Previously in Chapter 3, empirical analysis found that several environmental factors specific to the media and political landscape of the congressional district affected the amount of space allocated to congressional behaviors and actions in local newspapers. While much of this analysis was unaffected by the inclusion of press release frequency, a few variables did decrease in significance, indicating that congressional press operations do have some impact on the press environment within a district. Press releases represent one of the more versatile tactics employed by members of Congress in order to control the flow of information coming out of Washington to their constituents back home, and are considered by members of legislative press operations to be a vital tool in controlling the frequency and tone of news articles about representatives in the local press. According to the analysis presented here, the frequency of press releases does have a significant impact on news articles; however such tactics are largely successful at stimulating news during election years. This finding falls in line with previous research done by Clarke and Evans (1983), Gershon (2012) and others, and lends some credence to the argument that the press pays closer attention to easily framed battles such as elections where there are clear winners.
and losers. Likewise, previous theories posed by Cook (1989) which argue that press operations are more successful at stimulating journalists to pay attention to members of Congress, rather than affecting the tone of news items featuring members and their actions, are also found to have some empirical evidence in the analysis. Frequent press releases were found to have a significant impact on the level of neutral news stories featuring a given member of Congress, and overall press release frequency was not found to have any direct impact on the tone of stories in local newspapers, even when separating the valence scores into their positive and negative elements.

While the analysis here answers some questions about the level of success members of the House have in controlling the amount of news that is reported about their actions in the local press, there are still several questions that still require answers. Whereas the overall level of positive and negative stories analyzed in the models presented here do not provide any clear evidence that representatives are able to manipulate press coverage to cast their behaviors and actions in a positive light, the reliance a journalist has on press releases sent out by a representative’s office when developing a story has not been addressed. An analysis of the topics and content of press statements and corresponding news stories will provide some clearer evidence as to whether the economic constraints of news agencies discussed previously will significantly impact the ability of journalists to craft the news. The findings of this chapter provide an early indication that press secretaries, many of whom have a background in press operations within news agencies and recognize that the standard practice for journalists is to lean toward neutrality in reporting, may be more likely to
write press releases in a way that appear neutral in order to entice journalists to use them.

This question will be examined more directly in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

VENTRILOQUISM OR AN ECHO CHAMBER? MEASURING
THE PRESENCE OF HOUSE MEMBERS’ RHETORIC
IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Despite fragmentation due to changes in the media environment from new information technology, research shows that the mass media still has the ability to set the public’s agenda by focusing citizen attention onto particular events and providing cues about the salience of topics currently being discussed by political actors (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Soroka, 2012; Zaller, 1992).

Likewise, political elites have previously been shown to excel at manipulating and controlling the information environment that media work in. From the analysis thus far, we know that politicians—specifically representatives in the House—exist in unique media environment that is affected by the political landscape as well as by factors specific to the media system of the United States, such as ownership structure and coverage area (see also Schaffner & Sellers, 2003). We also know that the media environment can be affected in some ways by member’s own press operations, specifically during election years and in influencing the frequency of neutral stories written about a representative and their actions. What is still unclear from the analyses thus far is the extent to which representatives can exert control over the content of media reports about their behavior. That is, how successful are congressional press operations at controlling the message distributed to the public utilizing the rhetoric in press releases?
Theories about press control by elites are mixed, with some arguing that political actors manipulate the media like a ventriloquist, using the press to restate their rhetoric word-for-word, whereas others argue that the media act in an echo chamber, with different messages bouncing off the walls with differing degrees of clarity. The extent of press manipulation by political elites varies depending on several factors, such as the newsworthiness of the political actor, as well as demographic features of the representative as well.

Here, I examine the abilities of members of the House of Representatives to manipulate and control the agenda and topics concerning their work in Washington in the local press. As in previous chapters, I argue that representatives have an incentive to manipulate local news outlets in order to control their public profile and that local news outlets are constrained by the need for a localized angle for discussing national issues. Members of Congress attempt to leverage local press outlets through the use of press releases that are ready-made for news consumption and thus lower the costs of providing news to the public. Media strategists working in congressional press offices, utilizing their knowledge of the media system due to past experience and expertise, can better control the level of information presented through the press by creating press releases that provide information that is enticing to constituents, journalists and news consumers while still casting representatives in a positive light. Press releases are beneficial to members of Congress since they provide a frame for news stories that can positively affect a member’s image in the eyes of their constituents. As with previous chapters, I focus on
local newspaper outlets and how the expressed agenda advertised in members’ press releases affects the coverage that newspapers produce.

In order to understand the level of success representatives have at controlling the message of news articles written about them in the local press, the analysis in this chapter follows a two-pronged approach. First, I analyze the content of press releases and corresponding coverage using publicly available cheating detection software in order to calculate the percentage of echoing of representatives’ press statements that occur in the press. Examining the level of press echoing in this way allows us to more fully understand the extent to which representatives have control over the frame of a news story, by specifically examining how the language of press releases are adopted in the final news product. Second, I analyze the types of topics most prevalent in press releases utilizing a latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic model, and examine the strength and level of adoption of topics by the local press. Utilizing a topic modeling strategy in conjunction with the analysis of press echoing will provide some evidence to whether representatives have influence over the broader media agenda by allocating resources to their press operations and focusing on specific talking points. Each of these analyses will allow me to come to some conclusions about whether local media outlets, due to the constraints placed upon them from economic and information uncertainties, become mouth-pieces for representatives rather than independent collectors. Data on press releases was gathered utilizing members own web-pages on House.gov and matched with corresponding news coverage within their local district using the Newsbank research collection. I expect that press outlets will likely exhibit a significant amount of echoing
of representatives’ statements overall, and that the ability of news agencies to overcome economic and information constraints will mitigate the level of echoing that is exhibited overall.

**Who Sets the Agenda in the Local News?**

The media system in the United States is tasked with taking the millions of signals, events, actions and non-actions of political actors and condensing them down into meaningful and understandable stories that can be absorbed easily by the populace. Even with advances to media technology that allow individuals to customize and filter the news they receive, the prevailing wisdom is still that politics is a mediated experience that requires an intermediary to transmit information about events that are largely “out of sight, out of mind” (Lippmann, 1922) for the average citizen. Since politics is chiefly a mediated experience, proponents have argued that the effects of this sort of news-producing and disseminating process have become more vital and important in terms of its impact on citizens and their perceptions of government (Delli Carpini, & Williams, 2001). Essential to understanding this process are the factors which affect the decisions by the news media to focus on particular events over others. Beyond the concept of gatekeeping (Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2012), the news media has the ability to influence the political agenda at both the elite level as well as with average citizens by

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31 While the concept of mediation and politics as a mediated experience is nothing new to scholars and theorists of politics, the idea of mediated experiences in modern, mass media societies is highly influenced by the works of Edelman (1995, p. 1), who noted that, “Political beliefs and actions spring from assumptions, biases, and news reports. In this critical sense politics is a drama taking place in an assumed and reported world that evokes threats and hopes, a world people do not directly observe or touch.” This perspective is examined further by Delli Carpini, and Williams (2001), whom use Edelman’s theoretical framework as a jumping off point to examine the phenomena of “new media” and the way it shapes democratic governance, as well as Chadwick (2001) who examines the burgeoning role of the Internet in informing citizens about politics and political affairs.
focusing attention on and framing particular events as newsworthy while ignoring others. This same agenda setting power can be influenced, however, by political elites who work to influence the frame used by journalists by providing their own narrative regarding news items.

Agenda setting, the “successful transfer of salience from the mass media agenda to the public agenda” (McCombs, 2004, p. 37), is based primarily on the belief that individuals have an interest in public affairs and a need for information about the world they live in, a world which they may not have direct access to. Since the early studies performed on undecided voters in North Carolina (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the theoretical boundaries of agenda setting have expanded to include examinations of rhetoric, symbols and their importance to the successful adopting of the media’s agenda (Comstock & Scharrer, 2005; Entman, 1993), the psychological effects of agenda setting on individuals (Iyengar & Kinder, 1989; Soroka, 2003), and the impact of advances to communication technology on the ability of the press to influence the public (Hamilton, 2004; Zeller, 2005). Here, I focus attention on the production side of news making, specifically examining how the relationships that members of Congress develop with journalists affect patterns of news coverage that define the media’s agenda. That is, how successful are representatives at influencing the media’s agenda-setting function through the provision of positive frames via press releases, which journalists can easily adopt and assimilate into news items?

The choice in what events journalists focus on and write about on a day-to-day basis is the result of the norms and traditions of news making, interactions among news
organizations and with specific agencies, and interactions with sources, which have their own agendas that they hope the news will focus on (Entman, 1993, 2007; McCombs, 2004; Soroka, 2012). News organizations, acting as strategic entities, decide the news agenda in order to maximize readership and reputation (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Hamilton, 2004; Mullainathan & Schleifer, 2005). To this end, smaller and more regional newspapers rely on news about local representatives in order to stay competitive in the market and provide consumers with information that is relevant to their interests. Arnold (2004), in his study of local news coverage and political accountability, supplies evidence that local newspapers do provide a sufficient volume of coverage to voters about incumbent legislators, although there is wide variation between individual papers. Substantive coverage of representatives and Congress tends to focus more attention to distributive benefits that legislators bring to the district rather than policy stances, since these types of messages are often more appealing to readers interested in the local impact of legislation (Grimmer, 2009; Grimmer, Messing, & Westwood, 2012; Tidmarch & Pitney, 1984; Zaller, 1992).

In order to maximize attention and influence the public agenda, journalists must provide a frame that consumers can understand and accept. Entman (1993, p. 52) offers the most widely accepted definition of a frame, stating that, “to frame is to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (emphasis in original). For local journalists and news agencies, the prevailing frame is one of localization, where
journalists focus on the impact of news items in a more limited scope and focus on how stories will affect readers “at home” rather than painting a broad picture about issues under discussion and allowing local papers to remain competitive with the national press (Arnold, 2004; Larson, 1992; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003). A localized frame only provides a single part of the various angles journalists utilize when making news decisions, the aggregation of which becomes the eventual story the public sees. From the press perspective, the overarching concern when framing a story is whether it will provide readers with something they find interesting, that will stimulate readers to continue reading other stories and continue patronizing a particular outlet (Hamilton, 2004). This leads reporters to focus on the widespread appeal of conflicts, attention-grabbing narratives, easily simplified stories, and events with some sense of novelty and timeliness (Gans, 1979; Graber, 2010; Larson, 1992).

**Legislative Strategy and the Media Agenda**

The question is, given the ability of the media to influence the public’s agenda by framing news in a particular way, how successful are members of Congress—as representatives of the public—at influencing or manipulating the media’s agenda in ways that maximize the favorability of a legislator with the public? Are representatives able to slant the news frame in such a way as to create a positive image of themselves in the electorate? To what extent do local journalists adopt a frame created by congressional press operations? And under what circumstances will the news be more willing to adopt the frame provided by representatives?
The most common metric used in the literature on political representation to compare how successful representative A is at standing for their constituents is the analysis of “fit,” or congruence—the level of correspondence between the actions of legislators and the desires of the public (Golder & Stramski, 2010; Miller & Strokes, 1963). Implicit in these theories is the assumption that a representative’s actions are known to the public, and that this knowledge was developed independently. This neglects the fact that representatives allocate significant amounts of time and resources to ensure that constituent reactions to their behavior are framed in a way that will bolster support in the district (Arnold, 1992, 2004; Fenno, 1978; Grimmer, 2009; Mayhew, 2000). In order to influence constituent opinion, representatives must act outside of their official capacity as decision makers and interact with constituents through various means, the most well-known of which is the development of personal “homestyles” when directly communicating with the public (Fenno, 1978). Representatives cannot interact personally with constituents on a daily basis, however, and must also rely on the media in order to successfully control public support (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003). Whether directly or indirectly, when interacting with constituents, “legislators use tools of communication to explain to constituents why their representative is effective.
Legislators use this communication to define the type of representation they provide, through the creation of homestyle” (Grimmer, 2009, p. 627). The ways in which representatives present themselves via press statements has a significant impact on the ability of a legislator to forge an electoral connection (Grimmer, 2009), and variations in
the types of messages transmitted to the public by representatives have a significant impact on constituent opinions (Grimmer, Messing, & Westwood, 2012).

While there is prior evidence that the media and political actors do work together to produce the news (Arnold, 2004; Fogarty, 2009; Gans, 1979; Larson, 1992; Schaffner, 2006; Vinson, 2003), very few studies have fully delved into the process through which these interactions occur. While it can be reasonably argued that the final news product is created in part through interactions between representative A and news agency B, we cannot be certain of just how much of an interaction there is, and how successful representatives are at incentivizing journalists to focus on their work and manipulating the story to meet their goals. Previous work by Sellers (2010) has shown that political parties can be successful in manipulating the frame of news coverage, so long as members maintain a single, coordinated media message. Likewise, Domke et al. (2006) finds that members of executive agencies have similar success in the media so long as they remain “on message” with the President. Does this sort of result hold true when we focus attention on local media sources and the messages of individual members of Congress?

In his work examining bias in news coverage, Entman (2007) argues that while bias may be difficult to fully grasp, researchers can measure media slant by examining the differences in the skills and decision making strategies of journalists and media staffers of political actors. In this way, we can imagine the production of a news product as a type of political game in which actors utilize a series of incentives to coerce journalists to produce favorable news, and journalists respond by using their abilities as
gatekeepers and agenda-setters to coerce representatives to give them greater access. Fogarty (2009) develops several models of news agency-legislator interactions in which signals sent by the electorate and investigated by the media are picked up on by legislators to varying degrees, thus constraining a legislator’s voting preferences in order to remain in office. Here, I focus on the end result of such strategic interactions by examining the concept of ventriloquism and echoing that occur in the final news product by analyzing the level of congruence that exists between the press releases of members of the House of Representatives and corresponding local news agencies.

**Ventriloquist Dummies and Echo Chambers**

In order to insert themselves into the news production process, members of Congress issue press releases which are designed specifically for press consumption (Cook, 1989). Newspapers, especially local papers, are often subject to economic constraints that make it difficult to dedicate time directly to investigating and observing the actions of members of Congress in order to cover what representatives do in the legislature (Vinson, 2003). To fill this gap, editors and journalists often rely on press releases sent out from congressional offices (Arnold, 2004; Cook, 1989; Grimmer, 2009; Schaffner, 2006; Vinson, 2003). Press secretaries commonly believe that they will have a high degree of success generating news coverage with press releases (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). Cook (1989) notes that press releases are far more successful at generating attention to specific topics, rather than controlling the language used by journalists to describe members’ actions. The use of press releases as a source in journalists’ articles is often referred to as “ventriloquism” by scholars (Grimmer, 2009, p. 166).
5) due to the fact that releases can often be duplicated as news stories almost verbatim, “much like a ventriloquist’s dummy.” Printing of press releases in this way is commonly believed to be done more often by smaller newspapers, and newspapers that are constrained economically in other ways. Table 11 presents an example of ventriloquism of Sam Farr’s (D-CA) press statements by the Santa Cruz Sentinel. The press release and subsequent article focus on a planned workshop for immigrants looking to gain citizen status in the United States. While the language of the September 3, 2010 article is rearranged slightly, it bears a striking resemblance to the previously released statement made by Farr’s office on September 2, 2010.

Contrary to the idea of direct copying of press releases and ventriloquism, I propose here that legislative press releases—especially those sent out by members of the House of Representatives—exist inside what can be described as an “echo chamber.” The concept of an echo chamber is based on the idea that statements made by members of Congress are often picked up by the press to varying degrees based on characteristics of the news agency—such as economic constraints and the ability of an agency to provide independent investigations—as well as characteristics of the representative and the district they serve. Some legislators are more adept at creating statements that the press will utilize, and thus are better at controlling journalists like “ventriloquist dummies.” The relationship between the frequency of press releases distributed and news articles produced is rarely perfectly correlated, however, and members of the House are often not the only source of information used by news editors and staff when generating a story. The use of a member’s press releases and the variation in the level of congressional
Table 11

*Side-by-Side Comparison of Sam Farr (D-California) and the Santa Cruz Sentinel Newspaper*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Santa Cruz Sentinel (September 3, 2010)</th>
<th>Sam Farr Press Release (September 2, 2010)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship workshop Saturday</td>
<td>WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) on Saturday will host his first citizenship workshop, to take place in Watsonville. The goal of the event is to increase the number of citizenship applicants by providing eligibility information to the public about the citizenship process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressman Sam Farr, D-Carmel, will host his first citizenship workshop from noon-3 p.m. Saturday at Watsonville Civic Plaza Building, 4th Floor, 275 Main St.</td>
<td>“America has always been a land of opportunity, and that’s especially true for the many immigrants who work their way through the citizenship process and become naturalized citizens,” Rep. Farr said. “This workshop is designed to help cut through the red tape and make the process clear and fair for everyone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goal of the event is to increase the number of citizenship applicants by providing eligibility information to the public about the citizenship process. A representative from the Citizenship and Immigration Services will give a presentation on citizenship requirements and conduct a mock citizenship interview. Those who qualify for citizenship will have the opportunity to obtain assistance filling out their naturalization application. An attorney will also be available to answer questions regarding complex cases. Also, the Postal Service will be available to process money orders and photographs necessary to submit with completed citizenship applications.</td>
<td>A representative from the Citizenship and Immigration Services will give a presentation on citizenship requirements and conduct a mock citizenship interview. Those who qualify for citizenship will have the opportunity to obtain assistance filling out their naturalization application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Sept. 4, Noon - 3 p.m. Citizenship workshop - Rep. Farr will host a citizenship workshop to provide information and assistance for those interested in becoming citizens. Location: Watsonville Civic Plaza Building, 4th Floor, 275 Main St., Watsonville</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rhetoric that ends up in a final news product, therefore, is often more dispersed, leading the press to echo the sentiments of a legislator without explicitly becoming a representative’s mouthpiece, or “partner in propaganda” (Bagdikian, 1979).
Table 12 presents a brief example of press echoing of a statement made by Paul Tonko (D-NY) by the *Albany Times-Union*, which serves Tonko’s district. As the side-by-side comparison shows, the level of clarity between the press release distributed by Tonko’s office on September 2, 2010 and the subsequent news article printed by the *Times-Union* on September 3, 2010 is focused specifically on a few key quotes in Tonko’s press release. The *Times-Union* focuses specifically on Tonko’s call to increase the level of oversight by public safety officials after a gas leak evacuated several homes in New York’s 21st district. The article falls short of emphasizing the potentially catastrophic impact that could occur if the cause of the leak is not discovered, an opinion that is emphasized by Tonko’s statement. The author of the *Times-Union* piece does use the press release and statements made by Tonko as the main subject of the final article; although the final story does not completely copy the statement and utilize the release to create a concise, short article that explains the representative’s feelings regarding a local event.

**Data**

To be able to come to some conclusions how representatives shape the news agenda, a sample dataset of 60 members of the House of Representatives and corresponding local news outlets was created in order to test what factors impact the amount of *ventriloquism* that local news agencies exhibit when writing stories involving legislators work in Washington. Measurement of legislative success at getting their

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32 The sample used in this chapter is a subsample of the original 108 representatives chosen for the initial analysis. Representatives were chosen based on whether they had an active website on house.gov or had an accessible archived site as provided by the House website for representatives who are no longer in office. Having an available webpage was required in order to access and download press releases for examination.
Table 12

Side-by-Side Comparison of Paul Tonko (D-New York) and the Albany Times-Union Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAS LEAK BRINGS CALL FOR OVERSIGHT</td>
<td>Congressman Paul Tonko today sent letters to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and NYS Public Service Commissioner Garry Brown calling for answers and oversight in the wake of the Texas Eastern propane pipeline leak in Gilboa last week, which led to an evacuation of the area and heightened tensions for neighbors and the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times Union, The (Albany, NY) - U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko sent letters to state and federal agencies on Thursday, calling for more oversight after a propane gas leak last week in Schoharie County.</td>
<td>“We need to hold Texas Eastern accountable for the events that led up to the discovery of the leak,” said Congressman Paul Tonko. “This leak could have led to a large explosion, as it did two decades ago when two lives were lost and local property and homes were damaged. We need to understand the circumstances that led up to this incident, make sure all protocols and laws were followed, and figure out how we can prevent this from happening again. We must ease the fears of those who have to live with this pipeline in their community and ensure they are treated with fairness and decency.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leak in the town of Broome was discovered last Friday. Five families were forced from their homes for several days while the leak was fixed.</td>
<td>The leak was discovered last Friday at the intersection of Stone Store Road and Keyserkill Road. Officials evacuated dozens of households and five families were forced from their homes for a number of days while the leak was isolated and fixed. Congressman Tonko is most interested in answers regarding the excavation of the site by Texas Eastern crews one week before the leak was discovered, as well as the scope and timeline of the incident investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonko is asking U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and state Public Service Commissioner Garry Brown for more oversight of the propane gas lines in Schoharie County owned by Enterprise Products, which recently bought the lines from Texas Eastern.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We need to hold Texas Eastern accountable for the events that led up to the discovery of the leak,” Tonko said in a statement. “We need to understand the circumstances that led up to this incident, make sure all protocols and laws were followed, and figure out how we can prevent this from happening again.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Board of Supervisors Chairman Earl VanWormer III said county officials need to be notified by Enterprise when work is done on the pipeline. VanWormer said in his letter that the pipeline is 47 years old and was not built to current standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

message to the news media was done by collecting a unique database of over ten thousand press releases issued between 2009 and 2010. Press releases were chosen since these documents are designed specifically for press absorption in order to manipulate news frames in a way that focuses the public’s attention on issues and events that representatives want their constituents to hear about—what Grimmer (2009) refers to as a
legislator’s “expressed agenda”—and have been shown to be a useful tool to measure legislators’ strategies with the media (Kaplan, Park & Ridout, 2006). Press releases have also recently been utilized by researchers in order to systematically evaluate the level of attention that legislators allocate to particular topics of political importance, and have been shown to be a unique form of homestyle that focuses on journalists as the target audience (Grimmer, 2009).

In order to measure the saturation of a legislator’s press releases in a local news outlet, each member was matched first to a local newspaper that services the representative’s district. Afterwards, news articles were scraped from each newspaper utilizing keyword searches of the Newsbank Digital Archive, which provides a comprehensive list of several thousand local, regional, and national newspapers within the United States. The final sample contained 10,276 news articles, collected based on whether a representative’s name was mentioned in the article. To determine if a press release from a representative’s office was used in a newspaper, I used publically available cheating detection software to analyze whether a press release and newspaper had similar content (Bloomfield, 2008). Table 13 presents some brief descriptive information about the initial results of the detection analysis. Overall, the software was able to detect 897 newspaper-press release dyads which contained a sizable percentage of quotes, paraphrasing, or explicit plagiarism in newspapers from congressional press releases. Of the 10,087 press releases sampled, only 8.81% were found to be used in a corresponding news article. The average number of press releases used by a news agency included in
# Measuring the Coverage Rate of House Press Releases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Press Releases</th>
<th>News Articles</th>
<th>Press Release Frequency of Use</th>
<th>Avg. % Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Schock</td>
<td>Peoria Journal Star, The (IL)</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Putnam</td>
<td>Ledger, The (FL)</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Green</td>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcee Hastings</td>
<td>Sun Sentinel (FL)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Eshoo</td>
<td>Daily Post/Daily News (Palo Alto)</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart Stupak</td>
<td>Traverse City Record-Eagle (MI)</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chellie Pingree</td>
<td>Portland Press Herald/Main Sunday Telegram (ME)</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Van Hollen</td>
<td>Baltimore Sun, The (MD)</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Wu</td>
<td>Oregonian, The (OR)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Edwards</td>
<td>Baltimore Sun, The (MD)</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan D. Hunter</td>
<td>San Diego Union-Tribune</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Ruppersberger</td>
<td>Baltimore Sun, The (MD)</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Perlmutter</td>
<td>Denver Post, The (CO)</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie Bernice Johnson</td>
<td>Dallas Morning News</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Cummings</td>
<td>Baltimore Sun, The (MD)</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erik Paulsen</td>
<td>Twin Cities Star-Tribune, The (MN)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Wolf</td>
<td>Winchester Star</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Upton</td>
<td>Kalamazoo Gazette, The (MI)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Miller</td>
<td>San Gabriel Valley Tribune (CA)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Brown-Waite</td>
<td>Tampa Bay Times (FL)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Thompson</td>
<td>Centre Daily Times (State College, PA)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg Harper</td>
<td>Starkville Daily News (MS)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank Johnson</td>
<td>Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Langevin</td>
<td>The Pawtucket Times</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Costa</td>
<td>Fresno Bee</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim McDermott</td>
<td>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Moran</td>
<td>Alexandria Gazette Packet (VA)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Pitts</td>
<td>Intelligencer Journal-Lancaster New Era</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Wilson</td>
<td>The State (Columbia, SC)</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Mica</td>
<td>St. Augustine Record (FL)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Tierney</td>
<td>Salem News, The (MA)</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Chu</td>
<td>San Gabriel Valley Tribune (CA)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Castor</td>
<td>Tampa Bay Times (FL)</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny Marchant</td>
<td>Fort Worth Star Telegram</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt Schrader</td>
<td>Oregonian, The (OR)</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois Capps</td>
<td>Ventura County Star (CA)</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Jenkins</td>
<td>Topeka Capital-Journal, The (KS)</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac Thornberry</td>
<td>Wichita Falls Times Record</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia Fudge</td>
<td>Plain Dealer, The (OH)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsha Blackburn</td>
<td>Commercial Appeal, The (Memphis, TN)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Doyle</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Pence</td>
<td>Journal Gazette, The (IN)</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Simpson</td>
<td>Idaho Statesman, The (ID)</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niki Tsongas</td>
<td>Sun, The (MA)</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Press Releases</th>
<th>News Articles</th>
<th>Press Release Frequency of Use</th>
<th>Avg. % Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patrick McHenry</td>
<td>Hickory Daily Record (NC)</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Tiberi</td>
<td>Columbus Dispatch, The (OH)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Tonko</td>
<td>Times Union, The (NY)</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Hall</td>
<td>Dallas Morning News</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul Grijalva</td>
<td>Arizona Daily Star</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Neal</td>
<td>Milford Daily News (MA)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Brady</td>
<td>Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa DeLauro</td>
<td>New Haven Register (CT)</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Farr</td>
<td>Santa Cruz Sentinel (CA)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sander Levin</td>
<td>Detroit News, The (MI)</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer Bachus</td>
<td>Birmingham News</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Scalise</td>
<td>Times-Picayune, The (LA)</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Ryan</td>
<td>Vindicator (Youngstown, OH)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Foxx</td>
<td>Winston-Salem Journal (NC)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wally Herger</td>
<td>Chico Enterprise-Record (CA)</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe Lofgren</td>
<td>San Jose Mercury News (CA)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the sample was approximately fifteen total. Column six of Table 13 shows the average percentage of press releases copied by news articles for each member of the House. The range of use is between 0.0%—indicating that there were no measurable similarities between a member’s press releases and news articles—to 57.7%, indicating a high level of copying. On average, members’ press releases were copied by news agencies, either in quotes, paraphrasing, or direct plagiarism, a total of 18.36% of the time.

Findings

The average percentage of a member’s press releases that were copied by corresponding news articles was analyzed using an OLS regression. The factors believed to be significant to causing variations in the level of press echoing are based primarily on characteristics of the representatives themselves, such as demographic features like race and gender, as well as terms in office and being a member of party or committee.
leadership. Likewise there is expected to be some regional variation\textsuperscript{33} in the level of press echoing that occurs, with Midwestern and Southern states exhibiting more press echoing since these papers tend to have smaller circulations according to the data presented in previous chapters and therefore may be more susceptible to congressional press efforts. Members own behavioral traits, such as ideological extremism based on the Poole-Rosenthal scores as well as bill sponsorship and the number of press releases distributed by a congressional office, are included to examine whether behavioral characteristics cause the press to adopt the language of a representative more readily. Finally, characteristics of the news agency are included to test whether factors such as daily circulation, corporate ownership, the amount of the district covered by a newspaper’s media market, and whether the newspaper has a bureau in Washington significantly impact the ability of a press agency to generate news items free from the manipulation of congressional press offices.

The results of the OLS regression analysis are displayed in Table 14. While certain demographic features, such as being a minority in Congress or being female, were believed to spark more press attention and thus increase the likelihood that members of the press will echo statements sent out by these representatives, the analysis here finds that there is no significant effect of either demographic characteristic on the level of press echoing in the model. Likewise, terms in office is not found to have a significant impact on press echoing, though it is signed appropriately based on previous theories of press attention to more senior members (Gershon, 2012; Romano, 2013). The number of bills sponsored by a member of Congress was found to increase the level of press echoing. 

\textsuperscript{33} Regions are separated here using the U.S. Census coding for regional variation.
Table 14

*OLS Regression of the Percent of News Press Release Echoing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>(S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsorship</td>
<td>0.003*</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Variation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- South</td>
<td>0.093*</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Midwest</td>
<td>0.123**</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- West</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party or Committee Leadership</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Extremism</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Press Releases</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspaper Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Circulation</td>
<td>-0.047*</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Ownership</td>
<td>-0.050+</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Coverage</td>
<td>-0.076</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Bureau</td>
<td>-0.079*</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.630*</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>2.898**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results in Table 14, each additional bill sponsored by a member of the House increases the average percentage of press echoing by 0.003 points, all other variables held constant. Bill sponsorship is an activity that both representatives and members of the press find newsworthy, since representatives can utilize sponsorship as a way to provide public goods to the district, and journalists can easily craft stories that have a local angle which readers can understand.

Regional variations were found to significantly impact the likelihood of press echoing of a representative’s statements as well, according to Table 14. Specifically,
Southern and Midwestern states were found to be more likely to echo statements made by representatives compared to other regions in the United States. Figure 14 presents a box-plot of the predicted level of press echoing based on the results in Table 14 for each of the four regions coded using census labels. Newspapers in Southern states, such as Texas, Florida, Louisiana, and Virginia, were found to increase echo press release information by 0.093 on average compared to other regions, holding other variables constant, accounting for the greatest degree in variation amongst the different regions included in the model. Midwestern states similarly increased the average percentage of press echoing by 0.123 points compared to other regions.

![Box-plot of predicted level of press echoing by region.]

*Figure 14. Regional Variation in Press Echoing.*

Finally, looking at characteristics of the newspapers included in the model, the analysis in Table 14 shows that the daily circulation of a newspaper actually has the effect of decreasing the level of press echoing that occurs overall. In Figure 15, the daily circulation of a newspaper is plotted along with the predicted level of press echoing in
order to show how increases in the daily circulation of a newspaper decrease the expected level of press release mirroring by news agencies. Overall, holding other variables constant, an increase in the logged daily circulation of a newspaper has the effect of lowering the percent average level of press echoing by $-0.047$ points. Having a dedicated office in Washington that can provide information about representative’s activities in the Capitol likewise decreased the level of press echoing that was exhibited by an agency. The effect of having a Washington bureau decreased the average percentage of press echoing by $-0.079$ points compared to agencies without a press bureau in the Capitol. Both of these results suggest that, following theories put forward by Kaplan (2006) and others, news agencies exist in an open system which constrains their ability to independently produce news on a daily basis, and the ability of a certain outlet to overcome certain constraints—such as economic constraints caused by their level of circulation or information constraints based on their ability to conduct

\[
\text{Figure 15. Effect of Circulation on Press Echoing.}
\]
independent investigations in the chamber—will significantly affect whether a journalist must rely on legislators as a primary source of information.

As the analysis in this section has shown, representatives interested in influencing the narrative about their work in Washington through the media must keep in mind several distinct characteristics of the political and media environment within the district if they are to be successful. Here, I have focused specifically on whether or not representatives are able to influence the frame of a story through the cultivation of a mediated homestyle via the use of press releases. Influence over the frame of the story allows representatives the opportunity to shape and mold the language of eventual news stories, and provides congressional media operations with the ability to set boundaries around the discussion of particular topics and political events. Such control, which is often believed to result in representatives using journalists like ventriloquist dummies, is much more subtle than the conventional wisdom may originally have believed. And while this section has provided a starting examination of the ability of representatives to control the agenda via influencing the frame of stories, it has not fully examined representatives’ influence over the media’s agenda. In the next section, I move from looking at influence over a stories frame to the ability of a congressional press operation to influence the broader media agenda. Specifically, I now turn to examining whether representatives’ media operations are able to influence the specific topics of discussion in the media, and how successful members of Congress are at controlling the broader media agenda by specifically focusing on specific topics when dealing with the press.
Media Topics and Representatives’ Agendas

While the factors that lead to press ventriloquism may vary depending on certain characteristics of the news agency and—to some extent—characteristics of a district’s representative, ventriloquism may not be the norm for many news outlets. Thus, representatives who work with the press and develop a mediated homestyle can have some influence over the eventual frame of a news story through the use of press releases. While influence over the frame of a news story can be beneficial in leading journalists to write more positive articles, representatives may also be interested in controlling the broader news agenda when releasing statements to the press. Thus, the question now becomes, given the ability of the media to influence the public’s agenda by framing news in a particular way, how successful are members of Congress at influencing or manipulating the media agenda in ways that maximize the attention given to particular topics while avoiding others? That is, are representatives able to slant the news frame in such a way as to sway the agenda in their favor and keep the media focused on topics and news that representatives want to talk about? And to what extent do local journalists adopt topics chosen by congressional press operations?

Recent examinations of political communications by members of Congress have focused on the ability of members to express their political agenda in ways that are of interest to news agencies in order to affect the policy process in the legislature (Grimmer, 2009, 2013; Sellers, 2010). The attention a legislator pays to a particular issue—their “expressed agenda” (Grimmer, 2009)—allows an audience to be aware of the priorities of their representative and acts as an indicator for the level of attention a representative is
paying to political events and policy. According to Grimmer (2009, p. 2), “legislators employ the resources of their office to portray how they are responding to the priorities and concerns of their constituents (and to distract attention from areas where they appear less responsive)” (emphasis in original; see also Arnold, 1992; Fenno, 1978; Kingdon, 1989; Mayhew, 1974). These agendas are a form of strategic political communication as well, as they often are utilized by representatives in order to control the message surrounding a particular piece of policy and shore up support in the public.

In order to examine the correlation between representatives’ media efforts (in the form of press releases) and the media’s agenda, the analysis now turns to an examination of the topics and terms frequently utilized in both press statements and news reports using topic modeling algorithms. Topic modeling algorithms are statistical methods that analyze the words of original texts in order to discover themes that occur throughout a large corpus of data. Utilizing a topic model allows researchers to draw out the main themes of a text as well as draw connections between themes and show how they change over time (Blei, 2012). Mining texts in this way has grown in interest in areas of literature, education research, as well as in politics (see Quinn et al., 2010; Grimmer, 2009, 2013) primarily because unlike other machine learning and human-based content analysis models, topic modeling does not require any a priori knowledge or annotations in order determine the probabilities of themes, as the topics emerge from the analysis of the original text, allowing researchers to organize and summarize much larger archives of data that would be impossible by human annotation.
Before moving to the results of the topic model analysis, we can first get an idea of what topics and terms were salient in both press releases and news articles by examining the frequency with which certain terms were repeated during the sampled time frame. Figure 16 presents a side-by-side comparison of frequency distribution plots for the top 50 most commonly occurring terms in both congressional press releases and newspaper articles. While the range of terms is diverse, careful examination helps to draw out some conclusions about what topics may eventually become the most salient in the models. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the fact that members of Congress attempted to make health care legislation the most important topic during the 111th congressional term. The term “health” appears most frequently in press statements made by representatives during the time period. In news articles the primary focus of the

![Figure 16. Top 50 Term Frequencies.](image)
agenda seems to be one of localization, as has been previously argued by scholars such as Vinson (2003), Arnold (2004), Larson (1992) and others. Terms associated with localized angles and agenda crop up frequently in the initial frequency plot for newspapers, such as “cities,” “communities,” “district,” and “local” all occur to a high degree in the newspaper dataset, and the term “state” having the greatest frequency out of all terms in the top 50. Whereas multiple terms exist in the data that can be correlated to an agenda focused on localization, only two terms that can be associated with a more national agenda outlook occur with a great enough frequency to enter into the top 50—specifically the terms “nation” and “President.”

Zooming in to the most frequently used terms in both press releases and news articles, we can begin to see some strong correlations between what is salient in statements made to the press by representatives and the stories that are reported as news. In Figure 17, frequency distribution plots are presented for the top 10 most frequent terms in the press release and news article dataset. While press releases tend to utilize language that is more general, based on the data in Figure 17, news stories continue the trend of using a more localized news agenda when writing about members of Congress. There is some overlap between member's press releases and news articles, indicating a degree of correlation does exist in the two datasets. Terms such as “state,” “health,” “bill,” and “house” all occur to a high degree in both text corpora; though these terms are broad and general in their usage. Also interesting, looking at Figures 5.4 is that while both the top 50 and top 10 distribution plots for congressional press releases generally contain terms associated with political rhetoric, partisan labels only become prevalent in the eventual
news stories in the local press. As shown in Figure 17, both the term “democrat” and “republican” occur with a frequency above 20,000, making them the second and third most frequent terms used in sampled news stories, respectively.

Whereas word frequency may provide some indication of what topics may become prevalent in press releases and news articles, one item of interest may be the way that certain terms correlate with one another. In the examination here, it may also be interesting to see whether similar correlations occur across the two datasets included in the sample. The inclusion of particular terms or phrases prevalent in congressional press statements in eventual news stories may provide some evidence that members of Congress are able to strategically manipulate the agenda of the media through the creation of “spin” (Sellers, 2010). Figure 18 presents a table of word frequency plots for some of the terms found to occur greatly within the dataset. One of the most salient topics during the 111th Congressional term was health care, which was a prominent
theme in the Obama campaign during the 2008 election and promised by the incoming presidential administration and congressional party leaders. As the first graph in Figure 18 shows, representatives in Congress utilized a variety of rhetorical tools in order to try to control the media's frame and message to the public about health care. Certain terms—such as “insurance,” “afford,” and “coverage”—were all prevalent and correlated with discussions of health care at approximately 50%. If we examine the word correlations for the term “health” in newspaper articles with those found in press releases, one interesting feature that begins to occur is that while representatives may utilize a myriad of terms to
discuss health care in messages to the press and the public, “spin” of the policy seems to occur when a term correlates with “health” at or above a level of 0.3.

While representatives may work to control the salience of and conversation surrounding certain topics throughout the course of a congressional term, journalists may be better able to control the conversation surrounding more long-term issues. Topics such as taxation are often seen as being static issues in the electorate (Soroka, 2012) and as such representatives may be at a disadvantage in controlling the press with regard to the direction of conversation. For example, during the 2009-2010 term of Congress, shown in Figure 18, members of Congress utilized a variety of rhetoric in discussing the topic of taxation. Representatives primarily used positive terms intended to persuade constituents that they are fighting for an efficient tax system, however there is a strong sense of disassociation from eventual news stories concerning taxes in the local press. Terms such as “income,” “increase,” and “cut” occur frequently in both press releases and news reports. Newspapers are much more likely to discuss issues such as tax “breaks” as well as spending and changes to the tax system. “Change” to taxation has the highest degree of correlation overall, with an association of 0.48.

While the specific term frequencies and word associations provide us with some preliminary evidence of what topics might be significant in press releases during the 2009-2010 congressional term, a more in-depth examination of the language used in press releases will provide a baseline for analyzing topic salience. Table 15 presents the results of the LDA topic model of congressional press releases, which will act as the initial model for examining news articles later on. Each of these topics helps form the
baseline for understanding what issues were most important to members and forms the overall expressed agenda for members of Congress during the 111th congressional term.

Table 15 presents the results of the LDA model, including the 20 most common topics in press releases as well as the most frequent terms for each topic. As the results of the LDA analysis in Table 15 shows, the 20 most common topics of discussion in congressional press releases include specific pieces of legislation such as the Health Care Act and the debate surrounding the bill, as well as more long term issues such as the state of the economy, education, and consumer safety and protection. Also prevalent in press releases were statements focusing on specific types of communication—whether it is
with other political leaders in the form of the issuing of reports and investigations, or rhetoric designed to inform constituents of events and news about district concerns.

Up to this point, the analysis has focused solely on correlation of common terms and the frequency of those terms in both congressional press releases and news articles. The main question of interest here is with what degree of accuracy can we predict the topics and language of a news article utilizing press releases distributed by a member of Congress? In order to answer this question, I generated an LDA topic model that predicts the twenty most common topics in congressional press releases by examining the distribution of words in each document as described in the previous section. Next, I take the predicted topics from the press release LDA, and utilize them to predict the language and topics of news articles in the local press. In this way, the initial LDA acts as a learning model, using the press releases as the initial sample and examining whether the language of press releases can predict the language in news stories. The results of this analysis are shown in the divergence plot in Figure 19. The divergence plot shows the level of deviation that newspapers articles exhibit and the ability of press releases to predict the language and topics of local news stories. Greater levels of divergence indicate that newspapers were better able to write their own stories on a given topic, whereas more constricting and lower levels of divergence provide evidence that journalists were relying more heavily on the rhetoric and language of representatives in order to write their articles. Also, since press releases are unable to perfectly predict the language utilized in news stories, it is important to note the degree to which a topic exhibits outliers, as this is an indication that journalists are inserting their own rhetoric.
Looking more intently at Figure 19, we find that while newspapers exhibit varying degrees of divergence from the rhetoric of representatives, press releases are still able to predict the topics and language of news articles with a strong degree of accuracy. As we can see, it is only in the realm of specific political communications—letters to other agencies and reports to the public about investigations and other proposals—that the news displays a greater degree of divergence from the language of a representative. This is not overly shocking, however. Recall the example of Paul Tonko [D-NY] from Table 12, which presents an example of these types of communications and their usage in news articles. The eventual news story from the Albany Times-Union primarily focused on small pieces of Rep. Tonko's press release as part of a bigger story surrounding a major gas leak in the district. Political communications also exhibits the highest degree
of outliers in the divergence plot, indicating that journalists were more likely to break from the rhetoric of representatives when writing on topics concerning political communications (as is also the case in the article on Paul Tonko in Table 12). Similarly, stories concerning topics such as pork-barrel politics and district projects, as well as constituent communications (such as information about local town hall meetings or a representatives “office hours” in the district) and items concerning education display a greater degree of variation compared to other topics included in the model, as well has a greater degree of outliers when compared to the language in the baseline model.

While certain topics, like the ones described above, lend themselves to providing journalists with some freedom in developing stories about representatives and their work, other topics require more information and thus provide representatives with an opportunity to shape the flow and language of the news via press releases. For example, while the economy is generally viewed as a long-term topic of discussion among citizens, the impact of changes in the economy can be difficult to understand. Representatives are generally called on to act as experts in the realm of economic politics, since legislators are often responsible for the bills and laws that may stimulate economic development. According to the divergence plot in Figure 19, the topic of the economy exhibits the most condensed degree of divergence from congressional press releases. Similarly, congressional press releases were able to efficiently predict the rhetoric and language of news stories centered on topics of legislation currently being discussed in Washington.

While the broad topic of legislation may provide some power to members of Congress to control the language of news stories, more salient legislation may cause representatives to
lose control of the language. News stories concerning the 2009-2010 Health Care debate provided journalists with an opportunity to diverge from the rhetoric of representatives and examine the debate surrounding health care from a variety of angles. While members of Congress were still able to maintain a healthy degree of control over the language being used in such stories, stories centered on health care nonetheless exhibited a greater degree of divergence compared to other piece of legislation in the sample.

Conclusions

Despite changes in the business of news production (Pew Research Center, 2013), constituents often still rely on local news media to keep them updated about the actions of their elected officials. News about representatives is dependent on the interactions that journalists have with a variety of sources, and legislators tend to be viewed as “experts” where the local interests of national events are concerned. This leads news agencies to depend on representatives to provide a localized angle to stories, which journalists can then use to inform the public more fully. Variations in the constraints that limit the ability of journalists to conduct independent investigations in political matters eventually lead them to echo the statements made by legislators, and allow representatives to manipulate the news that is distributed to constituents through local news outlets.

Here, I have focused attention on the ability of members of the House to successfully manipulate the language and topics used by members of the press to describe political events as well as member’s own actions in Washington. Using a unique sample of the press releases of sixty representatives and corresponding news stories from local news outlets, I have shown that there is a significant level of echoing that occurs between
members of Congress and the press, although the level of mirroring is not so high as to conclude that members of the press are mouthpieces for representatives to utilize. Likewise, while common topics included in press releases do have a strong impact on the eventual themes and topics discussed in the news, the level of association between the rhetoric and language used by press operations is not so strong as to argue that journalists are dummies to be used by representatives. The findings here provide evidence that variations in the political characteristics of representatives and the limitations of news agencies have a significant impact on the level of echoing that occurs in the local press, and thus the ability of representatives to manipulate the language used to describe their actions to the electorate.

While the factors examined here provide evidence for the theory that variations in congressional coverage can be explained by the constraints being placed on news agencies and the behavior of representatives in general, future research into the topic still needs to draw out variations that may occur due to more transient factors as well. Factors such as the perceived hostility of a district to its member, the quality and quantity of challengers during an election season, and the amount of pork members bring back to the district may further our understanding of the variation that exists in congressional coverage. Developing a more accurate understanding of the effect of the environment that the media and members of Congress exist within, both politically and structurally with regard to their organizations, will help us better understand how constituents develop opinions about their elected officials, political knowledge, as well as voter turnout and vote choice.
CHAPTER 6
CONGRESSIONAL STRATEGY AND LOCAL MEDIA IMPACT ON CONSTITUENT PERCEPTIONS

It is a long standing issue in the literature of political science that citizen perception, and thus public opinion in the United States, tends to be inconsistent and uncoordinated. According to scholars who examine individual level data, high quality opinions must be stable over time and informed by not only present events but also by some abstract idea or value such as liberalism or conservatism (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Studies in opinion formation and opinion stability conducted since the 1950s have shown for the most part that such high-quality opinions are not held by the majority of the electorate in the United States, many of whom form opinions utilizing simple heuristics or “off the top of the head” opinion techniques (Campbell et al., 1960; Jacoby, 1995; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Zaller, 1992). And while political opinions do show signs of consistency when aggregated over time (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Erikson, Mackuen, & Stimson, 2002; Page & Shapiro, 1992), the knowledge level of most Americans is still believed to be subpar and determined primarily based on socioeconomic factors and concerns (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Neuman, 1986).

Understanding the determinants of political perceptions has important implications for representative government. Althaus (2003) notes that the uneven distribution of political knowledge tends to bias collective opinion formation, and thus can impact the way that collective bodies view their representatives personally. Many of
the major studies on public opinion take for granted the role of the mass media in shaping and maintaining the electorate’s perceptions of government. To this end, Prior (2007) notes that methodological and conceptual shifts in political science have been valuable in overcoming the prevailing wisdom of the “marginal effects” of the media. There remain questions about the impact of changes in the media environment and their effects on opinion formation and stability. Fluctuations due to the advancement of media technology have raised further doubts from those who believe that the increased ability to filter out undesirable information will decrease the electorate’s ability to communicate with one another (Mutz, 2006) and lead to the generation of knowledge gaps in the electorate (Prior, 2005). According to Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen (2006), exposure to media topics does significantly increase an individual’s level of political knowledge, even while controlling for more commonly accepted factors associated with knowledge such as education and income level. If knowledge is linked with perception, how successful are the media at affecting the formation and stability of opinions in the electorate?

In this chapter, I shift away from the news-making process and focus on examining the impact the media has on opinion formation about members of Congress. Previously, I have shown that representatives in Congress have limited success in controlling stories printed about their work. Determinants of legislative success at controlling the local news environment are based on such factors as timing and the amount of material provided to journalists to work with (in the form of press statements). Legislators also have some success at guiding the language and frame of news stories by focusing on topics that the media can fold into easily accessible narratives for news
consumers. Here, I focus on what legislators hope is the final outcome of their efforts, the successful transfer of a positive public profile through the media to the public. I argue that members of Congress, through their focus on developing relationships and working with journalists in their local communities, have been able to affect the perception of the public in order to maintain a positive perception even while battling the negative institutional perception of Congress as a whole. Utilizing the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere, 2012), I examine the strength of congressional media strategies and news reporting to alter the perception of the public and their opinion of individual members of Congress. I believe that individuals who do not use local media outlets on a regular basis will likely have lower opinions of members and their work in Washington when compared to individuals with higher levels of media exposure. Respondents who report utilizing local media outlets—specifically local newspapers both in print or online—will likely have a higher opinion of representatives and also view their representative as having positive character traits.

The rest of the chapter will break down as follows. In the next section, I begin by focusing on the theory of priming and the use of media to draw attention to particular viewpoints and events in order to shape public opinion about individual members of Congress in their home districts. By examining the ways that the actions of representatives are translated into stories for public consumption, one can begin to understand how members of Congress utilize the resources available to them in order to control constituent opinion and strengthen their ability to remain in office. Next, utilizing the CCES, I begin focusing on the theoretical expectations of the models first by
describing the data and modeling procedures used, and second by examining the
differences in media use by individuals in the United States, and how different forms of
media affect opinion formation prior to the inclusion of other variables. Afterwards, I
begin the analysis by examining the impact of the media and district characteristics on
level of approval reported by constituents. What the analysis shows is that, while the
particular media efforts of representatives do not have a direct impact on constituents,
regular use of newspapers as a source of political information does have a positive impact
on the approval of constituents.

**Priming, Memory, and Perceptions of the Public**

In order to influence the public, journalists, editors, news agencies, and political
actors all strive to frame events and behaviors in a way that individuals can understand,
accept, and internalize as the truth about the world in which they live. Frames, as noted
in chapter five, select certain aspects of reality and make them salient in communicative
texts (Entman, 1993). Frames allow actors to highlight certain aspects of reality while
marginalizing others when communicating with the public, and help actors promote a
particular context for others to use when thinking about a subject. This allows those in
control of a narrative the ability to manipulate the reality of a situation in order to
promote those alternatives that are within their own interests. For example, it is
commonly argued that partisan media tend to frame politics as a political “battle” in
which cooperation is not only impossible but also unwanted, due to the “extreme” nature
of the opposing party’s position. By using particular language and emphasizing the
inability of political parties to find compromise, media outlets *frame* the news as a war

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between opposing sides. This gives frame-makers the ability to set the political agenda by focusing on particular events—such as breakdowns in negotiations or extreme language from the opposing party in the above example—and also influences the way individuals talk about political events, an ability referred to in the literature as *priming*.

At its most basic level, the concept of priming refers to “changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1989, p. 63). Priming is considered to be an extension of the agenda-setting function of the media, since both theories are based on memory-based models of human information processing and are derived from common theoretical foundations in political psychology (Iyengar & Kinder, 1989; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). According to Tversky and Kahneman (1974, p. 203), “priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and government.” Priming is the effect of a frame, and it is the outcome that news-makers and political actors attempt to influence through the provision of certain narratives. Going back to the partisan media example used previously, priming would be the end result caused by the effect of a frame on a news audience. Successful priming by the media would cause the news audience to evaluate politics as a series of “battles” leading audiences to evaluate political leaders and actors primarily through the lens of “winners” and “losers,” which plays into the previously established “war” frame and can be vital to remaining in office from election to election.

At the heart of priming effects is the understanding of how individuals absorb and process information that they are subjected to through various outlets. Research on
human cognition often grounds itself by noting the limitations of human information processing. Simon (1979, p. 3) states that, “human thinking powers are very modest when compared to the complexities of the environment in which human beings live. Faced with complexities and uncertainty, lacking the wits to optimize, they must be content to satisfice—to find ‘good enough’ solutions to their problems and ‘good enough’ courses of action” (see also Iyengar & Kinder, 1989). Research on the news-making process has already shown that the media attempts to mitigate issues with human cognition through the editorial and gatekeeping process (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2003, 2006, 2012). Once pertinent information reaches an audience, however, the information must be absorbed and stored in memory for priming to occur. Perspectives on information processing generally fall into two contrasting models—referred to as the memory-based and on-line processing models. Memory-based models assert that individuals form opinions at the time of judgment based on the retrieval of relevant information from long-term memory (Lodge, Steenbergen & Brau, 2001; Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). The most well-known development of memory-based models, Zaller’s (1992) “RAS” model of mass opinion formation, argues that since individuals generally hold weak opinions about matters of politics, often times evaluations will come “off the top of the head” based on the most recent, relevant information. Chong and Druckman (2010) note that such evaluations may not be caused only by low interest or knowledge of politics, but could also be due to information decay, which occurs as new information usurps older information in an individual’s memory.
In contrast to memory-based models, on-line processing models assume that individuals’ attitudes form in real-time by updating a “running tally” as new information is encountered (Lodge et al., 1989; McGraw et al., 1990). According to Lodge and Stroh (1993) and Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau, (2001), when individuals form an impression about an object (such as a political actor, institution, or policy) they act as “bounded rationalists” and simplify the judgment process by activating and recalling predetermined, relevant political conclusions from memory. These conclusions are then evaluated based on the new information received, allowing recipients to actively update the “running tally” of opinion in their head. This tally is then “immediately stored in long-term memory and the considerations that contributed to the evaluation are quickly forgotten” (Lodge, Steenbergen & Brau, 2001, p. 312). Based on models positing rational behavior by voters, in on-line memory processing individuals are believed to have preferences that are updated upon the receipt of new information, and should act in predictable ways when encountering positive or negative information. In practice, such forms of rational calculations are not believed to be feasible by voters, however. Recent research has shown that factors such as emotion and its connection to reasoning have a significant and valuable impact on how voters process information (Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009; Damasio, 1999; Lodge & Taber, 2000; 2005; Redlawsk, 2002; Redlawsk et al., 2010).

Because of issues brought on by emotion and affective reasoning, political psychologists have argued that rather than deciding based on bounded rationality or through recent memory and “top of the head” judgments, voters follow a process of
motivated reasoning when evaluating politics and political actors. The core argument of motivated reasoning is that people are inclined to selectively process information in order to come to conclusions that are congenial to their prior beliefs (Fischle, 2000; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Redlawsk, 2002). According to Redlawsk et al. (2010), when presented with new information, motivated reasoners should weight their evaluation based on their pre-conceived conception of a given subject. Thus, individuals will, “ignore significant amounts of negative information about positively evaluated candidates” (Redlawsk et al., 2010, p. 564). Far from being static in their opinions, individuals do still “flag” positive opinions in the presence of new, negative information and after a certain point begin acting as rational updaters after reaching a “tipping point” of negative information (Redlawsk et al., 2010).

While methods of information processing do not discount the impact of the media, many of these studies focus specifically on the context of campaigns for the presidency and specifically on the selection and support for candidates in U.S. elections. Chong and Druckman (2010) note that public opinion may be more dynamic in nature, and focusing on a specific choice—such as in an election—may not provide the entire story of what affects the public’s perception. Knowing that individuals often hold contradictory opinions of Congress depending on their frame of reference, what can we expect citizens to utilize when they make evaluations about members and their behaviors? How does media use help frame the opinion of a representative, and how willing are individuals to attribute certain positive opinions to representatives depending on media use?
Impact of Media on the Public’s Opinion of Congress and its Members

In previous chapters, I have focused attention on the ways in which members of Congress and local media outlets shape and frame stories for public consumption. Previous research has shown that representatives act outside of their official capacities by allocating resources to media operations in order to bolster support for their work with constituents in the district (Clark & Evans, 1983; Gershon, 2012; Grimmer, 2013; Grimmer, Messing & Westwood, 2012; Kahn & Kenney, 1999, 2002; Lipinski, 2001). These efforts are pointless to representatives if potential voters do not accept such narratives as truths and store them in memory as positive opinions. Research on public opinion of representatives in Congress has shown that legislators’ unique homestyles (Fenno, 1978; Grimmer, 2009) and the amount of personal legislation a member involves themselves in through casework and pork (Dropp & Peskowitz, 2012; Grimmer, Messing & Westwood, 2012; Johannes, 1983; Parker & Goodman, 2009; Romero, 2006; Stratmann, 2013; Yiannakis, 1981) can be instrumental in affecting the views and opinions of the public.

Here I focus on the power of the media to impact voter perceptions. As discussed in Chapter 2, successful representation by a political agent, such as a member of Congress, is contingent upon whether a group of citizens believes a representative to be a part of their in group; that is, that a representative shares their interests and opinions or some other common characteristic. Representatives allocate resources to various activities in order to show constituents that they, as legislators, are part of this in group in order to gain the approval of constituents and cultivate a personal vote in the next
election (Fenno, 1978; Grant & Rudolph, 2004; Griffin & Flavin, 2011). One such activity that members of Congress allocate time and resources toward is the development of a relationship with media outlets in order to influence the narrative about their work in Washington (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). According to recent studies, political candidates with personal characteristics that make them appear more attractive and capable are more likely to receive voter support during elections (Banducci et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2009; King & Leigh, 2009; Lawson et al., 2010; Lenz & Lawson, 2011).

Capability to represent is not only based on physical qualities, but on how candidates frame themselves personally and how well audiences accept such frames. It has previously been shown that such efforts by representatives can assist in improving the tone of media reports, depending on the level of attention the media is paying to a representative and their work. Such efforts, therefore, should also have an impact in strengthening the evaluations of constituents as well.

The basic premise for understanding public evaluations of Congress and its members conforms to the simple reward-punishment model of accountability (Grant & Randolf, 2004; Kimball, 2005; Kimball & Patterson, 1997; Ramirez, 2009). Citizens have an interest in seeing government function in a way that conforms to their desires—whether that is the simple idea of a stable and healthy economy or the enacting of specific social policies or a partisan agenda. When their interests are fulfilled, citizens reward public officials through reelection or increased public support. When government “fails” its citizens by not meeting their expectations, public officials are punished either by losing their elections or decreased public support. There is a consensus in the literature
that the public largely disapproves of partisan conflicts and rhetoric in Congress (Cooper, 1999; Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Ramirez, 2009), although it is unclear whether citizens attribute such behaviors to their own representatives or to “others”—legislators that do not represent them. Recent work by Ramirez (2009) also calls into question whether partisan conflict is a detriment to long term evaluations of Congress, as some previous studies have suggested. Lipinski (2001, 2004; see also Lipinski, Bianco & Work, 2003) notes also that attempts by members to distance themselves from the institution in order to avoid the “partisan bickering” of Congress may not be as successful as previously believed. While congressional communications strategies attempt to downplay some partisan rhetoric in order to seem representative of increasingly larger, more heterogeneous districts, members of Congress do not “run against Congress” as often as once believed (Lipinski, Bianco & Work, 2003).

As previous chapters have shown, the level of attention paid to individual members is based primarily on local news institutions, since national news outlets tend to focus on Congress as an institution and party leaders (Cook, 1989, 2005; Gershon, 2012; Sellers, 2010). It is reasonable to accept, therefore, that the level of attention an individual pays to the local media should affect their understanding and perception of individual members of Congress and their work in the legislature. Decades of media studies have consistently reaffirmed the belief that the media does not tell the public what to think, only what to think about (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Gans, 1979; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Zaller, 1992,
The inefficiency of the media environment causes most individuals to satisfice when searching for political information, resulting in what is often called “by-product learning” by scholars (see Baum, 2003; Downs, 1957; Prior, 2007). By-product learning implies also that the reactions that individuals may have concerning politics and political actors will be the result of the media environment available to them. Some media sources may have an advantage in improving the level of support a representative receives, however. In particular, television has often been argued to be more influential in affecting and changing political opinion, although this finding has been questionable in empirical examinations.

**Data and Method**

In order to examine fluctuations in opinion about Congress brought on by media use and other traditional factors, the empirical analysis here utilizes the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere, 2012). The CCES is a comprehensive survey of the American populace conducted through YouGov/Polimetrix with over 50,000 respondents nationwide. It is highly beneficial for the analysis presented here since the study can be broken down to congressional districts. Using congressional districts, I subset the full sample into a subset based on the previously selected 108 congressional districts used in prior chapters in order to draw parallels with conclusions from previous chapters. Overall, the sampled subset includes just over 14,000

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34 Prior (2007) notes that there exist two types of media environment—an “immediate” media environment and a “standing” media environment—that impact citizens’ perceptions. According to Prior (2007, p. 10f8), “the standing media environment refers only to the media that are *routinely* available to a person.” The immediate media environment, on the other hand, is the sphere of media access available to a person overall, the distinction being that the immediate environment is a “potential” sphere of influence, whereas the standing media environment is an active sphere of influence.
respondents. Overall the sample is well balanced, with just over 50% of the respondents being female and 40.9% Republican respondents. The primary outcome variable of interest here is the strength of opinion that constituents have about their member of the House of Representatives, and how much sway media outlets have over that opinion.

Respondents were asked to rank their approval of their congressional representative using the following question as part of the pre-election interview of the CCES: “Please indicate whether you approve or disapprove of the job that [insert current House member’s name] is doing” (Ansolabehere, 2012). The responses were coded with values ranging from $-2$ to $+2$, with negative opinions corresponding to a negative indicator ($-2$ for Strongly Disapprove, $-1$ for Disapprove), 0 acting as a baseline for individuals whom answered “Not Sure” during the interview.

In order to account for variation that occurs from the fact that individual respondents are within different districts in different states, the analysis here utilizes a multilevel modeling strategy in order to account for the impact of district level factors. Multilevel modeling allows researchers to study variations that occur by groups (Gelman & Hill, 2009) and has previously been used to examine the impact of educational factors (such as schools, policy and forms of testing) on student learning (Doyle, Delaney & Naughton, 2009; Hansen & Gonzalez, 2014; Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986) and district variation in presidential election outcomes (Gelman, 2009; Gelman et al., 2007). Here, the analysis includes indicators for each of the 108 congressional districts used in previous chapters. Approval is modeled utilizing a varying-slopes model that allows for a differentiation in the slope of each district while maintaining a static intercept in the
model. Second level indicators (specifically district and representative level characteristics) are clustered based on a unique district code for each sampled area.

The various indicators believed to affect an individual’s opinion of their representative are broken down into three categories based on media use, attributes and characteristics of a district representative, and respondent characteristics. Beginning with media use, since the analysis up to this point has relied on the success of legislators with newspaper journalists, the analysis here includes a dichotomous variable is included for whether a respondent had read a newspaper in the past 24 hours. For local coverage of politics, newspapers tend to be the first source of information used by individuals to keep up-to-date about what their representatives are doing in Washington (PEW Research Center, 2011). Newspapers will be the focal medium in this analysis for two reasons. First, while there is a rising interest in the literature and the popular media with the role of new information technologies such as blogging and their impact on politics, most political blogs tend to focus on national politics. Although the voices may be different, therefore, the themes of discussion tend to be the same, with most political blogs focusing on national issues and policy, as well as major political leaders. Second, there tends to be a great deal of overlap between featured stories in newspapers and eventual television newscasts. While media-industry studies have found that television still holds powerful sway over peoples’ opinions, newspapers are often found to be more successful at engaging individuals and producing stronger opinions from consumers (Arnold, 2004; Vinson, 2003). In order to account for the attraction of television as a news medium, I also include here a dichotomous variable for whether a respondent watched television
news in the past 24 hours. Finally, while use of media is the main interest for the analysis here, interest in the news is also of some import, since interest can be influential in driving opinion and political knowledge (Prior, 2007). A variable for news interest is included in the results below in order to capture the variation in political interest from a mediated perspective, and both media variables are interacted with the interest factor in order to understand how these indicators work in tandem to drive the opinions of individuals about their representative.

Finally, it may be the case that the amount of attention—either positive or negative—a news agency gives to an individual representative will have an impact on constituents’ perception and thus affect their opinion of a legislator. In order to account for this, the analysis includes the frequency of positive and negative stories run in newspapers. As stated in the previous section, positive and negative information should be evaluated differently by individuals depending on their previous perception. Both positive and negative information should therefore be evaluated based on their ability to cause a “tipping point” in public opinion, whereby constituents will maintain their preconceived beliefs about a representative until enough information has been given for them to change their opinion. In this case, I argue that negative information in the form of negative stories in newspapers, should have a stronger impact compared to positive information when evaluating a respondent’s opinion of a legislator, as previous research has often shown that voters value negative information more strongly than positive information (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999). As such, the model also includes an interaction term for newspaper readership with the number of negative stories, the belief
being that individuals who read the newspaper regularly and are exposed to more negative stories should have a more negative opinion of their representative compared to others. While positive information should result in an increase in the positive opinion of a representative, it may be the case that other factors mitigate the strength of positive publicity in the news. In order to strengthen the likelihood that positive media portrayals affect public opinion, members of Congress also seek out the endorsement of news agencies during elections as well. A dichotomous indicator of whether a newspaper endorsed a specific member of Congress during the 2010 election is therefore included in the analysis in order to see if such endorsements can act as a separate and powerful tipping point for members when attempting to influence public opinion.

Following from previous chapters, the analysis here also includes second level variables for the unique characteristics of representatives and the work that representatives do in order to affect public opinion, either directly or indirectly. Directly, representatives are believed to affect public opinion utilizing their own personal forms of homestyle while also taking into account their use of political media. The concept of homestyle (Fenno, 1978) argues that members of Congress cultivate a personal vote with constituents through personal communication techniques; more specifically through the use of personal contact with constituents in the district. While such contact is generally through moderate to large scale events such as town hall meetings or public functions, it is generally believed that by connecting on a one-on-one level with constituents via in person contact, representatives can strengthen the overall opinion of constituents generally, while decreasing negative opinions and increasing positive opinions.
specifically. As such, a dichotomous variable for whether a respondent had contact with their representative in person is included in the analysis to test whether such activities mitigate or marginalize the use of news media by constituents. Indirectly, members of Congress attempt to affect the media by distributing press releases throughout the year, in an attempt to cultivate a stronger, more positive opinion of their work with the public. As previous chapters have shown, the frequency of press releases has a marked effect on the tone and frequency of news stories in a given year. It may also be the case that as the frequency of press releases goes up, members may be able to affect the opinion of the public indirectly as well. In order to account for this, therefore, the frequency of press releases a member distributed during 2010 is included in the analysis in order to account for this indirect affect.

Along with these factors, and following the findings in previous chapters, it is believed that specific characteristics such as being a member of the minority party in Congress, number of terms in office, number of bills sponsored, and ideological extremity of a representative may affect the opinion of the public when evaluating their representative. Members of the minority party in Congress often distance themselves from unsuccessful or polarizing legislation, placing the blame for such bills and laws on the shoulders of the majority party in order to avoid being associated with such legislation in the eyes of their constituents. Members of the minority, therefore, should enjoy more positive public opinion within their district, as they can more easily emphasize appropriations for the district and claim credit for the defeat of unpopular or polarizing bills in the legislature. Terms in office is often used as a baseline for the level
of entrenchment a representative has in their district, and therefore may affect the opinion of constituents as well. It is believed here that as a representative becomes more established in Congress, the more positive opinions of their work will become. Likewise, it may be the case that the number of bills sponsored will increase the level of support from individual constituents, as this is the easiest indicator that legislators are working for their district in Washington. While bill sponsorship is a noisy indicator for legislative success, it does show constituents that members are attempting to “do their job” in Washington, and can be utilized during elections as an indicator that a representative has been working hard for the public.

Unlike the previous representative characteristics, the ideological extremity of a legislator, as measured by the *DW-NOMINATE* scores (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997, 2007), are believed to decrease the overall approval of a representative with the public. While it seems contradictory to assume that in an environment in which both politics and the media tend to be more polarized than ever before that moderate representatives should have greater levels of approval in the public than their more extreme colleagues, I argue here that as ideological extremism goes up, approval of the representative should decrease. It is generally regarded in the literature on representation that constituents value moderate political views more highly than extreme views, and oftentimes during campaigns, opponents will attempt to characterize their opponents as being “too extreme” in order to dissuade potential voters. U.S. political values, likewise, tend to rank moderation as being a key feature in the idealized concept of a representative. Representatives with more moderate views, likewise, tend not to be the focus of
sensationalized news reporting, and therefore can avoid much of the negative attention brought on by making ideologically extreme arguments in the press.

Lastly, opinion strength is measured with indicators corresponding with the various factors that make up the socioeconomic status of individuals, in order to account for variations in opinion due to characteristics such as age, gender and race as well as education and income. Factors such as age, income, and education are often shown to lead to stronger and more refined opinions from the mass public, as these variables generally lead to greater interest in government and its operation (Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al, 2008; Verba & Nie, 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Zaller, 1992). The inclusion of these variables act as controls on the media effects hypothesis. The general expectation is that as these indicators increase, the necessity of the media as a political resource when forming an opinion should become non-significant. Along with this, a dichotomous variable for whether a respondent identifies as a Republican,35 is female, and is black are included in the analysis to examine whether such variation leads to lower levels of congressional approval. While there is no theoretical expectation that variations due to gender or race should strongly impact congressional opinion in the general sense, including such controls will allow the analysis to examine whether such variations impact the necessity of the media in the model.

Finally, the literature on congressional opinion has frequently shown that there is a disconnect between the opinion of Congress as an institution and opinions concerning individual members in their districts. While there has been some support to show that the

35 The use of a dichotomous variable indicating whether a respondent is Republican is used here in order to be consistent with the fact that Republicans were in the minority in the House during the time frame under study.
legislature-legislator dichotomy is mainly a factor of cognitive sophistication (Born, 1990), recent studies have shown that citizens with higher knowledge levels about the institution tend to show greater amounts of displeasure with Congress than citizens with lower cognitive sophistication (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2002; Mondak et al., 2007). In order to control for congressional opinion when evaluating a specific legislator, therefore, the self-reported level of institutional approval of Congress is included here as an independent variable to control for what Lipinski (2001) calls the “shared fate of Congress and its members.” It is believed that stronger congressional approval overall should strengthen the opinion of specific representatives, and following Lipinski (2001) that the timbre of opinion of the institution should affect the timbre of representative opinion as well.

**A Multi-Level Model of Media Effects**

Table 16 provides the results for three additive models examining the effects of the various indicators on the approval level of members of Congress. The models are broken down sequentially, allowing us to examine first a simple model of media effects on the approval of constituents, then including characteristics of the representative that may affect approval, and finally a full model that includes media, representative-level, and constituent-level effects all in one. Overall each of the models performs well, with chi-squared tests of the likelihood ratio being significant well over the 0.05 threshold.

Beginning first with the simple media effects model, the standout result shown in Table 16 is that of all the indicators of media strength included in the model, only respondents who regularly read the newspaper are shown to have a significant, positive
Table 16

*Hierarchical Linear Model of Representative Approval*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Media Effects</th>
<th>Model 2 Rep. Effects</th>
<th>Model 3 Full Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reader</td>
<td>0.113***</td>
<td>0.181****</td>
<td>0.156***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Viewer</td>
<td>-0.055*</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Interest</td>
<td>-0.038**</td>
<td>-0.074****</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. Positive Stories</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. Negative Stories</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorsement</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.063)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reader*</td>
<td>-0.003**</td>
<td>-0.004**</td>
<td>-0.004**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. Negative Stories</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Attributes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep. Contact (in person)</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. Rep. Press Releases</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party (Rep.)</td>
<td>0.374****</td>
<td>0.349****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms in Office</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Sponsorship</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0004)</td>
<td>(0.0004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Extremity (Rep.)</td>
<td>-0.169*</td>
<td>-0.168**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.083)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (Rep.)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituent Attributes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican (Respondent)</td>
<td>-0.238***</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (Respondent)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.083**</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>(0.063)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

212
Table 16—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Media Effects</th>
<th>Model 2 Rep. Effects</th>
<th>Model 3 Full Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.037***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.359**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Approval</td>
<td>0.220****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.217***</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>-0.359**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.080)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Variation (Intercept)</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.253)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>13,654</td>
<td>8,399</td>
<td>7,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-23991.390</td>
<td>-15178.830</td>
<td>-12907.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>48000.780</td>
<td>30389.670</td>
<td>25861.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>48068.470</td>
<td>30502.240</td>
<td>26020.170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ****p<.001; ***p < .01; **p < .05; * p <.10

effect. According to the results of the first model in Table 16, regularly reading the news increases the approval level of your legislator by 0.113 points. Graphically, newspaper readers range from weakly to strongly positive in their approval of representatives, and there is some indication that reading newspapers may have its strongest advantage in transforming non-opinion holders into positive opinion holders in the district. In contrast, regularly receiving news information from television is shown to have a weakly significant and negative effect on constituent approval of their representative. It is most likely the case that, due to the restrictions of television news segments as well as the more passive information environment, television viewing causes most individuals to simply reaffirm their previously held beliefs and perceptions of their representative. While watching the news on television is only weakly significant (p<0.10), the television news viewing still decreasing the approval rating of representatives by −0.055 points holding other values constant.
While the mode of news gathering used by individuals is significant to their level of opinion, an individual’s interest in the news more generally also has a strong effect on their resulting approval. News interest is found to have a significant and negative effect on the approval of representatives. This is unsurprising, as interest in the news generally should cause individuals to develop a more critical viewpoint of politics and the work of their representatives in Washington, resulting in a slightly more negative view than the casual observer. According to the results of the first model, as an individual’s general interest in the news increases, their level of approval for their member of the House decreases by $-0.038$ points. Finally, following the previous argument that there is perhaps a political “tipping point” for representative approval, the findings in the first model show that while positive and negative news stories do not have a significant effect on the approval of representatives on their own, negative stories do have a negative effect on approval when interacted with regular newspaper reading. An increase in the frequency of negative stories is found to decrease a representative’s approval by regular newspaper readers by $-0.003$ according to the results in Table 16. While this finding is smaller than others in the first model, it does indicate that, over time as negative stories accumulate, constituents may reevaluate their perceptions of representatives as a whole. This effect should push representatives, therefore, to try and dissuade news agencies from running negative stories in an attempt to maintain a positive perception with the public.

Moving now to the second model, it is noteworthy first that while reading newspapers still has the expected positive and significant effect, viewing the news on
television is the only indicator to go from significant to non-significant with the addition of representative characteristics. Each of the previously discussed media effects maintains similar directional effects on congressional opinion, but the magnitudes of each indicator’s effects are increased. The act of regularly reading newspapers jumps from increasing the level of congressional approval by 0.113 points in the first model to 0.181 points in the second model. As seen in Figure 21, this effect shifts the impact of reading newspapers toward a more strongly positive result compared to Figure 20. Both news interest and the frequency of negative stories in newspapers also maintained negative effects on congressional approval, with an increase in news interest decreasing the level of congressional approval reported by a constituent by −0.074 points. Increasing the number of negative news stories in the local press also decreased the strength of congressional approval for respondents who regularly read the newspaper by −0.004
points, indicating that like the simple media effects model, the frequency of negative information may cause a slow reevaluation of constituent perceptions over time.

Figure 21. Fitted Values for Representative Effects Model.

Of the indicators included to examine the way that the characteristics of a representative and the tactics used to increase constituent approval, perhaps the most surprising finding in model 2 is that contrary to theories espousing that personal contact with a representative is vital to developing a “personal vote” with constituents, meeting in person with a legislator does not have a significant effect on congressional approval in the tested model. While contact with a representative does have the assumed positive direction, the t-value for this variable falls short of statistical significance. Less surprising is the finding that the frequency of press releases is insignificant as well in the second model. As previously stated, since press releases are generally written for consumption by journalists rather than constituents, the likelihood that such tactics would
have a direct effect on congressional approval was not strong once other variables are controlled for, though there was reason to believe there may have been a marginal effect on approval.

Of the representative characteristics that have the strongest impact on the approval of constituents in the district, the findings in model 2 show that being a member of the minority party in Congress has a significant and positive effect on congressional approval. Members of the minority should be able to increase their approval in the district by focusing more attention on the successes that they bring to the district via appropriations requests and case work done in the district, rather than pointing to national policy, which is commonly dictated and controlled by the majority party (Cox & McCubbins, 1993, 2005). As Figure 21 shows, being a member of the minority party strongly increases the level of congressional approval an individual constituent reports, which can be beneficial in election years, as it has the ability to strengthen the incumbency advantage of current members of Congress. Overall, members of the minority received an increase of 0.374 points in support compared to members of the majority party. This increase is helped slightly by the frequency at which a representative sponsors legislation, which increases the level of support by 0.001 points. It is reasonable to assume that, similar to the effect of negative news stories, as members work more for the people by sponsoring legislation, congressional approval should increase as well. In contrast to these positive effects, the results of the analysis in Model 2 show that as members become more ideologically extreme, the level of congressional approval reported by members of the public declines. As Figure 21 shows, an increase in
the ideological extremity of a representative has the effect of decreasing the approval of constituents by \(-0.169\) points. While this result is only weakly significant compared to others in the model, it is interesting to find that in a political environment that is frequently believed to be more polarized and ideological, constituents still value moderation in their legislators more than extreme ideological thinking.

Moving finally to the full model, the results of the analysis in Table 16 shows that the addition of constituent level indicators to the model results in critical changes to the way we interpret what drives congressional approval. While some indicators (such as the frequency of negative stories read by regular newspaper readers, being a member of the minority party, and ideological extremity) remain relatively static in the magnitude of their effect, certain factors previously significant to congressional approval have dropped out of significance entirely. Specifically, interest in the news is no longer significant at even the weakest level. Most important to the analysis here is that despite decreasing in the strength of its significance, regularly reading the newspaper still maintains a significant and positive impact on the reported level of congressional approval in the model. As Figure 22 shows, overall the effect of reading the news is significant and positive, consistent with previous expectations. On the whole, regularly reading the news increases the level of congressional approval by a respondent by 0.156 points. Also important to note is that if a newspaper increases the number of negative stories it runs about a member of Congress, regular newspaper readers will begin to reevaluate their opinion based on new, negative information. The results here show that regular
newspaper readers, when exposed to an increase in the number of negative stories about their representative, will decrease their level of support by $-0.004$ per negative story.

Figure 22. Fitted Values for Full Model.

Looking at the constituent characteristics included in the model, the findings in Model 3 largely follow expectations of previous work done on political behavior and opinion. Age, education, and institutional approval of the Congress all have significant and positive effects on the approval of representatives in the legislature. Likewise, female respondents had a more positive approval of their representative than their male counterparts, with the representative approval of females being 0.083 points higher than males. The “shared fate of Congress and its members” (Lipinski, 2001) likewise was prevalent and significant. As the approval of Congress as an institution increased, representative approval increased by 0.220 points overall. Finally, the only indicator found to have a significantly negative impact on representative approval was whether a
respondent identified as a Republican. Identifying as a Republican had the effect of decreasing representative approval by $-0.238$ points overall. This result is likely the product of the House of Representatives being controlled by Democrats during the sampled time frame, which could have led constituents from the other party to decreasing their level of support.

Conclusions

In order to influence the public's perception, members of Congress rely on a myriad of communicative tools designed to convince the mass public of a representative's "closeness" to the district. The communicative concept of *homestyle*, the way members, "cultivate their constituencies" (Fenno, 1978, p. 32), generally relies on personal communication and personal contact in order to influence perception and the eventual vote of a district. Personal contact can only go so far, however, as it is impossible for members to remain in constant communication with their constituents on a daily basis (Schaffner & Sellers, 2006). Increasingly, individuals have been gathering their information and forming opinions about political actors utilizing the mass media (Graber, 2010), and local news agencies have been the primary source of information about how local leaders—including members of Congress—are making decisions and behaving in Washington.

As an extension of their ability to sway the public’s agenda, the mass media helps to prime constituents’ thinking about their representatives in Congress, and whether an individual member deserves their support. Due to the limitations in human cognition and information processing, individuals turn to other sources—such as the media—to inform
them what matters are particularly salient at any given time. Depending on how the media frames particular actors and events, constituents may shift their opinions of a representative if they regularly utilize certain media over others. Individuals are motivated reasoners with regard to political news, often selectively processing information so that their conclusions are consistent with prior beliefs (Fischle, 2000; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Redlawsk, 2002). After enough information contrary to previous views has been transmitted, individuals will reach a “tipping point” wherein their opinion changes regarding a particular issue or political actor (Redlawsk et al., 2010). While the results here are unable to pinpoint the exact moment of the tipping point, they do provide evidence that the media can assist in changing congressional approval by providing information to constituents. Representatives strive to maintain a positive view with the public, and regularly attempt to reach such a tipping point with undecided constituents in order to remain in office. The media can be a powerful tool for representatives in these situations, as the media often is utilized in framing the debate surrounding a particular issue, event or person.

While representatives may have some advantages in influencing the media’s agenda (Cook, 1989, 2005; Gershon, 2012), the end result of the representative/journalist relationship on individual opinion has been unclear to this point. The primary objective of a representative's media efforts is to influence not only journalists into writing stories, but also to indirectly influence the public’s perception of their work in Washington. Previous chapters have already shown that members do have some influence in shaping the tone, frequency, and topics of news articles, although to this point the question of how
this success translates into changing and strengthening the positive public opinion of a representative has been unanswered. In this chapter, I have shown that the media does have some success in influencing the opinion of constituents regarding their specific member of Congress. Newspapers are especially strong at influencing public opinion in a positive direction, even when controlling for more common indicators that impact public opinion. Interestingly, meeting directly with a member of Congress, an indicator of more traditional *homestyle* efforts, does not have a significant effect when controlling for a respondent's use of media. These findings add to the results in previous chapters, providing some evidence that a representative's use of the media has a resounding impact on the way they are viewed in their districts. In the next chapter, the findings will be examined in conjunction with each other in order to provide some conclusions regarding the strength and success of a representative’s *mediated homestyle* and how such strategies influence individuals' views of representatives and representation as a concept.
CHAPTER 7

MEDIATED HOMESTYLE

At the outset of this dissertation, I argued that members of Congress often are stuck attempting to please two distinct and separate audiences: the news media and their constituents. Legislators, as representatives of the people, should desire to transform the wishes of their constituents into viable legislation and, eventually, laws. The majority of the law making process does not make for tantalizing news stories. News making standards in the United States tend to push journalists to focus on the controversial and conflictual nature of the law making process, in order to attract consumer attention (Edelman, 1995; Hamilton, 2004). As constituents, these same consumers want to see that their representative is acting in their interest, working diligently and quietly and not being bogged down in partisan conflicts. The main purpose for a representative's press office, therefore, is to ensure that the news revolving around a legislator's actions and behaviors remains positive, despite the growing negativity in reporting on Congress as an institution (Hibbing, 2002; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2002; Malecha & Reagan, 2012; Mann & Ornstein, 1994; Soroka, 2012). Since the increase in the importance of congressional press operations starting in the mid-1960s (Born, 1982; Dunn, 1968), representatives have begun to translate their unique homestyle into media-based forms of communication in order to protect their image with the public.
Whether it is at the national or local level, news about Congress does not occur without some kind of interaction between representatives and journalists. Both groups have particular goals when interacting with one another (Cook, 1989; 2005; Fenno, 1978; Gans 2003; Hamilton 2004; Mayhew, 1974; Sparrow, 1999), and must act strategically in order to achieve those goals (Fogarty, 2009). The media is considered to be a strategic actor because it has the ability to shape and control the flow and frame of news stories that go out to the general public, and therefore can also control the way in which individuals perceive their government and representatives. Journalists have several advantages when shaping news flow. First, journalists have the ability to shape the way individuals think about news stories by controlling which stories enter the public’s eye; this ability is referred to in the literature as gatekeeping. The gatekeeping function of the press allows journalists to choose from the billions of stories and events that occur in the world each day and report on a manageable fraction so that consumers can be informed about the world in which they live (Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2012). At the local level, such tactics allow journalists to decide when and if a representative should enter into the public’s mind by strategically deciding what stories to include concerning a member’s actions or behaviors in Washington.

Beyond the initial gatekeeping function, journalists can also control the agenda of the public by focusing more heavily on certain topics over others (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Soroka, 2012; Zaller, 1992), and also by framing stories in a particular manner (Entman, 2007). These similar, yet distinct, actions by journalists shape the news by deciding what aspects of a story enter into the public’s eye after a story becomes salient. For certain news agencies, the results of framing
decisions dictate whether or not representatives will have some type of control over the way the public thinks about a particular issue. This is dependent on a few factors, such as whether a news agency has developed a relationship with a representative and has incentive to broadcast their views on an issue to the public, as well as whether a representative has included a particular issue as part of their expressed agenda in media releases (Grimmer, 2009). The final result is that the news primes individuals to think a certain way about particular issues, by focusing specifically on particular narratives and frames of reference when introducing a story to the public. As such, the news can be vital to representatives in maintaining a positive perception of their work, and it is worthwhile for legislators to work with the press rather than shutting them out of the lawmaking process.

While journalists may have the advantage in being able to shape what the news is on a daily basis, the media is not without its own constraints that representatives can utilize to gain an upper hand when trying to insert themselves in the news making process. The media is an open system (Sparrow, 1999, 2006), in which journalists must find ways to overcome particular constraints placed upon them due to the uncertainty of the political and social environments in which they exist. Specifically, I have focused here on the fact that the media must find ways to overcome constraints due to informational and economic uncertainties. The shift toward more market-driven journalism has pushed many news agencies to consider the marketability of news stories rather than the significance of their content (Gans, 2003; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Hamilton, 2004; Mullainathan & Heifer, 2005; Sparrow, 2006; Underwood, 1993). This has been coupled with the fact that

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36 Journalists must also deal with professional uncertainties, such as commonly accepted professional ethics of journalism, as well as the cultivation and protection of sources; however this subject has not been a focus of this project. For more on this, see Sparrow (1999).
newsrooms have begun to shrink significantly, especially in the beginning of the 21st century (Hamilton, 2004; PEW Research Center, 2011). These changes in the media environment have created fissures that representatives can exploit in order to manipulate the news message. The development of the press release in the 19th century has become an institutionalized tool of the congressional press operation. Press secretaries often utilize these releases in order to (hopefully) change the way the news is reported (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). The press release is a powerful tool in the representative’s arsenal, since it is often a ready-made news story written by a press secretary with previous experience as a member of the news media. It is also essential as it is a formal expression of a representative’s agenda, as well as an expression of their personal, mediated homestyle.

For political scientists, a paradox of congressional representation has been attempting to explain why representatives remain in office despite ever decreasing support for the institution itself in the public. *Homestyle*, the way in which members “cultivate their constituencies” (Fenno, 1978, p. 32), allows representatives to create a personal bond with constituents using unique personality traits and allocation of resources toward helping their home district in order to remain in office. While traditional conceptions of homestyle focus on the use of personal interactions and case work in order to develop a bond between legislator and constituent, such bonds must be reinforced with information that confirms a constituent’s belief that a representative is serving their interests. Most often this information comes in the form of local news stories centered on a representative’s actions and decisions. Representatives must, therefore, treat district residents not only as constituents, but also as an audience watching and evaluating their performance and
comparing it to the ideal form of what they believe a representative should be. New media technology has expanded the ability of members of Congress do perform such actions. However, it is still the case that representatives need some traditional news coverage of their work in order to remain in contact with constituents when traditional means of homestyle cannot be performed. Since the shift toward a more independent press in the early 1800s, legislators have worked more directly with journalists in order to develop a strong professional relationship in order to gain better media attention and increase support within the district. By the 1970s, legislators had increased the amount of resources they allocate to press operations in order to maintain a positive perception of their work in the home district, the hope being that such work will decrease the amount of uncertainty surrounding the next election and increase the ability of a member to remain in office. These operations translate the work and behaviors of representatives into a form of mediated homestyle, where press operations cultivate a constituency through the media utilizing strategically written and disseminated press statements in order to increase the attention paid to an individual member in the local press. The expected end result of this work is an increase in support in the district, primarily during the next election season and beyond.

Whether it is in person or though the media, homestyle consists of the creation of a personal narrative surrounding a representative that encompasses their goals and interests in politics. Members of the press are responsible for taking the stories of legislators and filtering them for public consumption. This process does not prohibit them from adding information in order to provide citizens with more robust stories. Thus, journalists and representatives develop a relationship with one another based on the mutual incentives each
can provide. For representatives eager to reach a more dispersed audience, the media provides an outlet through which they can project their narrative to the public in order to build support. The media, in contrast, is drawn to representatives with dynamic characteristics or the ability to translate large, national issues into captivating local stories. News agencies are not beholden to representatives as a source, and often attempt their own independent investigations in order to provide the public with more information (Fogarty, 2009). It is still the case, however, that news agencies exist in an open system where they face both economic and information constraints when making the news. Legislators can help alleviate these particular constraints by providing the press with information at low costs. The end result, for representatives, is that such information will be used to cast a positive light on a legislator’s work in Washington, and that such stories will have a positive and significant impact on the perception of constituents back home.

At the outset of this project, I began with three questions: How successful are members at cultivating a positive perception in the media and among their constituents? Which strategies are more efficient at influencing the ways in which local media outlets cover their activities? And how does such coverage affect the perception that constituents have of their representative and their activities in Washington? Throughout the examination here, I have attempted to focus on each of these questions, as well as explain why they are significant to our overall understanding of representation in the United States and whether or not such strategies can remain effective in the increasingly polarized, ever expanding media environment of the 21st century. In order to analyze these questions and draw some conclusions about the nature and creation of media narratives about members of Congress in
the local news, a unique dataset of 108 members of the House of Representatives who served during the 111th Congress, as well as newspapers associated with members’ districts, was generated. Using this sample, press releases and news articles were downloaded and analyzed in a variety of ways in order to understand the intricacies of the news making process from both the representative and the journalists’ perspective. Throughout this project, I have shown that members of Congress attempt to write their own news items in a way that bolsters their support in the district as well as provides constituents with information they need about what their representative is doing in Washington. Journalists utilize these news statements in a variety of ways depending on the level of constraint placed upon them by the media system. Journalists requiring an “expert view” but facing tough economic strains may be more inclined to utilize press releases sent out by a member of Congress on a regular basis. As the results in this dissertation has shown, it is not necessarily the case that journalists copy press releases verbatim all the time, as some critics have implied, but may act more strategically when choosing to use prepared press statements from members of Congress.

**The Impact of Mediated Homestyle**

The questions posed in this dissertation are important for researchers in political science, as well as applicable to modern day politicians interested in maintaining office and providing evidence that they are representing their constituencies. For political strategists, information about the strength and success of differing media tactics in the local press can be vital to the success of the next campaign. For incumbents, decreasing the level of uncertainty about their standing in the district helps inform their decisions in Washington, as
well as improve the quality of their campaign work. For challengers, knowledge of the media’s strength in shifting opinions over time can be useful in changing the outcome of an election in their favor.\footnote{More research into the exact nature of campaign media tactics and its influence on election outcomes would be required in order to make any conclusions about these sorts of outcomes, however, and was beyond the scope of this project.}

The findings from the main empirical chapters here point to three concurrent themes important to understanding representatives’ mediated homestyles and how they correspond to news media attention within the district, which will be discussed below. First, while it is apparent that members of the media work with representatives in order to create the news that is disseminated to the public, journalists are clearly partners in the process of making the news, and not just lapdogs or dummies. Following from this, the second theme from the findings here is that while members of the news media are autonomous actors with their own values and ideas about what makes a good story, representatives are able to influence the agenda of the media in several distinct ways that help in building and maintaining a positive narrative via mediated homestyles. Finally, while representatives have a finite amount of resources that they can allocate to cultivating the different constituencies important to remaining in office and developing good policies, members of Congress should remember to treat the media as one of these constituencies throughout their terms in office and understand the ebbs and flows of news production.

**Partners Yes, But Not Lapdogs**

Throughout each chapter, I have argued that legislators are strategic actors who utilize the media in order to accomplish multiple goals while in office. The primary goal representatives hope to achieve by using the media is the development of “brand loyalty”
within the district through the dissemination of press releases stating their policy positions and work they have done for the district, as well as advertising information about events sponsored by a representative’s office. The media allows members to maintain a link with constituents through the publication of their work in Washington. But in order to gain the attention of readers, representatives must cultivate a relationship with journalists as well. Such relationships can have a resounding impact for legislators during election seasons, where incumbents can receive a payoff from journalists by gaining increased media attention over challengers (Clarke & Evans, 1983; Gershon, 2012; Schaffner & Sellers, 2006). While there are risks inherent in any advertising endeavor, representatives who effectively work with journalists can downplay these risks and increase the level of positivity in local news articles.

While representatives hope to cultivate a sense of brand loyalty with constituents through the media, journalists and editors have their own goals when producing the news (Cook, 1989, 2005; Gans, 1979; Graber, 2010; Larson, 1992; Shoemaker, Chang, & Bredlinger, 1987). In order to have an influence on the final news product, therefore, representatives must provide develop a working relationship in which they share just enough information to satiate journalists’ interest without pushing them to conduct their own in-depth investigations (Fogarty, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, members of the media are part of a representative’s constituent audience, and representatives must provide them with information they will find interesting in order to cultivate a relationship with journalists and editors so that they can increase the likelihood that coverage will remain positive. In Chapter 3, I extended the work previously done by Cook (1989), Schaffner and Sellers
(2006) and most recently by Gershon (2012) by examining the development of the congressional press relationship and the structural determinants of news coverage throughout a legislative term. While the findings in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 largely confirm previous work done by Schaffner and Sellers (2006), Gershon (2012) and acts as a baseline for our understanding of the congressional-press relationship for other chapters, some of the findings are still important for understanding the concept of mediated forms of homestyle and how representatives can better develop strategies for dealing with the local press. In particular, the findings here have shown that, following from Cook (1989) and others, representatives’ media operations have are more influential in getting the press to pay attention to their work in Washington, instead of getting journalists to write positive stories specifically. Representatives’ media operations can often find ways to influence the media’s gatekeeping ability by funneling interesting news stories to journalists, and attempting to persuade journalists that representatives are interesting subjects to focus attention on.

**Agenda Influence**

At the outset of this dissertation, one of the primary questions of interest was how members of Congress not only insert themselves into the news-making process, but how they strategically influence the agenda of the media once they have passed the gatekeeping process. Specifically, I have looked here at how press releases are utilized over the course of the term as a strategy to develop a mediated homestyle with journalists. Press releases are an ideal proxy for examining the effort that representatives put forward in order to get the attention of journalists, since they are often written in ways that correspond with journalists’ guidelines of newsworthiness (Cook, 1989, 2005). Likewise, press releases present a
representative’s *expressed agenda* (Grimmer, 2009) and indicate to journalists what representatives believe to be the salient issues in government and in the district. As such, press releases represent one of the more versatile tactics employed by members of Congress in order to control the flow of information coming out of Washington. Following Fenno (1978), in order for a representative to cultivate a *homestyle* and develop a personal vote with constituents, legislators must allocate resources to activities that are outside their technical duties as representatives in Congress. For members’ mediated homestyles, this means allocating time and resources to the development of press statements that are interesting and compelling to journalists. The frequency of press releases can be an indicator for how much attention a representative is paying to the press. Representatives who value the creation of a mediated homestyle, therefore, should allocate more resources to the creation of press releases for journalists’ consumption, while legislators who value other strategies for cultivating a personal vote should devote less time to press operations. This not only helps in cultivating the constituency and developing a relationship with journalists, but also in influencing the agenda-setting functions of the press.

Agenda-setting, the ability of the press to focus attention on particular issues and transfer certain salient information to the public (McCombs, 2004), is one area where mediated homestyles can be most effective for representatives. In order for a legislator to affect the media’s agenda, representatives need to provide journalists with interesting and compelling topics of interest, and provide them with rhetoric that can be used to interest consumers of local news. Thus, the content of press statements becomes vital to the ability of representatives to insert their narrative style into the news-making process. The hope of
congressional press operations is that journalists will utilize press releases almost verbatim, causing the news to become a ventriloquist act for a representative’s topic of interest. In reality, journalists are more likely to present evidence of echoing with regard to a representative’s agenda, wherein a journalist utilizes a representative’s statements to varying degrees on particular topics of interest more than others. Since press releases have previously been established in the literature as a proxy for representative’s expressed agenda in politics (Grimmer, 2009), such documents can be analyzed in order to build models of salient topics, and compared to news articles in order to examine the ability of representatives to control the media agenda and insert their homestyle into the local press.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the ability of representatives to influence the press agenda was examined in two different ways. First, Chapter 4 focused on whether the increased production of press releases had any significant impact on the frequency or tone of news articles in the district, taking into account the initial results of the analysis in Chapter 3. Clarke and Evans (1983), Gershon (2013) and others have provided some evidence in previous work that supports the hypothesis that the press pays closer attention to representatives during campaign seasons, as these events provide a clear and easy to frame narrative centered on winners and losers. According to the results in Chapter 4, the frequency of press releases can significantly affect news articles; although this is primarily during election years. Frequent press releases were also found to have a significant impact on the level of neutral news stories featuring a given member of Congress, which follows from the work by Cook (1989) that argues press operations are more successful at
stimulating journalists to pay attention to members of Congress, rather than affecting the tone of news items featuring members and their actions.

Whereas the analysis in Chapter 4 provides us with an understanding of whether or not the frequency of press releases affect local news coverage, the analysis in Chapter 5 expanded on this notion by delving more deeply into the content of press releases and the ability of representatives to control the media agenda. In particular, I examined the common themes and use of language in both press releases and news articles utilizing a probabilistic topic model (Blei, 2012; Quinn et al., 2010). The use of topic models allows researchers to code a large corpus of documents without being hindered by other types of machine learning algorithms (Quinn et al., 2010). Whereas particular trends do emerge from the analysis of the topic model, the most unique finding is that while representatives do gain a high level of echoing from the press with regard to focus on salient topics, there is a strong level of divergence that can occur on particular issues over others. Thus, while research has shown that political elites are extremely effective at controlling political and media information environments (Coe et al., 2004; Domke, 2004; Riker, 1986; Zaller, 1992), the adage that journalists are lapdogs to representatives is not supported by the evidence presented here.

**The Media Environment Matters**

The cultivation of a relationship with the press, and influencing the agenda afterward, is only one part of mediated homestyle. Throughout this project I have argued that the main point for representatives to allocate resources to a press operation is to control and propagate a positive perception of their work with constituents back home. In order to use the media to do this, representatives must attune themselves to the media environment of their districts to
ensure that they are providing journalists with enough information to satisfy their curiosity, while piquing enough interest that journalists begin conducting their own in-depth investigations. News agencies are still primarily a middle-man used by representatives in order to converse with constituents on a more regular basis, and a form of indirect influence on the opinions of individuals (Mutz, 1998). Perhaps the most consistent and important finding throughout this dissertation has, therefore, been that the variables most influential to the frequency and tone of news coverage are those that specifically affect the media environment within the district.

In relation to the point that representatives should take seriously the media environment of their districts, one important finding from Chapter 3 is that it is important to keep in mind the variations that occur in media attention in off-election and election years. Unlike previous studies, the examination of what accounts for news coverage in non-election years adds a critical piece to the puzzle of understanding the local news agenda and how representatives are able to insert themselves into the news-making process beyond the campaign. Representatives interested in maintaining a positive perception of their work during the campaign season should consider developing a relationship with the local press early, and be consistent in their attitude when dealing with the press in order to build up a rapport with journalists. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the level of coverage a news agency provides to a member’s district was a significant factor in increasing the frequency and adjusting the tone of news. Previous work has shown that while out-of-state newspapers may mention representatives from bordering states from time-to-time, representatives are often better served by newspapers situated in their home states (Schaffner & Sellers, 2006).
The findings here support this belief as well; however future research should dig more fully into the extent of a representative’s reach via the media.

The media environment was also shown, in Chapter 5, to have a strong impact on whether news articles adopted similar language when discussing members and their actions. Press releases and news articles were evaluated utilizing publically available cheating detection software (Bloomfield, 2008) to see whether certain characteristics of the news environment and characteristics of the representative had any impact on increasing the level of language adoption from congressional press statements. The analysis shows that the news media system does have a significant impact on whether or not journalists “borrow” from press releases more frequently, and that particular constraints placed on journalists to perform their duties can have an impact on whether or not they are willing to adopt the narratives supplied by legislators to the local press.

Finally, while it is important to show that the media environment is significant to representatives and should be given serious attention as a constituency, investigations cannot stop after examining the efforts of legislators and news-makers, but also must examine whether these efforts have any effect on the public. In the literature on the political impact of the news, one of the principal theories of media power over the public is the belief that the news *primes* individuals to believe certain items and to attach salience to certain issues over others (Iyengar & Kinder, 1989; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The measure of success for mediated homestyles, therefore, should be whether or not the efforts of representatives in the media have any significant impact on the perceptions of voters, holding constant traditionally recognized factors that affect voting decisions. In
Chapter 6, the analysis shifted from examining the work representatives performed with the news media, and examined instead whether media stories—now shown to be partially managed by representatives—have an impact on the approval of constituents. Using data from the most recent Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), the examination in Chapter 6 examined whether media strategies have a substantial effect on citizens’ perceptions of their member’s actions, goals and behaviors while in office. The analysis shows is that media use, specifically newspaper use, affects congressional approval in a positive way. This provides some evidence that media frames in newspapers can help shift the opinions of media consumers, though more research needs to be done in this area, a point which I now turn to.

**Future Research**

While the findings in this project have been mixed, one conclusion is still clear: despite changes to the media landscape, newspapers still act as a fundamental tool for representatives to communicate with constituents and for citizens to keep abreast of the climate in Washington. More research into how changes in the media environment have affected the ability of representatives to shape the news and maintain a positive perception within the public still needs to be done, and the work in this project should serve as a baseline for future endeavors. Likewise, a more nuanced examination into the politics of news making at the local level should be considered by future researchers in order to help explain how journalists are utilizing representatives and other sources in the post-broadcast era of information gathering. Also along these lines of thought, while this project has focused solely on representative-journalist dyads, future research should look beyond such a
limited scope to analyze how representatives and news agencies form a complex set of networks within each state, and how information travels between various nodes within a state and into the public eye. Utilizing the literature on social networks as a baseline, we can begin to conceive of centrality networks revolving around particular members of Congress, in which legislators attempt to cultivate relationships with various local and national agencies in order to advance their own agenda and increase the amount of power they can control at both the local and national level. Future research should take seriously the fact that while news organizations have begun to consolidate more and more due to constraints in the media system, citizens are still privy to a variety of voices through different news organizations, and variations in the ways in which these organizations conduct business can have a lasting impact on the way citizens perceive the world around them.

A second line of research which was not the focus of this project is the impact that the new social media environment has had on congressional press operations. The ability of a representative to control the perception of the public concerning their work in Washington has traditionally been influenced by the media, due to the gatekeeping and agenda-setting function of the press (McCombs, 2004; Shoemaker, 1991; Soroka, 2012). The slow but consistent adoption of new media technologies that, in theory, allow members to be in two-way communication with their constituents places some strain on the belief that representatives prefer unidirectional communication from Washington to voters. The argument that representatives “don’t want feedback” (Browning, 1998, p. 65) may still be the case. With the inclusion of comments sections and the ability of individuals to link, share, and spread messages across new media outlets at near-instant speeds, representatives
must develop new strategies to account for storms that circulate around their comments and actions. New media of communication through web applications such as Twitter®, Facebook®, and YouTube®, among others, have allowed representatives’ press operations greater opportunities to keep in touch with constituents back home. These systems have also allowed non-supporters a more effective vehicle with which to air their grievances and frustrations with current members of Congress. Research into the effectiveness of such messages is still in its infancy. Future research should investigate the implications of social media technologies on the ability of representatives to control the message concerning their work in Washington, and on the ability to cultivate a constituency through socially mediated homestyles, as well as how the public’s perception is affected by these new systems of communication.

Finally, while the research here focused on press releases and their significance as a part of a representative’s “expressed agenda” (Grimmer, 2009) in the media, other forms of political communications meant to persuade constituents should be examined to find out how effective they are at persuading the public as well. Items such as campaign videos, press interviews, franked mail leaflets and emails are all designed by congressional press operations in order to increase the positive perception of representatives in the public. These types of media all come with their own unique advantages and disadvantages, which representatives must weigh when developing a more robust media strategy. Following the lines of research presented here, future research can examine the way in which the tone and the frequency of such media tactics influence not only news reports, but also the public’s view of a representative and their work in Washington. With regard to campaign media,
following the line of examination in Chapter 5, we can examine more fully the impact of various messages and the topics of campaign ads on the salience of issues in debates and, likewise, make connections between the rhetoric of campaigns and the use of language in the media to gain a deeper understanding of the cycle of spin previously developed by Sellers (2010).

A consistent theme throughout this dissertation has been the simple fact that the media environment is changing. With such changes come shifts in the way that individuals think about the events that the media focuses on. Communication, according to Habermas (2003) is vital to understanding the ways individuals understand reality. As a major tool of communication, the mass media is important since it provides individuals with a common narrative concerning the political and social world in which they live. As the media environment changes, therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the way in which we perceive the concept of representation will change as well. The development of a professional press corps focused on remaining “objective” led to an electorate that slowly became more aware of the actions of their representatives. This led, in turn, to the development of tools and tactics by representatives in order to deal with the press. The introduction of the press release to the congressional media repertoire, and the institutionalization of congressional press operations in most legislators’ offices, has given representatives new opportunities to insert themselves into the news making process. The media is still a fluid, changing landscape, and representatives must be attuned to changes in the media in order to remain up to date with the press. For representatives, therefore, the ability to predict and understand
the way in which the media scrutinizes their behavior is important in order to retain a positive identity with the public.

For their part, representatives wish to be viewed as protecting the interests of their constituents and states. Legislators cannot rely solely on personal interactions in order to maintain this viewpoint with constituents, however. Scholars have previously noted the use of targeted, localized press releases can be instrumental in gaining press attention (Larson, 1992; Vinson, 2003). Here, I focused broadly on the variations in media strategies utilizing press releases in order to examine two things. First, the analysis provided some clues as to how the supply of press statements impacts the news in terms of frequency and tone, and showed when journalists are most interested in news about local representatives. Second, I attempted to show how the interests of representatives get relayed through the news in order to increase public support and decrease the level of uncertainty a representative has about how they are being portrayed by the press. The findings here provide researchers with a fresh start and a new way to examine the connections between journalists and legislators in a changing media environment. The primary findings of this project have shown that, while print may be going out of style, newspapers still remain the best place for representatives to flex their media muscle and affect public opinion.
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Appendix

Measuring Tone of Coverage
Appendix: Measuring Tone of Coverage

In the analysis, the results reflect the overall tone of coverage in each article read. The following quotes illustrate the coding used to assess the tone of coverage when calculating the prestige scores used in the analysis:

"Congressman John Olver, in whose district the "100 Faces" project started, was instrumental in arranging the Washington showing." (coded as positive for Rep. John Olver).

"The meeting will also include reports from the California Highway Patrol and the Sheriff's Department, as well as presentations by representatives of elected officials, including U.S. Congressman Gary Miller." (coded as neutral for Rep. Gary Miller).

"A longtime East County political activist now trying to unseat incumbent U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Alpine, this November, Lutz says he is forgoing meals until Hunter agrees to debate him." (coded as negative for Rep. Duncan Hunter)